

THE STAMPS OF SICILY.

By EDWARD J. NANKIVELL.

History of the Kingdom.—The island of Sicily is the ancient Trinacria or Sicilia. It lies to the south-west of Italy, of which kingdom it forms part and from which it is separated by the Straits of Messina. Its length is 185 miles and its breadth 120 miles. Nearly the whole island is over a 1,000 feet above the sea level, the highest point is the volcano, Mount Etna, 10,840 feet above the sea, and its climate is said to be one of the most delightful in Europe. Its population is 3,529,266.

Mr. Marion Crawford in his charming history of the island, "The Rulers of the South," writes:—

"For three thousand years Sicily has been looked upon as the fairest among all the richly endowed lands that border on the Mediterranean Sea or lie as islands with it, a sort of earthly paradise, to obtain which no sacrifice could be thought too great; its claim to be so esteemed can be established by the short proof of any thoughtful man's first glance, even to the present day; its history is the narrative of fierce struggles fought by great and manly races for its possession, and is told in monuments and ruins still to be seen. It is of all lands the one in which the most entralling romance is interwoven with the most stirring fact, for it has always been the debatable country where fact has met romance and vied with it for supremacy."

Summarising, Mr. Crawford writes:—

"Three epochs stand out from the chaos of myth, legend and history: the development of farming by the Sicilians, about 1200 B. C., the introduction of commerce with the Phœnicians after that time, and the gradual growth of a higher civilization under the Greeks, from the time of their landing in the eighth century before the Christian era, until the Carthaginian or Punic wars with Rome, and the subsequent wreck of Greek art and thought under the atrocious governorship of Verres, between 73 and 71 B.C., during which, with the connivance of his father, the Senator, he pillaged all Sicily at his will.

The Roman rule became in the fourth century the rule of Constantinople, and next in history, when the Goths had ruled for a time, the Arabs began to take Sicily, in the year 827 A.D.; the Normans came after them, completing their conquest of the island in 1091, and through them the German Imperial House of Hohenstaufen, reigning from the fifth year before the preaching of the first Crusade, until the downfall of Ghibellines in 1268. Then the French, under Charles of Anjou, during the few years that ended in the Sicilian Vespers, in 1282, after which the Sicilians chose for their King, Peter of Aragon, and because both he and Charles of Anjou continued afterwards to call themselves Kings of Sicily, the two kingdoms of Sicily and Naples became known from that time as the 'two Sicilies,' and were still so called under Ferdinand the Catholic, after Naples was annexed to Aragon, and both became Spanish monarchies. In 1700 began the war of the Spanish succession, after which Victor Amadeus of Savoy was king of Sicily for a time, until Sicily and Naples were again united under Charles the Third of the house of Bourbon. Last of all in 1860, the two Sicilies were united to the modern kingdom of Italy."

Its Philatelic History.—Of all the postal issues of early European postal days, few are more interesting than the one series issue of Sicily, popularly

known as old King Bomba's stamps. And there certainly never was an issue that caused more trouble or fuss.



When the use of postage stamps was decided on, all sorts of knotty questions arose. The Neapolitan arms had already been appropriated for an issue of the twin kingdom of Naples, so a design embodying anything of that sort was at once put aside. Consequently it was resolved that the head of his very sacred Majesty, King Ferdinand, the reigning Sovereign, should decorate the design. Then came the troubles of selecting a design, and deciding the colours of the series. Of course, for such a portraiture the most eminent artist must be found, and no other could be trusted with such a sacred piece of work. After much inquiry, Thomas Aloisio Juvara, a native of Messina, one of the most celebrated engravers of his time, was induced to undertake the work.

On the 28th of February, 1858, King Ferdinand approved of the design submitted to him, the result of many attempts to secure an acceptable presentation of the sacred features of old King Bomba, who seems to have been a bit of a terror to those around him in his little domain.

Then came the work of engraving the accepted portrait. One engraver after another was tried till the finance minister was almost at his wit's end. At last the well-known portrait was engraved. The selection of colours was also beset with difficulties. Those were the days of wars and revolutions, when no throne was secure. Certain colours were proscribed as obnoxious to the Government, presumably because they were those of troublesome combinations at home and abroad. Red and green, combined with white, constituted the well-known cockade and banner of the Italians. At first the adoption of a single colour for all values was suggested as a way out of the difficulty, then a uniform colour for the three higher values because they would be less used stamps, but reserving a shade for the four lower ones. Finally the values were decided, as follows:—

- 1/2 grano, yellow.
- 1 grano, olive green.
- 2 grana, blue.
- 5 grana, red.
- 10 grana, dark blue.
- 20 grana, slate.
- 50 grana, brown red.

A design of the arms of the kingdom might be cancelled and blurred to any extent; the more so the less likely were the stamps to be cleaned and used again. But to bang a cancelling stamp right over the sacred features of his Majesty was not to be thought of; the bare idea of such an act of desecration seems to have horrified the authorities. As a way out of the trouble some ingenious soul suggested a little framework design, which, if very carefully used, with due deliberation, would effectually cancel the stamp, and yet leave the august countenance without a sign of disfigurement. That cancellation design was forthwith adopted, and no other ever marred the beauty of the exquisitely engraved postage stamps of King Bomba. Now and then you will come across a stamp in

which the features have been obliterated, but so scared were the postal employes of committing what might be regarded as an act of petty treason, that in most of the used stamps the profile, at least, is always clear of defacement.

The stamps were issued to the public on the 1st January, 1859. But one night in the last week of May, 1860, Garibaldi entered Palermo, and the circulation of King Bomba's stamps came to an untimely end. In Messina, it is said, they continued in use till July, 1860. Thus at the most they had a life of only nineteen months.

The remainders of the stock in hand were sold off to M. Moens, a Belgian stamp dealer, and for years that stock of remainders has been drawn upon by dealers and collectors all over the world. But M. Moens retired from business, and the stock is now dispersed.

1859. Seven values. Design: Head of King Ferdinand II. enclosed in a rectangular frame; at the top was the word "Posta," on the left "Bollo Della," on the right "Di Sicilia," and at the bottom the value. The sheets consisted of 100 stamps, in ten rows of 10 stamps. They were printed from plates made up with electrotypes, and were issued imperforate.

For some of the values more than one plate was made, and for advanced collectors I quote an excellent summary of the more important varieties from Gibbons' Catalogue.

1/2 GRANO (2 plates).

Dec. 7, 1858. Plate I. Printed in four groups of twenty-five stamps, about 2 mm. apart.

- Dull orange.
- Orange-yellow.
- Olive.

There are six retouched stamps on this plate.

Feb. 3, 1859. Plate II. Printed in one hundred reproductions of the die, spaced about 1 1/2 mm. each way.

- Deep orange.
- Pale orange.
- Error of Colour.
- Deep dull blue.

The 1/2 gr. colour trials are found in milky blue and dull blue, and can easily be told from the errors, as the colour trials are printed from Plate I. There are no retouches on Plate II. of the 1/2 gr.

April 12, 1859. Plate III. Printed from one hundred reproductions of the die in place of four groups of twenty-five as in Plates I. and II. No white spots on or near the nose.

- Deep blue.
- Dull "
- Pale "

There are no retouched stamps on this plate.

5 GRANA (2 plates).

Dec. 7, 1858. Plate I. Printed in four groups of twenty-five stamps. The stamps in the first, second and third groups show a white spot on the nose, and those in the fourth group have two white dots below the nose.

- Carmine.
- Carmine-rose.
- Brick-red.

There are seven retouched stamps on this plate.

July 23, 1859. Plate II. Printed from one hundred reproductions of the die in place of groups of twenty-five as in Plate I. No white dots on or near the nose.

- Deep orange-red.
- Vermilion.

There is only one retouched stamp on this plate.

10 GRANA (1 plate).

Dec. 7, 1858. Plate I. only.

Indigo.
Indigo-black.
Prussian-blue.

There are eight retouched stamps on this plate.

20 GRANA (1 plate).

Dec. 7, 1858. Plate I. only.

Slate-grey.
Bluish-slate.
Purple-slate.
Dull-purple.

There is only one retouched stamp on this plate.

50 GRANA (1 plate).

Dec. 7, 1858. Plate I. only.

Brown-lake.
Deep brown-lake.

There is only one retouched stamp on this plate.

1 GRANO (3 plates).

Dec. 7, 1858. Plate I. Stamps printed 2 mm. vertically and 2½ mm. horizontally apart. "ST" of POSTA generally joined at the top. No white dash under beard.

Russet-brown.
Olive-brown.

There are about twenty retouched stamps on this plate.

Dec. 7, 1858. Plate II. Stamps printed 1 mm. vertically and 1½ mm. horizontally apart, small white dash under beard, except on No. 98 on the sheet.

Olive-brown.
Dark olive-green.

There are eight slight retouches on this plate.

Feb. 3, 1859. Plate III. Stamps printed 1½ mm. apart both ways, stamps better made, impressions clearer, no white dash under beard.

Deep olive-green.
Pale "

There are about sixteen small retouches on this plate, chiefly in the angle of the neck.

2 GRANA (3 plates.)

Dec. 7, 1858. Plate I. Printed in four groups of twenty-five stamps. The upper left group shows a white spot on the nose on each stamp, the upper right group two white spots in background near the nose, and the two lower groups a white spot below the nose.

Deep cobalt-blue.
Dull blue.
Pale "

There are sixteen retouched stamps on this plate.

Used specimens from this plate are known printed on both sides of the paper.

Dec. 7, 1858. Plate II. Difficult to separate single stamps from Plate I. No recutting of the hair on this plate.

Deep cobalt-blue.
Dull blue.
Pale "

There are five retouched stamps on this plate.

Range of Catalogue Prices: Unused.—The price of Bomba's may be said to be largely a question of shade and condition. Hence a table of prices of the ordinary variety of each value does not

reveal much, and as the naming of the shades has not been consistent it is not possible to extend the comparison to shades. The ordinary varieties do not show much change. In 1897 the prices of Europeans were in the ascendant, since then Europeans have lost some of their old popularity, and prices have consequently declined. But even since the publication of the last catalogue the demand has increased, especially for some of the old Italian States, and Bomba's in particular. Remainders are being exhausted, and as they are absorbed the prices must advance for these grand old stamps.

Bibliography.—A History of the Postage Stamps of Sicily, by Dr. Emilie Diena, translated by Major Evans. This splendid work comprises a full and detailed history of the stamps from their first inception, through all their stages of manufacture to their final issue, and of the essays and proposals for subsequent issues with a description of the postmarks and obliterations. It is published by Stanley Gibbons' Ltd., 391, Strand, London, in paper cover 21s., and in half morocco 30s.

Forgeries of Sicily, *The Monthly Journal*, Vol. 7, p. 125.

Stamps of Sicily in the Tapling Collection. *The Monthly Journal*, Vol. 11, p. 158.

Stamps and Essays of Sicily, *Stamp Collectors' Magazine*, Vol. 4, p. 117.—*Postage Stamp*.