

THE FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT.

The long expected proclamation by the Secretary of State of the ratification of the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution was made last week, and the event has been made the subject of general rejoicing among the colored population of the country, as well as by the ardent advocates of the universal rights of man, and zealous republicans. The amendment is that "The right of the citizens of the United State to vote shall not be denied or abolished by the United States, or by any State, on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude." It is the final act of the series of reconstruction measures, which were the result of the rebellion, and opens to the colored race a career of equality before the law with the white race throughout the country. In the New England States, except in Connecticut, it will make practically no difference in the political status of the race, but in most of the other States of the Union it makes a radical change in superseding all laws and constitutional provisions making distinctions of color in the establishment of political rights.

The article has been ratified by the legislatures of the States of North Carolina, West Virginia, Massachusetts, Wisconsin, Maine, Louisiana, Michigan, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Arkansas, Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Indiana, New York, New Hampshire, Nevada, Vermont, Virginia, Alabama, Missouri, Mississippi, Ohio, Iowa, Kansas, Minnesota, Rhode Island, Nebraska, and Texas, in all 29 States, making three fourths of all the States of the Union. All the Southern States except Georgia have been restored to their full constitutional rights in the Union, and those of Georgia will soon be established by the bill now before Congress. The subject will or ought to be taken out of the national politics, and the agitation of it in Congress and the press must of necessity cease with this final measure.

The President in announcing the event to Congress sent the following message :—

TO THE SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES :

It is unusual to notify the two Houses of Congress by message of the promulgation by proclamation of the Secretary of State of the ratification of the constitutional amendment. In view, however, of the vast importance of the 15th Amendment of the Constitution this day declared a part of that revered instrument, I deem a departure from the usual custom justifiable. The measure which makes at once four millions of the people voters who were heretofore declared by the highest tribunal in the land not citizens of the United States, nor eligible to become so, with the assertion that at the time of the Declaration of Independence, the opinion was fixed and universal in the civilized portion of the white race, and regarded as an axiom in morals as well as in politics, that black men had no rights which white men were bound to respect, is, indeed, a measure of grander importance than any other one act of the kind from the foundation of our free government to the present time. Institutions like ours, in which all power is derived directly from the people, must depend mainly upon their intelligence, patriotism and industry. I call the attention, therefore, of the newly enfranchised race to the importance of their striving in every honorable manner to make themselves worthy of their new privilege. To a race more favored heretofore by our laws I would say, withhold no legal privilege of advancement to the new citizens. The framers of our Constitution firmly believed that a republican form of government could not endure without intelligence and education were generally diffused among the people. The Father of his Country, in his farewell address, uses this language :—"Promote, then, as a matter of primary importance, institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened." In his first annual message to Congress the same views were forcibly presented, and are again urged in his eighth message. I repeat, that the adoption of the fifteenth amendment to the Constitution completes the greatest civil change and constitutes the most important event that has occurred since the nation came into life. The change will be beneficial in proportion to the heed that is given to the urgent recommendations of Washington. If these recommendations were important then with a population of but a few millions, how much more important are they now with a population of forty millions, and increasing in rapid ratio. I would therefore call upon Congress to take all means within their constitutional power to promote and encourage popular education throughout the country, and upon the people everywhere to see to it that all who possess and exercise political rights shall have an opportunity to acquire that knowledge which will make their share in the government a blessing and not a danger. By such means only can the benefits contemplated by this amendment to the Constitution be secured.

(Signed) U. S. GRANT.

Executive Mansion, March 30, 1870.