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Title: Cotton, Its Progress from the Field to the Needle

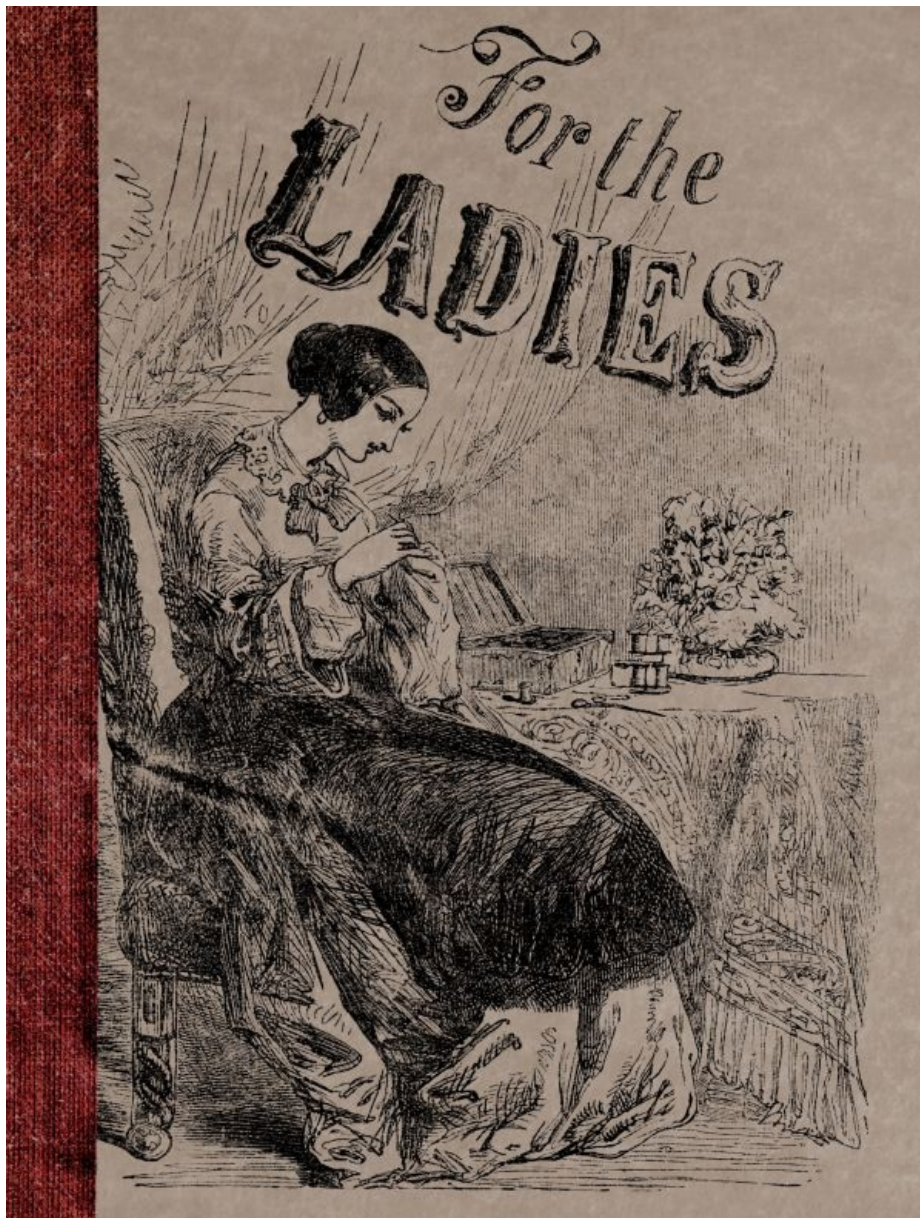
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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK COTTON, ITS PROGRESS FROM THE FIELD TO THE NEEDLE \*\*\*



# COTTON, ITS PROGRESS FROM THE FIELD TO THE NEEDLE:

BEING A BRIEF SKETCH OF  
THE CULTURE OF THE PLANT,  
ITS PICKING, CLEANING, PACKING, SHIPMENT, AND MANUFACTURE.



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## PREFACE.

Among the utilitarian gifts of nature and art we know of none in more general use, or of greater practical value, than sewing-cotton. The taste which turns into graceful shapes the products of the loom, the executive skill which converts them into convenient and elegant apparel, would be powerless without this simple accessory. It is the food of the needle, and might almost be called the thread of life to thousands of the gentler sex. Yet as it passes through the delicate fingers of mothers, wives, and daughters, ministering to so many wants, and creating so many beautiful superfluities, little thought is bestowed upon the labor, the care, the dexterity, and the scientific ability required in producing the article. The cultivation of the raw material, the processes of picking, ginning, packing, shipping, combing, spinning, and twisting, are among the most

interesting operations in the whole range of agriculture and manufactures; and we think the ladies, for whose especial convenience such a vast amount of industry, skill, and talent is employed, will not be unwilling to trace with us in a familiar way the progress of this great domestic staple from the field to the needle.

We therefore claim their attention to the following short treatise, from which, without being fatigued by dry details, they may derive a tolerably accurate idea of what capital, labor, and science have done to bring to its present perfection the simple article of sewing-cotton.

[4]

## CULTIVATION OF THE COTTON PLANT.

The cotton-planting season in all the Southern States commences in April. The seed is sown in drills, a negro girl following the light plough which makes the furrow, and throwing the seed into the shallow trench as she moves along. A harrow follows to cover up the deposits, and the work of "planting" is completed. About two and a half bushels of seed are required for an acre of ground.



In a week or ten days the cotton is "up," when a small plough is run along the drills, throwing the earth *from* the tender plants. The next process is "scraping;" in other words, thinning out and earthing up the plants, so as to leave each in the centre of a little hill, some two feet distant from its nearest neighbors. The dexterity and accuracy with which this feat is accomplished are wonderful; and there are few spectacles more animated and picturesque than that of a hundred active field-hands flourishing their bright hoes among the young vegetation, each striving to outstrip the others in "hoeing out his row." Several ploughings and hoeings intervene between the first of May and the last of June.

[5]

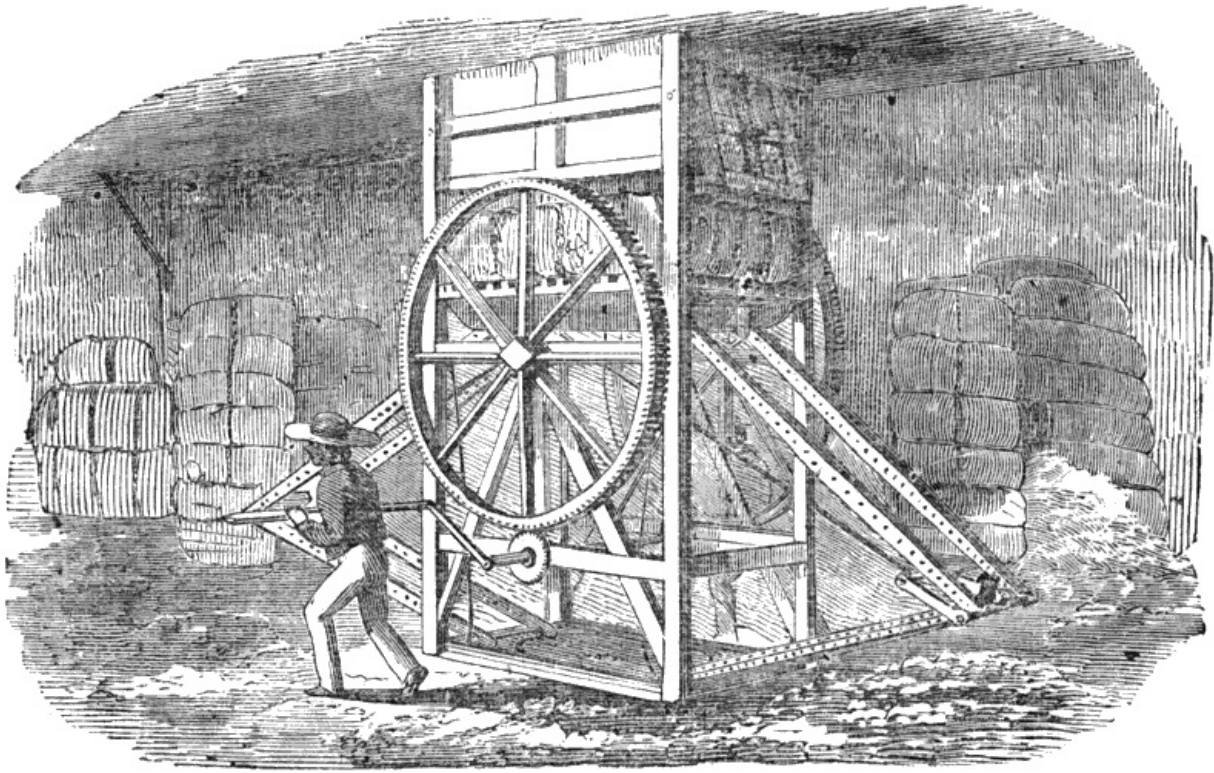
In July the cotton fields burst into bloom, *creaming* the landscape with a sea of blossoms, the flower being very nearly of the same tint as the ultimate product in its unbleached state. The new beauty thus imparted to the scenery is, however, ephemeral. The blossoms unfold in the night, are in their full glory in the morning, and by noon have begun to fade. On the following day their cream-color has changed to a dull red, and before sunset the petals have fallen, leaving inclosed in the calyx the germ or "form" of the filamental fruit.

The cotton plant, in its progress towards maturity, is liable to the assaults of as many enemies as the young crocodile on the banks of the Nile; but among them all, the "army-worm" is the most destructive. This worm is produced from the eggs of a chocolate-colored moth of particularly harmless and demure appearance; but its name is legion, its ravages terrific. No one who has beheld an invasion of these caterpillars can ever forget it. Deep trenches are dug to arrest their progress, but these are soon filled up by the accumulating myriads; and onward move the living destroyers over the bodies of the buried masses. Huge logs are drawn through the trenches by yokes of oxen, and the multitudinous swarms crushed to a paste, of which the effluvium taints the air for miles; but still the incursion, if checked, is not arrested. When the planter sees the army-worm in his fields, he is ready to give up his crop in despair.



[6] By the middle of July the "bolls" or "forms" begin to open; and the cotton fields, when viewed from a short distance, present the appearance of being covered with ridges of white surf. Toward the close of the month the *picking* season commences, and is continued without intermission until the Christmas holidays. Each field-hand is supplied with a basket and a bag. The basket is placed at the end of the cotton row, and the bag, as fast as filled, is emptied into it. It is a pleasant sight, on "the old plantation," to see the pickers returning at nightfall from their work, with their well-filled baskets picturesquely poised upon their woolly heads. Falling into line with the stoutest in the van, they move along through the twilight, too tired to talk or sing, anxious only to deposit their store in the packing-house, and retire to their "quarters" to rest. A first-rate hand will pick from three hundred to three hundred and fifty pounds of cotton per day.

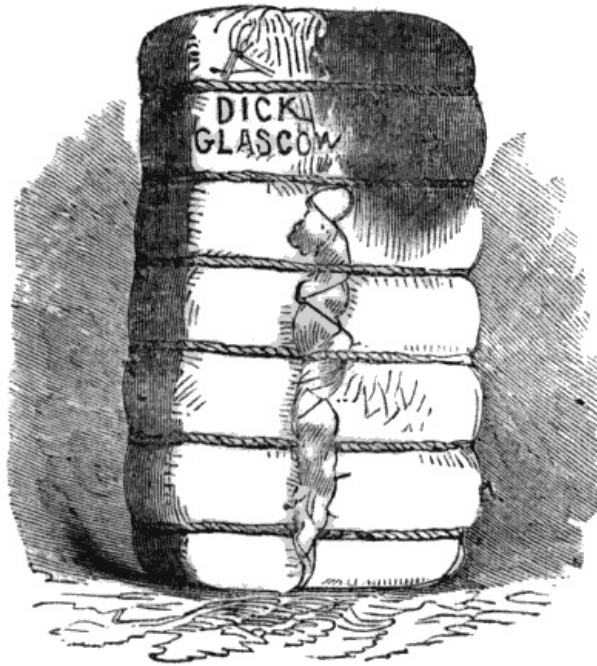
[7] The next process is the "ginning," or separation of the cotton from the seeds. The invention of the cotton-gin by Eli Whitney, a New England youth, in 1793, marked a new epoch in the cotton trade, and at once more than quadrupled the value of the article as a national staple. Arkwright had already introduced the spinning-frame, and through the genial influence of these two great inventions, a pound of cotton, formerly spun tediously by hand into a thread of five hundred feet, was lengthened into a filament of *one hundred and fifty miles*; and the value of our cotton exports was increased in sixty years from fifty thousand to one hundred and twelve millions of dollars!



### PACKING PRESS.

[8]

After the "ginning" comes the "baling" of the cotton, which ends the labor bestowed upon it on the plantation. In this process powerful screw-presses are employed. The cotton is inclosed in Kentucky bagging, and the contents of each bale are compressed by the screw almost to the solidity of stone. The cotton is now ready for market.

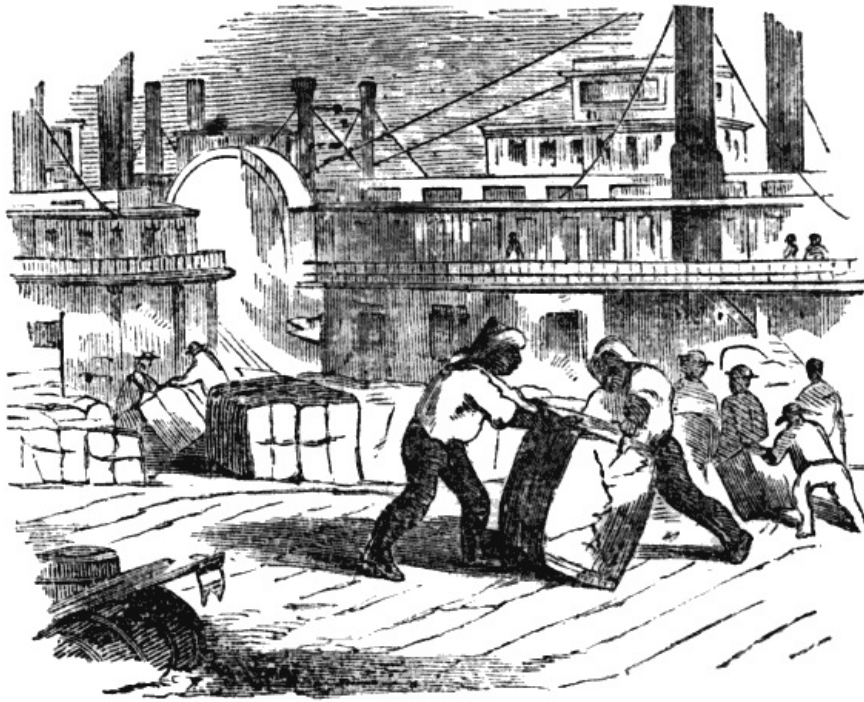


Toward the close of the packing season there are jolly times on the plantation. Fox-hunting and racing are the order of the day. The Southern planter, like the "fine old English gentleman," opens house to all, and all goes "merry as a marriage bell." Sambo rubs up his old musket, and is out after the ducks, while Dinah's shining face wears an extra gloss in anticipation of the holidays. Throughout the holidays there is high festival in the negro quarters. "The shovel and the hoe" are laid down, and the fiddle is continually going. So ends the cotton season.

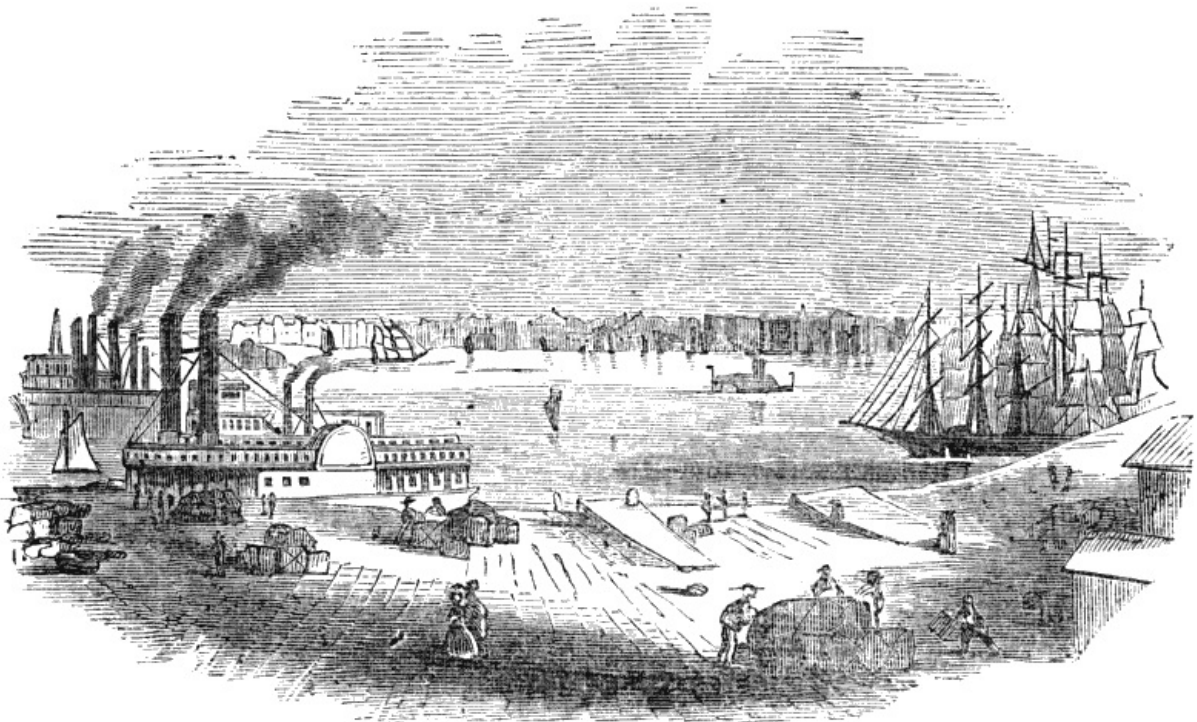
[9]

### Shipment on the Mississippi.

The cotton, being packed, is to be sent to market. For this purpose it is "hailed," generally by oxen, to the nearest landing on the river, where the bales are rolled down the banks and stowed on board freight boats bound to New Orleans or Mobile. This process is technically called "bumping." There are certain plantations famous for the tenacious and beautiful quality of their cotton, from which the supplies for Dick & Sons' celebrated sewing-cotton mills at Glasgow are principally derived.



### **Delivery and Re-shipment at New Orleans.**

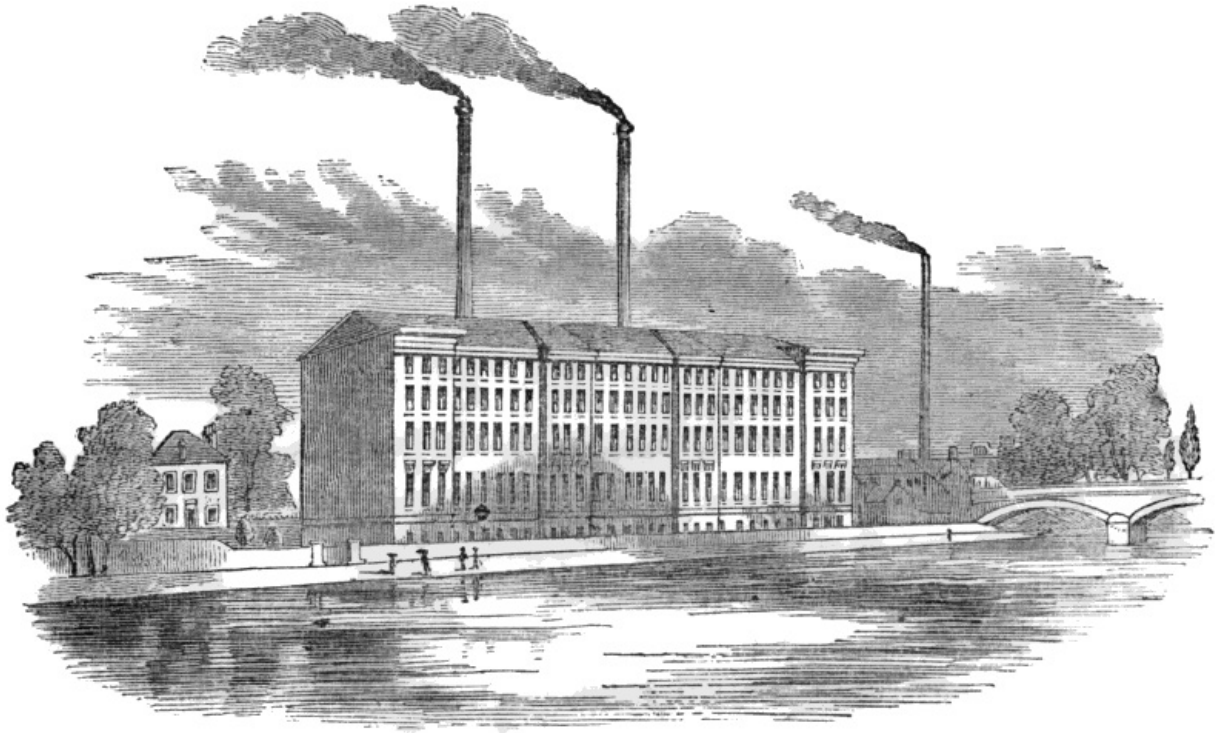


It would be difficult to describe the scene of bustle and seeming confusion presented by the levee at New Orleans when the bulk of the new crop begins to come in. The songs and clamor of the negro stevedores, at work in the holds and on the decks of the vessels; the sharp authoritative expletives of the overseers and masters; the eager conversations of the merchants, and the preternatural activity into which the occasion seems to have spurred all the energies of Southern

life, are to Northern ears and eyes at once amusing and confounding. But order reigns amidst this seeming chaos. The Mississippi boats are rapidly relieved of their bulky cargoes, and the cotton is warehoused or re-shipped, as the case may be, with marvellous celerity. Generally the shipments for the Clyde Mills, Glasgow, are among the first of the season; and the primest article in the market is always selected for DICK & SONS by the New Orleans agents of the firm.

[11]

## Arrival at Glasgow.



### DICK & SONS' CLYDE THREAD-MILLS.

The view of the CLYDE THREAD-MILLS, furnished by our engraver from accurate drawings taken on the spot, affords a very good idea of the extensive manufactory of DICK & SONS, from which this country is now supplied with the most perfect, even, and tenacious sewing-cotton made in the world. The cotton for the mills, after having been unloaded and inspected by the revenue officers, is conveyed at once to the mills, where there is an immense amount of warehouse room for the raw material, independent of the space devoted to machinery and the storage of the manufactured article. Of the latter, however, there is never a large accumulation, the active and ever-increasing demand taxing to the utmost the facilities of production, great as they are.

[12]

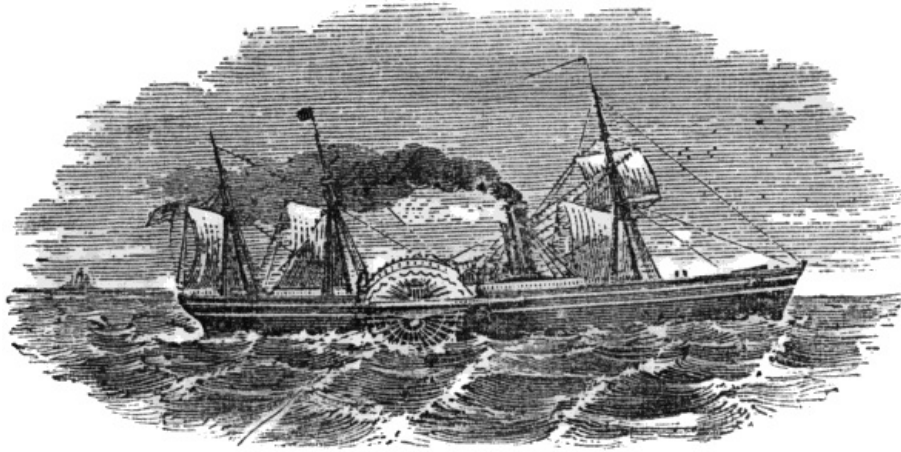
## The Manufacturing, &c.

A full description of the processes of scutching, carding, spinning, twisting, bleaching, and spooling, through all of which the cotton passes before it is packed for exportation in the form of thread, would require more space than we can devote to them in this treatise, and, moreover, would be rather dry reading for the ladies, for whose information and amusement this little publication is intended. It is sufficient to say, that all the latest improvements in machinery, in each of the above branches, have been introduced at the Clyde Works; and that as regards the perfection of their mechanical facilities, as well as in point of capacity, they have no rivals in the United Kingdom.

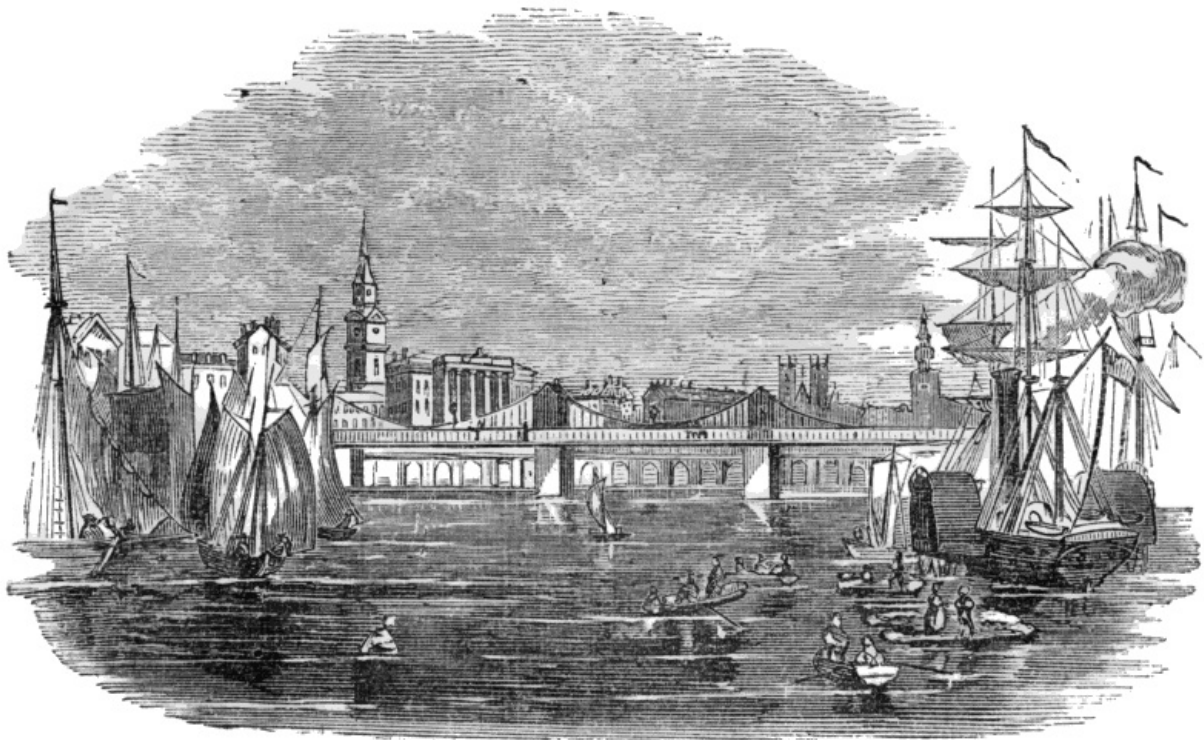
[13]

## Manufactured Article in New York.

The consignments of DICK & SONS' spool-cotton to this city are on a scale of magnitude which those who have never reflected upon the immense and universal consumption of the article would scarcely believe. The bulk of the importations is received by the Collins' line of steamers, and delivered at the Collins' wharf, whence it is conveyed to the New York agency of the firm, 51 DEY-STREET. To the trade it is unnecessary to say, that DICK & SONS' *six-cord spool-cotton* is the best in the market; and ladies generally are aware that in strength, uniformity of thickness, and closeness of fibre, it is superior to any other sewing-thread in use.



- [14] Mr. Dick, senior, has probably had more experience as a manufacturer of the article than any other man living. Prior to commencing business on his own account he had been for nearly thirty years the manager of a factory celebrated for producing a superior description of sewing-cotton, also well known in the United States. Hence the cotton of DICK & SONS came into the market with a ready-made popularity. The name of Mr. DICK was a guarantee of its excellence, and a large demand for it spontaneously sprang up in the United States, Canada, the West Indies, and the British possessions in India, and throughout the world.
- [15]



Infinite pains are taken to retain for the article the celebrity it has acquired. Every spool is inspected before it leaves the factory at Glasgow, so that no defective specimens can possibly reach the hands of consumers.



## CONCLUSION.

The history of the culture of cotton, and of its application to the uses of man, forms an almost romantic episode in the annals of agriculture, commerce, and manufactures. We have already mentioned the extraordinary impetus given to its production, sale, and use by the introduction of Whitney's saw-gin, for separating the seeds from the wool, in the years 1793 and 1794. Since that time the progress of the demand and consumption has been no less wonderful.

In 1794 the export rose from 187,000 lbs., the sum total for the previous year, to 1,601,760 lbs. The next year it was over 6,000,000 lbs. In 1800 it had advanced to about 18,000,000 lbs., and in 1810 to upwards of 93,000,000 lbs. The last returns before us are for 1852, when the export of the short staple variety alone exceeded one thousand one hundred millions of pounds! To this aggregate we suppose about one hundred millions of pounds may be added for the sea-island and other long-fibred cottons.

[16] It may well be doubted whether among all the fabrics into which this enormous amount of raw material is converted there is one more valuable than sewing-cotton. We think if the question were put to the ladies to-morrow, whether the textile fabrics produced from cotton, or cotton sewing-thread, were the most indispensable to their comfort and convenience, every thimble hand would be held up in favor of the latter. Sewing-silk is too expensive for ordinary exigencies, and linen thread cannot be spun of the same smooth and even fibre as cotton thread; and besides, being liable to knot and twist, is apt to cut the lighter and more fragile products of the loom. Abolish sewing-cotton, and you abolish muslin embroidery and innumerable delicate and fairy-like embellishments of female loveliness, which taste and fashion have endorsed.

Every lady is by habit a connoisseur in the article. She examines the spools with a critical eye; she tries the strength of the thread; she passes it through her fingers to test its evenness and compactness, and when seated at her work, detects in a moment any defects which may have been overlooked by the manufacturer.

To this ordeal the six-cord cotton-thread of DICK & SONS is cheerfully submitted. It challenges inspection and comparison. There is little necessity, however, for an appeal to the ladies in relation to its good qualities, for they have them already at their fingers' ends.

\*\*\* END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK COTTON, ITS PROGRESS FROM THE FIELD  
TO THE NEEDLE \*\*\*

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