

Mr. DIRICKSON resumed. He was still unable to perceive the nice distinction which the honorable gentleman had in fancy drawn. To his mind the terms compact, contract, and agreement had one common and general meaning, conveyed one general and common idea. If there was the least distinction, it was certainly too slight to hang an argument upon. The same reasoning would apply as properly to the one as the other. Among men, as individuals, an agreement was styled a contract, and it only assumed the more dignified and sounding appellation of compact, when inserted in the more solemn instrument that bound together a sovereign people. Sir, we are not here to discuss such slight and trifling distinctions—but for the higher and loftier purpose of framing a Constitution for a prosperous and growing people. And what, he asked, is the object and end of all Constitutions? To draw men together by a closer bond of union—to harmonise the social world—to secure individual rights, and more than all, to protect minorities from the strong arm of the many. This was its hallowed purpose and glorious design. Are gentlemen then willing to give countenance to a principle, that must defeat its every object—recognize without limitation the power of a lawless majority, which may set at defiance every right by us prescribed? If this new doctrine is to meet your sanction and approval, why are we here to reason together? Why has every community and section of Maryland, sent forth its Delegate to this high and wise conclave? Why have the venerable and the venerated been invoked to perfect our councils by their experience and maturity? Why, in short, this most expensive and “solemn farce,” if you are about to recognize a principle which may—though the instrument you are now perfecting, receives the sanction of the people—tear it asunder and rend it into a thousand fragments, in its own time, in its own way—above all Constitution, and beyond all law? Such was not the sort of power he had been taught to respect and cling to, as the great feature of republican institutions. He believed that Constitutions were devised mainly to protect minorities, and that to adopt any political vagary which over-rode and tended to their entire subversion, was to make them little less than the merest mockery. Talk of organic and statute laws—where was their efficacy? Where were minorities to look for protection? Solely to the clemency of the majority, and with uplifted hands, ask as a boon what they should demand as a right! Such innovation upon the science of government, could not well be tolerated in the nineteenth century. The day, (if ever it existed,) had gone by when the power of numbers alone was intended to govern the world.

But there seems to be some gentlemen, who regard the amendment as asserting, harmlessly, nothing more than a mere abstract right; and, as such, avow their willingness to support it. Sir, abstractions are dangerous things to insert in the great organic law. Upon them new theories may be built, and around them novel doctrines generated, which may, in time, destroy all the

fair proportions and harmony of the law itself, and finally war with its very vitality. He desired that the instrument, which should be submitted for ratification, should be clear and explicit—free from all abstraction—free from all doubt and obscurity—so plain that he “who runs might read,” and at a glance comprehend all its simple provisions. But he did not consider the amendment as a mere abstraction, however cunningly cloaked. An idea lurked amid its folds, which might speedily and easily develop itself into that doctrine, so acceptable to those sections and communities now clamoring for power. There was in it the admission of a lawless might and an overwhelming right, to which this Convention would hardly be willing to give its endorsement. There was about it the ghostly shadow of another Convention, called by a different power from that by which the present had its origin, and upon a basis ensuring a result not now anticipated. Gentlemen, when too late, would learn that so far from being an unmeaning abstraction, it was, in truth, a stern and practical reality; offered with deep design and significant meaning; that upon it, as a basis, new and startling systems might be awakened into life and energy. He trusted no such suspicious and uncertain feature, would be written upon the pages of our future Constitution. Let its mode of change and alteration be prescribed clear, explicit, and direct. The interest of every community, and individual, eminently demands that the manner of changing the organic law, under which their lives, their honor, and their property are secured and protected, should be, without doubt and without obscurity. Mystery should not shroud with darkness, a single word or line of that instrument, under which a free people are to live and exercise their inestimable privileges.

In his judgment, the gentleman from Caroline, (Mr. Stewart,) had in a slight degree at least misapprehended the real issue now under discussion. He had argued the question as though it was one of mere physical strength—and not solely of constitutional right. No one doubted but that power was the prerogative of numbers—nor denied but that they might exercise it in its wildest and most destructive form. That was revolution, soaring above all order—and far from the idea sought to be established by the amendment at present occupying our attention. The effort now made was not only to elevate the majority power to a lawless position, but to give it form, and place, and constitutional being in this very instrument we are framing. It was our duty to recognize the power, and at the same time to guard and secure it by proper moral and legal restrictions; and in the solemn compact, now to be ordained, we could not be too careful to so distribute this inherent power, that whilst the rights of none are crushed, the general interests of the whole State and community should be placed in the happiest and most prosperous condition. There was a great morbid and feverish excitement pervading every quarter of Maryland, and he respectfully warned gentlemen to abstain from startling and terrifying doctrines, lest by their unpropitious introduction they should discolor the whole public