

PHILATELIC RUMINATIONS.

Containing Bits of Advice, Some Facts, a Few
Observations, and Other Things Worth
Remembering, and Some Not.

BY L. H. BENTON.



WHILE sitting here, my thoughts run back over my short career as a stamp collector—a period covering five short years. Yet, during that time, one can have many experiences, and must necessarily have observed many points here and there worthy of mention.

It took me quite a while to understand that the dealer did not have all the stamps he catalogued, in stock. But experience has been a good teacher. Of about two dozen stamps I sent for once, I got half a dozen, I think it was. Thus, my "want list" was returned with about eighteen marked "not in stock."

Buying advertised sets is not always satisfactory, for, as a general thing, the set, when it comes, will prove to contain one or more specimens you would not have purchased had you seen the same on sheets, on account of the condition thereof. This is especially true in regard to used stamps, as there the chances for damage are greater, as heavy cancellations, nicked and torn edges, etc. This is not always the case, but in the general run it will be found so, as many will attest. It is according to with whom you deal, to a great extent. The best way to procure specimens is by the approval sheet system. Then you can see what you are buying.

The value of biographies of various philatelists in the stamp journals is manifest. Though we exchange photos, with many, there are hundreds we know physiognomically only by the prototypes accompanying most sketches. How our ideas regarding their ages change in reading them! I have a case in mind. There is a certain collector and philatelic writer, concerning whom I had heard much, that is, read his writings and numerous notes about his doings, etc. I had pictured him as a man of thirty or so. When I read his biography I was somewhat surprised to learn that he was six months younger than I, and yours truly has yet to see his 21st birthday; it is some ways off yet. And so on.

Undoubtedly the large number of varieties of our hand-printed stamps, used before the regular issue, is a prominent reason for their not being catalogued, yet I think I see another reason. Most of them lack the word "post." Those with the word "post" are catalogued. Query—Does the word "post" determine whether it is collectible or not?

If some small boy, of the usual inquisitive turn of mind, should ask you if the British Madagascar stamps are newspaper stamps, do not blame him. It would be a natural question.

And before I forget it, I'll speak about Philatelic poems. It is a pleasant diversion in the monotony to read such poems as are generally turned out by Roy Greene, Guy Green, "Diamond," et al. Real poetry is versification which, while it has true metre, and is interesting, has running through it a sentiment which leaves the reader in a pleasant state of reverie, as it were, at the conclusion; it is necessarily thrilling, and must be on a subject which will fit the

words and manner of construction. Judge a poem by its merits, and not by who writes it. The soon: the *litterateurs* grasp this idea, the better it will be, and less trash will be put before us over "great (?) poets'" signatures. I would not be greatly surprised if productions from the "poet laureate" of the *One Dime*, if under the name of—well—Tennyson, say, would sell well, drive, as it is. This false valuation should stop; justice should prevail. No personal experience has caused me to write this; I am no poet. I can appreciate a good poem, however, and I can tell a failure when I read one. It is a state of things to be regretted; and these are solemn facts. This is general and not particularly philatelic, though it has a definite connection with what I started to say.

Philatelic fiction is on the increase, too. Why does not some stampist with plenty of the wherewithal start the *Weekly Philatelic Fiction*? This suggestion is gratis.

The precision with which the beginner keeps account of the number of stamps in his collection is truly remarkable. He will tell you he has 937, 1,344, or 1,801, or something like that. How many advanced collectors can tell you? Few, I dare say. But it's all right, boys; nothing like rivalry, as long as it is honest. But the case of precision was in reading on a society application blank, under head of "When did you begin to collect stamps?" the answer, "Feb. 28, 1889," or something like it. That's the way to do it, boys, always tell the whole of it.

When I was a "kid," I had a printing press. On the box was this inscription: "Educate your boys; give them a printing press." This suggests an inscription for a stamp album: "Educate your boys—and girls; give them a stamp album," not to mention a good catalogue and some stamps.

We have received letters from all kinds of people, from all quarters of the globe, but never till recently did we receive one from a lunatic. It was signed "Lewis the Light," and was a circular containing thereon a lot of incoherent gibbering idiocy in the shape of religious chatter concerning the "True Army of Life," and requesting the receiver to send free all the stamps he can possibly rake together with which to buy the "True Army," a free ticket to Hades, or something of the kind. The million stamp racket again! Light-headed Lewis dated his kind request at San Francisco.

A bright newspaper paragrapher gives us a squib in which Jones tells Smith that he saw Brown treat his wife as he would not treat a dog. Smith eagerly asks the circumstances, expecting something scandalous, whereupon Jones quietly informs Smith that Brown merely kissed his wife.

And what has this to do with philately? you ask. Just this: It reminded me of a statement equally remarkable that might be made regarding our stamps, and that is, that they are *stuck down so that you cannot pry them up with a crowbar.* (Don't groan indoors, you might wake the baby.)

Why should our \$5.00 Columbus stamps have been issued in 1392? Know that? It's an easy one. Merely because it's a Head of Columbus.

And I suppose you all know why stamps are like lamps. Because we look for shades among them! (And the thermometer dropped to 2 in the shade.)

One more:

Why is a surcharge like a tin can tied to a dog's tail? Because it is bound to occur (a cur.)

P. S.—Send all undertakers' bills to writer.