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IS PHILATELY INSTRUCTIVE?

ADAPTED FROM AN ARTICLE IN AN OLD MAGAZINE.

MOST manias, whether chronic or acute, fail to become cosmopolite; they rage within a limited area, beyond which they do not spread; or they are confined to certain classes of society, above or below which they do not rise or sink. Every country has its own special mania; and there are doubtless plenty of little localities, both within the pale of Christendom and without it, each with its own pet mania, which, as far as the rest of the world is concerned, is born to break out unseen, and waste its sweetness on the desert air.

The above cannot be said of philately, as its influence is felt among all classes, from one end of the world to the other. Postage stamps are now issued by almost every country, and it would be hard to visit any place, where one or more interested in their collection could not be found.

I am about to relate a case in point, which occurred twenty-five years ago. My nephew had just arrived home for the holidays (I was his guardian), and he brought with him a large, square, strong-bound manuscript, filled with a series of sums, from simple and compound addition (with the lines ruled with red ink), through cube root extraction, tare and tret, interest for various terms and at various per cent., and a host of such like matter, all transcribed in his own handwriting, with corrections by the head usher. It was (for it is no longer) an autograph volume of which any cipher-master in the land might boast.

His aunt Emma and myself, after close inspection of the manuscript, were duly edified—so duly, in fact, that I believe we never opened it afterwards until the occasion I am about to relate. But what subsequently excited our approbation was the constant reference which Harry made to his model ciphering-book. He would lay down the *Recorder* to recur to its perusal. If I talked about the leading article, he would take up his book as if to help to a closer comprehension of the topic. If I alluded to the Court of the Vatican and mentioned the intrigues of the ex-King of the Naples, he replied (consulting the book again), "Ah, yes; I have it." If I wondered whether Hesse would make it up with Russia, "Let me see; unluckily, no," was his answer, after a glance at the oracle. He never parted from the book, his *vade mecum*, his manual, his companion by day, and his bedfellow, I believe, by night.

At the same time he seemed strangely inquisitive respecting our own private affairs. Neither Emma nor myself received letters that contained deep secrets