

Andrew Ure on Samuel Crompton and the Spinning Mule, 1836

(Samuel Crompton (1753-1827), was the inventor of the spinning-mule. Of humble origin, Crompton never became rich from the invention that was crucial to the mechanization of spinning. It became the dominant form of spinning machine once it was adopted to steam power. Andrew Ure. *The Cotton Manufacture of Great Britain*, 1836, 1, 263-5; in J. T. Ward, ed., *The Factory System, Vol. I, Birth and Growth* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1970), pp. 97-99.)

Samuel Crompton was born on the 3rd December, 1753, at Firwood, in Lancashire, where his father held a farm of small extent; and, according to the custom of those days, employed a portion of his time in carding, spinning, and weaving. Hall-in-the-Wood, a picturesque cottage near Bolton, became the residence of the family during the son's infancy, and the memorable scene of his juvenile inventions. His father died when he was very young. The care of his education devolved on his mother, a pious woman, who lived in a retired manner, and imparted her own sincere and contemplative turn of mind to her son. In all his dealings through life Samuel was Strictly honest, patient, and humane.

When about sixteen years old, namely, about 1769, he learnt to spin upon a jenny of Hargreaves' make, and occasionally wore what he had spun. Being dissatisfied with the quality of his yarn, he began to consider how it might be improved, and was thus naturally led to the construction of his novel spinning machine. He commenced this task when twenty-one years of age, and devoted five years to its execution. As he was not, properly speaking, a mechanic, and possessed only such simple tools as his little earnings at the jenny and the loom enabled him to procure, he proceeded but slowly with the construction of his mule, but still in a progressive manner highly creditable to his dexterity and perseverance.

He often said that what annoyed him most was that he was not allowed to employ his little invention by himself in his garret; for, as he got a better price for his yarns than his neighbours did, he was naturally supposed to have mounted some superior mechanism, and hence became an object of the prying curiosity of the country people for miles around, many of whom climbed up at the windows to see him at his work. He erected a screen in order to obstruct their view, but he continued to be so incommoded by crowds of visitors, that he resolved at last to get rid of the vexatious mystery by disclosing the whole contrivances before a number of gentlemen and others, who chose to subscribe a guinea a-piece for the inspection. In this way he collected about £50, and was hence enabled to construct another similar machine, upon a better and larger plan. The first contained no more than thirty to forty spindles.

About the year 1802 Mr. Kennedy and Mr. Lee, of Manchester, set on foot a subscription for him, whereby they obtained £500; which formed a little capital for the increase of his small manufactory at Bolton. As a weaver, also, he displayed great ingenuity, and erected several looms for the fancy work of that town. Being fond of music, he built himself an organ, with which he entertained his leisure hours in his cottage. Though his means were slender, he was such a master of domestic economy, as to be always in easy circumstances. In 1812 he made a survey of all the cotton districts in England, Scotland, and Ireland, and obtained an estimate of the number of spindles at work upon his mule principle-then amounting to between four and five millions, and in 1829 to about seven. On his return, he laid the result of his inquiries before his generous friends Messrs. Kennedy and Lee, with a suggestion that Parliament might possibly grant him some recompense for the national advantages derived from his invention. A memorial was accordingly drawn up, in the furtherance of which the late George Duckworth, Esq., of

Manchester, and the principal manufacturers in the kingdom, to whom his merits were made known, took a lively interest. He went to London himself with the memorial, and had the satisfaction to see a bill pass through parliament for a grant to him of £5000, without deduction for fees or charges.

This sum was advanced to his sons in order to carry on a bleaching concern, for the support of the family. But they-mismanaged the business, lost the money, and became bankrupt, reducing their father and sister to poverty. Mr. Kennedy, with Messrs. Hicks and Rothwell, the eminent civil engineers of Bolton, and a few other gentlemen, raised by a second subscription, a sum which purchased for Mr. Crompton a life annuity of £63. He enjoyed this benevolent pittance only two years, for he died on the 26th of-January, 1827, leaving his daughter without any provision.