

THE BACKS OF STAMPS

(By R.K.D.)

Who would think of looking on the back of a stamp for anything at all interesting? Yet, on some stamps there are odd things printed on the back. Who, for example, would expect to find a Latin prayer on the back of a stamp? Yet on the 1895 issue of Portugal — which was issued to celebrate the 700th anniversary of the birth of St. Anthony of Padua — there is such a prayer on the back of every stamp. The most curious picture of this series shows the saint preaching to the fishes.

Then again a glance at the back of some stamps will reveal the fact that they have been printed on strange materials. Particularly is this the case with the stamps of Latvia, one of the nations formed from the old Russian Empire. The first issue was printed on the backs of maps taken from the general staff of the German army, after the war, and on each stamp may be found a tiny portion of one of these maps, with towns, rivers, roads, etc., all marked. After the stamp maps had been used up, cigarette paper was used for one issue, and blue ruled exercise paper for the next. Later on, some Bolshevik bank notes were captured, and Red Cross stamps, showing a nurse and wounded soldier, were printed on these, the bank note design appearing in blue on the back of the stamp. At about the same time Lithuania, another new State, one part of the Russian Empire, was similarly short of printing paper, and used up some greyish paper, on which her war-time bread tickets had until then been printed.

During revolutionary warfare in Mexico in 1915, paper became so scarce that the Government printed stamps on the backs of post-office forms, so that each stamp shows part of a printed form.

Several other schemes have been put forward at various times for printing advertisements on the backs of stamps. Early British stamps may be found with words printed on the backs in various colours, but these were experimental. New Zealand, however, put such a scheme into operation, and on the backs of stamps of the 1882 issue there may be found advertisements for pills, soap, and other commodities.

There is also an issue of Russian stamps with an inscription on the back of each stamp, stating they may be used as money.

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