

CHAPTER I

CONSTITUTIONAL REFORM AGITATION

The period of prosperity which succeeded the War of 1812 was marked by great industrial and economic changes throughout the American States. During this time the spirit of democracy diffused itself throughout the nation and produced many great and important changes in the political, social, and economic life of the people. It was a period characterized by the erection of schools, the extension of the right of suffrage, the construction of various works of internal improvement, and wild speculation. With this growth of democracy and the idea of popular sovereignty, there were many changes made in the constitutions of the several states to correspond with the social and economic conditions of the people. These changes were, for the most part, effected by constitutional conventions, elected directly by the people.

Conventions of such a character, prior to 1850, had been held in Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Connecticut, Rhode Island, New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, and Missouri. These assemblies were called for constitutional purposes by the respective state legislatures, under the general legislative power, without the special authorization of their constitutions.¹ During the year of 1850 conventions for the purpose of amending or framing new constitutions were held in the following states, New Hampshire, Vermont, Michigan, Indiana, Ohio, Virginia, and Kentucky.²

With such precedents, a large portion of the people of

¹ Jameson's Constitutional Convention, p. 209.

² *Ibid.*, p. 533 et seq.