

A CHRONIC FAULT-FINDER.

Mrs. Ida B. Wells-Barnett, of Chicago, recently visited this city and lectured at Ebenezer A. M. E. Church, under the auspices of one of the organizations of the church. Mrs. Barnett was in the city a few days after her lecture, and had an opportunity to make some investigations, which, no doubt she did, and in her own way. The results of that investigation she has given to the Chicago Conservator. She starts off by saying that, "in Baltimore there are ninety thousand colored people, nearly one third of the population." Baltimore has five hundred thousand population, and the colored people in Baltimore are about one-fifth of that number and not one-third as stated by Mrs. Barnett. She also makes the following statement.

"It is safe to say the money they spend each week for groceries, dry goods, shoes and other necessities of life average ninety thousand dollars for one week alone. One would think that this enormous expenditure would at least guarantee civil treatment from the seller to the black buyer. Not so. The business is mostly done by white Americans and Jews. There is not a place in the city where a Negro may get a glass of soda if you are thirsty or a good meal if he is hungry save in places kept by our race. You would naturally conclude that with such an immense population to draw from, and stung by the insolent treatment which black people receive, there would be scores of business places kept by our own people there. Yet in the whole of that great city there is only one drug store kept by colored men. I never saw or heard of a single grocery or dry good store of any description kept by colored men. They are insulted with impunity in the white stores, day after day, because the proprietors know they can do this and the Negro will still give them his money. I told those to whom I talked about the situation, that even if there was no business ability and capital enough among them to start their own business places their race pride should drive them all to trade only with those white men who were at least courteous and respectful to them that every one of the hundred or more Negro pastors in that city, no matter how wide their religious or personal differences should unite in one grand body to carry out that policy. And when the merchant came to understand that he must treat the Negro differently if they desired his trade, it would not be long before they would get better treatment."

Now, as to her statements: As to the expenditures, we feel sure that she has under rather than over stated the amount which the colored people spend per week, and we also agree with her in the statement that the business of the city is carried on by white Americans and Jews, but when she makes the statement that there is not one place in the city where colored people can get a glass of soda water outside of colored people's places she makes a mistake, for there are dozens of such places, kept by white people where the same can be obtained. As to eating places, we admit they are few and far between. We also admit, to our shame, that we have only one colored drug store, and that is not too well patronized. As to the statement that she never saw a single grocery store kept by colored people, we have to say that she must have either been fast asleep or had her eyes closed the whole time she was in Baltimore. If she had applied to us we could have pointed out a dozen such places. It is true we have no dry goods stores, as yet. As to the matter of being insulted with impunity by white store proprietors, this we emphatically deny. As a matter of fact, almost any lady who has business in any of the prominent stores of this city will testify that they meet with the most courteous treatment, and when this is not accorded, a complaint to the proprietor will bring out the fact that those who have been guilty of the act once will not be guilty of the same again soon. And this is one of the reasons why colored merchants have such a hard time to get along. Colored people are treated so well by nearly everybody with whom they deal, and are shown so many favors that colored merchants cannot afford, that, naturally the trade goes to the white merchant who can afford greater facilities than the colored merchant.

In a number of the largest stores in this city, the colored lady shopper can get her purchases charged until such time as she is willing and ready to pay. Of course this applies to the better class of white people just as it applies to the better class of white people.

Two of the largest green grocery stores in the city are kept by colored men, and they are making money. We have within a radius of a few squares in northwest Baltimore, to say nothing of any other parts of the city, three or four grocery stores kept by colored men, and all of them are doing well. Nearly all the undertaking is done by colored men and their business is a large one. We have three or four colored tailors in this city and they are kept busy. Most of the catering in this city is done by colored men and as a rule they have missed a competency, and all of them are doing well.

We are alive to the fact that we are not doing all that we can and ought, but we are doing something and doing

that something well. If Mrs. Barnett treated all the colored business places as she did the Afro-American office, it is no wonder that she knows so little about Baltimore. Such statements as the ones above quoted are calculated to injure this or any other city, of which they are made, and we wish to take this opportunity to deny Mrs. Barnett's statements along this line about Baltimore. We have no objection to being painted just as we are, but we are sure that Baltimore compares favorably with Chicago when it comes to business enterprises, and Mrs. Barnett lives in Chicago.

We would like to Mrs. Barnett to tell us how many large grocery and dry goods stores there are in Chicago, run by colored people; how many hotels, and how many drug stores. This would perhaps aid us in forming a conclusion as to what kind of judge she is of business matters, and also how many of them she patronizes. And also how much capital she has invested in business enterprises in her city.