

GOOD ROADS AND THE FARMER

DISCUSSED BY HON. W. W. FINLEY, OF THE SOUTHERN RAILWAY, IN A SPEECH AT RICHMOND NOV. 20, 1911.

In considering the matter of highway improvement under the topic assigned to me—"Good Roads and the Farmer"—we are not taking a narrow view of the subject, for we are all directly and vitally interested in the development of agriculture in the United States.

We must rely upon the farm for by far the greater part of our food supply and for most of the materials for clothing. We no longer have vast areas of unoccupied farm lands in the west. The constant growth of our cities and towns results in a steady increase in the demand for everything produced on the farm. This increased demand must be supplied, to a greater extent than ever before, by increasing the average production per acre and bringing under cultivation or devoting to pasturage lands in our older states that are now lying idle. The problem of increasing the productiveness of our soils is being successfully solved by our progressive farmers, aided by scientific experts of the United States Agricultural Department, the State Department of Agriculture, and our Agricultural Colleges. There has been more real agricultural progress in the generation in which we are living than in any other period of equal duration since the dawn of history. This is to the advantage of those of us who live in cities and towns as well as of the farmers, and our self-interest impels us to support every movement tending to economy in farm operations and to larger agricultural production, for it is only by these means that the profitableness of farm operations can be maintained and increased without, at the same time, unduly advancing the prices which we must pay. Not the least important of the factors tending to bring about this condition will be improved country highways. They directly and materially reduce the cost of haulage, enable farmers to market their products more advantageously, and, by adding to the attractiveness of country life, will tend to check the flow of population into the cities and

towns and accelerate the moment "back to the farm."

Bearing in mind our universal dependence upon the farmer and the importance of good country highways as a factor in agricultural development, I believe we should, at this time, look upon the road improvement problem as one primarily concerning the farmer. His interest should be recognized in the formulation of all plans for the construction, maintenance, and regulation of the country highway. More especially this should apply to the selection of the roads which are to be first improved.

We have in the United States about 2,200,000 miles of country highways, of which only about 200,000 miles had been improved in 1909, the latest year for which complete figures are available, leaving approximately 2,000,000 miles unimproved. Hon. L. W. Page, Director of the Office of Public Roads in the United States Department of Agriculture, and the honored President of the American Association for Highway Improvement, has kindly supplied me with detailed data as to the progress of road improvement in the counties traversed by the lines of the Southern Railway Company. His figures show that these counties contain a total of 176,725 miles of country roads. Of this total, 10,321 miles, or 5.84 per cent, had been improved in 1904. In 1909, 15,298 miles, or 8.65 per cent, had been improved. In 1904, the road expenditures in these counties amounted to \$5,749,829. In the current calendar year, they will amount to approximately \$11,500,000. Assuming that the mileage improved since 1909 has been as great as that improved from 1904 to 1909, there are still about 150,000 miles of unimproved country roads in those counties. Similar conditions are found in many other parts of the United States, and it is obvious that the task before us is so great that all of the unimproved road can not be improved at once. Each community must decide which of its roads shall have attention first. Broadly speaking, country

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highways may be divided into two general classes—those which may be denominated trunk lines, running for long distances and connecting the cities and towns along their routes, and those which radiate from a market town or shipping station. The first of these classes—the trunk line highways—afford ideal routes for tourists. There are some localities, especially those frequented by tourists, where the construction of trunk line highways of this class is highly desirable and their improvement necessarily benefits the farmers adjacent to them. But the risk, however, of seeming to be actuated by the interest of the railways, I have no hesitation in saying that, if the greatest good is to be done to the greatest number, the farmer is more interested in the improvement of the roads of the second class which I have mentioned—those radiating from a market town or shipping station. By giving attention, first, to those parts of these roads immediately adjacent to the

towns and shipping stations and extending improvements out into the county year after year as funds may become available, entire regions will, in time, be traversed by networks of good roads. Then, by connecting up adjoining systems of these radiating, trunk lines and through roads for tourists will ultimately be formed.

The improvement of these radiating roads will be beneficial not only to the farmer, but also to a large proportion of the dwellers in cities and towns. They will enlarge the trade of retail merchants, facilitate the work of rural mail carriers, and extend the limits within which local newspapers can be circulated on the day of publication.

Manufacturers and users of automobiles have given a great impetus to the movement for the improvement of the country highways of the United States. By devoting their time and money to this work, they have earned the gratitude of the American people, and I believe that, in considering plans for road improvement, their interests should be considered, as well as the paramount interests of the farmer.

There has been for years an increasing demand for these vehicles from residents of cities who use them.

The extent to which this has grown is shown by statistics compiled by the United States Census Bureau for the year 1909, showing that in that year a total of 127,289 automobiles, valued at \$165,115,100, were manufactured, as compared with 22,830, valued at \$24,630,400, in 1904, an increase of 485 per cent. in the annual number manufactured in five years, while in the same period there was a decrease of 12 per cent. in the number of carriages manufactured in the United States. It may be that, in view of the large extent to which passenger automobiles are now used in cities and towns, a large proportion of the demand in this field in the near future will be for replacement and for improved models. We find many of the manufacturers now giving increased attention to the development of efficient motor trucks, wagons, fire engines, ambulances, and patrol wagons, and these vehicles are rapidly displacing those drawn by horses in our city streets.

Motor vehicles and traction engines are already used to a considerable extent by farmers in some localities. Looking back over the comparatively few years since the establishment of the industry and noting the improvements that have been made in the motors and the large numbers of special designs of vehicles that have been produced we may feel sure that the manufacturers will meet the growing demand of the farmers by supplying whatever special types may be required. As an illustration of the way in which practical farmers are looking at this matter, I may mention that, within the past week, a man who contemplates buying a large farm in a region traversed by the Southern Railway told a representative of our Company that he was contemplating a location about fifteen miles back from a railway station. He said that the distance made no difference to him as the road was good and he proposed to do all of his hauling with a motor truck. What this farmer proposes to do will be done by many other farmers as the country highways are improved, and I have no doubt that the annual addition to our good road mileage will result in corresponding to our increases in the agricultural use of motor vehicles.

Therefore, I do not believe that in advocating the improvement of radiating roads rather

than of trunk line highways, I am opposing the ultimate interests of the users and manufacturers of motor vehicles. In fact I believe that, in the near future, the manufacturers must look to our farmers for their largest opportunity for the extension of their sales.

I believe, Mr. Chairman, that the difficulties in the way of highway improvement in the United States some times seem to be greater than they really are.

When we look at the work in its nation-wide entirety and think of our two million miles of unimproved roads, the task ahead of us seems to be so great as to be almost impossible of accomplishment, but the good roads problem, while it is national in a sense, can be solved only by the solution of the vast number of local problems which go to make it up. The immense task involved in dealing with two miles of roads resolves itself into a large number of relatively small tasks, no one of which is impossible of accomplishment.

The total highway mileage classed as unimproved includes, of course, a large number of roads which are so little used that their improvement can be postponed almost indefinitely. It includes other roads which can be maintained in a passible condition at relatively little cost on which there is no immediate necessity for making expensive improvements. Taking these conditions into consideration and beginning first with the radiating roads to which I have referred, I believe that it will be possible for us, within relatively a few years, to have a system of improved country highways in the United States which will be of almost incalculable benefit to our farmers, and that we shall all share from the advantages of the higher agricultural development which will follow.

Within the past few years a large amount of educational work as to the advantages of good roads has been carried on in the United States. This has been participated in by the Good Roads Office of the United States Department of Agriculture, by the several states, the newspapers and the railways. The railway company which I have the honor to represent has contributed to this educational campaign by the running of good roads trains over its lines, by the distribution of literature, and by encouraging the organization of good roads associations in the territory which it traverses. As a result of this work it is no longer necessary to talk to the American people about the advantages of good roads. What is now needed is to direct the public sentiment in favor of their construction along the most intelligent lines by supplying helpful advice and information.

This is one of the objects of the American Association for highway improvement, under the auspices of which this congress is being held. We can all contribute to this work, each in accordance with his opportunities, and I believe that by doing so we will perform a high public service of benefit primarily to the farmer and, in the end, to all of our people.

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Attorney Gilbert T. Stephenson, of Winston-Salem, spent Friday night here attending to some professional business.

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Snow Hill, 1st Sunday at 3 p. m.
Danbury, 1st Sunday at 7 p. m.
Davis' Chapel, 2nd Sunday at 11 a. m.
Mt. Carmel, Saturday night before 2nd Sunday and 5th Sundays at 11 a. m.
Delta, 2nd Sunday at 3 p. m.
Danbury, 3rd Sunday at 11 a. m.
Vade Mecum, 3rd Sunday at 3 p. m.
Union Hill, 3rd Sunday at 7 p. m.
Sandy Ridge, 4th Sunday at 11 a. m.
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