

CHAPTER II

THE CONVENTION

The year 1850 was one of profound excitement throughout the United States. The slavery question was now agitating the country from one end to the other. The dispute about freedom in the new territories acquired by the Mexican War aroused sectional animosities and secession threatened. The article of the constitution and the laws of Congress providing for the recapture of fugitive slaves had been repeatedly disregarded, or set at defiance.

The government of the State of Maryland at that time was in the hands of the Whigs, who represented the agricultural and conservative element of the people. Although the Whigs were in the minority in respect to popular numbers, they were enabled, by the system of representation recognized by the constitution of the State, to have a majority in the General Assembly.

Representing the agricultural interest of the State, the Whigs, as a political party, were opposed to a constitutional convention. They were reluctant to surrender any portion of their relative influence in the state legislature to the growing population of the northern and western sections of the State, especially to the rapidly increasing population of Baltimore City. Self-protection, they considered, demanded the retention of the state government in their own hands.

It was not until revolution threatened the State that the counties of southern Maryland and of the Eastern Shore, through their representatives in the General Assembly, consented to submit to the voters of the State a proposition relative to a call of a constitutional convention.