

WHITNEY, ELI, American inventor, was born at Westborough, Massachusetts, December 8, 1765, and was educated at Yale College, where he paid his expenses, partly by school-teaching, partly by mechanical labour. Having graduated in 1792, he went to Georgia as a teacher; but finding a generous patron in the widow of General Greene, of the Revolutionary army, he resided on her estate, and studied law. The cotton culture at this period, especially that of the best kind, the 'green seed,' was limited by the slow and difficult work of separating the cotton from the seed by hand; but Mrs Greene told her complaining neighbours that she was sure W. could help them out of their trouble, for he could make anything. At their desire, he set to work under great disadvantages, for he had to make his own tools, and even draw his own wire; but the reports of his success prompted some lawless people to break into his workshop, and steal his machine, and get others made before he could secure a patent. He, however, formed a partnership with one Miller in 1793, and went to Connecticut to manufacture cotton gins; but the lawsuits in defence of his rights took all his profits, and 50,000 dollars voted him by the state of South Carolina. Finally, in 1798, he got a government contract for the manufacture of firearms, and was the first to effect the division of labour, by which each part was made separately. He made a fortune by this manufacture, carried out with ingenious machinery at Whitneyville, Connecticut; while he had but barren honour from the gin, one of the most important of the whole series of inventions connected with the cotton manufacture. He died at New Haven, January 8, 1825. See CORROX.