

From the Stamp Specialist: **The Engraver of the Five Cents De La Rue**

by August Dietz

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Scott 6

The identity of the Engraver of the Five Cents De La Rue has at last been definitely established. The artist was F. Joubert. This data supplies the last missing link in our record of the men whose instruments carved the originals on stone and steel for the various government-issued postage stamps of the Confederate States of America.

“The Five Cents ‘London Print’ has the unique distinction of being the only American postage stamp produced abroad and current, for a considerable time, within a large—though temporarily separated—section of the United States.” This quotation, taken from *The Postal Service of The Confederate States of America*, introduces a chapter replete with romance and adventure.

Though one of the commonest stamps of the Confederate General Issues—both in the London and Richmond printings—its history intrigued me at the time, and I accorded it particular attention and study. An extended correspondence with the Director of the house of Thomas De Le Rue & Co., Ltd., of London—Mr. A. J. Hayes—resulted in obtaining a wealth of data, upon which I built the story. It is here again briefly set forth.

The Postmaster-General of the Confederacy was never satisfied with the lithographed stamps, and every effort was made—even during the time of the Hoyer & Ludwig contract—to find engravers and printers who could supply a steelplate product, equal in quality to that of the North. Sample stamp designs and estimates had been

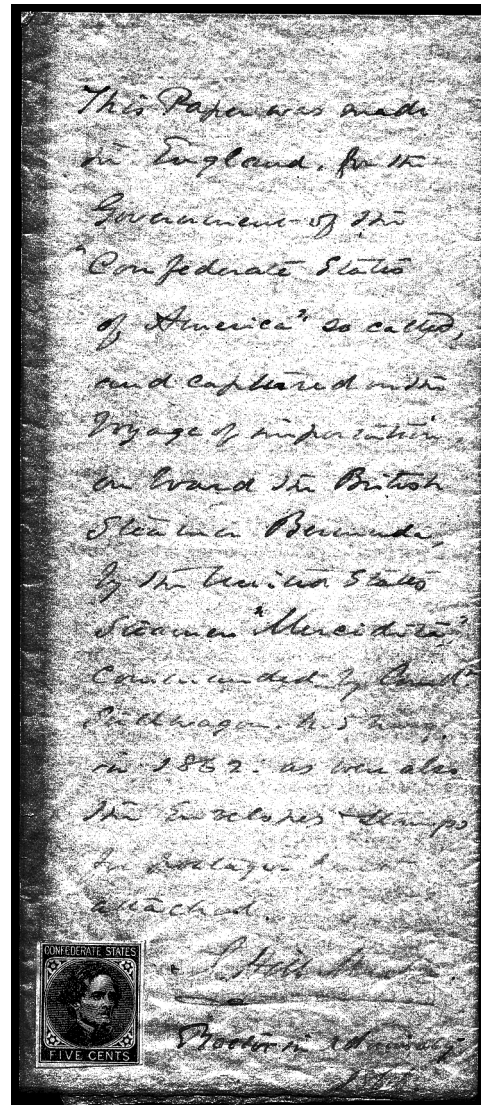
received from New York concerns when the Provisional Government was established in Montgomery, and one of these offers would probably have been accepted, but the incident of Fort Sumter, which marked the beginning of hostilities, precluded the printing of stamps in what then became enemy country. Finally, Major Benjamin Ficklen, that “Mystery Man of the Confederacy,” was sent to England to procure various necessities for the Government—among them *steelplate-printed postage stamps and plates*.

We know the story of his arrangements with the firm of Thomas De La Rue & Co. of London:

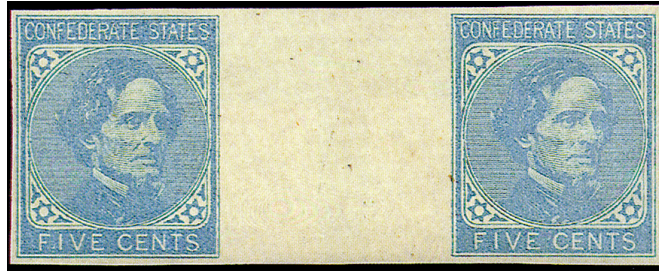
—to prepare the steel engraving, print a supply of stamps, and forward a printing plate to be used for subsequent editions in the Confederacy

—of the clever deception in the execution of this contract, which, while “living up to the letter of the agreement, detoured the spirit” by engraving the *original* on steel, but supplying *electrotype* printing plates

—of the capture of that first shipment of plate and stamps aboard the blockade-runner *Bermuda* by the U.S. Steamer *Mercidita* off the port of Wilmington, N.C.



The only known stamp from the “Lost Shipment”, taken from the *Bermuda*, the ship and cargo having been seized as contraband. The document, of which only a portion is shown, attests to the seizure and is signed “J. Hill Martin, Proctor in Admiralty, 1866”



5¢ De La Rue Plate Proof on wove paper, Sc. 6P5, showing the gutter between the complete sheets as printed

—of the safe arrival of a second shipment of stamps and another electrotypes plate, from which Archer & Daly subsequently produced, on a typographic press, the so-called “Local Prints”

—of how this work was continued from the four 100-unit panes until the time when the Richmond concern was in position to supply the first real steel-plate 10-cent stamps in sufficient quantities to make it no longer necessary to print Fives, after the letter-rate had advanced to ten cents.

All this is an oft-told tale from the primer of Confederate postal history—but the repetition appears in order in view of that which is to follow.

Before proceeding further with our story, I cannot refrain from weaving in a parenthetical thought. I have never been able to reconcile Ficklen’s acceptance of *electrotypes* with his specific instructions to contract for *steelplates*. He may not have been familiar enough with the two processes to know the difference. Again, in view of the fact that there were no plate-printing facilities in Richmond at the time, he may have been persuaded that the plates to be furnished could be handled by any competent typographic printer, of whom there were a number in the Capital in the 1860s. The De La Rues were known to specialize in relief work, while Perkins, Bacon & Co., likewise located in London, were recognized specialists in *steelplate* stamps. They had produced the Penny Black, and were supplying a number of Britain’s colonies with excellent workmanship in this line. Evidently the De La Rues were cleverer salesmen than their competitors. But a Nemesis overtook

them in the end, for the Confederate never paid the bill!

Now, back to our story. Despite all my efforts, the identity of the engraver remained a mystery.

The De La Rues had no record of the man who produced this outstanding example of craftsmanship in relief-engraved portraiture. It is quite probable, too, that Joubert engraved the One Cent stamp, which was never placed in circulation, although the portrait of Calhoun thereon is greatly inferior to that of the President.



Image of Senator John C. Calhoun of South Carolina. Typographed in

orange by Thomas De La Rue & Co. Ltd, London, England. Due to the increase in the drop rate to 2 cents this



stamp was never issued (but it was given Scott # 14). When the letter rate was changed from five to ten cents in July, 1862, the CSA Post Office sent an order to Thomas De La Rue & Co. to prepare printing plates for two cent (also with Calhoun and ten cent (Davis) stamps. The existing one and five cent designs were altered. The two new plates were shipped to Richmond, but were never used. Some private printings from the plates have been made, including those shown here.

With this historical background, we will turn to the real subject of our story—the discovery of Joubert.

THE LETTER AND THE ENGRAVER'S PROOFS

Credit for all that follows must go to Mr. Van Dyk MacBride of Newark, New Jersey. An enthusiastic student and collector of Confederate material, his interest is constantly

leading him to auctions whenever unusual objects are offered. And thus it came about that on one of these occasions he succeeded in acquiring a lot consisting of a letter from England, two *carte-visite* photographs of President Jefferson Davis, and two so-called engraver's proofs on glazed cardboard. The latter turned out to be impressions made by Joubert of the first completed stage of his work on the Confederate Five Cents stamp—that of the Southern President's portrait in circle. The *carte-visite* photographs served as models, while various pencil notations and a layout of the projected design for the stamp, in ink and pencil, on the face and back of one of the photographs, appear to have served Joubert as memoranda. These notes greatly enhance the value of the relics, injecting, as they do, that element of human interest which seems to be inherent in Confederates.

Let's examine the contents of that envelope. The baronial-shape envelope of light gray stock is addressed to "Louis V. Davison, Esq., 100 William Street, New York, U.S.A." Registry-franked with a 2d and 5d King Edward VII stamps, it is postmarked "Weybridge, Dec. 6, 1906" with the red New York receiving stamp on the back, dated Dec. 15, 1906. The folded lettersheet of corresponding stock bears the following message in longhand :

THE FERNS, WEYBRIDGE, SURRY
4th Dec. 1906

Dear Mr. Davison

During your Civil War my father was asked to engrave the original die for the postage stamps of the Confederate States.

I came across, the other day, amongst other proofs of stamp engravings, the original photos from which my father, F. Joubert, engraved Jeff Davis' head, and two proofs of the stamp.

I think they might be of considerable value to a collector as a unique curiosity. I refused £5 for them from one of the big London firms as I thought I might send them to you and ask you to try to get me a good price for them in New York from a collector or at a sale of stamps.

Of course they cannot be priced as *stamps*, but as the originals from which the Jeff Davis stamps were produced they may fetch a special price of their own.—

I do not think there are any other such proofs in existence, except perhaps with de la Rue & Co., who printed the stamps for the Confederate States in 1862—but it is doubtful if they would keep mere proofs.

I was very glad to hear from Mr. Hearn that the business so long in hand had been satisfactorily concluded.

I trust you and Mrs. Davison are well. With kind regards from all

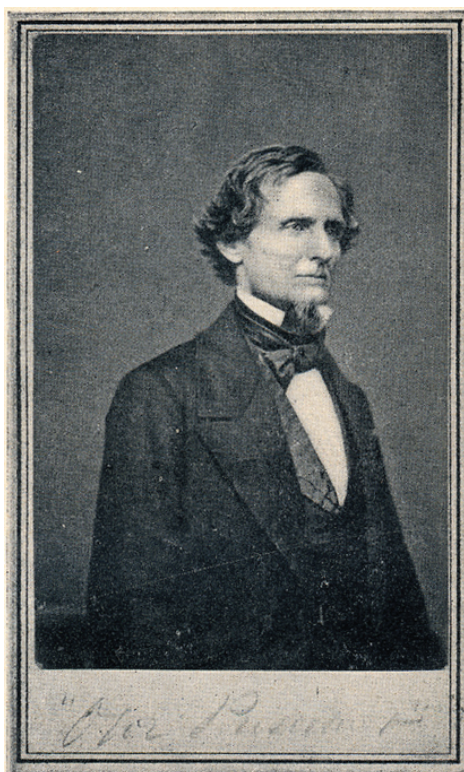
Yours sincerely

C. H. JOUBERT DE LA FERTE.

Thus reads the letter which, after nearly eighty years, discloses the name of the artist who engraved the De La Rue Five Cents. I do not think that Fred Melville, who was ever interested in Confederates and wrote exhaustively on the subject in general, knew of Joubert in connection with this engraving. Nor do I think that Drinkwater or Waterhouse—both students of Confederates—were aware of this fact. Moens may have known of Joubert, but if he did, I found no mention of that fact in his catalogs at the time of writing my Confederate story.

* * *

The next exhibits to be considered are two photographs from which Joubert engraved the portrait medallion. While in different arrangement, the heads of Davis are identical and stem from the same original—for neither is from a personal sitting.

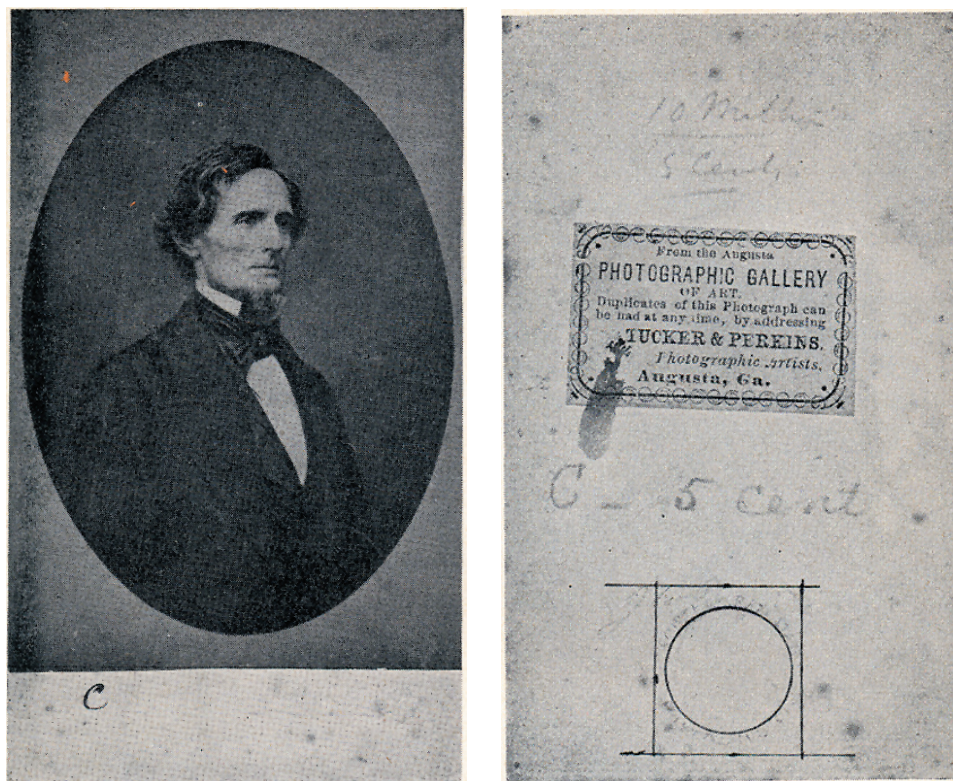


*The original sitting,
Rees Gallery, Richmond, Va.*

The *original*, for which the President sat, was taken in a studio in Richmond. Likewise of *carte-visite* size, this portrait appears on a rectangular background, and served Ludwig, of Hoyer & Ludwig lithographers, in his engraving of the *first* Confederate stamp—the Five Cents green. Subsequently numerous photographers throughout the Confederacy made copies of this original and placed them on sale in their communities.

In this manner the two examples here discussed were reproduced: the one in oval setting is by Tucker & Perkins, of Augusta, Ga., as evidenced by the small label pasted on the back; the other, in its circular setting with inscriptions, by Quinby & Co., of Charleston S.C., as their imprint appears on the reverse. A casual comparison of the three illustrations will confirm the foregoing statements. The features are the same to the last detail.

The portrait in oval was unquestionably the one from which Joubert worked. I am led to this belief by the fact that on the front and back appear his notes and a sketch:



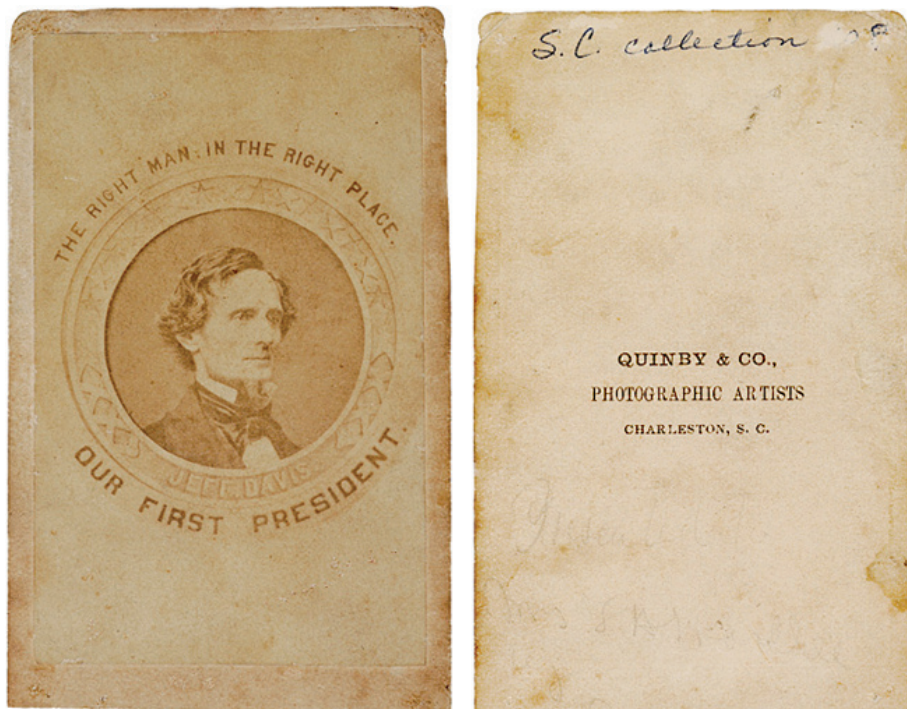
Front and back of photograph from which Joubert worked

while his original plan of lay-out (which, however, was not carried out in the execution) was suggested by the photograph with the head in circle, as we shall see from his tentative sketch.

Examining closely the front of the oval picture (page 7), we note an initial "C" in ink, while [not in the photo] discernible is the pencil notation "5 Cents," underscored, and below that "Jefferson Davis." Turning to the back of the card, and at the top, we find a pencil notation in two lines: "10 Million" and "5 Cents" both lines underscored.

The Tucker & Perkins' label occupies the center, and below this, again in pencil, we see "C—5 Cent." At the foot of the card, within an eighth-inch of its edge, appears the most interesting of these markings: Joubert's original sketch for the arrangement of portrait and inscriptions. Four lines form the rectangle which encloses the circle intended for the portrait. This is done in ink.

Around the upper segment of the circle, and conforming to its curvature, appears in penciled capitals "Confederate States," and to balance, at the foot of the circle in barely



The photograph that probably suggested the Davis head in circle

decipherable, sketchy lettering, either “Postag [sic] Five Cts” or “Postag [sic] Paid Cts”—again in capitals. Across this sketch runs a nearly obliterated inscription in pencil “Jefferson Davis.”

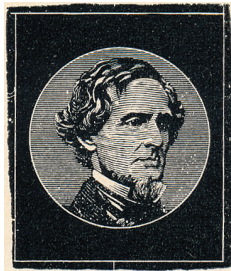
Comparing this tentative sketch with the finished product, we note that the circular inscription was abandoned for the straight line lettering at top and bottom.

The second card photograph, with its head enclosed in a medallion with inscriptions, requires no further description. There are no notations to lend interest, save that the better contrast of light and shadow may have caused Joubert to refer to it in his work.

The Engraver’s Proofs

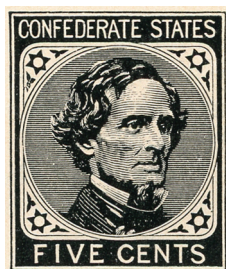
And now we come to two Engraver’s Proofs, which constitute the real gems of this historic material.

Proof-printed on highly glazed cardboards, approximately 2-1/2" x 3-5/8" in jet black, the first of these “consecutives” is typeprint dated “Jan. 11-62” and shows the Davis portrait in circle, surrounded by a rectangle in colorless lines, which mark the area of the final stamp, with a continued background in color of irregular shape. This



requires an explanation. The soft steel plate was of circular shape, in conformity with the requirements of the De La Rue method of electrotyping and adjustable to the machinery used in their process. In “pulling”

Above, the “Jan. 11-62” proof; right, the “Jan. 14-62” proof; below, De La Rue die proof of completed engraving



this proof a “frisket” was laid over the plate, with a cutout exposing only that portion of the “face” of the design which we see in its irregular-bordered rectangle.

Now, let us follow Joubert’s inspection of his work. He is critical of his own skill. There is too much “solid” in the hair and in the coat. The neckwear lacks detail, while the lined background needs just a slight lighting. The whole lacks just a bit more of color contrast...

The second proof has been “pulled” without frisket, and shows the size of the block of steel with its slightly beveled edges. It is imprinted “Jan. 14-62,” as all De La Rue Plate Proofs of that time were dated. A close inspection will reveal the marked improvements made by Joubert in the hair, the coat and the neckwear. In fact, this proof was probably the final one before proceeding to the more mechanical task of engraving the inscriptions and the simple ornamentation. A comparison of this Jan. 14 portrait with that of the better-known De La Rue cardboard proofs of the complete design—or with a London-printed stamp—will confirm these statements.

And so we have discovered Joubert and admired his great skill as a portrait engraver. We have examined his proofs and followed him in the progress of his work, and it would appear that our story ends here, but for the probability that some student might care to know more of the process, after the original engraving was completed, and how the De La Rues made the duplicate electrotypes from which the actual stamps were printed.

Rummaging among the photographs and drawings that served me at the time of my studies for *The Postal Service of The Confederate States of America*, I find a graph made for me by one of the artists of that London concern. It is the diagram of the steel die for the Five Cents stamp. It is here shown. An accompanying letter from Mr. Hayes describes the method of making the electro-types in the De La Rue plant: “Four hundred impressions were taken from the die in *soft metal* (probably lead, which is the medium for finer work) by special machinery. These impressions were built up in four panes of 100 each with the correct divi-

sions between the panes. They were then locked together in a chase (an iron or steel frame). This was placed in a galvanic bath and copper grown, the shell being backed up with metal."

The diagram is drawn to scale in inches. To those who would know more of the process of electrotyping, I would refer to my chapter on "The Typographed Stamps" in the aforementioned work. For actual observation of this method, I would advise a visit to an electrotyping plant, located in nearly every larger city in this country. The process today is practically the same as that employed by the De La Rues a century ago.

It may be interesting, too, to learn that this original Joubert engraving is still in the keeping of the London concern.

Another intriguing question arises, connected with the pencil notation on one of the Davis photographs.

Joubert's memorandum reads "10 Million." Evidently he had been told the quantity of stamps ordered. Now, the archives of the De La Rues reveal that the first lot of this issue of Five-Cent stamps was booked as of the 30th January, 1862: "Five Million stamps of Five Cents, printed in blue with head of President Davis. Also a Five Cents printing plate of 400 multiples."

Probably Ficklen cut the order down to half quantity before the printing proceeded. Maybe he had a premonition of the fate of that shipment...

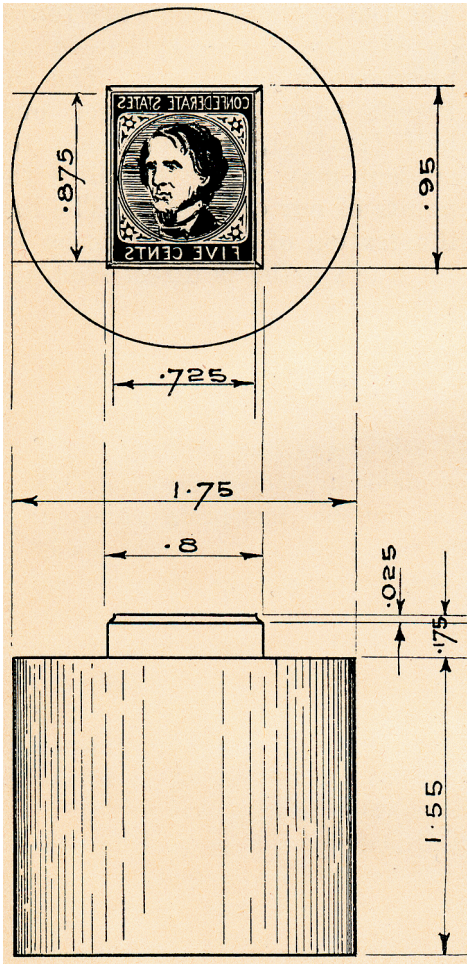


Diagram of the De La Rue steel die



Left, De La Rue printing tied by "Richmond Va. July 1, 1862" c.d.s., first day of the 10¢ rate; right, portion of a cover with De La Rue printing tied by "Calhoun Ga. Jun. 30" c.d.s, last day of 5¢ rate.

The story of the Richmond Printing from the De La Rue electrotypes of the Five Cents is familiar to all collectors—but the destiny of the plates still remains an unsolved mystery.

Some day they, too, may be found and tell us another story.

THE ENGRAVERS OF CONFEDERATE STAMPS

Now that the last missing name in the list of Engravers of Confederate stamps has come to light, we may fittingly close our study with a roll-call of those craftsmen of a bygone day:

The Lithographed stamps—5c., 10c. and 2c.: CHARLES LUDWIG, of Hoyer & Ludwig, Richmond, Virginia.

The Typographed stamps—Five Cents and One Cent: F. JOUBERT of Thomas De La Rue & Co., Ltd., London, England.

The Steelplate stamps — 10c. "Frame Line," "Ten" Cents and 10c. Type I: JOHN ARCHER, formerly of the American Bank Note Co., New York, founder of the firm of Archer & Daly, Richmond, Virginia. Figure-express 10c. Type II, Two Cents and the Twenty Cents: FREDERICK HALPIN, formerly of the New York Bank Note Co., New York, in the employ of Archer & Daly, Richmond, Va.

OUR ILLUSTRATIONS

A word concerning the illustrations accompanying this story. The Davis photographs are reproduced—fronts and

backs—in approximately actual size. The Die Proofs have been enlarged one-half ($1=1-1/2$), in order that the student may better visualize the points of our discussion. The line illustration of the diagram by De La Rue's artist is direct from the original.