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FOREWORD

Africa, with an area of 11,605,000 square miles, is the second largest continent in the world, but its road mileage (262,920 miles) is smaller than that of any other continent. Yet Africa is a rich rehouse of natural resources, and its development is exercising an important influence upon industry and commerce throughout the world. The vast distances to be covered and the inadequacy of rail facilities in many parts of Africa have emphasized the urgent need for good roads to accommodate the motor transportation which is already playing so important a part in the development of many areas.

The commercial importance of Africa is increasing rapidly, and American manufacturers are finding new markets there for their products. More roads will mean an expansion of these markets. Thus, the development of African highways is a subject of interest to every exporter to that part of the world.

The growing recognition of the need of highways is reflected in road construction programs in many parts of the continent. In Senegal, Senegal, the Ivory Coast, Fez, and other places whose names once meant little but tales of travel and adventure, the advent of the automobile has been followed by the provision of roads to accommodate the new traffic. A road which now links the Nile and the Congo is developing the Sudan and eastern Africa and making possible a regular motor mail service. Over this route a car can now be driven from Port Sudan on the Red Sea to the mouth of the Congo in 40 days. A 613-mile highway is projected from Alexandria to Luxor in the land of the Pharaohs. A highway is to be built to Timbaktu. All over Africa roads are being thrust into the angle, the desert, and the veldt, to expedite the movement of raw products and of men.

But the African roads movement is only in its initial stages. More roads are needed to tap the palm-oil resources in the interior of Liberia, to gain access to the store of natural resources in Ethiopia, and to solve kindred transportation problems in hundreds of other regions.

The matter of roads being directly related to the demand for automobiles, it is interesting to observe the growing demand for American automotive products during the few years for which figures are available. The United States exported to Africa in 1928 \$11,027,303 worth of automobiles and allied products, and \$10,551,658 worth in 1929. It is significant that even with small road mileage, there is in many countries of Africa a definite demand for motor vehicles. The development and improvement of highways obviously presages excellent opportunities for the sale of more American goods—not only automotive products but a wide range of other commodities.

The economic potentialities of the countries of Africa are great, but the extent to which these possibilities will be realized depends to no small degree on adequate transportation facilities. Most of Africa has witnessed only the beginning of road construction. At the present much good could be accomplished by extending the range of dirt and graveled roads—which types, of course, predominate. Highway traffic is still in the embryo, and the needs of the continent will, for the most part, be adequately served by low-cost roads, and improvements can be effected as funds become available.

The countries of Africa present such a wide variety of climate and topography, and their economic resources cover such a wide range of raw materials, that each country presents its own peculiar problems as to the types of roads most needed. It is obvious that roads suitable for northern Africa and the desert areas would not be adequate for the countries of central Africa, where there are heavy rainfalls and vast forests with dense tropical undergrowth. However, to these great undeveloped countries are now available the results of the experiences in road building in American and European countries through many years.

The main problems henceforth should be those of finance and administration. The demand for motor vehicles is becoming so insistent, even in the most backward countries of the world, that road development must proceed at a much more rapid rate than it has in the past, and by systematically planning for both present and future needs, African countries will be providing themselves with good systems of highways—the very basis of national prosperity.

The present brief survey of highway construction and finance in the various countries and possessions of Africa does not include the Union of South Africa, as the road system of that part of the continent has already been analyzed in Trade Promotion Series No. 70, *Motor Roads in South Africa*. The roads in some sections of Africa are not discussed to the extent that might be desired, but this is due to the lack of authentic data.

The automotive division of this bureau invites those interested in motor highways in various parts of the world to inquire for further information.

WILLIAM L. COOPER, *Director,*
Bureau of Foreign and Domestic Commerce.

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