

13 not out at the SLAAS Headquarters

by S. S. Vedanayagam

It was exactly 13 years ago that the SLAAS (then known as the CAAS or Ceylon Association for the Advancement of Science) decided to open an office with a paid Office Assistant for its activities. Hitherto, the official work of the Association was carried out by 2 General Secretaries, who functioned in a purely honorary capacity with the assistance of a part time typist.

Having just then retired from Government service, prematurely, I was selected from a batch of applicants to be the first Office Assistant of the Association. The Headquarters of the Association was then an insignificant building located behind the imposing structure of the CISIR. In this modest building, however, worked 2 scientists (Drs. V. Basnayake and R.O.B. Wijesekera) who during their spare time attended to the official work of the Association. They were the then General Secretaries who sacrificed their precious moments of leisure for the cause of science. I was indeed fortunate to have been associated with them to work for the Association. The three of us got the office going and from then onwards there was no looking back.

The first Newsletter of the Association was printed in May 1963 in which a reference to me has been made as follows: "The Association is fortunate in having a person of Mr. Vedanayagam's calibre as Office Assistant and in welcoming him to the Association it is hoped that he will play a valuable role in the future development of the Association." I do not know whether I have fulfilled the hope expressed, but I can say that I have tried my best always to maintain a high standard of efficiency in the work of the office.

The Association was fortunate in having an anonymous donor who donated Rs. 10,000 a year for 5 years in

succession for the popularization of science by the Association. To carry out this work, a Committee for the Popularization of Science was formed and a Co-ordinator who was to translate the ideas of the Committee into action was appointed.

The General Research Committee of the Association is composed of members from the various branches of science who could provide advice on scientific problems as and when they arise.

The Council of the Association which meets regularly once a month is the governing body of the Association and is composed of the General President, the President-Elect, the Immediate Past General President, the General Secretaries, the Secretary for Foreign Relations, the Treasurer, the Assistant Treasurer, the Editor, the Assistant Editor, the Chairman of the G.R.C., the Chairman of the Popularization of Science Committee, the Chairman of the Board of Trustees, the six Sectional Presidents and six elected members (elected at the Annual General Meeting)

From time to time various ad hoc committees are appointed and their reports are submitted to the Council for consideration and action.

The activities of the six Sectional Committees embracing the various branches of science have also increased steadily over the years and the small staff of the office has enough work to keep it fully occupied.

A major event in the activities of the Association is the holding of its Annual Sessions at the end of the year. This has been regularly held since the inception of the Association 32 years ago. To this session representatives

from the sister Associations are invited and generally a number of foreign delegates representing their respective Associations do attend. The work involved in making arrangements for the Annual Session is enormous and I am glad to say that we have always received praise and appreciation from the foreign delegates for the arrangements made by us for the successful completion of the sessions.

The office was shifted to its present location in the centre of the old race-course in May 1970 and arrangements are afoot to move the office from here to a spacious 3-storeyed building at Wijerama Mawatha costing over Rs. 6 lakhs. The committee in charge of the building operations hopes to have this building completed by the end of

the year. The Association sadly lacks a library with the necessary facilities. Due to lack of space in the present building the valuable books we receive from various foreign organisations have had to be dumped on the open shelves and no proper use could be made of them by the members. A good room for the library will however be provided in the new Head quarters and it is hoped that an up-to-date library will be made available for the use of the members.

Looking back on the 13 years of my service in the Association I can say that it has been a period of pleasant memories for me.