

Written for THE CANADIAN PHILATELIST.

THE HOBBY OF HOBBIES.

BY LEWIS G. QUACKENBUSH.

"The ruling fashion, be it what it will.
The ruling passion conquers reason still.—Pope.

ALMOST every man has some ruling passion: sometimes, a passion for books and learning; sometimes a passion for wine and women. Whichever it may be, it is apt to have full possession of him, and to sway him at its will. We seldom speak of interest in Philately as a passion. We call it by turns a fad, a hobby, or a science, according to the degree of our enthusiasm, but it does often become the ruling passion of our lives, taking the place of reckless amusement and dissipation.

It seems to me that it would be of some value to us to compare our ruling passion with those which govern us. Nearly every man has his fad. The bibliomaniac, the antiquarian, and the bric-a-brac collector are alike victims to a love for the rare and curious. Curiosities of all forms and all kinds are preserved by all sorts of people. The curiosity collector is almost as old an institution as the tax collector. But I leave out the question of collecting altogether; there are thousands and hundreds of thousands of other men who are entitled to the designation of cranks, that name which so easily provokes the stamp collector's wrath and indignation. There are horse-racing cranks, and cycling cranks, and dramatic cranks, and base-ball cranks. In fact, a large majority of mankind seem to be engaged in riding some pet hobby. Life and the magazine article are both too short for me to speak at any length on the various hobbies of mankind, and I must restrict myself to a comparison of several of the most prominent with our own favorite pastime. The collector of rare books would at first sight appear to have the best hobby in existence; but when we stop to consider that he buys a scarce old folio, not for the purpose of reading it, but because it is a rarity or a curious specimen of the book-maker's art, we see that he is not so far intellectually superior to the philatelist, after all. A taste for reading is one of the most valuable habits which man can acquire, and the collecting of books for the purpose of reading them cannot be too much commended; but I do not see that a love for rare first editions will prove a whit more beneficial than a similar love for unique and scarce postage stamps. The collector of old china, or pottery and bric-a-brac of any kind, like the bibliomaniac is always cultured and intelligent, and usually wealthy, but this hobby cannot claim to be of much benefit intellectually. Objects which are treasured because of any historical association are always instructive, and the china collector finds many plaques and dishes, on which are painted representations of famous events in history. Thus far, such a collection is beneficial, but the same drawback which applies to collecting of books is equally true in this case, namely that money must be expended freely to obtain any appreciable results. The philatelist, on the other hand, is often a poor man. The very fact that many stamp collectors are young men, necessarily working for small wages, plainly proves that here, at least, the millionaires do not dominate.

The hobbies of our boyhood deserve little notice unless it be for the pleasures which they temporarily afford us. Looking back, it seems impossible that

we could ever have derived any qualification from tobacco tags and cigarette pictures. The cigarette cards in particular were not over moral, being mostly adorned with portraits of young ladies, famous in that esteemed line of the drama, designated by the old maid, too modest to say "leg show," as a "limb exhibition." The collecting of postmarks was a slight improvement over the elevating pastime and yielded some geographical knowledge, but like the others was only a transient occupation. The collecting of bird's eggs recently dignified by some scientific name, which I can't at this moment recollect, has some merits, though such a collection soon languishes for want of specimens. Bird's eggs are an important aid to natural history, but this branch of collecting has never been very flourishing, probably due to the fragile and unwieldy nature of the specimens.

There is no end to the various things which might be collected; and I shall certainly not attempt to enumerate all or even half of them. The tyrant space compels me to pass over without special mention the collecting of minerals and insects, two exceedingly interesting and profitable hobbies, and attend at once to the only two dangerous rivals of Philately in the peculiar field.

Coin and autograph collecting are the only fads whose popularity is at all to be compared with that of Philately. Of course, I shall not institute a comparison between stamp collecting and the collecting of rare books or any other of the time-killing pastimes of the wealthy mentioned earlier in this article, since such a comparison would be ludicrous. Rare books appeal to an entirely different class of men from those who are reading this article, and to compare two such pursuits would be absurd. But stamp and coin and autograph collecting have a great deal in common, in fact, many persons are more or less interested in all three.

Coin collecting, which is a much older pursuit than Philately, has always been the latter's rival. It has been respectfully treated by the sceptical world when Philately was scoffed at. But Philately now has the laugh on her sister pursuit, for while Numismatics has stood still she has made a spurt and passed her in the race for popularity. Although I have never tried for myself the benefits of coin collecting, and cannot, therefore, speak from experience, we have the testimony of many who have forsaken Numismatics for Philately as to the superior charms of the latter. Nevertheless, it is a good old science, a little slow, perhaps, but it ought to be respected for age, if for nothing else.

Autograph collecting is younger, and, although a very popular pastime, engaged in to some extent by great numbers of those who burn to possess the signatures of great men, is hardly likely to ever attract many philatelists away from their hobby. Autographs are a first-rate teacher of biography, but there their merit ends; whereas Philately can boast of multitudinous attractions.

Come now, my friends; We have briefly glanced at about all the important fads of the hour, likely to prove attractive to the philatelist's heart. Would you exchange your hobby for any one of them? "No! I," cries Tom; "Not I," cries Harry; "Not I," cries Dick; and all about me I hear a chorus of negatives. "Why this enthusiasm?" asks some newcomer. The answer is not a long one. It is simply because our hobby is the hobby of hobbies.

We desire to purchase, for cash, a quantity of first-class manuscript for use in our Christmas number.