Getting a Wrong Start. 12mo, pp. 234. New York: The Macmillan Company. Price, cloth, $1.00 net.

THIS purports to be the veracious autobiography of a man aged fifty-seven—a blunderer, a "rolling stone," who after many wrong starts found at last a trail which led to success. The anonymous writer, badly reared at home and at college, found himself at thirty-two a failure, having been in succession a sewer of grain sacks, a rodman, a law student, a lawyer, an editor, a reporter, a solicitor, a collector of bad debts, a special writer, a townsite boomer, and a newspaper owner. He rises from this through an advertising solicitorship and a position as sporting editor to the authorship of books. He never had a dollar in bank until he was past thirty, and was not settled in life and in a home of his own until he was forty. He did not win success until he was forty-five. He subtitles this book The Confessions of a Successful Failure. His long years of failure made him cynical and severe in his judgments. He lost faith in men, and in the worth-while-ness of life. More than once he would have blown out his brains, or his lack of brains, but for the grief it would have caused his father and mother who already had troubles enough. His father, reared a Quaker, was a Southerner who moved to the West. Here are some statements about him: "My father was the most famous hunter in the town. I never saw his superior with rifle or shotgun in the field. I can recall the gentle chiding of our minister of the gospel to old Deacon Blank, my father, who went on a hunt and for once in his life forgot to come back in time for Thursday night prayer meeting. 'Let me ask your attendance, brethren and sisters,' said the minister, when announcement time came for the pulpit, 'at our Thursday night prayer meeting. I will be here next Thursday night, and the Lord will be here, and Deacon Blank will be here—if he does not forget and go fishing!' My father sank down in his pew, overwhelmed with mortification. He never could learn human nature. By the rascality of a business partner he was ruined when he was sixty-five years of age. He never got on his feet again, and died eleven years later; a very good, very gentle, kindly, honest soul. Dear old Dad, with his blue eye and his love of duty and fair play, and his belief that all men are honest and worth while! I am not sure that you could call his life a failure after all, for he died absolutely sure of the world hereafter, and he did not take on his belief late in life, or for any reasons of safety. His religion was a real thing to him, and gave him comfort. What would I not give for that same unhesitating faith to-day!"

The author of these confessions lived for some time in a Western mining town, and gives many pictures of life there. Here is one glimpse: "We had in our country some notoriously bad men, desperadoes who one by one disappeared permanently. Sometimes the sheriff killed one, sometimes one got lynched, or sometimes one killed another. At no time was a man there in danger from footpads of the sneaking sort. That sort of danger exists in the great cities where we spend millions in defense and millions more in tribute. There was a general charity of thought toward the personal preference of any gentleman, and a man might do about as he liked—up to a certain point. The property and the personal rights of others each man was obliged to respect. The peace officers of that country were men of splendid courage. It has always seemed to me that a dozen of these old Western sheriffs could come to the most vice-infested city of the North and make its streets safe as a Sabbath school in two months' time. Most of the city desperadoes are cheap and dirty little cowards. They do not class with the bad men of the early day, who simply were running amuck, careless of their own finish. I would rather have a dozen of these old-time sheriffs back of me than all the police force of the largest city. In a couple of months they would found a large graveyard—and that would end a lot of the holdup business very quickly." For some years the author practiced law and acquired, from what he saw, a very poor opinion of that profession. He says: "I have known a lawyer to sneer at the profession of the newspaper man and the author, saying that the average newspaper man can be bought. That comes well from a profession carried on by Hessians all of whose principles are openly and deliberately on sale, and in whose daily business life the savor of sportsmanship and fair play is in the nature of things unknown. On the whole, then or now, I am inclined to think that whatever there may be in heredity my father did not succeed in giving me much love for the noble profession of the law! To my mind it has been one of the great agencies of injustice in this country. It cost us the Civil War. It is costing us the principle of democracy in America. It is costing us the happiness of thousands. It will ruin the future of America because it is best paid when it shields organized and allied rapacity out of all touch with that splendid creed of creeds—sportsmanship, fair play—which, if you please, means democracy. I left it. From that day to this I have never regretted that decision. There is neither any science nor any sincerity in the profession of the law. It is not an exact profession. In the nature of things it cannot be a great and gratifying profession to any man. No lawyer makes a living who takes only the cases in which he really believes. And no man has *succeeded* who makes a living out of things in which he does not believe." This man never drank or smoked or gambled, but in the hard struggle of life he grew cynical, bitter, and faithless. When past fifty a short sickness put him in bed. What happened to him there he tells in his unconventional way: "I was almost a pagan, and resigned to the pagan creed, asking no pity of life or nature. When there was need to fight I have stood to my man, toe to toe and eye to eye, and for the most part taken the buffets of life without much

pity for myself when I had the worst of it. But the strongest is *not always* strong. There is no man who does not, has not, or will not some time find a need of something outside of and above himself. The Christian religion is in the world, with its strange new doctrine of unselfishness, of aid to the weak and the unhappy—the doctrine of being of help to some one besides yourself. Now perhaps the Christian religion has philosophically justified itself, after all. Perhaps there does exist in the world a place—a philosophical place—for sympathy and aid; a justifiable place. I say this impartially, because, though my people were religious, I was the black sheep, and am not now called a Christian. I confess I have once or twice been obliged to go outside of my own self for some additional power—something plus, shall we say? How can that be done? You come now to the old wish, ancient as humanity itself, to reach, or to attain, or to rest upon Someone or Something larger than yourself. That is to say, there are times when all of us feel weak and wish to lay hold of something outside of us, something which is strong. You find this craving for some plus quantity, something to increase our own powers, something to extend, if only for the moment, our human limitations. It is the craving to be something larger than ourselves which allows alcohol to remain a factor in the exhilaration or stupefaction, the transient ecstasy and the permanent misery of the world. If it had no reaction, if, indeed, it did help us to be Superman—then there would be for it a great place in the world. It would be the one great mitigant of life's ills. But if not alcohol, then religion? Yes, if that also means something *permanently*, not ecstatically and transiently, plus in power—and if it has no reaction. Let us go on then with those who believe in such power, and let us say Yes with them. Surely religion well practiced never hurt a man. Surely, also, any form of religion which enables a man to lay hold in his time of need upon something plus—there is a place in life for that factor, name it as you please. But in my own time of stress neither religion nor alcohol could be called upon for aid, for I lacked the one and would not use the other. And yet my mental condition was such that I needed something outside of myself. Well, once, sleepless after many nights, I lay alone, fighting myself, in a pagan sort of way, the philosophical way—the only way I had learned all my life—in that bitterest of all fights a man may wage, the one with his inner self, the one with his own acknowledged shortcomings and unfitness. I felt that I had lost. I lay there feeling that at last I was beaten, saying that at last I could not fight any longer. And then ensued something which, half humorous as it was, may prove of help to some one else who is feeling around for that something plus, and who would rather it were religion than that it should be alcohol. Feeling myself inadequate to myself, unable to sleep, much distressed, I began silently to call out, as human hearts have a habit of doing. Perhaps you might call it prayer. I don't know. I never was much for praying. There are many sorts of prayers. I believe that some sorts sometimes are answered. I know my prayer, if you call it that, was answered, and that my fight was saved by the aid of something plus. All of us who usually are strong, yet sometimes are weak. Let us suppose you find yourself

reaching out in the dark for a hand. That has happened to you, or is happening now, my friend; or some day it surely will. In my case it was only a small hand that reached out to me—the hand of a woman, which in my time of need represented that plus quantity in life. Unasked, my wife came to my bedside, with some simple word of reassurance, not making much of the matter. Then a curious thing occurred—you will forgive me for telling it, perhaps. She sat down beside my bed and began to drum on my ribs with her fingers. It was just a simple, unplanned, innocent act. I don't know what led her to begin it. I was careless of it at first, but the operation soon began to seem rather rhythmic, as if it were a tune. And suddenly my mind came back from some place where it had been, out in the darkness. O, call it what you like. It seemed to me a sort of answer to prayer. If you don't mind, I believe I shall let it go as that. At least, it was my something plus which I needed, and for which I was crying out, alone and sleepless. All the time I was like a pagan, lying there ready to die and not complaining much about it. I wanted something plus only so that I could go on, so that I could fight again. And it came, I say, in this ludicrous fashion, the drumming of a woman's fingers on my side! I heard her chuckle softly to herself. 'You can't guess,' she said. 'Guess what?' I inquired. 'What I was playing on your ribs.' 'No—what was it?' 'It was just a hymn,' said she, simply. We two don't usually talk much of hymns, not much of praying. We are still so strong that we are ashamed to do such things. I had not asked for any hymn. I did not even know I was making any kind of a prayer. But here, in this simple, strange, and, I say, half-ludicrous form, came that something plus! 'Hymn?' said I. 'What hymn?' 'I asked you to guess,' said she, simply. And I lay, laboriously trying to figure out with my ill-working brain what hymn it was which made this answer to my prayer. At last I asked: 'Was it Lead, Kindly Light?' 'Well, almost,' said my wife—who is not a philosopher at all, but just a simple, average, normal, splendid human being—who has the kind of nature you and I would like to have above all things else among earth's blessings. 'Almost it was—almost,' said she; 'but really I was playing Rock of Ages.'" And in the silence as the fingers of a woman's hand went on drumming gently, the rhythm of the old familiar tune ran through him, and the moving words of the great Christian hymn rolled through his memory, hushing his senses and soul:

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee;
. . . .
Thou must save, and thou alone:
In my hand no price I bring;
Simply to thy cross I cling.

While I draw this fleeting breath,
When my eyes shall close in death,
When I rise to worlds unknown,
And behold thee on thy throne,
Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in thee.

When the tapping of the fingers ceased, this man had caught sight of the Cross, and a quietness that was akin to peace soothed him to sleep. He says: "I slept that night. The next day I was strong again. That is all I have to say. Will you, then, pardon me? Because now I cannot go farther. I have only been trying to show you the inside of a mind and of a heart, my halting friend. I want to say that, when your time of terror comes, in every likelihood the great universe—so large, so solemn, so adequate—will have somewhere for you that thing additional, the thing from outside, beyond, Above—which shall answer your prayer for help. Believe me, a sinner, even a pagan, may pray—and find his prayers answered." Browning is right: Just when a man least expects, there's a sunset touch, a fancy from a flower-bell, some one's death, a chorus-ending from Euripides, a Scripture phrase, a verse of some old hymn, a tune his mother sang, or a woman's fingers beating the rhythm of "Rock of Ages" on his side,—and that's enough for the starting up of hopes and fears as old and new at once as Nature's self to knock and push and enter in the soul. The human soul lies open to earth and sky, to all God's angels of the earth and of the heavens.