

The Canadian Philatelist

PUBLISHED MONTHLY

IN THE INTEREST OF STAMP COLLECTING.

VOL. III. NO. 10.

LONDON, OCTOBER 1, 1894.

WHOLE NO. 34.

Written for THE CANADIAN PHILATELIST.

A PLEA FOR SYSTEMATIC COLLECTING.

BY LEWIS G. QUACKENBUSH.

IT NOW seems to be generally conceded, by those best qualified to judge, that Philately is more than a mere pastime and fully deserves to be called a study, if not, indeed, a science. The consensus of Philatelic opinion points to the conclusion that Philately possesses most of the qualities which are requisites of a pursuit wishing to fill the role of a science, though it cannot yet fairly be said to have attained that honor.

A large part of the contempt and ridicule with which the proposal to term Philately a science has been received is due to the fact that so very few collectors take up the study in a systematic way. The purpose of this article is to point out to those who have heretofore collected everything which came under their notice that was within reach of their purses, the superiority of a pre-arranged plan of collecting.

In any project whatsoever, a clearly defined plan of action is a vital necessity. In making a study of any subject it is impossible to obtain a clear and comprehensive knowledge of the subject, as a whole, by desultory and irregular reading. Educators have long recognized the necessity of systematic courses of study; the work of business men is systematized in every department of commercial life; even in the sporting world we find the value of systematic training and exercise recognized by all.

To reap the most good from such a study as Philately we must, from the very beginning, have a well defined object in view. Sporadic collecting cannot be satisfactory; it is that class of Philatelists who only snatch a moment now and then for their chosen pursuit who form a large part of the deserters. The true Philatelist has almost always a goal in mind which he is striving to reach; it may be the will-o-the-wisp of absolute completeness; or the easier goal of comparative completeness; or the still more sought for prize of specialist completeness, that is, completeness in the stamps of a certain country or portion of the globe; but in either case the collector knows what he is working for, what he should study, and to what end his efforts are leading him.

The phrase, "systematic collecting," as used in my title is, perhaps, a trifle obscure, and requires a brief explanation as to its exact meaning. I can best define it by illustration. Probably three-fourths of those who are interested in the collecting of postage stamps lack system. All beginners necessarily do, as they know but little, on first entering the field, of the real extent of the study.

But this lack of system is not by any means confined to beginners. Hundreds and thousands of experienced Philatelists have no well defined plan of collecting. As beginners they collected indiscriminately, and now, though they have long outgrown the place of the novice, they have made no change in their methods. They collect, haphazard, a stamp here and a stamp there; buying those varieties which look the handsomest on the approval sheets; one month bending all their energies to the stamps of one country, and the next, forsaking the old love for some other whose stamps happen to strike their fancy. He who collects thus cannot extract from the pursuit a tithe of the pleasure reaped by the careful investigator and the systematic scholar.

I do not advise all to make a systematic study of the pursuit. There are a few collectors, a very few, so circumstanced that they do well to eschew all system in their Philatelic studies. Some mortals are unfitted by nature for close application, or painstaking research; probably most of these fully recognize the fact themselves if they pay any heed to Solon's famous maxim, "know thyself." But the great majority of Philatelists would, if they could only bring themselves to think so, gain several distinct benefits from a closer and more systematic study of stamps and stamp lore.

In the first place, the discipline to the mental faculties, which such study gives, should not be underestimated. The minute differences in stamps which seem exactly alike on a casual inspection, yet whose value may vary widely on account of those very differences, which are well nigh invisible to an ordinary eye, are detected by experienced philatelists with comparative ease. Why? Simply because the collector has made it his business to learn everything possible in regard to the specimens which he collects, and, in his study of the minor varieties, has so trained his eye that he recognizes at a glance what the careless loiterer in the Philatelic field would fail to detect. The skin-deep Philatelist may have a smattering of Philatelic erudition, but it is of little practical value to him. It is vague and unsystematized, and hence is anything but satisfactory to a studious mind.

It is a proven fact that those who collect scientifically are far more likely to retain their interest in the pursuit than those who make no effort to delve deeply into its finer side. There is a certain fascination to the study which increases as we become better acquainted with it. No one can really understand its claim until he has actually chosen some particular branch for his field and bent all his energies and becoming an authority on that particular division of the subject. It is the advanced collector who derives the greatest pleasure from his connection with Philately. With the school-boy collector, Philately