

# **WHAT PHILATELY TEACHES**

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What Philately Teaches by John N. Luff

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BY

JOHN N. LUFF.

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A LECTURE DELIVERED BEFORE THE SECTION ON  
PHILATELY OF THE BROOKLYN INSTITUTE OF  
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## What Philately Teaches.

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**B**Y way of preface, I wish to say, that I have prepared this paper with the hope of interesting those who are not stamp collectors and my endeavor will be to indicate some of the interesting and instructive things that may be learned by those who follow this fascinating pursuit. Much that I have to say will be ancient history to philatelists, but I trust they will remember that this is not especially intended for them and pardon any dryness in it, in view of its intent.

Stamp collecting, as pursued to-day, has become something more than an amusement for children. It affords instruction and mental relaxation to those who are older and more serious.

On the title page of every stamp album and catalogue should be inscribed the old latin motto: "*Te*

*doces*," thou teachest, for it is certainly an instructor and affords much intellectual entertainment.

In connection with this motto we have a little philatelic joke from the orient.



In one of the Chinese treaty ports a stamp has been issued which bears the motto. We find them on the tea chests, written in excellent Chinese, and, even if we do not read the language,

we cannot doubt that they refer to the *tea doses* which the chests contain.

By some, philately has been called a science. Perhaps it hardly merits so exalted a title but it opens for us a wide field for research, in which we may find many curious, interesting and instructive things. It trains our powers of observation, enlarges our perceptions, broadens our views, and adds to our knowledge of history, art, languages, geography, botany, mythology and many kindred branches of learning.

Philately embraces the whole earth and likewise the whole earth is sometimes embraced within the limits of a postage stamp. As an example of this, witness the recent effort of our Canadian cousins in



celebration of the achievement of the long-desired ocean penny postage, at present an inter-colonial rate of the British Empire, but some day to be an international rate. The motto is a trifle bombastic and suggests the Teutonic superlative; "So bigger as never vas," and the "Xmas 1898" reads like the advertisement of a department store: "Gents pants for Xmas gifts." But we must admit that the stamp is a pretty conceit, in spite of these defects and of the ambition of the artist, which has spread the "thin red line" over territory that has not otherwise been acquired.

In addition to the things to be learned from the pictorial part of stamps, there are other things which attract the attention of the thoughtful and bring with them knowledge that is both interesting and valuable. The mechanical part of stamp making may be studied with much profit and entertainment. Considered in all its aspects, philately is even more instructive than matrimony. You will remember the elder Weller's views on the latter subject: "Ven you're a married man, Samivel, you'll understand a good many things as you don't under-



stand now; but vether its worth while going through so much to learn so little, as the charity boy said ven he got to the end of the alphabet, is a matter o' taste. I rather think it isn't." This reproach cannot be applied to philately. It teaches even the unwilling and careless. In the effort to fill the spaces in their albums they must learn what varieties they are lacking and in what these differ from other and similar varieties. Thus some knowledge must be gained, even if unsought. To the studious and the careful, in this as in other things in life, the greatest benefits naturally accrue.

In my remarks this evening I shall endeavor to touch upon a few subjects which are quite certain to attract the attention of any one who takes up stamp collecting with any degree of earnestness and thoroughness. That these subjects open up other fields for interesting and profitable study will be readily apparent.

Let us take a postage stamp and consider it. Aside from the name of the country whence it emanates and the expression of value, what do we find in it to study? First the design, next the means by which the design was prepared and placed upon the paper, thirdly the paper upon which the stamp is

printed, and lastly the finishing touches of gum, perforation, etc.

In the early days of stamps most countries made their own and they were, in some degree, an indication of the artistic progress, or want of it, in a country. But we have changed all that and to-day all effort seems to be directed toward producing artistic and attractive stamps. Sometimes this is due to national pride and occasionally it is intended to draw attention to the resources and



natural wonders of a country. As an example of the latter, here are the marvelous pink terraces of New Zealand, which were, un-

fortunately, destroyed by volcanic disturbances a few years ago. But too often, we fear, these picture stamps are produced merely with a view to their ready salability to collectors. More frequent-



ly than not, these brilliant labels are the product of a distant country and are no longer indicative of the artistic status of the country by which they are

issued. For example, a late issue from the Tonga islands but made in London. Indeed, the wilds of Africa, the distant islands of the Pacific and the tumultuous republics of Central America far outshine the cultured countries of the old world in their postal stationery. The designs of stamps may suggest many things : the power of nations, the march of history, the glory of victory, the advance of civilization, art, industry, natural resources, scenic grandure, the dead and storied past, the living breathing present.

The majority of stamps bear a portrait, usually that of a sovereign. The stamps of our own country present a portrait gallery of our great and heroic dead, for by law the faces of the living may not appear on our stamps or money. This is the reverse of the rule in monarchical countries, where the portrait of the reigning sovereign usually adorns the postal issues. The likeness most frequently seen on postage stamps is that of her most gracious Majesty the Queen of England. For more than half a century her portrait has adorned the numerous stamps of Great Britain and the British Colonies, beginning in 1840 with a beautiful portrait—painted by an American, we may be proud to say—