

THE COLUMBIA DEMOCRAT.

I have sworn upon the Altar of God, eternal hostility to every form of Tyranny over the Mind of Man.—Thomas Jefferson.

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PETER ROBINSON.

THIS EXTRAORDINARY CONFESS- ION. OTHER MURDERS, &c.

The New York Herald gives the following important particulars relative to Robinson, convicted at New Brunswick last week, of the murder of Abraham Suydam.

Peter Robinson is now about 42 years of age, was born in New Jersey, but raised in New York. He is not a carpenter by trade; but being ingenious, began to make looking glass frames about fifteen years ago, and has since worked at all sorts of carpenter and cabinet work.

His mother is dead, but his father is still living in the poor house at New Brunswick. He has two brothers, William and James, both of whom are shoemakers, are married, and have families. William is a shrewd, sharp, and rather queer tempered fellow, James is a young man of very weak intellect. Peter married a very respectable woman, has had three or four children by him, of whom but one boy, six or eight years old, is now living. He also had a sister, who is dead.

There are all sorts of stories and rumors about relative to his former life. It was believed by many that he murdered his sister, poisoned two of his children, and killed a pedlar and a carpenter, besides other miscellaneous murders. Last summer two of his children died suddenly, from taking some narcotic, and within a few weeks of each other. Dr. Van Dusen was called in to see one, and found him in the agonies of death, poisoned; and the mother said the child had been eating the *stramonium*, or *sink weed*; it was taken ill in the morning, and died before night. The same was the case with the other child; the eldest was eight or nine years old, and the youngest three or four; and Peter had whipped the eldest severely the day it died.

With regard to Peter's sister, the family say that she was known to have some money by her; that she was last seen in Peter's company and house; that he said she left to go to some service; and that she disappeared from that time, and has never been heard of since. And since Peter's arrest for the murder, his father had been to see him, and has said to him, "Now Peter, didn't you kill your sister?" which question he would not answer.

The story about the pedlar appears to be this: Some few years since a well known pedlar was in the habit of coming to New Brunswick and selling his trinkets around the city. He used to put up and board at various places. At last he took board at Peter's house. He disappeared a day or two afterwards very suddenly, and has never been heard of from that day, and no inhabitant has ever seen the man alive since. It is also said, that about a week or two after the pedlar disappeared, Peter's wife was seen with his little box and was selling the trinkets it contained. How true this is we know not.

There was another mysterious disappearance in New Brunswick a few years since. Peter came home from New York with a carpenter, who was known to have \$100, or more in his possession. The carpenter went to board at the house of Peter, and has not been heard of since. At that time Peter had just rented a new house for a year; he suddenly moved out of it, and declared he could not live in it; and the persons who moved into it, declared the basement stunk so horribly that they could not use it for a year.

These are a few of the charges that are brought against Peter, either with or without sufficient foundation thereof.

He was never known in New Brunswick to be other than a very poor man. His wife once lived cook with Mr. De Graw, (who keeps the very excellent hotel called the Mansion House,) and Peter used to eat and sleep there; whilst there he used to make little toys for Mr. De Graw's children, and do odd jobs about the house; but his aversion was always so great that he would charge four times as much as what he did was worth.

As to the manner in which Robinson committed this brutal and bloody deed, there are many opinions. Some suppose that he noticed Mr. Suydam to come to his house on Thanksgiving morning, and to bring all his papers, and all the evidence of his (Peter's) indebtedness with him; that Suydam went there, leaned over the carpenter's bench in the back room. In the act of writing a receipt for seventy five dollars, and that Peter struck him on the back part of the head with the hammer end of the hatchet, cracked his skull across, and then drove in the top of it with the blade of the hatchet; dragged him down stairs, and buried him in a grave already dug in the front basement. Peter has confessed to his counsel, Mr. Wood, and to clergy men, that he did not contemplate the murder at first, and that Mr. Suydam had a struggle for the possession of the papers; that Suydam, who was

a strong, muscular, and thick set man, got the better of him at the onset, and they both fell; that he (Peter) seized his mallet, and hit Mr. Suydam on the back of the head with it, which stunned, but did not kill him; that he then took from him his watch his wallet, with a large roll of money in it, the bond, mortgage, policy, and note, besides a quantity of valuable papers, such as Camden and Acohy railroad scrip, and notes, &c. against persons in New York, worth \$4,000, or \$5,000. These latter he hid under the floor of the first room on the first floor, near the fireplace, where they were afterwards found by his direction, and given up to Mr. Blauvelt, the Corporation Attorney.

Peter says that Suydam then came to his senses, and he had great difficulty in dragging the body down the stairs into the front basement. That he there tied and bound his half insensible victim, who begged hard for his life, and promised to give all he had taken and not to punish him. He also says that Mr. S. groaned so horribly that he could not bear to hear him; he therefore gagged his mouth, and left him in that condition, from Thursday morning until Saturday morning, on the bare ground in December. That on Saturday he went there early, dug the grave before his still living victim, threw him into it alive, and then struck him over the head with the spade, dashed in his skull, and thus killed him, and that he then covered the corpse with earth, and left the place, never to return there alone again!!!

All the accounts of the callousness of the criminal are true. We had the following conversation with him a short time before the verdict was rendered:

Peter—I see a good many fellows here taking likenesses of me. I should like to get one. I think I ought to have one.

Reporter—I'll try to get one, Peter.

Peter—I had a very handsome one, once; I gave \$30 for it; it was quite small; and had my wife, myself and two children on it. But it was stolen from me when I went to jail. I shall never see it again.

Such is the cold blooded confusion of this moral monster, and his actions are unparalleled in the annals of cruelty and horror; and had not some officious fool already told this thrilling tale of horror to Mr. Suydam's distressed and amiable widow, we should never have mentioned it here. Mrs. Suydam could have testified to her husband having taken the papers out of his bureau the morning of the murder, and having his watch in his pocket when he left his own house at half past nine o'clock. She was brought into the Court House one day for that purpose, but was not called on the stand. She was the second wife of Mr. Suydam, who was about 44, and she has four or five beautiful little children by him, the youngest of which was not six years old when the murder was committed.

Peter—I shall be condemned, I suppose; and then there'll be another opportunity for some of you to write books about me; but I think I ought to share the profits.

Reporter—Yes.

Peter—If I'm condemned you'll see no difference in me; I shall be just as cheerful as I am now. I may as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb. But there's one good thing, the worst witnesses are past; and all they can say, they can't say one word against my character; they can't say I haven't always been a sober, honest, and industrious man.

Rep.—Ay.

Peter—But if I had had a good lawyer at first I should have been better off; but my first lawyer came to me in prison, and the first thing he said to me was "Make your peace with God." What kind of a way was that? Make your peace with God! that was no way for a lawyer to act.

Here the conversation, which is literally true, was broken off by the jailer.

ROBINSON'S CONFESSION.

The Newark Daily Advertiser publishes the following extract from a private letter dated New Brunswick, April 3d.

Robinson seems raw to relent, and has confessed his crime in the most hideous form. He says he called upon Mr. Suydam the night before the murder and invited him to his house under the pretence of paying off the note and \$300 on the bond and mortgage—that he was prepared to assault him on his entry, and had placed his hatchet in the side-light of the front door intending as he passed in to seize it and make the attack; but Mr. S. came in the back door, which frustrated this plan. They went into the basement story, and Mr. S. entered into familiar conversation about the house, remarked to him that he was getting along well, and would soon be through, &c. &c., but seemed to keep his eye on his guilty associate, who had taken up a mallet. They passed into the first story, and there Robinson said to Mr. S. that his wife had gone out for pen and ink and would soon return.

Mr. S. replied, "I'll walk out a few minutes and return again, by that time she may be in," and advanced to the door. Robinson stepped behind him struck the blow with the mallet which threw off his hat and brought him on his hands and knees—a second blow brought him to the floor. He then went down to prepare the grave, and whilst digging he heard a noise up stairs, and returned and found Mr. S. on his hands and knees and at the moment took his hand and wiped the blood from his eyes and said, in a faint voice, "oh Peter, oh Peter."—These words the convict says were continually in his ear. He then gave the fatal blow and carried him down stairs and let him lay until the grave was finished.

VINSON

OF THE BANK BILL.

To the Senate and House of Representatives, of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

GENTLEMEN:—The bill entitled "An act relating to Banks, and to provide for the better government thereof," is herewith returned to the Senate, in which it originated, without the Executive approbation, and with the following reasons why that sanction is withheld.

This Bill relates to a subject of deep and universal interest to the people of Pennsylvania; and to its consideration I have brought all the energies of my mind, and all the lights that experience of upwards of half a century has furnished. I cannot persuade myself that duty or patriotism would justify my sanction of its provisions. Some things contained in it, I would gladly approve, but I cannot believe that the penalties imposed on the Banks, so far as relates to the citizens of this Commonwealth, ought to be repealed, or that the issue of notes under the denomination of five dollars by the Banks, to an amount of six millions of dollars, for the term of five years, should be authorized.

It would be useless to go into a discussion of the causes which have led to the present derangement and embarrassment of our monetary system, and of the evils which they exist, and that our banking institutions, generally, have been unable to meet their engagements. We have had three bank suspensions in less than four years.—The result is an almost entire destruction of the confidence of the public in our banking institutions. The intimate connection existing between our banks has involved all in one common fate. Those conducted with prudence and care, are suffering from the misconduct of others. That there are some great and cardinal errors in the mode of conducting our banking operations, must be obvious to all, or those things would not occur so frequently as they have done. The public will, seeking the public good, has required that these errors should be corrected. That correction, all must be aware, cannot take place at any time, without cases of individual suffering and hardship.—These are to be regretted, but yet ought not to prevent the correction of greater evils to the public at large. The indulgence given to the banks, by the resolution passed on the 3d day of April, 1840, which suspended existing penalties for not meeting their engagements until the 15th January last, it was hoped would have enabled them then fully to resume. When I approved those resolutions, I believed that it was necessary to give the banks and the people some time to meet their engagements. That given, however, was greater than I then apprehended to be necessary, or exactly satisfactory to the public. But as it was a mere question of expediency as to time, I yielded my assent, rather than run the risk of having no legislation on the subject. The indulgence thus given, was dictated by a spirit of extraordinary forbearance, and the public fully expected that at the time appointed, the banks would be fully able to meet their engagements. Such were most certainly my own expectations. Those expectations unfortunately have proved to be groundless. The banks are now in a state of general suspension, and this bill is designed by the Legislature as a remedy for the evil, and a relief to the community.—Let us examine how far it seems likely to answer the end proposed.

The principal features of it are, that it repeals absolutely and unconditionally, the penalties and forfeitures to which the banks of this Commonwealth are subject, for the non-payment of their liabilities on demand, and renders the banks liable, as natural persons or individuals are, agreeably to the laws of this Commonwealth, for the payment of their bills, notes and other liabilities; and also, that it authorizes the banks for the term of five years after the passage of this act, to issue, circulate, and receive bills or notes of the denomination of one, two, and three dollars, to an amount not exceeding fifteen per cent. on the amount of capital actually paid in. It also provides

sundry regulations, and imposes certain restrictions upon the banks. Some of these restrictions and regulations are wise and salutary, but many of them are, in my opinion, calculated to produce far more mischief than good.

In relation to the repeal of the penalties and forfeitures, and placing the banks on the same footing of natural persons, it seems to me, that the bill is peculiarly objectionable in several material respects. It prescribes no time when the repeal shall cease to be operative, and it serves none of the special provisions of the law under which, independent of the penalties and forfeitures to which the banks are subject, they may be required to pay liabilities. It seems to me that it would have been far better, if any law of this nature is to pass at all, instead of repealing absolutely the penalties and forfeitures, to suspend the law imposing them for some definite period of time.—They would then, at the expiration of that time, again take effect without any positive legislation upon this subject. But agreeably to the provisions of this bill, they are repealed forever. Should subsequent events require their re-enactment, we might be met with the objection, that the charters are violated; that the provisions of the bill to question, when accepted, became part of the same, and that the Legislature possess no power to re-inforce the existing penalties so taken off.

Great caution should be exercised in the passage of laws affecting corporation or private remedies in regard to them. Corporations being creatures of the law, and acting only by its express authority, and being responsible only in the manner pointed out by the law, any, by a hasty and inconsiderate alteration of the law, the whole operation of which was not foreseen at the time of its passage, be ruinously crippled in their actions, or placed beyond the reach of the citizens who may have dealings with them, or demands upon them. There are so many different modes in which the banks of this Commonwealth are connected with the general interests of the community, and there are so many legal provisions regulating

extremely hazardous experiment to say, that so far as respects demands against them in their corporate capacity, they shall be repealed, and the banks be placed on the footing of natural persons or individuals. At the first glance it appears to be plausible, but it may result in a manner very prejudicial to the community or to the banks, or probably to both. Without tracing its operation further it would relieve the banks from a serious inconvenience in giving bail on suits brought, and on appeals from awards obtained against them; although the popular impression is, that it would free them from no such liability. There may be other changes which it would effect, but I shall not occupy any time in following them out. It would have been perfectly convenient to have simply provided on this subject, that so much of any laws of this Commonwealth as relates to penalties imposed upon the banks, or the forfeiture of their charters, should have been suspended, leaving all the other laws for enforcing demands against them untouched. Then all the questions that can relate to the enforcement of the law, for the collection of demands against the banks, would have been provided for, and it would have been known precisely what the condition of the banks was; but not so under this law which places them in the same general class with natural persons or individuals.

So far as respects the authority given to the banks to issue and circulate notes under the denomination of five dollars, I beg leave to refer you to my annual messages transmitted to the Legislature of last year and to the present Legislature, for my general views. The untoward circumstances which have placed the banks of this Commonwealth in their present situation, are to be deeply regretted, and in no particular more so, than in the embarrassments thereby created, in procuring small sums for the common purposes of change among the citizens in their various transactions. These embarrassments are undoubtedly, in many instances, a severe hardship upon the community, but the question presented for consideration is, whether this mode of relief would not, in the end, be more injurious to the community than the temporary inconvenience they now suffer. This provision would authorize the issue and circulation of bank notes for less than five dollars, to the amount of six millions of dollars and upwards, and we might then well despair of seeing a dollar in specie in circulation.

Whatever arguments might be adduced in favor of a limited amount of small notes, for a short period, to aid in the resumption of specie payments, the force of which has not been conclusive upon my mind, the amount authorized by this Bill, and the period of time during which they are permitted, are, in my judgment, greater than can

be required by the exigency of the occasionth or than the people of the Commonwealth would willingly tolerate. The latter part of the same section too, for the first time in the legislation of Pennsylvania, expressly sanctions the issue of post notes. No portion of our citizens, so far as I have been informed, have asked this at the hands of the Legislature; and the policy of issuing them by the banks, has been more than rendered doubtful by the experience of past years, and has been loudly reprobated.

I have already stated, that the regulations and restrictions imposed upon the banks, were, some of them, wise and salutary, and I shall confine my notice only to some of the principal ones which I consider peculiarly objectionable. In the first place, this bill provides that the directors of any bank, individually or collectively, shall not contract any liabilities to the bank exceeding certain limits; that is, when the capital stock actually paid in does not exceed \$250,000, the amount of such liability shall not exceed the one-sixth part of the aggregate loans of such bank; and proceeding to provide, that as the capital of each bank increases in amount, the relative proportion of liabilities shall also be increased. At a cursory glance this provision might appear to be a very considerable security to the public against the monopolizing rapacity of bank directors; but upon more mature consideration, it will be manifestly fraught with dangerous consequences. One of the most grievous complaints against the banks of this Commonwealth, has been their over issues and expansions. The direct tendency of this provision seems to me to be to produce them. If, for instance, a bank has made loans to an amount of \$100,000, the liability of all the directors can only amount to one-sixth of this sum. But should they wish to obtain more, they have nothing to do but to increase the extent of loans to \$200,000, or to any other sum without limit, and they can increase their own liabilities to one-sixth of that amount. It is evidently, therefore, offering a direct inducement to expand their circulation, and that too, perhaps, by loaning their money to unsound borrowers, the interests of the public. I cannot, therefore, yield my assent to such a provision as this.

The Cashiers of the banks are specially entrusted with all their cash and other property; yet by the sixth section of this bill, they are prohibited from keeping any private or individual account with the banks of which they are cashiers. If there be wisdom, or additional security to the public in this, it is, I confess, beyond my comprehension.

A material change in the number of votes to which stockholders of banks shall be entitled, is also made. It is provided that every share of stock not exceeding fifty, shall be entitled to a vote, and a proportionate increase of votes to the number of shares of stock held is extended to an indefinite number. By the law as it stood before, fifty shares of stock were entitled to thirteen votes, with a relative proportion for any number of shares. It appears to me that the effect of this change would be, to place the control of each bank in the hands of a few persons, and to enable them to monopolize its management. I cannot think, therefore, that this provision is calculated to advance either the interests of the banks or secure the interests of the public.

This Bill further provides, that directors hereafter to be elected, in banks with an amount of capital stock paid in not less than three millions of dollars, shall be holders, in their own right, of not less than three thousand dollars of the stock of said bank, and extending a like proportionate qualification, to the directors elected in all other banks; and further providing, that persons to be elected State Directors in the bank of Pennsylvania and in the Philadelphia Bank, shall be stockholders to the amount of one thousand dollars, and in the Columbia Bank and Bridge Company, to the amount of five hundred dollars. The whole system here proposed to be established, of requiring the directors of the several banks of this Commonwealth to be holders of stock to so large an amount, seems to me to be exceedingly objectionable. It places the control of the banks, at once, in the hands either of the rich or of the large stock jobbers and stockholders. So far as respects the country banks, in particular, its operation will be a hard one. It will amount to a disfranchisement of some of the most competent and efficient bank directors in the Commonwealth, and will eventually place the banks in far less competent hands than even those that now manage them. The banks are already aristocratic enough without the addition of this, which is in effect, a property qualification to their directors. I can see nothing so peculiar in the character and duties of a bank director, as to require that he shall possess from five hundred to three