

077655

NX
650
0.92
1929

INTRODUCTORY

BY MR. E. C. WILLIAMS

Librarian, Howard University, Washington, D. C.

Formerly Librarian of Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio, and
Principal, M Street High School, Washington, D. C.

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. In 1913 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 since 1913 this work has been published each year 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 A. B. Coleman, who, associated with the younger Frederick Douglass, helped to organize the colored Forty-fourth, Forty-fifth and Fifty-fifth regiments in Massachusetts during the dark days of the Civil War, and for this service received the thanks of the legislature of Boston. Mr. Coleman was born November 3rd, 1876, at 708 D Street, N. W., Washington, D. C. He is a brother to Mr. John H. Coleman, a prominent business man of Chicago, Ill., Dr. A. B. Coleman and Mrs. Daisy Coleman Arnold, of Washington, D. C., a cousin of Mrs. Laura Jones, of Tuskege Institute, and of the late Judge Robert H. Terrell, Wm. Terrell, Mrs. Phyllis Terrell Gaines, of Washington, D. C., and Mrs. Mary Terrell Tancil, of Chicago, Ill., and a relative of Dr. Frank Allen and Douglas Henry, of Pittsburgh, Pa., an uncle of Mrs. James A. Mitchell, wife of Detective James A. Mitchell, of St. Paul, Minn., and great uncle of Florence Harrold and James Mitchell. He married Miss Mary A. Mason, of Baltimore, who has been an indispensable figure in the life and activities of Mr. Coleman. Mr. Coleman has six children, all girls, Daisy G., Dorothy May, Louise F., Catherine M., Harriett E. and Roberta A. Misses Daisy and Dorothy are teachers in the public schools of Baltimore and Louise a student at Howard University.

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. He organized the Maryland Association for Colored Blind, October 15th, 1913, which was reorganized May 3rd, 1925, as the Association of the Handicapped, Inc., which includes the blind, mute and crippled. April 13th, 1927, with the assistance of Mr. Marvin Eckford and others, he organized the South Baltimore Y Club at John Wesley A. M. E. Church for the purpose of erecting a 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.