

it, sir, that bill of rights would be but an empty casket, unseemly and valueless. Change without civil war—adaptation of the government to the wants of the people without bloodshed! This, sir, is the whole end and purpose of my amendment. But, sir, the gentleman from Kent, (Mr. Chambers,) “scents treason in the wind.” This does not surprise me, neither would it fright me from my propriety, if he should discover “it was flat burglary.” The amendment he had offered was like the line and plume, it would separate the reformers and the anti-reformers of that body, and with great deference, he placed the gentleman from Kent at the head of the latter. He had been called upon to unveil the monster which lurked under the drapery of his amendment.

Now, sir, let me first premise if the principle is a good one; if it be just and true, let it be inserted in the bill of rights. Nothing that he could say, would add to its intrinsic merit, and surely it should not be allowed to lose its force by any attempt on his part to illustrate it. But, sir, the gentleman from Kent, in putting inquiries, seeks a full and frank disclosure of the scope and objects designed by me. The Convention will remember this amendment was offered without comment, and he was willing that the Convention should vote “aye” or “noe” upon it, as the principle itself should inspire confidence or alarm. The gentleman from Kent, has indeed taken high ground; he denies, with great emphasis, that such a principle has been adopted in any form of Government, with which he has been acquainted, that it is a monstrous proposition. Before this discussion closes, he will perhaps recognise his present position, while holding a seat on this floor, as alone justifiable in the doctrine of peaceable revolution, by the will of the people, which he, (Mr. P.) was struggling to maintain. He will pardon the resort to the *argumentum ad hominem*. The proposition submitted by him was not an original one, either in the idea or the language in which it is expressed. It shines in letters of living light upon the face of many, if not the greater part, of the bills of rights of the several States of this glorious Union. In the constitution of Virginia—the mother of States, as she has been justly styled—the following language is employed:—“That government is, or ought to be, instituted for the common benefit, protection, and security of the people, nation or community. Of all the various forms of government, that is best which is capable of producing the greatest degree of happiness and safety, and is most effectually secured against the danger of mal-administration, and that when any government, shall be found inadequate or contrary to these purposes, a majority of the community hath an indubitable, unalienable right to alter, reform or abolish it, in such manner as shall be judged most conducive to the public weal.” Indeed, sir, the absence of such a provision in the several Constitutions constitute exceptions. A similar feature to that he had quoted is to be found in the Constitutions of Maine, Vermont and other of the older States, and it is incorporated in most, if not all of the new States.

Bear in mind, sir, no other mode is prescribed in the Constitution of Virginia and several other States of the Union, for the reform or alteration of their organic law. All is wisely left to the wisdom, patriotism and sound common sense of the people. Did the illustrious men who framed that Constitution contemplate a bloody revolution as the appropriate mode? It is not for us to set limits upon the action of the people. Let not the agent lord it over his principal.

In the Virginia Convention of 1830, the following resolution was offered:

“Resolved, That in the opinion of the committee that the Constitution of this State ought to be so amended, as to provide a mode in which future amendments shall be made therein.”

It was voted down, ayes 28, noes 68.

John Randolph addressed the Convention in opposition to its adoption, in the following significant language. “I shall vote against this resolution, and I will state as succinctly as I can, my reasons for doing so. I believe they will in substance be found in a very old book, and conveyed in these words, ‘sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.’ Sir, I have remarked since the commencement of our deliberations, and with no small surprise, a very great anxiety to provide for futurity. Gentleman, for example, are not content with any present discussion of the Constitution, unless we will consent to prescribe for all time hereafter. I had always thought him the most skilful physician, who, when called to a patient, relieved him of the existing malady without undertaking to prescribe for such, as might by possibility endure thereafter.” And yet, sir, in the face of all this, gentlemen say the necessity is urgent and cannot be avoided, that some mode of change must be fixed by the Constitution. If so, which he denied, it would be time enough to consider that after we had set forth the bill of rights.

In the language of the bill of rights of Texas, which, if report be true, is the work of that illustrious statesman, John C. Calhoun, and which, in its features show the chisel of a master’s hand, is the identical language embodied in my amendment. He had had it demanded of him, in terms and tones indicating anticipated annihilation, whether he designed to uphold the doctrine that the people are not bound to adhere to the terms of the compact to which they are parties. His plain answer was this: that no Convention that ever sat or ever will sit in this republican land have the right to bind posterity. The people are omnipotent, and when they speak it is “the delegated voice of God.” The creature is not above the Creator. The compact is binding so long as the sovereignty who framed it, wills it and until revoked, is supreme over all and must be obeyed; but it cannot survive one moment longer than the people ordain that it should last.

He held that the theory of compact between counties in a State, or the minority with the majority, requiring the assent of all to change their Constitution, to be founded in error—gross error. There is but one party—the people. The majority of the people can make or unmake it. If