

Eugene Ware and Dr. Sanger: The Code of Political Ethics, 1872-1892

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DURING the two decades, 1872-1892, the American political scene, as reflected in the Fort Scott area, possessed characteristics that may be differentiated from what came after. The symbols and the associated political code require explanation to later generations, and in terms that avoid value judgments. Something of the culture content of the political modes of the day is preserved and may be introduced by the story of the friendship between Eugene Ware, Republican, and Increase Sumner Sanger, M. D., Democrat, together with the account of the rites by which political victories were celebrated—a single local instance to be sure, but an illustration of significance far wider than the one community.

On the occasion of the death of Dr. Sanger (1828-1888), Ware furnished, for publication over his own name, the eulogy of a friend, and the only instance of the kind that has been found.¹ The burial of Dr. Sanger had taken place on Sunday, November 25, 1888, when "the November air was filled with the delicious haze of a perfect Kansas day. . . ." Ware referred to Sanger as "an educated doctor," and the full force of his meaning would be apparent only to those who were familiar with Ware's poem, "The Medicine Man," in which the fraudulent pretensions of an "educated fool" were mangled, both by Ware's pen and the heels of an army mule. Without specifying the nature of the affliction that was responsible for Dr. Sanger's death, Ware referred to it as a "grim mockery of science, and medicine and for years his hair has been whiter than snow." But, in spite of pain, his disposition was "one of sympathy and smiles. The head of no philosopher or statesman that Grecian marble has bequeathed us had a finer outline than did his." Furthermore his honor and integrity were above reproach. This Ware was saying of his friend who was a lifelong Democrat of an extreme sort, who in his own vigorous language kicked his party, but always from within.

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1. Fort Scott Daily Tribune, November 27, 1888.

As a physician, Sanger had spent most of his early career in the United States navy, and had sailed the seven seas in a man-of-war. In consequence of this life "abroad" the United States flag acquired for Sanger a special symbolism. Ware put the matter this way: "If he had any special religious belief he did not allude to it, but if questioned he would have probably said that he would be saved through the efficacy of the American flag, in which he firmly believed." Only the flag, Ware pointed out, took precedence over his democracy. By way of illustration, Ware recounted the incident of the Republican victory parade and celebration of the election of James A. Garfield to the Presidency in 1880. This incorrigible Democrat, Sanger, was a participant—

The doctor occupied, by invitation, a place at the head of the column, and for two hours he carried the American flag—by concession it was the flag of the occasion. . . . It was honor enough for me to walk beside him and hold his hat. Yet the doctor was not there to celebrate a Republican victory. He was there to carry the flag of his country, so that all would remember that there was one thing in the United States even greater than a victorious party. It was pure patriotism, and he was accorded the post of honor because everybody knew how he felt.

And then Ware closed his eulogy—one agnostic to another—with this affirmation of faith:

Rest quietly in peace, O! doctor. The fallen leaves upon your new-made grave bode you no evil. The flag you loved so well has yet nine hundred years to wave, and in such stretch of time it may even gather on its field the stars of heaven. Rest in your quiet grave, O! friend. There are none who bear you malice. You need no marble. We all hope to see you later.

The incident of the Garfield parade serves also to introduce the larger topic of the manner and meaning of celebrations of this kind, which, except in 1876, occurred in Fort Scott every four years, 1872-1892 inclusive. The first of these has its setting in the particularly bitter campaign of 1872 when the Republican party was split, and the revolting liberals were joined in part by the Democratic party. Two incidents became the focus of this particular ritualistic performance. Capt. George J. Clarke, a Democrat, had made an election bet with Dr. J. S. Redfield, a Republican, according to which the loser would deliver a sack of flour to the other in a wheelbarrow.² The second stunt was only slightly more original, but possessed symbolic significance to Democrats of the 19th century, who still insisted that the United States had a fundamental law which limited the power of the central government. A "Ship of

2. "A Wheelbarrow Bet" was announced in the *Fort Scott Daily Monitor*, June 23, 1872, and was referred to again just prior to election day. *Ibid.*, November 2, 1872.

State," called the "Constitution" was constructed which, in 1872, was to be "saved" by their hoped for victory at the polls. Instead of celebrating a Democratic return to power, however, the good ship "Constitution" had to be put to a different ritualistic use—it carried the defeated parties, liberals and Democrats, up the mythical "Salt river."³

The "Grand Jollification"—for Republicans—came Saturday evening, November 9, and the Sunday *Monitor's* headlines read: "The Wheeling of the Flour" and "The Ship Constitution and Her Noble Crew. The Departure for Salt River"—"The whole town, women and children, as well as voters, seemed to have turned out to witness the event. . . ." The procession started shortly after 7 P. M., from the Joss mill, led by the German band. Escorted by Dr. Redfield, Clarke pushed the wheelbarrow of flour,

flanked by faithful members of the Liberal party as hearse bearers . . . , and next came the good ship "Constitution," manned by its "Liberal" crew, on their four years' voyage up the uninviting scenes of Salt river. Dr. Couch occupied a position at the helm and mournfully tolled the "watches" of the death of the Liberal party. Dr. Sanger, Charlie Goodlander, and other prominent members of the Liberal party were on board, with Ware, of the *Monitor*, on the "starboard watch." The bootblacks, good Grant fellows, rode proudly in the rear, in an illuminated express wagon.

Accomplishing the delivery of the flour, Redfield addressed Clarke an "amusing speech," and Couch, "on the part of the Liberal 'crew' accepted the defeat. . . ." After the conclusion of the speech making, "Hail Columbia" was sung and the crowd dispersed. The flour was to be sold at a Presbyterian festival. In conclusion, the *Monitor* reported that "The best of feeling prevailed on every hand. . . ."

Another item in the same issue of the *Monitor* recorded the disposition of the ship:

The Liberal ship Constitution was raffled off at Henry's last night, and fell to the lucky number held by Mr. J. E. Trent. It was afterwards purchased by Mr. Shields and will henceforward ornament the roof of his block on Locust Street.

Thus was the Liberal-Democratic symbol preserved for participation in future rituals.

The Presidential election of 1876 ended in a dispute which was decided almost at the last minute prior to the inauguration day by an extra-legal commission of 15 which voted eight to seven on the

3. References to the ship "Constitution" and its first public exhibition appeared in this, October 23, 1872, and the preparations for the jollification were described in the same paper, November 7-9 (Thursday, Friday, and Saturday).

controversial issues. Under these circumstances Republican Rutherford B. Hayes, instead of Samuel J. Tilden, became President of the United States. No record of a "Jollification" similar to that of 1872 has been found, but when the decision of the electoral commission was announced in February, the *Monitor*, February 18, 1877, recorded that: "Dr. Sanger mourns. . . . His arm was adorned with crape yesterday. He evidently thinks the Democratic party dead—of suicide." Dr. Sanger replied that he did not mourn for Tilden or the Democratic party, "but I mourn for the utter demoralization of the Republic and the death of the principles upon which it was founded." The editor was reminded that Washington had warned in his "Farewell Address" against the danger of party strife:

I mourn, also, sir, for the blunted sensibilities of my countrymen. . . . I care not, sir, for men or parties, but I do love the Republic and the principles upon which it was founded. . . . I have loved, cherished and defended it in five quarters of the globe, and have been proud to call myself an American citizen, but now, alas! I bow my head in shame. . . . I mourn, however, sir, not without hope. Truth, Justice and Right, though crushed to earth may rise again. . . .⁴

One reader of the *Monitor* was not willing to let well enough alone, and the editor was so indiscreet as to print these lines addressed "To Dr. Sanger":

He mourns the best
Who mourns the least, for other's failings;
Who his own "beam" deploras,
Not other's ailings.

—[Squills.

Sanger cited, in reply, the definition of "Squills" given in *The United States Dispensatory* as a medicine that nauseates—in large doses emetic, and explained that:

If I have a failing I endeavor to correct, not to justify or defend it—never did.

The failing of which "Squills" refers was corrected months ago entirely, and radically, as all my friends know, and rejoice at, but which chagrins and disappoints some canting hypocritical puppies, who take their temperance, morality and religion in small doses like "Squills" that nauseates and disgusts.⁵

The details of Sanger's unhappy story cannot be reconstructed with any degree of satisfaction, but the *Daily Monitor*, October 1, 1870, carried the following: "NOTICE—All persons are cautioned not to give credit to Dr. J. [I.] S. Sanger, as I, his wife, positively

4. *Ibid.*, February 18, March 4, 1877.

5. *Ibid.*, March 6, 7, 1877.

refuse to pay any of his debts." The inference that is suggested by these two items, seven years apart, is that Sanger had become irresponsible from drink, but had conquered his failing. Not only that, such a public confession as he made required a very particular brand of courage.

As the campaign of 1880 drew to a close the *Republican Monitor*, October 26, printed an article "The Old Ship" in which the Democratic party was held up to ridicule, emphasizing the supposed condition of both the party and "The Old Ship":

In passing along Scott avenue a stranger will be likely to have his attention attracted by a miniature ship that stands on the top of the Shields Block, under bare poles, with cordage swaying in the wind and a diminutive flag floating from one of the masts. In the palmy days of 1872, when the Democracy were gallantly battling for success under the lead of that great and consistent advocate of a high protective tariff, Horace Greeley, this emblematic institution, being the most inconsistent that could be conceived of by that party of magnificent blunders, was built for use at a grand Democratic demonstration at Fort Scott. After serving the immediate purpose of construction, it was too fine a work of art to cast aside with the worthless trumpery and paraphernalia of a campaign. Constructed of excellent material and being an exact representation of a ship built to breast the rolling waves and buffet the fierce storms of old ocean's restless domain it was right and sensible that it should be placed on the top of a prominent building as a specimen of Fort Scott handiwork. However inappropriate it may have been, originally, time "which makes all things even," has at last constituted it a fit emblem of Democracy. From its rotten and cracked hull the gloss and glare of paint has long disappeared as the gorgeous pretensions of the party of slavery and rebellion have faded and died. . . . Its masts are shorn of sail and shroud as the political ship of Hancock and English has been bereft of its last shred of canvas by the hurricane generated in Indiana and Ohio. Poor ship! Probably on some stilly *Moonlight* occasion it might be possible to call the *Ross-ter*⁶ of its diminished crew, and get them to lower it from where the bleak winds so relentlessly *Blow*, through its rotten cordage, after which with a gallant commodore *Perry* in command, and by the aid of the trade winds, blowing *free*, it might be safely guided into some (Green) back water and thence up to its proper moorings on the head waters of Salt River.

The victory went to the Republicans and inspired the election jollification of 1880 with which this campaign history began—"a grand old-style riproaring sort of a jollification. . . ."

That consistent old-time Democratic patriot, Dr. Sanger, in company with Senator-elect Ware, headed the list, and while the Doctor truly mourns the defeat of Hancock, yet he is too much of an American not to accept the inevitable, and we judge enjoyed the parade as much as the most enthusiastic.⁷

6. The references are to Thomas Moonlight, and to Former Sen. E. T. Ross.

7. *Daily Monitor*, November 7, 1880; the *Republican Record*, and the *Weekly Herald* did not report the proceedings.

About a month later, political rancor having mellowed substantially, the *Monitor*, December 15, again described the condition of the ship "Constitution," and this time emphasized the devoted care given it by its owner. That this story contradicted the pre-election characterization did not seem to bother the editor. The article closed in eulogy of the ship's symbolism:

Eight years and one month ago yesterday the ship "Constitution" was hoisted on the Shield block and the flag of our country was nailed to the masthead. A flag has been kept there ever since. The ship has received on an average of four flags each year, making about forty that it has borne. Mr. Shields is determined to keep the national bunting flying over the nautical emblem [as] long as he lives. The original cost of the "Constitution" was \$115. After it had filled the purpose of its creation, it was sold at auction to the highest bidder, when Mr. Shields purchased it for the sum of \$24. It cost fully an equal amount to place it on the top of his building. The cost of the Constitution to the present patriotic proprietor up to date has been about \$60. Long may the old "Constitution," the emblem of the gallant ship that did so much for American Liberty, preside over the building. May the beautiful banner of our country float above it, and many a child be borne beneath.

The campaign of 1884 offered something different; the first Democratic victory in a presidential election after the Civil War. Although some doubts existed about the validity of some counts, the Democratic national committee set Saturday night, November 8, as the date for celebrations over the nation of the accession to power of "the grand old party of the people to the control of government." The news of the claim of a Cleveland-Hendricks victory reached Fort Scott during Saturday morning and the local party leaders "peremptorially agreed" upon "a good-natured jollification meeting" the same evening. Hand bills were printed and the call appeared also in the Democratic evening *Daily Tribune*:

Come out with you[r] torches, and your drums and your banners, and help swell the inspiring anthem that will roll over this great country to-night from ocean to ocean.

Sound the loud timbrel
O'er Egypt's dark sea.
Jehova has spoken;
His people are free.

To-night the sixty millions of freemen who live by every rock and rill and people every hill and dale in this lovely land of ours will stand up in the glorious realization of a redeemed and regenerated republic and sing the song of Tennyson: "That men may come and men may go, but this Union shall live on forever." Come out.

The local Republicans refused to concede the defeat, so a bargain was struck that they would go up Salt river Saturday night, No-

vember 8, provided the Democrats agreed to do likewise the next Saturday night should the decision be reversed. The *Tribune's* account of the celebration, printed two days later related that:

The old ship "Constitution," which had been put on top of the Shield's block in 1872, and which was to stay there until a national victory would perch upon the Democratic banner, was taken down by members of the Cleveland and Hendricks club. It was taken to Grant's [carpenter] shop and there placed upon a set of running gears and was put in full-rigged style. She was decorated with flags and banners bearing the portrait of Cleveland and Hendricks and strewed with Chinese lanterns in different parts of the rigging.

. . . The old craft looking as youthful as a bride . . . was drawn by four white horses. . . .

Again Ware was a member of the "crew" whose destination was Salt river. The parade terminated with speech-making at a bonfire in the center of the public square. Ware, who was among the spokesmen for the defeated party, "congratulated the democrats and said the republicans would turn over the government peaceably and quietly, and with the treasury fuller than any democrat in the audience." During the course of his remarks, as the Democratic *Tribune* put it, Ware "got off the following happy bit on St. John," the Prohibitionist Republican ex-Governor of Kansas, and nominee in 1884 of the Prohibition party for President:

He [Ware] said that the first thing a man always did after defeat was to try to explain it, and went on to say, "that twenty years ago there came to Kansas a man from Missouri with a painted mustache, named John P. St. John. In the course of a few years he gave us a Democratic governor. He has now given us a Democratic president, and I do not know exactly what he is doing, but I think he is now working up some scheme to beat Christ and give us a Democratic Redeemer."

According to the Republican Monitor's version: "Senator Ware's remarks were received with loud cheering and tremendous shouts of applause." The celebration "made a great deal of fun for the boys, and did much to allay the bitter hostility that has prevailed to some extent since Tuesday," concluded this paper, and in the rally itself "there was entire absence of bitterness of partizan feeling. . . ." From the Democratic *Tribune's* point of view, the evening passed pleasantly, "with nothing to mar the pleasure of anything or anybody. . . ." ⁸

After four years, 1888, the Presidency was again in Republican hands. The Democratic *Tribune*, November 10, 1888, announced that upon learning definitely of the defeat of its candidate, the

8. *Daily Monitor*, November 9, 1884, and the *Evening Herald*, November 10, have the Republican versions, and the *Daily Tribune*, November 8, 10, told the Democratic story. The *Monitor* and *Tribune* narrations were very similar.

Young Men's Democratic Club took down its manifestations of partisan warfare, and "flung the stars and stripes to the winds of heaven, as an acknowledgment of submission to the supreme will and majesty of the people as expressed at the ballot box, and a token of allegiance to the nation's newly chosen chief magistrate. . . ." The Republicans held their ratifying ceremonies, the central attraction being "two wagons, one containing a platformed float loaded with Republican guards, and the other containing a full rigged boat, the masts flying a variety of bandannas and flags." This time, of course, Ware was one of the speakers for the victors: "Everything passed off in the utmost harmony and good fellowship. The Democrats, generally," the *Monitor* conceded, "entered into the spirit of the thing," the festivities not breaking up until long after 11 P.M. "No doubt," the *Monitor* continued, "Mr. Harrison would have considered himself elected without this ratification, but the General will feel better when he learns how much good it does the lively Republicans of Fort Scott."

The *Tribune's* report on the Republican rally was that they "literally painted things red." Furthermore, "to the great credit of our people, . . . the victor and the vanquished, met most fraternally. . . . Let's all, as one body, pull together from now at least until '92, for the upbuilding of the best city in Southern Kansas. . . ."⁹

The following year the death of Mrs. Michael Shields, widow, prompted a *Tribune* interview with Eugene Ware concerning her husband. Ware recalled that:

[Shields] was the one who rigged up the "ship of state" in 1872. He was then a Liberal, and rowed up Salt River a batch of defeated candidates, and every four years since the ship has done similar service. After its first and second trip Michael put the ship on the top of his building and that became its accustomed dock.¹⁰

Certain inaccuracies of detail should be noted in Ware's accounts as reported, which indicate that already the ship was becoming a folk legend. In this form details of historical facts were being subordinated to the requirements of the symbol. So far as explicit evidence has been found, the ship was placed on top of the Shields building in 1872 and remained there until the Democratic victory of 1884. The reports on the jollification of 1888 described a ship mounted on a wagon, but did not identify it as the historic ship of 1872.

9. *Daily Monitor*, November 14, 1888; *Daily Tribune*, November 10, 14, 1888.

10. *Daily Tribune*, November 23, 1889.

In 1892 the Democrats again won the presidency, sending the Republicans once more "up Salt river." "The water was placid and the journey hilarious enough." The organ of the victors, the *Tribune*, November 15, prefaced its account with the following:

It is a custom immemorial in Fort Scott to ride the defeated party up Salt River after a presidential election. Every four years the old ship that Mr. McElroy dedicated to this purpose many years ago, is taken down from the top of the McElroy block where it was first placed by him, and re-masted for the cabalistic journey up Salt River, its passengers being the defeated candidates on the local ticket and the local leaders of the defeated party. C. W. Goodlander has upon every occasion been at the helm to steer the doleful crew up the mystic stream.

Here again to celebrate a Democratic victory the specific ship was identified, the one that had occupied the place of honor on top of a building. A mistake was made, however, in linking its origin with the name of McElroy rather than with Shields. Also an error attributed the position of helmsman "upon every occasion" to C. W. Goodlander. In 1872 Dr. Couch had been listed at the helm; in 1876 no ceremony occurred; in 1880 no helmsman was reported; in 1884 Goodlander was not named among those participating; in 1888 Goodlander was first mate; and in 1892 only was Goodlander listed as helmsman. Most of the older men who had participated in the initial ceremony were gone, and the stereotypes now being attached to the legend did not square with the facts. But, possibly all this is relatively unimportant, as the whole tradition of the quadrennial parade up Salt river was dropped. No such jollification has been found for 1896, and the one attempted in 1900 proved to be worse than a fiasco. An innovation of that year was a band of Rough Riders who led the short parade. Only one defeated candidate "had the stamina to be rowed up the creek by the republicans." No reference was made to the historic "Constitution." Rowdiness marred the event. As the *Monitor* put it: "Many . . . people had blotted out politics and had settled down to active business life again. . . ." ¹¹ Unmistakably, life in Fort Scott had changed, and in a fundamental manner. In 1912 the Democrats again came to power, but no mention appeared in the press of "Salt creek" or of the "Constitution" which had once been perched upon the Shields building—to be taken down only when the Democrats won a Presidential victory.

11. *Daily Monitor*, November 18, 1900.

CONCLUSION

Under American popular government of the 19th century, the forms of political party organization and practices were largely carried on under an unwritten code, subject of course to change. Political parties were not yet a subject of statutory definition, nor campaigning a game involving the evasion of corrupt practices acts. In politics a man was expected to observe the rules of propriety. A man's political and private life might be quite separate, as was his professional career. The case of Ware and Sanger is only an example of the general situation, not proof of it. Each was a very positive man in his respective views on politics. During a campaign each dealt the other vigorous blows. Neither pulled his punches out of friendship, but the code differentiated between things public and things private. A violation of the code as in the case of Leslie Winter in 1872 resulted in a breach of friendship.

A variable amount of corruption occurred among all factions of political parties, but that offense scarcely qualified as pertinent to the present discussion. The elements that muddied the political waters so frequently and seriously during these decades and which did matter, were the fanatical advocates of causes; people who had convinced themselves that they were bound by "principles" and "morality," but to these must always be added those who climbed on the band-wagon of what appeared to be a popular cause and stayed with it so long as the chance for office seemed propitious. The amateurs in these groups, many of them well meaning, inexperienced in politics, knew not the political code, or cared not to respect the distinctions between things public and things private. They knew not constructive compromise in things public. They talked of "principles" and of "morality," but often practiced neither. Political preachers, prohibitionists, greenbackers, silverites, farmers, labor agitators, advocates of railroad regulation, of Negro rights, of woman's rights, and other reformers, including vindictive disappointed office seekers, drew especially Ware's contempt. He was not a crusader, and frequently found himself caught between the uncompromising elements, usually referred to as radical and conservative, but more often merely self-interested pressure groups. Ware's independent proposals in matters of public policy were sometimes more far-reaching and fundamental in their nature than the purported radical measures, a fact that these groups failed to recognize.

Regular party members, even the much condemned machine politicians, might disagree on men and measures, but they understood Democrat Dr. Sanger, a diminutive man, his white hair blowing in the breeze, heading a post-election parade carrying the United States flag, and Republican Eugene Ware, all six feet of him, marching beside Dr. Sanger, holding the latter's hat. This generation that fought for the Union felt a passionate veneration expressed in religious ideology for the United States flag and for the political system for which it stood. This unique emotional focus was no longer present near the end of the century. Also, concepts of the political code and of the constitution were modified.

In 1888 rather generally the people had responded with a certain enthusiasm to Ware's statement of Dr. Sanger's creed in terms of an essentially religious apotheosis of the United States flag. They were thrilled by Ware's salute to the flag in his long narrative poem on the Civil War—"Neutrality":

There is something in a flag, and a little
burnished eagle,
That is more than emblematic—it is
glorious, it's regal.

But by the end of the century only a dwindling handful of the Ware-Sanger generation would react comparably and see in the flag a faith to live by as in his poem

THE OLD SOLDIER'S RELIGION

The Stars and Stripes have stood by me
In hours of darkest peril;
I worship them as good enough
For me in hours of need.
I know that they will live beyond
All present forms of creed,
Because all present forms of creed
Are sere and drear and sterile.¹²

Unless one appreciates these things to the full and takes them seriously, there can be no real understanding of the history of the post-Civil War generation.

Again, emphasis must be placed upon the fact that the differentiation which focuses upon a tacit code of political behavior pointed out in the foregoing is not a value judgment. Whether or not such a political code was good or bad, or might be abused more or less

12. The exact date of this poem has not been determined, but it appeared in the *Rhymes of Ironquill* for the first time in the tenth edition of 1900.

than any other institution, is not the point. But to recognize the existence and the nature of this mode of operation does explain many things about the much misunderstood generation, which was in power, immediately following the American Civil War. To be sure, the Fort Scott manner of celebration is only a single local instance, but it is small enough to be presented in detail and in terms of named individuals. It is not offered as proof; only as an example. This and other comparable variant cases at the local level afford a solid basis, however, for a sure grasp of the political party aspect of national history for the period.