

GENERALISM VS. SPECIALISM

BY MISS L. SWIFT.

It is as a rule far more satisfactory to the majority of us to be general collectors than to ignore all the stamp issuing world except just one country. The specialist who collects one country only may be thoroughly and deeply interested in his album, but when he tries to interest someone else in it he will find that shades of color, errors of printing, broken lines, re-engravings and all the rest of the minor variety crowd are not as quick to catch admiring attention as is a well selected and large number of "straight" varieties from all parts of the world. Again, should he ever wish to turn his album into money it is quite likely that one hundred good stamps from numerous countries will bring several times the amount that would one hundred very minor varieties from one country, the reason being that as yet there are far more general collectors than there are specialists. Once again: we all know how the catalogue prices fluctuate from year to year; the generalist is far more likely to come unhurt from the changes than is the specialist, for where he loses in one country he makes a gain in others, but when the specialist loses there is nothing to sway back the balance. I practice generalism myself, considering that for these reasons and still others there is greater satisfaction and benefit in collecting many countries than one only, but for all that it seems to be fully possible for anyone to be a generalist and yet be a specialist too, that is, collect all (or nearly all) countries but choose one or two or even more which shall receive particular attention in the way of study and in the addition of minor varieties of all classes and degrees.

To specialize one needs to have a practically unlimited supply of the postal emissions of the country selected in order that there may be a large quantity of stamps to be studied over. This is the way so many are specializing in United States issues; there is no trouble in any collector obtaining all the U. S. stamps that can possibly be required, barring the expensive varieties of course. The stamps of the Continental powers are, however, easy to obtain in quantities and at a cheap price, and as a field for students it seems to me that they are preferable to the issues of Uncle Sam, for "specialists have done this country until they have overdone it" as some one aptly puts it. In Continentals there is more undiscovered and fewer people with whom to wage rivalry, hence from the old issues to those of the present the stamps are more easy to gather up than are those of a country everybody is

interested in. The emissions of Norway, Denmark and Sweden are all fairly plentiful and with few exceptions cheap, the highest priced Norway being catalogued at only \$1.75, the highest Denmark at \$7.00 and the highest Sweden at \$10.00. These prices are for used of course, the unused being in some cases, more especially as regards the old issues, much higher. If the rarest U. S. specimen was no more costly than these many they be who would rejoice in complete collections, but our rare stamps are too numerous to specify, many of them being worth hundreds—yes, even thousands—of dollars apiece.

Norway and Sweden are both prolific in shades and will yield many a variety of that class to those who will specialize in them. In fact any country will yield shades, and as far as that goes it is always well to watch for and save them since there is never any knowing but what some of them may later prove to be rare and capable of commanding a high price; there are shades, very distinct ones too, in even the common German stamps of past and present issues. I have them, every one, when they happen in among my duplicates but never buy them; it is only the country of my chosen love, Tasmania, where I am willing to buy the minor as well as straight varieties. Perforations are minor varieties too really, albeit they have been raised to the dignity of catalogue recognition, and in almost every Continental country there are plenty of different sizes for the specialist to strain his eyes over. He can have one set perforated 10x12, another 10 1-2x11 and so on through set after set and change after change. They are small variations, too small to interest the generalist until he gets where actually new stamps come in slowly, but in the collection of a specialist they are of indispensable assistance in keeping him busy (and happy?) so for that purpose if no other they have a use in life.

If the generalist who is also a specialist gets tired of fussing over the minor varieties of one country, or if his stock of duplicates from that particular land runs out, he can rest himself by turning to another country and working on that for a while quite regardless of his earlier passion, then when duplicates and patience have both been improved it is easy enough to begin again just where the former studies was dropped without feeling that the intervening time has been in the slightest degree wasted. He who is a specialist only must often be brought to a stand for want of more duplicates to scrutinize, but he who is a generalist as well as specialist is never at a loss, for he can change from country to country as need dictates, therefore he who combines

generalism with specialism ought to be and probably is—a happier and a better philatelist than he who is a specialist only.

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