THE SOUTH’S CONTRIBUTION TO SCIENCE

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The general impression has been that most of the scientists of the United States have come from the northern and eastern sections, with the exception of a few, who have come from the western part of the country. On careful investigation, however, it was discovered that a great number of distinguished men of science have come from the South. There are perhaps two main reasons for such an erroneous impression: (1) the after-effects of the Civil War, and (2) the accumulation of wealth in the South. Because of the developments of the conquered land, we might have expected that progress of all sorts, especially scientific progress, would have been delayed. And since recent scientific achievements have come from institutions which have had the necessary capital for materials and equipment, it would be quite logical to think that the lack of wealth in the South would have had an curbing effect on interest in science. But regardless of the Civil War and this centralization of wealth in the country, there have been many investigators of the South who have merit national and, in some instances, international recognition.

Since this paper is an attempt to give a brief survey of the whole South’s contribution to science, of course, only some of the most important efforts can be included. I shall mention only contributions made by men who were born and wholly educated in the South, but I shall mention also the scientific labors of those who were born and even educated in the North but who were undoubtedly strongly influenced through teaching or living in the South.

This study naturally begins with the consideration of that well-known, beloved friend of birds, John J. Audubon, of Louisiana (1785–1851). He painted pictures of birds during his leisure hours and, since he was a poor man, he had to make several business