Speech of J. M'D. Sharpe, Esq.,

In the House of Representatives of Pennsylvania, on the Bill for the Adjudication and Payment of Military Damages

DELIVERED FEBRUARY 24, 1864.

MR. SPEAKER: On last Wednesday the courtesy of this House assigned this evening for the consideration of this bill. It is not my purpose to waste precious time, or to trespass upon the patience of this House, by making a tiresome political harangue. I have said from the first, and I repeat it again, that there are no politics in this bill, and that there ought to be none in its discussion.—When the gentleman from Washington (MR. KELLEY) introduced his resolution of instruction to the select committee to whom this bill had been committed, I was induced to make some remarks, because I at the time believed that the resolution contained a covert attack upon the loyalty of my constituents. Since that time the gentleman has disavowed all such intention; I am bound to accept his disavowal for truth, and I do so cheerfully. On last night the gentleman from Dauphin (Mr. ALLEMAN) made a positive and direct accusation of disloyalty against some of my constituents. I hope to have an opportunity, on some future occasion, to answer the gentleman. But I will not undertake to do so to-night, because I have matters of far more importance entrusted to my charge for this evening.

Mr. Speaker, it may be proper for me to say, whilst standing on the threshold of this debate, that I have no pecuniary interest whatever in the passage of this bill. Should I be betrayed, in the heat of discussion, into what may seem unusual zeal in its support, I trust that my earnestness may be charged to the account of that nobler impulse of the heart which prompts the representative, under all circumstances consistent with his duties to the State at large, to maintain the rights of his constituents. I do confess to a deep, intense and abiding interest in the fate of this bill. Nor is there a single gentleman upon this floor who would be surprised at this, could he walk with me through the beautiful valley of the Cumberland and examine for himself the blighting ravages committed by an insolent foe flushed with success, and still to be read upon the ground, in desolated farms, prostrated fences and ruined forests? Would that you had an opportunity to mingle with my constituents, and to hear the sad talo of the husbandman, stripped by ruthless hands of all his stock, deprived of the means of livelihood, and turned over, with his family, to the cruel tyranny of poverty. Would that you all could hear the touching story of the fond mother, how the rebels came in their pride and power, and drove away the favorite horse of her darling boy—who was far away from home and kindred—in the land of the stranger and enimies, fighting for the imperilled Constitution, with his eye fixed even in death upon the flag of his country. Would that you all could listen to the still more pathetic tale of the widow who has given all her household gods as offerings upon the altar of patriotism—husband and sons—and now by the fortunes of war l ecome a bankrupt not only in heart, but also in property; a husbandless, childless, penniless female, dependent upon the bitter bread of charity. The fate of this bill may, indeed, be of little consequence to many upon this floor They can return to their homes where the tread of armed legions have never left their footprints of blood, and where the hum of honest industry has never been drowned by the roar of cannon or the roll of musketry, believing that they have done a wise thing in voting against this bill. What matters it to them? These things are but history to them—not living truths. But to me they are stern realities. Even here, in this presence, methinks I hear these tales of suffering and see those touching spectacles Yes, even now I hear the Macedonian cry of my constituents, calling to all the loyal and true-hearted sons of Pennsylvania, "Come over and help us!" These scenes, like "Banquo's ghost," will not down at my bidding. They need no magician's wand to call them up before my mind's eye; they are there always—living, stubborn, stern realities. Mr. Speaker, is it surprising that I am earnest in this cause? Would it not rather be amazing if I were not? Could any heart less cold and hard than adamant, listen with stolidity and indifference to the voice of duty, which "pleads like angels, trumpet-tongued," against the selfish parsimony which could contemptuously refuse the measure of this relief?

But the success of this bill needs no support from that morbid sympathy which is ever prone to weep at the tale of suffering. It stands fairly and squarely upon the broad *foundation* of its own intrinsic merit. I trust this measure with confidence to the calm, sober, unbiased judgment of this House. I invoke not in its behalf those tender emotions which overflow the flood gates of the heart whenever the fountain has been started by the hand of violence and outrage.—But I also, on the other hand, deprecate that blind and unreasoning prejudice which would condemn my cause before it is heard. Every principle of State duty, every principle of right and justice demand, in imperative tones, the passage of this bill.

Will the House indulge me whilst I strive in my own feeble way to prove this? A fair understanding of the act will prove synonymous with its passage.

A brief history of the origin of these claims for damages may become necessary at this point.

Scarcely had the last sounds of the bombardment of Fort Sumter died upon the air—hardly had the pulsations of the national heart recovered from the shock of the deep mouthed cannon of treason, ere Harper's Ferry and all the country on that side of the Potomac were seized by the Virginia troops. They kept up, for a considerable length of time, a menacing attitude towards the State of Pennsylvania. There were no forces upon our borders, to repel the threatened invasion, and no natural obstructions, except the narrow Potomac, to prevent their penetration into the Cumberland Valley, and the burning of this capital. At this juncture it was deemed advisable by the military authorities of the Government, to concentarte the opposing force at Chambersburg. The Seventh, Eighth, and Tenth regiments of three months' Pennsylvania volunteers were ordered to that place. They took possession of the farm of a loyal citizen, being contiguous to that borough, and occupied the same as a military camp for the period of about two months. In the month of June, 1861, the Government determined to increase the force on the border to a corps numbering about twenty-five thousand muskets, with the view of pushing them down the valley of Virginia, under the command of General Patterson. This augmented force spread their encampments over large tracts of the most fertile land in Franklin county, whilst the crops were beginning to whiten for the harvest, and remained in the occupacy thereof for about three weeks. It requires no fancy to conceive how great would be the injury to crops, fences and timber at the hands of so large a force of then raw and undisciplined soldiery. These troops were in the service of the United States. But no steps have as yet been taken by the General Government, or by the Legislature of Pennsylvania, for the adjudication and payment of the damages inflicted by them upon the citizens of this Commonwealth. It is true that Governor Curtin appointed two very competent citizens of Franklin county to make assessments of these damages. The commissioners so appointed have done their work well, and have made report of their labors to the Executive. But inasmuch as their appointment by the Governor was unauthorized by law, and no legislation has ever been had to validate their reports, and no appropriation has ever been made to pay the claims adjudicated by them, their labors have ended solely in faith, not in fruition. In September, 1862, the rebel General Longstreet's corps took possession of Hagerstown, in the State of Maryland, and all the territory intervening between it and the limits of Pennsylvania. A universal panic seized upon the whole country. The heart of the North stood still, as if paralyzed with sudden fright. The Governer, with commendable zeal and earnesness, sounded the alarm bell, which struck a sympathetic chord in every heart. His proclamation calling upon the citizens of Pennsylvania to come up to help of the Government against the mighty, to shoulder the knapsack and musket, and marching to the border, there, upon the confines of their native State, to receive upon the points of their bayonets the insurgent hordes that were revelling in the intoxication of victory of the second fatal Bull Run, sped over the mountain, through valleys and across streams, like the ominous symbol borne by the fleet-footed Highlander in days of yore, known and recognized by all the clans, as the bloody signal of their chieftain which summoned them to the harvest of death. With the same heroic devotion with which the clansman was wont to answer the fatal summons of his chief, did the true hearted and sturdy sons of this grand old Commonwealth answer the call of their Executive. The voice of duty had scarcely ceased to speak, before thousands answered it, in person. The farmer left his plough in the furrow, the merchant forsook his merchandise, the lawyer forgot his cause, the minister turned his back upon his pulpit, and the artisan rushed from his shop, and all with one common purpose and firm resolve marched forward toward the foe, keeping step to the music of the Union. The earth, like a prolific mother, seemed to have brought forth in a single night, innumerable legions of armed men. Transportation could not convey them to the borders as fast as they desired to go. Thousands of them were quartered upon the farms and in the buildings of citizens of Pennsylvania. This large force, thus suddenly put into the field, could not, by any possible exertions of the military authorities of the State, be adequately provided with tents, rations and other necessaries for their comfort. They had a good right to make themselves comfortable, and I hope I may be pardoned for saying that they exhausted all the resources within their reach, to attain this desirable consummation. We were glad to see them there and we do not complain against them now, because they left a record behind them of their presence, which can be read to this day upon our farms, buildings and forests. In addition to this militia force the Governor ordered the "Anderson Troop" to the border, which was at that time lying in barracks at Carliste.—Time could not be spared to mount these troops in the regular way. It was of the highest importance that they should be put into the saddle, as scouts, without delay; and no other alternative remained but to impress the necessary number of horses, with their accoutrements, for immediate service. After the exigencies of the occasion had passed away, many of these horses were returned to their owners, in a very bad condition, and others were never returned at all. These horses were taken out of the plows of our farmers in the fields, and out of their wagons on the public highway, yet so high is the standard of loyalty among my constituents, that not only did they not murmur against this act of oppression, but they indeed acquiesced in it with alacrity and cheerfulness. These claims have also been adjudicated and assessed by two very intelligent citizens of Franklin county, acting under the appointment of the Governor. This appointment was also, at the time it was made, authorized by law, and consequently nothing has been done towards the payment of these damages. In October, 1862, the rebel General Stuart, with a cavalry force numbering about two thousand sabres, passed through parts of the counties of Adams and Franklin, destroying considerable property, and taking with them large numbers of horses. At the last session of the Legislature an act was passed, approved on the 22d day of April, 1863, which provided that the court of common pleas of Dauphin county should appoint three appraisers, who, after being sworn, should proceed to examine and ascertain the losses and damages sustained by citizens of this Commonwealth, by reason of the occupancy of and trespass upon their lands by any part of the militia force which was called into active service in September, A. D. 1862, for the purpose of defending the southern border of the States; also, to examine and ascertain the losses and damages sustained by the citizens of this State, by reason of the impressment of their horses, wagons, teams, forage and other property, into the service of the United States for the use of the Anderson cavalry, in the month of September, 1862; and also the losses and damages sustained by citizens on the southern border of the State, by reason of the rebel raid under General Stuart, on the tenth and eleventh days of October, 1862. The appraisers were also required to make report of their assessments of losses and damages, together with the testimony taken by them, to the court. It was made the duty of the court to review these reports, and authority was given to approve or set them aside, in whole or in part. In pursuance of this act of Assembly the court of common pleas of Dauphin county appointed General Worral, Judge Hiester and Mr. Weidle, three intelligent and upright gentlemen of this county, who have so far discharged their duties as to have ascertained all the losses and damages occasioned by the Stuart raid, and the court is now in possession of their reports. Since the passage of the act of the 22d day of April, 1863, it has become a part of the history of this war, that General Lee, with his whole army, has invaded the State, causing immense loss to the citizens of the border counties, in crops, grain, forage, horses, cattle and other property. That again the loyal and devoted sons of this Commonwealth rushed to the border, to defend, from the contaminating touch of the vandal hordes, that sacred soil which William Penn had dedicated to peace and good will toward all men, more than a century ago. Again our citizens suffered the ravages of a badly provided and poorly fed body of undisciplined troops. It is also well known that considerable damage was done to the property of citizens of Allegheny county, and of other counties, by the erection of defensive works by our troops, and in various other ways, during the excitement of last summer. The bill now before the House simply proposes to enlarge the powers of the commissioners so as to enable them to ascertain and assess all damages occasioned by the enemy and by our own troops, State and national, within the limits of this Commonwealth, since the commencement of the war. Thus, that which was made local and special relief by the act of 22d of April, 1863, has been changed, by the present act into a redress as broad as the boundaries of the State herself. This is eminently right and proper. This act also contemplates that the appraisers shall make their report to the court of common pleas of Dauphin county, and the same duty is laid upon the court to review these reports, and dispose of them in such a manner as to the court may seem right and just. The commissioners are also required to administer oaths, and to reduce the testimony of claimants and witnesses to writing, and to return the same to the court. This bill also proposes to give the commissioners the right, if they think proper to do so, to adopt the assessments heretofore made by the appraisers appointed by the Governor, and to return them to the court as part of their report, with the same duty of review imposed upon the court as in the other cases. The bill also requires the attorney General of the Commonwealth to depute an attorney for each county to which its provisions may apply, to appear before the board of commissioners as counsel for the State. Each claimant is also required to file, with his claim, an affidavit setting forth, in specific terms, that he has never borne arms against the United States or the State of Pennsylvania; that he has never given aid, information or encouragement to those in armed hostility to the Goverament; that he has never discouraged enlistments in the armies of the United States; and that he will support the Constitution of the United States and of the State of Pennsylvania, and bear true faith and allegiance to the same, and behave himself as a loyal citizen thereof. When these damages shall have been finally adjudicated, the bill provides that the State of Pennsylvania shall issue coupon certificates of indebtedness to the claimants, bearing five per centum interest per annum, payable semi-annually, at the State Treasury, redeemable in twenty years or sooner, at the option of the State, and that an additional tax of one quarter of a mill shall be laid on all property now taxable for State purposes, and the fund arising therefrom shall be appropriated solely to the redemption of these certificates.

Such, Mr. Speaker, is a brief and cursory narrative of this origin of these claims, and such a rough and hasty sketch of the measure of redress proposed by the bill. Is there any gentleman upon this floor, whose heart prompts him to ask me, why do your constituents come here asking for relief? I answer him, in their name, (for I am only authorized to speak for them,) because they have a right to do it. The first and highest duty of a State is protection to her citizens in life, liberty and property. Protection is the price of allegience, and allegience is the duty that follows protection. Where one of these duties dies, the other flies with it.—They are reciprocal, co-extensive and co-ordinate obligations. They can no more be seperated from each other and live, than can the soul and body be severed and natural life remain.—In a state of nature, man had an inalliunable right to consult his own safety, welfare and interest, in his own way, and in obedience to no restraints, except his own unchained violations. The result of this was that might made right. The strong oppressed the weak. No man was safe in his life, liberty or property, so long as there lived a stronger than he, who might deprive him of these inestimable blessings. A universal feeling of insecurity reigned throughout the earth. The want of a power that could retrain the strong arm of the oppressor, shield the weak, help the helpless and coerce the untutored volitions of the natural man, was universally felt and acknowled. It was at once discovered that this power could only be found and lodged in an aggregation of individuals.—Mankind was not long in learning that an aggregation of individuals cannot exist without government, and that as all could not be governors there must necessarily be a class whose duty it was to govern, and a class whose lot it was to be governed, and whose duty it was to obey. Starting with these things in view, men agreed to form a government and to surrender to their rulers a part of that unlicensed freedom which they had enjoyed in a state of nature, in consideration of the security they expected to possess as the fruit of the government. This we believe to be the true origin of all human governments and from these premises, we can with ease deduct the co-relative duties of the rulers and of the people. The one owes protection, and the other allegiance. Different forms of government have appeared up the earth. We have had and now have, despotism, constitutional monarchies and republics. But no difference what shape the government may assume, it never can rid itself of the original object of its institutions—protection to its people in all their rights. There never has been a despotism in all the annals of history that has ever forgotten this high obligation which it owed its subjects when their interests had been infringed upon by other nations, No matter how cruel might be the heel of domestic tyranny upon the necks of the citizens, still the despot in dealing between his subjects and foreign states, stood true as the needle to the pole in his discharge of this holy and sacred trust. Even now the Emperor of France has upon this continent a powerful army whose eagles have overrun a neighboring republic, in a crusade for the restoration of the violated rights of his citizens. Can it be that this great State, the theory of whose government is founded upon the broad and eternal principle that the people are the source of all powers—that they indeed are the sovereigns, and the rulers, for the time being, the servants? Can it be, sir, that this great Commonwealth, with such a political conception as that, can swerve the tithe of a hair from her high mission? Can it be that the people who, in this State, are the government, shall fall below the standard of security which despotism has set up for the rights of its subjects? Can it be that this people, through their representatives on this floor, will so stultify themselves as to deny protection to themselves?—Until it is shown that those whom I represent here have thrown off their allegiance to their government, and forfeited the right of protection; until it is proved that they are derelict in their duty; until it is shown that they have struck, with parricidal hand, a blow at the heart of that government that nursed them in safety during infancy, and protected their property in manhood; sir, until these things are shown here upon this floor, I ask this relief for my constituents not as a matter of grace—I demand it as a matter of right.

Is there still some gentleman in this House who asks why your constituents come here and ask for this relief? I answer him, because they deserve it. The highest civil duty of the citizen is to discharge all his duties to his government. There may be some gentleman upon this floor who may think that I put the case too strongly, when I say that my constituents have in all times past, and under all circumstances, fully performed every obligation that they owed to the Government. I repeat, sir, with emphasis, that they have done so, and I challenge contradiction, come from what quarter it may. There is a passive obedience to the Government which a citizen may give, and which is enough, in ordinary circumstances, to entitle him to protection in life, liberty and property. In other words, every State is bound to protect her citizens against all assaults upon their rights, so long as they hold allegiance to that Government, and do no act in open hostility to it. This is the universally acknowledged obligation of States to their citizens. But it may be argued that the relief provided by this bill is unusual and extraordinary. Sir, let it be so admitted, for the sake of the argument, (but only for the sake of the argument,) and I still insist that my constituents are entitled to it, because their obedience to the Government has been an extraordinary and willing one—a service of the heart, not of the lips. Their burdens and their struggles have been extraordinary in its behalf, and when compared with those of the other citizens of the State, may, in a certain sense, be termed works of supererogation. Mr. Speaker, my district sent one of the first companies that arrived in this city, after the bombardment of Fort Sumter. It furnished that glorious battery of artillery commanded by the gallant Capt. Easton, which covered itself with honor at Drainesville, and whose heroic commander, rather than surrender his guns to the enemy, upon the first of the seven ill-fated days before Richmond, calmly bared his breast to the storm of lead, exclaiming, with his dying breath, "This battery never surrenders!" It furnished two full companies to the Pennsylvania Reserve Corps. It sent the first regiment of Pennsylvania to gather laurels upon the battle-fields of Kentucky and Tennessee; I refer to the 77th Pennsylvania volunteers. It sent a full battery with that regiment, now commanded by the gallant Capt. McDowell. It furnished the 107th regiment to the Army of the Potomac. In August, 1862, it sent the famous 126th regiment to the same army, and upon the blood enriched fields of Fredericksburg, the grass now grows over the graves of many of both regiments. It has furnished three cavalry companies for the war. It has filled up its quota under the impending draft, and besides all that has supplied recruits to other portions of the State. Upon every battle-field of this cruel and unnatural war, the sons of my district have been found lying with their feet to the foe and their faces towards the stars. There were no politics in their deaths, as there had been none in their lives, after the stability of the Union was imperilled. There they lay, cold in death, Republican and Democrat, side by side, just as they had fought in life. Remember, Mr. Speaker, this is the military record of a district that lies within cannon shot of the enemy's country. This is the military record of a people whose homes were daily threatened with desolation, and which have, in truth, twice been ravaged. Have I not reason, sir, to be proud of such a constituency? Have I not, sir, just cause to be sensitive, when I am told, by gentlemen on this floor, that my people invited, and abetted this invasion of this Commonwealth? Did I say one word too much, sir, when I declared that my constituents deserve the relief of this bill? But, sir, the one-half is scarcely told. We have paid our taxes promptly. We have invested our means liberally in Government securities. I make no merit of this, sir, because all good citizens have done the same. But, sir, our country has twice been overrun with the rebel hordes. Twice have our citizens been robbed and plundered by an insolent foe. Twice have our people been drowned by the deluge of militia men, who swarmed over our fields like locusts, and eat up our substance. Many of our tenants have lost their entire stock, which they gathered together by the patient industry of a life time. They are now penniless and without the means of livelihood. Our mothers, our wives, our sisters and our daughters, have stood upon the streets of our towns and villages, and at our railroad stations, to feed the hungry and nurse the sick soldiers, who had come from afar to defend their homes. We have lived in a state of constant suspense and dread. In the morning, our families were forced to exclaim, "would to God it were evening," and in the evening, "would to God it were morning." Our business has been broken up. Our grass crops have been permitted to rot in the fields, and our grain to perish for want of the sickle, and our corn has been trusted to the dews and rains of a beneficent Creator, unassisted by human labor. Our industry has been paralyzed, and our times put out of joint. Yet all this we have borne with scarcely a murmur. The cry of my constituents for help and protection went up and filled the ears of those in power, at Washington, and yet no heed was given to their call. Despairing of assistance from beyond their own border, they at last only implored for permission to keep their own citizens, which had entered the service of the United States, at home, as a guard to protect themselves from sudden cavalry raids. The necessities of the nation demanded that this prayer should also remained unanswered. Thus were we compelled to send from our midst those who otherwise could and would have defended our property, at least from the rebel raid of Stuart. We did not slumber upon the brink of ruin, nor blindly shut our eyes against the dangers that environed us. We made known our apprehensions to the government, and we fully informed those in authority of the consequences of neglecting our demands. But they were as those who heard not, though having ears. Under such depressing circumstances, and treated with such stoical indifference, did my constituents falter in their loyalty? No, not they. They had hearts large enough to comprehend that their government was not indifferent to their fate, only too impotent, at the time to help them in their sore straits. They had intelligence enough to understand that the kind mother that had nursed them into prosperity, failed only to come to their rescue, because she was herself struggling in the expiring throes of impending dissolution. They could pity the anguish of a parent, stung to death by the serpent tooth of her own children's ingratitude. They could sympathize as well as blame, and when they cast their eyes over and across the troubled sea of revolution, and beheld the ship of state struggling amid the boisterous waves, with night and the tempest closing around her; when their eyes peered thorough the murky atmosphere of the battle-field, and followed with longing and anxious glances the starry banner of their country through the varied and chequered fortunes of each bloody day, the words of cavil and complaint changed upon their lips into shouts of honest admiration for the sublimity of the struggle, and the divinity of the fortitude it exhibited. Therefore, Mr. Speaker, my constituents stand to-day, as they have stood in all time, firm as a rock, against which the mad waves of rebellion and civil strife may dash; but still the receding flood will leave them fixed and immovable as before. They have borne long and patiently, even for three long, weary year. They now stand in this presence, and through me, as one of their representatives, demand that tardy justice shall at last be done to them. Did I, Mr. Speaker, go beyond the bounds of moderation and prudence, when I declared these people deserve this relief?

Is there still some gentleman upon this floor whose heart prompts him to ask, why do your constituants demand this relief? I answer because there is no reason founded in either justice or right, why they should be compelled to carry heavier burdens than other portions of the State, more fortunately located. Look at this question, Mr. Speaker, in a spirit of candor and fair dealing. We are all sons of Pennsylvania alike. The ægis of the same Constitution protect us all alike. We have a common heritage of State glory and renown, we have a common duty of allegience to bear towards our government we have common burdens to bear, and common aspirations and common hopes. The golden thread that links us in a common state brotherhood, begins on the shores of Lake Erie, and runs over mountains, through valleys and across rivers, until it gathers within its links, us who dwell near the banks of the Potomac. If all things else be common, why should our misfortunes be peculiar? If we have a joint tenancy of everything else, why should we suffer the fortunes of war in severality? There can be no answer adverse to my cause, unless it be spoken by the voice of that selfish parsimony, which, wrapping itself up in the mantle of its own influence and contentment, can shut his heart against the pleadings of justice, and turn a deaf ear to the tale of sorrow. There is no use in mincing words about this matter Cold, calculating selfishness can alone deny the provisions of this bill. No higher impulse will or can have aught to say, in making such a decision.

Is there still some gentleman upon this floor who inquires, why do your constituents ask this relief? I answer him, because they have precedent for it. The principle that peculiar hardships experienced by any portion of the people beyond the ordinary hardships of the masses, is entitled to special redress, has always been recognized since the first dawn of our national existence. The journals of every Congress and State Legislature, are filled with successful applications of this character. So important have these causes become in our country, that a peculiar court has been created for their settlement. I know of no civilized nation that does not acknowledge the binding force of this obligation. The destruction of property by mobs in our cities, has by express legislation been compensated out of the common public purse. If any gentleman will cast his eyes over the House file, he will discover more than one relief bill. Individuals are here year after year applying for relief. Here it is, the surety of a defaulting officer that prays he may be released from his bond—there it is, a man who has been unsuccessful in some enterprise, out of which he expected to make a fortune—then again, it is some poor unfortunate who lost his limbs in his country's service. It may be answered that these relief bills are of small moment. But I care not for the amount; it is the principle I am seeking for. The principle involved in a small bill is the same principle that is involved in a large one. Since the principle has been established, it is too late to retrace our steps because the amount is larger than usual. Is that not rather a reason why we should go forward? If the relief is too much for the States to give, it is too much for my constituents to lose. If it is too much for my constituents to lose, then it is too much for the State to give. I stand then, sir, upon the principle of the precedents, which loom up at all points along the pathway of our State and national legislation. Is there still some one here who feels disposed to inquire why do your constituents come to us for this relief? I answer, because they have nowhere else to go. The Treasury of the United States Government is barred against them. I believe this to be right, because the General Government could not without going into a commission of bankruptcy, begin to pay all the damages which loyal men have suffered since the war began.—The day may, no doubt will come, when the government can do so, but not now. But the case is different with Pennsylvania. She can well afford this relief to her own citizens.—What do I ask of her? I ask her to pay claims which will not exceed one million of dollars—at least one half of them incurred in repelling invasion and in defending her own existence. I ask her to issue certificates of indebtness to her creditors, under this bill, bearing *five per centum interest per annum*, and redeemable in twenty years, or sooner, at her own option. I ask her to levy an additional tax of a quarter of mill on all property now taxable for State purposes, amounting to one hundred and fifty thousand dollars annually, until a sufficient fund is raised to pay these certificates of indebtness Is this "the whole front of my offending?" Is this the measure of my demand? Is this, indeed, all? No, no, this is the lowest part of my request; this is the mercenary portion of my demand.—I ask what is of far more value than this. I ask Pennsylvania to be true to her high duty. I ask her to be worthy of herself. I ask her to be just, not generous to her citizens. This, this is the sum total of my offence.

Now, Mr. Speaker, I have endeavored to prove that my constituents may well demand this relief as a matter of right. I have shown that they deserve to have it—that there is no just or true reason why they should be subjected to greater misfortunes than other portions of the State more happily located—that their claim has been established by a long and unbroken chain of precedents, and that they have no other place to go for this redress. I cannot, therefore conceive what plausible objection the most refined caviller can raise to the bill, unless it be that it is premature; that it is too soon to pay these claims. I confess, Mr. Speaker, that until within the last few days this objection never occurred to my mind. It chanced in this manner: I happened to meet, the other day, an intelligent and respectable Senator, walking through the capitol grounds. In the course of conversation, I spoke of this bill and expressed a hope that he would support it. "Sir," said he, "your bill is premature; it is too soon to pay these claims." I am candid enough to admit, Mr. Speaker, that I was startled by the novelty of the objection. "Sir, your bill is premature; it is too soon to pay these claims." The words kept ringing through my head and fell upon my heart like the incubus of a night-mare. I have often read how the fatal words, "it is too late," have been wrung from the anguish-riven soul of ambition, when it saw its last chance pass by and its sun begin to set. I have often heard of it being "too late" to do justice. We are told that the sinner's death-bed often witnesses the expiring cry, "it is too late" to be saved. I have often thought that the most melancholy sound in all the realms of the lost, will be the despairing soliloquy of the soul that has gone down to death from the mount of Gospel privileges, "It is too late for mercy here." But, sir, I have never yet heard or read, that when wrongs have been suffered which the State is bound to redress, that justice can come too soon. I have yet to learn that relief, when deserved, can be premature. What, sir, would that patriot statesman whose chair you now occupy, have said had he been told that the redress which our Revolutionary fathers demanded of the British crown, was premature? What would he have answered had he been told that it was too soon to resist the oppression and tyranny of the mother country? What would he have said, sir, if he had been told that the blood of Lexington was shed too soon? What would he have answered had he been informed that the Declaration of Independence was premature, and our whole Revolutionary struggle a fatal mistake? Methinks I see his venerated form rise from the grave and fill that chair once more, and as his eye once more flashes forth the lightning of his soul, he exclaims in tones of stern rebuke. "Such counsels, if heeded, would have strangled patriotism, made the American Revolution an untimely birth, and left all its heroes slaves. Never again let such ill-omened words drop from the lips of the patriot so long as there is still a struggling son of his country presenting his claim for a redress of his wrongs at the august tribunal of the people."

Mr. Speaker and gentlemen representatives, go home to your constituents if you can. Go home if you dare and tell them you voted against this bill. Go home to your constituents if you can, go home to them if you dare, and tell them that Pennsylvania, the brightest star in the galaxy of States, the cradle of American freedom, the nursing mother of the Declaration of Independence, rich in the hallowed memories of Valley Forge and Germantown, having within its limits the birth-place of our nation, and the grave of treason close by the consecrated sepulchres of Gettysburg's heroes—an empire of three millions of people, whose mountains milk the clouds, and whose valleys run with fatness, having within her bowels coal enough to warm all her friends, and iron enough to cool all her foes—a Commonwealth abounding in prosperity, intelligence and civilization unknown elsewhere—tell your constituents, I repeat it, that this State, such as I have described it, through you as her representatives on this floor, has refused to be just to her citizens, and has declared herself to be too weak and poor to protect them. You may carry home to your people this disgraceful confession, but I humbly thank that beneficent Being, who has hitherto guided and protected me, that he has given me strength enough to declare upon this floor that I have neither part nor lot in tarnishing thus, the fair escutcheon of our State pride. I shift the responsibility from my shoulders, and here in this very presence, I shake off the dust from my feet as a momento against such a premeditated outrage.

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feb 17-3m

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feb 17