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Mr. WILLIAMS, (of Harford,) Chairman Select Committee.

REPORT
OF THE SELECT COMMITTEE

ON

IMPRISONMENT FOR DEBT.

JANUARY 28, 1839.

The committee to whom was referred the leave that was granted, for a bill to abolish imprisonment for debt, knowing the great anxiety which is felt in relation to that matter, now give notice that they will lay such a bill before this house, in the course of next week. It has been thought advisable not to proceed hastily, but to take time for due deliberation on a measure of so much importance, and to afford an opportunity for consultation and union among its friends.

The committee do not imagine that they are capable of presenting any new views on a subject which has heretofore been so ably discussed; nor do they aspire to do more than to reproduce the strong points which have been urged elsewhere.—They take this occasion to report some of the considerations which have influenced the committee in arriving at the conclusion that the law of imprisonment for debt ought to be abolished and expunged from the Statute Book of Maryland. They are unanimously of opinion, that it is unwise, impolitic and unjust, oppressive, cruel and odious.

It is in a great measure the result of judicial usurpation, forced construction, and absurd legal fictions, transmitted as a curse to posterity.

It is an abominable and disgusting relic of that atrocious policy of ancient and superstitious Rome, which authorised the subjecting of the debtor's person to chains, stripes and ignominy; which sanctioned the dismembering of his body, the cutting of it up into pieces, and the parcelling of them out, to inhuman creditors, in shares proportioned to the amount of debt; or which permitted his wife and children to be sold and exiled to perpetual servitude.

It subjects to a humiliating penalty an estimable citizen, or a helpless fellow being, because he is not endowed with the super-human