WHY SHOULD WE COLLECT ESSAYS?
(THE STAMP-COLLECTOR’S MAGAZINE, January 1, 1865)

To the Editor of the ‘STAMP-COLLECTOR’S MAGAZINE.’

SIR, - I am glad to see that the attention of collectors is being drawn to the collection of essays, and trust that through your columns an understanding may be come to on so important a point. For myself, I think that there is no sense in collecting essays, and will, with your permission, state my reasons for this opinion.

Essays in general may be divided into two classes, the genuine and the spurious; those which are really submitted to the inspection of the postal authorities with a view to their adoption as stamps, and those which are only made, like the pedlar’s razors, ‘to sell.’ The latter class no real collector would place in his album; I pass on therefore to the genuine. I will assume that a collector, prior to the decision of the government, obtains a dozen genuine essays for a new series of stamps, at a total cost of (say) £3. It is more than probable that they will all be rejected, for the fact is that in no one instance have accepted designs been seen in the stamp-market previous to their acceptance. But for the sake of argument we will presume that one of the twelve essays is adopted: in that case it is no longer an essay, it becomes a proof stamp and its possessor has only that slight and dearly-bought advantage over the purchaser of an ordinary stamp of the same design. What then can be said for the eleven rejected essays? They are mere abortions – mere stamped bits of paper, but not postage stamps. The only reasonable interest which attaches to them is as specimens of the arts of design and engraving in the countries to which they belong. But that interest as appertaining to stamp collecting is quite a subordinate one. It is not from that that the pleasure of possessing an album arises. But if any one will collect essays for that reason, then there is no valid argument against his collecting spurious essays also, for they, equally with the genuine, are specimens (and some of them very handsome ones) of the arts of design and engraving as applied to stamps. The champion of essays is therefore on the horns of a dilemma, for to be reasonable he must collect all or none.

If I am right in my idea (which is that also of ‘No Essays’) that stamps adopted by the postal authorities cease to be essays, then such stamps as the Connell and 12d. Canada would still merit admittance into albums and have a right to possession.

Mr. Pemberton in his November letter discusses the question with considerable ability, thought is much to be regretted that a matter of such vital interest to collectors should have been made a peg on which to hang personalities respecting a gentleman who, whatever his faults, has been of greater benefit to the English stamp-world than any of his detractors. There is however a discrepancy in his letter which doubtless many of your readers have noticed. It is, in brief, that whilst he refers to the collection of the English essays in proof of the futility of attempting to collect essays at all, he approves of the collection of those now appearing for Belgium – though both English and Belgian are equally genuine according to his definition as each one of the former was, and of the latter is sent to the authorities with the chance that that one might be the design selected. Will your ‘talented’ correspondent kindly explain his reason for the distinction?

I cannot close my letter without expressing my sincere regret that Mr. Pemberton should have thought fit to make the contemptible attack on your magazine which appears in your December number. It is an evidence of his extreme want of courtesy that whilst retained on the staff of your magazine, he should be in the very number in which an article of his own appears abuse the liberality with which your columns are opened to correspondents by using them as the vehicle for a malicious onslaught upon
yourself. Your statement that you would be ‘Aut Caesar aut nullus’ was no more than the honest expression of a legitimate desire akin, doubtless, to that which Mr. Pemberton himself felt when editing his now-defunct periodical, and the slight error into which you fell was quite capable of correction in a gentlemanly manner.

With the expression of my own entire satisfaction with the manner in which your magazine is conducted,

With the expression of my own entire satisfaction with the manner in which your magazine is conducted,

I am, sir, yours faithfully,

Liverpool.  

TIMBROPHILIST.