

Whitney, ELI, inventor; born in West-boro, Mass., Dec. 8, 1765; graduated, at Yale College in 1792; obtained a collegiate education largely by the earnings of his own hands. In the year of his graduation he went to Georgia, became an inmate of the family of Mrs. General Greene, and there invented his cotton-gin, which gave a wonderful impulse to the cultivation of the cotton-plant, rendering it an enormous item in the foreign and domestic commerce of the United States.

The seeds of the cotton raised in the United States adhered so firmly to the fibre that it was difficult to separate them from it. The seeds were separated from the cotton-wool by the slow process of picking by hand, which was chiefly done by negro women and children. The separation of one pound of the wool from the seeds was regarded as a good day's work for one woman. So limited was the production on account of the labor that even high prices did not stimulate its cultivation, and the entire cotton crop in the United States in 1791 was only about 2,000,000 pounds. The following year Whitney accepted an invitation to teach the children of a Georgia planter. He arrived there too late, and the widow of General Greene, living near, gave the young stranger a home in her house. He displayed much inventive genius, which Mrs. Greene encouraged.

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One day some gentlemen at her table expressed a regret that there was no machine by which the cotton-wool could be readily separated from the seed. "Apply to my young friend here," said Mrs. Greene; "he can make anything." Whitney had then never seen a cotton-seed with wool adhering. He was furnished with some. With rude plantation tools he constructed a machine that performed the work. This was the origin of the saw-gin, which, with some improvements, is universally used on American plantations. Some of Mrs. Greene's neighbors were called in to see the working of it. They were astonished and delighted. Phineas Miller, a college-mate of Whitney, had come to Georgia, and soon became the second husband of Mrs. Greene. Having some money, he formed a copartnership with Whitney in the manufacture of gins. The machine was locked from public view until a patent could be procured. Planters came from all parts of South Carolina and Georgia to see the wonderful machine which could do the work in a day of 1,000 women. The workshop of the inventor was broken into and the model was carried off. Imperfect machines were made by common mechanics, which injured the fibre and defamed the machine for a while.

The gin was patented (1793) before any were made. The violators of the patent were prosecuted, but packed juries gave sweeping verdicts against the owners. Even State legislatures broke their bargains with them, or, like South Carolina, long delayed to fulfil them; and when, in 1812, Whitney asked Congress for an extension of his patent, the members from the cotton-growing States, whose constituents had been enriched by the invention, vehemently opposed the prayer of the petitioner, and it was denied. Thence-

forth those who had wronged Whitney, in defiance of law and justice, were permitted to continue the wrong under the protection of law. The immediate influence of Whitney's cotton-gin upon the dying institution of slavery was most remarkable. It played an important part in the social, com-



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mercial, and political history of the country for seventy years. The increased production of cotton made an enormous demand for slave-labor in the preparation of the soil, the ingathering of the harvest, and the preparation of it for market. Its effects upon the industrial pursuits of nearly one-half the nation were marvelous. Such, also, were its effects upon the moral and intellectual condition of the people in the cotton-growing States. Before 1808 (after which time the national Constitution prohibited the prosecution of the African slave-trade) enormous numbers of slaves were brought to the country. The institution had been unprofitable, and was dying. The cotton-gin revived it,

made it strong and powerful, and cotton, its representative, assumed to be king of the nation, and for fifty years swayed an imperial sceptre, almost unchallenged. Eli Whitney, a Yankee school-master, built the throne of King Cotton, but was denied his just wages by the subjects of the monarch. The legislature of South Carolina voted him \$50,000, which, after vexatious delays and lawsuits, was finally paid. North Carolina allowed him a percentage for the use of the gin for five years. Congress having refused to renew his patent, he engaged in the manufacture of firearms for the government during the War of 1812-15, and finally gained a fortune. He died in New Haven, Conn., Jan. 8, 1825.