

## THE COTTON MILLS IN THE SOUTH.

*By Edward Porritt.*



HERE is at the present time a notable development of cotton manufacturing in the South, close to the cotton fields, — especially in Georgia and the Carolinas; and there is a notable interest in this development in New England. Not a little New England capital has already been invested in some of the new southern enterprises; and in Massachusetts especially there has been much discussion, both among mill owners and among working men, of the conditions of manufacture and labor in the South, as affecting a possible large transfer thither of the cotton industries of the North. The matter is one of such interest and importance, viewed from either side, that it is worthy of a careful study in this place.

As to the causes accounting for this recent great development of cotton manufacturing in the South, it is possible to cite either southern or New England testimony. I have heard both. I have talked with mill superintendents in Carolina and in Georgia; and in March last I listened to the case which the Arkwright Club laid before the Committee on Commercial Affairs at the State House in Boston. The only important difference in the two points of view is that the southern manufacturers lay stress on the advantages which accrue from the water powers, while the Arkwright Club witnesses made no mention of them in reciting to the legislative committee what are, in their opinion, the advantages of the South. Except as regards this point, there is a general agreement between southern cotton-mill superintendents and those of New England as to the causes for the recent great development of the cotton industry in Georgia and the Carolinas.

If a southern cotton-mill superintendent were asked to set down what

he considers are the advantages of the South, the probability is that he would place them in something like this order: Cheap white labor, nearness to the raw material, the absence of labor politicians and labor unions, long working days and few holidays, light taxation, and, finally, the possibilities connected with the water powers.

Nearly all these causes were reviewed before the legislative committee in Boston from the point of view both of the labor organizations of Massachusetts and the cotton-mill superintendents. In fact to an outsider the proceedings before the committee seemed to be largely in the nature of a contest between the trade unionists and the Massachusetts manufacturers.

The trade unionists were heard first. They took up the position that New England has no need to fear southern competition, and that the cry concerning the South is raised by the mill superintendents with a view to inducing the legislature to stay its hand in labor legislation. From this standpoint the representatives of the trade unions laid their case before the committee. To support it they relied for the most part on figures showing the growth of the cotton industry in Massachusetts since 1870. They admitted that there were few labor laws in the South, but argued that it would be a question of only a few years before all the southern cotton-manufacturing states have labor laws as drastic as those now existing in New England.

The representatives of the labor organizations were emphatic in their contention that Massachusetts has nothing to fear from the fact that, as regards factory legislation, the state is at the head of all the cotton-manufacturing states. They hold that climatic conditions and skilled labor have given Massachusetts its present position in the cotton industry, and that it can safely rely on these advan-

tages in any competition with the new mills of the South. "Short hours," said Mr. Robert Howard, speaking for the Fall River Mule Spinners' Association, "are not driving the trade away from Massachusetts. No state has made such wonderful progress in cotton manufacturing as this state since 1874, when the hours of labor were reduced to ten daily. Carroll D. Wright says Massachusetts made a gain in spindles between 1870 and 1880 of 1,517,236 and 30,741 looms. This was a greater gain in spindles and looms than all the other New England states combined, though during six years of that decade Massachusetts manufacturing establishments had been working under a ten-hour law. The census of 1880 also shows that the value of cotton goods manufactured in the New England states in 1870 was \$125,000,000. In 1880 it was \$143,000,000, or a gain of \$18,000,000 in 1880 over 1870, and \$12,000,000 of the \$18,000,000 was netted by Massachusetts manufacturers, though they had been running their mills six years out of ten under a ten-hours law. This speaks well for a reduction in the hours of labor. If the cotton trade is leaving Massachusetts, how can you account for the great increase of spindles and looms? In 1880 there were 4,236,084 spindles in the state. The last return shows 7,160,480, or an increase of 2,834,396 in the past fourteen years. Fall River at the passage of the ten-hour law in 1874 had in its factories 1,258,508 spindles. It now has about 2,700,000, and New England has seventy per cent of the spindles of the country." "I think," added Mr. Howard, "that from the perusal of statistics Massachusetts has little to fear from the competition of the South."

The Arkwright Club witnesses addressed themselves to the general question, "Can cotton goods be made cheaper in the South than in New England?" and insisted that the answer was in the affirmative. "What are the facts?" asked Mr. Jefferson Coolidge. "For a great many years past," he said, "the South has been trying to manufacture cotton goods. They put up small mills in various locali-

ties, but they did not know how to make cotton goods. The mills were put up in unsuitable climates, and the consequence was their success was small; their increase was small, and the amount of goods made was so insignificant that New England did not feel the competition. We were in an era of prosperity. At last, however, it was found that there was a region in the South where mills could be built, where the climate was good, and where help was to be found in great plenty, and very intelligent. It was found that mills in these localities were profitable; and the consequence was that very soon there was an increase in the number of mills. A great many new mills were built, and other mills were doubled. And what is the real difference in cost between these southern mills and ours? You have first of all cotton. Cotton grows at the doors of the southern mills and costs them one half cent to three quarters of a cent a pound less than it does us. After cotton comes coal. Go down south and you will find that coal costs eighty cents to one and a half dollars a ton. In Lowell the same coal costs three and a half to four and a half dollars. In the item of coal alone in the mills I represent, the difference of price would mean a saving of \$60,000 a year. Then you come to taxes. We are taxed enormously. In the South cotton mills go free from taxation for several years in order that the industry may be encouraged."

Coming next to the question of labor, which Mr. Coolidge described as the most important of all, he affirmed that labor at the South is about thirty per cent lower than in New England; besides that, the mills are run an hour or two hours longer than in the New England states, and in consequence general expenses are reduced to that extent. "The quality of the labor," continued Mr. Coolidge, "is excellent. It is taken from the mountains of Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia, from parts of the South which were originally settled by Scotch and Welsh people. As long as slavery lasted these people had never anything to do, because they were unwilling to compete with the negroes. They

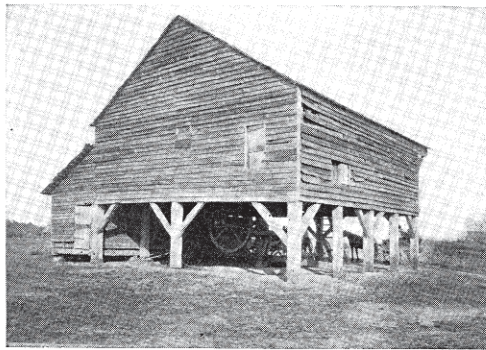


COTTON,—FROM FLOWER TO BALL.

have never been able to earn any money, and a dollar to them seems as large as a cart-wheel. The next thing in favor of the South is that there is no annoyance in the mills from trade unions. They do not exist in the South, and they cannot exist at the present time, and probably will not come into existence until more labor is required than can be found in

the mountain regions of the South. Then, undoubtedly, the South will have the same difficulty that we have. Now they have no legislative difficulties in the South; while here an enormous number of bills are carried through the legislature, or threatened every year, to the annoyance and expense of manufacturers. It has been said that the South cannot

make fine goods. There never was a greater mistake. The proportion of labor to the whole cost in fine goods is twice as great as in coarse goods. The South has thus an immense advantage in labor in coarse goods, and will have double that advantage in fine goods. Then it is also said that the climate in the South is too dry. There never was such a bugaboo as this talk about a climate being too dry. In New England we are not all making fine yarns such as have to be woven in a cellar. Much of the yarn used is not above forty-five; much of it is fourteen and fifteen and up to twenty. If any one will take the trouble to go into a cotton mill, he will find jets of steam over the looms to keep the air perfectly moist. These appliances are in every



AN OLD COTTON-GIN HOUSE.

way perfectly satisfactory and make the atmosphere just as good for cotton weaving as it would be out on the ocean. Besides, the climate of the South is as moist as our climate here in New England. When we suffer it is not from want of moisture, but on the cold days in winter, when the northern winds so fill the air with electricity that yarns stand out on end and break everywhere. They do not have such days in the South. There is nothing in the argument about climate. We felt no danger from the South until 1880. In that year I called the attention of my stockholders to the position in the South. Then the cloud was no bigger than a man's hand; but it was there and was threatening us. In 1889 and again in 1891 I spoke of it to my stockholders; but since 1891 it has been use-

less to point it out, for everybody could see it."

The greatest emphasis is laid by the manufacturers on the fact that there are no labor laws worth speaking about in the South. Mr. W. C. Lovering, who had opened the argument for the Arkwright Club, was most outspoken. He told the committee that there was too much legislation in Massachusetts; and this contention was further pushed home by Mr. Joseph Healey of Fall River, who assured the committee that he had always looked upon the State House in Boston as the headquarters of the labor unions. "I think it is a pretty well settled fact," said Mr. Healey, "that no mills are now building in New England. If there are any, I think you will find them simply extensions to mills already in operation with a view to putting them in more perfect condition, in order that they may compete more successfully. In the South a large number of mills are now building, and there is sufficient conclusive evidence to show that for the time being at least there are more advantages in the South than in New England. All the talk about the superiority of the New England operatives and its climatic advantages falls to the ground in view of the fact that mills which have these advantages are going away." The labor men had told them that when the South had ex-

hausted its surplus labor, labor unions and labor laws would begin to affect southern mills as they now do those of New England. "We admit that," said Mr. Healey, "but what do I care if between the time legislation reaches the southern mills and the present time my business is ruined? I do not care whether the working day is ten hours or nine hours, provided it is made the same for everybody. Then we would all stand on one level. But now the man in the South is not afraid of legislation, because it comes to him last. The man who is afraid is the man to whom legislation comes first; he is the man who has to carry the load."

According to the Arkwright Club figures, since 1892 the number of spindles in the Carolinas and Georgia has increased by three hundred and forty-five



HOEING COTTON IN THE FIELD.

thousand, or rather more than twenty per cent;\* while the number of spindles in Massachusetts has increased by three hundred and twelve thousand, or less than five per cent. In short the whole case of the manufacturers of Massachusetts at this juncture is, that the cotton industry is growing, "but the growth is in states far distant from ours, where legislative restrictions are few and continued exemption from annoying labor laws is eagerly promised."

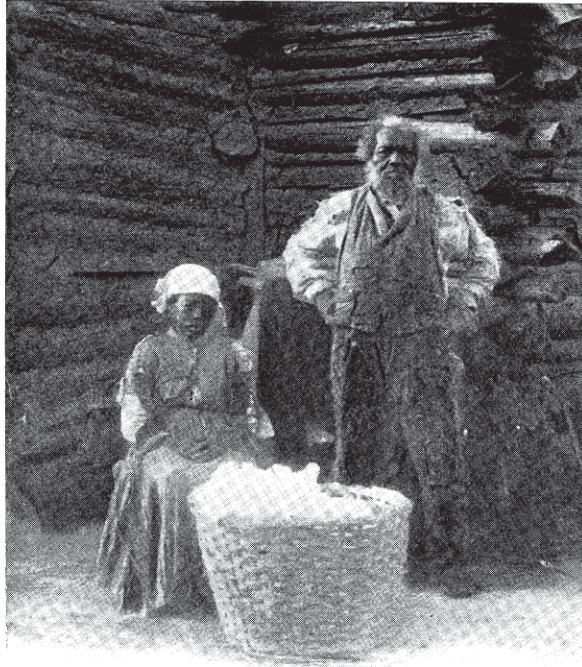
Leaving now the New England discussion, let us glance briefly at the actual conditions of cotton manufacturing in the South as the northern visitor finds them.

If I were asked to plan a trip for a party of excursionists who desired to see what the South has been doing in recent years in cotton manufacturing, and to learn to what extent the southern states are likely to become competitors of New England in the cotton industry, I should make Spartanburg, South Carolina, the first objective point. Spartanburg is the principal town in a county in which, according to a computation made in April last, there are 320,686 spindles, 8,908 looms, and some 6,430, people engaged in cotton manufacturing. It is the Fall River or the Oldham of South Carolina.

\**The Tradesman* of Chattanooga, in a cotton-trade special number published on April 15, reported the total number of spindles in the South as 3,001,340, and the number of looms as 70,874. According to the same authority there were, in 1890, 1,699,082 spindles and 38,865 looms in fourteen southern states.

From Spartanburg the party should go to Columbia, the state capital; from Columbia to Augusta; and next from Augusta northward to Atlanta, which is at once the political and commercial capital of the state of Georgia. Visits to these places would by no means exhaust the cotton-manufacturing centres in the South. North Carolina, Tennessee and Alabama are all sharing in the new activity in manufacturing. But Spartanburg, Columbia, Augusta and Atlanta are representative cities so far as the cotton industry goes, and a visitor who makes a round of them can see the industry under its newer conditions.

Much of the recent development of the industry in the South is along the rivers and canals, and most of the newer mills, those built within the past five or seven years, are on these waterways. In Atlanta and at Spartanburg there are mills driven in the old-fashioned manner by steam; so that by visiting these cities, as well as Columbia and Augusta, it is possible to see the industry under the older and the newer conditions. Apart from the fact that Spartanburg contains a number of modern mills driven by steam, it is the point from which any of the dozen great mills and mill villages on the Pacolet River can be reached. The mill village of Pacolet, where there are two of the largest mills in South Carolina, is about an hour and a half's drive through the pine woods and the cotton fields which lie between it and



OLD-TIME COTTON PICKERS.

Spartanburg. Pacolet is on the railroad from Columbia to Asheville; but the pleasantest way of reaching it is by road. The mills are in the valley. The Pacolet is a broad, full and rapid stream coming down from the mountains and ultimately reaching the Atlantic by the Santee River. The village is on the bluffs, at a much higher altitude than the mills. It has two churches and a schoolhouse. The houses of the mill people are well built and commodious; each stands in a good-sized lot; and altogether Pacolet is one of the prettiest and most advantageously situated of the mill villages in South Carolina. It is isolated, and nine or ten miles from town, and none but mill people live there. In these respects, however, Pacolet is no worse off than many mill communities in New England, or than some of the bleak moorland mill villages in Lancashire. The country in the neighborhood is hilly; much of it is beautifully wooded; and as to the Pacolet River, it is as attractive to the fisherman and to

the lover of scenery as the streams of Connecticut or Massachusetts.

All the houses are owned by the mill corporation; so is the land for a considerable distance about the mills. No one can settle in the village except by the good will of the mill corporation. The resident doctor is chosen by the mill superintendent; so are the school teachers. No saloons are allowed in the village. Those of the mill people who do not do their marketing at Spartanburg obtain their supplies at the store carried on by the mill corporation. When the mills were first established, house accommodation was provided by the mill company. For every member of a family at work in the mill, one room was assigned free of rent. Thus a family with four members at work, young or old, was assigned a four-roomed

cottage. Where a family of four work people chose to accommodate themselves in a three-roomed tenement, a dollar a month was allowed from the mill treasury in lieu of the additional room to which the family was entitled. This system led to some overcrowding, as many of the families were willing to pinch themselves on house accommodation in order to secure a little extra money. But this form of temptation to overcrowding, and in fact the whole of the arrangements in regard to house accommodation existing between the mill corporation and its work people, came to an end when, in April, 1893, the eleven hours day law came into operation in South Carolina. Prior to this time the people in the mills had worked from sunrise to sunset each and every day of the week except Sunday. This working day from sunrise to sunset is a relic of the plantation system, which still holds good in the case of hired laborers, white or colored, on the farms and plantations in the South, and also in some

of the cotton-manufacturing states in which there has been no labor legislation.

Georgia led the way in labor legislation in 1890. When the eleven hours day law was adopted in South Carolina three years later, the mill corporations in the country districts did not reduce wages; but instead of doing so they adopted a system of charging rent for their houses; so that the shortening of the working week from seventy-two hours to sixty-six has since 1893 been costing each operative twenty-five cents a week.

Although usually none but mill people live in these isolated mill villages like those on the Pacolet, mill superintendents assured me that they were seldom short of help, as in most of the villages there is a surplus labor equal to about ten per cent of the entire labor required in the mill. All the factory work people are white. I saw colored people working as porters in the cloth rooms, and as laborers about the cotton houses; but I do not remember seeing a single colored man or woman, boy or girl at work in the mills. The white people draw the color line very strictly. Much of the work that is done by children could be done by colored children, for colored children are prematurely sharp; but the colored boys and girls are as yet getting no opportunity of showing that they can take any useful part in the cotton industry. With the racial feeling in the South as it is, it is hardly practicable for a mill owner to give the colored people a trial. If he determined on an experiment of this kind, he would have to make up his mind to draw all his mill people entirely from the colored race. White and colored will not work side by side in the mills.

The only place where I saw the two races working side by side at machinery was in the State Penitentiary at Columbia. There white and colored convicts stand together at the hosiery machines,

and, as far as I could judge, turned out about the same quantity of work. In the penitentiary, however, conditions are vastly different from those in the cotton mills. In a gallery at one end of the hosiery room there sits all day long an armed guard; while on the floor of the room there is a sufficient force of overseers to see that all hands are kept steadily at work.

In the early days of modern cotton manufacturing in the South, white people were disposed to look down on work in the mills. Something of that feeling, I was told, is still left; but it must soon die out in the rural districts; for the wages and conditions of life in the mill



A PICKER'S CABIN.

villages put people in a much better position than that of the majority of small mortgage-laden farmers in the South. It is from the farmer or the "cracker" class that the mill operatives are largely drawn. They apparently make good work people; for the southern mills import no labor. These new-comers to the mills require to serve some little apprenticeship, but they are quickly through this training, and soon earning what to them appears good wages. Fifty cents a day is the average wage for laborers hired by the day on the farms and plantations in South Carolina. Seven or eight dollars a month, with a cabin and rations of corn-meal and bacon, are the wages paid to laborers hired by the year. In the

mills about Spartanburg wages average per day in the

Spinning room,	46.61 cents
Weaving “	84.69 “
Carding “	67.43 “
Slashing “	82.31 “
Cloth “	73.47 “
Repair shop	95.56 “
Entire mill	67.85 “

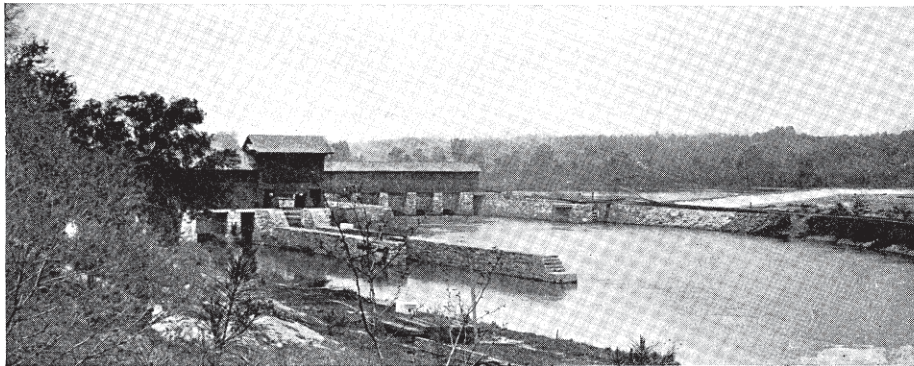
The average pay per hand per month of twenty-six days is \$17.64. In the newer and larger mills it is mostly the fault of the work people if they lose any time. The only holidays are the Fourth of July and Christmas Day.

The mills on the Pacolet afford a good idea of the way in which the rivers are being used in the cotton industry. At the upper mill at Pacolet village there is a dam giving a fall of twelve or fifteen feet and a canal about a hundred yards long and ten or twelve yards wide. Half a mile lower down there is another mill and another dam; but at this mill a canal of only about one third the length of that at the upper mill is needed to carry the water to the great wheel which furnishes the power to the machinery. The Pacolet River, by reason of its great volume of water, its fall and the character of its banks, lends itself excellently to mill sites; and it turns more cotton

Carolina that it has water power sufficient to run half the mills in the South; but the Pacolet seems at present to be the busiest of the mountain streams of the Carolinas.

The mills at Pacolet are splendidly equipped. They contain 52,900 spindles, 1,946 looms, and give employment to 1,200 work people. Much of the cotton they use is grown at their doors, and is bought direct from the farmers. As one drives over the country about Spartanburg, one frequently comes across printed signs at the cross-roads to the effect that cotton may be sold at the neighboring mills. The large mills do not obtain anything like all the cotton they need in their own neighborhood. Much of their supply has to be brought from a distance by rail. The mills at Pacolet village are two or three miles from a main line of railroad, but after the second mill was built there two or three years ago, a branch line was constructed to bring the mills into connection with the railroad system.

Up to the present time the finest mill in South Carolina is at Columbia. It stands about two miles to the westward of the city, on the bank of what is known as the Congaree Canal. This canal taps the Congaree River at a point about seven miles above the city, and is capable of

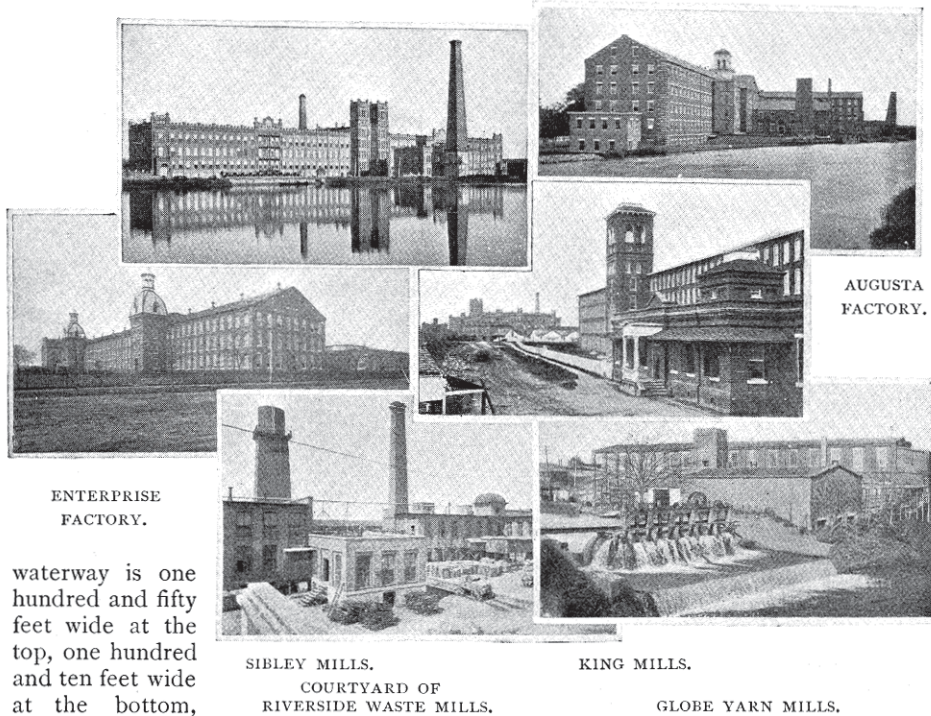


INTAKE OF SAVANNAH CANAL, NEAR AUGUSTA, GEORGIA.

spindles and weaving looms than any other mountain stream of South Carolina. Other rivers in the mountain country of the Carolinas are perhaps equal to as much of this kind of work as the Pacolet. It is claimed for the Atkins River in North

bringing down a volume of water second as regards power, it is said, only to that in use at Niagara. There is a fall of forty-one feet between the dam at the head of the canal and the point at which the new cotton mill is located. The





ENTERPRISE  
FACTORY.

AUGUSTA  
FACTORY.

SIBLEY MILLS.  
COURTYARD OF  
RIVERSIDE WASTE MILLS.

KING MILLS.  
GLOBE YARN MILLS.

waterway is one hundred and fifty feet wide at the top, one hundred and ten feet wide at the bottom, and of an average depth of ten feet. The Columbia mill is driven by electricity, generated at a power house on the strip of land which lies between the canal and the Congaree River. The power house is thus on the western side of the canal. The mill is on its eastern bank. The cable conveying the electricity from the power house to the mill is carried across the canal on an iron bridge.

No plans were made for the Columbia mill until its architect and its superintendent had been over the most modern mills in England and in the other cotton-manufacturing countries of Europe. All the machinery is of the latest pattern, and much of it was imported from Lancashire. The mill building is perhaps the finest in the South. It contains 30,000 spindles. For roominess, loftiness and airiness, and for appliances for ventilation and for carrying off dust, it would satisfy even the exacting requirements of the new factory laws which at the time of writing are before the House of Commons in England, laws which are much in advance of any factory enact-

ments hitherto adopted in any part of the world.

As is the case in the mill villages on the Pacolet, the corporation owning the Columbia mill provides house accommodation for its work people. Its mill village is situated across the river in West Columbia. It has a church and a park, and has been built on a plan as generous as that of the mill. There is no lack of house accommodation for working people in the city of Columbia; but the owners of the new mill regard it as an advantage to have their work people forming a community of themselves. All southern mill superintendents are not of the opinion that it is an advantage, so far as labor is concerned, to have the mill in an isolated situation. One of the mill superintendents in Atlanta, a pioneer of the new industry, who had had charge of mills in urban and rural districts, expressed to me a decided preference for a mill in a large town. "Then," he said, "I can ring the bell in the morning and get all the help I want. And to make money in the cotton trade," he added,

"one must have every wheel going, and always going."

No community in the South has given a heartier welcome to the new industry than the city of Columbia, although not much Columbia capital is invested in the mill at West Columbia. It is largely a Baltimore concern. But the business men of Columbia had long looked to the time when the Congaree Canal should be full of water and the great mills on its banks at work. Columbia as regards natural beauty and climate is



PICKING COTTON.

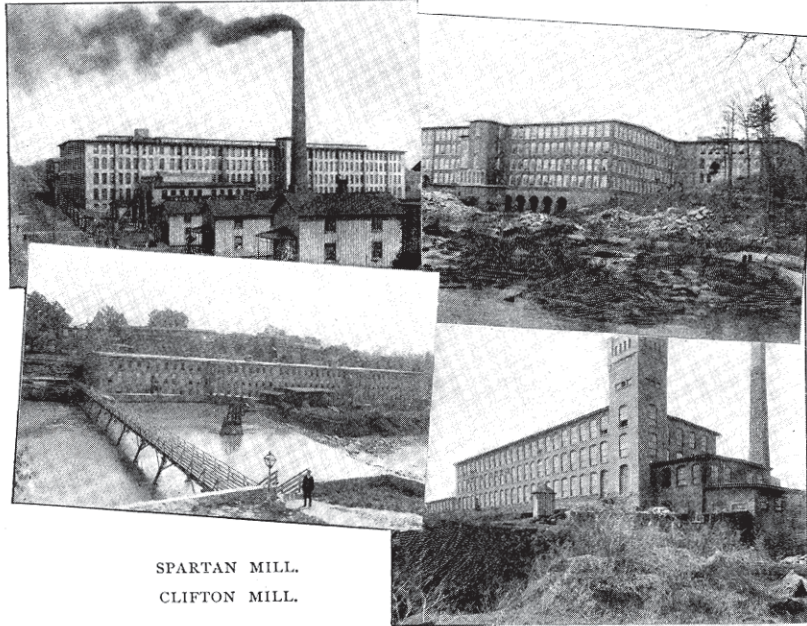
second to none of the southern state capitals. It stands on a high ground; its State House commands a view for miles around, and the streets and avenues of the city are as wide as those of Washington. The city was laid out on ample lines; but its development has not been such as to give it the finish and dignity which are called for by the original plan. Still, although many of the streets are unpaved, and some of them disfigured by open sewers, others are made beautiful by lines of well-grown shade

trees and pretty lawns; and Columbia needs only the addition of commercial to its existing political importance to make it one of the most desirable of southern cities. The establishment of the cotton industry at West Columbia is looked upon as the beginning of a movement toward this end.

Augusta, Georgia, is interesting as a cotton-mill centre, chiefly on account of the Savannah Canal, on the banks of which most of the mills are situated. The Savannah Canal is nine miles long and in three levels. The intake from the Savannah River is a few miles above Augusta. At some places the canal assumes the proportions of a small lake, and it carries down to Augusta a never-failing body of water, which provides power for a score of mills and then falls again into the Savannah River. According to local statistics, the canal now furnishes a motive force equal to 12,200 horse power. Less than 9,000 horse power is now in use, of which nearly one third is used by three great cotton mills. These and the smaller cotton mills in Augusta have in the aggregate 208,700 spindles and 5,300 looms. Most of this machinery is driven by the canal; and Augusta long ago began to realize the advantages of the foresight of General Oglethorpe, who, when he founded the city in

1735, directed that it should be laid out at the foot of the falls, and at the head of the navigation of the Savannah River.

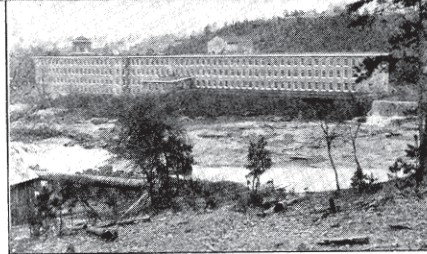
One phase of this new question of the East and the South — returning in conclusion to the general subject — has an international interest. Massachusetts now stands in respect to the South as England stands to India. The factory laws of Massachusetts are nearer those of England than are those of any other state. Between the factory laws affecting Lancashire and those of India there is quite



SPARTAN MILL.  
CLIFTON MILL.

as much difference as between those of Massachusetts and those of Carolina and Georgia; and India, like Georgia and Carolina, has no trade unions and no labor politicians. In India, as in the South, a manufacturer does much as he pleases. For years past the mill owners and the mill work people of Lancashire have joined forces in pleading with the India Department for some assimilation of factory legislation in the two countries. The Lancashire people do not ask that any existing laws in England shall be repealed, but that those of India shall be brought up to the Lancashire level. No results, however, have attended these appeals to the India Department in London. They go unheeded, as any suggestions made in New England are likely to go unheeded in the southern legislatures.

Lancashire, like Massachusetts, is the industrial district in which labor laws have come first; and manufacturers of cotton goods in India, like those in the South, have equipped their mills with the best modern machinery, and are taking the fullest advantage of the fact that labor laws are reaching them last. People in the cotton trade in India are easy in the conviction that, whatever



ENOREE MILL.  
WHITNEY MILL.  
PACOLET MILL.

they may do as to factory laws, whether they stay practically without them as at present, or whether they go forward a little, England cannot go back. There is apparently something of the same kind of feeling in the South toward New England.

England and the continental nations of Europe two or three years ago sought to settle matters concerning labor at an international congress convened by the Emperor of Germany. Only in the present session of the English Parliament measures are being discussed with a view to fulfilling some of the suggestions approved by England through her representatives at the international congress at Berne. One of these solely

affects the cotton and woollen trades, and if carried out will bring about the beginning of the end of the system of child labor in England, which dates back to the commencement of the cotton factory era. Some of the European States were backward in accepting the Emperor William's invitation to the conference. Others instructed their delegates to give no

pledges. At the present time, when southern cotton mills are driving as hard as they can go, and the South is in the enjoyment of a new prosperity, the southern cotton states would be even less disposed to go into an interstate conference than were some of the European nations to discuss international labor problems at the suggestion of the Emperor of Germany.

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