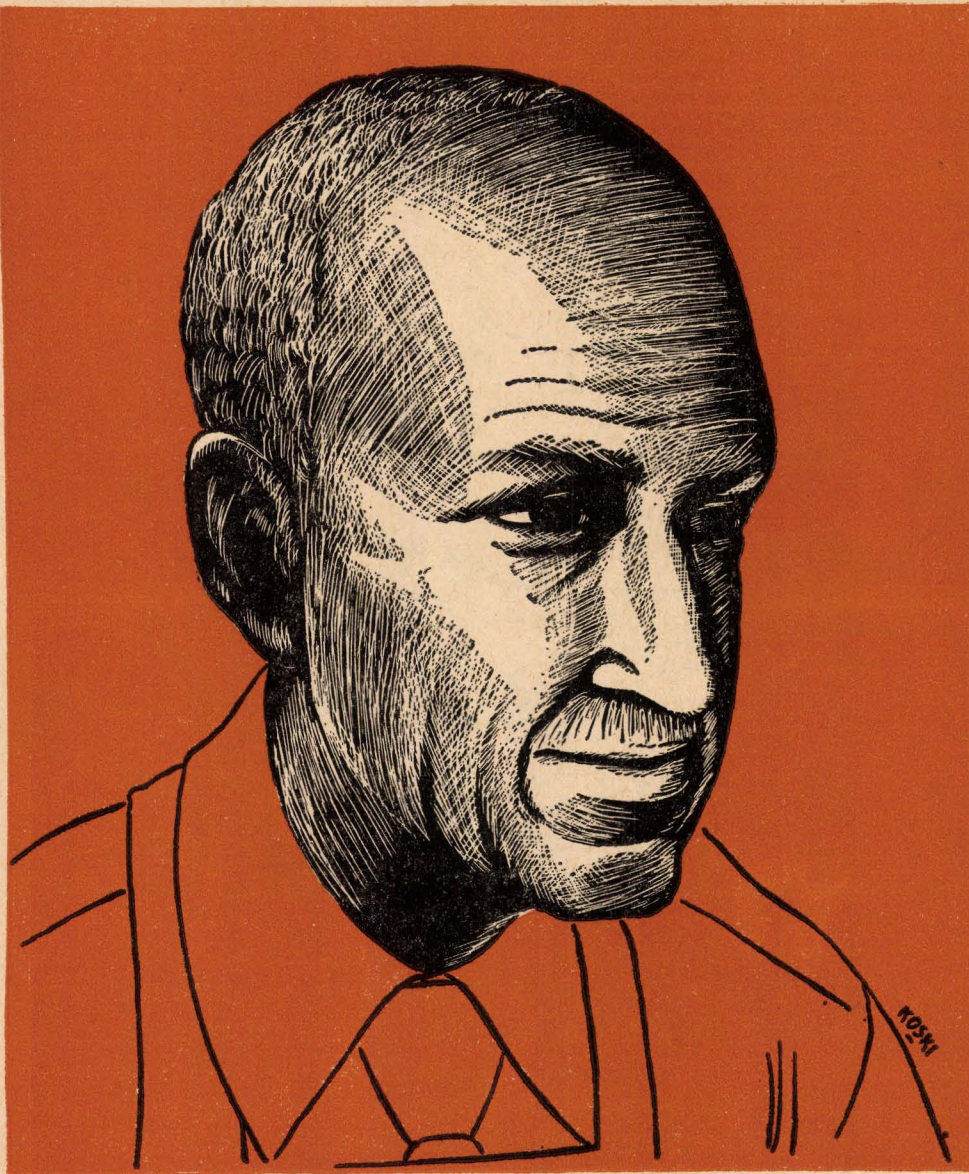


GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER



By MABELLE E. MARTIN

Illustrated by Barbara Koski

DARK night had settled over the Carver plantation. In a tiny cabin back of the big house sat Mary, the colored slave, rocking her sick baby boy. Suddenly she heard galloping horses coming down the road. She was terrified. It might be the night riders who stole slaves and took them down the river to sell to other plantation owners! "Hush, baby, hush," she whispered, as she started to run for her master's big house. But she was too late. The riders grabbed her and the baby, and carried them off.

The Carvers were angry and unhappy, for they were very fond of Mary and her baby. Mr. Car-

ver offered a large reward for their return. Mary had already been sold and they never saw her again, but the baby was finally found and brought back to them. He was still very ill and only Mrs. Carver's careful nursing kept him alive.

It was the custom in those days for a slave to take the family name of his master, so the little lad became known as George Washington Carver. He grew into a puny little fellow with pipestem legs, bony fingers, and a pinched little face. He was sick a great deal. His voice was high-pitched and cracked, and he stuttered. He was ten years old before he

could talk so people could understand him. This made him shy and, when he was not working, he amused himself by wandering through the woods. He dug plants and brought them back for his own garden. He talked to the plants as he worked among them, and felt that they could understand him, even if people couldn't. He didn't know then that his interest in the soil and in growing things was later to make him famous.

George must have been about seven or eight when he began peeking in at the schoolhouse door. He couldn't understand or accept the fact that Negroes didn't go to school. Mrs. Carver gave him a spelling book and he tried to teach himself, but it was too slow. There was so much to learn and, anyway, spelling books didn't tell you "why" about everything. Gradually Mr. Carver came to realize that the young boy was really in earnest, and when George was eleven, Mr. Carver sent him to a distant town, where there was a school for Negro children. It took George all day to travel there on foot. When he arrived he had no place to stay, so he slept that night in a hayloft. The next day he went to school. The children laughed at his squeaky voice and funny clothes, but he was happy—until school was out. Then he went from house to house trying to find a place to work for room and board. Nobody seemed to want him, and he spent that winter attending school in the day and sleeping in the barn at night, half frozen, half starved. Finally a colored woman, Aunt Mariah

Watkins, took him into her home. She was a good mother to him. She taught him to wash and iron, cook and bake, sew and clean house. He had a natural talent for doing things with his hands and soon learned how to crochet, hemstitch, and knit. For two years he lived with Aunt Mariah, helping at home and attending school. By then he had learned everything the school taught, and he had also learned that Negroes were supposed to do the kind of work that needed little or no education.

But George would not give up. He had heard of a high school in Kansas that taught both white and colored children. And so at the age of thirteen he left Missouri and traveled with a family moving to Kansas. Their wagon was so loaded with household goods that he had to walk most of the way. Once there, he had no trouble finding work, for Aunt Mariah had taught him well.

He did such excellent work in high school that, when he graduated, he was offered a scholarship at a university. But when he presented his letter at the university, he was told that they did not admit Negro students. In despair he turned to homesteading in western Kansas and tried to forget his thirst for knowledge. Then he heard of a little school in Iowa where he could go on with his studies. Once there, he set up a laundry in a woodshed and earned his way through school by caring for the other students' clothes. From there he went to the State Agricultural College at Ames, Iowa, where he did such brilliant and painstaking work that they put him in charge of the greenhouse when he graduated. At last he had exactly what he wanted! He could grow plants and study plant life. He had a good income and could live a good life.

But fate had other plans for the little slave boy. He received a letter from Booker T. Washington, head of the Negro school at Tuskegee, Alabama. "I cannot offer you money, position, or fame," wrote Mr. Washington. "The children, barefoot, come for miles over bad roads. They are thin and in rags. You would not understand such poverty. These people do not know how to plow or plant or harvest. I am not skilled at such things. I teach them how to read, to write, to make shoes, good bricks, and how to build a wall. I cannot give them food and so they starve."

But Mr. Washington was wrong. Carver did understand such poverty. Had he not suffered through it in his fight to become educated? And what good was his education if it could not help others like him? So he left his fine position and his fascinating work, and journeyed to Alabama.

Here he found problems, indeed. The southern farmers had grown cotton for so long that the soil was worn out. The crops were growing poorer each year. Carver advised them to grow peanuts to enrich the soil. "Peanuts!" exclaimed the farmers. "What would we do with peanuts?"

Carver answered that question, in time, by showing them that from peanuts they could make milk, cheese, butter, candy, ice-cream powder, pickles, mock oysters, and flour. In addition he showed them how to make more than 300 non-food products from peanuts, including plastics, paper, insulating boards, dye, ink, soap, shaving lotion, and linoleum. He did this by separating the chemicals in the peanuts and then combining them in a new way to create new products. He was developing a new science—chemurgy. It has done a lot to change farming and

increase the wealth of farmers, who now are raising the raw materials from which plastics and synthetic rubber are made.

Up to then most farm crops were intended as food for men and animals. But the farmers produced more food than was needed, and the surplus went to waste. Here was a way of using that wasted food, of turning it into money. Henry Ford, the automobile man, was one of the leaders in this movement. He and Carver became fast friends. Carver used soybeans to make a plastic which Ford used in his cars.

It is not surprising that, in 1940, George Washington Carver was chosen as the man of the year who had contributed most to science. He died in 1943 at about the age of eighty.

And so ends the story of the sickly little Negro slave, who strove for education against almost impossible odds, who arrived at a position of ease and importance, and then had the courage to give it up in order that he might be of service to his people. In so doing, he has been of service to the whole world—a countryman to be proud of!



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