

THE MATHEMATICAL GAZETTE

EDITED BY
T. A. A. BROADBENT, M.A.
WILLS HALL, BRISTOL, 9.

LONDON
G. BELL AND SONS, LTD., PORTUGAL STREET, KINGSWAY

VOL. XXVI.

JULY, 1942.

No. 270

ANDREW RUSSELL FORSYTH 1858-1942

ON 2nd June, Andrew Russell Forsyth passed away. Of his contributions to higher mathematics and the esteem in which he was held by mathematicians all over the world, other journals will bear record. In the *Mathematical Gazette* it is fitting that tribute should be paid to the great work that he did for mathematical teaching in schools.

There can be few teachers in active work today who were teaching at the end of the last century, when most mathematical teaching was academic in character and mainly banished from reality. How few boys then had ever seen a protractor or used a graduated ruler in geometrical work; algebra for the majority was mere manipulation with symbols that meant nothing to them; trigonometry was only for the very few, and that again was mostly symbol-grinding. To a gifted few it made an appeal, but few present-day teachers can realise how dull and dreary it was to the majority of pupils.

In the late 1890's Professor John Perry was agitating for root-and-branch reform, but his proposals were so drastic that they were mainly ignored. In 1900 the British Association appointed a committee to consider the reform of school mathematical teaching; Forsyth was appointed chairman and Perry Secretary. Forsyth can have had but little sympathy with Perry's proposals as actually put forward, but he saw that there was much good in them and, like a wise statesman, he used the energy put out by Perry and directed it so that the proposals were modified and put in such a form that opposition to them became much less violent, and there was much discussion about mathematical reform.

In January 1902 the Mathematical Association appointed its first Teaching Committee. In December 1902, on the motion of Forsyth, the Council of the Cambridge Senate appointed a Syndicate to consider mathematics in the pass examinations of the University. In January 1903 Forsyth became president of the Mathematical Association and for the two years in which he held that office he generally presided at the meetings of the Teaching Committee. From that time on, as a member of the Syndicate and as secretary of the Teaching Committee, I saw much of him; he was always willing to give his time and help, but the thing that amazed me most was that a man, whose real interest and whose teaching were concerned with the most advanced

mathematical work, should display such a clear and intimate understanding of the difficulties under which the schools were labouring. On the Syndicate, he and the late Professor Hobson did most of the work of persuading the other members of the desirability of reform and, in particular, of freeing the teaching of geometry from the tyranny of Euclid's order. The Syndicate's report was skilfully steered through the Senate by Forsyth, and, as a result, Euclid by degrees ceased to dominate the school teaching of geometry. That in itself was a great achievement, but there were other changes: graphs and the use of 4-figure logarithms were introduced into the Previous Examination and so into most school examinations. It is interesting today to read the account of the discussion of the Syndicate's report in the Senate: several speakers regarded graphs and logarithms as dangerous introductions.

Thus began the great reform of the mathematical teaching in schools throughout the country. Had the Cambridge Senate rejected the Syndicate's report which proposed these changes in the Previous Examination, it is probable that the reformation of mathematical teaching would have been delayed for years.

Some years later Forsyth was a prominent figure in the discussions about abolishing Compulsory Greek at Cambridge and again in the reform of the Mathematical Tripos. He was not a reformer who wished to destroy for the sake of destruction, but he realised that the retention of the order (and of the senior wrangler) in Part I of the Mathematical Tripos was encouraging the best mathematicians at Cambridge to grind too long at the work of Part I instead of pushing on at the proper time to more advanced work: he saw that the adherence to tradition was hampering the work of the day, so he advocated that tradition should go.

Forsyth was a very regular attendant at the annual meetings of the Mathematical Association, and in 1936 he was again President. He had an amazingly clear mind and a wonderful memory. In discussions, and particularly as chairman, he displayed a quiet twinkling humour that prevented angry feelings from arising, and his clear judgment of the weight that should be given to the various arguments for and against any proposal swayed many people in the way they should vote on any question. His kindness and guidance to younger men encouraged many to carry on and improve good work which they had begun.

A great mathematician has passed away: one who has had a wonderful influence on mathematical teaching throughout its whole range. A. W. S.

MEMBERSHIP OF THE ASSOCIATION.

THE total number of members on the roll of the Association at the end of 1941 was 1,752. Unsettled conditions make it impossible to ascertain the number of Associates. A reference to the *Gazette* of February 1940 will show that the fall in membership since the beginning of the war is surprisingly small, and the thanks of the Association are due to its members for their loyal and continued support.

The following members died during 1941 (the list includes some who lost their lives as a result of enemy action): R. Butcher (1939), J. Brill (1884), W. J. Dobbs (1898), I. O. Griffith (1928), E. L. Ince (1926), Miss E. L. Jameson (1910), H. Lob (1922), F. Mayor (1925), J. W. Michell (1925), R. F. Muirhead (1895), T. J. Pearcey (1934), C. Pendlebury (1885), Miss K. M. Rigby (1910), W. Stott (1926). Mr. Butcher lost his life while serving in the Royal Navy.

G. L. P.