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THE MISSISSIPPI TO ATLANTIC WATERWAY.

By U. S. Senator Duncan U. Fletcher.
(Written especially for The Tradesman, Chattanooga, Tenn.)

That there is a widespread and increasing interest in the inland waterway scheme is evidenced by numerous inquiries, recently, and at least a half dozen requests from periodicals, to furnish an article on the subject.

The stress and exactions of other matters, at this time, hinder anything like a full discussion of this important portion of a national system of waterway development and improvement.

The association having in charge the agitation and education by way of unfolding the practicability and desirability of this great public enterprise was organized a few years ago, and will hold its annual meeting in Jacksonville, Fla., this coming fall—probably in October.

The movement contemplates an inland waterway from the Mississippi river, at the advisable point near New Orleans, extending along the Gulf to a point on the west coast of Florida, perhaps near St. Marks. This entire distance could be covered for barge navigation, and small boats, at small cost. The natural waterways would make unnecessary any considerable excavation. The modern dredge would soon do the work. Deep water and good harbors at St. Marks, Apalachicola, St. Andrews, and Pensacola, would accommodate ships of any size.

The undertaking involves a ship canal across Florida, built on the lock system, terminating in the Atlantic ocean, and connecting with the inland waterway, extending along the east coast of Florida, as far north as Key West, and extending north to the Atlantic coast to New York.

This work is being urged by the Atlantic Coast Waterway Association, which is receiving enthusiastic support.

The most difficult and expensive portion of the scheme is the ship canal across Florida, which, in itself is no new idea. It was suggested by Jefferson Davis, secretary of war. Important then, it has become more so with our growing commerce, and our military and naval necessities.

It is estimated that the distance from coast to coast will not exceed 128 miles, and the route could be surveyed so as to utilize rivers, lakes and water courses to such an extent that no doubt solid material would be encountered for only about one-half the distance. Some years ago the route was surveyed by a distinguished engineer, Caffalls, with a view to enlisting private capital in the enterprise of building and operating such a ship canal across the state of Florida, and he reported, as I remember, heartily in favor of it, as an investment, and estimated the cost at about \$28,000,000.

Such a canal would be of inestimable

advantage to the country, and especially to the Mississippi Valley and the Gulf States. As a part of a great system of waterways, extending from New York down the Atlantic coast, across Florida, along the Gulf to the Mississippi, up that to the Great Lakes, thence through the Erie back to New York, it must command the attention, and ought to receive the support of the whole country.

Any policy of waterway development, national in scope, must include this project as a necessary part.

That some plan of this kind, in response to a generous and emphatic public sentiment, must be worked out in the near future is evident. The National Rivers and Harbors Congress, and the various waterway associations, all co-operating, are pointing the way, assuring the demand for cheaper transportation, and greater facilities for reaching markets. Products are valuable if they can be got to market when and where there is a demand for them. Bulky commodities, heavy freights, move faster and cheaper by water. One of the greatest problems with which we have to deal is that of adequate and least expensive transportation. Freight rates adjust themselves when you have water and rail in competition. There was a time when the railroads objected to improving the water highways. Not so now, because the railroads cannot, without congestion and delays, handle the traffic of the country. Our products and traffic are increasing at tremendous bounds. Railways are not keeping pace with this growth. If they carried passengers and lighter freight, and the heavy tonnage could move by water, a far better condition would exist.

In Germany, the government owns the railroads, and Germany is spending and proposing to spend millions of dollars upon canals, and her canalized rivers, to facilitate cheap transportation, and get her products to sea without having them seek out shorter routes through Belgium and France.

New York is submitting to her people a proposition to build the Cayuga-Seneca Canal. She is rebuilding the main stem of the Erie Canal, which has already yielded many millions more than it cost. Its traffic is almost beyond comprehension, and the freight from the Great Lakes finds it an economic outlet, which must be enlarged to meet the demand of increased freight which otherwise would seek the sea through Canada.

Chicago is spending many millions on waterway improvement.

Canada, with a population less than one-tenth, and wealth but a fraction of ours, has constructed a deep waterway, more than 700 miles long, connecting Montreal by a 28-foot channel with every harbor and seaport of the world.

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