THE YOUNG ENGINEERS

CARL AND THE COTTON GIN

EXPLORE WITH CARL HOW ONE INVENTION RESHAPED FARMING, TEXTILES, AND EVERYDAY LIFE.

SARA WARE BASSETT

Also by Sara Ware Bassett

THE YOUNG ENGINEERS

Carl and the Cotton Gin
Christopher and the Clockmakers
Paul and the Printing Press
Steve and the Steam Engine
Ted and the Telephone
Walter and the Wireless

THE STORY OF

The Story of Glass
The Story of Leather
The Story of Silk
The Story of Sugar
The Story of Porcelain
The Story of Lumber
The Story of Wool

This edition published 2026
by Living Book Press
Copyright © Living Book Press, 2026

ISBN: 978-1-76153-450-8 (hardcover)
978-1-76153-452-2 (softcover)

First published in 1924.

This edition is based on the Little, Brown, and Company printing by 1924.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any other form or means – electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner and the publisher or as provided by Australian law.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the National Library of Australia

Carl and the Cotton Gin

by

Sara Ware Bassett

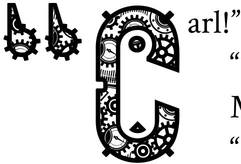
"Mr. Carl McGregor," announced he in a stentorian tone.

Contents

1.	THE McGREGORS	1
2.	CARL TELLS A STORY	14
3.	A TRAGEDY	25
4.	PROBLEMS	37
5.	A TANGLE OF SURPRISES	50
6.	THE WEB WIDENS	59
7.	THE COMING OF THE FAIRY GODMOTHER	65
8.	THE ROMANCE OF COTTON	80
9.	NORTH AND SOUTH	92
10.	A LESSON IN THRIFT	102
11.	A FAMILY CONGRESS	116
12.	A CLUE	133
13.	HAL REPEATS HIS VISIT	149
14.	SPINNING YARNS	160
15.	TIDINGS	181
16.	A RELUCTANT ALTRUIST	190
17.	AN ORDEAL	198
18.	THE SOLUTION OF MANY MYSTERIES	209
19.	UNRAVELING THE SNARLS	217

CHAPTER I

THE McGREGORS

arl!"

"Coming, Ma!"

Mrs. McGregor waited a moment.

"But you aren't coming," protested she fretfully. "You never seem to come when you're wanted. Drat the child! Where is he? Carl!"

"Yes, Ma."

"*Yes, Ma! Yes, Ma!*" the woman mimicked impatiently. "It's easy enough to shout *Yes, Ma*; but where are you—that's what I want to know. You're the slowest creature on God's earth, I believe. A tortoise would be a race horse compared with you. What under the sun are you doing?"

The boy entered, a good-humored grin on his face.

He was thin, lanky, and blue-eyed, and a rebellious lock of tawny hair that curled despite all he could do waved back from his forehead. He might have been fourteen years old or he might have been seventeen; it was hard to tell whether he was an overgrown younger boy or an under-sized older one. Whatever his age, however, he could certainly boast a serene disposition, for his mother's caustic comments failed to ruffle his temper. Having heard them ever since babyhood he was quite accustomed to their acid tang; moreover, he had learned to gage

them for what they were worth and class them along with the froth on a soda or the sputter of a freshly lighted match. The thing underneath was what mattered and he knew well that beneath the torrent of words his mother was the best mother on earth, so what more could a boy ask?

Therefore he stood before her, whistling softly and waiting to see what would happen next. For something surely would happen; it always did when Mrs. McGregor rolled up her sleeves, and they were rolled up now, displaying beneath the margin of blue gingham a powerful arm terminating in a strong hand and slender, capable fingers.

Years ago she had come to Mulberry Court with a large brood of children and it had been a long time before she could number one friend among her neighbors. The chief complaint entered against her was that she was not sociable, and if you were not sociable at Mulberry Court it meant you were lofty, uppish, considered yourself better than other folks. What it really meant, however, was that you did not hang out of your window and chatter to the inhabitant of the opposite tenement; or loiter in the doorway or on the sidewalk to gossip with the women who lived on the floors below.

At the outset Mrs. McGregor had let it be understood that she had no time for gossip and it was this decree that had earned for her the stigma of not being sociable, the acme of all crimes at Mulberry Court. Of course she had not proclaimed her policy in so many words. No, indeed! Yet she might as well have done so for the business-like manner in which she hastened home from market and shot up the stairs published her philosophy more forcefully than any words could have done.

"She's just too good for the rest of us," announced Mrs. O'Dowd sarcastically to the little circle who were wont to await

her verdict on every newcomer to the district. "Proud and snappy and stuck-up, I call her. Not much of an addition to the house, if you ask my opinion."

This snapshot judgment, hasty as it was, was promptly accepted by the other women, for was not Julie O'Dowd the social dictator of the community? Had she ever been known to be wrong? With one accord Mulberry Court turned its back on the new arrival who so flagrantly defied the etiquette of the place.

Indeed had not Mrs. O'Dowd's baby fallen ill the seal of disapproval put on Mrs. McGregor might have rested on her all her days, and she and her entire family been completely ostracized by the neighborhood. But little Joey O'Dowd, the youngest of Julie's flock, was seized with pneumonia, and although the flock was a large one Julie was too genuine a mother to feel she could spare one out of her fold. Was not Joey the littlest of all, the pet of her household? All the motherhood in her revolted at the thought of losing him. Strangely enough until the present moment she had escaped great crises with her children. She was well schooled in the ways of whooping cough, measles, and chicken pox and could do up a cut finger with almost professional skill; but in the face of crucial illness she was like a warrior without weapons.

Overwhelmed with terror, therefore, by the immediate calamity, she did in benumbed fashion everything the doctor directed and still Joey was no better; if anything he grew steadily worse. Motionless he lay in his crib, his great staring eyes giving forth no flicker of recognition. There was not much hope, the neighbors whispered, after they had tiptoed in to look at him and tiptoed out again. He was as good as gone. Julie could never save him in the world.

The whispers, humanely muffled, did not reach the panic-

stricken mother but she was not blind to the despairing head-shaking and these suddenly awakened her to the realization that according to general opinion the battle she was waging was a losing one. It was a terrible discovery. What should she do? She must do something. Wild-eyed she plunged into the hall, a vague impulse to seek help moving her; and it was just as she paused irresolute at the head of the stairs that she came face to face with Mrs. McGregor ascending to her fifth-floor flat.

Now Mrs. McGregor was a born nurse, whose skill had been increased by constant practice. With a wisdom that amounted almost to genius she had brought her large family through many an appalling conflict and emerged victorious. Sickness, therefore, had no terrors for her. Instantly the mother in her read and interpreted the desperation in Julie's face and without a word she slipped through the open door into the room where Joey lay. One glance of her experienced eye showed that there was plenty to be done. The interior was close and untidy, for Mrs. O'Dowd in her distraction had cast aside every consideration but her baby.

Mrs. McGregor stooped down over the crib.

What she saw there or did not see she at least kept to herself, and when she straightened up it was to meet the searching gaze of her neighbor with a grave smile.

"He's going to die," moaned Julie, wringing her hands. "He is going to die—my baby—and I can't help it!"

Although for a long time the two women had lived beneath the same roof, these were the first words Mrs. O'Dowd had ever addressed to Mrs. McGregor.

"Might I touch him?" the latter inquired gently.

Like a suspicious animal Julie stiffened jealously.

"I'll not hurt him," Mrs. McGregor hastened to say, not tak-

ing offense at the other's attitude. "I just want to raise him up so he can breathe better." Then she added reassuringly, "I'd not give up if I were you. You must keep on fighting to the very last minute. There is much we can do yet to make him comfortable."

"What?"

"We can bathe him a little for one thing, if you would heat some water."

Dumbly Julie turned to obey.

"I've a big family of my own," went on Mrs. McGregor in matter-of-fact fashion, "and I've seen so many children pull through when they looked fit to die that I've learned never to quit hoping. You'll get nowhere in a fight if you haven't courage."

"I had courage enough at first," whispered the baby's mother in a shaking voice, "but I've lost my nerve now. I'm frightened—and—and tired."

Tears came into her eyes.

"Of course you are," came with quick sympathy from Mrs. McGregor. "We all are apt to lose our nerve when we are worn out. I don't wonder you're tired. You've had no sleep day or night, I'll be bound."

"Not much. The neighbors were kind about offering but somehow I couldn't leave Joey with 'em. Besides, how can you sleep when you are worried half out of your mind?"

"I know! I know!" nodded the other woman. "Still you can't go on forever without rest. Next you know you will be down sick yourself and then where will your baby be—to say nothing of your other children. A mother has got to think ahead. Now listen. Would you trust me to watch the baby while you curled up on the sofa and got a wink or two of sleep? I'll promise to call you should there be an atom of change. Do now! Be a sensible woman. And how would you feel about my giving the little

chap a drop of medicine? A Scotch doctor in the old country once gave me a prescription that I've tried on both Timmie and Martin and it did 'em worlds of good at a time just like this. It might do nothing for your child, mind. I'm not promising it would. Still, it couldn't hurt him and it might cure."

Julie's dulled mind caught the final word. *Cure!* Alas, she had given up hope that anything in the world could do that. The reaction that came with the suggestion was so wonderful that it left her speechless.

"Now see here," burst out Mrs. McGregor misinterpreting her silence, "use your common sense. Do I look as if I had come to poison your baby? Why, woman, I love children better than anything on earth. They're a precious lot of bother, there's no denying, and sometimes I get that impatient with one or the other of 'em I could toss him out the window. But for all their hectoring, and their noise, and their dirt—their meddling, and smashing, and mending, I'd not be without them."

While speaking she had been touching the baby with a hand so yearning and tender that it could not be stayed. She had raised his head, smoothed his pillow, straightened the coverings that lay over him. It was amazing how quietly and deftly her hands moved. Even the child seemed conscious of her healing presence, for all of a sudden his wee fingers curled about one of hers and he smiled faintly.

"See!" exclaimed Mrs. McGregor, "the baby is not afraid to trust me."

"Nor am I any longer," put in Julie with eager surrender. "Do as you like with Joey. You know better than I."

"Oh, it isn't that," the visitor protested, rising. "It is just that it's sometimes well not to leave a stone unturned. You might regret not having taken the chance. I'll slip upstairs and get the medicine. It won't take a minute."

"If you'll be that kind."

The Scotchwoman needed no second bidding. She was gone and back again in a twinkling, the magic green bottle in her hand.

"Now if I might have a cup of hot water," said she. "I've a dropper here. We'll see what a spoonful of this mixture will do for the wee laddie. What is his name?"

"Joey."

Mrs. O'Dowd's eyes had brightened and they now beamed on her neighbor.

"It's a nice name," replied Mrs. McGregor, beaming in turn. "I always liked the name of Joseph. Well, Joey boy, we'll see if we can make you well. Here, little fellow!"

Gently she forced the liquid between the baby's lips.

"Now we'll sponge him a bit, put on a fresh slip, and give him some air!"

"But won't he——"

"Catch cold? Not if he is shielded from the draught. He'll like the air and feel the better for it. It will help him to breathe."

Noiselessly she went to work and within an hour both Joey and his surroundings took on a different aspect.

"Now," said she to the grateful mother, "you roll up in that comforter and take a nap. Don't worry about the baby. I'll be right here. Will you trust me?"

Julie hesitated.

"It's not that I won't trust you," murmured she. "But you're so heavenly kind. Not another soul has done for me what you have and I'm a hundred times better acquainted with 'em, too. Of course I know they have all they can do without taking on the cares of others. I'm not blaming them. You yourself can't have much time to spare. Haven't you other things to do?"

"Of course I have," came with curt honesty from Mrs.

McGregor. "I've six children and they leave me little time for idling. But when I do take time away from 'em, I plan to take it to some purpose. Just now I have nothing more important to do than nurse this baby. It's my first job. So don't be worrying about my work. Luckily it is Saturday and Mary, Carl, and Timmie will look after the little tots and get the dinner. I told 'em to when I was there just now. Martin and Nell seldom give any trouble, and should James Frederick wake up, one of the boys is to run down and tell me."

Julie placed a hand impulsively on that of the other woman.

"I can never thank you," murmured she brokenly.

"Oh, don't be talking of thanks," Mrs. McGregor interrupted, cutting her short. "My dosing may do no good and before the day is out you may be calling me a meddlesome old harridan. Wait and see what happens. I'm not one that sets much store by thanks, anyhow. After all, what does it amount to but a string of words? If we can cure the baby it will be all the thanks I want."

If the sentiment the final phrase so modestly expressed was genuine Mrs. McGregor at least received the boon she craved, for as if by magic the baby began to mend that very night and before the week passed was out of danger and on the high road to recovery. Julie's gratitude was touching to see.

"'Twas Mrs. McGregor saved Joey," declared she to every person she met. "She's as good as any doctor—better, for Joey might have died but for her. Should I go through life kneeling to her on my bended knees I never could thank her enough."

Julie O'Dowd did not go through life, however, kneeling before Mrs. McGregor on her bended knees; but she did a more practical and efficacious thing. Everywhere she went she sounded the praise of her neighbor; talked of her kindness, her wisdom, her unselfishness, until not only Mulberry Court, but

the area adjoining it began to view the gaunt, austere figure from quite a different angle. Shyly the women began to nod a greeting to the stranger.

"It's just her way to be curt and quick," explained they to one another. "She doesn't mean a thing in the world by it. Julie says she's sharp and prickly as a chestnut burr, but with the sweetest of hearts inside."

Indeed it was not long before Mrs. McGregor proved her right to this generous summary of her character. Other neighbors gained courage to consult her about their children and in time about their troubles in general.

"Ask Mrs. McGregor," became the slogan of Mulberry Court. "She'll know."

And she unfailingly did. She it was who prescribed medicines; gave advice; suggested plain, common-sense remedies for every variety of dilemma. Nevertheless she wasted no words about it. She had no time to fool away, she let it be known. Whatever she did had to be done with pitiless directness. Often her council was delivered through a crack in the door or even given through the door itself; and there were instances when it was shouted through the keyhole. But no matter where the words came from they were always helpful and friendly and the neighbors came to understand the manner accompanying them and did not resent it.

Her children understood it too. Mary, Carl, Timmie, Martin, four-year-old Nell, and even wee James Frederick (whom Mrs. McGregor unfailingly addressed by his full name) all understood and worshipped their quick-tongued mother. Together with the rest of Mulberry Court they also had supreme faith in whatever she did and said, and were certain that every calamity under the sun could be set right if only she were consulted and her advice followed.

And yet loyal as they were, there was one point on which neither Carl nor Mary agreed with their mother. Of course she was right—she must be right; wasn't she always so? Yet notwithstanding this belief they could not but feel that it would be a far better arrangement for them to leave school and go into the cotton mills where their father had worked for so many years. Ever so many of the boys and girls they knew worked there. Why should they remain in the High School struggling with algebra, geometry, history, Latin, English and bookkeeping when they might be earning money? It seemed senseless. Certainly the family needed money badly enough. Were there not always endless pairs of shoes to be bought? Caps, mittens, suits, stockings, and underclothing to purchase; not to mention food and groceries? And then there was the rent.

Ah, Mary and Carl knew very well about the rent, the bills, and all the other worrisome things. Even Timmie, who was only nine, knew about them; and once Martin, aged six, had startled his elders by proclaiming on a sunny May morning, "This is rent day, isn't it, Ma?" in a tone of awe, as if the date marked some gruesome ceremony.

You came to understand about rent day when toward the end of the month there were no pennies to be had, and you were forced to wait for the shoes or rubbers you needed.

That rent day was a milestone to be dreaded even Nell vaguely guessed and when it had passed in safety all the McGregors, both big and little, joined in a general rejoicing.

Ma was the magician who accomplished that happy miracle. Ma always contrived to accomplish everything, so of course she managed rent day along with the rest of the wonders she performed. She made no secret, either, of how she did it. She sewed! Yes, she sewed for a dressmaker who sent her marvelous

dresses to embroider. For Ma was very clever with her needle and right out of the blue sky could make the most beautiful flowers and figures with colored silks. She could also do beading and she was teaching Mary how to do it. Already Mary could do quite nice embroidery and exquisite plain sewing.

Ma was very proud of this.

But what Mary did chiefly when she was not at school was to help with the housework so her mother would be free to sew. That was the important thing. Ma must not roughen her hands or the silks she worked with would be spoiled. So Mary cooked and scrubbed like a real little housewife; took care of the younger children and kept them quiet so they would not interrupt their mother.

And between school hours Carl and Tim helped also. They built the fires, wiped the dishes, ran errands, and brought home any bits of discarded wood they found in the streets. In fact, there was not one drone in the McGregor hive. Even James Frederick had learned to lie in his crib and play by himself when everybody was busy.

It was a happy family, the McGregors. Its members, it is true, did not have everything they wanted. They never expected that. Those who had mittens lacked new caps, and those who had caps were often forced to wear patched shoes and made-over stockings. Martin's reefer frequently did duty for Nell, and Mrs. McGregor's cape for Mary. However, all that did not matter. They were happy and that was the chief thing, happy in spite of patched clothing, coats that were outgrown, rubbers that were either sizes too small or dropped off at every step, and shoes that were common property. The little flat was sometimes hot in summer and cold in winter but it took more than that to dampen the McGregors' spirits.

When they had lentil soup, how steaming and delicious it was! When meat stew, what a dish for the gods! And who could have asked for a greater treat than a thick slice of Mary's fresh bread coated over with molasses or peanut butter?

Every month a long blue envelope containing a check from Uncle Frederick arrived and that, together with what Mary and her mother earned, kept the household going. But they seldom saw Uncle James Frederick Dillingham. He was always sailing to India, China, or South America. Sometimes letters came from him and picture postcards showing strange countries and people in foreign dress. But the check never failed to make its appearance and as it was highly important that it should, everybody agreed that since Uncle Frederick could not come himself he was almost as satisfactorily represented by this magic bit of blue paper. The check brought things and perhaps if Uncle Frederick himself had come he wouldn't. You could not tell about uncles you had never seen.

In the meantime the blue paper kept stew in the kettle and the shelter of Mulberry Court above their heads, and what better service could an uncle render his relatives?

Hence Uncle Frederick's name came to be mentioned constantly in the household.

"Remember, Timmie, those are your Uncle Frederick Dillingham's rubber boots and be thankful to him for them," the boy's mother would observe when she brought home the purchase. Or "Uncle Frederick is presenting you with those stockings, Carl. See you don't forget it."

And the children did not forget. Gradually their unknown uncle came to assume in their imagination a form that would have surprised him had he been suddenly confronted by it. It was that of a benevolent-faced fairy clad in robes of purple and

ermine, and wearing on his head a crown resplendent with gems of myriad colors. In his hand he carried a scepter terminating in a star that far outshone the jewels he wore, a scepter all powerful to work miracles. He was the good angel of the McGregor home, the Aladdin to whom they owed all sorts of blessings.

And yet withal Uncle James Frederick Dillingham was one and the same person who sailed the *Charlotte* to India, China, South America, or some other ephemeral port. How paradoxical was this dual rôle, how alluring and how ridiculous!

CHAPTER II

CARL TELLS A STORY

It was April. Already spring was in the air. The grass in the parks was turning green, forsythia bloomed golden, and boys were playing marbles on the streets and sidewalks. Even Mulberry Court, shut in as it was, felt the impulse of the awakening season. The landlord came, looked over the premises, and after viewing the general shabbiness became reckless enough to order a broken windowpane to be reset, some of the tumble-down ceilings to be repaired, and the fire escapes and window frames to be repainted.

Painting at Mulberry Court was a terrible ordeal. As there was not an inch of the place that was not crowded to the limit of its capacity, painting meant that milk bottles, improvised ice chests, and woodpiles must be put somewhere else; and where that somewhere could be was an enigma. Furthermore, to add to this difficulty there were the children—dozens of them tumbling over one another and surging in and out the doors, a fact that rendered painting a precarious undertaking. Youthful investigators examined the moist pigment; chubby fingers drew hieroglyphics in it; while the less curious forgot it altogether and carried away on their garments imprints of vermilion and black that transformed their otherwise dingy garments into robes of oriental splendor.

Carl McGregor was no exception to the rule for wherever calamity lurked he was sure to be in its vicinity.

"I'd know you'd never rest until you got a patch of red paint on yourself," announced his mother, surveying him as he started toward the door. "As, if buying you sweaters ain't enough without your leaning plumb up against the fire escape and stamping a whole decalcomania of red stripes on your back like as if you were a convict."

"Is there paint on me, Ma?"

"Is there? I suppose you had no notion of it."

"I hadn't—honest Injun."

"Well, aside from the fact that you're barred up and down neat as if the lines were ruled there's nothing the matter with you," returned his mother with a faint smile.

"Oh, I'm awfully sorry, Ma. Truly I am."

"Sorry? I'll be bound you are. You are always a bundle of regrets when it is too late to help anything. However, you need weep no tears for that sweater needed washing anyway. You're that rough on your clothes that none of 'em keep clean more than a minute. I'll get some gasoline and soak it out in the shed and it will be like new. Peel it off and give it to me."

"I'm sorry, Ma," the boy repeated.

"It's no great matter, sonny. Children must be children. I'm past expecting them to be grown-ups," his mother said kindly. "If you hadn't been getting into the paint you most likely would have been getting into something else. You have a genius for such mishaps. I'm glad it was no worse."

Reassured, Carl grinned.

"I do seem to have a good many—" he hesitated, then added, "misfortunes."

"Misfortunes, do you call 'em? Sure that's a pretty polite

word to apply to the things that manage to happen to you," sniffed Mrs. McGregor. "I suppose it was a misfortune when you tumbled underneath the watering cart; and a misfortune when you sat down in the wet tar! A misfortune when you sent the snowball through the schoolroom window; to say nothing of the creamcake you treated Jakie Sullivan to that well-nigh killed him."

"I didn't know the creamcake was going to make him sick."

"No; 'twas just your misfortune. You seem to attract adventures like that. Why, if I was to let you go into the cotton mills as you are always begging to do you'd have every machine there out of order in less than a week and yourself hashed up into little pieces into the bargain."

She had touched upon an unlucky subject for instantly, with flaming face, the lad confronted her.

"No, I wouldn't. I wish you would let me go into the mills, Ma. You might let me try it. Ever so many boys no older than I are working there and earning oodles of money. If we had more money we could——"

"We could be having an automobile, no doubt, and going to Palm Beach winters," was the grim response. "Well, Palm Beach or not, you're not going into any mill so long as we can keep body and soul together without your doing it. You are going to get an education—you and Mary too—if it costs me my life. I'm not going to have you grow up knowing nothing and being nothing. Some day you'll see I was right and thank me for it."

"I thank you now, Ma," declared Carl soberly. "But that doesn't make me relish Latin and history any better."

"No matter if it doesn't. What you like is of no consequence," Mrs. McGregor announced, with a majestic sweep of her hand. "The chief thing is that you exercise your mind and learn how

to use it. The Latin itself amounts to nothing. It is like boxing gloves or a punching bag, a thing that serves its turn to limber up your brain. It is learning to think that counts."

Carl's face brightened.

"The teacher was saying something like that just the other day," asserted he eagerly. "He was telling us about some of the people who had done great things in the world and explaining how long and how hard they had to work at them. The inventors, for instance, had to think and think about the things they invented. It didn't just come to them all in a minute as I used to believe it did."

Although his mother did not look up from her sewing she nodded encouragingly.

"There was Eli Whitney," continued Carl, coming nearer. "I remembered about him because of the mills here. He invented the cotton gin, you know. Mr. Kimball told us that Whitney went through Yale and then started down South to be a tutor in somebody's family without any idea of ever being an inventor. But when he got to where he was going the people who had hired him had changed their minds and found somebody else and poor Eli Whitney was out of a job."

"A shabby trick!"

"Yes. Still, it was lucky for him, just the same," responded Carl, "because on the way down he had met the widow of General Greene and she was sorry for him and asked him to her house. He'd just been vaccinated because there was lots of smallpox in the South and he was feeling rotten. You know how sore your arm gets and how sick you are sometimes. Remember Martin? Well, anyhow, Mrs. Greene either knew what it meant to be vaccinated or else she was kind of ashamed of the way her part of the country had treated Eli Whitney. Or maybe she was just

kind-hearted like you. Anyhow she invited Mr. Whitney to come to Savannah when she saw how mean he felt and the fit he threw at finding himself so far from home without money or a job."

"Carl!"

"Well, wouldn't you have thrown a fit? I think Mrs. Greene was a peach," went on Carl, passing serenely over the reproof. "She was mighty kind to take a stranger into her house when he had no friends."

"Certainly."

"By this time Mr. Whitney had decided to be a lawyer and while he was making his home at Mrs. Greene's he began to read all the law books he could lay hands on. Then one day Mrs. Greene busted her embroidery frame——"

"Did *what*?"

"Oh, you know, Ma," fretted Carl, at being interrupted. "She smashed the thing and——"

"What had that to do with it?"

"Everything; because, you see, Eli Whitney mended it so nicely that Mrs. Greene was pleased into the ground and thought he was the smartest person ever. His father had had a shop at home where as a boy he had learned to use tools. But of course Mrs. Greene didn't know that. All she knew was that he made a corking job of her embroidery frame and so one day when some Georgia gentlemen were there at dinner and were telling how hard it was to get the seeds out of cotton she up and said, 'You should ask Mr. Whitney how to do it; he can do anything,' and to prove it she toted out her embroidery frame to show them."

"Did *what*?"

"Oh, say, Ma, don't keep bothering me when I'm trying to

tell you a story," Carl complained peevishly. "You know what I mean well enough."

"Much as ever," was the grim reply.

The lad grinned.

"Well, anyhow, the Georgia cotton men talked to Eli Whitney, explaining how the cotton stuck to the seeds and got all broken to bits when you tried to get them out; and how it took nearly a whole day to separate a pound of cotton fiber from the seeds. And then the cotton planters went on to tell how there was lots and lots of land in the South where you couldn't raise rice but could raise cotton if it wasn't such a chore—" (a warning glance from his mother caused Carl hastily to amend the phrase) "such a piece of work to get the seeds out. Eli Whitney listened to their talk and after the men had gone he thought he'd try to make some sort of a machine that would clear cotton of the seeds."

"And did he?"

"You betcha! I mean, yes, he did. Whitney was no boob." (This time Mrs. McGregor failed to protest; perhaps she decided it was useless.) "He had, as I told you, made wheels and canes and knives and nails in his father's workshop at home. He had even made a violin. So he wasn't at all fussed about trying to make a cotton gin. I guess he had a hunch he could do it."

"A *what*?" gasped Mrs. McGregor involuntarily.

"A hunch means he knew he could turn the trick."

The mother shook her head ruefully.

"And me almost killing myself to give you an education!" she ejaculated beneath her breath.

"Well, anyway, Ma, slang or no slang, I'd be telling you nothing at all about Eli Whitney if I hadn't gone to school, so cheer up," asserted Carl impishly.