

CORRESPONDENCE

To the Editor of *The Mathematical Gazette*.

DEAR SIR,

It is sometimes said that the traditional examination question is a good preparation for life, as it is always contrived to provide just, and only just, enough information to lead to the answer. It is suggested that problems should contain superfluous information so that the ability to select can be tested. (How often do we say to a pupil who is stuck, "have you used all the facts given?") Again, there is a move to eliminate statics as a topic at A level. There is a contradiction here, as my experience as an examiner has led me to realize that there are few better tests of a candidate's ability to be systematic and to select than the traditional equilibrium problem, especially involving two bodies. Assuming—a hurdle that many fail to surmount—that he has drawn a correct diagram showing *all* the forces with a *clear* indication of what they are acting on, many a candidate resolves wildly in all likely directions and for any set of forces and takes moments about numerous points, adding up with umpteen equations (not always in umpteen unknowns) with which he then gets into a wonderful welter of muddled and inconclusive calculations. Sometimes the correct answer does emerge. But how rare it is—and how refreshing!—to see a solution in which the candidate has thoughtfully chosen just those directions, and points, and sets of forces, that lead to the required answer with the minimum of fuss. I express no opinion about my opening observation; but it is worth while to note that the "just sufficient information" question may well be able to show up the candidate who knows how to select his weapons. And there are other examples: I remember marking a question on 3 connected particles, one of which was kicked; extremely few candidates realized that by resolving momenta in one particular direction one could "hole out in one".

I agree that exactitude in the terminology of mechanics is vital. If I don't know whether a certain light rod is undergoing a thrust or a tension, I call it a stress. But the new Mechanics Report says I mustn't 3.06). Why not? Lamb does.

Yours sincerely,

A. R. PARGETER

*Dundell's School,
Wiverton,
Leamington.*

To the Editor of *The Mathematical Gazette*.

DEAR SIR,

Some time ago in a letter to the editor of *The Gazette* (Vol. XLVII 274) H. Levy conjectured (1) that every odd number $2N + 1$ can be written in the form $2p + q$, where p and q are primes (2) that this can be done with $q \leq p$. A preliminary skirmish on the GIER computer here has verified both conjectures as far as $N = 2620$.

Yours Sincerely,

B. H. MAYOH

*egncentret
Fysisk Institut
Århus Universitet
Århus, Denmark.*

COMMUTATIVITY IN THE CLASSICS

After reading my review of Dr. Matthew's CALCULUS (*Math. Gaz.* XLIX, 213) Mr. A. P. Rollett has written to point out that in Virgil, *Georgics* I, 281, the sons of Iphimedeia "ter sunt conati imponere Pelio Ossam, scilicet, atque Ossae frondosum involvere Olympum": they tried three times to pile Ossa on Pelion, and wooded Olympus on Ossa. In Homer, however, (*Od.* XI, 315) they tried to put Ossa on Olympus, and then Pelion on Ossa. Ovid, (*Met.* I. 155), the source named by Dr. Matthews, also places Pelion on Ossa. Authorities are agreed that the experiment was a failure, since Zeus marched in and despatched the twins, and presumably tidied up the nursery after him, since the bricks now stand side by side.

H. M. CUNDY

Sherborne School, Dorset.

NOTICE

Copies of *The Mathematical Gazette* No. 362 for December 1963 are still available from the Office of the Association at 5s. 6d. each. The number is a Symposium on "Modern Mathematics" by eight authors and is concerned with both content and teaching.

HONOURS COURSES IN MATHEMATICS

I have twice drawn attention to the important pamphlet of which the Second Edition is now before me.—

*Honours Courses in Mathematics in the Universities of
Great Britain and Ireland, and the Colleges of
Advanced Technology.*

This Edition is, once again, prepared by Mr. A. P. Rollett and is published, at 7s. 6d., by the Incorporated Association of Head Masters.

Those whose duty it is to advise young men and women in this field must surely regard the volume as an essential part of their equipment.

E. A. MAXWELL

WANTED

1. C. F. v. JAENISCH—*Traité des applications de l'analyse mathématique au jeu des échecs*, Vol I, II, III
2. Ed. LUCAS—*l'Arithmétique amusante*

3. H. DÖRRIE—Mathematische Miniaturen
 4. G. KOWALESKI—Alte und neue Mathematische Spiele
 5. Recreational Mathematics Magazine “No. 3 (June 1961) and No. 7 (February 1962)” or all 14 numbers published.
- Please state price.

C. C. VERBEEK

98 *Van Merlenstraat*
The Hague
Holland.

MISS L. D. ADAMS

As the final proofs of this number of *The Gazette* were being prepared for Press, we heard with deep regret of the death of Miss L. D. Adams, one of our Vice-Presidents and President of the Association for the year 1959.

An Obituary Notice will appear in a later number.