

into one State, one civil government, which was actually split up into so many diversified interests. In the first place, the great bay divides us into the two shores. The people are necessarily cut off from one another in that way. There must be certain interests attaching to the people of the Eastern Shore different from those which attach to the people living upon the Western Shore. Then there are the great commercial interests of Baltimore city, the manufacturing interests in its vicinity, the grain-growing interests of western counties, the mining interests of counties still further west, and in the lower counties of the State there is the tobacco interest. People situated as we are in these respects cannot be reached and have their welfare and happiness promoted by such a system of general government as any body of men could frame.

That was the position our forefathers took, and those who preceded us in these halls. It led to the passage of local laws for one county which would not affect the people of the other counties. The theory always has been that inasmuch as my people are in some respects differently situated from yours, inasmuch as their pursuits are entirely distinct from your pursuits, the laws which should govern you in order to protect your welfare will not of necessity protect the welfare of my constituency. That is the reason, the foundation, and the strength of the theory of local legislation that has prevailed in this State.

If I understand the gentleman rightly, he does not far depart from my theory upon this question; but he wishes to devolve upon local bodies a great deal that is done in the legislature. How shall I be prepared to say that the legislature shall be stripped of these important powers, before I discover in what local bodies these powers are to be devolved? How can I say that the legislature shall not retain the power of releasing people from taxes overpaid, or releasing collectors from their bonds, before I know upon what authority in the counties this is to be devolved? If you tell me that you are to give to a board of county commissioners the power of releasing people from their obligations to the State, instead of preserving that power in the legislative department of the government, I reply that the county commissioners will release every body in their own counties; that it is too dangerous a power to confer upon them.

After all, to look at the matter in a more restricted way, it is a question more of legislative convenience than anything else. It is an effort to relieve the legislature from improper applications. Is not that a matter we can safely leave to the general assembly itself? When I served here the rule was, and I presume they have had the same rule since, that whenever there was a general law upon the statute book to cover the case of any par-

ticular application, the committee refused to consider it. If there was some special circumstance existing, which took it out of the operation of the general law, and gave it an exceptional character and position, the general assembly exercised its power for the relief of the applicant.

Why not give the legislature the power? Why put in these restrictions at all? The general assembly have the power under the constitution to pass any laws it pleases to devolve powers upon the courts, or the county commissioners. Why take from them the power of passing special or local laws that they now possess? It can by general laws protect itself from improper applications. Although it possesses the power of passing special laws, it may pass general laws to cover all cases which can be properly reached by general laws. I wish to let the legislature have the power to provide for those cases which may not properly fall under the operation of a general law.

To carry out my view of it, although I do not regard it necessary at all, because I think the legislature have the power now, I move to strike out the amendment to section nineteen, and to insert the following:

"The general assembly shall have power, from time to time, in its discretion, to pass general laws providing for the exercise by the courts of law or equity, or other local authorities, of such powers and duties not necessarily legislative in their character, having reference to private or local affairs, which are now exercised and performed by the general assembly."

Mr. STOCKBRIDGE. That is not in order. There is an amendment in the second degree now pending.

The PRESIDENT. Did the gentleman from Kent move to strike out?

Mr. CHAMBERS. Yes, sir; but I think upon further consideration that the next item comes in the same category, that in relation to conferring the rights of citizenship upon miners and foreigners. I do not see how general rules can be prescribed for that. I therefore include that in my amendment, and move to amend by striking out the words "changing the names of persons, conferring the rights of citizenship upon minors and foreigners."

Mr. JONES, of Somerset. The question presented by the amendment of the gentleman from Baltimore city (Mr. Stockbridge) presents much greater difficulties than at first blush might be supposed. The subject of local legislation has certainly been carried to a very great extent in our State. It is one of the evils swelling the bulk of our statutes. And yet the remedy for it is not so easy to be applied as some might imagine. I think the fault is more in the careless exercise of power, I had almost said the criminal neglect of duty on the part of the legislature in the exercise of power. Instead of these local