

The Romance of Stamp Collecting

(Stephen Golder, Hon. Sec. British Columbia Philatelic Society.)

"Stamp collecting," says Mr. Cecil H. Bullivant, in his excellent book, "is a Pleasurable and Profitable Hobby." It certainly is, and during the seventy odd years or so that have passed since its inception, stamp collecting as a hobby has steadily increased in popularity until at the present time, when its devotees may be numbered not by tens but by hundreds of thousands it appeals alike to peasants and kings.

His Majesty, King George himself, is one of the keenest and most critical of philatelists. In a recent letter written by him, he confessed that stamp collecting provided him with one of his chief pleasures in life. As year succeeds year, the number of collectors is increasing by leaps and bounds.

Immediately upon its introduction into Great Britain from France, stamp collecting took a strong hold upon popular fancy. From that moment interest in it has never abated, and it may safely be assumed that the number of champions of a hobby as interesting as it is instructive, as amusing as it is profitable, will go on steadily increasing. There is something in stamp collecting above the ordinary attributes to most hobbies—something which is definite and helpful—this popularity may be largely due, for particularly nowadays do people take up with a hobby with the idea of deriving benefit from it—to procure an adequate return for the time and energy expended.

Circumstances and the passing of years give to certain stamps values sometimes only to be estimated in thousands of pounds. Certainly one of the great attractions which stamp collecting offers to its followers is the possibility, however remote, of sooner or later becoming the proud possessor of one of the great philatelic rarities of the world. These naturally are comparatively few in number, but every stamp collector ought to know something about them.

The rarest and most valuable, if not the best known stamp, is the one cent of the 1850 provisional issue of British Guiana, of which only one single specimen is known. For long it has reposed in the famous Ferrari collection. It is possible, having no peer in the realms of philately, that if put up to auction at the present time when prices rule high it might fetch anything between two and three thousand pounds. And of all stamps it is the least imposing in appearance. A crudely-drawn ship, set in a Latin inscription, printed from rough type, within plain rules, outside which are the words "BRITISH GUIANA. POSTAGE 1 Cent." the whole being printed in black on a magenta surface-coloured paper. This unimposing representative of the stamp maker's art is the rarest postage stamp in the world.

Several of the early stamps of Mauritius are very valuable. His Majesty King George, one of the keenest collectors in Great Britain, when Prince of Wales, paid no less than one thousand four hundred and fifty pounds for a fine copy of the 2d. blue Mauritius.

Another exceedingly valuable rarity is the 2 cents of the Hawaiian Islands, of which several years ago a very poor specimen realized seven hundred pounds.

There must still be hidden away in old cupboards and es-critoires bundles of documents and faded letters, which perchance may bear some of the world's great philatelic rarities, and it may be the good fortune of even the most amateurish of collectors, the very novice of the art, to bring them to light. Valuable errors and so forth, of which only one or two specimens are now known, must in the first place have been printed by scores. As time goes by, these treasures are continually being brought to light, and often

in the most unexpected manner. If only it were possible to go through all the old collections which our grandparents still have somewhere locked away, the search would undoubtedly reveal large quantities of stamps whose value is almost too great to be estimated.

Possibly no other pastime provides so many valuable and lasting lessons in history and geography. One cannot look intelligently through a collection of stamps without learning something of the social and political histories of almost every country in the world. A careful examination of the postal emissions of various countries reveals the several conditions through which, perhaps, that country has passed—a vassal state transformed into a monarchy, an empire giving place to a republic, islands passing from the possession of kings into self governing hands.

The stamp collector becomes the most observant and critical, because the very nature of the work necessitated in gathering together a collection of postage stamps teaches him to exercise the most scrupulous care and exact judgment. Where value often is dependent on minute points of difference; where the slightest shade or colour or variety in printing or dissimilarity in paper may mean the difference in worth between pence and pounds, it is only natural that the powers of quick and accurate perception should be cultivated to a high degree. But this is not all.

(Since this article was written a portion of the Ferrari collection has been sold by the French Government, and a vertical pair of British Guiana 1850 stamps fetched the record price of £5,250. The same pair were purchased by Ferrari 26 years ago for £1,450.)



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