The Register April 29th 1914 39

Economic Importance of Roads.

There were few things so wasteful as a bad road. It was a constant drain upon the resources of a country, and a continuous tax upon the users of it. An effort was being made in South Australia to concentrate control in order to make for better thoroughfares, and in that patriotic movement the Good Roads Association was proving helpful. Increased power had been conferred upon the Government Roads and Bridges Department, and it was hoped that the lost art of roadmaking in this State would be regained, and that good roads would be made an dthen maintained. It often cost more to move produce from the farm to a railway than the combined railway and ocean transit charges, and it was because that fact was recognised as economically wasteful that there was a world-wide movement in favor of improved highways.

Harbors and Ocean Freights.

The problem of transportation was by no means finally solved, as far as trade and commerce were concerned, when produce had been moved at a minimum of cost from the most distant inland point to the seaboard. Oversea carriage was a prime factor to the producer, trader, and country of origin, since all surplus produce over home requirements had to meet world-wide competition. Although at a disadvantage in the matter of distance from European consuming centres, Australia had been well served on the whole by shipowners. Rates of freight compared favorably with shipping charges against other exporting countries, and no exception could be taken to the ready and continuous response for larger and faster steamers. It was just at that point that State enterprise had failed to anticipate the sudden demands for an expanding trade and the narrowing margin of profit on oversea shipments due to increasing charges and keener competition in the markets of the world. Some steamers trading to Australia had reached the maximum depth of the majority of shipping ports, and freights were more and more being regulated by the carrying capacity in a single bottom, which in turn was governed by draught. There were only two Australian harbors where there was the minimum depth of 40 ft. recommended by the Dominions Royal Commission. When it was appreciated that an additional draught of 3 ft. to a given steamer (the P. & O. Moldavia, for example) would increase that vessel's freight-earning capacity by 66 per cent. it would be easy to realise how vitally was the problem of oversea transportation affected by the policy of the various Australian harbor authorities. The minimum depth of Australian ports would in the near future be a growing factor in the development of Australian commerce.

Conclusion.

On a per capita basis Australians could invite comparison with any other producers or traders in the world. Productions from all industries in 1911 reached the fine total of £188,745,000, equal to £42 0/8 per inhabitant. Australia's combined trade—export and imports—equalled £33 17/2 per head of population, and there would have to be a ready response to the growing demands for cheap methods of transportation if this high standard was to be maintained. Rural expansion, which meant the development of natural resources, would be regulated from time to time by the facilities provided for reaching the final market. There was no reason why Australia should not supply the needs of her own people, and supply them well, too, and then help to keep full the cupboards of other countries. There were vast areas in the Commonwealth of no productive value to-day simply because of the absence of modern means of carriage to the seaboard. Australians should unite in a patriotic effort to inaugurate an era of improved transportation embracing increased efficiency in railway management, full use of inland waterways, and a "good roads" movement in order to encourage the occupation of waste places of the continent and so multiply production, and add to the volume of trade and commerce. Problems of transportation not only had a close relationship to trade and commerce and the general material concerns of the country, but they affected national life in all its numerous interests. They owed much to the pioneers who had so well and truly laid the foundations of their already great Commonwealth, but upon this and succeeding generations devolved the sacred duty of courageously facing the daily obligations of making this continent the home of a prosperous and progressive people. By such means and such means only would Australia occupy its rightful place as the economic centre of the Pacific—the dominating commercial power of southern seas.

The address was listened to most attentively throughout. The speaker's sentiments were frequently applauded, and at the conclusion he was warmly thanked for a highly instructive and entertaining lec-

THE JOSEPH FISHER LECTURE.

TRANSPORTATION, TRADE, AND COMMERCE.

The Hon. D. J. Gordon, M.L.C., was selected to deliver the Joseph Fisher lecture on commerce this year. It was given in the Prince of Wales Theatre of the Adelaide University on Tuesday evening, before a large audience. Mr. J. R. Fowler, M.A. (President of the University Society of Commerce) occupied the chair.

Mr. Gordon chose for his subject "Problems of transportation, and their relations to Australian trade and commerce." He dealt with the economic influence of modern methods of carriage, the railways systems, grades and gauges, inland waterways, road and harbours, and showed how those things had an influence on national life.

—Problem of Civilization.—

Mr. Gordon stated that the problem of transportation was the problem of civilization. National progress rested upon production—the full use of natural resources—and production and distribution determined trade and commerce, and profitable business ultimately regulated wages and governed the standard of living. The cost of carriage was the true commerciail measure of distance.

—Australia as a Wealth Producer.—

Australia was essentially a producing country. Public credit has been pledged for money to build railways and roads, and make harbours in order to facilitate the development of resources and shipment of products. The State, having a monopoly of railway carriage in Australia, was the chief arbiter in breaking down distance from the point of production. The producer could not live in remote parts unless modern channels of communiation were provided. The commercial prosperity of Australia could not continue on its present level without increased attention being devoted to the economic influence of improved land and water carriage.

—Object Lessons.—

The future of Australia depended upon the efficiency of its means of transportation and the wise use of natural outlets. The development of transportation systems and lines of communication preceded and made possible the marvellous industrial expansion of the United States. A large proportion of the population there lived within half a dozen miles of a railway. Railway speeds and weights had been increased, and the freight and passenger rates had steadily fallen. In their bold policy of transcontinental railways the United States and Canada had provided a fine object lesson for Australian statesemen to emulate. Australia could never be regarded as a self-contained Commonwealth until south was linked up with north, and east was bound by ribbons of steel to west. The Federal Royal Commission had pointed out that the isolation of the Territory was reflected in the exceedingly high rates of inland carriage. Without transportation the hinterland of Australia must continue to be unproductive and unprofitable—an economic wasteful The accepted policy of Germany towards transportation problems had been officially stated in the following terms:—"Any means whereby the distances which separate the economic centres of the country from one another can be diminished must be welcomed.

—Australian Railways.—

Of the total public debt of Australia more than one-half was represented in its 17,000 miles of railway. The railways alone —not to mention other public utilities—represent more than adequate security to Australia's creditors. The average rate received by the railways in the United States for hauling a ton of freight one mile was .375d., in England 1.125d., and in South Australia it was .97d., and in New South Wales .88d., or more than double the rate in the United States, and slightly less than the English charge.

—Neglect of Geographical Outlets.—

It could be affirmed that in Australia production has kept ahead of the means of transportation, and that trade and commerce have suffered because of the absence of modern facilities of carriage on the one hand, and the congestion of traffic on the other, due to the crime of centralization. In some countries—notably the United States, Canada, and the Argentine—the policy had been for the railway to precede settlement. In Australia the practice generally had been to wait for country to be pioneered and proved before spending money on public utilities. The neglect of geographical outlets in Australia represented a daily enormous waste. The policy of centralization should be abandoned in favour of utilizing natural outlets, thus saving the cost of unnecessary haulage

—Curves, Grades, and Gauge.—

A constant source of anxiety to Australian railway managers and of cost to producers and traders and consumers were the curves, grades, and variety of gauges. In Australia a great deal was still sacrificed to cheapness in the initial stages of construction, with the result that the working expenses were out of proportion to earning capacity. No consideration of the problems of transportation and their relation to Australian trade and commerce would be complete without reference to the colossal national waste represented by the variety of gauges. The wisdom of the Federal Government of the day in adopting the 4 ft. 8½ in. as the gauge for Australia's Trans-Continental and main trunk railways had been the subject of much discussion in view of experiences in other countries and the strong opinions expressed by experts in favour of a broader track.

—Rivers as Highways of Commerce.—

In the Murray Australians possessed one of the largest rivers in the world, and with its tributaries the longest inland waterway system in King George's Dominions. It was not creditable to Australia that navigable streams of such magnitude should have been neglected for so many years. The examples of the national attitude of other countries towards inland waterways were quoted in order to support the policy of locking the Murray. It was a noteworthy fact that while in most countries private interests had opposed the development of inland waterways the chief antagonists in Australia of river carriage had been the managers of State-owned railways. It had been officially estimated that the Murray and its two main tributaries could be made permanently navigable at a cost of £3,000,000. Australians had not hesitated to pledge the national credit to the extent of £171,000,000 in order to provide 17,000 miles of railway, but the same people collectively hesitate to spend £3,000,000 to provide 3,000 miles of navigable rivers, and simultaneously to provide water for productive purposes.

—Economic Importance of Roads.—

There were few things so wasteful as a bad road. It was a constant drain upon the resources of a country, and a continuous tax upon the users of it. An effort was being made in South Australia to concentarte control in order to make for better thoroughfares. It often cost more to move produce from the farm to a railway than the combined railway and ocean transit charges, and it was because that fact was recognised as economically wasteful that there was a world-wide movement in favour of improved highways. This was not surprising in view of the rapid improvement in motor traction. There was a growing demand in America and Europe for transcontinental roads, national highways connecting States in order to facilitate passenger and goods traffic by motor power. That movement should be encouraged in Australia.

—Harbours and Ocean Freights.—

The problem of transportation was by no means finally solved, as far as trade and commerce are concerned, when produce had been moved at a minimum of cost from the most distant inland point to the seaboard. Oversea carriage was a prime factor to the producer, trader, and country of origin since all surplus produce over home requirements had to meet world-wide competition. Australia had been well served on the whole by shipowners. State enterprise had failed to anticipate the sudden demands of an expanding trade and the narrowing margin of profit on oversea shipments, due to the increasing charges and keener competition in the markets of the world. Some steamers trading to Australia had reached the maximum depth of the majority of shipping ports, and freights were being regulated by the carrying capacity in a single bottom, which in turn was governed by draught. The minimum depth of Australian ports would in the near future be a growing factor in the development of Australian commerce.

—Conclusion.—

On a per capita basis Australians could invite comparison with any other producers or traders in the world. There must be a ready response to the growing demand for cheap methods of transportation if this high standard was to be maintained. Australians should unite in a patriotic effort to inaugurate an era of improved transportation embracing increased efficiency in railway management, full use of inland waterways, and a "good-roads" movement in order to encourage the occupation of waste places of the continent, and so multiply production and add to the volume of trade and commerce. (Applause.)