

Go with me to a crowded courtroom in a city in the northeastern U.S. A boy about sixteen years of age, who has been accused of stealing an automobile, stands before the judge, awaiting sentence.

In a chair nearby, a mother sobs hysterically. An attorney has just testified that the young offender has been a constant nuisance to the community.

Previously the chief of police had told how the boy had been arrested on numerous occasions for stealing fruit, breaking windows, and committing other acts of vandalism.

Now the stern, cold-eyed judge, glaring over the rims of his spectacles, launches into a bitter tirade against the youth, reminding him of the dire consequences which will result from his lawless acts. Every word from the thin-lipped judge is like the crack of a whip, as he mercilessly berates the defendant for his irresponsible conduct. He seems to be searching his vocabulary for the cruelest words he can find with which to humiliate the lad who stands before him.

But the boy does not cower before this bitter tongue-lashing. His attitude is one of reckless defiance. Not once does he lower his eyes from the face of the judge. With compressed lips and flashing eyes, he glares at his persecutor. When the judge pauses for a moment to let his words take effect, the boy looks him straight in the eye, and from between clenched teeth come the words, "I'm not afraid of you."

An angry flush spreads over the face of the judge as he leans

over his desk and snaps out, "I think about the only language you can understand is a six-month sentence in reform school."

"Go ahead and send me to the reform school," the boy snarls. "See if I care."

The feeling in the courtroom is tense. Spectators look at one another and shake their heads.

"That kid is hopeless!" an officer has just remarked.

All of the invectives hurled at the boy have served only to stir up a deeper feeling of hatred and resentment in him. The scene is much like that of a lion trainer jabbing at a caged beast with a pointed stick, with every thrust goading the victim to renewed fury.

At this point the judge spies among the spectators a young man from a nearby town, the superintendent of The Golden Rule Farm for problem boys.

"Mr. Weston," he says, in a tone of weary resignation, "what do you think of this boy?"

The gentleman in question steps forward. He has an air of assurance that immediately commands respect, and a kindly look in his eyes that makes you feel that here is a man who really understands boys.

"Judge," he says quietly, "that boy isn't really tough. Underneath that bluff of his he is completely and thoroughly frightened and deeply hurt. My belief is that he has never had a chance. Life has been bewildering to him. He has never known a father's love. He has never had the hand of a friend to guide him. I'd like to see him given a chance to show what he's really worth."

For a moment the courtroom is quiet. Then the silence is

suddenly broken by a stifled sob, not from the mother, but from the boy! The kind, sympathetic words of Mr. Weston have broken him completely. There he stands with shoulders drooped and head bowed, as tears slowly trickle down his cheeks. One kind word has reached the boy's heart, whereas a half-hour of denunciation had served only to make him the more resentful.

The judge coughs to hide his embarrassment and nervously adjusts his spectacles. Then the chief of police, who had testified against the lad, slips from the room, followed by the attorney.

After a moment of deliberation, the judge turns to Mr. Weston and says, "If you think you can do anything with the boy, I'll suspend sentence and turn him over to you."

The conclusion of the story is that the lad was given into Mr. Weston's charge, and from that time forth he caused no more trouble. The friendly gesture of the man who had come to his defense that day in the courtroom had put his feet on a new path and helped to bring out those finer qualities of character which no one previously thought even existed.

—Adapted from
Clarence Westphall

God is always there to give us a new chance, a fresh start, a way out of any situation we find hopeless. He always believes in us, always knows our greatest potential, and is always ready to help us achieve it. We do well when we take full advantage of His opportunities to change for the better.

—Chloe West

A hopeless case?