



BEAUTIFUL AND ATTRACTIVE ROADSIDES

By FRANK C. PERKINS.

The accompanying illustration shows an attractive roadside and indicate the imperative demand for expert supervision of planting and forestry along highways. A. D. Taylor, Professor of Landscape Architecture of the Ohio State University, points out that there is more to the highway question than is dreamed of in the philosophy of good road enthusiasts. Questions of pure utility relating to highways, have received a tremendous amount of attention, but America has not yet commenced to do the things that it certainly will do in the control of vegetation and appearances along highways.

It is held that frequently the investment that pays the highest returns in dollars and cents is the one which is, in some respects, the most highly sentimental. This is particularly true of those investments that concern appearances. An inter-urban route of auto travel that becomes noted for the stately trees or attractive shrubbery along the way will have three times the traffic that is found on a road of equal utility, but without scenic interest.

It is maintained by this landscape architect that people make land values, particularly people that seek out a locality to admire it. There is nothing new in the idea. Paving materials are continually being chosen on grounds of appearance. Urban real estate is vended on the basis of beauty. The only excuse for dwelling on the point at such length is the fact that in suburban road development we seem to have left the question of appearance entirely out of calculation, or else consigned it to the mercies of chance.

It is held that in spite of the fact that wonderful examples exist in many parts of the world, and that our attention is called to the desirability of entering upon a program of beautification repeatedly, two broad problems present themselves; first to plant trees where the roadside is barren; second to thin out the over-dense foliage found where roads are cut through forests. Each is the same in the sense that it is an effort to combat monotony and introduce variety. Taking the barren roadside first, there are several arguments for the planting of trees. One of the most is that of shade for the traveller; a second is found in the sheer attraction that it lends, particularly the air of established permanence that a shaded road has in contrast with a barren road. The former conveys the impression of a main highway, whether it is or not. The latter might have been opened last year, so far the eye can tell, and it conveys the impression of a by-road. Against this there are the occasional complaints of farmers that trees rob the soil near the road. Admitting the possibility that the effective acreage of a farm may be slightly reduced in this way, it is believed that the benefit usually overbalances the loss, even from the standpoint of dollars and cents. There are few farms in America that are cultivated so intensively that this loss of productivity cannot be made up in other portions of the farm.

Prof. Taylor maintains that: "As we are combating monotony, warning must be issued against too regular and symmetrical a scheme of planting. A road-side with uni-

form trees planted at regular intervals is tiresome, if continued too great a distance. Skilled supervision of the work will result in effective grouping of trees, with suitable intervals to assist the perspective."

The treatment of dense wild foliage, he claims is largely that of making openings for the eye and eliminating the raw evidence of axmanship. Undergrowth must be controlled. Vistas must be opened through the trees. The question of safety is involved here. An abrupt turn in a woodland road means danger of collisions. Intelligent treatment of such a situation results either in the removal of trees and undergrowth at the turn, or cutting an opening through the trees, so that the roadway can be seen before the turn is actually reached. The use of shrubbery, both at the open roadside and in the more wooded effects, must not be overlooked. Viburnums, dogwoods, wild roses, thornbushes and sumach are native shrubs that can be secured for a few cents and are hard to kill. Imagine, for example, a sloping shaded roadside banked with dog-wood shrubs, all in bloom; an effect easily within the reach of thousands of land owners who will submit to a slight amount of trouble.

Attention is called by this landscape architect to the fact that another fit subject for a few elementary suggestions is the treatment of exposed earth surfaces, especially where cuts and fills have been made during construction. The bare angular cuts left by the steam shovel are unnecessary, unsightly and often a menace to the usefulness of the road. It would require only slight additional attention to round out some of the sharp angles in these cuts and give them a finish such as good workmen strive for in any other sort of mechanical task, but which the excavator seems to regard as non-essential. Then, by all means, cover the surface with foliage of some kind. If the slope and soil permit, a vigorous grass may be best, but this entails a certain amount of labor in cutting that cannot always be afforded. Shrubs take less subsequent attention, and can be grown on steeper inclines. One of the best and quickest methods to hide a bare space is to plant quick growing native vines, such as the wild honeysuckle or the Virginia creeper. Vines that give forth roots at the nodes are to be preferred.

It is held that this vegetable growth not only serves the purpose of beauty, but it preserves the shape of the bank when frost or rain might otherwise bring down large quantities of it, either upon the roadway itself, in case of a cut, or into the drainage ditch, in case of a fill.

Prof. Raylor disagrees with some of the exponents of his profession, who say that a road or path is, in a scenic sense, merely a necessary evil to be made as tolerable as it can be. He points out that there is an ancient wayfaring instinct in all of us, closely linked with our perceptions of beauty, which makes the road a subject of allurements. A road contains a vista and the vista is one of the simple scenic effects which will never cease to charm. Then, the mere possibility of rapid travel has its scenic value, for it means continual change and continual possibility or surprise."