

Written for the Canadian Philatelist.

### WHY ARE WE PHILATELISTS?

BY J. C.

Several times during the last year have I intended to put together a few thoughts in answer to the above question, so far with no result, but the enthusiasm which seems to have been evoked by the formation of the Philatelic Society of Canada has roused me to give a leaf from my own experience, hoping others may do the same, as we all ways enjoy these personal references instead of dry generalities.

Some people sneer at the stamp collector, and we perhaps hear the word "crank" bandied about; but have those who so sneer ever summed up the benefits gained by this fascinating pursuit? Being only a mere tyro in the art, no doubt I shall omit many of these; but methinks, novice as I am, I could sum up a respectable array of reasons *pro*, let others take the more ungrateful task of collecting the *cons*. And first, the knowledge gained in different subjects—in history first. The stamps, for instance, of such countries as France and Spain, with the alterations of Republic, Empire, Kingdom, Carlist, War Stamps, with the varieties of heads, when contrasted with our own British Stamps during the fifty years that stamps have been used, the serene face of Victorias, "beloved, revered," and our own familiar three cent stamp since Confederation, and all the varieties of beaver, ship, seal, cod-fish, with the different values in cents and pence, form an interesting page of history. Then, in Geography, shall I confess that since commencing in earnest this pursuit I have gained some definite knowledge as to the topography of several countries. I was much struck lately with the interest shown in this subject by a bright boy, one who had never been specially interested in geography. A few months as a stamp collector seemed to give him more knowledge of the islands, etc., of the world than his years of geographical training. Then a knowledge of the coins used in each country is soon gained, and the names of the sovereigns past and present.

Then what a gain is the training of the powers of observation. How blind we are to what we take no interest in! How readily we see what we are looking for! This is as true in the case of the philatelist as the botanist or the astronomer. Ask anyone with no knowledge of stamps to tell the difference between a perforated

and unperforated or watermarked stamp, and the answer will be: "There is no difference; they are exactly the same." Then the gathering, arranging, classifying, placing neatly and systematically, is a valuable training.

And is it not well to see a boy or girl take an eager interest in some pursuit? Is it not better than the sensational novel, or the soul-killing daily papers, or the dawdling in drawing-rooms, or attempts to kill time we sometimes see? We would not urge the giving up one's time to the neglect of known duty, but many an hour otherwise perhaps wasted can be pleasantly and profitably spent in this pursuit, and the exhibition of the collection to friends often gives much pleasure and information. I had intended to keep out all reference to the money value, but the question of dollars and cents will come up, and postage stamps are like diamonds, always rising in value, if not to such an extent, yet sometimes with leaps and bounds.

In this respect, take my own small collection. Twenty-five years ago I collected a few on a page of my scrap-book, but no additions were made for some time. Then a young lad (now a distinguished barrister of Toronto, after gaining high honors in the University) gave me or exchanged with me a number of stamps. I wonder what became of his collection, or if, while laboring at a brief, he ever thinks of those British Columbia's I sent him, which now so many would like to have. With what a lavish hand did I distribute to friends those British Columbia and Vancouver Island stamps! so that when, after twenty years, my interest in them was again, by a mere accident, revived, my time and thoughts having been given to pursuits educational, horticultural, literary, social, botanical. Now, on recurring to pursuits philatelic, I could find on my old B. C. letters but few of these stamps now become so valuable.

I have been greatly amused and interested in the attempts I have made to obtain assistance from friends to find how different is the fate of letters in different houses. Some stately mansions contain not a single old letter; some lowly cots may hold treasures of this kind. Some people burn their letters as soon as read; others keep the letters, but burn the envelopes. Of all the friends I asked I found only one who, like myself, had kept old letters—in the one case, a trunk-full, and in the other, a bag-full in the garret yielded up a few