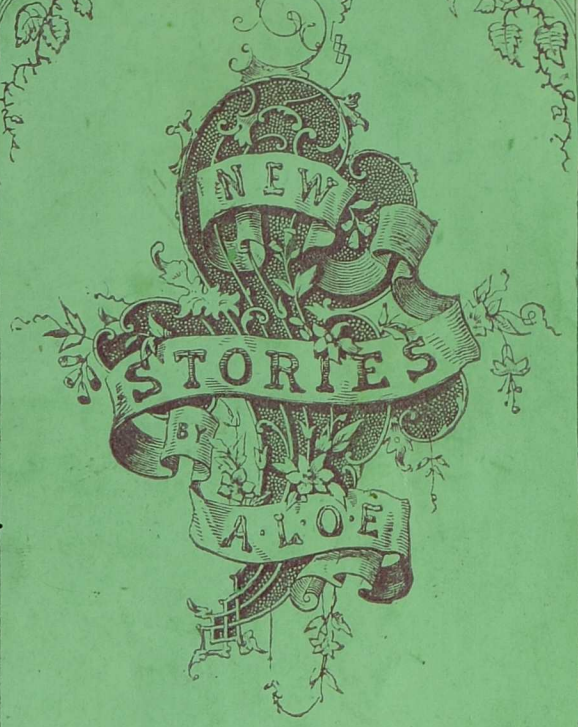


BEHOLD A SOWER
FELL BY THE WAYSIDE

WENT FORTH TO SOW
AND SOME SEEDS

SOME FELL UPON STONY PLACES
SOME AMONG THORNS



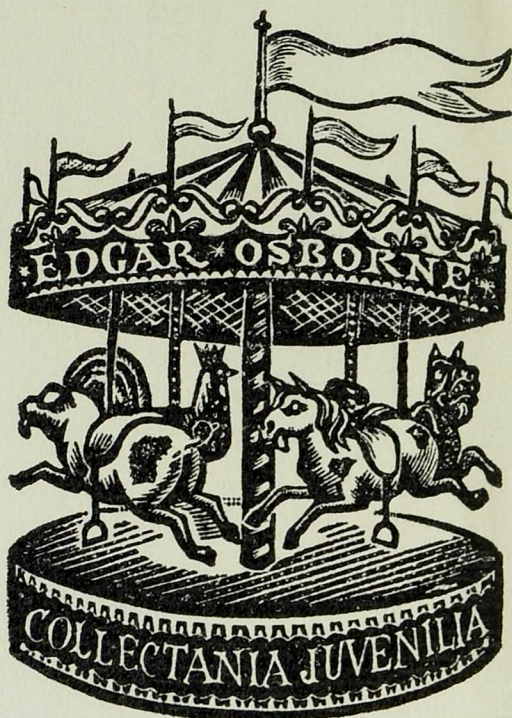
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HOLD FAST.

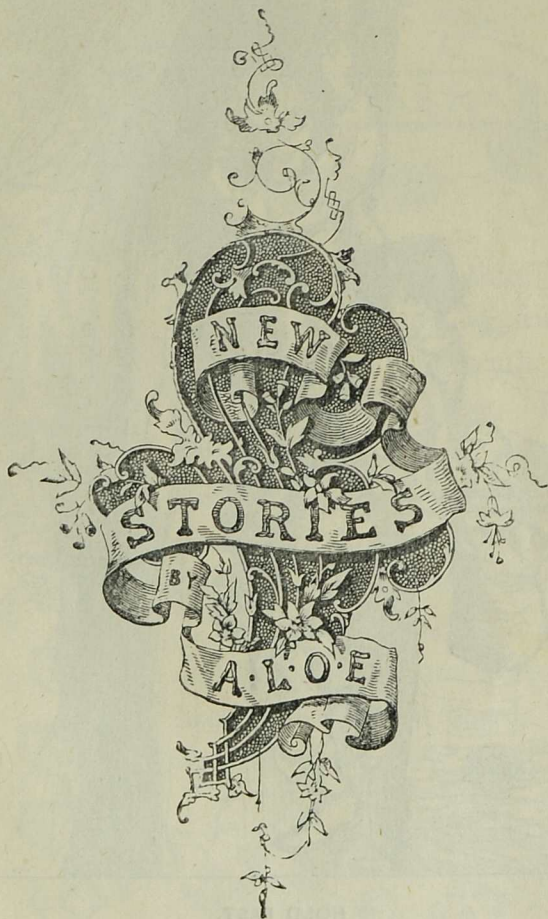
BUT OTHER FELL INTO GOOD GROUND

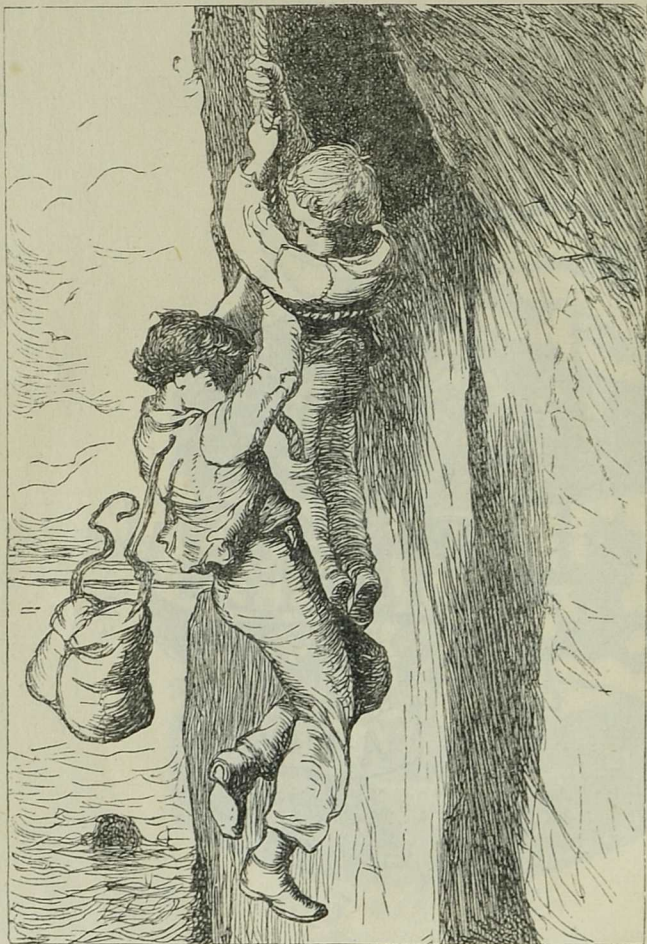


AND BROUGHT FORTH FRUIT



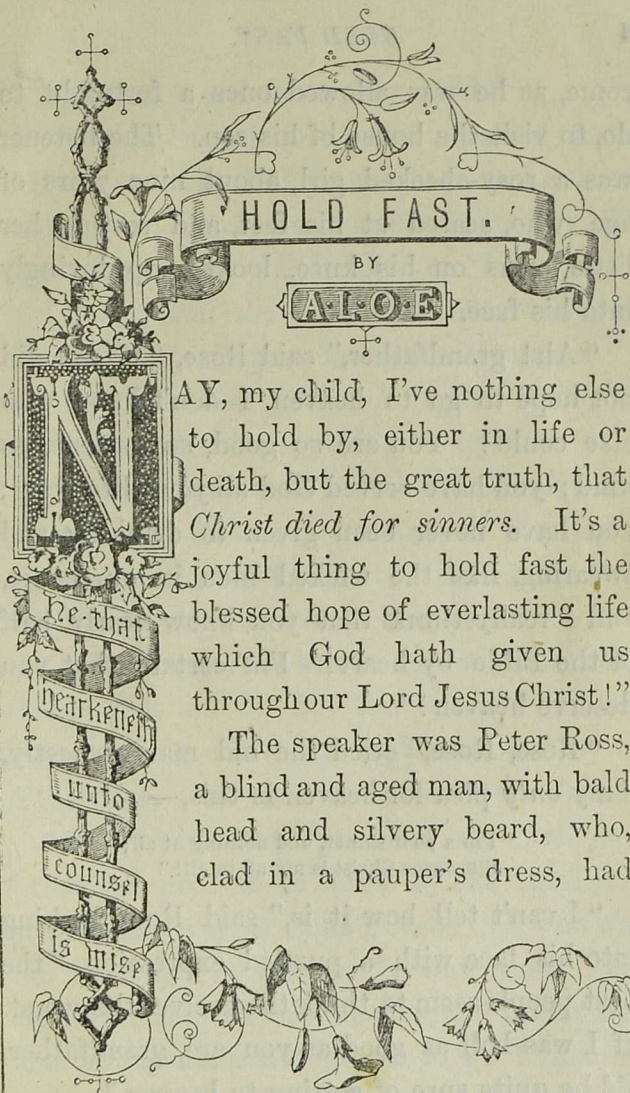
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HOLD FAST.

"Hold fast, brother, hold fast!" shouted poor Sam in mortal terror at my danger.— Page 14.



HOLD FAST.

BY

A. L. O. E.

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He that

hearkeneth

unto

counsel

is wise

AY, my child, I've nothing else to hold by, either in life or death, but the great truth, that *Christ died for sinners.* It's a joyful thing to hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life which God hath given us throughour Lord Jesus Christ!"

The speaker was Peter Ross, a blind and aged man, with bald head and silvery beard, who, clad in a pauper's dress, had

come, as he was allowed once a fortnight to do, to visit the house of his son. The listener was a rosy-cheeked girl, about nine years of age, who, seated at his feet, and resting her little arms on his knee, looked up lovingly into his face.

"Ah! grandfather," said Rose, "if *you* did not hope to go to heaven, I don't know who else could! You are so good, so patient, so kind; you have served God all your life long; you have never been given to drinking and swearing, like the wicked men in our court, and I really think that you know nearly half of the Bible by heart! I'm certain that you deserve heaven!"

"Rose, Rose," cried the old man earnestly, "my *only* plea for heaven is this,—

"I'm a poor sinner, and nothing at all;
But Jesus Christ is my all in all!"

"I can't tell how it is," said Rose, looking into his face with a puzzled expression, "the best people seem to think themselves the worst. If I was half as good as you are, grandfather, I'd be quite sure of getting to heaven."

"By your good works, my child!"

"Yes, by my good works," repeated Rose. "I can see why bad people hope to be saved only by the Lord; but it must be so very different with pious people like you!"

"Rose," said the blind old man, "do you think that I ever pass *one day* without sin?"

"I'm sure that you do," replied Rose, "I never knew you do anything wrong."

"If my salvation were to depend upon my passing one waking *hour* without sin, Rose, my poor soul would be lost! Remember that God looks at the *heart*. His pure eyes read the evil *thought*; he knows not only the sinful things that we *do*, but the duties which we leave *undone*. *All our righteousnesses are as filthy rags*; that truth is written in the Bible."

"But I can't see," persisted the little girl, "that you need to be saved by the Lord just in the same way as Luke Dobson did, who was run over by a cart when he was drunk. He lay ill for months and months, and father says that he repented, and hoped to go to heaven at last, because the Lord died for sinners.

Now there must be a very great difference between his case and yours, for he was once a very bad man, and treated his wife very cruelly when he had been at the public."

"My dear child," said the aged Christian, laying his thin hand on the curly head of Rose, "I have no more power to reach heaven by my works than poor Luke Dobson had by his. *The blood of Jesus Christ which cleanseth from all sin*, is just as much needed to wash away mine as it was to wash away his. He depended on the mercy of the Saviour, and I have nought else to depend on."

"I can't understand that," said Rose.

"I'll tell you what happened to me in my youth, Rose, nigh three score years ago, when I was not much older than you are. It seems to me a sort of picture, as it were, of the way in which sinners are saved, and how there's nothing that we have to trust to but God's mercy in Christ."

"I should like to hear what happened to you, grandfather; but I want to ask just one question first. If the wicked and the steady

all need mercy alike, where's the use of doing good, and trying to put away our sins? Why should we not live as we choose, and trust that all will come right in the end?"

Old Peter looked grave as he replied. "Because no one who really belongs to the Saviour can bear to continue in wickedness. The Lord died not only to save His people from hell, but from sin; and they hate and dread the one as they hate and dread the other. I'll try and show you what I mean by my story.

"It's nigh sixty years ago, as I said, when I was a young, strong, active lad, that I lived for some months by the sea-shore. Our dwelling was near the beach, in a place where the cliffs were rugged and high—so high, that when we looked from the top of one of them, men walking on the sands beneath seemed little bigger than crows.

"I set out one day to gather shells—for that was a wonderful place for shells—and the gentry as came to the village hard by, used often to buy them from us. I wasn't going alone. I took with me my brother, poor Sam.

He and I went together, each with a bag to hold the shells, which was hung by a long string round our necks, so as to leave our hands quite free. The last thing our mother said to us afore we started was this, 'Mind, lads, and don't go too far; for the tide is on the turn, and the waves be running high, and if ye go as far as High-cliff, there's danger that ye both may be drowned.' 'No fear, mother!' said I; 'even if the tide should come in upon us, I reckon that I'm active and strong enough to climb to the top of the cliff; but I could not say as much for Sam, with his weak arms and the swelling on his ankle, I know he has no chance of climbing, so I'll keep out of harm's way for his sake.'

" 'And for your own, too, Peter,' said Sam, as we walked along the beach together; 'you are strong and active, to be sure, but you are no more able than I be, to climb up such a mighty high cliff.'

" 'There may be two opinions as to that,' said I, for I had a great notion of my own powers, and prided myself on being agile as a

goat on the rocks.' Well," pursued the blind pauper, "we had plenty of luck that day in finding shells on the shore; both of us filled our bags, and we were so eager and pleased with our success, that we wandered on farther and farther, and scarce gave a thought to the tide, till we saw the white creamy foam tossed on the sand from the waves that came rolling and tumbling in shore, and we looked up and saw the great white cliff rising high and bluff before us!

"'I say, Sam,' cried I, 'just see how the tide's coming in! 'tis time for us to make the best of our way back to mother!'

"My brother turned white as a sheet. "'Tis too late for that,' said he, giving a wildered gaze at the waste of heaving billows. For the coast just there made a bend like a crescent, and though we stood upon dry land still, the white-topped waves, both afore and ahind us, were rolling right up to the cliff! Where we had walked dry-shod not an hour before, there was nothing to be seen but the waters which soon would cover the place where we were!

“ ‘What’s to be done!’ cried my brother, as he looked up at the great rocky wall before us.

“ ‘Keep a good heart!’ said I, ‘I’ll climb up to the top o’ the cliff, and then I’ll get help and a rope, and we’ll draw you up to safety.’

“ So I put down my bag, and I pulled off my jacket, for it was clear enough that I could not climb with them. I knew well, though I didn’t choose to say it, that it would be hard work to get to the top of so high and steep a cliff; but I did not know, I would not believe that it was *impossible* for me to do so. By dint of straining every muscle, claspings, clutching at every jutting crag or little rock-plant that offered a hold, I managed to struggle up a few yards. But the way grew steeper and harder. I could scarcely find place for my foot, or hold for my hand; the earth was slipping beneath me! I panted—I gasped—I strained—feeling myself falling, I tried, with a violent effort, to catch hold of a little stump that seemed to be just beyond my reach. I caught it, but lost my footing—hung for a moment by one hand, then the stump gave

way, and with a cry of fear I fell heavily down the rock !”

“ Oh ! grandfather, were you much hurt ? ” exclaimed Rose, who had listened with breathless interest to Peter’s account of his perilous adventure.

“ Not badly hurt,” said the blind man ; “ but enough bruised and shaken to be kept from the folly of trying the climbing again.”

“ Then you were just in the same case as your brother, though you had fancied yourself so much better able to get to the top than he.”

“ That’s it ; that’s what I wished you to see,” cried Peter. “ It is for that I tell you the story. We were alike helpless, my child, the strong and the weak, the active and the maimed, neither could reach the top ; both were just in the same danger of being drowned by the coming tide. And so it is with the matters of the soul. One man seems wiser, another better, another bolder than his fellows ; but the wisest, the boldest, the best, can never reach heaven by their efforts. The way is too high, too steep, to be climbed ! Their good

deeds break away; they can't support them; they can't hold them up from destruction!"

"But how were you saved?" exclaimed Rose, more eager to hear the story than to gather its moral.

"My brother and I felt that there was but one thing which we could do—we must loudly call out for assistance. We cried aloud again and again; we lifted up our voices with all our might, and as God in his mercy ordered, the sound of our cry was heard from the top of the cliff. And so it is with the sinner, my child, when he feels that he is in danger of eternal death, when he finds that he has no power in himself to help himself, and that unless God come to his aid, he is lost and ruined for ever. The cry, *God be merciful to me a sinner!* is heard even above the heavens, and mercy comes to the rescue!"

"Was a rope let down from the top of the cliff?" asked the impatient Rose.

"A rope was let down," replied Peter, "and it was long enough, and strong enough to save us. It was let down not a minute too soon,

for already the sand on which we stood was washed by every advancing wave! Sam, who was terribly frightened, at once caught hold of the rope, and clung to it as for his life. Nay, if I remember right, he fastened it round his body. But my courage, or rather presumption, had risen once more, as soon as I found that means were provided to draw us up safely beyond the reach of danger. I put on my jacket again, and passed the string of my bag of shells round my neck. ‘Since I have not to climb,’ cried I, ‘there’s no use in leaving them behind; I’ve no mind to part with one of ’em!’ Now, mark my words, Rose, my child, I was thinking in an earthly matter as you thought just now when you said, ‘if the wicked and the steady all need mercy alike, what’s the use of doing good, and putting away our sins?’ I believed that the rope was enough to save me; and so in truth it was; but how could I hold fast by the rope, when I carried a weight round my neck!”

“I see—I see!” exclaimed Rose; “you must leave your heavy bag behind you; for

though the rope might not break, you could not keep your hold on it, while the weight was dragging you down!"

"No more than any man who *wilfully keeps one sin*, can continue safely to hold fast the blessed hope of everlasting life. He but deceives himself if he ever tries to do so. I soon found out, as I was drawn upwards, what a fearful mistake I had made! I had not risen many feet above the sands when a horrible dread arose in my mind that I should never be able to hold on till I had reached the top of the cliff! The muscles of my arms ached terribly, my fingers could scarcely keep their grasp, and the string round my neck seemed to choke me, like the gripe of an iron hand!"

"'Make haste!' I gasped out in agony, scarce able to bring out the words. 'Oh! be quick—be quick—or I shall be forced to let go!'"

"'Hold fast, brother, hold fast!' shouted poor Sam in mortal terror at my danger. The men above were straining every nerve to pull

us up before my strength should fail me; but oh, how fearfully slowly we seemed to ascend!

“The strain on my arms now was torture! My brain grew dizzy. I could scarcely breathe. I had but one thought—one maddening wish—to get rid of the fatal bag! It seemed to grow heavier every moment; it was as if some barbarous foe were pulling me down to destruction! I felt that unless I could be relieved of the weight, I *must* let go, and be dashed to pieces! I dared not attempt to cling by one weary hand, so as to use the other to untie the fatal string! I cried in despairing agony to God, for I was beyond all help from man. I know not to this day how his mercy wrought,—whether the weight on it snapped the string, or whether in my struggles the knot was untied; but never, till my dying hour shall I forget the sense of relief, when suddenly something gave way, I felt that the weight was gone; I heard a splash in the waters below, and in another minute was firmly grasped by a hand stretched out from above!”

“Oh! grandfather, what a mercy!” ex-

claimed Rose, drawing a long breath. Her heart had beat fast at the account of such terrible danger.

“A mercy, indeed!” said the old man solemnly, clasping his hands together, as memory recalled the awful scene. “Had that bag, instead of shells, contained all the wealth of the world, how thankful should I have been to have dropped it into the sea for ever! As that weight was to my body, so is sin to the soul! In vain do we grasp the hope of salvation, in vain do we seem to be raised from a state of danger by the mercy of Christ, if we resolve not to try to cast from us every sin that our God condemns! *Without holiness no man shall see the Lord.* We must *cast away every weight, and the sin that doth so easily beset us*; not in our own poor strength, but in the power of prayer, looking to God, trusting to God, ready to give up everything for God! Then will His love never fail us; He will never leave us to perish. By His grace shall we *hold fast* to the end, and rejoice for ever in His presence!”

