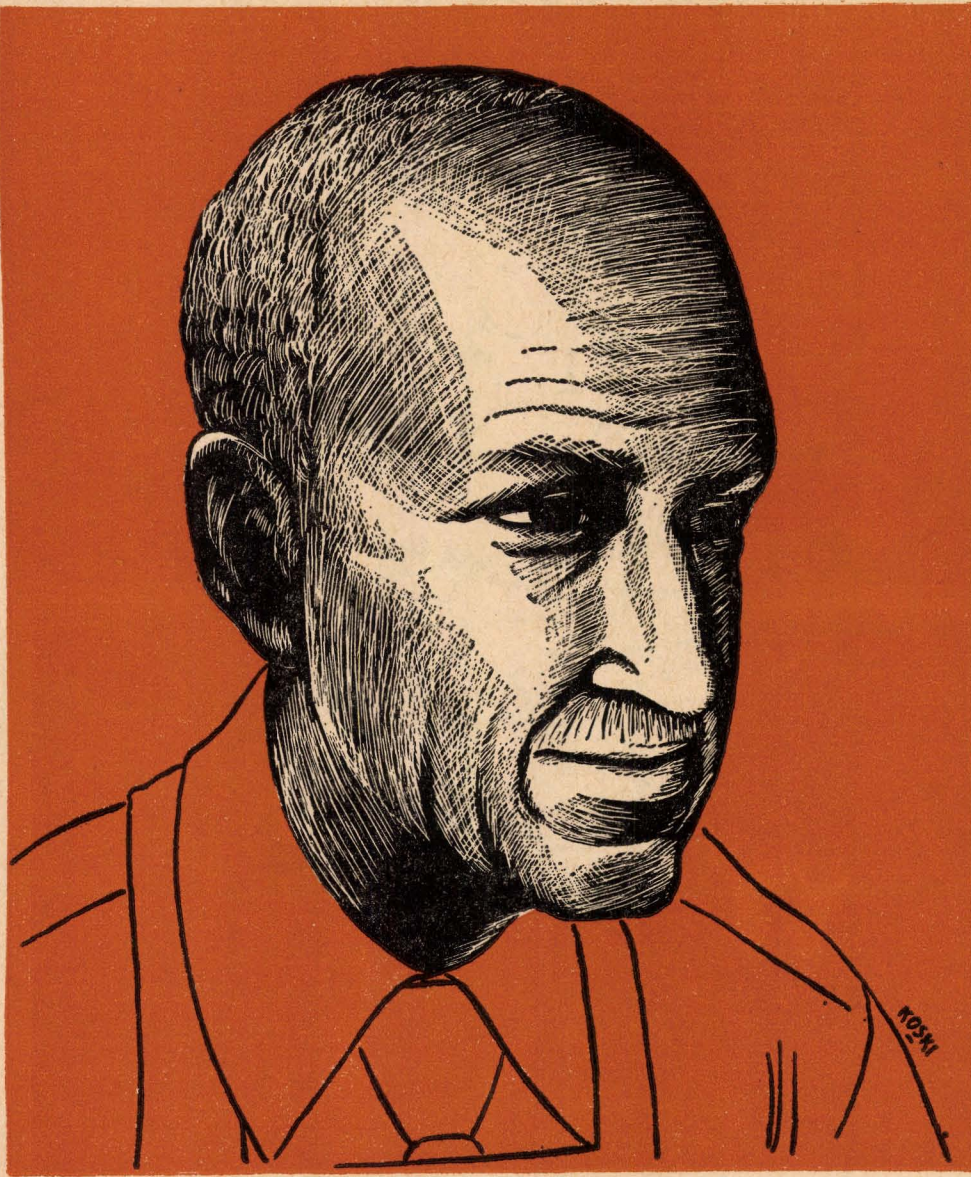


GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER



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 peering 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

