

No. 33
OF
HOULSTON'S SERIES
OF
TRACTS.

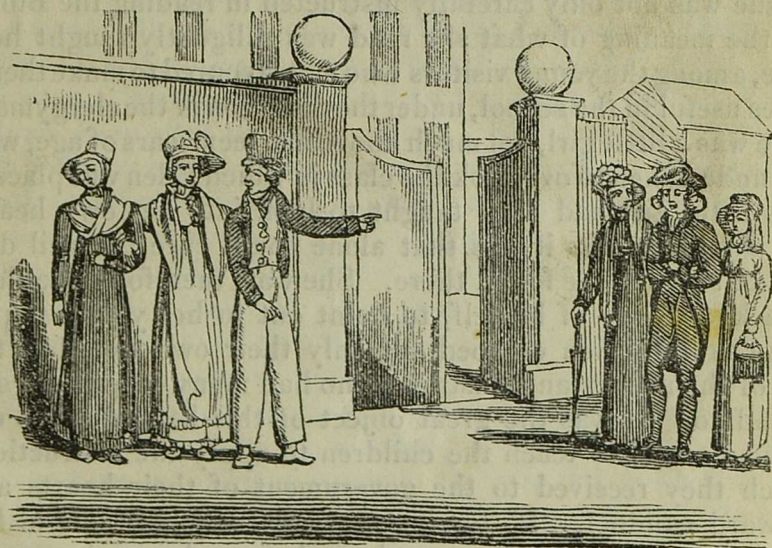
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THE
TWO WIVES.
PART I.

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LONDON:
PRINTED FOR HOULSTON AND CO.
65, Paternoster-Row.

Price 1d. or 7s. per 100.

[Tract Societies supplied with large quantities at a lower rate.]

THE TWO WIVES.

PART I.

ELLEN MASON lived in the town of K——. Her father was a weaver, and gained a comfortable livelihood for his family; her mother was a clean, industrious woman; but both she and her husband thought a great deal more about this world than the next.

Ellen was the eldest of all her brothers and sisters, and when she was five years old, she was sent to a day-school near at hand; for her mother wished her to learn to sew well before she began to work at the factory, as she knew that she would not have much time for learning afterwards. Ellen's father wished her to work at the factory, for the girls earned a great deal of money there.

While Ellen was at school, her mother took care to supply her with work either in mending or making; and if at any time she happened to be without herself, she would send to ask the schoolmistress to be so good as to provide her with some: and she took care to furnish her with a thimble and needles, that no excuse might be made for idleness.

Ellen also went to the Sunday-school, where she was taken regularly to church. In this school she had great advantages, for she was not only carefully instructed in reading the Bible, but the meaning of what she read was diligently taught her. Here, among the young visitors who endeavoured to make themselves useful in the school, under the direction of the clergyman, there was a little girl, not much above fourteen years of age, who had undertaken to overlook the class in which Ellen was placed. This little girl had been taught to look into her own heart, and she knew who it was that alone could cure the evil disease of sin that she found there. She was, therefore, enabled, by a knowledge of herself, to point out to her young pupils many faults which escaped not only their own eye, but the eye of the master and mistress, who had many other things to attend to. It was the great object of this little girl, as occasions arose, to teach the children to apply the instructions which they received to the government of their hearts and outward conduct. If, for instance, she saw any one of her children quarrelling about a place, before she made a complaint of that child to the master, she would talk gently to her sometimes by herself, and remind her who it was that has said, *Whosoever would be chief among you, let him be your servant*. If a child looked cross or sulky, or spoke in an ill-tempered manner, she would remind her of such a verse as this—*Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth*. If she saw one of her children taken up with a new frock or bonnet, she would ask her by whose providential care it was that

she was provided with raiment when others were without, and would point out to her what a sad return it was for God's goodness towards us, to allow any of his gifts to turn away our thoughts and hearts from him, and that even in his own house and on his sacred day. She tried to teach her children the necessity and value of secret prayer on every occasion of temptation and difficulty, however small; and she tried also to fill their young hearts with love to the Saviour who had died for them, and with shame for their coldness and ingratitude towards him. She told them that He was ever knocking at the door of their hearts, and that, if they would admit the heavenly stranger, and not turn away their faces from him, he would fill their hearts, even now, with sweet peace, and bring them, at last, to heavenly glory.

This little girl had so earnest and kind a way of talking to the children, that she was made the means of lasting good to many of them; and from these causes it was that her scholars, whether they were the best readers or not, were in general the most civil, quiet, orderly children in the school: and if their conduct at home was enquired into, it was generally found that they were less obstinate, and more gentle and humble, and more honest, than they had formerly been.

In this school it was that Ellen, who had received little or no religious instruction from her parents, was, through the divine blessing, led into the narrow path of life.

Among Ellen's schoolfellows at the day-school, there was a giddy little girl, about a year older than herself, called Lydia Johnson. They generally sat on the same bench, and, after school, they often played together. She was neither attentive nor industrious; but, as she was good-natured, and brought apples, and gingerbread, and such sort of things, in her pocket to school, and would give them away to the other children, she was generally liked by all her schoolfellows.

When Ellen had been some time at the Sunday-school, and had begun to think seriously about her everlasting concerns, she was very desirous that Lydia should go to the school also, and she persuaded her to ask leave of her parents to do so.

Lydia did not attend regularly at school, for her mother was not an industrious woman, and she did not much mind whether her little girl could read and sew well, and she would allow of any excuse for her staying at home, either on week days or Sundays. Some good seeds, however, were sown in the heart of Lydia at the Sunday-school, but whether they would ever spring up to bear fruit seemed very doubtful.

Thus the children passed their time till Ellen was about twelve years of age, when Lydia was sent to work at the factory. Ellen now saw very little of her; for her own home was at the other end of the town, and Lydia very soon afterwards left the Sunday-school.

About a year afterwards, Ellen also was taken from the day-school, and sent to the factory.

By this time, she could do all kinds of necessary needle-work well: she could dress her little brother, clean the house, bake, and, in short, under her mother's eye, could do any thing that was needed in the family very well.

When Ellen was first sent to the factory, she seemed to be got into a new world, the behaviour of the young people was so unlike any thing she had seen at home or at school, and she had seldom been any where else.

It is not my purpose now to give any more account of these young people than I am obliged to do in speaking of Ellen and her old friend Lydia; but I cannot help mentioning the great change which Ellen observed in this girl.—Instead of being merry and playful, she was become bold and noisy. She had always been idle; but at school she would pay some regard to what her mistress said to her: now she was even more idle, when she was not looked after, than she had formerly been; and she would stare at the overlooker as if she did not care what he said to her, and make game of him behind his back. She was ready to join in all kinds of foolish jesting with either girls or boys who came in her way. At dinner-time, and in an evening, when it was not quite the depth of winter, instead of going directly home, she would stroll about, arm-in-arm, with the other girls, laughing and talking idly, often ridiculing quiet people who passed by.

A few days after Ellen went to work at the factory, she was preparing to go home at the dinner hour, when Lydia, in company with a tall boy, came up to her, and, taking her arm, led her towards the gate of the court in which the factory stood. By the side of this gate was a sunny wall, against which the boys and girls were often accustomed to lean, and watch the passengers in the street. "What do we stay here for?" said Ellen: "I ought to be going home."

"I want you to get acquainted with us," answered Lydia; "you look so dull and moped always."

"I had rather be at school than here, to be sure," returned Ellen; "you make such a noise, and say such bad words. Please to let me go, Lydia; I want to be at home."

"I dare say," said Lydia, "you feel shy at first, and so did I a little: but that would go off, if you would but be a little free with us. I am sure we are very merry, ar'n't we, James?"

James did not answer, and she gave him a pull.

"What do you want with me?" said the boy.

"I say, James," repeated Lydia, "ar'n't we very merry here?"

"I know," said James, "I like it better than being up in Shropshire, with my grandmother.—There now, there he is again!"

"Who?" said Lydia. "What are you looking at?"

"Why, that man with the funny wig," (and here he began to laugh loud,) "and a hat for all the world like one of your tory cakes here."

Here Lydia and Ellen looked up, and they perceived the vicar walking very near them, and with him was an elderly lady, and a very young one, who were taking his arm; and, as James repeated, "What a funny wig!" laughing loud again, the young lady, who had heard him, turned round to discover who it was that had spoken, and Ellen knew her to be her friend at the Sunday-school. She drew back, hanging down her head, and, as soon as the ladies were past, she pulled away her arm from Lydia, and ran home as fast as she could.

Ellen's mother enquired why she came so late; and she did not try to make any excuse for herself, but told her the exact truth, though she knew her mother would be very angry with her: and it was a good thing for Ellen that she was, as it prevented her repeating the fault afterwards.

The following Sunday, Ellen hardly dared to appear before the young lady, so ashamed did she feel of herself. As soon as this kind friend could find an occasion of speaking, unheard, to Ellen, she came up to her, and, gently laying her hand upon her arm, "Oh, Ellen," she said, "I hardly knew how to believe what my eyes told me when I saw you in company with those young people that were laughing at our worthy vicar."

Here Ellen burst into tears.

"I do not suppose," added the young lady, perceiving her distress, "that you were so wicked as to join in the laugh; but you know, Ellen, our hearts are so inclined to evil, that, if we keep bad company, we may soon learn to love the ways we once abhorred:

'From one rude boy, that's us'd to mock,
We learn the wicked jest:
One sickly sheep infects the flock,
And poisons all the rest.'

In the course of the day, the young lady had further conversation with Ellen, in which she gave her some directions respecting her behaviour at the factory; and she particularly advised her to be very diligent at her work, talk little, and keep her mind employed on some profitable subject when her companions were engaged in vain discourse around her, and always to go home immediately when work was over.

After this time, Ellen's mother would often contrive her errands in the town so as to call for her daughter at the time she ought to be coming home.

By these means, Ellen was preserved from many snares and dangers into which her other companions fell. She likewise lost none of that useful knowledge which she had gained before she went to the factory; for the time that was allowed her to

spend at home was always improved: she employed herself in household work, or in mending and making her clothes, or in reading her Bible. So she had neither the bold manners nor the slovenly appearance which we too commonly see in girls who work in factories, or in any large mixed companies. She appeared more like a neat and modest servant in a serious and creditable family. She likewise continued to attend the Sunday-school, even when she came to such an age that she was ridiculed for doing so by her old companion Lydia.

Many girls, from the fear of being laughed at, turn their backs upon a Sunday-school, where perhaps they have received all the instruction that was ever given them, without even returning any thanks to the persons who have taken so much pains with them, and at the very time too when they are making most improvement themselves, and are arrived at an age when they might become very useful to the other scholars.

Ellen was now turned nineteen, and was adding one more proof to many others which I trust may be found—that we may serve God in any honest calling, even though that calling may expose us to many snares and temptations; provided, however, that duty call us into it, and that we earnestly seek divine assistance, and use all prudent means within our power of keeping ourselves from evil.

Lydia had not made so good use of her time, as we have seen already. She 'id not, however, run all the lengths which some of her companions did, for she was not without some checks of conscience.

About three years after Ellen had gone to the factory, James Harper returned to work with his grandfather in Shropshire, though I believe he did not stay long there, for he preferred the weaving business at K——.

After he had left the factory, Lydia seemed to become more steady, and would listen more to what Ellen said to her: but of late there had been a change for the worse in her, and Ellen, therefore, had kept as much as she could out of her way.

When Ellen was about the age I have just been speaking of, her mother one day desired her to take a walk into the country, when she left work in the evening, to settle a little business for her with a woman who lived about two miles off. A young brother and sister of Ellen were to go with her, and they were ready waiting for her when she came out of the factory.

It was the month of May; and when they got out of the town into the B—— road, and had reached the top of a pleasant little hill, about a mile and half from the town, they stood still to smell the flowers and enjoy the fresh air, and to listen to a bird that was singing in a neighbouring oak tree. "O how pleasant!" said Ellen.

* These are the joys he makes us know,
In fields and villages below."

As the road descended this hill in the direction Ellen was going, there was a footpath on one side, raised upon a high bank, and shaded by tall trees, and on the other side the road fell into open ground, full of little hillocks covered with furze, and here and there was a clump of hawthorn, now full in bloom; and beyond this ground there was a field full of cowslips: so the children asked leave of their sister to run across the road, and gather some hawthorn and cowslips for their mother.

They had not been away many minutes, when Ellen, who was walking on the footpath, heard voices behind her; and, turning round, she perceived Lydia following her very close, and with her was her old acquaintance, James Harper, whom Ellen had rarely seen since he had left the factory. "How fast you must have been walking!" cried Lydia, as soon as she came up to Ellen: "I have been trying to catch you ever since I knew where you were gone."

"How do you do, Ellen?" said James, putting out his hand to shake hers; "I have not seen you this many a day."

"I am pretty well, thank you, James," replied she. Then, turning to Lydia, who had taken her arm, "You know," she said, "that it was late when I set out; and, if I do not walk fast, I shall not be at home before it is dark."

"How afraid you always are of the twilight!" returned Lydia. "You are just like a chicken, that goes to roost when the sun sets."

"I do not think it is well to be out when it is dusk, if one can help it."

"Are you afraid of robbers and murderers?" asked Lydia.

"Perhaps she has got to cross the church-yard," said James, "and she is afraid of the ghosts? I do not like going through the church-yard myself at night."

"O," replied Lydia, "you are such a Heathen sort of fellow. But she is too good to mind them; they won't hurt *her*: besides, she does not live near the church-yard."

"I am not afraid of ghosts, nor robbers either," said Ellen; "but I know I am best at home when it is dark."

"Well, we will protect you to-night," returned Lydia.

Ellen made no answer; but, taking from her bosom a few primroses which she had gathered in her walk, "See, Lydia," said she, "what sweet flowers these are! Do not you think them much pleasanter than dyed worsted, which we smell so much of all day?"

"O, I should like such a walk as this every evening," replied Lydia.

"I should be very fond of the country," said Ellen, "if it were my lot to live in it: green fields, and flowers, and poultry, and all those things, I do so delight in; and the country is so quiet."

"Quieter than our factory," replied Lydia: "but, you know, we cannot help being born in a town."

"To be sure not; and I do not wish to be discontented."

"You never liked our goings-on at the factory," said James, "if I remember right: we were not good enough for you."

"Indeed," replied Ellen, "I think we might be a great deal more comfortable, and quiet too, at the factory, than we are now, if it was not our own fault."

"O, you would have some preaching and praying, I suppose?" said James, "and some hymns sung?"

"No," answered Ellen, "we do not go there to preach and pray, but we go to work: and if we were to work as we ought, we should go on much better than we do now."

"But we *do* work," said Lydia, "and very hard too, I think."

"We are obliged to do something," replied Ellen, "when we are watched; but *you* know, when we are not watched, what is done."

"And what is done?" asked Lydia.

"O, there is a great deal of idle talking, many bad words said, and——. But why need I tell? you know as well as I do."

"Come, Ellen," said James, "please to speak a little plainer."

"Why should not we value our characters," added Ellen, "as much as if we were servants in a family? And why should not we remember that we are Christians? and, instead of quarrelling, or trying to teach each other what is wrong, why should not we live in peace and quietness together? And, if we must talk, why might we not talk of such things as would do us good, at least of such as would do us no harm? And then a factory might be almost as quiet as a green field."

At this James laughed quite loud, and, clapping his hands together, he cried out, "O, you would have the factory like a Quaker's meeting, I suppose! and then you might get up and preach." Then he laughed again at his own wit, and Lydia laughed with him at first, but afterwards she became silent; and though James continued laughing, nothing more was said till they reached the cottage where Ellen was going.

Here Ellen wished her companions good-night, and they walked on.

When she had finished her business, and was coming away, she was surprised to see Lydia leaning against the garden-gate. "You are vexed to find that I am waiting for you," said Lydia, laughing: "but it is only me; I have sent *him* away, for I have something to say to you."

"Very well," answered Ellen: "if it is only you, I do not mind; and I shall not be sorry to say something to *you*, if you will let me."

“Come, go and get flowers, children,” said Lydia to the little ones, as they all returned into the footpath. “And now, Ellen, what have you got to say to me?”

“Why, Lydia, I am afraid that that young man is as great a favourite with you as ever.”

“Afraid!” said Lydia, quickly; “and why afraid?”

“Because,” returned Ellen, “I do not like his discourse. Besides laughing at serious things, he used several very bad words while he was talking with us.”

“You are very ready to judge your neighbours,” said Lydia.

“Indeed, I do not wish to judge my neighbours,” replied Ellen; “and I am sure I would have taken no notice of the thing at all, except to you.”

“And why to me?”

“Because I love you, and I think you know what is right; and if you would listen to your conscience, you might be a much better girl than you are. You must not mind my speaking plainly.”

“Well, then, if I am so bad a girl,” returned Lydia, “he is good enough for me.”

Ellen looked earnestly at Lydia. “I do not know what to make of you,” said she. “But surely there is nothing serious between you and James?”

“I should have told you the secret before,” answered Lydia, “if you had not begun by abusing him; but I *will* tell you *now*: we are only waiting for a house in that new row that is building, just on the other road, and then—”

“And then what?” asked Ellen.

“O, then I shall settle into such a quiet, sober, stay-at-home body, just like your mother, Ellen.”

Ellen looked very thoughtful for some minutes: then, turning to Lydia, she said, “And is it quite settled? Oh! I could wish that you had chosen one who could advise and direct you, and who would lead you, by his own example, into the narrow way.”

“And perhaps I should not have liked such a *saint* of a man,” returned Lydia. “But, however, the thing is quite settled now, and, seriously, I do not think it is such a very bad thing. James has very good work, and he is as steady as most other young men; and I dare say we shall do vastly well.”

“Well,” said Ellen, “if it *is* settled, there is only one more thing I would say: do try to get him into good habits *now*, and persuade him to leave off those bad words.”

“Well, I will try, if I can remember; for I know you speak out of good-will. But now you have done lecturing me, I must catechise *you* a little in my turn. Pray, who is that smart young man that has settled himself in your house?”

“In our house!” repeated Ellen; “I do not know what you are talking about, Lydia.”

"O, you pretend ignorance! but I have been at your house this evening, and there he was sitting, as if he was quite at home; and I saw a bed being put up in that little parlour room where your old aunt used to lodge, and when I asked your sister who it was for, she pointed to this young man."

Ellen looked amazed; and Lydia, calling the little boy, said to him, "Now, John, tell the truth: is not there a young man lodging in your house?—your sister Ellen says there is not."

"O, because she knows nothing about it," returned the boy, laughing; "and I was so glad to come out, that I forgot to tell her."

"And, pray, who is it?" said Ellen.

"It is uncle Ben's nephew," replied the boy, "out of Shropshire: he came just after dinner-time, when you were gone to work, and he brought a long letter from uncle Ben."

"And what is he come for?" asked Ellen.

"O, he is come to live in our house a great while, I suppose: for he is a weaver, and he wants work; and uncle Ben wishes him to be with father and mother."

"I suppose he is your cousin?" said Lydia.

"No," returned Ellen: "uncle Ben married my mother's sister, and this young man, I suppose, is one of his own nephews; they are no relations to us. I know he has some nephews that live near him in Shropshire, and I have heard my mother say that he is very fond of them, for he has no children of his own."

"Well," said Lydia, "I suppose you will be very glad of his coming; for I often think you must lead a very dull life at home."

Ellen made no answer; and the boy cried out, "I know I am glad enough, for he is very good-natured; and he has given me a knife and a ball of string, and he says he will shew me how to make a fishing-rod." So saying, the little brother and sister ran off again, to look through a gate at some young lambs; and Lydia and Ellen walked on together, talking about other things, till they reached the door of Ellen's house, where Lydia lingered a few minutes, in order to satisfy her curiosity a little further respecting this new lodger.

The young man appeared good-humoured and civil; but some very discerning persons might not have been altogether satisfied, had they conversed very long with him. I do not know what Ellen thought of him at first; but he had not been long in the house before she discovered that he was a very great favourite with her mother.

Ellen and Lydia had no particular discourse together for some time after their country walk; but William Lee (for that was the name of uncle Ben's nephew) seemed always very well pleased to be in Ellen's company, and would ask to go with her to church, and would appear very willing to listen

when she read the Bible to her parents, which she sometimes got leave to do: and it did not appear that he sought after much other acquaintance than that of the family in which he lived. He was a very good workman; and, as wages were high, Ellen's father soon perceived that it was in his power to get a very good bread for a wife and family. Ellen's mother also remembered that her brother-in-law had no children, and that he possessed some little property of his own, and that, therefore, it was in his power to do something for his nephews. When, therefore, at the end of some months, the young man made known to the parents that he should like Ellen for a wife, they made no objection, provided that he was agreeable to their daughter, and that his uncle was consulted. Ellen herself had seen nothing that she thought unpromising in the young man; yet it was impossible for her not to feel, that, in religious affairs, he wanted more instruction from her than she could receive from him. The great regard which her parents professed for him disposed her also to look favourably upon him: but perhaps, however, Ellen did not pray enough to be directed for the best in this important affair.

When uncle Ben was informed of his nephew's wishes, he came over immediately to K——; and he was so much pleased with Ellen, that he was for having his nephew married without loss of time, and he went with him to engage one of the houses in the new row that was building. Ellen, on her part, was as well pleased with the old man as he was with her; for he was pious and very kind-hearted, and, when he took his leave, he called her his daughter, and told her, that, when she was settled, he would come and see her: he also gave his nephew ten pounds to lay out in furniture.

Every thing being thus settled, Ellen took her leave of the factory, and busied herself at home in making preparations for her removal; and, a few days before the new house was quite ready to receive them, William wishing to take Ellen to visit his relations in Shropshire, the wedding took place.

On their return, Ellen found that they must yet wait a few days longer in her parents' house before their new dwelling would be ready.

It was on the evening of the day of her return that, having a little leisure, she called at the house of her kind friend the young lady of whom we have so often spoken, to acquaint her with the step she had taken, and to thank her again for all her past kindness to her.

The young lady had not before heard of her marriage; and she said to her, "I shall often come to see you, Ellen, and I cannot doubt that you will be happy, for I am sure you would not marry any one who does not fear God; and I dare say you have prayed diligently for *His* direction and blessing in this important step."

This speech of the young lady made Ellen uneasy, though she could hardly tell why. When she had taken leave of her, and was returning home, just as she turned into another street, she met Lydia, whom she had not seen since she had left the factory. Lydia stopped her, and, taking her hands with both hers, "O you cunning creature!" she cried, "and so you are married before me, and you have kept it all to yourself! But I suppose you were afraid to tell me?"

"Afraid!" said Ellen, "and why afraid?"

"O, because—because he is not one of the saints, and you thought I should have the laugh against you now!"

Here Lydia laughed loud; and Ellen, colouring highly, said, hastily, "What do you mean by saying my husband is not one of the saints?"

"How serious you take every thing! I meant just nothing but that he is like other men; and he is all the better for that, in my way of thinking; for most of your saints I look upon to be hypocrites."

"But what do you know about him?" asked Ellen.

"O, *I* know nothing about him; but our James used to see him often when he was up in Shropshire with his grandmother."

"And what did he know about him?" asked Ellen, impatiently.

"O, nothing at all," answered Lydia: "I can't tell you now: besides, it is a long while since then."

Ellen now checked herself; she began to think that she was acting a very wrong and imprudent part: and, as she stood silent and thoughtful, Lydia put her arm within hers, saying, "Come, let us walk on, and I will tell you something that pleases me very much."

"What is that?" asked Ellen.

"I have just found out," returned Lydia, "that we are to have the very next house to the one you have taken; and that will be very pleasant, for, you know, Ellen, we have been friends from our childhood. And the houses will be quite ready next week; and I am to be married on Monday."

Ellen heard what Lydia said, but she could hardly rouse herself from her own thoughts to answer her; and Lydia tapped her on the arm, before she said to her, in reply, "O, Lydia, I wish you all comfort. But these are very solemn changes; and I hope we shall all try to set out in the right way, or we shall never, never be happy."

Just as Ellen finished these words, they reached the door of her parents' house, where the two young women parted.

What further befel them, when they were settled as next door neighbours in the new row of houses, must be related on another occasion.

L.