

My dear Sir:

I received your letter with essays on terms and cards. Had I seen the letter and known the conditions under which the judges are supposed to act, I would certainly never have assented to your request. I do not think any thoughtful or self-respecting man should place himself in a position where he is likely to do such injustice to himself or another as that system requires.

As I understood it, the judges are to mark upon the cards the quality of each of the petitions in the respects named upon a scale of 100 and then the merits of the contestants are to be determined by a consolidation of their markings ~~of the whole~~.

The rage for percentages has become so universal that it is hardly strange that the social societies should deem it possible to ~~apply to~~ ^{apply to} ~~such a decision~~ ^{to such a decision} mathematical formulae. They will learn better some time: but in the meanwhile no self-respecting man should put himself in the way of encouraging such folly ~~as its resultant injustice~~.

It must be evident to any one that such a scale cannot be reliable or harmonious, even if ~~it~~ considered in advance by the judges, since no two of them will ever adopt the same determining unit. We know how the zero point of the thermometer was obtained and it is possible to duplicate it but there is no zero-point from which can be ^{definitively} measured either up or down literary excellence. As to the like manner, no two men can agree upon degrees of "original thought" or "style of composition," though they might agree

perfectly and decide justly upon comparative merit
of literary excellence
Thus, one man's standard, might be so high
that he would mark all the compositions sub-
mitted under 50, in a scale of 100, while another
might be so low that he ~~would~~ ^{might} grade
them all ~~over~~ ^{above} 90.

Take the present, ~~case~~ as a case in point. Of the
four essays and orations submitted to me, I should have
been compelled to grade one of ~~them~~ very nearly at
zero as to "Originality of Thought" it being little less than
an adaptation as is clearly shown by certain start-
ling errors in the changes made in adapting it.
Another judge might not detect ^{an aspect of} ~~this~~ ^{style}
~~Another I should~~ of affairs and so
grade the composition very high.

So too, I should have to rank one of these
compositions very low, indeed, on "Style of Com-
position", because of a singular and striking
misuse of words, showing an unnecessary of thought
fatal to literary excellence
which might not strike a less ~~acute~~ exacting
critic of language.

Still another ^{of the three submitted} (which awakens my admiration
for its ~~clarity~~ ^{simplicity} and ~~accuracy~~ ^{happy arrangement and good form} and unusual accuracy
in the use of ~~words~~ ^{terms}, ~~would~~ ^{might} very probably be ranked
low in the scale of merit, ^{by another} because of certain obvious ^{defects}
but ^{to my mind} ~~admittedly~~ comparatively insignificant ^{effects}.

Of course, the average of such judgments, would
be very far from justice. Regarding, as I do, the systems
of individual graduation upon an indeterminate

scale, ~~in reference to~~ and without
personal consultation of the judges, as necess-
arily unjust and ~~facts~~ in all probability
~~undoubtedly~~ ^{undoubtedly} I am compelled to decline to
serve in the manner desired.

With full appreciation of the honor ~~con-~~
intended and the confidence ~~reposed~~ implied,
I remain your^s obedient servant.

Wm. D. Bourque