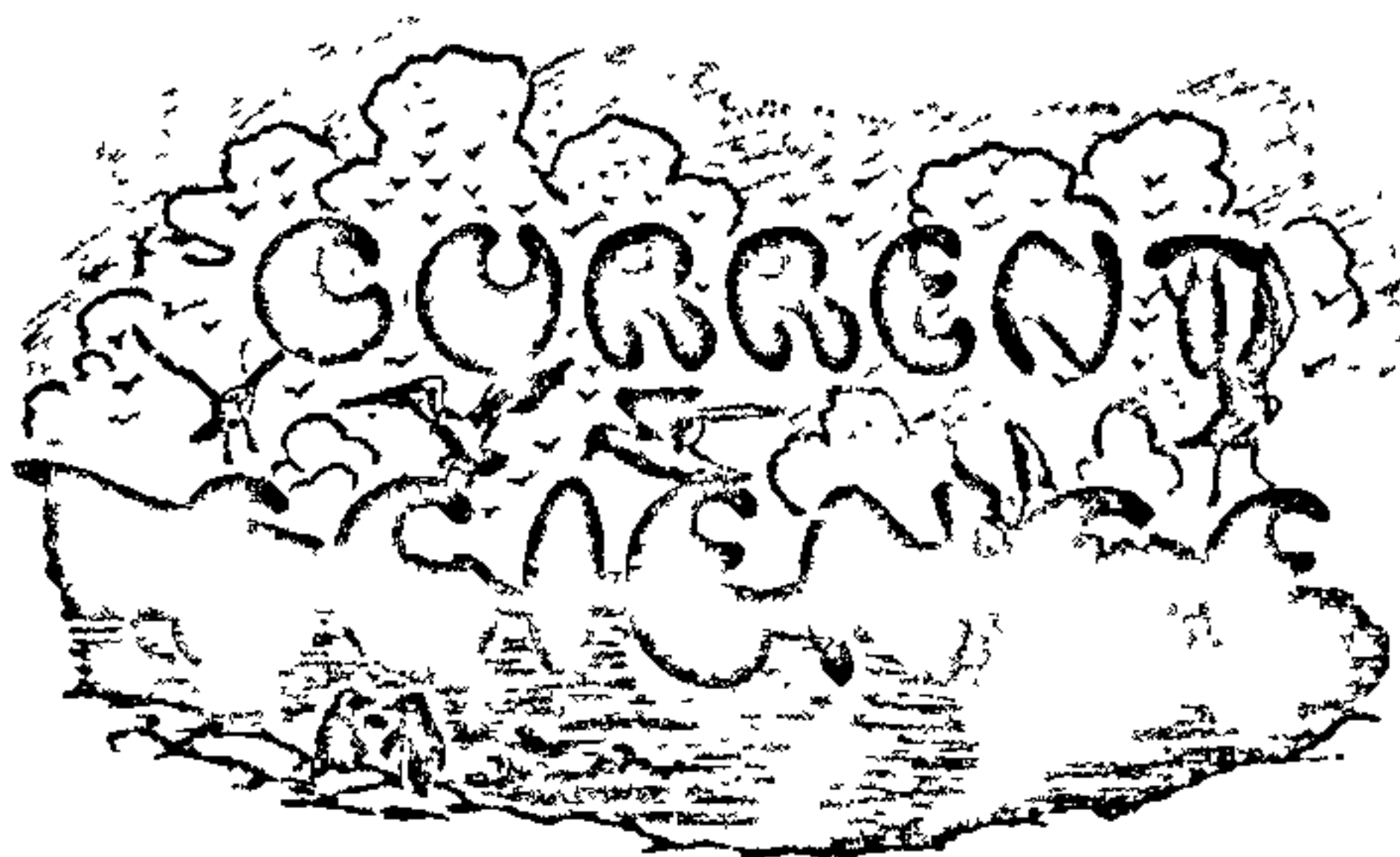


CURRENT SCIENCE—50 YEARS AGO



 Vol. II FEBRUARY 1934 p. 277.

The Statham Committee Report.*

The results of the enquiry into the present education system in Travancore are published in a skilfully compiled document, many of the observations and recommendations of which have a purely local interest. However, the chapter on Secondary Education is full of substance and flavour and, holding as this subject does the key-position in the framework of educational organisation, offers certain fundamental problems of far-reaching importance, which are well worth re-examination. Admittedly there is a certain amount of legitimate dissatisfaction and a large measure of criticism about the results achieved by this department and it is only natural that neither the University authorities nor the discerning public are happy over the annual output of imperfectly prepared material from the secondary schools. Several causes have tended to produce this unsatisfactory position and it seems to us that few of them could well have been avoided. Secondary Education in India is at the present moment passing through a critical transitional phase in its development and it will probably take a long time before it can fully regain its function of contributing to the moral and material progress of the country.

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The doctrine of democratisation of education which according to its exponents means "free education for

all," is at the root of the whole trouble. They would "open wide the sluices" and permit "the water of human life to flow under the bridge of education" without considering its purity and power to fertilise. The democratic ideal of education really implies that every child must, "in proportion to his aptitude and regardless of his parents' occupation", be provided with facilities for the attainment of the fullest measure of his intellectual and moral stature, but in practice the ideal actually imposes selection of candidates so that "the unfit may not block the way of the gifted and prevent us from offering to the latter a culture worthy of them." The school is certainly a democratic institution where "children of all origins mix and elbow each other on the same benches," but, while no one need be alarmed at mixing and elbowing, it must be admitted that at least for some time to come the selective effects which are expected of education cannot be realised. The children who come from homes where they have neither the proper spirit nor culture, do not possess that predisposition for learning which the more favoured ones bring to bear on their tasks and a class which presents intellectual gradients of a nature disturbing to the uniform progress of instruction cannot hope to reach such high standards of attainment as did schools a generation ago from which these impediments were comparatively absent. It may be expected to take at least three generations of secondary education before a generation of children can arise, possessing sufficiently wide and uniform intellectual equipment to profit by instruction in a manner satisfactory to the public and the university authorities. The majority of young men attending our high schools do not now possess the advantages of a cultured home, and they therefore suffer from the handicap of a meagre intellectual heritage. The so-called backward communities have to acquire enlightenment before they can impart it to their children and no amount of impatience and criticism can accelerate this rather slow psychological process. The general awakening of the masses to the benefits of education not as a reward in itself, but as a means of absorption into the professions and public service, has introduced into the class-room intellectual inequalities of a kind unknown to the generation of teachers now disappearing, and their successors are accused of not possessing that touch of alchemy which converts pewter into gold. It is true that the classroom should

* Report of the Travancore Education Committee, June 1933.

not recognise social distinctions but its obvious function is to discover and emphasise intellectual differences, for "democracy more than any other form of society needs an *élite*". The criticism against the lowering of standards really arises from the habit of applying the old yard-stick of efficiency to new and entirely different conditions, there has not yet been sufficient time for the large body of the intellectually backward pupils to acquire from their parents the necessary predisposition for an academic discipline. The setback in standards is a psychological phenomenon, inevitable under the existing circumstances.

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The reform of secondary education in India is attended by difficulties which are absent in other countries. Here a candidate failing in the matriculation examination acquires a social stigma, however capable he may otherwise be and however well-qualified for earning an honourable and independent livelihood. Because the government have placed a premium on university degrees as a qualifying test for admission to administrative posts which are supposed to carry with them social prestige and political power, communities hitherto apathetic to higher education, have discovered, under the stimulus of "Communal representation in the Services", a passion for the rewards which a literary education is expected to confer. This age-long apathy must necessarily impose a handicap on securing immediate academic distinctions on at least a majority of those who but for

communalism, would have been content to carry on and enrich the traditional pursuits of their fathers. We must seek and foster intelligence and scholarship wherever they may be found, but no efforts of education can create them where they do not exist and the money and energy devoted to producing them might more profitably be utilised in training the young men to professions for which they possess specific aptitudes. Perhaps the most serious difficulty confronting any rational reform of education is that within recent years it has come too much within the range of communal suspicions, which can only disappear after government withdraws recognition now accorded to University degrees.

We shall have to wait for administrative reforms to be introduced by the new constitution before we can formulate any schemes for reconstructing the system of secondary education and any proposals for educational reform that may be put forward even when the reconstructed government has been introduced must be of a tentative character, for India is an organism still in the process of becoming. A certain measure of national stability in the wider sphere of its functions is indispensable for the sound evolution of educational reforms the necessity for which will need to be adequately understood by the new legislature. Only a thorough conviction that a sound secondary education with a wide range of selective courses must form the backbone of the national well-being can bring effective means for overhauling the educational machinery slowly, wisely and efficiently.

ANNOUNCEMENT

ENVIRONMENTAL ASPECTS OF GEOLOGY

A seminar on 'Environmental Aspects of Geology' jointly organised by the Centre for Earth Science Studies, Trivandrum and the Geological Society of India, as part of the Silver Jubilee celebration of the Society, will be held at Trivandrum in November 1984. The Seminar will cover the following aspects: (1) Minerals for the future, enrichment studies and feasibility of recycling; (2) Water pollution and water resource management; (3) Energy resources—Coal, petroleum, atomic minerals and geothermal energy; (4) Environmental geological mapping; (5) Natural geo-

logical hazards—prediction and assessments; (6) Impact of human interference on physical environments; (7) Human and plant diseases *vis-a-vis* minerals and trace elements; and (8) Mapping and environmental problems.

Those desirous of participating in the seminar are requested to get in touch with the convenor, Dr K. K. Ramachandran, Environmental Sciences Group, Centre for Earth Science Studies, P.B. No. 2235, Sasthamangalam, Trivandrum 695 010, Kerala, for further details.
