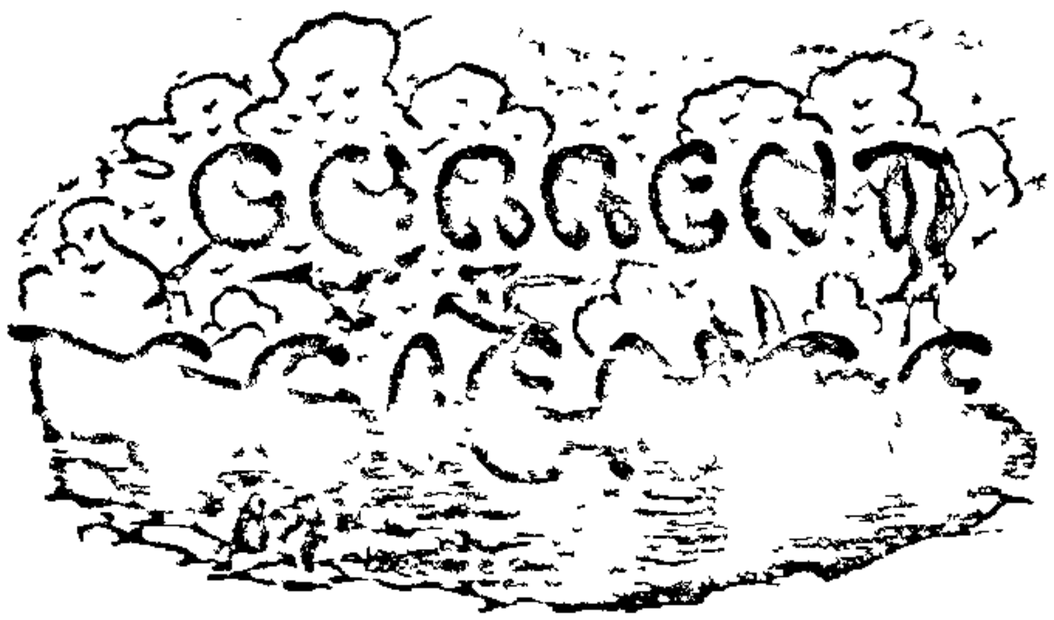
CURRENT SCIENCE—50 YEARS AGO



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SCIENCE NEWS

IMPERIAL Council of Agriculture:—The Council will start a marketing section for which the Government of India will give an annual subsidy of Rs. 1,00,000 for a period of three years. Mr. Livingstone of the British Marketing Board has been appointed Marketing Officer and he is expected to join duty early. In co-operation with the provincial marketing officers and in consultation with the trade, it is proposed to arrive at a national grade of standards for such commodities as wheat, rice and oil-seeds. It is also proposed to organise marketing surveys. The possibility of establishing 'exchanges' at the principal wholesale markets including arrangements for arbitration on quality based on accepted national standards will also be examined by the officer.

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Pasteur Institute of India, Kasauli:—The thirty-second annual report of the Institute, recently issued, records several important advances achieved in the treatment of rabies. As a result of researches covering a long period, it has been shown that large doses of vaccine were superior to small doses in preventing rabies and that the Paris strain of rabies fixed virus was superior to the Indian strain in antigenic value. To give practical application to these results during 1932, the Paris virus alone was used in manufacturing vaccine, and a higher average dose was administered than had previously been in use. As a result of these measures the total number of deaths was 27 per cent, less than in any previous year. The percentage of death rate was as low as 0.57.

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Campaign against Locust Pest:—Consequent to his discovery that adult locusts and particularly those on the wing fell speedy victims to a spray of finely ground sodium arsenite, Mr. H. H. King, formerly chief entomologist to the Sudan Government, will soon start a mass attack on locust swarms in northern Rhodesia. The experiment will be watched with great interest, particularly because the usual methods of combating locusts are mostly confined to their egg and hopper stages but so far no method of tackling the locusts in the winged stage is available. The problem is of interest to India and if Mr. King's experiment proves successful and safe a great advance would have been achieved in our methods of combating this ancient enemy of the agriculturist. Mr. King's plan of campaign is to fly to and fro across the line of advance of the swarms of locusts and fill the air with fine poison dust discharged from special blowers mounted on the wings of the machines. In view of the fact that the natural dissipation of the cloud reduces in a short time the density of the poison dust to a point when its effects are no longer poisonous, it is unlikely that any danger will arise to human beings, crops and livestock.

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Lemuria—the lost continent:—Indian geologists have long been familiar with the evidences in favour of the existence of an extensive southern continent known as the Lemuria during the Mesozoic era. Chiefly on the basis of palæontological studies of the Mesozoic rocks in the now widely separated areas like India, Africa, Australia and South America, geologists have concluded that in those remote times, an unbroken and continuous land connection existed between these distant regions across what is now the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. While this conclusion has been generally recognised, there has been a difference of opinion among geologists regarding the way in which this continent broke up and led to the modern conditions of distribution of land and water. The older idea has been that this land area broke up as a result of the submergence of large portions under-

neath the sea; in other words, that the breaking up was effected by the foundering or sinking of the intervening portions of the continent. More recently several geologists who have been impressed by Wegener's theory of Continental Drift seek to explain the breaking up of the Lemurian continent in accordance with this theory, and postulate that the existing continents were grouped together during the Carboniferous period as one continuous land mass in apposition to South Africa and that subsequently, this continuous land mass was fractured, with drifting apart of the fragments to form the present continents. There has been considerable discussion regarding the relative merits of these two hypotheses, and it has now been recognised that the final solution of this problem must await further researches. Speaking on this subject in his presidential address to the Indian Science Congress at Patna in January 1933, Dr. Fermor referred to the forthcoming Murray Expedition led by Col. Seymour-Sewell and said that, if during this expedition rock specimens in any quantity can be secured from the bottom of the ocean, we would get some "evidence helpful to the determination of whether India has been separated from Africa by the foundering of the intervening land or by drifting apart."

In the light of this, it is very gratifying to read the announcement made in the press only a few days back that this expedition has been able to collect extensive samples of rock material from depths of 2–5 miles below the surface in both the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea. It is expected that an intensive study of this material, which will shortly be undertaken at Cambridge, will make it possible to draw the map of a large part of the world as it existed millions of years ago in the days of the Lemurian continent. One of the important achievements of the Expedition is the discovery of "a submarine mountain range rising 10,000 feet from the ocean floor, whose summit is yet 1,000 feet below the surface between Socotra and Sychelles." So far as the breaking up of the Lemurian continent is concerned, the observations recorded during this Expedition seem definitely to support the older idea of the foundering of the land masses as against the theory of continental drift. Geologists all over India, will be eagerly looking forward to a fuller and more comprehensive account of the results of the Expedition, which will no doubt be published in the near future.

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Ring-Dykes in India:—Subsequent to the publication of the note in *Current Science* (**2**, No. 7, p. 246) on the occurrence of a ring-dyke near Hulikere, Mandya Taluk, by Mr. M. R. Krishnamurthi Rao and others wherein the authors had claimed that this ring-dyke was the second example of its kind in India, Mr. A. L. Coulson of the Geological Survey of India has written to us drawing attention to the occurrence of another ring-dyke which he has described from Mundwara in Sirohi State, Rajaputana.

NEWS

SPACE STATION: 'A WASTE OF MONEY?'

. . ."In comments released by Stanford U., three scientists roundly opposed the station. There are James van Allen, professor of physics at the State U., of Iowa and the man who discovered the radiation belts surrounding the Earth, Thomas Gold, professor of astronomy, Corneil U., and von R. Eshleman, director, Stanford's Ctr. for Radio Astronomy. 'The various applications of manned vehicles are grossly overstressed' said van Allen. He called the work 'enormously inefficient'. Gold said NASA wanted to keep manned space flights going because they attracted public attention. 'But that's not true any more. No one knows who is up in the space shuttle'. A space station also gave NASA a reason to increase its shuttle flights. 'It's just a lot of busywork' he said. Eshleman said that, instead of keeping pace with the Russians, the US would be better advised to develop automated spacecraft." (*Reproduced with permission from Press Digest, Current Contents®, No. 15, April 9, 1984. Copyright by the Institute for Scientific Information®, Philadelphia, PA, U.S.A.*)