

he had given to this subject. The hon gentleman had suggested to him no scheme, apparently had not thought out one, and he (Attorney-General) had not felt at liberty to ask him for one. After he had prepared the scheme which he was now about to bring down to the House he did think that it would be a great object to him to talk that scheme over with the member for South Brant. He had, however, at that time prepared the resolutions which embodied it and which he was now asking the House to consider, and the hon. gentleman was most encouraging in his observations with reference to that scheme. If, however, he had failed and if his hon. colleague who joined with him had failed in preparing such a scheme as would receive the approval of the House, the hon. member for South Brant was to be charged with no part of the discredit of it. The House would remember that no possible plan would be free from good objections, but all that the House and country would require from the Government was a scheme which, on the whole, was satisfactory. It might be thought that some places received too much and that some got too little benefit; the exact equity of the results as applied to the different places might not be seen. What he asked was that the House would look at the matter as a whole, with all its complications and difficulties, and consider it in that view; and if on the whole it was satisfactory, he confidently called for their support to his measure, which he was sure would receive the approval of the country. Some of the debts owed by the municipalities were enormously large; some of them, beyond all question, were beyond the power of the municipalities to pay, although if they had paid year after year, if these municipalities had made that struggle which other municipalities made, he thought the thing might have been done. Under the Act of 1859 there was no obligation upon any municipality which it could not fulfil; but now some of them were less able, with the interest now due, to pay up, and he had no hesitation in saying that it was utterly impossible for some of them to pay. The power to pay, no doubt, varied. It would be extremely difficult to compare one with another of these various municipalities, and what had occurred to him was that in dealing with this whole subject they should endeavour to find some rules that might be on the whole just and equitable rules, and to apply those firmly to every case. It would be a most unsatisfactory thing if any Government were to undertake to examine the debt of each municipality separately, and to examine the circumstances of each municipality, and to examine the objects for which the debt was contracted, and then to decide with regard to each separately whether the whole debt or how much of it should be enforced. An attempt of that sort could not possibly give satisfaction, because different persons view the same thing from different standpoints, and come to different conclusions. But everybody could understand a good, sound rule; and every one could understand that, while there were advantages in rules, we must put up with their occasionally not working as they might be desired to work; that they must be firmly carried out; and that if we are to allow any exceptions to them these exceptions should be founded on principles as sound as the rules, and which can be defended as well as the rules can be. He had endeavoured to find such rules, and if there were any exceptions they were such exceptions. The principles which he would ask the House to adopt were few in number, and he thought they would commend themselves to the good sense of the House. He asked first, with regard to all debts which five cents on the dollar in 1859 was not sufficient to pay the interest upon, to adopt the principle that such debts should be regarded as practically paid to such an amount as in 1859 would have been the annual payment provided by that Act in reference to the assessment of 1858. Practically the assessment of 1858 has been the guide, so far as we have had any guide, from that time to this. In but one or two municipalities who would be affected by that principle in 1859 has there been any increase on the assessment of 1858. Either the property has not increased in value or the Assessors have not found so. In some cases the assessment was considerably less. There was no machinery which could be made useful for making an assessment according to the actual value. Experience of the last fourteen years had shown that either the will or the power had been wanting in every Government that has been in power to collect the five cents on the dollar on the assessment of 1858. What he asked the House was, what was the use of our burdening these people with the debts nominally against them, and which stand in the way of their prosperity, and which we do not enforce, and which

he had no hesitation in saying that practically we could not enforce? He asked the House to abandon any claim it had on any sums that is ascertained by means of that computation. He was satisfied they could not get more out of those municipalities which that rule would provide for. He did not mean to say that they could get even all that. He asked something further on the same grounds. The Act, as he read it, provided that the revenues that might be produced by the investments made by the municipalities of the sums that they had borrowed should be paid over to the Receiver-General, in addition to the five cents on the dollar. This reading had been disputed, and no Government had found itself in a position to enforce the law. He thought there was no use attempting to enforce it. He thought that now, when they wanted a new settlement, they ought to forego that claim, if there was anything in it, which they had not been able to enforce during the long period of fourteen years. He asked the House to abandon whatever right they had in that interest. They would be giving up nothing by so doing—would be surrendering nothing which they had enjoyed—would be giving up only something that was on the Statute Book, but which was nothing useful—which was in fact a dead letter, although it was far from being a dead letter in so far as it prevented the advancement of the municipalities. In dealing with this whole matter it was necessary to remember that our populations are constantly changing, that those who are now in an indebted municipality were perhaps fourteen years ago in another municipality. We have persons coming to the country who had nothing to do with the contracting of its debts. Children in '56 or '59 are now men, who by their own exertions have accumulated property. The Government would lose nothing by throwing off the amounts of which he had spoken. He hoped that no municipality which would receive this benefit would be dissatisfied with it. In some of the memorials that had been received, however, municipalities which were to receive allowances under this scheme had also asked to receive a share of the surplus with the rest of the population of the Province; but he thought the House would agree with him that when they received the measure of relief granted to them under this scheme, they might be satisfied. He would mention to the House some of the figures to which it was proposed to reduce the debts by the 5 cent allowance. From Lanark and Renfrew the amount of principle and interest due on the 1st of January, 1873, was \$870,368 96. The amount of the reduction to the town of Peterboro' was \$25,407 27. But the biggest figure of all was the town of Port Hope, where the reduction would be \$1,433,984 27; for the township of Opo the reduction would be \$90,757 64; for the town of Goderich, \$45,776 21; for the township of Elizabethtown, \$150,352 29; for the town of Chatham, \$46,211 93, and for the town of Brantford \$340,836 37. These were pretty large figures, he admitted. He thought they were quite large enough for them to forego, but at the same time he thought with regard to some of the municipalities that they might as well forego them. He thought the House would agree with him that the best thing they could do was to lay down a rule and stick to it. It was an essential part of any scheme that was going to work effectually that they must be more liberal to some municipalities than to others, and they must be careful that they did not put the figures of any municipality higher than it could pay. If they attempted to do otherwise the result would be that they should get less than if their demands were moderate. Everybody knew that the reason some of the municipalities had paid nothing was that what they could pay was so short of what they ought to pay. The town of Port Hope was a strong illustration of this. In regard to all the cases he had read, it would be seen that no more had ever been received from them than he proposed to take from them. That was a most important thing for the House to recollect. Every municipality had been paying sums which did not exceed what they expected to receive from them for the future. There was no use, after the experience of 13 or 14 years ago, going beyond the rule of five cents on the dollar. Governments of different political complexions had endeavoured to collect the money owing by these municipalities, with the same result in every case, and he thought that any reasonable man would say that what no previous Government had been able to do it was useless for this one to attempt to accomplish by hostile litigation. How could the money be col