



A Bad Penny

Many many years ago, when a penny could buy you a big bag of sweets a little girl was skipping up and down the road outside her house. It was a cold day and a wind whipped around the ankles of the little girl as she skipped along. She held a secret in her tightly clenched hand. It was a secret that nobody else knew. Eventually she stopped skipping and stood, anxiously, outside the door of a sweet shop. Her boots were tightly laced up and on top of her head she wore a navy hat with a light blue bow on it. Other shoppers walked up and down the street looking in at shop windows and discussing the wares on sale in the market stalls.

The little girl looked at them out of the corner of her eye and her heart raced. She had a secret and it was a secret in her tightly clenched hand. It was a secret that she didn't want anyone to know.

"Hello there Effie," called a voice from be-

hind her. She nearly jumped. "Are you going into the sweet shop with your money?"

Effie nodded and the person smiled, "Don't eat them all at once or you will spoil your dinner when you get home." As the footsteps died away Effie took a deep breath and opened the sweet shop door. Effie didn't want anyone to find out about her secret - Effie had found a penny.

She had spotted it, shining in the gutter just by the edge of a muddy puddle. The penny must have fallen out of someone's coat pocket without them noticing. When the glint of the shining penny caught Effie's eye she had stooped down to see what it was. Imagine her joy when she discovered she had found a penny. What a find. A penny could buy her quite a lot of sweets. And that was what Effie planned to buy.

But then she noticed something... the penny was French. It was a foreign coin. Effie knew immediately that she couldn't give the shop keeper a French penny. Effie didn't live in France. This meant that Effie could not use it to buy any sweets in any of the shops in her village. The shops only accepted pounds and pence. They didn't accept French money at all. So for Effie it was a bad penny and that was Effie's secret - she had found a bad penny. The bad penny was worth nothing, it was useless

in fact. But Effie planned to use it to purchase some sweets from the sweet shop.

“If I hide the penny like this in my hand the shop assistant won’t notice that it is a bad penny until it is too late. I’ll make sure I pay for the sweets and then leave the shop really quickly before she can stop me. Then I will get a whole pennyworth of sweets for nothing.”

Effie could almost taste the sweets on her lips already, but she felt a little nervous. “What if I’m caught?” she wondered. “I’ll be careful, I won’t get caught,” she said to herself as she closed the door of the sweet shop behind her.

On entering the shop a kind lady smiled at her as she gazed at the row upon row of sweets in jars. There were red strawberry drops and striped humbugs, white mint imperials and honey-coloured toffees and then there was Effie’s favourite – black liquorice.

“How can I help you my love,” the kind lady asked. Effie said “A pennyworth of that” – pointing to a stick of black liquorice. The shop lady broke off little bits of the liquorice with a small hammer, weighed them, put them into a bag and handed it to Effie.

Effie picked up the bag as quickly as she could, undid her hand so that the bad penny still remained hidden, and turned to hurry out of the shop. “Oh,” said the shop lady, “this won’t do.” Effie said nothing. She put the

sweets down on to the counter, picked up the bad penny, and went away, with a guilty face and a guilty, guilty conscience. She was a thief. Effie felt awful. Nothing could ever alter that.

“Even if I grow up to be rich and give away a great deal of money for children’s homes. I will always be the one who wanted to cheat, wanted to take things that were not mine. I’m a thief.”

You might say “But she did not keep the sweets, she gave them back.” Yes, but, she was a thief from the very moment that it came into her head that perhaps the lady in the shop would not notice that the penny was a French one. She wanted the lady not to notice, she wanted to go away to some place where no one would see her and to eat them when they had not really been paid for. That was just as bad as if she had watched outside the shop until it was empty and then had gone in very very quietly and had taken something off the counter.

Later Effie was very glad that her mother did not find out. But often she would worry that somehow or other the story of her wickedness would all come out. I do not think that anyone got to know but sometimes people feel happier when the bad things that they do *are* found out. It is miserable to be thinking day after day about something wrong that we have

done. We know we ought to tell our mother, but are afraid to. We are afraid that she will be angry. But she would not be angry if you told her; she would be very sorry, but she would be very kind.

God said to His people, "Only acknowledge thine iniquity and I will abundantly pardon"; that means "Only say how naughty and wicked you have been and I will not say any more about it but will forget, and you will be My own dear child."

God was very very kind to little Effie; when she grew older He gave her a new heart which made her want Him to know about everything that she did, and to wash away all her sins.

God said to Moses, "I will by no means clear the guilty"; that means, that God never says that bad things do not matter. He says that they matter very very much. Sin matters so much that Christ came to die so that sin might be put away, and forgiven. If you have sinned it is not right to say "I was only little, so my stealing did not count".

If you want to go to heaven you will go because God loved you even before you had thought wicked thoughts, and because the Lord Jesus died, and because the Holy Spirit taught you and has given you a new heart.

Remember what happened to Ananias and Sapphira when they told lies and remember

that King David said, "God has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquity." This means that God has not treated us in a way that our sins deserve. Our sins and wickedness deserve his anger, but he is patient and loving and is always ready to forgive us our sins whenever we ask.