

# "SALIENT POINTS IN STAMP COLLECTING"

by Dr. E. Aquilina

Philately, or the hobby of stamp collecting is a wide and varied subject with an excess of personal likes and dislikes. Thus one may opt for a particular country, another may have an inkling for Thematics (one particular theme, e.g. butterflies or ships), while another may go for whatever tickles one's fancy.

The result of all this, is that unless you get well organised, you are bound to become confused and end up by having a lot of unnecessary material which will not be worth anything, except what you may think of in your illusionary world of philately. To start with, you have to decide by selecting your preferencies which must be limited to two or three countries or themes. An improvement would be just one particular country — being a Maltese myself, I would say Malta stamps only, and stop there.

It is after having decided on this important and vital choice, that you proceed further and channelise what you possess into its proper place by following one of the leading stamp catalogues. As for the rest of your philatelic material, get rid of it as fast as you can in exchange for what you need to complete what you are after, your country or theme of choice.

You must realise by now where you stand, and your next step will be how to mount up your precious stamps. In the case of one country albums, there is a very wide range of selection on the market, which go quite a long way to satisfy all the requirements of a choosy collector. The actual mounting up, then, presents some headaches. Assuming that the album bought contains suitable plastic pockets, then your problems are more or less solved. If no pockets exist, then you must go into some pains to select the right pockets, which will have to be cut to size and carefully affixed to the album leaf, for the stamp to be slipped into.

At this stage you may have to decide on whether you collect mint, used, or both; in the case of mint, then I would recommend pockets with a black background, while for used specimens the pockets must be completely white. The reason for this is obvious. Greater contrast for your stamps is achieved in the case of mint stamps. It must be remembered that the cancellation or obliteration on stamps is normally dark in colour and this shows better on a white background.

The one golden rule which should always be kept in mind, is that under no circumstances should stamps be hinged, especially if mint. In the latter condition, they will loose all their commercial value. Of course, you cannot help the fact that many of the earlier issues were hinged, as our predecessors did not own our modern facilities for stamp mounting. Admitted, but let us stop at thirty to forty years ago, and let us not repeat the error on the later or recent issues.

If this business of mounting up with pockets gets on your nerves, the nearest equivalent is a good stockbook, soft-padded, and transparent (not translucent) strips. Such stockbooks will display the stamps quite clearly, and at the same time keeping them well-positioned. The choice of black or white stockbook leaves, depends, as has already been stated, on whether the stamps are in mint or used condition. Personally I would opt for black for the mint and white for the used for the usual reasons of contrast.

By now, the reader must have formed some idea of what goes at the basis of mounting up. However, the story is far from complete unless a few words of advice are not pointed out, in defence of our biggest enemy — foxing. By foxing or moulding, is meant the yellow brown stains or “rust” which appear mainly at the perforation line of stamps. It is true that they are the philatelist’s headaches, but their formation can be limited if certain elementary precautions are headed in due time.

To begin with all albums should be placed in a vertical position and not lying flat on top of each other like a pack of cards. The next step is to keep them in well-aired rooms which are free from damp. An abundance of natural light is essential. The main reasons for the above precautions are that foxing is nothing but a mould, (a form of yeast) which thrives on paper in humid atmosphere and away from light. Thus it would be an excellent idea, if say once every fortnight, you have a look at your stamps, while at the same time you will be “airing” them as well as allowing sufficient light to inhibit the growth of the mould.

The more your stamps are stucked away in some nook or corner of your library, the greater the risks of foxing. I always compare the value of a stamp collection to a block of ice. Unless ice is kept in proper surroundings, it melts away and end up by having nothing; so will your collection, unless taken care of in a manner similar to the one described, you will finish up with a hatful of rain.

An attempt has been made to give a few hints to the philatelist, mainly the beginner, and to place him on the right track, that he may love his stamps better; not to look at his collection as just bits of coloured paper, gummed or otherwise, but as something worth possessing, that can be handed down to posterity with pride. It is sincerely hoped that the above does not fall on deaf ears.

### MONTHLY MEETINGS

Please attend whenever possible and bring a guest; the warm friendly atmosphere of philately is always in evidence at our monthly meetings.