

INSTRUCTOR LITERATURE SERIES.

The Story of Cotton.

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Cotton Boll

THE STORY OF COTTON.

Have you ever wondered how clothes grow?

"Why," you say, "clothes don't grow! We buy them or make them from cloth."

Yes; but what is the cloth made from? All cloths are made from silk, wool, cotton, or flax.

The silk comes from the silk worm. The caterpillar spins a cocoon of fine silken thread. We unravel this thread and weave it into all sorts of silk goods. Sometimes we weave it with linen, or even cotton; but the cloth is best when all the threads are of silk.

The wool comes from the sheep. It is their winter overcoat. When the warm summer weather comes and they do not need their heavy coats, we shear off the thick wool. The sheep are more comfortable, and we need the wool to make our clothes for the next winter.

The cotton and flax are two plants. Did you ever see the seed pod of the cotton plant? It is full — so full that it bursts open — of a soft white bunch of cotton. This looks very much like the wool on the backs of the sheep. So some people have called it vegetable wool.

If you look at a thread of silk, and one each of wool and cotton, they will look just alike to you. But if you put them under a microscope you will find that they are quite different.

The thread, or fibre, of the silk is round and solid. The fibre of the wool seems to be made of little scales, overlapping each other, as shingles do on a roof. But the cotton fibre is more or less twisted like a ribbon. These twists lock and intertwine with each other, and are very helpful in making a long thread, when the cotton is being spun.

Cotton is, next to wheat, the most valuable crop raised in our country. The cotton industry employs more people, and uses more capital, than any other industry in the United States.

For hundreds of years men have cultivated cotton, because a large proportion of their clothes were made from it. Pliny, a Roman writer, speaks of cotton awnings being used in Rome in 63 B. C. In the time of Caesar cotton was used for making tents, sails, and fancy coverlets. In 1519, Cortez, while in Mexico, was so pleased with the beauty of the cotton goods made there, that he sent to the Emperor Charles V. a present of some cotton mantles.

Don't you think that cotton is an important plant? Wouldn't you like to know it better?

Let us begin with the seed, and watch the plant grow.

First, where shall we plant the seed? In the Northland, or in the sunny South? It will not grow North, unless planted under glass. It is sometimes grown in a hothouse for a curiosity. If we want it to be at home, and if we wish to see a beautiful field of it, we must plant it in the Southern part of our country.

Can you find on the map the states where cotton grows? These states are: