

this Convention, or any part of either of them, ought not to be altered, changed or abolished, but in such manner as this Convention shall prescribe and direct."

The report was read through, and was then taken up by sections.

The first article being under consideration as follows :

"*Art. 1.* That all government of right originates from the people, is founded in compact only and instituted solely for the good of the whole."

Mr. PRESSTMAN moved to amend said article by adding at the end thereof, the following :

"And they have at all times the inalienable right to alter, reform, or abolish their form of government, in such manner as they may think expedient."

Some conversation followed between Messrs. PARKE, BISER and PRESSTMAN as to the most appropriate place for the amendment.

Mr. CHAMBERS had hoped, after occupying so much of the attention of the House on matters more immediately confided to his care, to take no part in the debate on the bill of rights. But he felt it to be his duty, and he supposed every other member did also, to understand what he was about.

The second article of the bill, as reported, recognizes fully the right of the people—the sole and exclusive right—to regulate the internal government of the State. What more is to be the effect of this amendment? If it is designed to admit the power and right of the people in a constitutional and legal mode, to effect changes in the government, it is submitted that this is already there, in terms as strong as language can express it. Is any other power intended? Is it to countenance the doctrine that under any sudden impulse, regardless of the legal forms which they themselves have prescribed, and by any tumultuous movement, the people might rise and by violence effect a change in the existing government? If that was the power intended to be asserted, he denied that it had ever been recognized by any government. The exercise of such a power would be fatal not only to property, but to the life of every citizen. It could not fail ultimately to be exerted by a lawless and infuriated assemblage. He hoped the gentleman who offered the amendment would explain his object. We had hitherto lived happily under the present bill of rights, which has been every where respected, and if we are to adopt a new principle by which any self-constituted body of men choosing to call themselves "the people," can assume the power to subvert, when and as they please, the whole social and political fabric, let us at least understand it. Let it be in terms plain and distinct, that neither this Convention or those who are to pass upon our work, may be in any doubt or error in regard to it.

Mr. PRESSTMAN said:

That when he offered the amendment to the first article of the bill of rights, he would take occasion to say to the several gentlemen who

have suggested the propriety of presenting it to certain other articles, or as an additional one to the report of the committee, that he had weighed well the purport of his amendment, and after mature reflection thought, (and he had as yet seen no reason for a change of that opinion,) that there was a peculiar and fitting appropriateness in the position where he now sought to place it. He did not think that the provisions of the 4th or 41st articles, in the report of the gentleman from Anne Arundel, (Mr. Dorsey,) embraced the principle he sought to engraft upon the bill of rights; one looks to the naked revolutionary right which exists under all governments in the people, to resist tyranny and throw off the yoke of oppression. The language employed in that article is "that whenever the ends of government are perverted, and the public liberty manifestly endangered, and all other means of redress are ineffectual, the people may, and of right ought to reform the old or establish a new government." And that, sir, is the identical language of the present bill of rights of Maryland. The other refers to the mode of change which this Convention may or may not adopt, when we come to establish the Constitution itself. Possibly, sir, that mode may be the one now prescribed by the 59th article of the existing Constitution, which declares "that no change shall be made without the vote of two successive Legislatures." He was admonished by the lessons of experience, that the people, in trusting to that mode, had for years leaned upon a broken reed, which had pierced them. He hoped never to hear again of legislative reform. He could see in that, nothing but disappointment,—

"The serpent coil of future faithlessness."

Before making a more explicit annunciation of the object of his amendment and the doctrine it contained, he wished to relieve himself of the effect of an impression which seemed to be in the mind of the gentleman from Kent, that this was an unmatured proposition. He had nothing of that kind to say in extenuation of his position. What he had done, he had done with deliberation. The uncertainty which had existed as to the true construction of the present bill of rights and Constitution, when taken separately or as a whole, as to the time when, and the means and measures required to effect a change by the people in their organic law, and above all, the unwillingness of many to recognize this inalienable right in them, except in a manner and form so mutilated, as to peril, if not to deny its very existence, impelled him to insert the principle contained in his amendment as a cardinal one, in clear and unambiguous language, in the bill of rights now to be adopted, and that, too, unrestrained by the terms employed in the present bill of rights. The phraseology of the present article, stringent as it is, implying, in the minds of some men, no change short of a revolution by physical violence. He regarded the principle of peaceable revolution, (such as that now going on) as a precious one; it would be a jewel that would attract the affections and confidence of the people, if placed in our bill of rights, while, without