



Figure 22.—WILSON'S PREPATENT MODEL for his reciprocating-shuttle machine, 1850.
(Smithsonian photo 45525-A.)

won the earliest known premium for a sewing machine, and although the machine was produced commercially to a considerable extent (figs. 20 and 21), one outstanding flaw in its operation could not be overlooked. As the shuttle passed around the six-inch circular shuttle race, it put a twist in the thread (or took one out if the direction was reversed) at each revolution. This caused a constant breaking of the thread, a condition that could not be rectified without changing the principle of operation. Such required changes were later to lead I. M. Singer, another well-known name, into the work of improving this machine.

Also exhibited at the same 1850 mechanics fair was the machine of Allen B. Wilson. Wilson's machine received only a bronze medal, but his inventive genius was to have a far greater effect on the development of the practical sewing machine than the work of Blodgett and Lerow. A. B. Wilson⁴⁷ was one of the ablest of the early inventors in the field of mechanical stitching, and probably the most original.

⁴⁷ See biographical sketch, pp. 221-222.

Wilson, a native of Willett, New York, was a young cabinetmaker at Adrian, Michigan, in 1847 when he first conceived of a machine that would sew. He was apparently unaware of parallel efforts by inventors in distant New England. After an illness, he moved to Pittsfield, Massachusetts, and pursued his idea in earnest. By November 1848 he had produced the basic drawings for a machine that would make a lockstitch. The needle, piercing the cloth, left a loop of thread below the seam. A shuttle carrying a second thread passed through the loop, and as the tension was adjusted a completed lockstitch was formed (fig. 22). Wilson's shuttle was pointed on both ends to form a stitch on both its forward and backward motion, a decided improvement over the shuttles of Hunt and Howe, which formed stitches in only one direction. After each stitch the cloth was advanced for the next stitch by a sliding bar against which the cloth was held by a stationary presser. While the needle was still in the cloth and holding it, the sliding bar returned for a fresh grip on the cloth.

Wilson made a second machine, on the same principle, and applied for a patent. He was approached by the owners of the Bradshaw 1848 patent, who