

OBITUARY

A. W. SIDDONS

“It is desirable that every schoolmaster should be intelligent, zealous, and stimulating.” This is a quotation which Mr. Siddons gave from the sayings of his own schoolmaster, Mr. R. Levett. It is an understatement to say that the pupil followed this precept and went far beyond in the enthusiasm which he showed throughout his career. With the wide interests he had, he was primarily a teacher of mathematics, and he thought and talked about his work and sought by every possible means to maintain a high standard and inspire others with the same enthusiasm. He remained surprisingly free of set ideas which most teachers are subject to as they advance in age. In mathematical teaching he was an innovator himself and, while he would not abandon a well-tryed idea without good reason, he did realise that there must be change and he was receptive of new ideas from any source, whether the workings of a grandson’s mind or a remark from a young teacher at an Association meeting. The problems of introducing number and space to a child of 5 seemed to interest him as much as his Sixth form work.

This notice must put on record the great work he has done for the Mathematical Association, and plain facts speak for themselves. Less than three years after he started teaching he was, in 1902, appointed the secretary of the first Teaching Committee of the Association, and in less than four months, their first report, on the teaching of Geometry, was published in the Gazette. He was also in the same year appointed to the Cambridge syndicate set up to consider mathematics in the pass examinations of the university. Thus he was able to spread the influence of the Association to wider fields, and the first steps in removing the Euclid order of theorems for all examinations followed quickly. It has been said of Mr. Siddons that the Teaching Committee in their first years must have owed much of their success to his combination of force of character with essential kindness. He was not content to theorise, but his first two books, with Mr. C. Godfrey on Elementary Geometry and Elementary Algebra provided material for teachers and pupils to put into practice the new order and methods which he advocated.

His work with the Teaching Committee was so distinguished that in 1913 he was appointed a vice-president of the Association, an unusual honour for one as young as 37. In this way he held a position on the Council from that date till his death, and it was a rare event for him to miss a meeting. In the years following the first war he was prominent in all meetings of the Association and o

the London branch, and he was appointed president of the Association in 1935, the first schoolmaster to receive this honour. In his presidential address, published in vol. XX, no. 237, he gave a masterly account of the progress in teaching and the growth of the Association. He was finally elected an Honorary Member of the Association in 1958.

A. W. S. always considered that the Gazette should be primarily concerned with the teaching of elementary work, and was apt to say that successive issues were becoming too 'high-brow'. He often wrote and talked to the editor, with whom he sometimes disagreed, and put his case firmly, even bluntly, but always with such underlying kindness that there was never any friction. Obeying the injunctions of the editor that if he wanted elementary articles he should write them, or get others to do so, he wrote frequently, and it is fitting that in this number his last contribution, written shortly before his death, should be printed.

As well as being a Wrangler in 1898 he also obtained a first class in part 1 of the Natural Science Tripos in 1899. While at Harrow he taught physics, as well as mathematics, for a long time, and aimed successfully at closer liaison between the mathematics and physics at school. He was concerned in his spare time in teaching scientists the beginnings of Calculus in the days before this was considered an essential part of their work.

To those who knew him in Harrow there are many more interests in Mr. Siddons' life which can here be referred to only briefly. While a master at the school he was twice in charge of the gymnasium. His greatest hobby was in gardening, and many gardens in Harrow, especially those of the School and the Hospital, have been reorganised by him, and show the breadth of his vision and constant work which he devoted to them. When he first retired from teaching he devoted much time to the Hospital, and became Chairman of the House Committee in 1943. He found time frequently to visit Dr. Bickley after he had lost his sight, reading to him to keep him up to date with modern developments. In the last few years, while his daughter was working on Braille at the institute for the Blind he became interested in the many problems of converting mathematical symbols to Braille. Above all, in his home with Mrs. Siddons, who died in 1954, he gave welcome to very many people, boys, masters, friends of all ages.

The steady growth of this Association which took its new name in 1897, only two years before he became a member bears testimony to the inspired work for teaching and wise guidance in Council which has always been his contribution.

K. S. SNELL
