

CHAPTER CCCLII.

AN ACT FOR THE MORE EASY AND SPEEDY RECOVERY OF SMALL DEBTS.

Whereas it is found by experience that a great number of the lawsuits which are commenced in this province are brought against the poorer sort of people for small sums of money, who are unable to bear the expenses arising by the common method of prosecution:

Therefore, for remedying thereof:

[Section I.] Be it enacted by George Thomas, Esquire, with the King's royal approbation Lieutenant-Governor under the Honorable John Penn, Thomas Penn and Richard Penn, Esquires, true and absolute Proprietaries of the Province of Pennsylvania and of the counties of Newcastle, Kent and Sussex on Delaware, by and with the advice and consent of the representatives of the freemen of the said Province in General Assembly met, and by the authority of the same, That all actions for debt or other demand for the value of forty shillings and upwards and not exceeding five pounds (except such actions as are hereinafter excepted) shall immediately after the publication of this act be and are hereby made cognizable before any justice of the peace of any of the counties in this province in the county in which the defendant shall be or reside; and the said justices are hereby respectively empowered and required, upon complaint to either of them made for any such debt or demand, to issue a warrant in the nature of a summons or *capias*, as the case may require, directed to the constable of the township or district where the defendant dwells or can be found, commanding him to bring or cause such defendant to appear before him at the time and in the manner following: (That is to say) in cases where such process shall be in the nature of a *capias*, forthwith after the service thereof; but where a summons shall be issued, then on some certain day-

therein to be expressed not less than five nor exceeding eight days from the date of such process; and at the time appointed for the hearing of any such cause the said justice himself, or at the request of the parties by auditors or referees to that purpose by him appointed and approved of by the said parties, shall proceed to hear and examine the proofs and allegations of the plaintiff and defendant, and upon the return of such auditors or otherwise to give his judgment thereupon as the true merits and right of the cause shall appear to him, with such costs only as by the laws of this province are allowed in debts under forty shillings.

Provided always, That the process against a freeholder shall be by summons only, and service shall be made thereof on the person or a copy thereof left at the house of the defendant in the presence of one or more of his family or neighbors at least four days before the time appointed for a hearing; and in case the defendant does not appear at the time appointed, then on oath or affirmation made by the constable that the said summons was duly served in manner aforesaid, the justice who granted the same summons may either then or on such further day as he shall deem consistent with reason and the nature of the case to appoint and not otherwise to [sic] proceed to hear and determine such cause or causes in the defendant's absence and give judgment and award execution thereupon as if the defendant had been personally present.

[Section II.] And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That after judgment given in any of the cases aforesaid the justice who pronounced the same shall grant execution thereupon directed to the constable aforesaid, commanding him to levy the debt or damages and costs on the defendant's goods and chattels (who by virtue thereof shall within the space of ten days next following expose the same to sale by public vendue, returning the overplus if any be to the defendant), and for want of sufficient distress to take the body of such defendant into custody and him or her to carry and convey to the common gaol of the county; and the sheriff or keeper of such gaol is hereby required to receive the person or persons so taken in execution and him, her or them safely to keep until the sum recovered with costs be fully paid, and in default of

such safe keeping to be liable to answer the damages to the party grieved in such manner as by law is provided in case of escapes. But in case no assets belonging to the defendant sufficient to pay the debt and costs can be found, it shall and may be lawful for the plaintiff to apply to the justice who pronounced the judgment for a transcript thereof, and on filing the same in the prothonotary's office of the court of common pleas in that county in which the recovery shall be had it shall and may be lawful for the plaintiff to levy the sum recovered with costs of suit on the lands and tenements of the defendant, either by *feri facias*, *venditioni exponas* or extent as the case may require in like manner as by law is provided in other cases.

Provided always, That no such execution shall be issued against any freeholder in less than the space of three months next after the entry of such judgment unless the plaintiff or somebody for him or her shall on oath or affirmation declare that he or she hath good reason to believe that the debt will by such delay be lost, for that at the end of the said term or before it (he or she believes) the defendant will not have sufficient assets in the county on which the said debt may be levied. And if any judgment to be given as aforesaid shall be against a person not a freeholder, such person shall have the execution against him or her respited for like term of three months on his or her entering into recognizance to the plaintiff with one sufficient security in the nature of special bail on condition to deliver the body of the defendant to the sheriff of the county at the expiration of the time so to be allowed or that the condemnation money shall then be paid, and in default of giving such security shall be committed to the common gaol of the county, there to remain until the debt and costs shall be paid or such defendant otherwise legally discharged.

Provided also, That where the plaintiff in any cause shall become nonsuit or judgment shall pass against him, then the justice is hereby required to assess the defendant his reasonable costs, to be levied in manner aforesaid.

Provided also, That it shall and may be lawful for the justices of the respective courts of common pleas to give such relief to any insolvent debtor or debtors prosecuted in pur-

suance of this act as they might have done by the laws now in force in case this act had not been made.

Provided also, That if any person or persons shall conceive him, her or themselves aggrieved by any such judgment so to be given (cases determined on the return of auditors or referees as aforesaid only excepted) it shall and may be lawful for such person or persons at any time within the space of six days next following the giving of such judgment, but not after, to appeal therefrom to the next court of common pleas to be holden for the county in which such suit shall be commenced, he, she or they first entering into recognizance with at least one sufficient security at least in double value of the debt or damage sued for and sufficient to answer all costs to prosecute the said appeal with effect and to abide the order of the said court, or in default thereof to be sent by *mittimus*, to the sheriff of the county, by him to be kept until he, she or they shall give such security or be otherwise legally discharged.

[Section III.] And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That the said justices shall cause fair entries to be made in books by them to be provided for that purpose of the name of the plaintiff and defendant in all such cases as may come before them, with the debt and costs adjudged and the time when the same judgment was given; and upon any appeal made from any such judgment the justice who pronounced the same shall send a transcript thereof to the prothonotary of the court of common pleas of the county in which such appeal is made on or before the first day of the term next following any such appeal; for which transcript or any other obtained by virtue of this act the justice shall be allowed in the costs to be taxed eighteen pence and no more.

[Section IV.] And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That at the court to which any such appeal shall be made the person so appealing shall cause an entry of his suit to be made by the prothonotary of such court, and shall either have his appearance entered or give bail to the action, as the nature of the case may require; or on neglect thereof and application of the appellee to the court for that end, the appellant's default shall be recorded, the first judgment af-

firmed with reasonable costs and execution shall be issued out of the said court against the defendant's body, goods or chattels, as is usual in other cases. And in case the defendant shall appeal or give bail as aforesaid, the plaintiff or defendant in the appeal (as the case may require) shall file his or her declaration and the adverse party plead to issue in such time as shall be directed by the court, so always that the cause be tried by a jury of the country in the usual manner, either the court to which such appeal is made or the next term at furthest (unless the court on cause to them shown shall think fit to give the parties a further day) and as the verdict shall be rendered in any of the said causes the court shall give judgment thereupon as the nature of the case may require with costs of suit.

Provided always, That if the parties appellant and appellee shall neglect or refuse to file his or her declaration or to plead to issue in such time as shall be directed by the court, a nonsuit or judgment by default may be entered for want thereof as usual.

Provided also, That the costs to be taxed in any such suit to the several officers and others concerned for the services by them respectively to be done shall be two-third parts only of the costs now usually taken in the said courts of common pleas.

Provided also, That none of the justices who by virtue of this act shall hear and determine any of the causes aforesaid out of court shall afterwards sit on the hearing and determining the same cause on an appeal made to any of the courts of common pleas aforesaid.

[Section V.] And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That if any person or persons whosoever shall commence, sue or prosecute any suit or suits for any debts or demands made cognizable as aforesaid in other manner than is directed by this act and shall obtain a verdict or judgment therein for debt or damages, which without costs of suit shall not amount to more than five pounds (not having caused an oath or affirmation to be made before the obtaining of the writ of summons or *capias* and filed the same in the prothonotary's office respectively that he, she or they so making oath or affirmation did truly believe the debt due or damage sustained

exceeded the sum of (five pounds), he, she or they so prosecuting shall not recover any costs in such suit, any law, usage or custom to the contrary notwithstanding.

Provided also, That this act nor any thing herein contained shall be deemed, construed or understood to extend to actions of debt for rent, debt upon bonds for performance of covenants, to actions of covenant, to actions of replevin or upon any real contract; nor to actions of trespass on the case for trover and conversion or slander; nor to actions of trespass for assault and battery or imprisonment; nor to such actions where the title of lands shall anywise come in question.

Provided also, That this act shall continue in force for the space of three years and from thence to the end of the next session of [the] assembly and no longer.

Passed May 19, 1739. See Appendix XIV, Section I, and note to the Act of Assembly passed February 21, 1735-36, Chapter 341, and the Act of Assembly passed February 3, 1742-43, Chapter 355.

CHAPTER CCCLIII.

AN ACT FOR REPRINTING, EXCHANGING AND RE-EMITTING ALL THE BILLS OF CREDIT OF THIS PROVINCE, AND FOR STRIKING THE FURTHER SUM OF ELEVEN THOUSAND ONE HUNDRED AND TEN POUNDS FIVE SHILLINGS TO BE EMITTED UPON LOAN.

Whereas through the scarcity of silver and gold in this province, occasioned by remitting the same to Great Britain to pay for the product and manufactures of that kingdom imported hither for the use of the inhabitants, sundry sums of money in bills of credit were formerly emitted, which by experience have been found to be very useful for carrying on the trade and commerce of this province. And whereas in pursuance of the direction of former acts of assembly by which the said bills of credit were emitted a great part of the same have been sunk and destroyed, so that there is not current in the province at this