

"ET DONA FERENTES"

by

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Let me assume that at birthday, anniversary or holiday season you want to bestow a present on a collector. Do not, I pray, send him stamps. Allow me to explain. The Prince Regent once asked Beau Brummell's opinion of a horse someone had given him. Brummell, instead of judging the beast in the usual way, went behind and spent time examining its tail. When Wales inquired at what he was playing, the dandy said: "Sir, you should never look a gift horse in the mouth." If you want fulsome thanks for a philatelic donation rather than a smile like a fox eating yellow jackets, go slow.

Unless you have an exact knowledge of your friend's stamp holdings, packets, plate blocks or first day covers — things that appeal to your eye — in place of filling his albums with sought-after specimens more often than not will add to his supply of duplicates. What you can provide for his pastime with little fear of redundancy are supplies and literature. **Figurezvous:** can a collector ever have enough stock books to shelter his surplus adhesives? Several years ago a trader on Old Bakery Street in Valletta featured the Stanley Gibbons accessory line; there I saw several handsome stock albums which I wish I could have found room in my luggage to ferry home. A subscription should be welcome to a general or

specialty journal he does not take. Today, by coincidence, I received at the hands of a former student paid up membership in a society devoted to German colonies and an issue of its newsletter *Vorlaeufer*. It made my afternoon! Just so, early copies of next year's Sassone, Minkus, Gibbons, Scott or Zumstein catalogues will spare him having to order them.

For a couple of Maltese pounds you can buy a small press to take crease out of stamps or to prevent them from curling while they are drying. Costing slightly less is an ingenious help called a stamp lift. It allows quick and easy removal of old hinges and restores hopelessly stuck mint stamps without destroying original gum. Various types of magnifiers or combination magnifying glass and flashlight can be selected, or a mineralight philatelic lamp at £18 for detecting luminescent inks, papers and phosphorescent tags. Providing you know your friend preserves sheets or covers, a mint sheet album or a blank cover album will make fine presents. Too you never will go wrong with a dozen or more approval cards; these are splendid to arrange stamps before mounting or to sort duplicates.

Should your recipient be a general collector, consider a historical atlas that shows maps of earlier periods and of dead countries. Only the most primitive student of stamps is not interested in learning where Eastern Roumelia, North Ingermanland, Manchukuo or New Granada were located. Beyond periodicals the literature of the hobby is so broad that reference or monographic books are generally grateful. I see on my shelf, for example, Lowell T. Ragatz, *The Fournier Album of Philatelic Forgeries* (Worthington, Ohio, 1970) about the old Swiss facsimilist. Anyone who pursues stamps should like that. The Kenneth W. Anthony *Beginner's Guide to Stamp Collecting* (London, 1973 paperback) has odd data I had missed in the half century since I gave up collecting cigar bands for stamps.

Now to abridge slightly my opening; I resemble the diplomat in the old saw: when a diplomat says yes he means maybe, when he says maybe he means no, but if he says no he is no diplomat. When the receiver is a beginner, then indeed a packet of 300 Spanish colonies or 1,000 Scandinavia may be offered. At the other end of the scale an advanced collector can use an extra copy (in top condition) of rarities. In a Robert A. Siegel New York auction some months ago I notice that Maltese mints went at these prices: Scott No. 2 at £40, No. 60 at £208, No. 73 at £42. No doubt the same price levels obtain in Europe; such stamps would enrich anybody's albums. Your copy, if he has the item, may be better than his or have a postmark of peculiar interest.

For a middling collector the so'ie stamps I recommended are those picked up on trips abroad or secured from overseas correspondents. The USA sells for about a pound an unused set of the year's commemoratives along with a cardboard album for the same. There are also highly coloured and illustrated paperbacks treating our stamps, available at any sizeable

American postoffice giving their current value used and mint, and the stories attached to them. One can purchase from postal clerks in the territory of Belize (British Honduras) the butterfly definitives through the \$5 and \$10 values. I fancy these on a registered letter or airmail package — per picture — could not fail to make some stamp field, as they were called in the 1890's, content.

By considering the above points before rushing at the closest trader to hunt a gift for your stamp collecting acquaintances when one is needed, you can avoid a dusty response like that the nineteenth century English writer Charles Lamb gave when he was questioned how he liked babies. "Boiled," was his reply.