

SHIP CANALS AND DEEP WATERWAYS

TO THE EDITOR OF THE CONSERVATIVE :

I was much pleased to see in the last issue of THE CONSERVATIVE that your attention had been drawn to the subject of ship canals and deep waterways. The editor of THE CONSERVATIVE may not have forgotten that four years ago, while he was Secretary of the Department of Agriculture in the cabinet of President Cleveland, I sent, in his care, to be submitted to the President, a paper, I will call it a brief, upon this great subject. It was in the nature of a petition requesting him to go to Congress and the country with a special message recommending such aid as might be required to build a ship canal and deep waterways, to provide cheap transportation between the Atlantic seaboard and the base of the Rocky Mountains. The country at that time was in a condition of wide-spread, universal distress from the panic of 1893. I saw in the undertaking of such a great national work, or thought I saw in it, an immediate restoration of confidence and the employment of vast volumes of skilled and unskilled labor that would have brought comfort and peace to suffering millions of men, women and children all over our stricken land. I was absolutely sure that I saw in it then, as I think I see in it now, the greatest step for national advancement and development in population and wealth that is possible in this generation. As a measure of peace it would divert the minds of men from war and insure internal peace and prosperity for at least fifty years. If this great national work had been inaugurated in 1895, such a colossal crime upon a friendly nation as the Spanish war, and that which is still going on, which the President bought for twenty millions spot cash, and which is now costing a million a day and thousands of lives, would never have been committed.

The editor of THE CONSERVATIVE may remember the bare outline which was contained in the paper to which reference has been made. It was about as follows :

1. The federal government to pledge the national credit by an issue of \$500,000,000, or \$1,000,000,000 if necessary, to build a national system of deep waterways, this system to consist of a ship canal *via* the St. Lawrence river and Lake Champlain to broadwater navigation on the Hudson river to secure all-water transportation from the estuaries and harbor of New York to Lake Michigan and Chicago.

2. The immediate completion of the Hennepin canal, already authorized by congress, to connect that great inland sea with the Mississippi river as mentioned by THE CONSERVATIVE.

3. A deep waterway from the Mississippi river across Iowa on or near the

imperial parallel of $41\frac{1}{2}$, to the Missouri river.

4. A similar deep waterway from the Missouri river through the Platte valley from which, every ten miles, electrical power could be taken from the Platte river for propelling all sorts of water craft, to the foothills of the Rocky Mountains.

5. Supplementing this great central waterway, I would have a system of lateral canals built by state authority and state aid, supported by the national credit, if necessary, for which, as for the broader waterway, the perennial streams which flow from north to south in our two sister states furnish ample water—the whole system being under federal control and supervision, low tolls to be levied for maintenance of and operation and payment of interest on bonds for ten years, no tolls for revenue for all time afterwards, water transportation being practically free.

I venture to say that the president of the United States who marks his public service with a plain initiative of his own with such a mark will live forever in the grateful memory of his countrymen. I venture to say that, if Grover Cleveland in 1893 had secured the inauguration of this great national enterprise, he would have been re-nominated and re-elected in 1896, and would have handed himself down to posterity in the history of his country as De Witt Clinton has come down to us for building the Erie canal.

"The cost is too great," said the late Charles A. Dana, with a few pungent words of dissent, when he kindly noticed the outline I gave him of the national highways. He did not wish to *buy* peace and order when the perils of discontent and disorder alarmed the country. And yet, before the utterly causeless and wicked war with Spain, and the one that we have bought—the two wars have been continuous and are one—is ended, we shall have expended in destroying thousands of innocent human lives and countless millions of property in this country and the Philippines, more than twice the amount of money which it would cost to build this great national work of peace.

But, it is objected that such a system of cheap transportation would hurt the railroads. The ready answer is that it would help the railroads by the upbuilding of innumerable towns and industrial centres along these canals as the Erie canal has helped the New York Central railroad between Albany and Buffalo.

If New York state can favor the expenditure of \$60,000,000 for the enlargement of the Erie canal, could not this great nation pledge its credit for \$500,000,000, for a great measure of assured prosperity and progress for the whole country? If the nation could destroy \$5,000,000,000 of property, a million priceless human lives and spend \$4,000,-

000,000 in war to save the union, would such a nation feel it as a serious burden to expend \$500,000,000 for a work full of blessings and benefits to all the people of the country?

The safe basis for this enterprise rests upon the simple and indisputable fact that the transportation of freight by water from the great producing west to the seaboard can be done for one-third less cost than it can be by railroads. The enormous saving which such a measure would bring to the buying and selling and conserving millions is so great as to be almost beyond human estimate.

Let it not be forgotten that China, for a thousand years, has made possible the support of hundreds of millions of educated and refined people by the agency of internal canals and waterways.

GEORGE L. MILLER.

Omaha, Neb., Feb. 20, 1900.

THE SHIP SUBSIDY.

Last Speech of John M. Forbes on the Ship Subsidy Question.

"Fifty years ago Great Britain was protecting her shipbuilders, not so much by national legislation as by permitting a system of guilds which undertook to regulate not only the rates of wages paid for work on ships, but the number of apprentices a shipbuilder might use, and every other detail of his business, and of course endeavored by combination to fix the selling price of vessels. American shipbuilders were free and unprotected, and their maritime genius, exercised freely, enabled them, in spite of high rates of interest and high prices of iron and hemp, to lead the world in foreign commerce, carrying English goods from England to the East, covering the Eastern seas with their flags, and doing absolutely the whole packet business between England and America: so that nobody, however bigoted his admiration of the mother country, ever dreamed of trusting himself to any but an American packet ship on the Atlantic. Steam, and later iron, helped to change the condition of shipbuilding; but while emancipation from guilds and other paternal restrictions has brought the British islands up in the scale, our fatal hallucination in regard to protection has weighed around our necks and landed us on the same shoals from which our competitors had escaped. The war, with its Confederate cruisers, formed one element, but the pervading influence of the Goddess of Protection has been the continuing cause of our downward career, and now the costly experiment of bounties and subsidies will be urged, and perhaps accepted, by those patriots who wish to keep our taxes high, before we can emerge from the dead sea in which we have become embayed.

"The laws of trade are immutable, and so long as our people set them at