

REPRODUCTION INTERDITE

My Technical Autobiography.



I was born at Pistoia (Italy) on 14th October 1884. My father, who had fought in all the campaigns against Austria was a retired Colonel at the date of my birth and had become the owner of an Iron Foundry of which I was destined one day to become the accountant. I had three brothers each of whom was expected to take some part in the foundry management.

My father, having spent all his life in the Army, lacked business experience and was obliged to dispose of the foundry. From then, everything changed. One of my brothers joined the Army, another became a photographer and the eldest became a stamp dealer. To the last two I owe the foundation of "La Philatelie d'Art". In 1892 the stamp dealer was also the owner and Editor of "Le San Marino", one of the earliest philatelic periodicals.

I continued without a break with my accountancy studies at the Institute Technique de Bologna" but the major interest which occupied my spare time was working with my brother in his studio with the chemical products he manipulated.

When I was 15 years old, when walking one day in Bologna I saw in a bookseller's establishment 12 large volumes of "L'ENCICLOPEDIA DI CHIMICA" by Dr. SELMI at a bargain price of 50 lire. I gave a deposit of 2 lire which I had in my pocket and ran home to count my savings. I was 6 lire short. I explained the position to my mother making her realise that with these books I could study, invent and make money, and so I became the happy owner of the encyclopaedia. I had found my vocation - chemistry; with such success that some time after I nearly succeeded in setting the house at Bologna on fire when experimenting with phosphorus

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and carbon sulphur.

In due course my brother added an annex to his photographic studio for graphic art. There he worked on heliography and contact photography making postcards and book illustrations. In all these processes in which chemistry played its part I was enthusiastic in helping my brother.

I followed him to Turin where he had successfully established two workshops of graphic arts; "LA FOTOCELERE" and "L'ARGENTOGRAFICA", where I undertook research work on my own account in order to perfect certain processes. Thus I acquired knowledge of engraving, lithography, photography, heliography and certain aspects of chemistry.

Owing to a fortunate circumstance I was able to acquire a knowledge of "paper". That I owe to one of my cousins, the "Commendatore FLORIDI", who possessed at GUARCINO (Italy) - of which locality he was the Mayor - a paper mill.

One year, I was invited to spend the holidays at his house, but seizing the opportunity, I passed the time in the factory where I spent the greater part of the day taking notes.

My knowledge of paper was gained from the preparation of the pulp in passing through the stages of cleansing and shredding up to the appearance in sheets. But in my make-up there was also revealed from early years a curious tendency; the passion of imitation. I recollect that I amused my brothers by making them see the exact manner I was able to imitate my father's and mother's signatures.

At school in Pistoia - I was then about 10 years old - we had a teacher who, as a method of awarding good marks, gave the pupil a little rectangle of paper with his signature. Certain pupils, having noted the aptitude with which I imitated his signature, begged me to

reproduce it for them on pieces of paper, which were subsequently accepted without demur.

Love of chemistry, for graphic arts and for imitation, are my three loves which, in coming into contact with philately, were inevitably destined to lead me to "PHILATELIE d'ART".

I have said "coming into contact with philately" and why? As I have already said, I had an elder brother, now deceased, who had been in the stamp trade. One day, this brother aware of my interests and talents persuaded me to reproduce certain stamps of SAN MARINO, which were his own particular speciality. I was unable to refuse, curious at the same time to discover if these three factors could be made to play a convincing part.

I used both engraving and lithography and the results were only passable, as this was but the first step in the art of imitation.

My brother faced a trial in Italy which ended in acquittal. That, however, was his business and did not affect me. My earnest searching had been ~~s~~satisfied; that was all.

Since then my enemies - playing on the name of my family - tried to insinuate that I had been found guilty of forgery in Italy, where I have never been interfered with.

I have even been obliged to show a summarised version of the legal proceedings which show a large "NULLA" (not guilty) and to proceed against two newspapers to force them to correct mis-statements.

From the first these imitations of SAN MARINO had roused my "amour propre" to discover if it was possible to improve upon them with my expert knowledge of graphic arts.

In 1909, going to Paris in order to advertise my brother's products, I made the acquaintance of several philatelists and, out of

curiosity I asked for their opinion about some of the examples I had imitated which I had brought with me.

One of these even trusted me with a genuine stamp asking me at my leisure to amuse myself by imitating it and show him the result. I did so.

I saw this philatelist again later and he told me that out of curiosity he had sent my imitation to a well-known expert, M. THIER of Berlin, who had sent it back to him signed.

As a result of this my plan was made. I embarked on a project to obtain documentary evidence of the inability of experts to detect my imitations, by the professionals or dealers, and to make ~~my products~~ available my products as "works of art", which status the opinion of experts justified.

To realise my ambition, I spent more than 40 years during which I devoted all the leisure my other occupations (that of commercial traveller and my business in Paris) allowed me in improving my "PHILATELIE D'ART".

I have succeeded: A "Livre d'Or", which holds hundreds of my imitations guaranteed or certificates of guarantee by experts and expert committees both French and foreign, furnishes the proof. So far so good, but it was necessary to make myself known.

My two trials which I provoked, the one at Chambéry where I gave the knock-out to a celebrated criminologist and the other at Paris, provided the means.

Following these two trials, the philatelic reviews, periodicals and magazines of the five Continents publicised my abilities, my campaign against the experts, and my productions.

Thanks to this propaganda, "PHILATELIE D'ART" has made the

grade so well, that to-day no advanced specialist in the world can ignore the "PHILATELIE D'ART" with which is indestructably liked the name of JEAN DE SPERATI.

*Jean de Sperati*