

Who and what are they to be? Will they not be the chosen agents of a free and enlightened people, coming always fresh from among them, acquainted with their wants and wishes, and having specially in charge the fulfilment of those wishes, and the gratification of these wants? Will they not be, in short, the agents by which the people are to carry on and carry out the principles and rights of self-government? And to argue that they are not to be trusted with the power of passing such laws, from time to time, as the good of the State may require, whether for the call of Conventions or otherwise, is to argue against the capacity of the people for self-government, it is anti-republican, anti-democratic, and leads to unjust assumptions of power and prerogative. It must be admitted that it is to the Legislature we are to look generally for the true and only authoritative expression of the will of the people—they are the channel through which the people are accustomed to speak, and will speak in a voice to be heard and respected. Why attempt to deny them this right in reference to amendments to your plan of a Constitution, till after the lapse of ten years, and thereafter only at decennial periods? You have not the pretext now of unequal representation in the Legislature, for you have fixed that yourselves, and to your own liking—and if you adopt the amendment of the gentleman from Allegany, you will evince a determination to keep that and all things else, as you have fixed them, for at least ten years, complain who will, oppress whom it may!

Rely upon it, sir, the only wise and proper mode of providing for future Conventions, is to leave to the people the privilege of speaking to that subject through their Legislature. When then, and whenever the people desire the convention of such an assembly, it will be called, and not without such a desire on their part. Wherefore burthen the people with the expense, vexation and turmoil of assembling at stated periods, at the usual places of holding elections, to declare by their votes, whether they will have a Constitutional Reform Convention or not. When you know not, you cannot know whether any portion of the people will have a desire for any such thing, or that there will be any occasion for it at the time you designate; yet they must, if you adopt this provision, go and cast their votes, however much they may be opposed to it, or the Convention will be called by a small minority—a parcel of agitators and office hunters who may chose to cast their votes! Why unnecessarily impose this task upon the people? Why not leave them to speak their wishes upon the subject through their Legislature.

That minorities may call Conventions, if the proposition of submitting the question, once in ten years, to the popular vote is adopted. I need only refer to the manner in which this Convention was called. Every one knows, that although the calling of this Convention had been a subject of agitation for years, and there was supposed to be considerable excitement about it. Yet, when the question was submitted to the popular vote, but a small minority of all the voters of the State

voted for it—though a majority of the votes cast were in its favor—the larger number of the people not taking interest enough in the subject to go to the poles. If, then, this the first Convention since the revolution, and about which so much clamor had been raised, was called into being by a minority of the voters of the State, you can judge what will be the case when the question comes to be submitted by virtue of a provision of our organic law, once in every ten years. A few agitators and office seekers will drum up some hundreds, or some thousands, if you please, in different quarters of the State, to join them in voting for a Convention; whilst the great body of the people, satisfied and contented with the government, and pursuing their ordinary employments, will remain at their homes; and thus the Convention will be called, society disturbed, large expenditures of the public money incurred, and no body benefited except those who are to appropriate to their individual emolument, the unnecessary public expenditure!

Again, sir it is not to be expected that the new Constitution is to pass from our hands in a state of perfection—fallibility is the lot of humanity. There will be, there must be, some defects, some imperfections in this instrument, after this Convention shall have ended their labors upon it, and unless I am much mistaken, many defects and imperfections will be found to exist. Will you not leave with the Legislature the power which they have always had, and never once abused, to amend these defects by the acts of two successive Legislatures? Will you not allow them, in the old, usual and approved mode, to harmonize its discordant parts, to regulate its practical workings, so as to effect the very end you have in view? It may be that some very slight alterations may be necessary in consequence of clerical errors or accidental omissions, the propriety, the necessity for which the whole community may see and desire to have made, they may be necessary even to make a clause or section covering the sense intended. And will you not leave power in the hands of the people to do this by an act of their Legislature, which, after it is passed, they are to judge of and approve by an act of the succeeding Legislature, before it becomes binding? or will you compel them to wait for any and every such amendment for the long period of ten years, and then be able to accomplish it only by the most cumbersome and expensive machinery of another Convention? Costs are not to be regarded when public rights are at stake, and no man would more indignantly scorn any argument which should seem to balance money with any real security of the public weal than I would. But where no popular right is involved, it seems hard to require the people to incur an expense of two or three hundred thousand dollars, to accomplish an end which can be as well and much better effected without any, or with but very little expense.

The honorable gentleman from Baltimore county, (Mr. Howard,) has said that the people will bear with patience an inconvenience for ten years, provided they know that at the end of that time they can remedy it. I know the people are