

WRITTEN FOR THE CANADIAN PHILATELIC WEEKLY.

Philatelic Crooks.

BY LEWIS G. QUACKENBUSH.

THE army of persons who "live by their wits," as the saying is, does not seem to suffer the slightest depletion as the years go by. Though honesty may be the best policy, there are still a great many who believe otherwise, and who thoroughly practice what they preach. As every newspaper reader knows, Chicago has, since the close of the Fair, been suffering from an epidemic of lawlessness and crime. Pickpockets, garrotes, confidence men, burglars and chieftains of every description have been making Rome howl ever since the gates at Jackson Park were closed.

I do not mean to say that that class of citizens described by the artful dodger and other eminent members of his profession as "prigs," ate the bread of idleness and the crust of leisure during the progress of the great Fair. By no means. During the time specified they displayed the most commendable activity in attention to business, and succeeded in transferring considerable personal property of various kinds from the care of others into their own hands for safe keeping. But their operations paled into comparative insignificance, beside the manoeuvres practiced by the hotel men, the concessionaires on the Fair grounds, and above all by those most distinguished artists in the line of highway robbery, the Chicago huckmen. Only since the Fair has closed have we had time to consider the deeds of those whom some humorist has dubbed: "The Congress of Crooks."

Judging from the frequent walls in our stamp journals regarding approval sheet swindlers, advertising dead beats and similar philatelic pests, one would be tempted to believe that there is ample material in the philatelic cohorts for a very extensive congress of crooks. Certainly there are many sharpers in our ranks who thrive and grow fat on their ill-gotten gains, despite the fact that strenuous efforts to bring them to justice. The much-sung Lewis Bishop is, perhaps, the most famous of philatelic crooks. He certainly has committed greater havoc in philately than any other swindler of recent date, as it seems probable, he is identical with John J. Morgan and A. B. Galtley. His deeds, rather mis-deeds, are so fresh in the minds of every person who reads this that I shall not enter into any detailed recital of his offenses. But there is one thought that suggests itself in connection with this arch swindler, and that is, that as long as he is at large philatelists cannot be too careful regarding whom they trust. There is no doubt that he will soon bob up in some new quarter of the country under a new alias, and both collectors and dealers should be very wary in dealing with any unknown person who may suddenly step upon the scene of action.

To an impartial critic, it would seem no wonder, that dealers are swindled so often, for they do not exercise due caution in regard to whom they should trust. Under the approval sheet system, which seems to be the only way in which a stamp business can be carried on by mail, some loss is, of course, inevitable. But it seems to me that the losses need not be so large as they are. In order to outwit the philatelic crooks, stamp dealers should organize and publish a weekly black list to circulate among dealers only.

Every dealer should be posted in regard to the dead-beats, and quickly, too. Just as soon as one dealer is swindled he should inform all other dealers, in order that they may be on their guard and escape loss. I am sorry to say that there are some dealers who, if they have been swindled by an approval sheet fraud, take no pains whatever to warn others, and, in fact, seem more than willing that their com-

petitors shall also suffer a loss. This is not the right spirit. Why should not those in the same line of trade co-operate in removing a common evil? Their interests are identical. Why cannot they unite against the common enemy? We cannot expect to remove this evil altogether, but we can, if we are only sufficiently awake to the need of it, make the defrauding of dealers and collectors so unsafe, that none but the most reckless will undertake it.

The approval sheet fraud, whose petty speculations are the bane of the stamp dealer's life, is certainly not an honor to philately. Therefore, collectors, as well as dealers, are interested in quelling the despicable philatelic crook. The advertising dead beat is first cousin to the approval sheet swindler, and is just as much of a drag and hindrance to the science as the latter. The good rule recently adopted by some philatelic publishers of requiring each writer, and it is to be hoped that other publishers, who are plodding along in the old way, will recognize the merits of this method, and follow suit. With few exceptions, neither one of the three classes, which make up the philatelic army, dealers, publishers and collectors, conduct their philatelic dealings in the business-like manner which would be expected. Certainly no business man of any experience whatever would be as trustful and confiding in the rectitude of his fellow-men as is the average philatelist. Most business men have been taught by cruel experience that promises do not count among cash assets, and have been rendered wise thereby. When will philatelists learn wisdom, and cease to trust on their stamps to every Tom, Dick and Harry in the country.

I do not wish to be considered a pessimist or a cynic; on the contrary, I am an optimist of the most pronounced type. But I am often disgusted, and I presume many other philatelists are also, at the many columns in our journals which have to be devoted to black lists. It makes it appear as though we had more than our share of dishonest ones, and it does not tend to give one a very exalted opinion of the class of persons engaged in the science of philately. Any movement which promises to be of the slightest effect in weeding out these parasites should have the hearty support of every philatelist in the land.

It seems to me that it would be a good thing if there were in America an organization similar to the Philatelic Protection Association of England; and I should like to see such a body formed. Money spent on such a society would be a profitable investment. All that is needed to bring about the much-needed change is to prosecute a few culprits and make an example of them. This could be done much better by an association than by any private individual. One reason why the philatelic crooks are so bold is because they believe themselves to be absolutely safe. Once let them learn that the stealing of approval sheets, or stamps of any kind, will be punished to the full extent of the law, and they will seek fields and pastures new for their lechery, and reason why the leading dealers of the country could not form such a protection association. The time and money used on it would be nothing compared with the large sums which could be saved annually through the society's efforts. Why can't something of the kind be done? Awake, ye dealers, from your lethargy, and bestir yourself in this matter. By organization you can drive the philatelic crooks from their chosen working place. Why not do it?

Blotting paper—what some philatelic poets succeed in doing.

Of the 3,000,000,000 Columbian stamps printed, it is said that little over half have been sold. How many "remainders" will there be at this time next year?

WRITTEN FOR THE CANADIAN PHILATELIC WEEKLY.

Our English Better.

BY JOHN BULL, JR.

THE readers of the CANADIAN PHILATELIC WEEKLY must excuse the shortness of this week's letter. The editor desired me to have this on hand for the first issue, and, as I had only a few minutes prior to the closing of the Canadian mail, it was a case of a little or nothing, so I decided a little was the best.

A certain up before the Bow Street Police Court recently, charged with unlawfully obtaining from a certain London firm of stamp dealers approval sheets of stamps, which they failed to return. The former had also stole from a book store an album containing 3,000 stamps, valued at £100. They were let go on suspended sentence.

The *Auction Epitome* for 1890, 1891 and 1892, has appeared. The work is, to all appearances, accurate, and it can be readily seen that Mr. Skipton has taken great pains in the preparation.

The Brighton and Sussex Philatelic Society has for its Honorary President the Baron de Worms.

The Oxford Philatelic Society has just forwarded to the Duke of York a finely gotten up address, congratulating him on his recent marriage to Princess Victoria Mary of Teck.

The exhibition of the stamps of the West Indies, recently held by the *London Philatelic Society*, was a success in every way. The exhibit of J. R. H., the Duke of York, was one of the best. The exhibits, which commanded the greatest interest were those of Messrs. Chambers, Avery, Gellard, Churcher and Blest.

The market is flooded with Costa Rica's now, since the recent acquisition in remainders was made.

Strange to say, two of our leading London dealers are claiming that they received the highest reward at the World's Columbian Exhibition at Chicago—Mr. T. H. Hinton and Stanley Gibbons, Ltd. We are now wondering which of the two firms received the higher award.

Messrs. Williams, Field & Co. were recently robbers of a valuable album containing, among others, the following stamps: Tasmania, 1891, 1d, 2d, 3d, 4d, 5d, 6d, 7d, 8d, 9d, 10d, 11d, 12d, 13d, 14d, 15d, 16d, 17d, 18d, 19d, 20d, 21d, 22d, 23d, 24d, 25d, 26d, 27d, 28d, 29d, 30d, 31d, 32d, 33d, 34d, 35d, 36d, 37d, 38d, 39d, 40d, 41d, 42d, 43d, 44d, 45d, 46d, 47d, 48d, 49d, 50d, 51d, 52d, 53d, 54d, 55d, 56d, 57d, 58d, 59d, 60d, 61d, 62d, 63d, 64d, 65d, 66d, 67d, 68d, 69d, 70d, 71d, 72d, 73d, 74d, 75d, 76d, 77d, 78d, 79d, 80d, 81d, 82d, 83d, 84d, 85d, 86d, 87d, 88d, 89d, 90d, 91d, 92d, 93d, 94d, 95d, 96d, 97d, 98d, 99d, 100d.

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