

otherwise, then our ancestors who formed this Constitution must have expected that the right of the majority could alone be secured by bloodshed—experience was not necessary to inculcate the lesson that a minority never surrender power by voluntary action. Gentlemen will perceive, that the doctrine he was seeking to maintain, was this, that the people had intelligence enough to make or unmake a Constitution without a resort to pikes and guns. Aye, sir! without being ground to the earth by the iron heel of despotism; without being the victims of tyranny; the people may, and of right ought to, alter their form of government, with a view to the adoption of a better system of government; to avail themselves of the improvements daily made in the science of government; to keep pace with the onward progress of free principles. While he spoke, we were in the midst of a revolution, not only “bloodless as yet,” but, to borrow a familiar phrase, all is “as calm as a summer’s morning.”

Without the machinery of a legislative act, or forms prescribed by the Constitution, he insisted, that the people might take into their own hands the work of reforming the Constitution, and they would be seldom found to act on light and trivial grounds. He supposed a case, that the people of Kent county chose to meet together for the purpose of framing a Constitution, and that instrument was proclaimed by that meeting and submitted to the people of the State, would they have a right to adopt it? and if assented to by the political power of the State, would it not be valid and binding? All forms are mere matters of convenience, and are not obligatory.

Mr. CRISFIELD asked by what process this Constitution of the people, if ratified, was to be carried out? How did he propose to ascertain if it was ratified by a majority?

He should come to that presently, and in passing, need only say that when the gentleman from Somerset, (Mr. Crisfield,) and the gentleman from Kent, (Mr. Chambers,) both denying the constitutional right of the Legislature, (as did the party to which they belong, in many a hard fought contest,) to pass the very act which called this Convention into being, and likewise denying that “the ends of justice have been perverted, and liberty manifestly endangered,” (the revolutionary right,) and pass through the fiery ordeal with their robes unscorched; (it will not do to say, that they hold their places by as good a title “as any one else,” possession not being a good plea in *foro conscientiae*.) it will be time enough for them to set in judgment upon the modes the people may hereafter adopt, to declare their will, and when they do so declare, possibly, these gentlemen may be members of the Convention.

But, sir, for the sake of the great principle he would be more explicit. He held the doctrine that the people—that is, a clear and unquestionable majority—have a right to determine in what mode their will is to be proclaimed, and permit him to say, that whenever they shall speak in thunder tones and adopt a Constitution in such

mode and manner, as to evince to the world that it is the expression of a majority, no political Canute can be found to stay the onward tide of public sentiment; it will come to the practical test of public opinion, and as was admitted by the gentleman from Kent in a former discussion, when he held this Convention to be unauthorized by any recognized form of law, that, nevertheless, the Constitution which they should present, none but a madman would dare oppose, after it had met the sanction of the people. He did not expect that there would be found any man bold enough to say that such a movement should be put down by executive batteries.

If the proposition he sought to maintain was regarded as unsound, let some gentleman bring forward a proposition disaffirming it. The difference between himself and those who opposed the amendment was this: They no doubt entertain a fear that if we recognize this principle, that the people have the right to alter or change their Constitution at will and pleasure; that they will abuse that right, and that it will be exercised without sufficient reason, and for light and trivial causes. By what authority is this judgment pronounced against the virtue and intelligence of the people? He entertained no such opinion as to the great mass of the people. If he thought so he would openly confess that the great experiment which was being tried, whether man was capable of self-government had proved a miserable failure. Gentlemen must not confound the term *people* with that of *mob*. Give them, sir, a good Constitution, and they will appreciate it as an unpurchasable treasure. They will cling the closer to it when the tempest of passion is aroused by demagogues, and in the full enjoyment of liberty and happiness, they will not exchange the tried gold for the counterfeit presentment.

Mr. P. having concluded,

Mr. CHAMBERS obtained the floor, but yielded for the moment to

Mr. HICKS, who said he wished to offer an amendment, but not to make a speech upon it. He desired simply to state that if the proposition of the gentleman from Baltimore city, (Mr. Presstman,) was adopted, that contained in his (Mr. H.’s) amendment, must necessarily go with it.

Mr. H.’s amendment was read as follows:

Amend said amendment by adding at the end thereof, the following:

“And that any portion of the people of this State, shall have the right to secede and unite themselves, and the territory occupied by them, to such adjoining State as they shall elect.”

Mr. CHAMBERS said in reply to the call for his opinion. Why if the people were supreme, the act convening the Legislature was not constitutional, he had only to repeat, as he had before said, it was because the bill of rights and the constitution positively forbid any change in the organic law, except in the mode prescribed in the 59th article. He did not mean to enter upon a discussion of the doctrines of the reform party. He would, however, say, they take their origin long