

LINCOLN LORE

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"IN GOD WE TRUST"

The inscription "In God We Trust" first appeared on our coins during the administration of Abraham Lincoln. It seems to have been inspired by the periods of thanksgiving and prayer which were proclaimed at intervals during the war. A few days after the first observance of a national Thanksgiving Day, occurring on the last Thursday in November, 1863, a movement was put on foot which found its culmination in an act passed April 22, 1864, providing for the familiar slogan on our metal money.

Thus two significant contributions to the religious life of the nation were accomplished during the administration of Lincoln. The setting apart of one day in each year which has become our annual Thanksgiving Festival and the imprinting upon our coins a motto, which indicates that ours is a nation with religious ideals.

A clergyman by the name of M. R. Watkinson, who lived at Riddleville, Pennsylvania, possibly was the first one to make a direct appeal to the Secretary of the Treasury of the United States with respect to placing on its coins an appropriate religious inscription. Under the date of November 13, 1861, he wrote observing that "One fact touching our currency has hitherto been seriously overlooked. I mean the recognition of the Almighty God in some form on our coins." Watkinson's thought was that the words "God, liberty, law" might suffice with the "all-seeing eye" somewhere displayed on the coins.

One week after Mr. Chase received this letter from the Pennsylvania clergyman, he addressed a note to James Pollock, Director of the mint, bearing the date November 20, 1861, in which he expressed the following sentiment "No nation can be strong except in the strength of God, nor safe except in His defense. The trust of our people in God should be declared on our national coins. You will cause a device to be prepared without unnecessary delay with a motto expressing in the fewest and tersest words possible, this national recognition." Legal bar-

riers, however, stood in the way of immediately carrying out the suggestion of Mr. Chase but he found in Mr. Pollock, one who was keenly interested in the project.

In the meantime there were other proclamations for prayer and thanksgiving coming from the White House and these words of Lincoln appearing in the proclamation of March 30, 1863, must have inspired both Chase and Pollock to further action. "Whereas, the Senate of the United States, devoutly recognizing the supreme authority and just government of Almighty God in all the affairs of men and of nations, has by a resolution requested the President to designate and set apart a day for national prayer and humiliation:

"And whereas, it is the duty of nations as well as of men to own their dependence upon the overruling power of God; to confess their sins and transgressions in humble sorrow, yet with assured hope that genuine repentance will lead to mercy and pardon; and to recognize the sublime truth, announced in the Holy Scriptures and proven by all history, that those nations only are blessed whose God is the Lord: . . ."

Mr. Chase and Mr. Pollock again became interested in the motto project and after many conferences and the preparation of a lengthy memorandum prepared by Mr. Pollock, steps were taken to bring about the desired end. The necessity of a very brief inscription was submitted and such phrases as, "God Our Trust," "Our Country; Our God," and "In God We Trust" were suggested in the memorandum, with a preference for the first one mentioned. Mr. Chase, however, preferred the last one, believing that "In God We Trust" would be "more effective and direct."

The Philadelphia papers of course, because of the location of the mint there, were aware that some change was contemplated in the inscriptions on coins and Mr. Forney, editor of "Forney's War Press," printed this

brief notation on November 21, 1863: "When Cromwell first coined his money, an old cavalier, looking upon one of the new pieces, read this inscription on one side "God With Us" and on the other, "The Commonwealth of England." "I see," said he, "God and the Commonwealth are on different sides."

Lincoln most certainly would have his attention called to this brief reference to the inscription on the English coin and undoubtedly would get a good laugh out of it. Possibly it would also remind him of an occasion when he was visited by a clergyman who told Mr. Lincoln that he hoped "the Lord was on our side," to which Lincoln replied: "I am not at all concerned about that, for I know that the Lord is always on the side of the right. But it is my constant anxiety and prayer that I and this nation should be on the Lord's side."

On April 22, 1864, an act was passed which authorized the coinage of a two-cent piece, the inscription and size of the coin to be fixed by the director of the mint. Whether or not the size of the two-cent piece was influenced by the inscription which was first to appear on this coin is not known but this now obscure piece of money was the first coin to bear the inscription "In God We Trust."

Just about a month before the assassination of Lincoln, Congress passed an act which made it lawful for the mint to place the motto "In God We Trust" on each coin which had available space where the inscription might be displayed.

Among all the American coins which have carried the memorable inscription, on no one of them does it stand out more prominently than on the Illinois Centennial memorial half-dollar, coined in 1918. This coin might serve as a memento of the inscription which first appeared on the coins of the country during Lincoln's administration. Here one may see on the obverse side of the coin, an excellent portrait of Abraham Lincoln and also the motto, "In God We Trust."