

SOUTHERN OPINIONS ON NEGRO SUFFRAGE.

THE race conference at Montgomery, Ala., last week, and the vigorous campaign in North Carolina for a constitutional amendment that will practically disfranchise the negroes in that State are stirring up the Southern press to a renewed discussion of negro suffrage. Three States, Mississippi, Louisiana, and South Carolina, have amended their state constitutions so as to bar (by means of educational and property qualifications) nearly all the negroes from the polls; North Carolina is about to vote on a similar amendment, Virginia and Alabama are considering the step, while Georgia has decided to let the negro retain his ballot.

The campaign in North Carolina for the constitutional amendment is becoming very earnest. A speech delivered by Prof. W. E. Abernathy, of Rutherford College, before the White Supremacy Club in Charlotte, N. C., has been printed and is being used as a campaign circular. In this speech Professor Abernathy refers to the enfranchisement of the negro as "the most foul, most damnable wrong ever forced upon a free sovereign State," and says of the terms of the proposed amendment: "They are plain and simple. We disfranchise no white man. We disfranchise only ignorant and incompetent negroes. We must pass the amendment. We shall pass it." The *Raleigh (N. C.) News and Observer* (Dem.) says: "Does anybody suppose that the white men of North Carolina are fools enough and cowards enough to stand still and submit to negro domination, when all the rest of the world is governing the negro? Manhood demands the adoption of our constitutional amendment." The *Wilmington (N. C.) Morning Star* (Dem.) declares that the Fifteenth Amendment to the Constitution of the United States was ratified with the assistance of the votes of twelve Southern States, when their legislatures were controlled by "scalawags and carpetbaggers, when thousands of white men were disfranchised and the negroes voted to enfranchise themselves, one of the most outrageous proceedings ever enacted in this or in any other country, a proceeding so outrageous that its leading advocates did not have the hardihood to defend it as constitutional"; and, the same paper adds, "promises made under duress or under intimidation are not binding in law, honor, or morals, and it was under such conditions that negro suffrage was forced upon the Southern States."

The *Washington Bee* (Afro-American) fears that when the negroes of North Carolina go to the polls to vote upon the proposed amendment, "the whites will combine, and by force of arms and their bloody and dastardly methods prevent negroes from voting," and it gives the North Carolina negroes the following counsel:

"Force is to be detested when exercised in a contest where conscience, patriotism, and eloquence should be the controlling forces. Yet the sense of manly independence and self-preservation dictates that brute force be met by a like force when other forces become useless. God forbid that the tragic scenes about Wilmington be reenacted this year, but should such be attempted manliness, justice, and self-respect demand that the negroes shall defend their helpless sisters, wives, and daughters against unholy slaughter by gangs of bloodthirsty and heartless brutes.

"We trust that the thinking class of whites in North Carolina will not be led into schemes of gross injustice and crime by unprincipled and designing demagogues and grasping politicians.

"Above all it is the duty of all intelligent and manly colored people to watch and be prepared for the worst and not fall with their backs toward the enemy."

Several speakers at the Montgomery conference spoke strongly on the suffrage question. A. M. Waddell, ex-mayor of Wilmington, N. C., who led the armed movement against negro domination in Wilmington in November, 1898, said, among other things:

NEGRO SUFFRAGE.

"Unrestricted negro suffrage in the Southern States, if the right be fully and freely exercised, means the most ignorant, corrupt, and evil government ever known in a true country. It means more than this, for there can be no social security where it prevails. Among white men, political party ascendencies are never utilized to affect social order. Social disorder invariably follows negro political ascendency. The negro has had nearly forty years of freedom and citizenship and opportunity for education, and yet, with many honorable exceptions, he is quite as incapable of understanding the meaning of true liberty and of intelligently exercising political rights as he was when first emancipated. . . . White supremacy is absolutely essential to his welfare, because it means the salvation of those things upon which his every interest depends. It is madness in him, and cruelty in those who so advise him, to resist it."

Hilary A. Herbert, of Alabama, President Cleveland's Secretary of the Navy, who also spoke before the Montgomery conference, said of the negro and the ballot-box :

"There is no country in the world where elections were purer than they were in the Southern States in 1860. If since that time we have departed from the teachings of our fathers, it was necessity that taught us—the necessity of preserving our civilization. It was not a desire to get rid of negro domination that prompted the new constitution of Mississippi or the new constitution of Louisiana. The white men already were dominant in both States; they were simply taking steps in the direction of pure elections. It is just one step from defrauding the negro to defrauding the white man, and we know that as long as matters remain as they now are we can never have, as we ought to have, and wish to have, two respectable parties in these Southern States.

"It will probably be agreed upon by the majority of those in this conference that most of our Southern States need changes in their fundamental laws to adapt them to present conditions; but, while I concur in this necessity for amendments, it must also be borne in mind that no changes merely as to suffrage that could be made in state or federal constitution could of themselves meet the demand of the hour. We need better and more harmonious relations between the races. Race friction, race hatred, beget such crimes as malicious mischief, arson, and assassination. It prevents cooperation for the prevention or discovery of crime, and is the prolific mother of distrust and perjury. Lynch law but adds to race hatred; it begets the feeling that injustice has been done, because a trial is denied."

Ex-Governor William A. McCorkle, of West Virginia, advocated "an honest and inflexible educational and property basis" for the suffrage, "administered fairly for black and white"; but, he added, the time is rapidly coming when the South will need every vote it can get to sustain its commercial politics, and "the South most certainly will be ultimately insistent that the negro vote be counted." Bourke Cockran, in a speech that was received with great favor by the audience, advocated the repeal of the Fifteenth Amendment to the federal Constitution, by which the negro was enfranchised.