CHAPTER III.

"NOW the point to be decided," said the Leftandiron, after he and his companions had been flying through space for some time, "is where we are going. There are two or three things we can do, and Tom can have his choice as to which it shall be."

"Subject, of course, to my advice," said the Rightandiron with a bow to Tom. "You can go where you please if I please. See?"

"Yes," said Tom. "I see. I can have my way as long as it is your way."

"Precisely," said the Rightandiron with an approving nod. "And as you may have heard, precisely means exactly so. You can have your way as long as it is my way, which shows how generous I am. Possessing my way as I am, I am willing to divide it with you."

"All right," returned Tom. "I'm very much obliged. What are the two things we can do?"

"Well," said the Leftandiron, scratching his head softly, "we can fly up a little higher and sit down and watch the world go round; we can take the long jump or we can visit Saturn."

"What was the first?" asked Tom.

"To fly up a little higher, where we can get a better view; to sit down there and watch the world go round. It is an excellent way to travel. It's awfully easy—in fact, it isn't you that travels at all. It's the world that does the traveling, while all you've got to do is to sit down there and keep an eye on it. It's like a big panorama, only it's real, and any time you see a place going by that you think you'd like to see more of all you've got to do is to fly down there and see it."

"When you get up higher and sit down," said Tom, "what do you sit on?"

"You sit on me and I sit on my hind legs, of course," said the Leftandiron. "Don't you know anything?"

"Of course I do," said Tom indignantly. "I know lots of things."

"Then I can't see why you ask such silly questions," retorted the Leftandiron. "What do we sit on? Why, you might just as well ask a dog what he barks with, or a hen what he eats his breakfast with,—and that would be as stupid as the Poker's poem on Sandwiches."

"Did the Poker write a poem on Sandwiches?" asked Tom.

"Eight of 'em," returned the Leftandiron. "The first of them went this way:

He sat upon a lofty hill,
And smoked his penny pipe.
"Ha!" quoth a passing whippowill,
"The oranges are ripe."

"The other seven went like this," observed the Rightandiron:

The day was over, and the six
Were little darkness then
Found they were in a dreadful fix,
Like several other men."

"There isn't anything about sandwiches in those poems," said Tom with a look of perplexity on his face.

"No. That's where the stupidity of it comes in. He wrote those poems and called 'em all Sandwiches just to be stupid, and it was stupid."

"But what did he want to be stupid for?" asked Tom.

"Just his vanity, that's all," said the Rightandiron. "The Poker is a very vain person. He thinks he is superior to everybody else in everything. If you say to him, 'the gas fixture is bright tonight,' he'll say, 'Oh, yes—but I'm brighter.' Somebody told him once that the kindling wood that started the fire was stupid, and he wouldn't even stop his bragging then. 'Oh, yes,' he said, 'but I'm a great deal stupider than the kindling wood and I'll prove it.' So he sat down and wrote those verses and called 'em all Sandwiches, and everybody agreed that he was the stupidest person going."

"You only told me two of 'em," said Tom.

"Yes, the whole eight were there. To make it more stupid the Poker said that the first one was number five and the second was the other seven."

Tom smiled broadly at this and made up his mind to cultivate the acquaintance of the Poker. He was boy enough to like stupidity of that sort because it made him laugh.

"I'd like to meet the Poker," he said. "He must be lots of fun."

"He is," said the Leftandiron. "Tenmore lots of fun. You'll meet him soon enough because we shall join him shortly. We never go off on any of our trips without him. He is a great help sometimes when we get into trouble just because he has so many sides. If we fall into a pit through some misstep the Poker comes along and pries us out of it. If we fall into the hands of some horrible creature that wants to hurt us, the Poker talks to that creature as stupid as he knows how, which makes the other so drowsy that he can't possibly keep awake, and then, of course, we escape."

"There he is now," cried the Rightandiron, putting his right forepaw up to his ear and listening attentively. "I can hear him singing, can't you?"

The Leftandiron stopped short and Tom strained his ears to hear the Poker's song. For a moment he could hear nothing, but then a slight buzzing sound like the hum of a bee, came to his ears and in another minute he could distinguish the words of the song. It was a song that the Poker who was singing was one of those favored beings who are satisfied with what the world has given them—as you will see for yourself when you hear it. These are the words as they came to Tom's ears, sung to a soft little air which the Poker made up as he went along, thereby showing that he was a musician as well as a Poker:

Oh, I am a Poker bold and free,
And I poke the livelong day.
I love the land and I hate the sea,
But the sky and the clouds are there for me.

I dote on the Milky Way.
The clouds are as soft as a fleecy rug,
And as cool as cool can be.
The skies fit my figure snug,
And they make me feel so blithe and snug
That I am glad Fate made me Me.

Oh Me!
Ah Me!
'Tis a lovely fate
And a mission great
To be
Like me
And to love the skies,
And the clouds to prize,
And to have the turbulent sea,
He—he—
So I lift my voice
And I loud rejoice
That the Fates made me Me.

"Hullo!" cried the Rightandiron.

"Hallos?"

"That's not my name," came the voice of the Poker from behind a cloud just above Tom's head. "But I know who you mean, so I answer Hallos yourself."

"Where are you?" cried Lefty.

"Here," called the Poker.

"No, you're not," called Righty. "You're there. We're here."

"Well, that's neither here nor there," retorted the Poker, poking his head out through the cloud. "Hullo! Who have you got there? That isn't Tom, is it?"

"No; it's Sleepyhead D. Dormouse," laughed Lefty.

"Good," said the Poker, advancing and shaking Tom by the hand. "I was afraid it was Tom. Not that I dislike Tom, for I don't. I think he is one of the nicest boys I know—but he weighs a good 5½ pounds, and so far we haven't been able to get a cloud strong enough to support more than 58. If Tom were to come up here and sit on a cloud he'd fall through, and if he fell through you know what would happen."

"No, I don't," said Tom, to whom the Poker's remarks were addressed. "What would happen?"

"Well, in the first place, it would spoil the cloud, and in the second place, if he tumbled into the sea he'd have to swim ashore," said the Poker sagely. "That's why I am glad you're young Mr. Dormouse and not Tom. Dormice can sit on the flimsiest clouds we have and not break through."

"What is a Dormouse anyhow?" asked Tom, to whom it now occurred for the first time that he had never seen a Dormouse.

"Ho!" jeered Righty, as Tom asked the question. "The idea of not knowing what a Dormouse is!"

"He's a mouse with a door to him, of course," said Lefty.

"Which he keeps closed," said the Poker, "so that he will not be disturbed while he is asleep."

Tom tried to imagine what a creature of that sort looked like, but he found it difficult. Not liking to appear stupid he accepted the explanation.

"O!" he said, "it must be a very pretty animal."

"O, yes," said the Poker, "but he isn't as pretty as I can be when I try. My, how pretty I can be—but say, Andies, where are we bound this trip?"

"We've left that to Sleepyhead to decide," said Lefty.

"In the usual way, of course?" queried the Poker.

"O, yes. He can't decide except as we want him to and have it go as a real decision. We've given him his choice of watching the world go round, going to Saturn or taking the long jump."

"And which will it be, Dormy?" asked the Poker.

"I sort of think I'd like to sit up here and watch the world go round," said Tom.

"Nope," said Righty.

"Then let's go to Saturn," suggested Tom.

"O, no," said Righty, "not that."

"Then there's only one thing left," said Tom with a sigh, "and that's the long jump—whatever that is."

Tom's three companions roared with laughter.

"Absurd!" cried Righty. "The idea. The long jump the only thing left! Ha-ha-ha!"

"Perfect nonsense," laughed Lefty. "I never thought Dozy Pate could be so dull."

"Well, he isn't anything as dull as I can be when I try," said the Poker. "He's pretty dull, though."

"I don't see where the joke comes in," snapped Tom, who did not at all like the way the Andirons and the Poker were behaving. "If there are only three things we can do and you won't do two of them there's only one left."

"Ha-ha-ha!" roared Lefty.

"Poor dull Dormouse," said Righty, with a smile that was half of mirth and half sympathy.

"You are evidently a Dormouse with very little education, Dormy," said the Poker. "If there are three apples on a plate, one red, one green and one white, and you are told to take your pick of the lot, there are four things you can do, not three."

"What are they?" asked Tom, meekly.

"You can take a red one, a white one, a green one, or all three. See?"

"O, yes," said Tom, beginning to smile again. "I see. You don't want me to choose watching the earth go round, or going to Saturn, or taking the long jump, but you do want me to choose all three."

"Now you are talking sense," said Righty. "And sense is what we are after."

"That's it," said the Poker. "Now, what do you choose, Dormy?"

"All three!" roared Tom.

"The Dormouse is getting his eyes open," said Lefty.

"Which is very proper," put in Righty, "for there is a great deal for him to see."

"Not so much as there is for me to see," said the Poker. "My, what a lot there is for me to see!"

"The first thing for us to do," said Lefty, paying no attention to the Poker's words, "is to get a good place for us to sit, so that Sleepyhead can see the world."

"There's no better place than this cloud," said the Poker. "I've sat here many a time and studied China by the hour."

"It's a little too far away for Sleepyhead," said Lefty. "Dormy mustn't be allowed to strain his eyes."

"Never thought of that," said the Poker. "Of course, I can see a great deal further than he can. My, how far I can see! What's the matter with our pushing the cloud in a little nearer?"

"Nothing—if we can do it," said Righty. "But can we?"

"We can 'wink our eye and try,' as the poet says," returned the Poker. "Ever heard that poem, Dormy?"

"No," returned Tom. "That is, not that I know of. I've heard lots of poetry in my life, but it goes in one ear and out of the other."

"You must have a queer head," said the Poker, peering into Tom's ear. "How a poem poured into one ear can go out of the other I can't understand. There doesn't seem to be any opening there."

"His head isn't solid like ours," said Lefty. "It's too bad to be afflicted the way he is. He ought to do the way a boy I knew once did. He suffered just as Dormy does. You'd tell him a thing in his left ear and the first thing you'd know, hop! it would all come out of the other ear and be lost. The poor fellow was growing up to be an ignoramus. Couldn't keep a thing in his head, until one night I overheard his father and mother talking about it in the library. The boy's father wanted to punish him for not remembering what he learned at school, when his mother said just what Dormy here said, that everything went in one ear and came out of the other. Then they both looked sad, and the mother rubbed her eyes until the tears came. I couldn't stand that. If there's one thing in the world I can't stand it's other people's sorrows. Mine don't amount to much, but other people's do sometimes. I felt so badly for the poor parents that I racked and racked my brains trying to think of some way to cure the boy. It took me a week, but I got it at last, and the next time the boy's parents talked about it I took the matter in hand. I simply walked out of the fireplace where I was and said: 'I hope you will excuse the interference of an Andiron, ma'am, but I think your boy can be cured of his ear trouble.' 'Noble fellow,' said the father, after he had got over his surprise at my unusual behavior. 'What do you suggest?'

"'Put a cork in his other ear,' said I.

"And they did, and from that time on the boy never lost a bit of information any one gave him. He grew up to be a dreadfully wise man, and when he finally died he was known as the human N. Cyclopedia."

"That was a noble act of yours," said the Poker. "Did you have the idea patented?"

"No," said the Andiron. "I wanted to, but the patent rules require that a working model should be sent with the request for a patent for the patent office to keep, which, of course, I couldn't do."

"Why not?" asked Tom.

"I couldn't get a boy who would consent to spend his life in the showcase. I could get all the corks I wanted, but no boy, so I had to give it up," replied Lefty with a sigh. "I'd have been a rich Andiron today if I could have had that idea patented. I shouldn't be surprised if I'd have had enough to have Righty and the Poker and myself gold-plated."

"Oh, well, I wouldn't feel badly about that," said the Poker. "What's the use? You're bright as any gold that ever shined, and you are quite as useful. Gold may be worth more than you are, but what of it? The people who bought you are willing to change their gold for you, so that really puts you ahead. As for myself, I wouldn't be gold if I could. Gold Pokers aren't worth anything as Pokers, and what's more, if I were gold Tom's father would lock me up in the safe every night, and then I couldn't travel about the way I do."

"Never thought of it in that light," said Lefty. "I'm glad I'm brass, after all."

"But you were going to tell us a poem, weren't you?" asked Tom.

"Yes," said the Poker. "It is a simple little verse, but there is a good deal of fine advice in it. All it says is:

If you're in doubt if you can do
A thing some one has asked you to,
Don't sit you down and moan and cry
Because you can't, but wink your eye
And try.

"There's good advice enough for a lifetime in that, Dormy," said the Right Andiron. "And now let's see if we can move the cloud."

The four little creatures set out at once to push the cloud nearer to the earth so that Tom could see the latter going around there clearly, but their efforts were in vain. The cloud wouldn't budge an inch.

"No use," said the Poker, panting with his exertion. "There is only one thing to do now, and that is to send for the Bellows. If he'll come and blow in his usual style we'll have that cloud where we want it in less than no time. I'd blow it there myself, for I am a far better blower than the Bellows is—my, how I can blow! But I'm out of breath trying to push the cloud."

"I'll run back and get the Bellows," said Lefty.

"And I'll go with you," said Righty. "He may not come for one, but I'm sure he will for two."

"All right," said the Poker. "Dormy and I will wait here for you; and I'll tell him a story while you're gone. How will that suit you, Dormy?"

"First rate," said Tom. "I like stories."

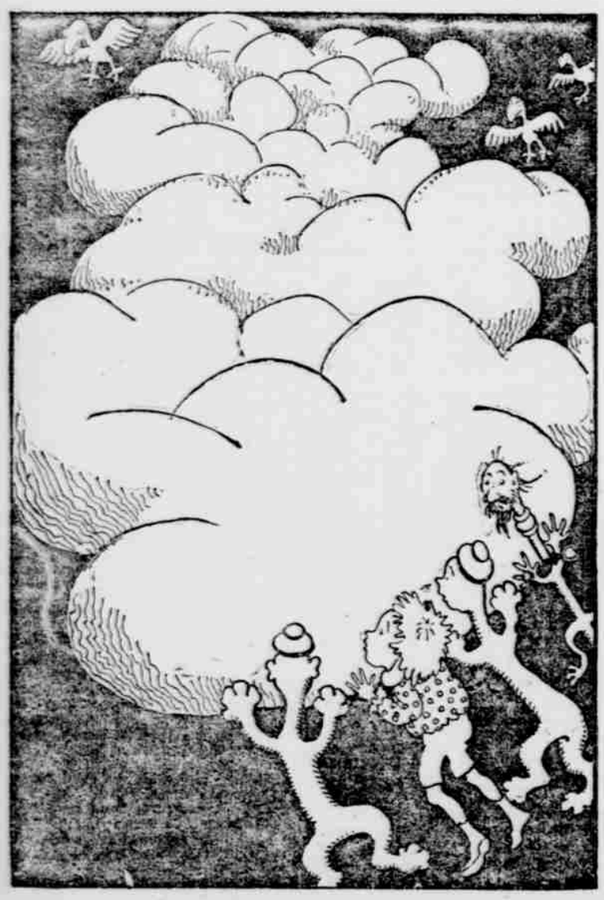
"We'll be back soon," said the Right Andiron, as he and the other started back after the Bellows. "So make your story short."

"Very good," returned the Poker, amiably. "I'll make it so short that Dormy will hardly know that it was ever begun."

And so Tom was left sitting on a big cloud, way up in the sky, with the Poker—which was indeed a very novel position for a small boy like him to be in.

(To be continued.)

"WHEN YOU GET UP HIGH AND SIT DOWN," SAID TOM, "WHAT DO YOU SIT ON?"



"THE FOUR LITTLE CREATURES SET OUT AT ONCE TO PUSH THE CLOUD NEARER."

WASPS' PAPER HOUSES

JAMES SPEED TELLS HOW TO STUDY NATURE WITH PROFIT.

EVERY country boy is acquainted with the nest of the common paper wasp. He sees it under the eaves and roofs of old farm buildings, and sometimes hanging from a twig on a shrub or small tree. Wherever he finds it, he is apt to give it a wide berth, as experience has taught him what fighters the owners are. If a boy has never disturbed the wasps near their nest he has probably felt their sting as he walked through the orchard where they were busy getting the sweets from fallen apples.

When Winter comes all of the wasps except a few of the females die. These fortunate ones winter in cracks about barns or under stones and come out in the warm days of Spring. Each female at once goes to work and builds a small nest, lays her eggs and commences feeding the young as they are hatched. As the grubs reach maturity and change to perfect insects, they help in the building and feeding.

With increasing numbers in the colony the nest often assumes large proportions late in the season. The nest from which the second photograph was taken weighed seven and a half ounces with its eggs and grubs. There were in round numbers about 400 cells in this one nest, and most of them contained either eggs or young grubs. The cells which appear high and white are those holding grubs ready to undergo their change into perfect insects.

The main paper nests are of course made by the adult wasps, but the white, convex covers are formed by the grubs when they have got their full growth. The covers are woven much as other larvae of insects weave their cocoons.

The work of paper making as performed by these red wasps is interesting. They obtain fiber wherever a wood surface is exposed to the elements and has "weathered." Poplar planks, which have remained out until the soft part of the wood has rotted and allowed the small fibers to hang, making the plank look like velvet, are favorite spots from which the raw material for nestbuilding is obtained.

The wasp cuts enough fiber to make a small ball in its jaws. This is taken to the nest and carefully chewed into a soft pulp. The pulp is run all the way about the edge of the cell, and as it begins to dry the wasp pulls it out into a thin paper. While the wasps pull and work the paper to give it strength, they are constantly measuring the thickness with their antennae. These are used much as a pair of calipers, one being placed on each side of the thin wall of paper.

Most of our native birds are improvident, never laying up anything to eat during the long, cold Winter months. They seemingly trust to the bounty of good Mother Nature to spread their daily meal in the treetop, fence corners and on the wide stretches of the open field. A number of birds go South as soon as the first severe weather is felt. But I am speaking of the birds which stay with us through the year.

The blue jay and some of our woodpeckers, however, often lay up a goodly supply of nuts and acorns. Sometimes they will select a hole in a tree and fill it. The woodpeckers more commonly stick their provisions in cracks and crannies of the bark of large forest trees.

Late in the mellow Fall days, when all creation is singing her sleepy song of Winter to come, the redheads and the red-bellied woodpeckers become very busy as they fly, loaded with acorns and beechnuts, to the trees they have selected for storehouses.

If a hole in a tree has been chosen, it is a simple matter to drop the acorn or nut in and hurry after another until the receptacle is full. But if such holes are easy to fill they are also likely to overflow with water and ruin the food. The safest plan is, as usual, the most laborious, and that is the placing of acorns in holes and rough places in the bark of trees. In such spots there is little danger of the provender spoiling, as it cannot remain wet for any great length of time.

I remember a giant red oak, whose rough seamed bark was used year after year by an industrious red-bellied woodpecker for a storehouse. All Fall I could hear his peculiar, chuckling notes as he filled his granary for Winter. It seemed as though he chuckled in delight over the prospect of having so much good to eat. He could be seen hunting for a crack that would fit the acorn he had in his bill, and would hop along a branch with head on one side, busily scanning every available nook. Occasionally he would stop and try to insert the acorn into a hole. If it proved a tight fit he would hammer it carefully to make it hold and then hurry after more.

The energetic person who expects to make nature study a fad of a few weeks or months is certain to be disappointed. Nature is an open book which all may read, but, like a little child, each person must of necessity learn the alphabet. Then must follow slow lessons in putting letters together in short words. And then simple sentences can be built up. At first the lessons are to some extent irksome, but as the student gradually begins to spell out the great truths of the universe and read the unity of all life the task becomes a pleasure.

Another thing which usually makes the impetuous person lose heart in this fascinating study is that he fails properly to see animals and birds when he goes out. It is simply because of his desire to cover a great amount of territory. The one great secret for the student is that he remains quiet. The lesson is one which has been learned by watching the denizens of the forest and open. They all know that to remain perfectly still means to remain practically unseen. Even a bird of very gaudy plumage will be passed unnoticed if it keeps still. An inconspicuous bird moving about will invariably attract attention before a conspicuous one at rest.

Numerous animals and birds seem to disappear absolutely from view when they become motionless. This instinct is still noticeable in some of our common domesticated animals, especially among hogs. When an old sow and her pigs are suddenly frightened while feeding in the high grass, a startled grunt from the mother will cause every little pig to drop flat. Lying close on their stomachs, the only motion to be seen is the rolling of their small eyes as they strive to see what has alarmed their parent.

So the main point of nature study is not to tramp, but to sit and allow nature to come to you. Then what is seen will be observed just as it appears every day in its ordinary life, and can be the more truly interpreted.

JAME SPEED.

(Copyright, 1902.)

WASPS' NEST AT END OF SUMMER.

Wasps' Nest Early in Spring.

STAMP COLLECTING

WHAT TO DO AND WHAT NOT TO DO IN STARTING AN ALBUM.

STAMP collecting is not necessarily an expensive hobby; on contrary it can be followed on an economical basis with entire satisfaction. As for its educational features, one need only talk with a youthful collector to find that he knows more about history and geography than many older persons. Nor is it the most valuable collections which make the best appearance, but rather those arranged with taste and originality.

Many are the sources for obtaining desirable specimens, and all collectors have one or more open to them. Most parents have treasured some old letters of the family, and the number of stamps that can be secured in this way alone will make a first-rate start for the beginner. Indeed, some of the most valuable United States stamps, bringing hundreds and even thousands of dollars, have turned up in just this way.

Those having friends or relations abroad have splendid opportunities for getting the current issues of foreign countries. Many desirable specimens are coming into the United States every day, and one of the pleasures of collecting is in ferreting out the sources from which the coveted treasures may be obtained.

A great mistake made by beginners when looking over old letters for stamps, is in taking them off of the envelopes. The value of many rare specimens has been reduced one-half in this way. In ordinary stamps it is all right, for there are a sufficient number on the market to make them low in price, but with scarce varieties, particularly the old local stamps, their value is enhanced fully 50 per cent by allowing them to remain on the original envelope. It is a good plan to show all stamps of this kind to an older collector; then you will be on the safe side.

If the beginner intends making a purchase now and then, it is best for him to buy stamps in packets, which are sold by all dealers at from 10 cents to $1 each. They are much cheaper bought in this way, and the enthusiast will be enabled to improve his collection greatly at merely a nominal cost.

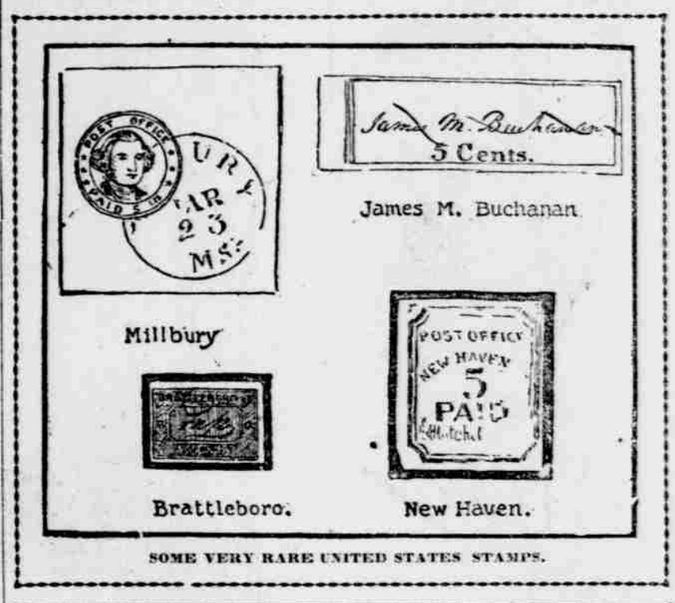
It must be remembered that among the world's postal issues there are nearly 5000 varieties having very little value. These can be had at a few cents per hundred. Packets are prepared containing every class of stamps, excepting, of course, those which are very rare. Most dealers issue price lists describing these packets and one may select those he prefers.

The collector who attends school will find that nearly half of his associates are actively interested in the same hobby. Through his various sources he naturally gets more than one specimen of a kind. By trading with his philatelic friends he can acquire many new varieties. "Swapping," as boys call it, is a very pleasant way in which to spend an evening. In fact, it is one of the delights of the hobby, and should be encouraged more than it is, even among advanced collectors, for there is no better way of improving a collection.

When a number of like specimens have been secured, the best one always should be selected for one's collection. By "best" is meant that which is in the finest condition, lightly canceled, evenly centered, and not torn or damaged. This is important, for while the hobby may not be pursued from a monetary point of view, it should be remembered that many stamps are constantly increasing in value, and should you desire to part with them at some future time you will get little or nothing if the stamps are in bad condition. Torn specimens, even though rare, have practically no value. A stamp worth $1 in fine condition would not bring 10 cents if torn or badly damaged.

A catalogue will be of great service to the beginner. If he has manufactured his own album, it will come in handy in identifying the various specimens, and in arranging the issues and countries. Catalogues are published nearly every year, and contain much information about stamps, in addition to their market value. Illustrations of most specimens are also given. Numerous weekly and monthly papers devoted to stamp collecting are published in this country, and it is a capital idea to subscribe to one or two of them in order to keep informed. The subscription prices are 25 and 50 cents per year.

Stamp collecting can be profitably followed in a variety of ways, according to taste, and the long Winter evenings can be spent very pleasantly by gathering and studying the world's postal issues.



SOME VERY RARE UNITED STATES STAMPS.

LONGFELLOW'S FIRST VERSES.

Asked to Write a Composition, He Chose Turnips for a Topic.

When Henry W. Longfellow, the great American poet, was a little boy of 10 or 12 years, attending the district school near his home in Portland, Me., his teacher requested him one day to write a composition to be handed in the next morning.

Very much disturbed in mind, young Henry sought a little information as to how he should go about his task and was told to just write his thoughts upon anything he saw or heard, or had seen or heard. This was not of very much assistance, so he went dolefully home, and as no inspiration seemed to come on the way he retired to the barn to meditate. While sitting there a turnip growing just over the fence in the garden of his father's next-door neighbor, Mr. Finney, struck his fancy, and proved to be the inspiration he was looking for.

The next morning Master Henry handed in the following composition to his teacher:

Mr. Finney had a turnip,
And it grew behind the barn;
It grew there and it grew there,
And the turnip did no harm.

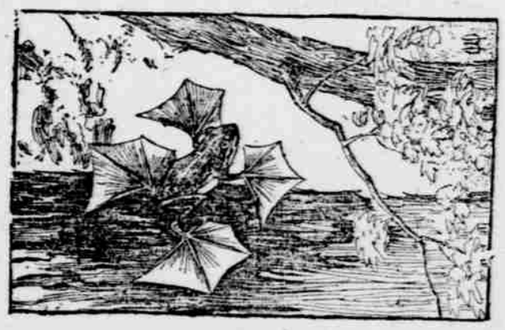
It grew and it grew
Till it could get no taller,
Mr. Finney pulled it up
And put it in his cellar.

It lay there and it lay there,
Till it began to rot.
His daughter Sally took it up,
And put it in the pot.

She boiled it, and she boiled it,
As long as she was able.
His daughter Peggy fished it out,
And put it on the table.

Mr. Finney and his wife,
They sat down to sup.
And they ate, and they ate,
Till they ate the turnip up.

THE FLYING FROG



HE SAILS FROM TREE TO TREE LIKE A BIRD.

Upon seeing the expansive membrane on the feet of this little frog, shown in the picture, you might easily imagine him using them in the hot climate of his home (Borneo) as fans to keep himself cool. To be sure, a frog fanning itself with its feet would be a funny sight, but I think this little fellow can do it, though naturalists do not report ever having seen him so employed. They do, however, know positively of one use he has for them, and that is, in sailing from tree to tree. They enable him to do this in the same way as the wings of our modern flying machine enable its inventor to remain for a time in the air.

When he wishes to leave the tree on which he is resting, he leaps into the air, at the same time spreading out his great webbed-feet for sails, using them so as to maintain a horizontal position, and thus with a long, slanting flight, reaches another tree 20 or more feet away.

When he has finished the flight the toes are drawn together, inclosing the membrane between them so that, except for the awkward length of his feet, you might take him for only a common tree frog.