IN INTEREST OF GOOD ROADS

Mr. J. B. Von Canon Makes Valuable Suggestions in The Observer

I HAVE been very much interested in the good roads movement in our good old North State ever since Mecklenburg and a few other counties began the improvement of their public highways, and have watched closely the various stages of progress made throughout the State. Now, to the close observer, it is very plain that there has been an immense amount of money spent, and lots of roads built which have proved disappointing, because the roads so soon went to the bad or cost too much to keep them under repair, and I will say now that any road is an absolute failure as a good road, in the full sense of the word, which you cannot perpetuate at a nominal cost of maintenance. What was the trouble? Too often the road was built and left to take care of itself, and roads will not do that any more than a child. They have to be cared for and the younger or newer they are the closer the care must be. But that is not the worst trouble. The main trouble is in the way we use our roads. Instead of using them as we do other things that we consider of value, with a view to the preserving and improvement of them, we use them as though they were an evil and something that ought to be destroyed the quickest way possible. It is no wonder we should have a kind of spite at some of the roads we have, but we use the same gun on our good roads that we do on our bad ones, only loading with a double or triple charge. Why not look upon our roads as a valuable asset and as something worth taking care of as we do our farms, horses, cattle, dogs, etc.? If a man abuses his horse you prosecute him for it and say he had no right to abuse his stock; that is right even if the horse is his own, but, the same man can abuse the roads to his heart's content and we cannot say to him don't do that, if we do, he will say that this is a free country and the roads are public property and as much mine as yours. Now if we can make laws to prohibit the abuse of individual property why cannot we make laws to prohibit the abuse of public property? I say we can, and especially so when it does not operate to hinder any one from enjoying the same benefit, but instead will actually result in giving far more.

I have been watching very closely the proceedings of the present General Assembly to see if they were going to try to do anything to relieve us of the greatest destroyer of good roads, and give us instead a maker of good roads, viz: wide-tired wagons to take the place of the present narrow tire which is in general use. I wonder why the people use them? That is plain enough, habit; Jones uses a narrow tired wagon because Smith does, and Smith because Brown, and Brown because some one makes them

and somebody sells them and will not furnish you anything else without a special order and an unreasonable extra price, and in this way the old habit of using narrow tires has been continued since the first settlers of America. At that time such wagons were very reasonable, iron to make the tires was costly and very hard to get, all roads new and full of stumps, 1,000 pounds being considered a big two-horse load, and all taken into consideration the narrow-tired wagon was all right then, but conditions have changed since this country was first settled; they used then the most crude implements of every kind, now we use, generally speaking, the most modern machinery except the wagon, which as a rule is built on the very same plan that it was 100 years ago. The wagon at that time was in keeping with other things, but other things have been improved to meet the demands of the times.

Now about the narrow-tired wagon. If we want bad roads made worse and good roads made bad we have the very thing in operation, the narrow tire, and if that is what we want let us quit spending the people's good money, pretending that we are "red hot" for good roads, and we who have wide-tired wagons get narrow ones, get out on the roads when the ground is too wet to plow, and if there happens to be a stretch of road to get on which has been built at a cost of $400 to $800 per mile, hit that, loaded with 2,000 feet of rough lumber weighing 6,000 pounds on a one and a half inch tire, make four loads a day with six or eight teams, and others follow with cross-ties and wood with the same kind of wagons. Now if this does not get this stretch of road it will almost. But wait until the corn is "laid by" and the roads get good and dry, try the same thing over, with the auto to fan off what the heavy load on so small a base grinds to powder, and you have accomplished the destruction of the road, then "cuss" the man who built it and say it was no good. What is really the trouble? It was not that the road was no good, it was all right. Take the same road, same wagons, except with tires in proportion to the load, say two-inch for 1,000 pounds, two and a half-inch for 1,500 pounds, three-inch for 2,000 pounds, three and a half-inch for 3,000 pounds, and four-inch for over that, same autos and everything, and instead of your road going to pieces it will have gotten better for the using. I have seen this condition, or nearly so at various times and places first mentioned. Some accuse the autos and say they are ruining the roads, while others will say the road is no good.

We have in Mineral Springs and McNeills Townships, Moore County, roads that were built at a cost of $300 per mile five years ago and maintained since at a cost of not over $5 per mile per year and today are in perfect condition. Do we have the automobiles? I should say so. Pinehurst and Southern Pines, two of the largest and most popular Winter resorts in the South with scores of the heaviest of touring cars on our roads