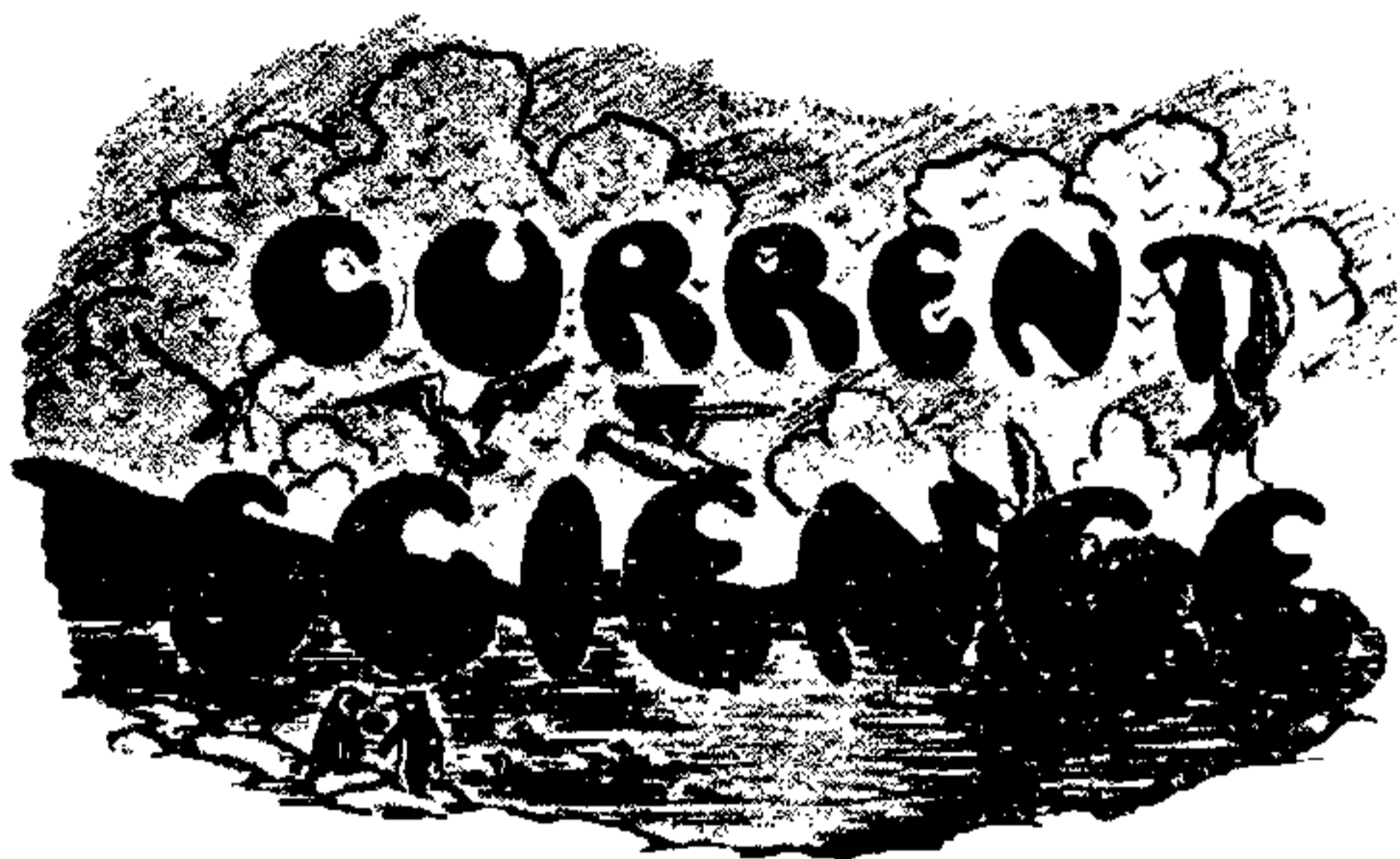

CURRENT SCIENCE—50 YEARS AGO



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Our City Streets.

Few will doubt the fact that the average man in the present age enjoys greater comforts and a distinctly higher standard of life than his predecessors in the past. Generally speaking, science has made it abundantly possible to prolong human life which is now less subject to disease, and its discoveries have been used to place amusements and light instruction practically within the reach of all. Transport has now become rapid and fairly safe, and the increasing appreciation of such amenities by the public supports huge industries, which provide employment both for skilled and unskilled labour. But it is equally manifest that the mechanical inventions which have rendered all these things possible have also introduced certain grave and objectionable features into our lives. It must be remembered that every material device, which distinguishes the present age from the last, is invariably noisy and sometimes even fraught with danger to the public when incautiously handled.

The streets and roads in Indian cities are becoming noisier every year, but there is still no general complaint that the noises have begun to affect human nerves and health. In India the street noises are comparatively a milder nuisance, but the danger to public health, produced by the insanitary conditions of the streets and the dust raised by the fast-moving vehicles, is always grave, and is not mitigated though most of the principal thoroughfares are asphalted. Indian towns and cities which were built in ancient

times satisfy neither the principles of modern town planning nor the hygienic requirements of efficient and healthful urban life. The chief concern of the early builders was obviously to ensure protection for the towns against the aggressions of invaders, and with this object the houses were built contiguously and the roads were purposely made narrow and tortuous. In the early centuries when public life in India was frequently disturbed by the conflicts of rival parvenu chieftains, the mortal anxiety of the people was to protect their person and property in thick mud houses with small doors and smaller windows, and all built as near to each other as possible. Whether this mode of defence secured immunity from the raids of lawless criminals and free-booters might be doubted, but it is certain that these types of buildings which effectually shut out air and light, laid the foundation of recurring epidemic diseases. The establishment of peace and security in the country under the British Rule has stimulated the expansion of trade and favoured the rapid multiplication of population, but till recently it has not affected the physical structure of towns and cities. The European community, which lived beyond the city limits from the time of Company Administration, could hardly visualise the unsatisfactory conditions under which the native population flourished, and even to-day the administrators of the country have only a vague apprehension of the squalor and maladies which afflict the extremely insanitary and congested quarters in the heart of towns. The intention underlying the transfer of municipal administration to local self-governing bodies is certainly entitled to praise, but the successful accomplishment of the task confronting the municipal commissions demanded knowledge, training, experience, imagination and financial resources which the councillors did not possess. In spite of such inadequate equipment, Indian municipalities have done a great deal towards improving the conditions of areas in their jurisdiction, but if more has not been done it is not their fault. The civic population has to co-operate and appreciate the efforts of municipalities in securing the amenities which make life enjoyable.

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It seems to us that the Road problems both in their magnitude and importance are sufficiently complex and serious to warrant the creation of a Ministry of

Transport in each Province to deal with every aspect of traffic. These problems are at once scientific and psychological. The existing practice of dealing with them partly through the police department and partly through the municipalities must be empirical. This new Ministry of Transport must be attached to the Noise Abatement Commission and Industrial Health Research Board, staffed by physicists, psychologists, physicians, lawyers and engineers. It may be said that proposals of this nature are premature, because in Indian cities the problem is not so serious as in London, New York, Paris and Berlin, but the level of noise and accidents is bound to rise year by year, and wise statesmanship should not wait till the torment becomes ungovernable.

The efforts of Government alone will not be adequate to grapple with the road problems, and the co-operation of the people is indispensable for their satisfactory solution. Every town should have a

People's Health League for securing protection of the public against noise, dust and accidents. The league when established might find it advantageous to work in collaboration with the educational institutions. It is the younger generation who stand in most need of imbibing the principles of public health and cultivating road courtesy and a cheerful adherence to law. It ought to be the imperative duty of Scout and Rover corps to utilise every opportunity of assisting the deformed beggars and unsophisticated village folk whenever, either out of ignorance or incapacity, they trespass the rules of traffic. Every member of the Health League and all the Scouts and Rovers should be invested with power by Government to bring to justice offenders of traffic regulations and public decency. A clean and wholesome street implies sweet and hygienic homes and both are an insurance against epidemic diseases. The task of fighting them is largely in the hands of the people themselves.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

21st EXHIBITION CONGRESS ON CHEMICAL ENGINEERING

The twenty-first exhibition congress on Chemical Engineering will be held in Frankfurt am Main from 9th to 15th June 1985.

The exhibition and congress will provide the members with comprehensive information on the state of technology in the field of Chemical Engineering with particular reference to those working in the chemical and pharmaceutical industries, petrochemistry, the

food industry, biotechnology and the ceramic industry. Pollution control, biotechnology, offshore processing plants and water desalination technology, raw material and energy saving as well as safety are topics of great importance during the exhibition.

For details please refer to: DECHEMA Organisation ACHEMA, Postfach 970146, D-6000 Frankfurt am Main 97, Germany.

THE SECOND NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON VIBRATIONAL SPECTROSCOPY

The Second National Conference on Vibrational Spectroscopy will be held at the Division of Applied Sciences, Anna University, Madras Institute of Technology, Madras during 20-22 May 1985. The broad fields of specialisation to be covered include 'current and developing applications of vibrational

spectroscopy and the development of equipment of instrumentation'. Further details can be had from Dr S. Mohan, Conference Organiser, Division of Applied Sciences, Anna University, Madras Institute of Technology, Chromepet, Madras 600 44.
