This fascinating book tells the remarkable story of William Sanders Scarborough’s rise from his origins in slavery to a distinguished career as the first African American professional scholar of classical languages and literatures. Michele Valerie Ronnick is to be commended for making this compelling account available to a wide reading public.”
—Valerie Smith, Woodrow Wilson Professor of Literature and director of the Program in African American Studies, Princeton University

“Expertly presented by Michele Ronnick, Scarborough’s autobiography constitutes an important and timely contribution to the history of Classical Studies in America and to the story of African American intellectual life in the century after Emancipation. Scarborough believed passionately that classical education was a critical component of African American advancement and understood that a liberal education is liberating and the property of all free human beings.”
—Jenny Strauss Clay, professor of classics, University of Virginia

“This autobiography presents to a new generation the career of William Sanders Scarborough . . . a precursor to W. E. B. DuBois, and someone whom the famed intellectual admired and emulated. The complicated ties between Scarborough and the A.M.E.-sponsored Wilberforce University showed that those who valued the life of the mind drew substantial support and encouragement from black religious and educational institutions. Scholars in the classics, history, African American studies, and other subjects will find much relevant information in this valuable volume.”
—Dennis C. Dickerson, professor of history, Vanderbilt University, historiographer of A.M.E. Church

“William Sanders Scarborough, a respected classicist when the classics represented the ultimate in learned knowledge, embodied the living refutation of white supremacy in the late nineteenth century. The twentieth century was all too quick to forget him. Michele Ronnick’s edition of Scarborough’s autobiography brings him back to life, with all its promise, achievement, and frustration. We need to know it all.”
—Nell Irvin Painter, Edwards Professor of American History, Princeton University

“It is uplifting to discover in this fascinating life, so compellingly narrated, a refutation of the racist view that a black man was genetically incapable of learning Greek, and at the same time so clearly to see precisely the effects of such learning on this likable and able man. Like the Roman poet Horace, he too the son of an ex-slave, Scarborough reveals to us a personality imbued with culture, humanism and compassion.”
—Richard E. Thomas, professor of Greek and Latin, Harvard University, trustee of Loeb Classical Library

“William Sanders Scarborough should be an exemplar for any aspiring intellectual. Under conditions that can be, at best, described as absurd, he forged an amazing career and life. Michele Ronnick has done us a great service in bringing this grand figure back to us.”
—Eddie S. Glaude, Jr., Princeton University, inaugural winner of the MLA William Sanders Scarborough book prize for outstanding work in black literature or culture

This illuminating autobiography traces Scarborough’s path out of slavery in Macon, Georgia, to a prolific scholarly career that culminated with his presidency of Wilberforce University. Despite the racism he encountered as he struggled to establish a place in higher education for African Americans, Scarborough was an exemplary scholar, particularly in the field of classical studies. He was the first African American member of the Modern Language Association, a forty-four-year member of the American Philological Association, and a true champion of higher education. Michele Valerie Ronnick contextualizes Scarborough’s narrative through extensive notes and by exploring a wide variety of sources such as census records, church registries, period newspapers, and military and university records. This book is indispensable to anyone interested in the history of intellectual endeavor in America, Africana studies, and classical studies as well as those familiar with the associations and institutions that welcomed and valued Scarborough.

Michele Valerie Ronnick is associate professor of Greek and Latin at Wayne State University.
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