

RATIFICATION OF THE FIFTEENTH AMENDMENT.

Congratulatory Message of the President—Official Promulgation by the Secretary of State.

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 a constitutional amendment. In view, however, of the vast importance of the Fifteenth Amendment of the Constitution, this day declared a part of that revered instrument, I deem a departure from the usual custom justifiable. A measure which makes at once four millions of 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, 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 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 the race more favored heretofore by our laws I would say,

Withhold no legal privilege of advancement to the new citizen. The framers of our Constitution firmly believed that a republican form of government could not endure without intelligence and education 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 now, with a population of forty millions, and increasing in a rapid ratio. I would, therefore, call upon Congress to take all the 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 the opportunity to acquire the 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.

U. S. GRANT.

EXECUTIVE MANSION, March 30, 1870.