

Written for THE CANADIAN PHILATELIST.

TOO LATE.

BY CHAS. E. JENNEY.

“**U**EEER looking stamps, those! Victoria; eh? Old ones, too. Must be rare?” This was a remark from my friend, Barker, who, by the way, is not a “stamp fiend,” as he designates me. The subject of his remark was one which even I considered worthy of notice. You know, as a general rule, when you show your unphilatelic friends your collection, and are enthusiastically giving them pointers on your rarities, they do not seem to be paying much attention, and all at once a bright colored stamp will catch their eye, and you will feel disgusted with the general ignorance of humanity for half an hour afterward at hearing them praise a — Heligoland or — Seebeck, as some of our non-church-going philatelists are apt to term them—I mean the blank adjective part.

But my friend Barker is, although not a philly, as I said before, a man of judgment, and when I was showing him my stamps on the original envelopes, his attention was first attracted by one certainly worthy of remark. There were three stamps on the envelope besides the postmarks *Melbourne*, *Liverpool* and *London*, *rec'd*. There was a yellow six pence stamp of the 1854 issue of Victoria; a one shilling, blue and red, “registered” stamp, and another one very similar in design, but green and purple in color, six pence in value, and on it the words “Too Late.” Barker examined the stamps and read the inscriptions. “Too late,” said he, “What is the object of that?” Barker is of an inquiring mind, and often asks questions in regard to my hobby that a ten year old collector would consider as beneath answering, and I find it hard not to snub him; but on the present occasion he had hit on a subject I was willing to dilate on.

“This letter has quite a history,” said I. He expected a yarn, and looked resigned. “All right,” said he, “expectorate it out, old fellow; only don’t make it too fishy, and cut it short, too, for I’ve got to be up at the office at twelve, you know.” It was only eight o’clock in the evening and I felt aggrieved at his hint at my long-windedness, for everybody knows when I have anything to say I get at it at once; but I forgave him this time, and began:

“You notice the address on the envelope, — ‘Mrs. Frances Denham, — Street, London, E. C., England.’ In the early fifties there lived on that particular street in London, in one of the most respectable quarters, the lady whose name appears here—a widow with one son, now a man. The Denhams were well-to-do, and had many friends; but a cloud hung over their house. Coming of a family never noted for strong lungs, Mrs. Denham had, as often happens, escaped the full force of the inheritance; but a constant fear of it had developed in her a very nervous character and her family physician often shook his head after his periodical visits and made a remark to himself about ‘heart disease, some day.’ The dreadful inheritance, doubtful in the second generation, had seemed to have utterly died out in the third, for young Walter Denham, the only son, had been, up to his twenty-second year, a healthy although not a strong youth. But in his twenty-third year symptoms began to appear which the anxious mother did not like, and an opportunity offering, and the doctor advising, it was thought best he should es-

cape for a while from the fogs of London and ‘rough it’ in Australia. His mother, being naturally timid, was persuaded by friends not to accompany him. So early in the year 1853 the son took a fearful parting, and sailed for the Southern Seas. Is it not necessary to follow his career for the next two years. The healthful climate of inland Victoria, and his rough experience on a great sheep farm, brought out all the latent energy in him, which in England would have been lost to the world. He became tall, strong and bronzed by exposure, and if his mother’s old physician could have seen him, he would not have required to sound his chest in order to pronounce a verdict of “good for three-score and ten, at least.”

In the fall of ‘54 the gold fever first struck him. It was rather curious that it had not earlier, but it is perhaps accounted for in that he was ranching nearer the mines at that time. So he went to the mines and went to work among the strange conglomeration of nations that had been attracted to this region. Those were rough times in the early mining days, and many a man who after months of toil had accumulated a little pile of the precious stuff, and started to return to civilization where it would do him some good, had been found dead by the wayside with a knife in his breast, or never heard from again. But Walter Denham was of the stuff all true Englishmen are made of and felt fully able to take care of himself. He had good luck from the first, and at the end of five months made such a stroke that he decided he had enough of mining and began to think of returning to England. During his life in the mines he had held himself aloof from the other men, and as the claim he worked was at a distance from the others, and he made a confidant of no one, the fact that he had struck it rich was not known, and when he set out for Melbourne it was supposed he had become discouraged with the mines. An old miner who had served his first apprenticeship to the business in California in ‘49, and there become imbued with the wandering spirit which led him to Australia, accompanied him. This old Californian, making use of his experience in America, had rapidly acquired a fortune in the mines of Victoria, and now the wandering instinct had seized him once more and he wanted to see California again. So these two set out on the long journey to Melbourne alone; but it was not such a very lonesome one, as they were constantly meeting or passing parties going to or from the mines. The two men separated when about half way, as Denham wished to make a more circuitous route. He arrived in Melbourne on the first day of March, 1855. The next morning, as he stepped out of his lodgings, two officials placed their hands on his shoulders and gave him to understand he was their prisoner. Thoroughly surprised, he tried to find out the charge, but they were as silent on that point as mutes. It was not till two days had passed in the dark prison that he learned that the old miner with whom he had started from the mines had been found with a bullet hole in his skull near where they had parted, with all his gold missing. Denham now knew why it was the police had given the exclamation of satisfaction when they found his belt full of gold when they searched him. He looked thoughtful after he heard the charge. He knew he was not guilty, but he saw clearly how much the evidence was against him.

About four weeks later the case came on trial. He had an attorney that he had put in possession of the facts; but it was evident he did not half believe his client. Witnesses for the prosecution were not lack-