

LINCOLN LORE

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THE REVISED PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

Inasmuch as this bulletin bears the date of Flag Day it seems appropriate to call attention to the new version of the vow of allegiance to the national emblem. This revision becomes especially timely because it gives to the pledge to the flag a Lincolnian tone. One will recall that the Gettysburg Address reaches its climax in the expression "that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom." The amended pledge to the flag states, "One nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all."

Those instrumental in having the term "under God" included in the pledge to the flag were anxious that the resolution be passed by Congress so that it might be used in its new form on June 14 of this year for the first time. The House measure was introduced by Rep. Louis C. Rabaut (D. Mich.) and Senator Homer E. Ferguson (R. Mich.) moved that the Senate concur in the House measure.

The change in diction appears in the statutes as an amendment to a section of a joint resolution of June 22, 1842, "to codify and emphasize existing rules and customs pertaining to the display and use of the flag of the United States." It is understood that the use of the two supplemented words is not compulsory.

Congress adopted the stars and stripes as the national emblem on June 14, 1777. It was not until the centennial anniversary of the day that any special attention was paid to it. The occasion was observed at Independence Hall and later at the Betsy Ross home the day was given notice. Dr. Bernard J. Cigrand a student of Lincoln contributed to the *Chicago Argus* for June 1886 an article entitled "The Fourteenth of June." This initial attempt to center interest on the day was followed by the organization of The American Flag Day Association of which Dr. Cigrand became president and the moving spirit of the project to set aside June 14 as Flag Day. On February 12, 1899 he spoke before the organization on the subject of Abraham Lincoln bringing the story of the Emancipator before the members of the flag association.

When one thinks of Lincoln with relation to the national emblem the flag raising at Philadelphia immediately comes to mind. This phrase which the President elect used on the occasion emphasizes the "under God" concept recently adopted—"Under the blessings of God, each additional star added to that flag has given additional prosperity and happiness to this country." On the same day in reply to some remarks from Governor Curtin Lincoln said: "I feel that, under God, in the strength of the arms and wisdom of the heads of these masses, after all, must be my support."

Possibly Lincoln had been reviewing in his mind during this Philadelphia visit the concluding words of the Declaration of Independence "With a firm reliance on the protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our lives, our fortunes and our sacred honor."

It is well known that Lincoln did not use the expression "under God" in either one of his preliminary copies of the Gettysburg Address but that it first was pronounced in his oral rendition of the speech. The inter-

polation was picked up by the reporters and each one of the three copies of the address the President, made after its delivery, include the added words. This last moment contribution to the text has quickened an interest in the use of the term. It may have come spontaneously at the very moment he needed such an expression to set off the grand climax to his speech.

A phrase in the speech of Edward Everett, Lincoln's predecessor on the program may have influenced the use of the term "under God" by the President. The former professor of Harvard University in accounting for the remarkable victory at Gettysburg stated: "That so decisive a triumph, under circumstances like these, was gained by our troops, I would ascribe, under Providence, to the spirit of exalted patriotism that animated them, and the consciousness that they were fighting in a religious cause." The "under Providence" terminology may have evolved into the simpler term "under God" as Lincoln put it.

Lincoln's use of the term "under God," which has been given more attention in the Gettysburg Address setting than elsewhere, was used primarily after he assumed the responsibility of directing the affairs of the nation. It did not come to him as a Biblical quotation as it is not found in Holy Writ. That Lincoln was greatly influenced in his use of words and sentence structure by the writings of M. L. Weems there can be no doubt. The clergyman has God appearing constantly throughout all his books and at least three times in his Washington story uses the exact term "under God," to say nothing of the many parallel statements. Referring to the visit of Mr. Genet, an envoy from France, Weems observed, "The people everywhere welcomed him as the representative of a beloved nation, to whom, under God, they owed their liberties." After the delivery of the Farewell Address by Washington, Weems stated that to him the people had "so long and so fondly looked up, as, under God, their surest and their safest friend." After the death of Washington, Weems refers to the deceased as one "to whom you and your children owe, under God, many of the best blessings of life."

On other occasions Lincoln used the expression noted in the Gettysburg Address and now featured in the pledge to the flag. On March 9, 1864 when Grant was given his commission the formal written presentation by the President contained this phrase: "As the country herein trusts you, so, under God, it will sustain you." Back at Philadelphia to address the great Central Fair, two days after the June 14, 1864 anniversary, it is interesting to note that Lincoln again used the words now incorporated in the pledge to the flag. He said, "We accepted this war for an object, a worthy object, and the war will end when that object is attained, under God, I hope it never will until that time."

The expression "under God" in these famous declarations is closely akin to the motto "In God we Trust" appearing on our nation's coins. It may also contribute something to the meaning of the pledge to the flag not only by emphasizing the religious character of the nation but also throwing further emphasis on its "indivisible" structure.