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THE

## 2 Копекъ Serpentine PERF. OF BALLYROTSK.

(CONSIDERABLY) AFTER JULES VERNE.

*I've very greatly enjoyed this owing to the incalculable economies of space and expense, we have been obliged to curtail this very interesting story, the original manuscript of which would have produced a three-volume novel. We have felt it necessary to bring it into a few columns of this magazine, and have therefore unreluctantly omitted a vast amount of geographical, ethnological, and other scientific details, which we are sure would have been most interesting to our readers, and reduced it to a mere shadow of its former dimensions. We trust, however, that in thus abridging it we have not diminished its interest, but have, perhaps, by concentration, even added thereto.*—ED.]

The Stamp Bourse of Paris was in a state of emotion closely bordering on excitement. An entirely novel variety had been discovered; not merely a new variety—such are met with every day upon the Bourse—but a variety of a novel kind, hitherto quite unknown to philately.

Now Philately, or the Science of Stamp Collecting—[We are obliged to omit here a dissertation of several pages upon Philately, or the Science of Stamp Collecting.—ED.]

This notable discovery emanated, too, from the very highest and most responsible source. It was made by no less a person than the great Mons. Chose, of the firm of Chose, Bonmarche et Cie., well known as being at the head of the Stamp Trade in Paris, that is in the whole of the civilized world.

The stamp trade, as we all know—[We have again to omit a detailed account of the Stamp Trade, but considerations of space and expense cannot be disregarded.—ED.]

The 2 kopeks stamp of the current issue of Ballyrotsk is plentiful in every stamp market. These little pieces of pink paper, disfigured by a design impressed in the poorest manner of lithography, are to be found in every school-boy's collection; yet here was a variety of it that commanded almost the highest figure on record, a specimen the possession of which was disputed at the price of the king's ransom by the richest collectors in Christendom, a rarity such as the great Mons. Chose himself believed to be possibly unique. Lithography, as all collectors know, even lithography as practised at the primitive printing office of Ballyrotsk, does not produce any very striking varieties, or, at least, none that cannot be easily accounted for.

Lithography, or the art of printing from stone—[Considerations of space substantially compel us to omit a most interesting article upon this subject, copied, we believe, from the "Encyclopædia Britannica."—ED.]

No; it was plain that the variety which had aroused so much enthusiasm was not one of design. But varieties of design are not the only varieties known to advanced followers of the Science of Philately.—[Considerations, &c.,

&c., again oblige us most regretfully to omit the chapter upon varieties of all kinds.—ED.]

What then was the particular form of variety in question here? Was it of watermark? No; watermarks were quite unknown in Ballyrotsk. Of paper? Well, little variations in the substance or tint of the paper—which was of the commonest and cheapest nature—were only to be expected. No, it was something more interesting than this. It was a variety of the most philatelic nature, a variety of perforation.

The ordinary 2 kopeks, black on pink, of the issue of 189—, is, as every philatelist is aware, imperforate, devoid of any nature of perforation even of the most ordinary description. Throughout its long career as a stamp-issuing district, Ballyrotsk had never perforated its stamps. The simple Jugginski,\* if ever he used the stamp, tore them roughly asunder; the scientific collector or the careful dealer served them with the scissors. Small wonder then that the discovery of a single perforation specimen should have caused such an excitement in the philatelic world. Had Ballyrotsk indeed adopted at last one of the most advanced improvements of philatelic civilization, or was this the handiwork of the gang of nefarious fakers, for which Alibon—perfidious in this as in all else—was so justly famed? Surely the answer to one of these must be in the affirmative—but such was not the case, and hence arose the mystery which was troubling all the savants of philately.

The stamp has been received direct from Ballyrotsk by the great firm of Chose, Bonmarche et Cie. in the ordinary course of importation. A single perforated specimen among a quantity of *used* stamps would have been nothing; but these were not *used* stamps. The oldest philatelist in Paris had never seen a used stamp of Ballyrotsk. Either the inhabitants of that district religiously preserved all the used stamps, and would not allow one of them to leave the country—or—but the alternative was too monstrous; Ballyrotsk had been issuing stamps for years; it was impossible to believe that all were produced entirely for exportation.

No; the stamp in question had been received direct from the district post-office. It was immaculate, and the original gum was still uninjured upon its reverse. It formed one of a sheet, the usual sheet of fifteen, in three horizontal rows of five, differing from one another only in the greater or less degree of smudginess of the impression. But this one, forming the extreme upper corner of the right hand side of the sheet, differed from all the others, not only on that sheet, but on all other sheets that had ever been seen! On two sides, and these not opposite sides, as is usually the case with partially perforated stamps, but two adjacent sides—the top, namely, and the right-hand side—it showed plain traces of a rough kind of a perforation! Truly a marvellous variety!!

But, you will ask, of what kind was the perforation? Now the nature of perforation known to philatelists—[Con, &c., &c., again

compel us to consign to the waste paper basket a treatise on perforation, which we are sure, &c., &c.—ED.]

Which of all these various methods had been employed here? It was a question not easy to answer. The great Dr. Lаметте, the highest known authority upon such a point, had examined the specimen with the most powerful magnifiers. Other only less learned philatelists had studied it also; and Monsieur Chose himself—no mean authority—had subjected it to all these high authorities with the stamp itself, all these high authorities were agreed upon, on one point, and that was that this was a species of serpentine perforation; on every other point connected with it they, as was more natural, entirely differed. As to the nature of the stamp by which it had been produced, there was the most stormy controversy; the sheet—for the stamp had not yet been a cover, but it still retained the place of honor, the right upper corner—would certainly have been torn in pieces, without the aid either of perforations or scissors had not one of Monsieur Chose's most active assistants rescued it, almost at the risk of his life, and placed this unique variety in the fire and burglar-proof safe. Unique! But was it unique! Time alone will determine this.

### CHAPTER II.

The zemstro, or district, of Ballyrotsk is one of the smallest and least important in the great Russian Empire. It is shown only on the largest maps. Look a little to the south of the thirty-first parallel of latitude, and some fifty degrees west of St. Petersburg, and you probably will not find it. [50° west of St. Petersburg is in the Atlantic Ocean. It can't be there.—Ed. Quite right. Don't I say that you won't find it?—AUTHOR.]

Situated many thousands of *versts* from any centre of civilization, it was one of those places where the proverb, "Go further, and fare worse," would not apply, for it was practically impossible to do either. The Hairap Licunoc (the local authority) had long ceased to attempt the collection of taxes, on the principle that it is impossible to extract blood from a stone, and the village post-office was now the sole source of revenue.

The fact that no letters even passed through it, for the simple reason that there was only one person in the district who could write, in no way prevented this department from being a most flourishing one; and the Imperial Government, which claimed a large percentage upon the gross receipts, had granted it all the privileges of first-class postal rates.

The Letajovski\* was a man of considerable talent as a financier. In addition to the above important office, he was the editor and publisher of the local paper, the "Froggallert"—president of the Hairap planning and proprietor of the only printing establishment,

\* District or sub Postmaster.—Author.

[TO BE CONTINUED.]

\* Peasant of South Central Russia.—Author.