

MATH'S IF

(An Imitation of Rudyard Kipling)

If you can prove ahead when all about you
Have lost your points and put the blame on you;
If you can trust your proof when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too:
If you can prove and not be tired by proving,
Or, being questioned, don't deal in lies,
Or, being asked examples, don't be roving,
And give a few, but don't talk too wise;

If you can claim and prove claims at your lectures;
If you can count, not making count your aim,
If you can meet with problems and conjectures
And treat all kinds of challenge just the same:
If you can't bear to see the questions you have posed
Dissolved by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or find the problems you adore unclosed
And start again to solve'em up with novel tools;

If you can mark each of your own papers
That yield a vicious circle with a cross,
And start again controlling mental scrapers,
And never breathe a word about your loss:
If you can force your mind and nerve and sinew
To serve your proof long after they are gone,
And so prove on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Prove on!"

If you can talk your Math and keep your virtue,
Or walk with deans—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much:
If you can fill the last remaining minute
With sixty seconds' Q.E.D. to end,
You're fond of Math and everything that's in it
And, which is more, Math blesses you, my friend.



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