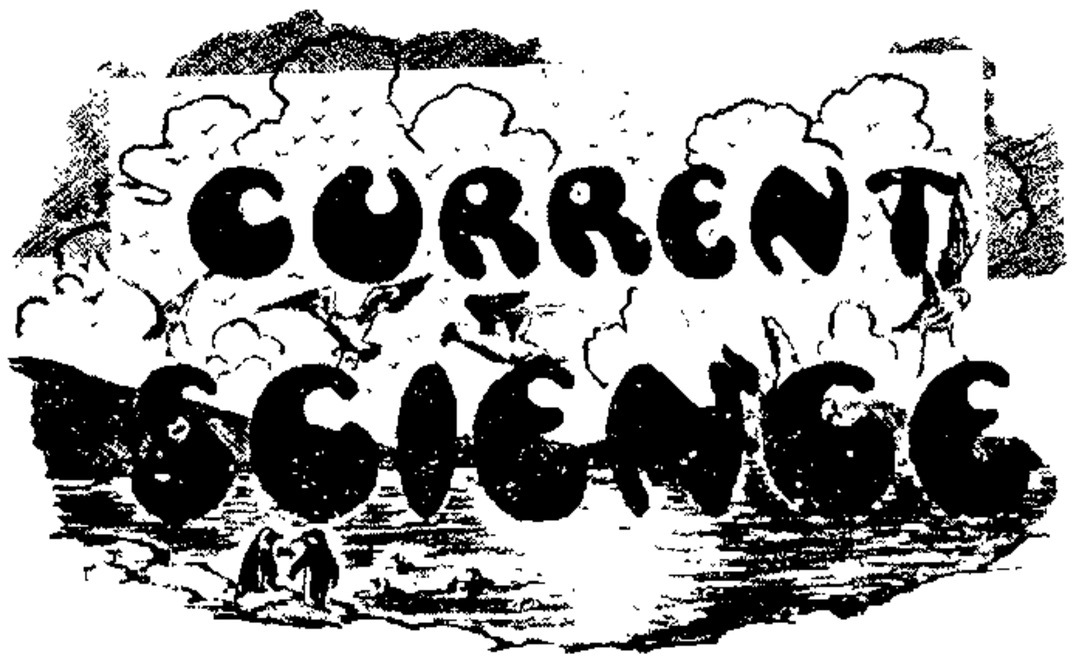

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Indian Public School.

THE extracts from the report of the Indian Public School Committee, which have recently been published in the Press, are sufficiently full to enable the discerning public to form a fairly correct estimate of the value and significance of the institution proposed to be established early in the next year at Dehra Dun. Some of the important features of the recommendations of the Committee, which have all been accepted by the Government of India, are that the School, as was originally conceived by the late Mr. S. R. Das, is to be founded on the model of the English Public Schools; its first Head Master and the Assistant Masters are to be Englishmen possessing an intimate knowledge and experience of the work and organisation of English Public Schools: the aims and ideals of the Indian Public School will develop in an atmosphere of Indian culture and environment: the courses of study provided for the pupils will be sufficiently varied so as to offer scope for individual differentiation, and the social, religious and communal solidarity will be promoted by the genial influence of a common messmatism and comradeship in compulsory games. The School is proposed to be located in the buildings of the Imperial Forest College and Research Institution which together with the surrounding grounds have been acquired at a cost of three lakhs of rupees; and for the construction of additional structures and for endowment of funds the Committee have fourteen lakhs of rupees in their possession, which they hope to supplement from public benefactions. As a tentative measure residential accommodation has been provided in the main building for two sections with sixty boarders in each. The minimum and maximum ages of the first batch of scholars are fixed at eight and twelve years, which in the successive stages will be raised to twelve and nineteen, involving the gradual abolition of the lowest classes. The administration and general control of the School will be vested in a Board of Governors consisting of officials occupying exalted positions. Presumably the School is going to start on its career of usefulness under the most august and propitious circumstances.

The scheme is undoubtedly irreproachable. The ambitions of its promoters are truly praiseworthy.

The aims and objects of the School which

have been described in detail by the Committee appear to us, however, precisely identical with those about which we are daily accustomed to read in the addresses and speeches made on the ceremonial occasions of laying the Foundation Stone, or the annual prize-giving functions of primary and high schools in India. We are confident that no important pronouncement is made at these gatherings without a generous reference being also made to the schools developing "in an atmosphere of Indian culture and social environment" and that the outlook of the whole school should be distinctly moral and spiritual. Every convocation address is adorned by exhortations to the graduates on the importance of cultivating self-discipline, building up of a lovable character, developing the capacity for corporate action in civic life and fostering the spirit of chivalry and fairplay in normal human dealings. When School "days" are celebrated, the gentleman, "gracing the occasion with his distinguished presence," devotes his whole speech to extolling the quality of manliness and self-reliance and to persuading the young scholars to be free from the taint of social, communal and provincial prejudices and to cultivating the spirit of "united nationhood".

In the course of his scholastic career, a young pupil is destined to listen to such exhortations on at least 20 occasions and the need for them indicates that the unassisted efforts of education are inadequate to fortify his mind against the malign influences of the world which he is about to enter. While we admit theoretically that man is made in the image of God, we practically adopt the Jesuit doctrine that the young man harbours in his soul the author of evil, who is to be exercised by speeches and birches. The essence of education as we practise it is an elaborate attempt to convert the natural human animal into a conventional mechanised being, and every instrument which civilised society could invent is requisitioned for completing this process of metamorphosis. From the days of which we possess any historical record down to modern times, progressive education, apart from "illuminating the mind", has been a ceaseless struggle in the attempt to weave a rigidly uniform moral and spiritual garb for its votaries, and in this enterprise all the auxiliary forces of public opinion, the church and the state are enlisted. The fact that the report of the School Committees, the speeches addressed to youth in schools and colleges insist on the prescription of religious and moral instruction as an integral part of the educational programme must be a sorry commentary on the essence of human nature, which, at the least provocation, is apprehended like Arthur's Kingdom to reel back to the beast. The reason for this constant repetition of levitical doctrines in educational reports is due to our inadequate recognition of the law of change in the realm of objective reality and in the world of thought. The progress of science has altered our conception of the human mind and of the constitution of matter. The young men who are nurtured on the milk of the new philosophy inevitably subject all fundamental ideas to re-examination untrammelled by the "word of man", and they will not hesitate to go down to the very basis of things. We deliberately stimulate in the young men this spirit of unfettered enquiry in the sphere of intellect. Could we then curtail this newly discovered freedom from extending its influence into other domains? A conflict inevitably arises on the discovery that the progress of intellect has outstripped that of the other component parts of the mind, and modern education is confronted with this disjunction of intellectual and moral faculties. It is unable to equalise the pace of mind in the different fields of thought because of its adherence to an ancient code of conduct on the one hand, and on the other, its loyalty to freedom in the intellectual sphere. We are trying to put the heady wine of modern scientific knowledge into an old world ethical bottle; and the restlessness of the present age is the product of this attempt; and until the Church evolves a more satisfactory code of morality and a more rational system of spirituality, we shall have to continue to repeat the formulæ which form the staple of all educational reports and addresses.

The idea of an Indian Public School on the English model is not new; the various schools which commemorate the memories of Bishop Cotton, Baldwin and Lawrence are organised on the best traditions of the English public schools. They were originally intended for the benefit of children belonging to the domiciled Anglo-Indians, but more recently children of other communities also are admitted. We find in

them large numbers of day boys and resident scholars; the study and dormitory system; that unmitigated public nuisance of a personage, *viz.*, the monitor, prefect or preceptor; compulsory games; a staff of European Head Masters, Assistant Masters and Matrons; a delicately adjusted code of corporal chastisement; and finally, scout corps and military training including practice in pugilistic exercises. The Viceroy and the Provincial Governors, who are usually invited to preside at the ceremonial gatherings of these institutions, listen with great patience and interest to the reports of the Head Masters narrating the achievements of their pupils and in their replies, they pay glowing tributes to the excellent performance of the schools. The pupils are trained for public service in all its branches, for technical professions and for a military career; but few elect to proceed to higher education in the Universities. We have actually therefore a large number of Indian Public Schools in full action following the traditions of their English counterparts.

The English public school is certainly an elusive subject which "comprises in itself a difficult study of no inconsiderable magnitude," and within recent times the entire system has been criticised. The great head masters such as Dr. Butler, Arnold, Thring, Sanderson and Almond, who by their personal qualities built up great schools from small foundations, differed radically in everything that was essentially of educational importance. So different is the outlook of these schools that it is commonly said that "what are truisms at Rugby are paradoxes at Harrow, and an Eton custom would prove a Marlborough revelation." In spite of broad differences in the type, the English public schools occupy an important position as educational centres, and so great has been their influence on public life that even secondary schools and national schools are coming more and more to be run on public school lines. The European schools in India, which reflect the principal characteristics of the British system and which have been in existence for a long time, have not attained the reputation and influence on the public life which the English public schools possess. This is due not so much to their exclusiveness and want of adequate financial support as to the preferential treatment of these schools. The English public schools, on the other hand, owe their eminence to the surpassing fame of the head masters, distinguished alike by their scholarship, piety and public zeal. Their devotion to an ideal altered the face of education all through the public schools in England in a manner which neither government grants nor even popular support could have produced. They organised their own machinery, evolved their own principles of administration and invented their own methods of teaching, to each of which they imparted touches of their personal character.

We have heard a great deal about the criticisms on the games, punishments, the monitorial system and the exclusive spirit of the English public schools; but in the long course of their existence, some aspects of the school activities are apt to receive greater emphasis. Judged, however, from the widest point of view the English public schools are an invaluable heritage of the British people. Their pupils adorn their calling with their own particular aptitudes and knowledge, their own qualities of willingness to accept responsibilities and their ability to set an example wherever their lot may be cast. It is perfectly legitimate for the leaders of Indian public life to desire to found an institution in India turning out a band of brave, helpful and chivalrous Indians ready to shoulder cheerfully responsibilities and to regard service as its own reward.

Does the projected Indian public school possess the seeds which will germinate its greatness? It seems to us that while government support and supervision are an asset to all educational institutions, its inspiration and practical guidance may hamper the growth of the schools. None of the great public schools in England, none of the great scientific institutions, none of the universities owe their origin to government initiation. It is men with a missionary zeal for an ideal that create public institutions, to whom worldly goods and recognition are entirely of subordinate consideration. The Indian Public School is proposed to be brought into existence under slightly different auspices. The catalogue of aims and objects intended to be achieved by the Indian Public School is not its monopoly, and perhaps represents the pious wishes of its promoters. We are told that the School is to develop in an atmosphere of Indian culture and environment, but the conditions created for its management seem almost hostile to the realisation of this object. A number of

European teachers surrounded by children between the ages of eight and twelve, separated by language barriers and ignorance of each other's mental presuppositions, is suggestive of the tower of Babel rather than a seminary for fostering culture. Moreover, Indian culture and environment cannot successfully be hoped to be cultivated through optional studies of Indian vernaculars and classics, and an Englishman fresh from England,—if he is a reasonably humble and wise person—will refuse to be their exponent.

The moral and spiritual development of the school children is to receive the special attention of the masters; while it is fairly easy to grasp the exact connotation of the former term, the latter is a trifle puzzling. It seems to us that the work of the pupils in the class-room and their extramural activities should be founded on a moral basis rather than that we place before the immature minds, a code of illusive doctrines. The moral sense has to grow as an integral part of the development of the intellect and no teacher, however eminent, can hope to accomplish this seemingly impossible task unless he is thoroughly conversant with the racial history, family traditions and the mental make-up of the children. It is almost impossible to achieve spiritual unity in a heterogeneous assemblage of pupils, who follow different persuasions, and if by spirituality we mean God-mindedness and not what pertains to religion, perhaps schools might attempt to produce it without ecclesiastical assistance. The Indian Public School is proposing to achieve what the government and aided institutions have tried, and are silent about the fruits of their labours. Are we justified in investing nearly 20 lakhs of rupees with further financial implications, on an institution whose ostensible object is to turn out 50 or more young men annually, who will be moral, spiritual, chivalrous with a capacity for corporate actions and for military, professional and university training? Cannot the same results be obtained by re-organising and consolidating a few of the selected European schools in India where the traditions of the English public schools are reproduced? The success of the Indian Public School and the establishment of its reputation as an educational centre are not financial and pedagogical problems; they are, however, assured if the European officers in India consent to send their children to this institution to be trained along with Indian children. Their interest in the institution would then become personal, instead of remaining academic. We can conceive of only one justification for bringing so costly an institution into existence. The Indian child is a biological organism,—not of the variety of Strasburg goose;—and is to be trained to acquire a view of the world in perspective and to realise that what he does or thinks is not the product of one community or one country and that he himself is the citizen of the world as a whole. The morality and spirituality that the Indian child—like every other child,—has to learn in the Indian Public School ought to consist in the paramount duty to join the rest of the world in a spirit of co-operation to improve the lot of his fellow-men irrespective of territorial, racial and language barriers. If the Indian Public School succeeds in producing this frame of mind in its pupils, it will be the only justification for its continued existence and public support.