

One Cent

By J. W. Henson

When I was about three years old I put a penny in my mouth, as is common with young children. At last I ran my tongue around and could no longer feel the coin. I had swallowed it instead of groceries. Now Mother had always told me never to put money in my mouth. She said it was dirty. Said that "ole" men carried it in their front pockets and that some of them had very serious "bad" diseases. When Mom used the word "ole" it was in a disparaging manner, as a prefix to something or someone that she wished to defame, it had nothing to do with age. She never bothered to explain what the "bad" diseases were, or how you came to contract them, except from putting money in your mouth. The term "bad disease" was generously used by our family around guests and at other times when wishing to speak politely of a social malady. It was a trademark of our family to do so.

I remember one day in church the teacher for the junior age children was telling a story in the class. It had its setting in the Holy Land and he worked the story around to the point where the person was diagnosed with leprosy, but to his misfortune he could not bring the name of that disease to mind. He stood there wrestling with his failing memory. At last he called on the class for assistance. He said, "Oh, you kids know. Its that bad disease!" My first cousin Ray was sitting just a row in front of me and he volunteered an answer. In a strong, questioning voice he said, "Syphilis?"

When I told Mother about the lost penny she showed serious concern and started a prophylactic program at once. She fed me dry bread, cheese and other substances that were calculated to entrap the foreign object and move it through the maze of the intestines. I was closely monitored until the happy time when Mother informed me that she had recovered the penny. It was no longer mine!

For many years I thought that Mother's concern was for my welfare during this episode, but as I later came to know Mom better, I believe it was the loss of the penny that concerned her most! **Anyway it all came out . . . okay!**