

THE  
**TWO SISTERS.**



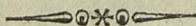
BY

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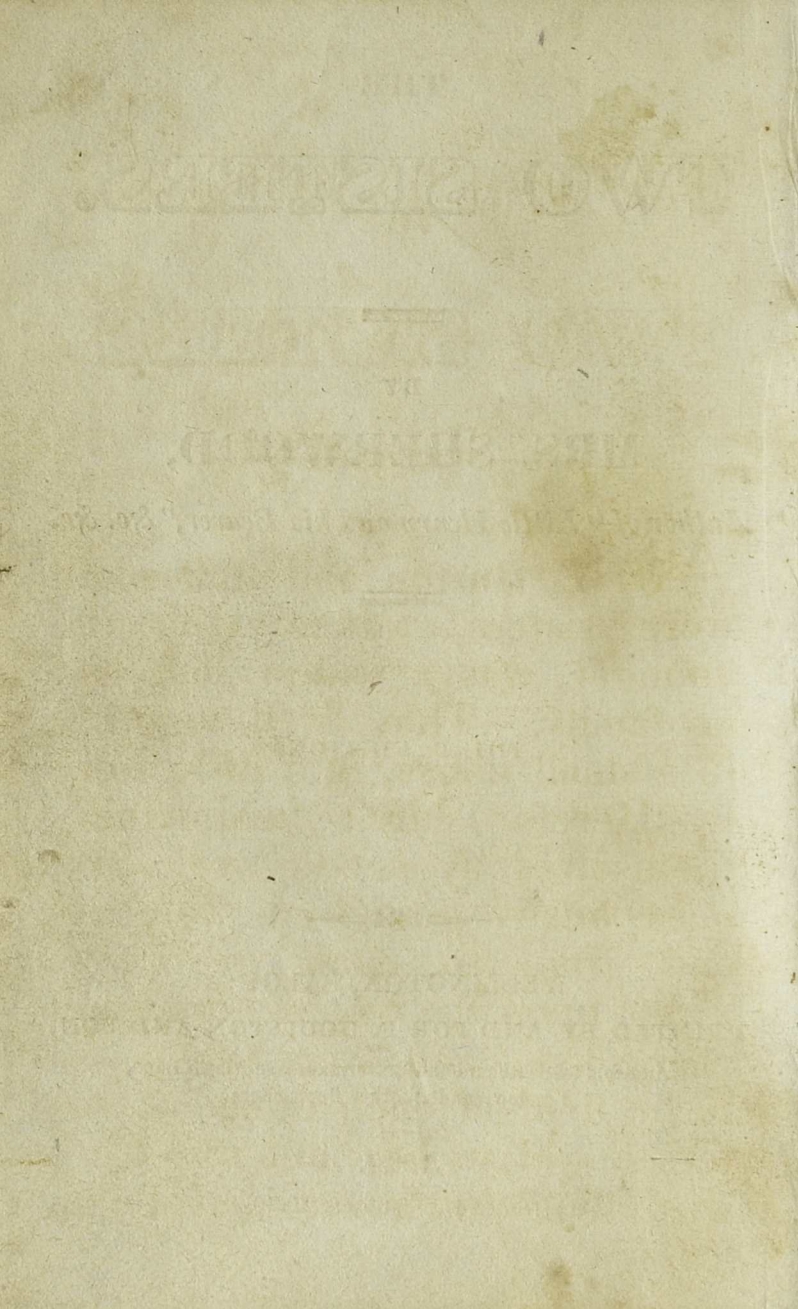
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THE

# TWO SISTERS.



ANNE Burton and Jane Hill were sisters. Jane Hill, the younger, was a widow, but had no family. They lived together in a small house, in a little town in Herefordshire; maintaining themselves by needle-work, and occasionally going out to wash and iron, to cook, or nurse. They, upon the whole, bore good characters, and were supposed to be fond of each other, as sisters ought to be; but the truth was, that the house and furni-



ture being a joint property, left them by their father, they lived together only for conveniency's sake; while there was in fact no sisterly regard between them.

The characters of these two women, although passing, as I before said, pretty well in the eye of the world, were such as would not bear a closer inspection. It was with them, as with all other worldly persons; their affections were set on things on the earth, not on things above. And although their natural dispositions were different—Anne Burton, on the one hand, being of a lively temper and free carriage; while Jane, on the other hand, was grave and sour—yet were they both equally the slaves of sin, each indulging privately her own darling propensity.



Anne Burton was given to excess in drinking, but not so as to expose herself to public shame; for she feared the world, and wished to keep up a respectable name in the town where her family had dwelt in credit for several years. She therefore never took her glass very freely, till she was going to bed: and then, indeed, she treated herself, whenever she could afford it, with so large a dram, as even to prevent her crawling up stairs, without her sister's help. And many were the times that the curtains of her bed would have been set on fire, by her carelessness, if Jane had not narrowly watched over her.

During the day she indulged herself more sparingly, seldom taking enough to produce any

effect; though she never failed (unless money ran low) to take as much at her dinner, as served to raise her spirits and set her a talking. And then, as she was never at a loss for words, and was fond of a joke, she would run on in a manner, which caused those, who were at all nice and particular, to avoid her society; although in general she had command enough over herself, even at such times, to suit her discourse to her company, and especially when that company consisted of her betters.

Yet, with all this, Jane Hill was more disliked by her neighbours than Anne Burton, although she fell not into the gross sins of her sister: for she was temperate in her drink and diet, and offended less with her tongue. But



she was exceedingly close and stingy, and had a high opinion of herself, while she despised her neighbours. She prided herself on the decency of her conduct, and looked with contempt and abhorrence on all her fellow-sinners.

She had been married, early in life, to an old man who had one son by a former wife. To this son she had behaved so ill, that he ran away from home, and, after having suffered every species of misery, had died leaving one little boy.

This poor boy used to beg about the streets in a state of the utmost wretchedness, and often came to Jane Hill, his grandfather's widow, to beg a bit of bread. But Jane Hill never could be persuaded to do any thing for him,



although she had actually in possession more than twenty guineas, which she had found among her old husband's stores after his death. But imagining the world ignorant of this circumstance, she pretended that having gained nothing by her husband, she could not be required to do any thing for his grandson.

Covetousness and pride were the besetting sins of Jane, and though these sins were more decent than those of Anne Burton, yet they proved equally effectual in separating the soul which was under their dominion from the Saviour, and in working out, we fear, its everlasting destruction.

Such was the situation of these two sisters, the younger of whom was about forty years of age,

when the minister of the parish being removed, the benefice was given to a man of extraordinary godliness, one who was enabled by his heavenly Master to set forth all the doctrines of the Christian religion in such order and harmony, that no one truth was ever brought forward to the exclusion of another; but every one of them appeared in this holy man's discourses, in its due place and fairest proportion.

This excellent man soon filled his church, insomuch that every part of it was crowded every Sunday, the people running together as if they had never heard of the Christian religion before. Many who went only to stare and wonder, returned home to pray: and many were effectually converted and turned to the Lord,



who is oftentimes *pleased by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.* (1 Cor. i. 21.)

Religion now became the fashion in the town and country about, while the last discourse from the pulpit for the most part furnished the subject of common conversation among the neighbours.

While persons of all descriptions were thus running to the church, Anne Burton and Jane Hill would not be left behind. They went at first, like the generality, to wonder and stare; but what they heard there had at least the effect of drawing them thither again and again. So that if the preaching of the Gospel did not reach their hearts, it nevertheless informed their un-



derstandings, communicating to them a great deal of head-knowledge on the subject of religion, which every day increased, as they continued to attend their minister, and to hear the talk of their neighbours.

With respect to Jane Hill, whatever change her feelings and sentiments underwent, being a woman of few words, she, for the most part, kept all to her-  
 But Anne Burton very soon came not only a great talker on religious subjects, but a vehement professor: and although without of her private habits was enhanced by her religion, yet she was not a woman of the low classes in all the town, who made such a noise about the Gospel.

As I before said, she had always a great command of words;

and now there was not an expression used by their excellent minister, which she had not at her tongue's end: and painful it is to say, that the times which she chiefly chose for speaking on these subjects, was when her spirits were raised by a private dram. At such seasons, she would lament the sins of her nature, and run on surprisingly upon other subjects

Wacred to be mentioned in this tions, or in any place whatever, church any time, when the heart of Hill peaker is not duly prepared They pics of such solemnity.

nera any inexperienced persons but among the gentlefolks in at neighbourhood, were imposed upon by these high professions; while their kindness, and indiscreet commendation, encouraged the poor woman to carry on these



pretences, till she at length deceived herself, as well as others. No one thoroughly knew her, but her sister Jane, who, being well acquainted with her private habits, felt the utmost disgust whenever she heard her professions; looking upon her at the same time with a contempt, which she had no care to hide. And indeed, I believe that the loud and empty professions of Anne Burton were a dreadful hindrance to the well-doing of Jane Hill.

These sisters sometimes passed whole days together without speaking to each other, or speaking only to quarrel. Their contentions were commonly now upon religious subjects. Jane generally began by charging Anne with hypocrisy, in pretending to be religious, when she



privately indulged in so odious a vice as drunkenness. While Anne in return would point out her sister's covetousness, and accuse her of cruelty to those whom she ought in justice to assist.

Jane's reply was generally of this sort, that she worked for all she got, and others might do the same: and that although she made no profession of religion, she knew that she had much more than many who did.

Anne Burton was louder, and had more to say than Jane, she therefore generally had the best of the dispute, which, for the most part, ended on Jane's side in a long fit of gloom and sullenness.

In those places where religion becomes the fashion, and where,

in consequence, there is a sudden and extraordinary increase of professors, a careful minister will find it necessary to admonish all persons diligently to examine themselves, and try their own hearts; since *the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked*. Poor people especially, when their superiors in rank become pious, may often be led to assume an appearance of religion, in order to please their betters; by which means, they not only impose upon their neighbours, and deceive their own hearts, but even bring themselves into danger of final condemnation.

It is true, that you must not wait till you have left your sins, before you go to Christ: you must carry the burden of your



sins, and lay it down at the feet of Him, who has undertaken to bear it for you. But when you have taken your sins to the cross, you must be careful to *leave them there.*

When you have once come to Christ, and are become a professor of his religion, if you have been covetous, you must be covetous no more. If you have lived in hatred, you must hate your brother no more. If you have been an adulterer, you must never more entertain an unclean thought. If you have been a drunkard, you must henceforward be sober. If the religion you profess does not enable you to lead a better life, either you have no religion at all, or it is of a wrong sort. It is true, that good works are not the *fore-*



runners, but they are invariably the *fruits* of faith.

*Beware of false professors, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves: ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. (Matt. vii. 15—17.)*

Of all this the good minister was aware; and therefore carefully watched for the fruits of his labours, namely, *the reformation of morals among his people*. There were many who gave evidence of their faith, by turning from their sins, and leading holy lives; but others who attended his ministry, afforded him so little satisfaction on this head, that

he determined to make his visits from house to house, for the purpose of trying what private exhortation might accomplish.

In the course of these visits, he called at the house of the two sisters: it was about three o'clock in the evening when he came in, and he found Anne Burton alone. She was employed with her needle, and was sitting in the kitchen, which Jane, who was very neat, had just put in order. Money at that time being low, Anne had taken little, if any thing, after her dinner that day; on which account she fancied herself in a particularly good state to receive the minister. He immediately led the discourse to religious subjects, when he found that Anne understood, at least, the leading



doctrines of Christianity, and could speak fluently upon them; notwithstanding which there was something in her manner, that did not please the good man. If she spoke of her sins, it was like one who repeated a lesson by rote; if she spoke of the Saviour, it was with a degree of familiarity which no one could use who had an abiding sense of the immeasurable distance there is between the Almighty and Holy God and his sinful creatures: in short, she seemed to want humility, while her appearance bespoke not the state of one whose body was the temple of the Holy Spirit of God.

The good minister felt hurt, and the more so, as the poor woman continued to talk freely

and rapidly on religious subjects. He was silent for a time, being much troubled ; after which he took occasion to point out to her, that religion must begin in a very deep and humbling sense of sin, of which the general effect is, to make persons silent and fearful of offending with their lips, instead of pouring out a torrent of words. He assured her also, that assistance to do well would be given to every one who desired it : and then, saying that at some other opportunity he would call upon her again, he took his leave.

On quitting the house, the good minister turned out of the street, and walked slowly up a retired path that led to the fields in which his own house was situated ; meditating as he passed,



on the state of man upon earth—how, through the sinfulness of his nature, he turns every thing meant for his good into the means of his destruction; and how even religion itself, in places where it meets with respect, becomes frequently either a subject of ostentation, or a cloak of disguise. It then struck him, that he had not sufficiently laboured to open to his people the depravity of the heart, and the utter helplessness of man's nature; but had, perhaps, led them on to cry *peace, peace, when there was no peace*. Thus the truly godly minister mourns over each particular wanderer of his flock, and takes a part of the blame of every failure.

While he was meditating in this manner, mixing his meditation with prayer, he saw a wo-

man coming towards him, from the way of the fields; and as she drew nearer, he perceived that it was Jane Hill. He stopped her, and telling her where he had been, he expressed his anxiety for the good of her soul, in common with that of every individual of his flock. After which he informed her, that he had been much surprised, in conversing with her sister, at the knowledge she displayed of the doctrines of the Christian religion: adding, that he hoped Anne Burton did not consider the mere ability of talking upon those subjects, as all that was necessary to salvation; but that she endeavoured to bring forth the fruits of the Spirit.

Jane was very glad of this opportunity to lay open what she



called her sister's pretences, and gave such an account of Anne's private conduct, as, although it did not surprise the good man, afflicted him deeply.

He answered, "I shall repeat my call very soon." And then addressing himself again to Jane respecting her own soul, he said, that he hoped her sister's example would be a warning to her. He intimated moreover that there were many sins not so scandalous as drunkenness, which were equally displeasing to God: that these sins, which marked the pharisees in old time, such as, *oppression of the fatherless, pride, and cruelty*, were perhaps more to be dreaded than even the sins of the flesh; because though they seldomer brought men to shame on earth, they

were not less effectual in separating the soul from God.

“There is,” added this excellent man, “in your manner when speaking of your sister, an apparent want of tenderness, which seems to make you glory in her shame. O cultivate, I beseech you, a kinder feeling towards her; and remember with respect to yourself, that pride will as certainly shut you out from the kingdom of heaven, if not subdued, as want of sobriety will exclude her; according to our Lord’s address to the proud pharisees—*Verily I say unto you, that the publicans and the harlots go into the kingdom of God before you.*” (Matt. xxi. 31.)

The good minister had seen something in Jane Hill’s manner, which led him to adopt this tone



of reproof; and he hoped that it might be of use, in opening her eyes to her own state of mind, which was, in fact, not a whit better than that of her sister.

In a few days, the minister having made some further enquiries respecting the two sisters, called upon them again; and finding them both at home, he entered into a most serious and heart-searching conversation with them. He perceived, he said, that they were both well acquainted with the doctrines and duties of the Christian religion; that they were both, in some degree, convinced that they could be saved only by Christ the Redeemer; and that without an interest in Him, nothing remained for them, *but a certain fearful looking for of judgment*

*and fiery indignation.* (Heb. x. 27.)

“Hitherto,” said he, “you are come, and here you stand. You talk and call to others, holding forth to them what they must do to be saved; thus, by your own words sealing your own condemnation. But you will come no further yourselves, and for this reason”—(here he paused, and looked hard at them)—“because each of you have a darling, a besetting sin, which holds you in bands of iron and brass; and which will hold you down beyond all possibility of relief, unless you speedily attempt to break them as by the Spirit of the Lord.

“What was it,” continued the good minister, “that prevented the armies of Israel from conquering the idolaters of Ai? was it not



the accursed thing which Achan had hid in the camp? Therefore, because of that accursed thing, the Children of Israel could not stand before their enemies, but turned themselves to flight as an accursed people; neither would the Lord afford them his presence any more, until they put away the accursed thing from among them. (*Joshua* vii. 12.) In like manner, the evil habits which you cherish, the love of liquor in the elder sister, and the pride and love of money in the younger, render you utterly unable to stand before the enemies of your soul; neither can you ever expect the Lord to be with you, until these accursed things are removed from among you."

The good minister then pro-

ceeded, in an affectionate and earnest manner, to exhort them to lay aside those sins by which they were so easily beset, saying, as the Lord did to Joshua on the occasion above mentioned, "*Get thee up; wherefore liest thou thus upon thy face?*" (Joshua vii. 10.) "There is help to be had," continued he, "and power will be given us to overcome the vilest lusts, if we are but willing to cast ourselves as utterly helpless and self-condemned at the foot of the cross."

He then pointed out to them various sweet passages of Scripture, in which assistance is promised to those who humbly seek it in the name and through the merits of the Saviour, and who are willing utterly to renounce all self-dependence. And he



concluded his discourse, by laying before the two sisters several awful instances, which had fallen under his own knowledge, of persons making a considerable profession of religion, and giving hopes of better things, who, on finding that the Gospel would not permit them the indulgence of some besetting sin, had preferred the poor and low enjoyment of that sin even to the everlasting felicity of heaven; thus perishing at last in their iniquity.

The good minister did not leave the two sisters without prayer; after which he followed up this beginning of his labours for their common good, by several other private visits: in all of which he addressed them in the most serious and impressive man-

ner. But, at length, finding his labour to be wholly without fruit, and being called elsewhere upon more promising grounds, his visits to them became less and less frequent, till they entirely ceased.

I have no pleasure in telling you the end of this story. Anne Burton could not resolve to give up her favourite liquor ; nor Jane Hill to part with any of her guineas for the relief of her late husband's grandson : and these sins lying on their minds, rendered religion unsavoury to them. They continued to go now and then to church ; but they had no delight in its holy ordinances, for Israel's God was not with them, because they refused to put away the accursed thing.

Anne Burton's sin gained so fast upon her, after she had re-



fused to hearken to the private exhortations of her good minister, that it speedily ruined her health; insomuch that she died before her fiftieth year, talking of religion till nearly the last, though still refusing to give up her sins. A short time before her death, she became exceedingly cast down, the delusions of Satan now having faded away, and nothing being left but horror and amazement. But her poor head was so disturbed by the drams she even then continued to take, that it was impossible for any one to afford the least spiritual assistance; although some were with her, who would have led her, even at that eleventh hour, to the Saviour.

Jane Hill lived to a great age, and remained, to the last, hard

and unsubdued. In her death there was as little hope as in that of her sister.

The cases of these women were peculiarly awful. They knew the truth: but, inasmuch as they loved their sins more than their own souls, religion became to them the savour of death unto death. Reader, forsake thy sins, and the Gospel will be to thee a savour of life unto life. (2 Cor. ii. 16.)

