

Good Roads and Prosperity

Good roads are the advance agents of prosperity. In any community they are unmistakable evidence of progressiveness and thrift. Their absence is a sure indication of economic lethargy and social dry-rot. It would not be hard to take a map of this country of ours, and, even in the corn belt of the middle West, to lay one's finger down on counties which, in developed wealth, enterprise, and public spirit, fall far below the standard of which the average American citizen is so proud. When these communities awake to realize their waste of golden opportunities—and especially when they come to know that, at a mere bagatelle of cost as compared with the advantages to be secured, concrete is the instrument that will unyoke from their necks the present heavy burden of their "mud tax"—then and then only will they attain that goal of prosperity to which Providence and their environment have destined them.

The total weight of farm products marketed in the United States each year amounts to about 313,000,000 tons. The cost of hauling this is about \$946,500,000. It has been estimated that \$60,000,000 of this could be saved each year if we had smooth, hard roads. Hon. Edward Burrough, president of the Board of Agriculture in New Jersey, is reported as saying that on a new stone road from Merchantville to Camden, his teams haul 85 to 100 baskets of potatoes, where formerly he hauled 25. One of our counties, writes A. C. Stone in "Better Roads," issued \$450,000 of 4 per cent. bonds, and put down 60 miles of stone road, averaging 16 feet wide; and though they pay taxes to meet the interest on those bonds, their tax rate is now lower than it was before the road was built. The increased value of property and enhanced return from products at lower expense for marketing, made the investment reasonable.

The farmer does not escape a heavy road tax, even if not one dollar is spent on public highways. The "mud tax" is heavier than that imposed by authorities, for it is paid in wear on his horses, his wagon, and harness; in wallowing through the highway with half a load; in wasting his time waiting for the sun to make it passable in the spring; in driving to town with a double team when one of the horses might be left at home to do farm work if the road to town were smooth and hard as it should be.

The difference between good and bad roads is often equivalent to the difference between profit and loss. Good roads have a money value to farmers, as well as a political and social value; and looking at them only from the "almighty dollar" side, they are found to pay handsome dividends each year. This has been well proven by Prof. W. C. Latta, of Purdue University, who, a few years ago, collected from the farmers of Indiana some important information on the subject of the increased value of land in the State, due to good roads. He sent out letters, and received reports from many farmers, some of whom live on good roads once bad, and others on roads still bad. From these reports he computed statistics showing that the difference between good and bad roads amounts to 78 cents an acre annually on the farms. Apply this amount to the entire State, 36,350 square miles; or 23,264,000 acres, and we have the sum of \$18,145,920. From the answers received, Prof. Latta also drew the following conclusions:

1. The average estimated increase in the selling price of land due to existing highways is \$6.48 per acre.

2. The estimated average increase per acre that would result from improving all the public roads in a community of country is \$9.

That the above estimate of Prof. Latta with regard to the increased value of the land is not excessive, writes Mr. Stone, may be shown from other States. The farmers of Canandaigua County, N. Y., who have themselves built a number of miles of hard roads at a cost of \$1.50 per acre, find that their land has increased in value \$20 to \$30 per acre. In New Jersey, where one of the road commissioners of the State has collected many opinions from the farmers living in the neighborhood of roads lately improved, all state that they would not go back to the old roads under any conditions. One of them, voicing the popular sentiment, says: "I would not sell my farm and accept another worth \$7,000 as a gift, and be obliged to live on it two miles from a macadam road. No farmer in the neighborhood would buy a farm not located on such a road. Now that they have improved roads, all want them."

A lesson on the value of road improvement might be learned from the great railway managers who are spending millions upon millions of dollars, not in building new railways, but in improving old ones. Take for example the Cincinnati division of the Big Four Railway between Indianapolis and Cincinnati, where two millions of dollars have been spent in the last three years in eliminating curves, reducing grades, and improving the roadbed by making more solid embankments and laying heavier rails. Why was this done? Not simply that the traveller may ride with a little more comfort than before, but mainly that a given amount of power shall be subject to less strain and shock than had to be borne when the road was in the old condition. If a single railway management finds that it pays to spend millions in making the best road that they can build, why will not the same reasoning hold good for the people in connection with the improvement of a wagon road?

During the last decade, our vehicles for rapid country travel have become more numerous and of an entirely different style from that they were twenty years ago. Almost every farmer now owns his own buggy and carriage. The bicycle and automobile have come to stay. Automobiles in communities where there are improved roads are more common than buggies. The farmer is tired of taking his buggy rides in a "jolt wagon," and is demanding the modern conveyance, and will have it. The twentieth century has brought the rural mail carrier, who now travels in every county.

Aside from the "almighty dollar" side of the road question, is there not another side of the question that appeals to the finer nature of the American farmer? There is no doubt, and history proves it, that good roads are the chief accompaniment of an advancing civilization. The American farmer is no longer a "drudge." He is a business man. He lives for the pleasure he gets out of life. He demands that the mail be sent to his door. He has demanded that his children have a good education, equal to that which can be had in the city. In the more advanced communities, he is demanding that his roads be improved; and they are improving them. He is realizing that time and pleasure are the most valuable possessions given to man on earth. It is because of this realization that he is demanding the rural mail carrier, his school, improved roads, and the automobile. Cement World.