Do you cuss just a little when you reach into your pocket for a dime only to come up with one of those discolored steel pennies that look like a dime? Or do you fret a bit when you lay down 3¢ for a newspaper, only to discover that you laid down 12¢ or 21¢ or 30¢ instead? In any event, be of good cheer. The old copper cent is on the way back. In due time, the coinage confusion will be dispelled. The fair sex who dig deep into the dim recesses of a modern purse and make six tries before they find a dime instead of a steel penny for street car fare will in due course be no longer subject to that exasperation.

HOW IT CAME ABOUT.

Copper went to war. Shell cases, small arms ammunitions, implements of war, guns and a host of other things required more than all the copper we could produce. Thus it was that War Production Board and military officials zealously eyed the tons of copper represented by the old 1-cent pieces that were in circulation and determined that the penny must be conscripted for victory. But war also altered prices of many items very materially and more and more 1-cent pieces were needed with which to carry on the normal commerce of the nation. Faced with a huge demand for pennies and with no copper available, mint officials were compelled to begin experimenting with a new one-cent piece.

MANY ALTERNATIVES CONSIDERED.

It first became necessary for the Treasury Department to secure authority from Congress to produce a different kind of penny and one of the requirements which Congress laid down was that it must be made in such size and shape that it would operate the hundreds of thousands of vending machines which disgorge a stick of gum, a stamp, or a small handful of peanuts when a penny is inserted. Otherwise the usefulness of such machines would have been destroyed. Within this limitation, the experiments began. The mints experimented with glass, with plastics, with low carbon steel and other substances in order to find a suitable penny. Steel seemed best suited for the purposes but it rusted easily even as a result of perspiration. So it had to be coated with zinc to prevent rust. That of course made the new one-cent piece look like a dime. It was suggested that a hole be punched in the middle to distinguish it but that would have been a slow and costly process. It was suggested that it be made elliptical instead of round but that would have made it impossible to use them in vending machines. Thus the new penny of low-carbon steel and coated with zinc became a part of our provocative coinage.

HUGE DEMAND.

Between the pennies that seem to get lost and the extra demand created by changes resulting from war, there was and is a constant demand for pennies. In the fiscal year 1943, about 487 million pennies were produced. In the fiscal year 1944, it jumped to 1.2 billion. In the year ahead, it is estimated that another 1.2 billion will be minted. At the moment, the Treasury has orders for 70 million pennies which it cannot fill. In some western cities, the shortage was so great that for a brief time, paper pennies were issued. But the mints are grinding away at the rate of 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and producing 6,700,000 every day.

BRIGHTER DAYS AHEAD.

But brighter days are ahead for less bright pennies that don't look like dimes. Copper is being made available and in due time, the steel cent will move into oblivion and the old copper cent with its dignity, its rich heritage and its historic tradition will move back into economic grace.