

XII. This act to commence on the first day of October next, and continue in force for three years from that day, and to the end of the next session of assembly which shall happen after the end of the said three years.

Continued for three years, &c. by the act of February, 1777, ch. 17, and for seven years, &c. by the act of March, 1780, ch. 21.

HERE end the laws under the proprietary government. The arbitrary acts of the king and parliament of Great-Britain having manifested a settled design of enslaving her colonies in North-America, a determined spirit of opposition, in a little time, pervaded every part of the continent which now belongs to the United States. From this period, notwithstanding the mere forms of the ancient governments were permitted a little longer to subsist, there was no real authority except that derived immediately from the people. In Maryland, and indeed in most of the other colonies, the people, without waiting to hear what was done in other places, assembled and entered into the most spirited resolves. In these they universally expressed a determination of coinciding with their brethren in any measures, that might be deemed proper, for procuring a redress of grievances. In general, they declared their opinion, that all commercial intercourse with their unnatural parent country should be suspended; and they appointed delegates to meet, on the 24th day of June, 1774, in a provincial convention, which was invested with full powers to adopt any measures that might be suggested by the united wisdom of the whole.

After these first meetings, and until the formation of a fixed and permanent government, in the year 1776, the supreme legislative, executive and judicial powers, resided in provincial conventions, or in councils of safety, chosen by conventions. In each county, likewise, a legislative and judicial authority was at first exercised by committees, elected from time to time, and superceded at the will of the people.

Such an administration, the immediate offspring of necessity, might have been reasonably expected to be subversive of that liberty which it was intended to secure. But in the course of more than two years, during which it was cheerfully submitted to by all, except the advocates for British usurpation, although many occasions occurred in which an intemperate zeal transported men beyond the just bounds of moderation, not a single person fell a victim to the oppression of this irregular government. The truth is, that during the whole memorable interval, between the fall of the old, and the institution of the new form of government, there appeared to exist amongst us such a fund of public virtue as has scarcely a parallel in the annals of the world. Without this, the opposition of a country unskilled in war, destitute of arms, inferior far in numbers, and wanting almost every thing for which it had before relied solely on its now inveterate enemies, the opposition of such a people to the efforts of the most powerful nation on the globe, would have been feeble indeed. There were, moreover, amongst us, men not fired by the general enthusiasm, men too of character, talents and influence, who, doubting the reality of that spirit and patriotic ardour which seemed to animate all other classes of men, and reasoning as they thought from sure principles, concluded, that the subjugation of America would be effected almost as soon as it should be attempted. These men took their measures accordingly.

There are occurrences in which it would be impious to suppose that Divine Providence does not interfere. Amongst these is the revolution of America, which has taken place contrary to all reasonable calculation. But it does not fall within the design of this work to take any notice of this singular event, except where it has an immediate relation to the acts of legislation herein contained. Thus far is premised by way of introduction to the proceedings and resolves of that convention which framed the constitution under which we now live.

On the 3d of July, 1776, the provincial convention, then sitting at Annapolis, came to the following resolutions:

RESOLVED, That a new Convention be elected for the express purpose of forming a new government, by the authority of the people only, and enacting and ordering all things for the preservation, safety and general weal of this colony.

RESOLVED, That there be four representatives chosen for each of the districts of Frederick county, as described in the proceedings of the session of July last, two representatives for the city of Annapolis, and two representatives from the town of Baltimore in Baltimore county, and four representatives for each county in this province, except Frederick county aforesaid; but that the inhabitants of Annapolis and Baltimore-town be not allowed to vote for representatives for their respective counties, nor shall the resolution be understood to engage or secure such representation to Annapolis or Baltimore-town, but temporarily,