

PHILATELY AND THE TEACHING OF MODERN HISTORY

HISTORIANS have long recognised the aid which they receive from numismatics; a coin is first-hand evidence, sometimes the only evidence that exists, of peoples and kings and kingdoms in far-distant ages. But probably not many students of modern events are yet aware that in the past sixty years there has sprung up a new science of not dissimilar character, which may prove to be another handmaid to history of real, if modest, value. The first postage stamp, the famous and beautiful "Penny Black," was issued by our own country on 6 May, 1840; within the next twenty years the majority of civilised countries had followed the example thus set of an easy method of franking correspondence; and before 1860 the collecting instinct which is engrained in human nature had claimed the postage stamp as an object of its interest. To the new hobby the name of Philately was given, a somewhat far-fetched invention of an ingenious Frenchman who hunted the Greek language to find a word that might express the idea of a frank, and finally found it in the word that means a tax—so that a philatelist, literally, is one who loves taxes! To-day there are stamp collectors by the hundred thousand; philately has its devotees in every corner of the world, and in every class and age. It is no longer, if indeed it ever was, merely a small boy's pursuit; many busy men and women find in it their recreation, and it is, of course, well known that our own King possesses and is actively interested in one of the best collections in the world. And stamp collecting has developed from the jackdaw stage of unintelligently accumulating and huddling within an album anything that possesses the shape of a stamp, into the serious study of all that can be discovered regarding each issue. In this way the modern philatelist acquires a very respectable amount of general information upon, for instance, the paper-maker's art and the various methods of printing; and he probably gains a much more reliable knowledge of geography than the average man, who might be puzzled to tell you exactly where Tonga, Togo, and Rarotonga are, and might possibly think that Santander is the name of a curious reptile!

The purpose of this paper is to show how Philately especially illustrates the history of our own times. It depicts with fidelity and swiftness the rise and fall of states; it tells of their development, of their political complexion, of the youth, the middle years, and the old age of their rulers; it has much to reveal concerning their natural resources and commerce, and speaks now and again of the romance, the tragedy, and even the comedy of national and personal hopes and fears.

It is natural that in this country the issues of the states that comprise the British Commonwealth should arouse the greatest interest, although possibly they have less actual historical value than, for instance, the stamps of the continent of Europe between 1850 and 1870, or the War and post-war emissions of the past eight years. But even so, there is much that is capable of arousing an interest in modern events in the student of stamps of the British Empire, and, conversely, much that the teacher of history may use to point his observations. Undoubtedly the greatest development within the Empire during the past eighty years has been the gradual abandonment of what may loosely be called Colonial Office control, in face of the rise to nationhood of the great states which now for all practical purposes are free members of a British Confederation. This is reflected with unerring fidelity in the postage stamps of these countries. Take, for instance, the Dominion of Canada; the philatelist traces its consolidation through independent issues for Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Canada proper, British Columbia, and Vancouver Island, to the absorption of these provinces within the Dominion, and the first issue of postage stamps for the whole country in 1868; and he wonders sometimes whether the process will continue to its logical conclusion, and Newfoundland, which still issues its own stamps, will seek admission to the Union. In Australia the same process of growth and combination is evident; New South Wales and Victoria issue the first stamps in 1850; Van Diemen's Land, afterwards to be named Tasmania, Western Australia, South Australia, and Queensland, the last being a state cut off from New South Wales, follow suit, and so continue until the Commonwealth is formed, though separate postal services are kept on for a few years after that date. Meanwhile the Australian peoples follow the example of the home country; British New Guinea is handed over by the Colonial Office, and becomes the first Australian Colony, under its native name of Papua; and since the War the Commonwealth has become the Mandatory

Power for German New Guinea and various islands in the North Pacific; all of which historical facts are duly recorded by the stamps of the period. And again, in South Africa, whose complicated political history is faithfully reflected in, and easily learned from, its postage stamps. We begin with the British Colonies of the Cape¹—whose first triangular issue is known even to the non-philatelist—and Natal, and the Boer Republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State. Afterwards there appear and disappear separate issues for Zululand and British Bechuanaland, as these territories are first formed, and then merged within their larger neighbours; and, in the Boer sphere, the evanescent States known as the New Republic and Swaziland leave their traces in the stamp album. The first Boer War sees the Transvaal stamps overprinted V.R.; there follows a short-lived "Queen's Head" issue, in its turn after Majuba to be overprinted Z.A.R. The Jameson Raid had no postal results; but the war of 1899 of course did. We have Boer issues used in Cape Colony; "Mafeking Besieged" ran its own postal service, both within the town and by means of native runners through the enemy lines, the head of its defender, Colonel Baden-Powell, appearing on one of the stamps; and later on both Orange Free State and Transvaal issues receive the overprints V.R.I. and E.R.I. Then the conquest, after the futile struggle in the Pietersburg region, where rough-and-ready stamps were produced by the Boer Die-hards; for a short time there are "King's Head" issues for the Orange River Colony and the Transvaal, the Crown CA watermark showing the home control of these additions to the Empire; and finally the general issue for the new partner in the British Commonwealth, the Union of South Africa. Meanwhile, in the far north the British South Africa Company was developing what is now known as Rhodesia, and issuing its own stamps; and there is still one relic of direct Crown control in the Bechuanaland native reserves, where British stamps overprinted Bechuanaland Protectorate are used.

Leaving the Empire—though the historical interest of its stamps is far from exhausted by these brief notes, in which nothing has been said, for instance, of our vast Asiatic possessions, or Egypt, or the West Indies—we find that there is hardly a country of the world, civilised or uncivilised, upon whose recent history

¹ At first under control from England, which was gradually relaxed, full responsible government being granted in 1872. The change is marked philatelically by the alteration of watermark some years later from an Imperial Crown and CA (= Crown Agents) in the paper of each stamp, to the Colonial device of a Cabled Anchor.

no light is thrown by its stamps. For reasons of space, it is possible to deal with Europe alone in this paper; but both in Asia and in America the political history of the past sixty years is faithfully recorded by postal changes; to name a few events only, the Boxer Rebellion, and, later, the overthrow of the Manchu dynasty in China; Imperial marriages and deaths in Japan; the troubles of Stevenson's days in Samoa; revolutions without number in South and Central America, including the extinction of the only monarchies of the New World in Brazil and Mexico; the war of 1860 between North and South in the United States—these are all familiar things to the stamp collector. But it is in Europe, as one might expect, that the richest material is to be found. In France, for instance, the first stamps were issued in 1849, shortly after the abdication of Louis Philippe; these stamps bear the inscription *Repub.(lique) Franc.(aise)*, and the design is the head of the goddess Ceres. Quickly there follows a short-lived issue of two stamps, *similarly inscribed*, but bearing the head of Perpetual President Louis Napoleon; and then a third series, with the same ruler's head, but now with the inscription *Empire Franc.(aise)*. The war of 1870 restores the Republic; but Paris is besieged, so roughly lithographed copies of the first issue (that with the head of Ceres) are made at Bordeaux, whilst a supply of stamps from the original plates is being printed in Paris itself, to be brought into general use as soon as peace is restored.

The illustrative value of such a series of stamps is self-evident; but still more valuable is the help that the student of the tangled history of Germany may gain from the postal issues of its various states between 1850 and 1870. A map of the country before its unification is enough to fill with despair anyone who approaches its history for the first time; how can he ever visualise and make real to himself this amazing medley of kingdoms and duchies and free cities? How can he keep clearly before him the gradual Prussification of the German peoples which led up to the war with Austria, the North German Federation, and 1870? Or how can he disentangle the intricacies of the Danish Duchies quarrel, and mark the realisation of Bismarck's subtle designs therein? Quite soberly, I know of no help so great as that which he may receive from the stamps issued by the various German states and cities during this period. He may not have access to all the stamps themselves, for some of them are scarce; but he can gain all the information needed from a good illustrated catalogue. Only a few of the points which may thus be learned

and understood can be mentioned here. During the period 1850–1860 stamps were issued by the following German states: the *Kingdoms* of Bavaria, Hanover, Prussia, Saxony, and Wurtemberg; the *Grand Duchies* of Baden, Mecklenburg Schwerin, Mecklenburg Strelitz, and Oldenburg; the *Duchy* of Brunswick; and the *Free Cities* of Bergedorf, Bremen, Hamburg, and Lubeck. In addition, stamps were issued rather later in Schleswig and Holstein during and after the Austro-Prussian occupation. The postal service in those parts of Germany not covered otherwise was a monopoly of the Austrian princely house of Thurn und Taxis, by whose command there was issued in 1852 a double series of stamps, one with values expressed in silbergroschen, for Northern Germany, the other with values in kreuzer, for Southern Germany. We may summarise briefly some of the historical events illustrated by these stamps: the absorption of Bergedorf by Hamburg (1867); the abortive revolt in Schleswig-Holstein (1850); the Bund occupation of Holstein (1864); the participation of Austria and Prussia in the occupation of Schleswig and Holstein, and the allocation of the former to Prussia, the latter to Austria, before the war between the two Powers; the backing by Hanover of the wrong horse in that war, and its consequent extinction as an independent kingdom; the formation of the North German Confederation; the war with France; the establishment of the German Empire; and, as showing that the new Empire was not legally or actually homogeneous, the retention by Bavaria and Wurtemberg of postal rights which even now, after the War, are not entirely surrendered.

To take one other instance from this period of the nineteenth century, Philately affords a similar illustration of the progress of Italy towards unity. There are marked stages in this progress, each of which is faithfully recorded in the stamps of the time. The following states in the old Italy at one time or another issued postage stamps:—the Kingdom of Sardinia, which included Piedmont on the mainland; Austrian Italy (Lombardy and Venetia); Modena; Parma; Tuscany; Romagna; the Papal States; and the Two Sicilies, with separate issues for Naples and the island itself. Each step in the unifying of these long-separated segments of Italy can be traced in the stamps of the various states and revolutionary committees. In the first war with Austria (1859), Lombardy was freed, and Parma, Modena, and Tuscany expelled their princes; provisional stamps were issued, those of the two last-named states bearing the White Cross of the House of Savoy. Next year the amazing exploits

of Garibaldi gained Sicily and Naples, and the head of Victor Emmanuel replaced the arms of the Bourbons and the effigy of "King Bomba." Venetia was conquered in 1866; and after the fall of Rome in 1870 the Pope lost his temporal power, and the King of Savoy reigned as monarch over all Italy. Now, only the tiny republic of San Marino maintains a semi-independence, and with it the right to issue stamps. It may be mentioned that modern Italy is not unmindful of its great men; during the past few years it has issued stamps specially commemorative of Garibaldi and Mazzini, as well as of the Jubilee of the establishment of the kingdom.

The recent history of Spain and Portugal, Scandinavia and Russia, and above all the Balkan kingdoms, may be traced in a similar way; but we must pass on to the philatelic results of the late war. It would be hopeless to attempt to do more than summarise some of the chief philatelic sources from which historical information may be drawn. Several influences have contributed to the formation of a vast mass of material, the real historical value of which has not hitherto been recognised even by philatelists. The first of these influences is the great development during recent years in the use of the post by civilised nations. If Transport is Civilisation, as we are sometimes told, no less essential to the maintenance of social life is a quick and dependable postal service. Hence one of the first cares of a Government, whether it be in occupied territory or in a newly formed state, is the establishment of a Ministry of Posts; and this necessitates the issue of stamps. Two other influences during the past eight years have been of perhaps greater importance. One is the obvious value of the postage stamp as a means of propaganda, both internal and external; there have been many issues during this period which have been frankly political in their origin and intention. The other is the by no means despicable revenue that may be raised from stamp collectors who are eager to keep their collections up to date, a revenue which follows almost automatically upon each new issue—though of late collectors have got a little tired of helping to balance the budgets of Central Europe! For these reasons the stamps of the past eight years are very numerous, and of real value to the historian. Not only has he the "occupation" stamps issued by Germany and her allies during the War; but literally every chameleon change in the new Europe that is still in process of being fashioned out of the ruins of the old is depicted in the stamps issued by the kingdoms which have been overthrown and

are being re-made. Russia from the Tsardom through the Revolution to the Soviet Republic, and all the futile efforts of Judenitch and Wrangel and Denikin; the long-expected breaking-up of the Austrian Empire; its *disjecta membra* as new nations and states; Poland free once more, but still pitiful in its misery; the Plébiscite areas in North and East Germany, Schleswig, Silesia, Allenstein, Marienwerder; Roumania enlarging its borders; Fiume and the amazing adventure of D'Annunzio; Great Serbia, and the extinction of the heroic kingdom of Montenegro; these are but a few of the events which the stamp album illustrates with a clarity and an inherent interest that no post-war historian has succeeded in reaching.

It is obvious that a paper of this nature, necessarily unillustrated, and read for the most part by people who are unacquainted with Philately—even, perhaps, faintly contemptuous of it—cannot suggest with any approach to adequacy how much the historian may find to his purpose in the postage stamp. I do not pretend that he will discover through it anything of importance that he does not already know; I do maintain that he might use it to give point to his teaching, to throw a clearer light on doubtful matters, and to arouse interest and attention in those whom he addresses: and this paper has been written mainly with the object of directing the attention of the teacher of modern history to Philately as an aid in his work.¹ The interest in history and kindred sciences which stamp collecting

¹ It would not be difficult to give practical effect to the suggestions of this paper; even a non-philatelic historian may quite quickly gain sufficient knowledge of the stamps of his particular country or period to use them in illustration of his subject. Excellent stamp catalogues are issued by several of the bigger dealers, and those especially of Messrs. Stanley Gibbons contain a great amount of carefully compiled historical information. With their aid it is comparatively easy to discover the most useful stamps; and it will be found that few of them are rare or costly. In the case of those that would be difficult to obtain, the illustrations in the catalogues, which are usually life size and very good, form a not ineffective substitute. So far as post-war issues are concerned, the collapse of the Central European exchanges makes it possible to get practically everything that is necessary at a very trifling cost. The writer has recently addressed the South Dorset Branch of the Historical Association on this subject, and the total value of the stamps used in illustrating the paper (on the political development of Europe since 1850) was probably under ten shillings. There are, moreover, a large number of Philatelic Societies in this country, several in London and one in very nearly every large town in the provinces; and these will be found to be glad to place their expert knowledge at the service of those who may request it. Further information on this point may be obtained from the Hon. Secretary of the Permanent Executive Committee of the Philatelic Congresses of Great Britain, Mr. J. S. Telfer, 61, Chancery Lane, W.C. After May 1923 it will be possible to obtain the loan of lantern slides on this and similar subjects, by application to the same quarter.

frequently arouses in the young scholar is undoubted, and the extent of it is probably wider than many teachers realise. Rightly used, it may be of true educational value, as has been found in those schools where Philatelic Societies amongst the scholars are allowed to exist. It need hardly be said, however, that a master or mistress must avoid giving the least ground for the suspicion that the hobby is being used as a stalking-horse for "lessons"; that would be felt to be not playing the game, and nothing would more quickly kill all interest, and render nugatory all attempts to turn Philately to good account.

BASIL D. REED.