

THE MEDAL IN PHYSICS.—WHY NOT AWARDED?

To the Editor of THE VARSITY:

DEAR SIR,—With your permission I shall give you an account of my attempts to find the correct answer to the above question—attempts which closed just a few days ago in a flat and reasonless statement that the medal had not been granted.

In the latter part of last August I wrote to the Registrar, enquiring if a medal would be given in Physics. He replied that there would not likely be an award. "No recommendation has been made," he wrote, "it being practically impossible to discover who is the best man. Of course you understand that first-class men in the fourth year examination are all considered equal. The medal in Physics has been withdrawn for next year." Thinking that the "impossibility," above stated, was the result of a tie, I wrote to Prof. A. C. McKay, stating that I supposed that the two of the class who had led also on previous examinations had been considered equal, and asking him if he did not think that those two should be bracketed on the Convocation list, even though no medal was given. That gentleman promptly replied that "No recommendation was made this year, because none was asked for—as was done in the past." Notwithstanding this, there appeared on the list of medallists, after the name of the medal in Physics, the monstrously unjust words: "Not Awarded," as though none in the class had obtained first-class honors. This may not have been intended for a direct snub, but by many it was considered such. A short note of enquiry in the *Mail* of October 3, and the mildest and most gentlemanly requests of THE VARSITY for a satisfactory explanation were not noticed.

On the advice of several friends I petitioned the Senate. I argued that in this case the class-equality regulation and the offer in the Calendar were in opposition, and I asked them to decide which to follow; but stated my belief that the offer of the medal in the Calendar was the more just. My petition was presented on Hallowe'en, and on the following Monday I received a card saying that the Senate had no jurisdiction in the matter. When I sent my communication I also wrote to Prof. Loudon, informing him of what I had done, and when he saw that I had petitioned the Senate, he wrote informing me that the College Council was the proper authority. He continues, "I think you are taking the proper course in view of the offer made by the Council in their Calendar. They cannot plead that I made no recommendation, because I never have done so in previous years. The point is if they gave the medal in previous years on the advice of the University Examiners, why did they not do so this year?" Prof. McKay, writing a few days afterwards, also stated that he thought I was taking the right course in demanding a definite reason.

I then wrote to ask the Registrar how I should approach the Council, and when they met. In reply he said he would state the reasons why there was no award, and as they are very interesting to the University public I give them fully: "The medals are at the disposal of the College Council, and in other departments where medals were given the recommendation of the professor was taken as the sole ground of the award. No reference to the relative standing of candidates at the Exams is possible beyond the indications of relative merit given by the class lists, where the only distinction is that of the class of honors. In the Department of Physics there are three candidates besides yourself placed in first class in both divisions of Physics. It is therefore impossible for any one to say which of the four is the best man by the test of the Exam. Prof. Loudon declined to recommend anyone as decidedly first on class-work during the session. There is therefore nothing by which the Council may be guided"—and therefore all were snubbed. This letter requires some explanatory remarks. In the first place, if the recommendation of the professor is taken as the "sole

ground," I think the professors should be so informed; but in conversation Prof. Loudon said that if such were the case this was the first year of the arrangement, and that he knew nothing of it. I might ask, who makes the recommendation in Moderns? Again this reference to those in the same class being considered equal I think little removed from absurdity. The very essence of a medal is distinction, while the effect contemplated in the class-equality statute is "levelling." Moreover, if all in first class are to be considered equal why should a professor or anyone else proclaim that it is all a hoax, that they are not equal at all? Also, if all are considered equal, should not the one who started, perhaps in second class, and graduated equal to the best, be given the medal? Has he not done the most creditable work?

But let us take Physics. In both 1888 and 1889, the winner of the medal did not receive first class honors in Practical Physics, thus taking precedence of those who were in the first class in both departments. In 1889, both in Moderns and in Metaphysics the medallist received some second class honors, thus showing that the class lists were not considered at all, and that the average first class, necessary for a medal, must have been obtained behind the printed lists. This same thing occurred in 1890, when Mr. Kerswill was in second class in Philosophy, and yet received the medal. I think this shows that the class list was not the final authority (except perhaps in Physics) even in 1890. I might say, right here, that the *exact percentages* in Physics could easily have been obtained as the Examiners reported them to the Registrar. Why were they not consulted?

But there is something more serious. I would ask you to compare Prof. Loudon's words above with those of this letter. And further, Prof. Loudon told me that he was not consulted in the matter! But the above statement about "class-work of the session" is absurd on the face of it. There is no such thing. In some subjects no lectures at all were given; and in those lectured upon there was no attempt to mark the candidates.

I, therefore, prepared a petition to the Council. After stating some of the above facts, I said that I thought there had been some misunderstanding; and so I asked that body to "determine whether the medal was really won or not; and if it be found that it was, that it be presented to the winner." This was presented on the first Friday in December, and the Registrar informed me that it was referred "to the Professor, with a request that he would, if possible, make a recommendation for the medal." The Council met again on the 16th inst., and the result is that all the "communications on the subject were referred to the Professor of the Department, but that no award of the medal has been made." Why? Did the Professor so decide? He told me that as he was not consulted before he declined to be consulted now. He did not say that no award *should* be made; he simply declined the Council's "courtesy." When the Council referred the matter to him, with the request above-mentioned, did they not acknowledge that an error had been made? The Registrar says I misconstrue that action, but from my other information I cannot but think otherwise.

Now, Mr. Editor, why was there no award? I have stated the case as fairly as I can. I have made every effort to find a satisfactory reason; you see the result. And from considering the above facts, as they were given me, do you think I speak without sufficient reason when I say that I consider the action of the Council—and I cannot name two members of it—in withholding the medal in Physics last year was unprecedented, arbitrary, and unjust? Very truly yours,

C. A. CHANT, '90.

Ottawa, January, 21, 1891.

A plan is on foot to establish in New York city a national university on the European plan, with an endowment of \$20,000,000.