

him. As property, it was, under the practice of government, and by the sanction and example of our greatest and purest men, recognized as equal, in degree, to any other in the State. And since it was subject to assaults from within and without, and might, in some season of strong excitement, be placed in sudden peril, it was not improper to impose a check upon the legislative power of the States. Slavery does not thus become eternal, because those who will adopt the new Constitution, may annul it, but it was just and wise in seasons of high political excitement to keep this element of discord out of our frequent legislative contests—so that fanaticism may find no foothold in the State, and that those most concerned shall be left to pursue that course, which interest, wisdom and humanity may dictate for their guidance. Above all, ought we to refrain from any measure which will create within our own limits, a pretext even for those dangerous opinions which are freely canvassed in the northern States?

Maryland is a border State, and is from her position, exposed to the chiefest ills which would ensue upon a disruption of the Federal Union. Her internal harmony creates a bond between the north and south, and the growth of fanatical opinion within her territory, would do more towards the dissolution of the Union, than all the wickedness and perversity of external influence could accomplish.

Mr. MERRICK, (with a view, he said, to remove all doubt,) offered the following amendment.

“Provided that nothing in this article shall be so construed, as to prevent the Legislature from passing all such laws for the Government, regulation and disposition of the free colored population in this State as they may see fit.”

Mr. BRENT of Baltimore city. That amendment carries out my own view, and I accept it as a modification of my own.

Mr. BOWIE suggested to the gentleman from Charles, (Mr. Merrick,) to substitute the word “regulation,” for the word “disposition.”

Mr. MERRICK thought, he said, that the word “disposition” was better. The object was to retain the whole power (in case the necessity for its exercise should arise,) to remove these people from the limits of our State, or to dispose of them in such manner as the public interests and safety might require.

Mr. McMASTER desired to be informed by the gentleman from Charles, (Mr. Merrick,) whether his amendment went so far as to allow the Legislature to impose a tax on free negroes?

Mr. MERRICK assented.

Mr. McLANE asked the gentleman from Charles to modify his amendment.

Mr. MERRICK declined to modify the amendment.

Mr. McLANE said, he was not disposed to embark to much extent in the discussion. He acknowledged that it was a subject of delicacy and importance; at the same time, it was one on which he had a fixed opinion. He believed that we had the power to deal with these people, as

we may think proper. He objected to the amendment as it was first proposed by the gentleman from Baltimore, because it made the distinction too broad, and opened the way to oppression. It may be proper for the State to remove the colored people before the danger is so imminent as some have contemplated; but, until that time shall arrive, they ought to be protected and succored. Any other course would, in his opinion, be cruel to them, and unsafe to the white population.

If the amendment does not place them out of the pale of legal protection, he would be satisfied.

Mr. MERRICK said, his amendment was offered with no idea of placing these people out of the pale of the law, but merely to empower the legislature to make such laws in relation to them as the public interests might require, to leave them in the hands of the legislature.

Mr. McLANE said, that the gentleman from Charles, concurred with him as to the impropriety of subjecting the colored people to disabilities. But did not this amendment put it in the power of the legislature to subject them to these disabilities? Might it not even proceed so far as to take from them their property? He objected to placing them in a situation in which they would be liable to this. He, therefore, wished that the amendment should be modified in this respect. He thought these people ought to be removed as soon as it can be done with propriety, and that we are not bound to wait until the danger becomes more imminent. The gentleman from Baltimore asked, what we owe to the principle of abolition? Owe to abolition! Could that question be put to this Convention at this day? What do we owe to abolition? We owe to it the spirit of discord, the spirit of hatred, the danger of disunion.

Mr. GWINN said, he alluded to it for the purpose of saying, we should do nothing to strengthen it in our own borders.

Mr. McLANE agreed as to this. But this abolition principle has operated on the colored people, and he was ready to adopt any humane provision for their removal, although he would protect them while here.

Mr. MERRICK said, that to his mind, no question could be more deeply interesting to the State than this. We had amongst us a numerous class of persons, who, by nature, were inimical to the great body of the people of the State. We were in the same condition towards them, in which other classes had been towards each other in times gone by. We saw it written by the hand of God, that the two races could not exist in harmony in the same country. The time must come when a separation, peaceably or forcibly, must take place. No two distinct races could, or ever would, inhabit the same land, except in the relative condition of master and slave—of the ruler and the ruled. Sooner or later they must separate, or extermination of the one or the other must take place. In making an organic law, therefore, it became the duty of those who formed it, to look to futurity. It was true, that there was no present danger of any terrible calamity,