

INTRODUCTORY

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One of the great differences between modern civilization and the ages that have gone before is to be noted in the use by many men of information compiled and published by one of their number. It is impossible to make even an approximate estimate of the time and energy saved to the human race by the application of such a process in modern life. Little by little men have learned the value of organization and co-operation, and have understood how to make use of the labors of their fellows, and today the extent to which this is done in any group or community is an accurate index of the state of advancement of that group.

For a long time after the Civil War the colored people in this country were "hewers of wood and drawers of water," and their business and industrial life was of the simplest kind. As the years passed slight changes were noted, and in very recent years the change has been most rapid, especially in the great urban centers. One of the recognized accompaniments of modern commercial and professional life and organization is the directory. In 1820 Bradstreet first published his famous commercial directory in New York. Thirteen years ago the publisher of this work thought he saw the need of a directory for the colored business, professional and educational world of Baltimore, and later included other cities. That his thought was a good one is evidenced by the fact that in the years intervening between 1913 and the current year 12 editions of this work have been published, and similar works have been compiled for other cities with large colored populations, in imitation of Mr. Coleman's idea.

One of the very interesting things about this directory is its compiler, himself well known in the cities which figure in its pages. Mr. Robert W. Coleman comes of good stock, being the son of Sergeant A. B. Coleman, who, associated with the younger Frederick Douglass, helped to organize the colored regiments in Massachusetts during the dark days of the Civil War, and for this service received the thanks of the legislature of Boston. He is a brother of Mr. John H. Coleman, a prominent business man of Chicago, and a cousin of Judge Robert H. Terrell, formerly of the Municipal Court, Washington, D. C. He married Miss Mary A. Mason, of Baltimore, who has been an indispensable figure in the life and activities of Mr. Coleman.

Stricken, after he reached adult manhood, with almost complete blindness, Mr. Coleman, though weighed down by the responsibility for the care of a large family showed the stuff that was in him by learning a new trade, that of piano-tuning, and in his odd hours, at certain seasons of the year, collecting the advertising and other material for his directory in the cities concerned. His energy, courage and perseverance, under such a handicap, have been little short of marvelous. Mr. Coleman is a graduate of the Business Department of M Street High School, Washington. In his later years under the administration of Rev. Williams' secretary, he was a member of the board of directors of the Baltimore branch of the Y. M. C. A.

The directory idea, in this new age of progress and expansion among the colored people, is capable of almost indefinite extension, and its possibilities are unlimited. It is our hope that the originator of the idea may some day realize his most ambitious dreams concerning it. With the assistance of and co-operation of the communities involved, not only in the way of advertising, but also in the furnishing of complete and accurate information, there is no reason why he should not do this, for the enterprise is certainly deserving of the most hearty and generous support of the public.

P. S.—Mr. Coleman is assisted in the editing of this directory by his second daughter, Miss Dorothy.

