An Early Experience

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By Helen Crane

Childhood days when high finance was almost as good as Wall Street in '29

Too young to attend school, I enviously carried Mary's notebook and pencil for her to the corner of our block. Bidding her a wistful goodbye, I crossed the street to Carmen Waller's house to play.

Carmen sat in a big chair watching her mother start Marjorie off to school. Carmen's round blue eyes smiled at me from under her tousled gold curls as she edged over to make room for me beside her.

At the desk Mrs. Waller wrote something in a flat little book. Tearing out the page on which she had written she handed it to Marjorie, saying, "Here's a check for one dollar. Buy the salmon and the olives at the little store at noon."

When Mrs. Waller had gone to the kitchen, Carmen opened the desk and took out the little book. "Let's buy some candy! Can you write?" she whispered.

"I got a dollar bill for my birthday," I said. "I know how to mark a 'I'."
Carmen scribbled something that looked like writing below my “1”, and tore the slip from the book.

INSIDE the little store I eagerly led Carmen to the notebook counter, where we each selected a tablet with a bright red cover. We bought pencils and candy. After each purchase we conscientiously asked the woman, “If we have one dollar to spend, is this too much?”

She kept smiling and helping us to decide when teasing colors were involved. When she said that we had spent our dollar, Carmen handed up the check. She and I each lifted from the counter a notebook piled with tiny bags of candy and colored pencils.

Suddenly the woman startled us with, “Here, you naughty children! This is not money at all!” All her smile was gone.

“It’s the kind of money Mother gives Marjorie,” Carmen said.

“Yes, but your mother writes it.”

“Well, but Betty and I wrote this,” Carmen explained in vain.

The woman snatched the little bags of candy and the pencils off the tablets and set them on a high case. “Now put those tablets over there,” she ordered.

I HUGGED the lovely red cover against my dress. I would rather she had asked for my best dolly. Reluctantly we laid the notebooks on the shelf. I tried to say, “Let’s go, Carmen!” but the words choked me. I still believed that we had paid the woman real money. The memory of that moment comes back to me whenever I read that quotation of Dickens, “In the little world of children there is nothing so finely perceived and so finely felt as injustice.”

The woman came toward us with two bright orange suckers which she put into our fists, then shoved us out onto the steps as though we were kittens or puppies. Carmen and I said nothing as we walked down the shady street. It was wonderful what immediate solace we found in those suckers! All day I kept thinking about the loss of the red notebook, but I suf-
ffered from a feeling much bigger, one which years afterward I found described in a psychology. I cannot quote it verbatim, but the gist of it is that over and above the loss of the intrinsic value of a thing, one experiences a sense of self-shrinkage.

A Dream of Today

By George Woster

One midnight, weary with the same old strife
That barely earned necessities of life,
A life of late grown more and more depressed,
I tossed upon my cot and tried to rest.
Then in my dreams I wandered through a maze
Of forests where the trees were dismal days
That bore no fruit; where flowers, their bloom denied,
Became rank weeds with thorns on every side;
There in the gloom came sounds of heavy tread;
A demon spoke and filled the earth with dread:

"Behold Depression!" cried the mighty voice;
"Born of men's minds, they wither in my grasp
And spread my plague by crying out my name;
Now on this day all nations pay me tribute;
Beneath my feet I crush both young and old;
In bitterness of heart some shall become
Inhuman men, who, preaching hellish gospels,
Shall swell my power and keep the Devil's Cross
Of idleness and hate and endless waiting
On shoulders bowed to earth beneath their own."

Sound ceased, and I went onward through the maze
Of forests where the trees were dismal days.
It may have been a baby's cooing cries,
A smile, half-hidden in a woman's eyes,