Historical Fiction: His First Dollar

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After he became President, Lincoln told his Secretary of State the following story

of the first dollar he ever had for his own:

Seward, he said, did you ever hear how I earned my first dollar? No, replied

Seward. Well, I was about eighteen years of age . . . and had constructed a

flatboat. . . . A steamer was going down the river. We have, you know, no wharves on

the western streams, and the custom was, if passengers were at any of the landings

they had to go out in a boat, the steamer stopping and taking them on board. I was

contemplating my new boat, and wondering whether I could make it stronger or

improve it in any part, when two men with trunks came down to the shore in

carriages, and looking at the different boats, singled out mine, and asked: 'Who owns

this?'

I answered modestly, I do.

“Will you.” said one of them, “take us and our trunks out to the steamer?”

“Certainly,” said I. I was very glad to have a chance of earning something, and

supposed that they would give me a couple of “bits.” The trunks were put in my boat,

the passengers seated themselves on them, and I sculled them out to the steamer. They

got on board, and I lifted the trunks and put them on deck. The steamer was moving

away when I called out:

“You have forgotten to pay me!”

Each of them took from his pocket a silver half-dollar and threw it on the

bottom of my boat. I could scarcely believe my eyes as I picked up the money. You

may think it was a very little thing, and in these days it seems to me like a trifle, but it

was a most important incident in my life at that time. I could scarcely credit that I, a

poor boy, had earned a dollar in less than a day—that by honest work I had earned a

dollar. I was a more hopeful and thoughtful boy from that time.