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[Philatelistische literatur - ein vorschlag zur mitarbeit]

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PHILATELIC LITERATURE - A PROPOSAL FOR CO-OPERATION

Paper read to the Teplitz-Schönau Philatelic Society by Max Block.

Stamps have been collected since the '50s of last century, the first German catalogue appeared in the '60s, as did the first specialist philatelic journal, and they have had numberless successors. Since then, many books, catalogues and reports have been written, printed, bought and sold, but the majority of collectors, unfortunately, do not know of a simple book, read barely a simple journal - and that is probably an advertising sheet - and it is comparatively rare to find a collector who takes a serious interest in philatelic literature.

The reasons? They are all too obvious.

A great number of collectors are too young and superficial. We cannot expect school children who gladly spend their odd coppers on brightly coloured foreign stamps to subscribe to a magazine. There are also many older occasional stamp collectors who go on collecting at odd times just out of habit and who have little idea that philatelic literature exists. It is scarcely surprising if they are indifferent to the fact. But there are numbers of serious stamp collectors who will say "yes, I do collect, but just to amuse myself, I don't take it so seriously that I need to read specialist literature". And yet this viewpoint is as perverse as it can possibly be. The collector - at least the average collector - is not expected to go in for detailed serious research, but he should read a publication or book - whether a textbook or a handbook - partly for enjoyment and partly - and this should not be underestimated - for protection against losses.

What pleasure the collector will have if he finds from a specialist work that his collection includes, unknown to himself, rare varieties or types, unusual cancellations etc. How easily he can detect a forgery and so protect himself from loss!

But there is a great deal of laziness here. He would rather firmly stick ten forged stamps or new issues into his album or pay 100 crowns for notoriously dubious stamps than spend 10 crowns a year on the subscription to a really good magazine or 20 crowns for a good handbook.

And he has a second objection.

He says: "Supposing I do subscribe to a magazine, I shall not find nearly as much as I need in it, but there will be a great deal that simply does not interest me.

This is unfortunately true, but it is reasonable to expect the 10 to 24 issues of a simple volume to give a basic education about all the postage stamps of every country?

"Yes, but I can't get hold of all the back issues of an old magazine."

Right again. The 46 volumes of the Senf journal would already cost a pretty sum. The **Deutsche Briefmarken-Zeitung**, with its now more than 30 volumes, would also cost 150 to 200 marks.

And yet I would say to everyone who is not a specialist collector of an individual country: "Buy as many old stamp magazines as you can! They are the basis of science in philately."

The work has been going for years: is philately, or better the study of postage stamps a hobby or a science? I think we can say the position is now as follows: simply sticking in pretty little pictures is a hobby, or a game, an investment, or perhaps even a form of playing the market, but serious concern with stamps such as gives the collector his real enjoyment is - and this is quite indisputable - a science.

Now, what are the sources of this science, since there are no schools and teachers for it? Only the literature.

We have to distinguish between two branches: Firstly, philatelic books, secondly, philatelic journals.

To every serious collector, and to many of the younger ones, a philatelic book means a catalogue. Whether it be the Senf, the Normal, or the Michel catalogue, one of them is absolutely essential for the purchaser or exchanging collector in Germany or Austria - or what is left of Austria now. The Senf catalogue, with its fundamental information, really amounts to a small handbook, which has basically not been superseded by the Kohl handbook, is too inconvenient for many collectors, too detailed and too dear, or else it would be used more widely than it is. Moreover the Kohl handbook is inadequate for the specialist collector of many countries and for them reference has to be made to other philatelic literature. The collector of old Germany has it easy. If he has enough money he can buy the Krötzsch handbook, if he collects cancellations he has a range of other specialist works such as the Reinheim catalogue of cancellations, Glasewald's work on numerical and place-name cancellations of the individual German States, and there are works by Ohrt, Ton, Beck-Holzschuler, Stenger, etc. on individual German States. We also know of very good specialist works on most of the other European States, though they all have one shortcoming: they go up to a certain point in time, that of their publication, and then they stop. Supplements practically never appear.

This is where the periodical literature comes in, a supplementary factor, not just for this one aspect but as a general supplement to the book literature. What an enormous amount of knowledge and experience, observations and discoveries lie in the volumes of all these journals - and unfortunately for the most part ignored. Then how is it possible for the normal specialist collector, without a big library to hand, to find out which volume of which journal contains the article to which most collectors would be indifferent, but which is of the greatest interest to him. There is a gap here and it is one which I would gladly fill if I could get the necessary support.

The way I look at the matter is as follows: a handbook or general index to all the existing German technical journals should be compiled. It should list even the smallest and apparently least important article alphabetically under the names of individual countries, with an index of significant words. As an example, and irrespective of trouble and cost, I have drawn up a general index to German Philatelic Literature for the year 1918 and it is appearing in **Briefmarkensammler**, I took as my pattern the impressive index of the **Deutsche Briefmarken-Zeitung** of Leipzig.

Thus, the philatelic periodical literature must be processed year by year, or, what might be more practical, every journal should produce its own cumulative index to all the volumes it has published. The Krötzsch Company of Leipzig intends shortly to produce such a general index for the **Deutsche Briefmarken- Zeitung** - perhaps others would care to follow suit.

However, any individual collector who owns the older volumes of philatelic journals, and has sufficient idealism to take part in such a gigantic task, can help by dealing with one or more volumes along the lines of my proposal i.e. by drawing up a contents list corresponding to the requirements of **Deutsche Briefmarken-Zeitung**. The Suppanttschitsch bibliography is adequate up to the year 1890. The new work must follow on from that. I will gladly take on this enormous task if I can get sufficient support, and if some of the other collectors will help me. My own experience has shown me that a volume takes 3-6 hours on average to process, and 8-10 hours at most. Please write to me at the address below, telling me which journals you have available. However, I will of course need support from the big societies and the editors and publishers of journals.

However, the work will not be finished when this handbook has been compiled and printed. How will the collector who does not possess his own large library find out exactly what was said by journal xyz in 1893 on a particular topic if he cannot get hold of the relevant volume.

This is where the societies and their libraries come in. There are societies in Germany which already possess magnificent libraries, such as the Germania Ring or the Int. Phil.-Verein, and although these libraries do not own complete runs of all journals they still have a good number. However, the smaller societies should really make an effort to build up a library commensurate with their size. How many volumes of old philatelic journals lie unread and gathering dust in the bookcases of individual members! Get them into the society library! If members do not wish to build up their own little libraries, they can act for the good of all in this way.

I will not today go into the actual literature, the individual books and journals but reserve this material for a second brief contribution.

I would be very pleased however if my idea for co-operation on the large-scale Handbook of Periodical Literature met with approval and if, in these days of mass unemployment, those who are ready to work will find pleasure in helping with this great task..

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