

EUROPEAN CLASSICS

When a philatelist, collector or dealer, is called upon to give advice to a prospective collector, he is correct in advising him to start a general collection of all stamps from the earliest classics to the new issues. But when, asked by the same collector several years later, what he would suggest for him to do now that he has acquired a basic knowledge of stamp collecting, he is usually apt to be in a dilemma.

The easiest way out taken by many advisers is to recommend a modern field, such as semi-postals, air posts or the like, because they feel that the collector will here find his way easy and without difficulties. This is certainly true for with a little alertness and by buying from reputable sources, there is not much danger that the collector will run into difficulties with his newly acquired and not too profound knowledge. But some collectors do not want to go into such easy fields; they became convinced that there are still many countries where specializing is easily possible and will provide them with pleasures which other fields cannot give them. They ask for advice as to which country they should choose.

The series of articles we are now starting confines itself to the *classic stamps of Europe*. It is written with the intention of showing that there are many ways to collect and that there are many countries in which the classic stamps can provide the most satisfaction to the specialist. The glamor of new issues is advertised in the philatelic magazines in a way that makes the good old classic issues look like poor relatives. It is high time to show the lure of the classics, to give the collector a vivid picture of the glamor which lies in the stamps which are seventy five and more years old and were produced and used for postal purposes only, without any intention of making them items for a stamp collection.

The people who profit by the popularity of new issues try to make collectors believe that classic stamps are too expensive and therefore the average collector with limited means should leave them alone. But it is a fact that many classic stamps are available for 5c and 10c, some even for 1c or 2c each and that many classic sets cost less than some modern sets, which include high values for the sole purpose of squeezing out larger sums from the pockets of the new issues collectors. Many

countries have classic issues, which can be still specialized with quite limited means and will provide the specializing collector with all the satisfaction he may expect.

In writing about the classic issues of the European countries—to which we have limited our nevertheless quite extensive undertaking—we want to show the collector the *possibilities* which exist in this field. We want to tell him what has been already achieved in *philatelic research* in the various countries and where fertile fields still remain to be harvested. We want to give information about the possibilities of *specializing* and give hints about the difficulties which may discourage the collector who wants to assemble a specialized collection. We will show the fields which are so hopelessly barren that we would advise keeping out of them. We will not give any advice as to which stamps may prove a good investment, because classic stamps, bought with knowledge and alertness will preserve their value, giving to the collector the enjoyment of his collecting as a dividend.

Some of our statements may include new facts and correct existing catalogs, although this series of articles is in no way intended to produce philatelic research; it merely wants to show what is known of the various countries and issues and which are the special features making the collecting of them interesting and rewarding. It is an old rule that knowledge makes collecting more enjoyable and that a collector who studies his stamps will derive much more pleasure from them than another who merely fills the spaces in his album without giving much thought to the origin, the use and the many other features of each specific stamp. Our series of articles will also prove that stamp collecting is interesting wherever we touch it, regardless of how we do our collecting, provided only that we know what we are doing.

The end of the *classic period* of stamps coincides with the first signs of *philatelic influence* in the issue or use of stamps. This did not happen at the same time in all countries. As early as 1870 we find in some countries that philatelists were not satisfied with buying and collecting stamps, but wanted to influence their issue and use. For other countries as late as 1880, in a few cases even a few years later, there is no proof of any philatelic

influence in the production or use of the stamps. Our series, therefore, will not end in the same year for each country, but somewhere between 1870 and 1880 or even a little later. We have included all countries of Europe, which were independent or had their own postal service before 1875. There are 61 "countries" involved, including those who had no postal service of their own during the classic period. For convenience, we have separated the stamps of Alsace-Lorraine and Lombardy-Venetia, although they were philatelically only special issues of another postal administration. But we have left the stamps of Basel, Geneva and Zurich with Switzerland and those of Moldavia and Moldavia-Walachia with Romania, because they were forerunners of stamps for the whole country. We have excluded Azores and Madeira, although the Scott Catalog considers the former—contrary to all other catalogs—as a European country. The series will bring the countries in *alphabetical or almost alphabetical order*, as necessitated by the available space. The various stamp issues are dealt not with the country which *issued* them, but with the country where they were *used*; therefore the various foreign post offices in Turkey are considered with this latter country, because this makes postal conditions more easily understandable and less complex. We will deal not only with the *stamps* themselves, but also with the *postal stationery*, as well as the *pre-stamp postmarks* and the *cancellations*, to give the most complete picture possible. We will also reproduce *photos* of some unusual and infrequently seen items of special interest for each country. Short hints concerning the existing *philatelic literature* in the field will also be given, to enable the collector to acquire additional information.

We have always been and are still of the opinion that the collector should not be regimanted by telling him what he should collect and what he should not. We believe that a collector can even find satisfaction in collecting stamp issues which were solely made for his collection and have never seen—at least not in any significant quantity—their supposed country of origin, if he knows these facts. But we will always oppose philatelic business which is based on misrepresentation, by offering unfinished stamps without perforation which have never been sold for postal purposes as rare varieties, or cut squares from postal stationery as rare imperforates or mini-

ature sheets. Some people are as happy with costume jewelry as others are with rare gems set in platinum. But anybody who tries to sell the former for the latter would quickly go to jail. As long as the same rules do not prevail in philately, we will advise collecting classic stamps which we can be sure are postage stamps and not mere labels to rook the unwary.

I. ALSACE-LORRAINE

We start on our road with a "country", which existed as a stamp-issuing unit for sixteen months only. It is not even a "country" in the regular philatelic sense. The so-called stamps of *Alsace-Lorraine* are in fact a special issue of the postal administration of the *North German Confederation* for those parts of France which were occupied by German troops during the Franco-German war of 1870-71. Only after the peace treaty of Frankfurt was signed which ended the war and gave Alsace-Lorraine to Germany, did the occupation stamps cease to be valid in other parts of France and therefore really became a stamp issue for Alsace-Lorraine. In any case, in a strict philatelic sense, there was never a stamp issuing country of Alsace-Lorraine and when we nevertheless use this name, it is for convenience only, to separate this *first European occupation issue* from the other less interesting issues of the North German Confederation. Incidentally, the various general catalogs also go their own ways. Scott lists the stamps, as does Yvert, under France, occupation issues, while Gibbons, Michel and Senf put them under North German Confederation as a special issue for the occupied parts of France. Only Zumstein lists the stamps separately under the country name, Alsace-Lorraine.

Alsace-Lorraine, the border region between France and Germany, has changed hands several times during modern history. When the Franco-German war started on July 19, 1870, it was a province of France, forming the French departments of Bas-Rhin, Haut-Rhin and Moselle. It covered 5,605 square miles and had almost two million inhabitants. The capital was Strasbourg, the main occupation of the population agriculture, but with a growing industry (iron and coal). The German armies, consisting mainly of Prussian troops, with contingents from Baden, Bavaria and Wurttemberg, occupied during August 1870 almost all of Alsace-Lorraine, except the fortresses of Strasbourg and Metz; the former