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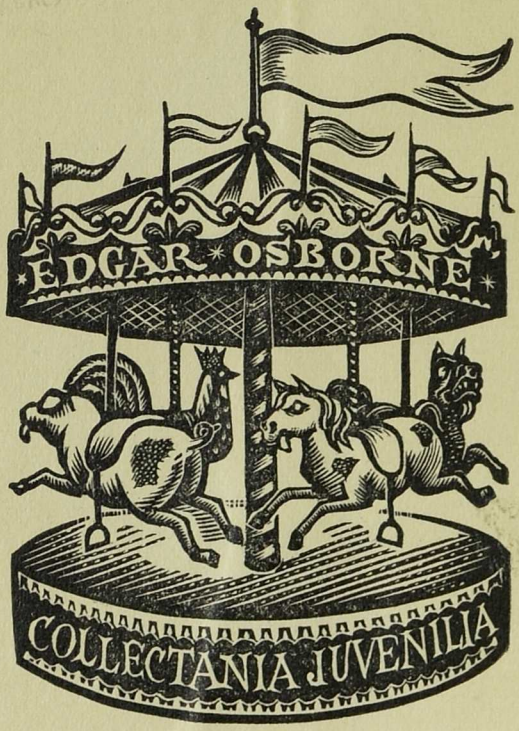

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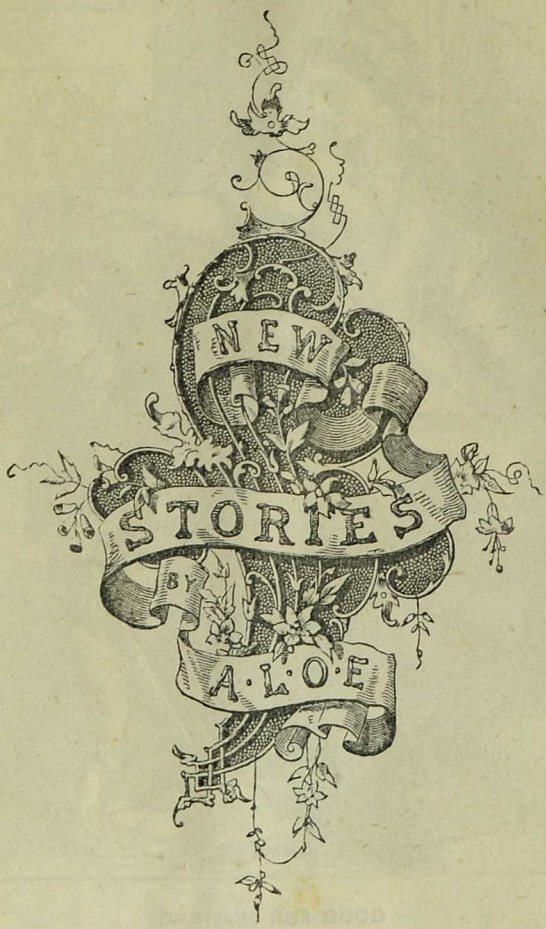
NEW
STORIES
BY
A·L·O·E

GOOD FOR NOTHING.

"I wash my hands of you, I'll have nothing more to do with ye, I tell you! ungrateful and good for nothing as you are."—Page 4.

GOOD FOR NOTHING.

BY

A·L·O·E

He that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise

"GET away with ye, for an idle good-for-nothing thief!" exclaimed Mrs. Paton, as with an angry gesture she waved from her door a ragged miserable lad who stood before it. "Never shall you be trusted with another errand by me! To take the biscuits out of the very bag! Don't tell me you were hungry; don't tell me you won't be after doing it again! I was ready, I

was, to give you a chance, since I knew that you was a homeless orphan; but I'll not be taken in twice! Go, beg about the streets or starve, or find your way to the workhouse, or the jail! I wash my hands of you, I'll have nothing more to do with ye, I tell you! ungrateful and good for nothing as you are!" and as if to give force to her words, Mrs. Paton slammed the door in his face.

Rob Barker turned away from the house with the look of a beaten hound. He knew that the reproaches of the woman were not undeserved, that he had not been faithful to his trust. Deprived, when a child, of his parents' care, brought up in the midst of poverty and vice, growing even as the weeds grow, uncared for and unnoticed, save as something worse than useless, he seemed as if born to be trampled upon; he appeared to be bound by no kindly ties to the fellow-creatures who despised him. A feeling of savage despair was creeping over his soul.

"Ay, I'm good for nothing, am I," Rob muttered, as with slouching gait he sauntered down the street not knowing whither to go,

for all the world was alike to him, a desert without a home. Almost fiercely he looked at the passers-by, some on foot, some in carriages, some upon prancing steeds. "*They* are good for something," thought Rob; "*they* have their homes and their friends, their kind parents, their merry children. *They* are loved while they live, and sorrowed for when they die. But *I*, I have no one left on earth either to love or care for me, or miss me when I'm gone. Life is just one tough hard struggle, there's none will help me through it!"

Rob stopped at the corner of a street, leant against an iron lamp-post, and moodily folded his arms. The bare brown elbows were seen through the holes in his tattered sleeves. His worn out shoes would hardly hold together.

"I say you, won't you come in there?" said a voice just behind him. Rob started, he so little expected to be addressed, and turning half round he saw a pale boy, in clothes that were poor but not tattered, who pointed to a door close by, over which was written "Ragged School."

"I'm not wanted there," muttered Rob.

"Every one's welcome," said the little boy, "and it's better to be in a warm room, than standing out here in the cold! I'm late, very late to-day, for I've been sent on an errand, but I think I'm in time for the little address; teacher, she always gives us a bit of a story at the end. I can't wait, but you'd better come in;" and with the force of this simple invitation, Sandy Benne, for such was the young boy's name, drew the half unwilling Rob within the door of a place where a devoted servant of the Good Shepherd was trying to feed His lambs.

Rob did not venture to do more than enter the low white-washed room in which he heard the hum of many voices. A poor-looking room it was; its only furniture, rough benches; its only ornaments, a few hymns and texts in large letters fastened on the wall. Rob stood close by the door, a shy, almost sullen spectator, watching the scene before him. The room was thronged with children, such children as, but for the Ragged School, would have been

playing about in the streets. Little rough-headed urchins, who once had been foremost in mischief, pale sickly boys who looked as if they had had no breakfast that morning. Seated, some on the benches, some on the floor, they were conning their tasks with a cheerful industry which might have shamed some of the children of the rich. But a few minutes after the entrance of Rob, at a signal given by the teacher, a tall fair lady in mourning, books and slates were put back in their places, the morning's lessons were ended, and the school looked like a bee-hive when the bees are about to swarm.

"Now we shall have the little address," whispered Sandy, who had kept an eye upon Rob; "the teacher is going to knock upon the floor with her parasol, and then, won't we be quiet as mice!"

There was no need to call "silence;" two little raps upon the floor were enough to make every rough scholar in the place go back to his seat in a minute, and remain there as still as a statue. All the young eyes were fixed on

the teacher, the gentle loving lady, who daily left her comfortable home to trudge, sometimes through rain, and snow, and sleet, to spend her time, her strength, and her health, in leading ragged children to the Saviour. Her voice was a little faint, for the lady was weary with her work, though never weary *of* her work, but her smile was kindly and bright as she began her short address.

"I have promised to give you a story, my dear young friends," she began, "and as I am speaking in a Ragged School, and to those who are called Ragged Scholars, you will not be shocked or surprised if I choose for my subject—a Rag."

The teacher's cheerful smile was reflected on many a young sunburnt face; *rags* were a theme on which most of the company felt perfectly at home, though few present, except poor Rob, actually wore the articles in question.

"On a miry road," continued the lady, "trodden down by hoofs, rolled over by wheels, till it became almost of the colour of

the mud on which it was lying, lay an old piece of linen rag, which had been dropped there by a beggar. Nothing could be more worthless, and long it lay unnoticed, till it caught the attention of a woman who, with a child at her side, was picking her way over the crossing.

"'I may as well pick that up for my bag,' said the woman.

"'Oh, mother, don't dirty your fingers by picking up that rag!' cried the boy with a look of disgust; 'such trash is not worth the trouble of washing! It's good for nothing; just good for nothing; it is better to leave it alone!'

"'Let me judge of that,' said the woman; and stooping down, she picked up the miry rag, all torn and stained as it was, and carried it with her to her home. There she carefully washed it, and put it with other pieces of linen in a bag; and after a while, it was sold for a trifle to a manufacturer of paper.

"If the rag had been a living creature, possessed of any feeling, much might it have complained of all that it had then to undergo.

It was torn to pieces, reduced to shreds, beaten till it became quite a pulp; no one could have guessed who looked at it then that it had ever been linen at all. But what, my young friends, was the end of all this washing, and beating, and rending? At length a pure, white, beautiful sheet of paper lay beneath the manufacturer's hands; into this fair form had passed the rag which a child had called *good for nothing!*

"But the sheet was not to lie useless. Not in vain had it been made so white and clean. It was next carried to the press of a printer. There it was once more damped, so as better to receive an impression; then it was laid over blackened type (that is, letters cast in metal), and pressed down with a heavy roller, until every letter was clearly marked upon the smooth white surface. God's Holy Word had been stamped upon it, the sheet was to form a leaf of a Bible; such honour was given to the once soiled rag, which a child had called good for nothing!

"And where was this Bible to be; to what

home and what heart was it to carry its message of mercy? It was bound, and gilded, and bought, and carried to the royal palace of the Queen. The Bible lay in the sovereign's chamber, it was opened by the sovereign's hand; her eye rested upon it as upon that which was more precious to her than her crown! What was it to her that a portion of the paper had once been a worn-out rag dropped by one of the meanest of her subjects? It had been washed, purified, changed, the Word of God had given it value; well might the Queen prize and love it as her best possession upon earth.

"Dear friends," continued the lady, looking with loving interest on the listening groups before her, "can you not trace out now a little parable in my story? Need I explain its meaning? There have been some neglected ones in the world, as little cared for, as little regarded as the rag which lay on the miry road. But who shall dare to say that even the soul most stained by sin, most sunk in evil, is *good for nothing?* Such souls may be

raised from the dust, such souls *have* been raised from the dust. While God spares life we may yet have hope. I have just read of the case of James Stirling, a faithful servant, an earnest worker for God. That man for twenty years was a drunkard, a grief to his wife, a disgrace to his family, an evil example to those around him. If he, by the power of God's Word, was raised from such a depth of sin, who now need despair? What if our sins be many before God, *the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth from all sin.* The soiled may be made pure and clean. What did the Saviour say to the weeping penitent whom all the world despised? *Thy sins are forgiven thee, go in peace.* And thus speaks the merciful Lord to the lowly penitent still.

"And when a soul is washed from its guilt, it is not left to be idle and useless. When God gives to a sinner *a new heart*, it is that His Holy Word may be deeply stamped on that heart. Then those who have been cleansed, forgiven, and raised, bear to others the blessed message which they themselves have

received. *Come, hear what the Lord has done for my soul. Come, taste and see that the Lord is gracious;* such are the Bible words printed, as it were, on the heart of every pardoned sinner, who, having been forgiven much, feels that he loveth much.

"And once more, dear friends, let me refer to the leaf of the Bible described in my little story, as a picture of a soul redeemed. It too will one day be borne to a palace; not the dwelling of an earthly monarch, but the mansion of the King of kings! Precious will it be in his eyes, and counted amongst His treasures. Oh, what a joyful, glorious end may be reserved for some whom the world calls *good for nothing*, when penitent, pardoned, purified spirits shine as stars in the kingdom of heaven!"

The lady ceased, but her words seemed to echo still in the ears of poor Rob. He stood fixed to the spot where he stood, scarcely conscious of the bustle around him as the scholars noisily quitted the room. A door of hope had been suddenly opened before the almost despairing lad, a gleam of light had fallen on his

darkness. Rob Barker had read the history of his own past life in that of the trampled rag; could a like future be before him, could he ever be one of the "penitent, pardoned, purified" ones, who shall shine at last like the stars?

The teacher's attention had been attracted by the wretched appearance and earnest look of the stranger lad. A feeling of interest and pity made her watch him, as he lingered in that room in which he had first learned that it was possible for such as he to be saved. As Rob walked slowly from the place, the lady overtook him, asked his name, and inquired what had brought him to the Ragged School that morning.

"I believe that God brought me," murmured Rob, and his answer came from his heart.

"Where do you live?" said the lady.

"I have no home, no friends," replied the lad, in a tone of gloomy despair.

"You are young, you look strong and active, you must never give up hope," said the teacher; "God is willing and able to help all who come in faith to Him. Let us see if

no way can be found by which you can earn your bread as an honest Christian should do."

The lady herself did something, perhaps to some it may seem very little, to aid the poor homeless lad; she had many poor to think of, many claims on her purse. She gave but a stale roll, an old broom, and the means of procuring a single night's lodging, together with an invitation to come every day and learn at the Ragged School. This was but a small and humble beginning to Rob's new start in life. I am not going to trace his career through all its various stages. He was the crossing-sweeper, the errand-boy, the lad ready for any message or any work, cleaning boots, putting up shutters, carrying parcels to earn a few pence, or some broken victuals. Life was a struggle to Rob, as it is a struggle to many who, when they rise in the morning scarcely know where they will lie down at night. But Rob Barker was learning more and more to put his trust in that heavenly Father who never forsakes His children. He was learning to be honest, sober, and pious.

Gradually the sky brightened over Rob; his character became known and trusted, and greater prosperity came. Having sought first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, other things were added besides, according to the promise of the Lord. Rob entered service, and rose in it; he remained for nearly twenty years under the same kind master, then with his honest earnings, set up in business, and prospered. Rob lived to be known and respected in the world as a good husband, father, and master. He lived to be useful in the station of comfort and honour to which God's mercy had raised him, and to look forward with humble hope and rejoicing to the changeless glories of heaven.

Such was the career of one who had once been deemed *good for nothing* by a fellow sinner!