To the Editor of the *Mathematical Gazette*

DEAR SIR,

I read the Gleaning No. 1904 in the last number of the *Mathematical Gazette* with some concern. As a mathematician and amateur sailor I can assure you that the Daily Herald is right provided the expression "much faster" is interpreted not too stringently.

Yours etc., H. HEILBRONN

ALAN ROBSON

PRESIDENT OF THE MATHEMATICAL ASSOCIATION, 1949.

The death of Alan Robson in 1956 deprived the Mathematical Association of services whose value only those who were in close contact with him can appreciate adequately since much of his work was done behind the scenes.

He served on most of the sub-committees which have been responsible for the major reports issued by the Association during the last thirty years, through which indeed the influence of the Association on teaching methods is largely exercised, and he took an active part in their composition and preparation:

Mechanics (1929); Arithmetic (1932); Algebra (1934); Geometry, second report, (1938); Trigonometry (1950), Calculus (1951), Algebra in Sixth forms (1957), and the succession of book-lists for School Libraries (1936, 1945, 1954).

Mention should also be made of an important meeting held in Cambridge in 1937 under Robson's chairmanship to discuss the extension to sixth form work of the reports of the Association which up to that time had hardly gone beyond the range of the School Certificate Syllabus. Plans were made but their execution was delayed by the War It should however be put on record that with a few others Robson prepared unofficially a draft report which formed the basis of the report on *Higher Geometry in Schools*, (1953). Robson did not serve on this sub-committee because he was fully occupied at that time with the preparation of the Calculus report as its editor but advantage was taken of his wisdom and experience by informal consultation when difficulties, inevitable in a pioneer report, arose in its preparation.

Robson's work for mathematical reform extended far beyond this committee work. He belonged to the first generation of schoolmasters who enjoyed the fruit of the renaissance of mathematics at Cambridge for which Hardy, Russell, Bromwich, Baker, Hobson and others were responsible. There are now few who can realise

how great was the change in the mathematical atmosphere of Cambridge before and after the abolition of order of merit in the Mathematical Tripos, itself a symptom rather than a cause of reform. But these changes in the teaching of analysis and geometry at the University exerted in their turn a growing and deepening influence on the training of school specialists, as no doubt generations of Marlburians who studied under Robson are especially aware.

Apart from insisting on the accurate use of language and logical statement, perhaps the most interesting of his qualities was a passion for economy in material and presentation which showed itself in the stress he placed on the structure of mathematics rather than on applications. His contributions to teaching method belong to the same category as those of Sir Percy Nunn who has influenced profoundly main-school mathematics both by the originality and versatility of his books and by his work at the London Day Training College. Robson however was more interested in Sixth Form work and it is probable that his influence was exerted most effectively through the lectures on post-certificate work he gave for the last thirty years of his life to teachers who attended the summer courses arranged by the Board of Education. All who heard for example his talks on economy of material in proofs of algebraic inequalities and on the nature of abstract geometry could not fail to be stimulated by the point of view he presented.

Some sixty years ago, by a happy inspiration, Greenstreet adopted as his text for the Gazette:

"*I hold every man a debtor to his profession, from the which as men of course do seek to receive countenance and profit, so ought they of duty to endeavour themselves by way of amends to be a help and an ornament thereunto.*"

To this appeal, the responses made by Nunn and Robson were alike whole-hearted. Could there be any finer tribute than this to two great teachers?

C. V D