Child Labor in the South

An interesting debate is brought to a close in our columns this week between Dr. A. J. McKelway, of Georgia, and Captain E. A. Smyth, of South Carolina, on the question of child labor in Southern cotton-mills. The discussion between these gentlemen only strengthens the opinion of The Outlook that some form of Federal legislation is needed to control, if not to abolish, the evils connected with the employment of children in the factories and mines of the country. We cannot even depend upon State statistics for accurate information upon this vital subject. Captain Smyth is an officer of an important manufacturing corporation in his State; Dr. McKelway is Assistant Secretary of the National Child Labor Committee. How is it that these two authorities differ by many thousands in their estimates of the number of young children engaged in exhausting labor in South Carolina and the Southern States?

Obviously, it is because there are no trustworthy current official statements published by the State of South Carolina that a bewildered world is thus left to choose among the estimates of Mr. Smyth, Dr. McKelway, and the figures collected seven years ago by the Federal Census Bureau. South Carolina has no State Department of Labor, no Bureau of Labor Statistics, no State factory inspector, no compulsory education law, no truant officers or comprehensive school enrollment, no school census, and no State census of industrial workers in the long interim between the periods of the Federal census. In the absence of current data such as would be at hand if all these departments of the State were

regularly publishing the results of their labors, the public cannot be blamed for accepting with reserve the estimates and opinions of an advocate speaking from within a corporation which employs children under fourteen years of age.

Captain Smyth attempts to excuse South Carolina by accusing Maine, New Hampshire, and Rhode Island of permitting children twelve and thirteen years of age to work in their mills. Far be it from The Outlook to hold up New England mill conditions as perfect models for the rest of the world; but these New England States to which Captain Smyth applies his *tu quoque* argument have established regulations and safeguards which it appears hopeless to expect in the near future in South Carolina. In New Hampshire children of twelve years are permitted to work in the mills only during the vacations of the public schools, no child under fourteen years can be employed at any occupation when the public schools are in session, and no child under sixteen years may be employed during school sessions unless he can read and write English. Similar regulations, differing only in detail, prevail in Vermont. In New Hampshire the total number of illiterate children, ten to fourteen years of age, reported in 1900 by the United States Census was 557, in Vermont 287, while in South Carolina the number was 51,536. Comment upon these appalling figures would be more than useless. Delaware, Maine, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Rhode Island, all cotton-manufacturing States, have fixed the age for beginning to work in factories at fourteen years, and all these have State officials to enforce the law and supply the public with authentic information. In South Carolina nominally no child under the age of twelve years can be employed in a cotton-mill. But an orphan or any widowed mother or any disabled father may take oath before a magistrate or a county clerk that children at any age are dependent upon their own earnings, and the children are thereafter free to work until 8 P.M. Any child of twelve years or more may, so far as the law is concerned, work all night.

Louisiana, Maryland, Kentucky, and Tennessee, all have departments of Factory Inspection. Why not South Carolina? North Carolina has a Bureau of Labor Statistics. Why not South Carolina? Kentucky and Tennessee have established fourteen years as the age limit for boys and girls in mills, and Louisiana has set the same limit for girls. Why not South Carolina? Kentucky ends the working day at 7 P.M. for all children under sixteen years of age in mills and mines, and Alabama for all children under thirteen years in mills. Why not South Carolina? The New York Legislature has just passed a bill, which the Governor will undoubtedly sign, providing that no child under sixteen shall work more than eight hours a day, and that those eight hours shall be between eight o'clock in the morning and five o'clock in the afternoon. It is, perhaps, too much to say, Why not South Carolina? but we can at least hold up the example to that State.

Let South Carolina establish the fourteenth birthday as the earliest date for beginning to work, and require the child to prove its assertion that it is fourteen years old by showing the physical stature and the school record of a normal child of that age. Let South Carolina establish a Bureau of Labor Statistics and a Department of Factory Inspection [authorized to inspect factories by day and by night and to prosecute all violations of the law, publishing in a monthly bulletin of labor, as New York does, the records of these investigations. Let South Carolina provide, as Massachusetts has provided, for a State industrial census, independent of the Federal Census. Let South Carolina, by statute, establish the eight-hour day for all working children under the age of sixteen years, as Illinois and New York have done. And let South Carolina establish a compulsory education law, as all the States of the Union but eleven have done. It is safe to predict that when these changes become known as accomplished facts, adverse criticism of the attitude of the people of South Carolina towards the children of their State will cease. There is only one way in which the Southern States can silence this adverse criticism, and that is by adopting and maintaining as high

standards of dealing with child labor as are successfully maintained in other parts of the civilized world.

What these standards are may be found presented in a compact and telling form in a "Handbook of Child Labor" compiled by Miss Josephine Goldmark, Assistant Secretary of the National Consumers' League. The League, which has accomplished remarkable results in the amelioration of the too often wretched conditions in which women and children work, has performed no one single service of more value than the publication of this significant tabulation of practical and successful legislation in behalf of child workers.

Letters to The Outlook

CHILD LABOR IN THE SOUTH

I desire to make some reply to an article by the Rev. A. J. McKelway, of Atlanta, Georgia, who is employed by the National Child Labor Committee; the article appeared in your edition of February 16, 1907. The writer has been for twenty-six years engaged in cotton manufacturing in South Carolina.

Dr. McKelway states that "the child labor evil in the South to-day is greater than it is in any other part of the country, perhaps than in any other part of the civilized world." He quotes from Bulletin 69 of the Census Bureau, issued January 25, 1907, and also from the synopsis of the Census of 1900, but does not tell the whole story as told in Bulletin 69, and on page 42 you will find the following:

> To a greater extent than any other manufacturing or mechanical industry, the cotton-mill furnishes employment to children. In 1900 the number of cotton-mill operatives ten to fifteen years of age was 44,427, and they formed eighteen per cent. of the total number of persons over ten years of age who reported that occupation. When compared with the number of children engaged in pursuits not of a manufacturing or mechanical nature, the figures for child cotton-mill operatives in 1900 are found to be smaller than those for three other groups—agricultural laborers, servants and waitresses, and laborers of a class not specified. The proportion of children at least ten years of age among the total number employed is greater in two occupations, namely, those of messengers and errand and office boys, and of agricultural laborers. Thus the occupation of the cotton-mill operatives ranks fourth among all occupations in the actual number of children employed and third in the proportion of children among the total number reporting.

It is a well-known fact that in the two occupations of messengers and office-boys the South employs comparatively few, and those young people are employed largely in the great cities of the North and not in the sparsely settled districts of the South.

Another error Dr. McKelway makes is in stating that it has been "demonstrated that the same class and quality of goods made in the South and in the East bring a considerably lower price when made in the South, through the bad reputation the Southern mills have won for the indifferent product of unskilled, that is, child, labor." Dr. McKelway would find great difficulty in establishing the truth of this statement, and, on the contrary, indisputable proof could be furnished that the statement is wide of the facts and grossly incorrect.

I am one of the several cotton manufacturers from Georgia, South Carolina, and North Carolina who are members of the Civic Federation, and attended the meeting in December last in New York City. I there made my protest against the misrepresentations made by the officials of the National Child Labor Committee in reference to Southern mill conditions.

I first alluded to the statement of Spargo in his book, "The Bitter Cry of the Children," on the authority of Dr. McKelway, that the spinning-frames in the Southern cotton-mills had adjustable legs, so as to be lowered to the floor for the convenience of the small children. I clearly demonstrated the absurdity of this statement, and the ignorance of conditions and the spirit of unfairness that prompted it. I also disputed the statement made by the officials of the National Child Labor Committee in their appeals for contributions that 60,000 children under fourteen are employed in Southern cotton-mills, and that little girls eight years of age worked a twelve-hour night in the cotton-mills. As a matter of fact, none of the weaving mills in South Carolina work at night, and to my knowledge only four of the yarn-mills do any night work, and I am informed only in the twister-room, where adults are employed. I was, and am, speaking for South Carolina, with whose conditions I am familiar, having access to the official records. There are about 9,000,000 spindles in the Southern States, and a low average would be 100 spindles to the side, and in the mills with which I am familiar the average number of sides attended by an operative is seven and one-half, which would indicate 12,000 people employed in all the Southern spinning-rooms. As a matter of fact, as far as my observation goes, in South Carolina about half the spinners are over sixteen years of age, and many of them women; but granting for the sake of argument that all the 12,000 are children, and that there are an equal number of young children employed as sweepers, doffers, band-boys, drawing-in hands, and in the cloth-rooms, you would not find over 24,000 young people actually employed at any one time in the cotton-mills, and many of the sweepers and doffers and drawing-in hands are over sixteen years of age.

On page 47 of Bulletin No. 69 the comparative table is given of the total average number of wage-earners employed in the manufacture of cotton goods and small cotton wares, which, of course, includes the knitting-mills, as reported by the Census of Manufacturers. In 1905 the figures for the Southern States are 123,165. This is very

far from the 209,000 reported by Dr. McKelway. This same table gives the number of children under sixteen years of age employed in the manufacture of cotton goods and cotton small wares in the Southern States as 28,135, and it is difficult to understand how Dr. McKelway persists in his estimate of 62,000 to 78,000 children being employed in Southern cotton-mills.

Referring again to Census Bulletin No. 69, page 48, it is stated:

> In 1905 the estimated number of cotton-mill operatives ten to fifteen years of age in the total population was 44,839, an increase over 1900 of only 412.
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> In spite of the increase in the actual number of child operatives ten to fifteen years of age in the Southern States, the tendency is apparently away from the employment of children, a fact indicated by a comparison of the figures presented in Table 30 for the average number of all ages with those for the average number under sixteen. The average number of all ages increased 4.3 per cent. during the five-year period from 1900 to 1905, while the average number under sixteen increased only four-tenths of one per cent. In all of the principal States which showed a decrease in the number of child operatives the number of all ages did not decrease proportionally. Of the States that showed an increase in the number of child operatives, Indiana, Tennessee, and Texas were the only ones in which the number of all ages did not increase more than proportionally. Thus it appears that the tendency is to employ older people.

The increase in the number of children employed in the Southern States between 1900 and 1905 is easily explained when we realize that in 1900 the total number of Southern mill employees was 100,930, and in 1905 the total number had increased to 123,165, or an increase of about 22 per cent., and this owing to the great increase in the number of cotton-mills in the South between 1900 and 1904.

Again, Dr. McKelway states that the age limit for the employment of young persons is two years lower, and in some exceptional cases four years lower, in the South than in the rest of the civilized world. Is not the age limit twelve years in Maine and New Hampshire, and thirteen in Rhode Island, as stated in Labor Bulletin, January, 1906?

For ten years before the National Child Labor Committee was organized fair-minded men who were engaged in the manufacture of cotton in the Southern States, and who employed thousands of operatives, were actively and steadfastly working to overcome the evils that the rapid growth of the industry had unavoidably developed. Manufacturers had appeared before the South Carolina Legislature since 1902 advocating labor legislation, child labor laws, birth registration laws, marriage license laws, and other reforms that were felt to be necessary. For ten years before the child labor law in South Carolina was enacted (and it was done largely through the influence of the manufacturers themselves), certain cotton-mills in South Carolina had rules preventing the employment of children under twelve years of age, and attempting to compel their attendance at the schools maintained by the cotton-mill corporations. To-day South Carolina has not a birth registration law, a marriage license law, or a compulsory school law, but it is not the fault of the cotton manufacturers; and it is impossible properly and fairly to enforce any child labor law unless there is a birth registration law, which would prevent false statements on the part of unscrupulous parents.

The taxes in South Carolina are almost entirely paid by the white population, and the amount collected for school taxes is fairly divided between the colored schools and the white schools. As is well known, the colored population in South Carolina largely exceeds the white population, and the white population are carrying the burden of educating the colored people. The result is that the public schools in South Carolina are open only for three and a half to four months, and in the cotton-mill villages the mill corporations are supporting their schools for nine and ten months, and also their kindergartens. The cotton-mill corporations in South Carolina have invested over $85,000 in school buildings and furniture, and they supplement the State fund over $40,000 annually in maintaining these schools; there are enrolled in the mill schools over eight thousand children, and these children are indebted to the mill corporations for an opportunity to receive an education. The National Child Labor Committee have seemingly determined to antagonize all those who are working for the betterment of the condition of the cotton-mill employees and the children in the cotton-mills in South Carolina. Efforts that were made to forbid the employment of children under twelve years of age ten years before any child labor law was enacted, and to force those children to attend the mill schools, or to induce them to attend the mill schools by a gratuity each month, have been perverted by officials of the Child Labor Committee, and extracts from this agreement published claiming that children of twelve years of age were forced to work in the mills, and ignoring the fact that the younger children were protected and encouraged to go to school.

To judge fairly of the condition of the employees of the cotton-mills in South Carolina to-day one must understand and remember the conditions surrounding these people before the cotton-mills were built. Many of the inhabitants of these mill villages are from the mountain country, and lived in single room

log houses, some of them with earth floors. The conditions to-day are changed, and the wonderfully rapid development of the cotton-mill industry has furnished these people with the employment they desired, with school-houses and church facilities; and, even with all the imaginary or real evils that have been developed by the rapid growth of the cotton-mill industry, no one can justly say that the condition of the residents of the mill villages is not far better to-day than was their previous state. Many of our mill villages and mills have been investigated by honest and competent investigators, who are always welcomed, such as Miss Beeks, of the Welfare Department of the National Civic Federation, and Mrs. J. Ellen Foster, of the Department of Justice, Washington, who is now investigating the condition of the working women and children of the United States under a special commission from President Roosevelt. The report of Miss Beeks has been published, illustrated with photographs.

ELLISON A. SMYTH.
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Letters to The Outlook

CHILD LABOR IN THE SOUTH

Captain Ellison A. Smyth's letter to The Outlook of March 30 on "Child Labor in the South" calls for a brief reply, as he questions both my knowledge of the conditions and the spirit of fairness in my article of February 16 on the same subject. I shall not enter into another discussion of the conflicting estimates as to the number of children employed in the Southern mills. The Government investigation, which the National Child Labor Committee earnestly advocated and the manufacturing interests vehemently opposed, ought to determine which is right. I simply call attention to the fact that the same manufacturers report over 200,000 operatives to their trade journal and 123,000 to the census department the same year, and I have taken the larger figure as nearer the truth from my own knowledge. For instance, I have actually seen in one cigar factory in Tampa, Florida, more children at work than the manufacturers report—nineteen in all—for all the cigar factories in the State.

With regard to my statement that "the same class and quality of goods made in the South and in the East bring a considerably lower price when made in the South, through the bad reputation that Southern mills have won for the indifferent product of unskilled, that is, child, labor," Captain Smyth says: "Indisputable proof could be furnished that the statement is wide of the facts and grossly incorrect." The Hon. Murphy Candler, of the Georgia Senate, a practical cotton manufacturer, made the statement on the floor of the Senate, and challenged contradiction from his manufacturer colleagues, that Southern cotton goods brought from two to three cents a pound less than the same quality of goods from Eastern mills. The Hon. W. A. Covington, member of the Georgia House of Representatives, told me that a mill with which he was connected was ordered by its Northern selling agents to conceal the fact that its goods were made in Georgia, as they had been passing them off as Eastern goods. On March 21 of this year Mr. Garrett Andrews, of Chattanooga, who was chosen to represent the Tennessee manufacturers in their opposition to the passage of a nine-hour law for children under sixteen, said before the legislative committee, in my hearing, that the same cotton goods brought one and a half cents a pound less in the South than when manufactured in the North, arguing that Tennessee manufacturers should not be put at a further disadvantage with their Northern competitors. I do not deny that individual Southern mills have earned a better reputation, and therefore get better prices.

At an address at Cooper Union, February 16, 1905, I said: "I was told not long ago by a leading dealer in cotton-mill machinery that a spooler had been put upon the market with adjustable legs for small help." Says Captain Smyth in his letter to The Outlook: "I first alluded to the statement of Spargo in his book, 'The Bitter Cry of the Children,' on the authority of Dr. A. J. McKelway, that the spinning-frames in the Southern cotton-mills had adjustable legs, so as to be lowered to the floor for the convenience of the small children. I clearly demonstrated the absurdity of this statement, and the ignorance of conditions and the spirit of unfairness that prompted it." Captain Smyth should consider Captain Sigsbee's proverb, "It is better to know than to think." If he will turn to Draper's "Textile Texts," edition of 1901, page 183, he will find the advertisement of a spooler with the following description: "Another important feature of our construction is the use of adjustable legs in the frame so that the height of the machine may be suited to the operative. Small help is used in some mills and full-grown help in others. The motions required in spooling are very fatiguing if the spindles are not at a proper height for easy manipulation, and this height necessarily varies with the height of the attendant."

Captain Smyth seems inclined to boast that the present child labor law in South Carolina was enacted "largely through the influence of the manufacturers themselves." Captain Smyth will not deny that the law was a compromise measure, that it began with a ten-year age limit, gradually increasing to a twelve-year age limit, that the hours are sixty-six a week, which means twelve hours a day for the first five days of the week, and that children of any age who are unfortunate enough to be orphans or the children of dependent parents are allowed to work in the mills. So that to-day a six-year-old orphan or the child of a disabled father is allowed, by law, to work twelve hours a day in the South Carolina cotton-mills. Nor will Captain Smyth deny that during the session of the Legislature of South Carolina in January he argued before the committee against raising the age limit to fourteen years and against the immediate reduction of the

hours to sixty a week for children. I have his argument before me as I write.

A. J. McKELWAY.

Atlanta, Georgia.