

RECREATIONS OF AN ANTHOLOGIST

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Recreations of an anthologist by Brander Matthews

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BRANDER MATTHEWS

**RECREATIONS OF
AN ANTHOLOGIST**

Recreations of an Anthologist

By
BRANDER MATTHEWS

Author of "Ballads of Books,"
"American Familiar Verse," etc.



NEW YORK ≈ ≈ ≈ ≈
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RECREATIONS OF AN
ANTHOLOGIST

I

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

PRYING eyes all over the world are now seeking to spy out the secret motives of every human action and to find an explanation, more or less plausible, for all the freakish deeds and foolish misdeeds of mankind. But no one of these inquirers into the recesses of man's being has yet come forward with a wholly satisfactory explanation of the reasons which lead so many of us to find our chief pleasure in the seemingly idle pastime of "making a collection," as it is called. Why is it that many a man puts his whole heart in this

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gathering together of the objects of his seeking? There are not a few otherwise sensible beings, good citizens, voters, church-members, who act on the axiom that the chief end of man is to "make a collection,"—whether of books or of autographs, of fans or of playing cards, of postage-stamps or of pictorial posters, of coins or of counterfeit money.

Of course, there is no denying that any collection, a string of buttons or a shelfful of boot-heels has some scientific value; and more than once has the mere heaper up of unconsidered trifles rendered inestimable service to the avid investigator into the records of human endeavor. The acquisitive energy of the coin-collectors has led to the lighting up of many a dark spot in chronology; and the accumulative zeal of the autograph-collectors has preserved writings which have helped to elucidate many a doubtful point in history. Even a collection of the buttons of precocious poets or a gathering of the boot-heels of famous

BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION

female authors might supply suggestive material to an inquisitive critic like Saint-Beuve, who was forever striving to interpret the works of every writer by a painstaking analysis of all the petty facts of his or her personality.

But however much the collector may boast of the utility of his labors, he knows perfectly well that his motive is not utilitarian. If he is honest with himself, he will admit humbly that the attraction of "making a collection" does not lie in the ultimate value of the collection when it shall be completed (as far as that may be possible). In the immense majority of cases the beginnings of the collection were accidental and wholly devoid of purpose. Sometimes as the collection grew, the collector has become conscious of its possible importance to science; but the charm of collecting is wholly independent of the actual value of the things accumulated. Indeed, the collection seems to lose some of its interest the nearer it approaches to com-