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A reference book on philatelic literature

[*Ein nachschlagbuch über philatelistische litteratur*]

Das Postwertzeichen, July 1889, Volume 2, Issue 7, pp.66-67 &

August, Issue 8, pp.80-81

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April 2003

A REFERENCE BOOK ON PHILATELIC LITERATURE

John K. Tiffany, who is to be considered as the true father of philatelic bibliography, recently published a new work belonging to this genre, not less outstanding than his other writings which accorded him the name of the most significant American philatelist. This opus, *The Stamp Collector's Library Companion*, furnishes a list organised in chronological order of all philatelic journals published in the United States, indicating publisher, place of publication, years of publication and number of issues. The brochure also contains a listing of periodicals which had been announced but never appeared. Anyone who knows how frequently in the United States, stamp journals come into existence and again disappear can get a notion of the amount of labour and of investigation which this very comprehensive catalogue must have occasioned. On the one hand, one must accord all recognition to **Tiffany's** work; on the other, one must not lose sight of the *Reference Book on Philatelic Literature* which I have proposed. Involuntarily there arises the question why **John K. Tiffany** has not placed himself at the head of the movement that arose in favour of the project named.

I must confess that when at first I attempted to prove the value of such a work, my thoughts were initially of **Tiffany** whose valuable support would have contributed a great deal to the success of the project. It is odd that while I was honoured and congratulated by the most outstanding philatelists because of my idea, **Tiffany** alone appeared not to show an interest. In the minutes of the session of the Philatelic Society, London dated 6th January 1888, I note that the members present expressed unanimously their sympathy for the project. Nevertheless, **Tiffany** declared in a long letter to the very same gathering, read at the session of 16th March 1888, that my idea was not at all of the type that could be realised, and sought to show difficulties that would be encountered with such an effort.

I regret that I do not have the letter in question before me so that the reader might form a judgement more easily; though admittedly my project would be condemned to failure if judged by such an authority. Since, unhappily, I do not own his letter, I shall pass on **Tiffany's** reasons which he had been kind enough to address to me personally in two letters.

In one of these he says that it would surely be pleasant to own a manual such as the one I propose; but, he adds, even when one has it, in most instances the respective works referred to are not available.

To this remark I reply that even though the real philatelist cannot procure all works, he will nevertheless be in a position to acquire a good number. Furthermore, many clubs own, as is well known, rich libraries - I mention here the Bavarian and the International societies - accessible to every member for his use against payment of slight postage expenses. As an example, no one who consults **Meyer's** *Kunsterlexikon* will believe that he can acquire all the books and journals contained in the comprehensive bibliographic opus of the history of art; and yet, the value and usefulness of the *Kunsterlexikon* is incontestable.

Without a doubt the publisher of the Reference Book would encourage the acquisition of further libraries which alone would constitute a valuable indirect use of the work for which I plead.

Tiffany, however, touches upon another point, highly unpleasant for every philatelist: he says that a great many collectors will not concern themselves at all with scientifically constructed works dealing with a knowledge of postage stamps and that for this reason little interest would be evinced in the manual proposed by me. Unfortunately I must acknowledge that this remark is correct and that a shocking number of collectors is satisfied with their catalogue and a pre-printed album, even when the album contains lots of pictures but errors and gaps, as well. **Moens** in Brussels, in a better position than I to recognise this sad truth, has discussed this in an article in *Le Timbre-Poste* in which he recommended to his readers the catalogue of the stamps of Peru which the Society in Lima had published. I can add here that the small editions of excellent works that constitute **Moens' Bibliothéque des Timbrophiles** prove that the philatelic science still does not have many devotees while, on the other hand, the collecting of stamps increases daily.

Nevertheless, I am convinced that one must not let oneself be discouraged and must hope that the limited number of those who seriously desire the progress of our young science and its literature will increase year after year; and indeed that the number of such collectors is adequate to ensure the financial aspect of the project, even today.

Tiffany further remarks, precisely in reference to the financial side, that the publication of the work would devour a significant amount of money. His calculation in this regard is as follows: Until this day some 500 specialised periodicals with altogether some 6,000 numbers have appeared in print. When now the reference work shows only the locations where every country is mentioned, about 175,000 citations would be required, and one would have to seek in at least 100 places in order to learn whether this or that stamp with which one is occupied at the time is mentioned or not. If, on the other hand, he adds, the places where every stamp is mentioned are denoted, there would be not less than 300,000 citations, assuming that approximately 6,000 stamps are in existence. On a two-column page, some sixty might be accommodated, and that would yield a total of 5,000 pages.

I do not intend by any means to question the correctness of the figures indicated; I believe, in fact, that they are rather higher even - not lower - than indicated. But the plan shown by **Tiffany** is by no means the one I am suggesting. I do not believe that it is useful to know where every stamp is mentioned; I do believe, however, that it would be important to own a list of special works, monographs, and articles about stamps of the individual countries. One

understands that the volume of the tome would be reduced considerably and thus the work and expenses as well. For whom could it be of interest to have an index of chronicles of newly issued stamps as published in speciality periodicals when it is known that the information given there is often given without the specimen being present and based only on incomplete and at times incorrect news?

As I pointed out in my previously published article, the reference work should consist of two parts, the first of which dealing with stamps generally as well as collecting, while the second part would list works about the stamps of individual countries. Above all, one would have to indicate complete titles, names of authors and of publishers of the works dealing with stamps of particular countries, followed by a listing of the diverse articles; and could finally add other, important notices which are not exactly articles, yet of interest. In this way, country after country would have to be dealt with.

Evidently the compiling of the opus would have to be entrusted to experienced philatelists and to their judgement would be submitted the adoption or omission of certain data. Occasionally it might be valuable to cite minor items, news of a shorter kind, and similar information. Precisely as a result of the manner in which the choices are made the value of the Reference Work can be increased notably, and the drawing up of the same could not be regarded as a dry labour.

Originally I had proposed to issue one volume only (though, as indicated above in detail, divided into two parts) which would have incorporated the total philatelic literature of all languages. Now, however, I consider it more advisable to compose Reference Works for each language especially. Indeed, the works that have appeared in the United States might be distinguished from those of Great Britain, Canada, and the English [*sic*] colonies. As a guideline, the most recent work by **Tiffany** mentioned at the beginning of this article, *The Stamp Collector's Library Companion*, might be adopted, and the stamp societies of the different countries could prepare similar lists in accordance with his pattern - not only from speciality magazines but also from other works dealing with the science of postage stamps. The bibliographical catalogue which one or the other society could publish would be submitted by more or less members according to the size of the material, each member working separately but according to a uniform plan.

The protective alliance which exists among the international, Bavarian, Viennese, and Frankfurt societies should simplify the realisation of my project as far as German philatelic literature is concerned, and since, furthermore, **Dr. Moschkau** spoke favourably about my ideas in an article a few months ago, there is hope that in a short time the most outstanding philatelists of Germany and of Austria will initiate work on the Reference Book for German literature.*

* **Note from the editor:** on the initiative of **Mr. Theod. Haas**, the Bavarian Philatelic Society recently requested associated societies to take an interest in the project. For the objective, each of the four societies is to name a member for the purpose of forming a committee which is to determine the feasibility of the project.

As for France, the work of **Mr. Ph. de Bosredon** above all, viz. his *Bibliographie Timbrologique de la France et de la Belgique* which appeared in 1878 is to be continued further by adding to the list works published in the French language during the last decade. This task falls to the Société Française de Timbrologie in Paris which also published

Bosredon's book and which unanimously recognised the benefit of the work (See Bulletin No. 47, p.39). Since I am just mentioning the name of **Mr. Ph. de Bosredon**, it is a pleasant duty for me to mention that this gentleman also spoke very favourably about the publication of a Reference Book and would even gladly agree to add his collaboration if in the near future he were not prevented by other urgent business matters.

Further encouragement came to me from **Mr. P. J. Anderson** of Aberdeen, whose articles covering English philatelic literature are much esteemed. One may hope that soon other English [*sic*] philatelists will take an interest in the project, as a result of which no doubt the Philatelic Society, London would be moved to take up the publication of the Reference Book as far as English literature is concerned.

I cannot avoid adding here that one of my friends had the opportunity to speak with **Major Evans** about my idea, and that this well-known philatelist has also expressed himself with much approval.

I must also remark that the American Philatelic Association at their annual meeting in Boston, on 15th August 1888, recognised the feasibility and usefulness of the project, appointing three members to make suggestions on how the matter might be realised in the most practical fashion. The National Philatelic Society in New York, too, weighed the plan carefully.

Thus there is hope that possibly in the United States initially, steps will be taken toward the realisation of the work to which the valuable basis given to Americans in **Tiffany's** previously mentioned works might well contribute, notably *The Philatelic Library* by the same author which, as the first bibliographic opus about philatelic literature, appeared as early as 1874.

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