STAMP COLLECTING IN THE FUTURE
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A number of articles have been making the rounds of the philatelic papers with such titles as “Stamp Collecting in 1986,” “A Stamp Collector 200 years from now,” etc. The idea is nearly the same in all of them, and usually runs about as follows: The philatelist of 1986 or 2086, or of whatever future century he may be, owns a collection numbering anywhere from fifty thousand to one hundred and fifty thousand varieties, contained in a dozen or more folio volumes, and requiring several days to be looked over. His greatest rarity is some such stamp as the two cent U.S. 1883 issue, or the three cent 1870 issue, or some other stamp common perhaps in the 19th century, but whose origin and use is now clothed in obscurity.

Articles of the above nature may be amusing, and indeed I suppose that is their object, as I do not think they give at all a correct idea of what stamp collecting will be in the future. It seems much more probable that as the number of stamps increases, collectors will become specialists and devote their attention to certain branches oh philately only. This is the case in numismatics, for we only find young collectors taking coins of all nations and of all ages indiscriminately. By the time that thirty or forty thousand different stamps have been issued the number of collectors will probably be three or four times as large as it is now, and the value of obsolete stamps will have increased proportionately. The consequence will be that persons of moderate means and with no great amount of spare time will find it an utter impossibility to obtain a complete collection, and only dealers who devote their whole time to the business, and persons with plenty of money who make it their hobby will even attempt to collect stamps of all kinds. The great majority of philatelists will take up some branch suited to their means and in which they feel particular interest. Some will only collect the stamps of their own country, others will select certain countries and confine their attention to them, others again will collect only those stamps issued between certain dates.

In fact, although the number of postage stamps that have appeared up to the present day is comparatively small, many collectors have already become specialists, and a movement in that direction seems to have already begun. In Europe nearly all the advanced philatelists collect all kinds of stamps, postage, revenue, telegraph, postal cards, etc. In this country very few collectors care for revenues, and those who do keep them separate from their postage stamps. Postal cards seem also to be generally neglected, and it is only lately that persons have begun to collect envelope stamps on the whole envelope, as many consider them to have lost much of their value if cut from it. There is a large and growing class of collectors who collect only U.S. stamps and some few are beginning to discard all provisionals.

This movement towards become specialists will, in all likelihood, steadily continue, and it will not be long before it will be an exception to find a person collecting even all varieties of postage stamps. Of course this will only be the case if new issues continue to appear as often as they do now, and from present appearances we should judge that they would. But none of us know what the future may have in store for philately, and indeed in the onward march of invention it is not at all improbable that some new and improved system of prepayment of postage may be devised which will entirely do away with the use
of stamps, so that but for collectors their very existence might be forgotten a few centuries hence. – The Stamp and Coin Gazette.