

Ex Parte Simon

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Decided On : Jan-20-1908

Appeal No. : 208 U.S. 144

Appellant : Ex Parte Simon

Judgement :

Ex Parte Simon - 208 U.S. 144 (1908)

U.S. Supreme Court Ex Parte Simon, 208 U.S. 144 (1908)

Ex Parte Simon

No. 13, Original

Argued January 6, 7, 1908

Decided January 20, 1908

208 U.S. 144

PETITION FOR WRITS OF HABEAS

CORPUS AND CERTIORARI

SYLLABUS

The usual rule is that a prisoner cannot anticipate the regular course of proceedings having for their end to determine whether he shall be held or released by alleging want of jurisdiction and petitioning for a habeas corpus, and the same rule is applicable in the case of one committed for contempt until a small fine shall be paid for disobeying an injunction order of the circuit court and who petitions for a habeas on the ground that the order disobeyed was void because issued in a suit which was *coram non judice*.

Notwithstanding the prohibitive provisions of 720, Rev.Stat., the circuit court of the United States may have jurisdiction of a suit brought by a citizen of one state against citizens of another state to enjoin the execution of a judgment fraudulently entered against him in a state court which had no jurisdiction by reason of nonservice of the summons, and this Court will not determine the merits of, such a case on habeas corpus proceedings brought by one of the defendants committed for contempt for disobeying a preliminary injunction order issued by the circuit court.

The facts are stated in the opinion.

Page 208 U. S. 146

MR. JUSTICE HOLMES delivered the opinion of the Court.

The petitioner is in custody for contempt, he having violated a preliminary injunction issued by the circuit court of the United States. He brings this petition on the ground that the circuit court had no jurisdiction, and that therefore its decree might be disobeyed.

The jurisdiction of the circuit court over the cause depends on the allegations of the bill upon which the injunction was granted. That bill was brought by the Southern Railway Company against the petitioner. It alleges that Simon brought

Page 208 U. S. 147

a suit against the railway in Louisiana surreptitiously and without its knowledge, and that, on the suggestion that the railway was a foreign corporation, doing business in the state without having named an agent to receive service, he served the citation upon the assistant secretary of state, whereas the railway was not a corporation doing business in the state, and the service was void. The suit proceeded to judgment for a fraudulently exaggerated sum, while the railway had no knowledge of the proceedings until after the judgment was rendered. As soon as it heard of it, it began this suit -- in effect, to prevent the enforcement of the judgment, because unconscionable and fraudulently obtained, upon a cause of action to which it has a good defense if allowed to present the same.

The bill further alleges that Simon will attempt to collect the fraudulent judgment by *feri facias*, and prays, as specific relief, an injunction against his further proceeding under the same, but the general scope and purpose of the bill is what we have stated. A preliminary injunction was issued, after a hearing on affidavits, on June 30, 1905, and Simon appears to have obeyed the order for over two years. A demurrer to the bill was overruled in December, 1906, and a plea to the jurisdiction, filed in February, 1907, was overruled in the following May. Simon answered in August, and issue was joined in the same month. The contempt seems to have occurred in November. It consisted in obtaining a writ of *feri facias* and directing a levy and the service of garnishment process to collect the judgment. It was admitted at the argument that this method was adopted in order to obtain a summary disposition of the cause by this Court instead of awaiting the result of a trial in the regular way. The punishment was a small fine, and the imprisonment was ordered only until the fine was paid.

The facts stated seem to us enough to dispose of this case. The usual rule is that a prisoner cannot anticipate the regular course of proceedings having for their end to determine whether he shall be held or released, by alleging want of jurisdiction and petitioning for a habeas corpus. [United States v. Sing Tuck](#),

[194 U. S. 161](#) , [194 U. S. 168](#) ; *Riggins v. United States*, [199 U. S. 547](#) ; *Whitney v. Dick*, [202 U. S. 132](#) , [202 U. S. 140](#) ; *In re Lincoln*, [202 U. S. 178](#) .

In the present instance, the release of the petitioner is not the primary issue of the case, to be sure, but it is so closely wrapped up with that issue that, when it is apparent that the imprisonment is only nominal and has been incurred after two years' acquiescence, merely in order to secure a speedier hearing in this Court, the analogy of the decisions is very close. The petitioner is in no position to demand this summary relief.

This is not a suit *coram non iudice* and wholly void by reason of Rev.Stat. 720, forbidding United States courts to stay by injunction proceedings in any state court. The circuit court had jurisdiction of the cause. That must be assumed at this stage, and finally, unless we overrule the strong intimations in *Marshall v. Holmes*, [141 U. S. 589](#) , and the earlier cases cited in that case. Even if the decision could have been put on a narrower ground, the ground adopted was that the circuit court had original jurisdiction of such a suit. It would be going far to say that, although the circuit court had power to grant relief by final decree, it had not power to preserve the rights of the parties until the final decree should be reached, or that an injunction continued in force under the authority of the United States, but originally issued by a state court, stood on stronger grounds than one granted by the United States court in the first place. Even if the order was erroneous, it would be going far to say that it was made without jurisdiction, and might be disregarded, although the court had jurisdiction of the cause. *See United States v. Shipp*, [203 U. S. 563](#) , [203 U. S. 573](#) . But, without laying down a broader proposition than is required, we are of opinion that, in the particular circumstances of this case, habeas corpus is an extraordinary remedy for which there has been shown no sufficient ground.

It is argued that the bill does not disclose facts that warrant going behind the judgment, but contains only vague allegations of fraud. But it alleges facts that show a total want of jurisdiction in the state court, and implies at least, that the

fictitious service was made with deliberate fraud. Its general nature and purpose are clear. Enough is alleged to amend by, if amendment is necessary, and to give jurisdiction to the circuit court. As we cannot pronounce the whole proceeding void, we have nothing to do with the sufficiency of the pleading or the question whether the bill would be good or bad on demurrer. There was at least color of right for the preliminary order, and it will be time enough to discuss the merits if the case comes here again after final decree.

Rule discharged.

Petition for habeas corpus denied.

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