

START WHERE YOU STAND

A type of case which has often confronted me is that of the man "who has made a mistake," who is convinced, since the cards are stacked against him, that he is, as he puts it, "all washed up." I recall a brave young wife in conflict with her husband over this defeatist attitude, which he could not or would not overcome.

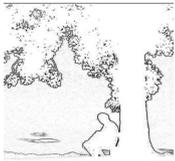
Eleven years before the two had married after a most pleasing romance dating back to the time they had been childhood sweethearts. During the first four years of the marriage two children were born to them. The husband was employed as the manager of the bookkeeping department of the local bank, and it would have been difficult to find in their community a happier little family or one that lived a more conventional life. Four years after the marriage the wife and the younger child contracted pneumonia and were confined for a considerable period to the hospital. With the relatives of the couple in a distant section of the country, it was necessary to retain a nurse to care for the child at home, adding to the rather considerable hospital expense that had already taxed the husband's modest salary. He began to brood over his ill luck and, with time hanging heavily on his hands, sought to relieve his restlessness and uneasiness. The rest was the old story. He got in with the wrong crowd, took to drinking, gambled in the desperate hope that he would be able to win enough to keep his home going during this emergency but succeeded only in losing heavily and getting into debt.

In desperation he manipulated the books, hoping to be able to make good the amounts embezzled before his crime was discovered. In all he misappropriated four thousand dollars. The wife returned from the hospital and, taking in the situation which she attributed to the expense undergone, proceeded to effect every economy possible. She of course had no intimation of the serious trouble into which he had gotten himself.

One day to her astonishment two detectives entered the home while the reunited family was at dinner and arrested the husband. He was tried and convicted of embezzlement and sentenced to the penitentiary for the minimum term. Following the initial shock and the continued denial and suffering during his period of imprisonment, the wife welcomed him back, eager to start a new life with him, confident that he would apply himself conscientiously toward piecing together his shattered life.

At the time this case was heard the man had been out three years. In presenting the situation the wife claimed that the husband was continually throwing up the fact that there were "two strikes on him," that once a man is a "jail-bird" he is forever a marked man, that it was impossible for him to "come back." Every night he came home a little more discouraged, blaming his ill luck on the impossibility of getting anywhere with a prison record. The wife attempted in vain to overcome this attitude of mind. The man insisted to the board that his experience had proven to him that it was virtually impossible to lift this "black cloud" from over his head.

I am frank to say that whenever I encountered a case of this kind it was more than a little disconcerting. Surely it does not take very long for a man such as this to sink into the quagmire of despondency. Repeated attempts, no job, no encouragement, and he becomes so broken, so filled with despair, as to be incompetent ever to rescue himself. Few employers will give a job to a man who has been involved criminally. In this particular instance the effect of the mediation was such as to enlist a tremendous public interest, and jobs from over a hundred reliable sources were offered. The additional openings were made available to others in similar situations. Today this man and his family are completely rehabilitated, and to look at him one would never know that he had been through so despairing an episode. Lifted up by this experience, he made the most of the opportunity presented, discovered reserves of character he never real-



ized he possessed, found for himself and his family new avenues of happiness.

The poem I read on the occasion of this broadcast was inspired by the utterance of a well-known manufacturer to a man who approached him for a job and started to tell his story of having been in the penitentiary. "Never mind," said the famous industrialist; "I don't care about the past. Start where you stand"

(from Poems that touch the heart, Compiled by A.L. Alexander)

START WHERE YOU STAND

Start where you stand and never mind the past;
The past won't help you in beginning new;
If you have left it all behind at last
Why, that's enough, you're done with it, you're through;
This is another chapter in the book;
This is another race that you have planned;
Don't give the vanished days a backward look;
Start where you stand.
The world won't care about your old defeats
If you can start anew and win success;
The future is your time, and time is fleet
And there is much of work and strain and stress;
Forget the buried woes and dead despairs;
Here is a brand-new trial right at hand;
The future is for him who does and dares;
Start where you stand.
Old failures will not halt, old triumphs aid;
Today's the thing, tomorrow soon will be;
Get in the fight and face it unafraid,
And leave the past to ancient history;
What has been, has been; yesterday is dead
And by it you are neither blessed nor banned;
Take courage, man, be brave and drive ahead;
Start where you stand.

(Poem by Berton Braley)