

OBITUARY

Cyril Gordon Nobbs

C. G. ("Gordon") Nobbs was a yachtsman, and knew that making progress and making a splash are not the same thing. His approach to people had much more the subtlety of tacking than the here-I-come thrust of a speedboat, yet all who worked with him on committees or in day-by-day affairs will remember the quiet forcefulness with which he put forward his advice and opinions—always carefully considered—sometimes with discomfiting persuasiveness, invariably with a charm born of a generous and kindly disposition, yet with an impact which stemmed from manifest sincerity and conviction. Light-hearted, jovial and trenchantly witty at the right time, he knew when to be serious. He was zealous but unobtrusive, and of the many who reaped the benefit of his work, comparatively few knew him personally. Those who did found him a delightful companion and friend.

From Palmer's School, Essex, C. G. N. won an open scholarship to St. John's College, Cambridge, and in 1924 was a Wrangler with a star in Schedule B. He took a Teaching Diploma, and taught for a while at King Edward's School, Birmingham. In 1928 he was appointed Second Master and Head of the Mathematics Department at the City of London School, where for forty years his personality and insight made on the school an impact which brought richly deserved tributes from all quarters when he retired last July. It was a tragic loss to his friends and to mathematical education when on October 31st, as he finished an after-dinner speech—he was a brilliant speech-maker—he collapsed and died.

He joined the Mathematical Association in 1925, and did a great deal to help the Association and its objectives, sometimes through other organizations. During the early 30's and again during recent years he served on the Council, and in 1965 was President of the London Branch. He worked on committees which produced several of the Association's Reports. He was always willing to take part in discussions provided he felt he might have some worth-while contribution to make.

From 1960 till 1966 Nobbs was a member of the Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board, and more recently of the Royal Society's committee on Decimal Currency. In 1965 he was appointed Chairman of the Mathematics Committee of the Schools Council, where, anxious to give all views a hearing yet curbing irrelevancy, he endeared himself to teachers in all spheres from infant School to university. His comments and suggestions were invaluable

to the Staff of the Schools Council, and his meticulous paper-work ensured full effectiveness of the Committee's deliberations.

His ability to involve a class of pupils in enthusiastic participation and to convey this to an audience of teachers made him in great demand for D. E. S. short courses. One of his last assignments was to encourage undergraduates to teach mathematics in schools.

Mathematically, Nobbs was a classicist. He wanted his pupils to *do*, rather than *learn*, mathematics, and perhaps for that reason was hesitant to embrace some parts of "modern" mathematics which he felt presented ideas but little opportunity to use them. He staunchly believed that with all the flapping of wings in current flights of fancy, mathematics should keep its feet on the ground, and he was deeply involved in recent attempts to align school mathematics *and*—not *with*—basic university requirements. He wrote text-books on calculus, coordinate geometry and trigonometry for sixth forms, and a course of traditional middle school mathematics. He showed a rare gift for inventing examples from the most unlikely sources, many revealing his love of the sea and sailing. He gave courses in navigation to the Cruising Association.

Nobbs abhorred the dubious, and imbued his pupils with his own high standard of intellectual integrity. This quality together with his sound vision was sought and valued by his Church at Orpington as well as by mathematical educationists. There was much more he could and would have done, and we are the poorer for losing so early such a valuable friend and colleague.

A. P. ROLLETT AND G. BOOLE

Mr. John Rollett, who is finishing off his father's work on Boole, is anxious to see any letter from his father that may help in elucidating the 'detective work' for which he had such a flair. Such information will be gratefully received by Mr. D. F. Taylor, Westminster College, Oxford, who will forward a photocopy and return the original.