

Mr. SANDS. That is our own fault. The supervisors are responsible, and they are indictable if they do not keep the roads in good repair. They are indictable if they do not keep them in good passable order.

Mr. DAVIS, of Washington. So far as my observation has gone, the public opinion in my county is decidedly averse to the election of supervisors. It is universally condemned in the county. I have been approached on the subject by intelligent farmers over and over again in Washington county, begging me if possible to get the Convention to change the system. They complain that their roads in every section of the county are miserably managed.

Mr. PURNELL resumed: I had not concluded my remarks. I merely yielded to the gentleman from Howard (Mr. Sands) supposing that he wished to ask me a question. So far from endangering the ratification or adoption of this Constitution by changing this system, I think such an argument cannot seriously prevail. I think that if I were to return to my constituents and say to them that I had voted to retain this provision in the Constitution for the election of road supervisors and all these subordinate officers, they would say to me very properly, we have no farther use for your services. You have misrepresented us.

With that view of the subject I could not under any circumstances advocate the amendment proposed by my friend from Washington county. I think really it is one of those questions of reform which addresses itself more directly to the sound discretion of this Convention than any other perhaps that may come before them. It is true those officers are of a subordinate character; yet they are no less important. There is nothing that conduces more to the prosperity of a county, than good roads. We cannot have good roads, I maintain, under the existing system. There must be a change. Whether we return to the old system of district overseers, or adopt any other of a more practical character, some change is necessary.

Then, regarding the experience of the past as being well founded, having been carried out practically in all its operation, and worked well, I should be in favor of restoring the appointment of these officers to the county commissioners. They are generally distributed over the county. They are cognizant of the wants and necessities of the county. They travel to and fro frequently, and they have a general supervision over the roads, and over the conduct of the officers. If it is deemed necessary to increase the number at any point, they can do so. If it is deemed necessary to curtail the expense, by employing a less number, they can do that. But under the present system there is a supervisor who receives thirteen or fourteen hundred dollars for doing nothing. That has prevailed, I am informed, to some extent. I do not know the fact of my own

knowledge, but I have heard the complaint frequently that the supervisor will go to a farmer and say, I want your hands such a day; it is your time to work on the road; and the farmer will say, I am very busy, I cannot spare them; what will you charge me to furnish me a substitute? The arrangement is made for one, two, three or four dollars, and the overseer pockets his three or four dollars, and the roads are not worked. I have understood that such has been the case. Instead of placing it in the power of any one to extort money under such false pretences, I say that there can be no practical road in a community where this practice obtains.

Mr. CHAMBERS I rise to give my testimony; not to offer an argument. I should be recreant to my duty as representative of my county if I did not take this occasion to say that the election of these officers has been productive of mischief and nothing else but mischief; especially with regard to the roads. The deterioration in the character of the roads has been such as would scarcely be believed by persons not cognizant of the fact. There is a general belief that there is an entire irresponsibility upon the subject. A popular man wants to make a few dollars; and without the slightest qualification he puts himself up as a candidate for election, and becomes road supervisor for the county, and farms out particular districts to Dick, Tom and Henry, nobody knows why or wherefore, but everybody knows that most of the roads are unfit for travel. My colleagues, I believe, can testify to the very same state of facts. And so far as I know, in the adjoining counties it is just as bad.

But I have other objections, upon principle, to this amendment. I believe it is not unknown to the history of these elections that some of the most important officers of the government have been swapped—in the midst of the river too—for an insignificant officer like a constable or road supervisor. I believe there is much more corruption practiced in electing a constable or a supervisor, than in electing a member of Congress or member of the court. This business of making exchanges, bartering at elections, is one, I think, of more serious consequence than is generally suspected. I go on principle as well as on experience in denouncing this system of electing these petty officers.

Something has been said about the motive of putting this into the Constitution. It is a most extraordinary idea that any man here should conceive it possible that a member of this body would deliberately have inserted in this Constitution a provision which in his conscience he did not think proper. I do not believe—I cannot believe there is such a man in this house. I should fear, on the contrary that there were some gentlemen who having incorporated one great fact, are willing to keep out things which might be useful lest it