To the Editor of the *Mathematical Gazette*

DEAR SIR,—Every generation must make its own discoveries. The " Stroud " system of denoting physical quantities by letters was fully ventilated in the Gazette for 1924, as your correspondent Mr Copley states. A note on this matter was Prof. C. Godfrey's last contribution to the Gazette. In it he says " the elementary convention may be cast aside at the right stage if good reason is shown. As a matter of fact, books are very far from consistent in its use. In geometry, lengths are constantly distinguished by small letters without units ; in trigonometry, we find $a = 1 \cdot 54''$—the very Stroud! In scholarship work no-one troubles about the elementary convention at all. . . ." After 35 years the position would appear to have remained unchanged. Prof. Lodge, in a later note, tilts at the " lamentably erroneous statement that 1 lb weight $= g$ poundals, which is found even in some text-books ". Indeed it is! In the very latest text-book on Mechanics this statement is displayed, a few pages after we are told that $g$ is the value of the acceleration due to gravity and is 32 ft/sec$^2$ in British units, and 980 cm/sec$^2$ in metric units. Now what are we to do? To be consistent, we should write 1 lb weight $= 1$ lb $g = 1$ lb $\times$ 32 ft./sec$^2 = 32$ pdl, but probably few of us would dare to do so, not because we think it necessarily difficult, but because we do not trust ourselves to be consistent about it. For myself, I am a modified Stroudian ; I would preserve letters (standing for physical *quantities*) as long as possible throughout a problem, and insert numerical values in a consistent system of units at the end. But when the resistance to motion of a train is given as $v^2/200$ lb. wt. per ton, where $v$ is in m.p.h., salvation would seem to lie in total obedience to the Stroudian Rule.

Yours etc., H. MARTYN CUNDY

P.S. Prof. Neville pointed out in 1924 that Everett introduced the " Stroud System " in 1879, whereas " forty-three years afterwards it was being put forward at the B.A. as unknown ". And now after 35 years more. . . .

## OBITUARY

### W. C. FLETCHER

There must be many mathematical teachers in Secondary Schools who do not realise the debt that they owe to W. C. Fletcher. He was born on May 13th, 1865, and was educated at Kingswood School, Bath, and St. John's College, Cambridge. In 1886 he was 2nd wrangler, the senior wrangler being A. L. Dixon from the same school ; in 1887 he was placed in division one of the first class of Part II of the Mathematical Tripos. He became a fellow of his college in 1887.

After spending nine years as a master at Bedford School, he was headmaster of Liverpool Institute from 1896 to 1904. In 1904 he was appointed to the newly created post of Chief Inspector of Secondary Schools at the Board of Education and there he stayed till his retirement in 1926. He was responsible for the organisation of the Secondary Branch of the Inspectorate and for the inauguration of the system of regular Full Inspection of Schools.

After 1926 he taught mathematics in a girls school of which his daughter was headmistress until she herself retired.

Just before he joined the Inspectorate he devised the famous trolley, which superseded Atwood's Machine in vividness and accuracy, and is still widely used in the teaching of mechanics.

In 1910 he became a member of the Mathematical Association ; he gave valuable contributions to the reports on Algebra (1924), Mechanics (1930),