

A RAY OF LIGHT

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A Ray of Light by Mrs. Henry S. Mackarness

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MRS. HENRY S. MACKARNESS

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RAY OF LIGHT.

By the Author of
"A TRAP TO CATCH A SUNBEAM," ETC.

"Rebuke them, if thou wilt rebuke,—but neither hastily nor harshly.
Or, if thou wilt commend, be it honestly, of right; I work for God and good."
FURZER'S Proverbial Philosophy.

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A RAY OF LIGHT.

CHAPTER I.

“ Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all.”—
Proverbs, xxxi. 29.

THE shades of evening are falling on the pretty little village of Wetherley, gradually enveloping in a soft, shadowy mist the distant landscape, and causing the old ivy-crowned church-tower to look larger and darker in the fading light, and the forge-fire to seem brighter and blaze higher ; and so stealthily the light fades, that one can scarcely see how every moment steals a ray away and leads the darkness on.

How still it is ! The tired labourers are all home, some smoking at their cottage-doors, some working a little in their gardens, the children are mostly all asleep, the birds at roost and the sheep folded, and silence and repose seem keeping guard over the little peaceful village.

BY P. L.

The sun has sunk to rest some hours ago, and yet surely he has left behind him some of his radiance, or what can make old Peter Ray's cottage so bright when you enter it? There are certainly no wax candles, nor tallow ones either burning; no fire either, for it is too warm; but a face and form are there which would make surlight in any home. The light from a true heart is shining in those soft grey eyes, and in the glad smile which parts the lips so often; but it is no beauty, no lovely young girl who is thus the sunshine of her old parents' home. No, Millicent Ray had no beauty but the beauty of goodness; and she is not young,—some thirty summers have passed over her head, and the young things of seventeen call Millicent an old maid. She is not frightened at the sound; she calls herself so, glancing very archly though all the while at some one who, on many summer's evenings beneath their rose-covered porch, or on winter nights by the wood-fire, has always a seat next Millicent; some one who, when she takes her well-laden basket to the neighbouring town with her eggs and butter for sale, manages so often to be coming home, at the same hour, and who always happens to come out of church at the same moment, which is a great comfort to poor old Mrs. Ray, for she exchanges the feeble arm of her old husband for the strong one of Philip Hartley.

On this still summer evening of which I have spoken, Millicent sits beneath the porch working, while the old folks are dozing in their respective arm-chairs. A smile—that bright, glad smile, which so often brightened Millicent's features, plays round her mouth now as her fingers move nimbly at her task, and every now and then she peeps into the room to see if the old people are awake and ready for their supper. Some little time has passed since she first took her seat there amongst the roses and honeysuckles, and the light has faded so that she can no longer see to stitch that wristband to her fancy; so she lays her work aside and rests her head among the sweet-scented blossoms which grow so thickly over the old porch, and in a pleasant, dreamy silence watches the sun go down, and the smile still rests upon the lips it seems loth to leave, for glad and happy thoughts are in Millicent's mind, and no sad or gloomy ones ever come to frighten the smile away. And yet Millicent's lot is not so very bright a one; she has had to work for her living as long as she can recollect; her parents are aged and infirm, and a great charge to her; the old father can earn but little now, for he is paralysed; she is their main support, and Philip Hartley has loved her, and she has loved Philip these five years, and they are still unmarried; so, you see, she has her trials like all in this world, but she bears them with

the hopeful courage of one who looks beyond the present to a bright future, where she knows there will be no tears nor sorrow any more. She has learnt and believed that "the path of the just is as a shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day," and her life's aim has been to walk in that path. Millicent is thinking in that half light of many things, and amongst them of a young sailor-lad who is now tossing on the bosom of the great deep, and who shares Millicent's large heart with her old father and mother and Philip. This dearly-loved sailor-boy is her only brother, born to his parents late in life, and so considerably younger than Millicent—so much younger, that her love for him was more a mother's than a sister's love; she had washed and dressed him, taught him, and worked for him; and when she found his taste was for the sea, rested not till it was gratified, as she thought no boy could do well in the world unless he pursued the profession he chose and loved; and so she sent him forth with her blessing and followed him with her prayers, and longed for the time when he could get leave and she could press to her heart once more the boy she loved with that strange, earnest, mingled love of mother and sister. The old folks, too, loved their boy so fondly, that Millicent had had a hard matter to persuade them to let him go to sea; but from her earliest childhood she had

possessed a singular influence over her parents, and "Millicent says so," was generally the reason assigned to everything which was done, so her advice was taken at last, and the idolised boy was permitted to embrace the profession he had chosen.

Amongst the many good qualifications which Millicent possessed, was that sense which used to be called *common-sense*, but in these days deserves to be called uncommon, for it is amongst the rarest to be found. The clergyman of the parish where they then resided had taken a fancy to the bright-looking little thing, and had induced her mother to send her, with one or two other village girls, to the Rectory, where his wife took the greatest pains to educate them in those useful household matters which are now being introduced into schools. Finding this mode of instruction seemed to answer, and having numerous applications to receive girls into her class, she, by the aid of the Squire of the place, established a school entirely for this purpose. There the little Millicent, with her earnest desire to learn, and her peculiar tendency to find out a reason for everything she saw done, soon astonished every one by her proficiency; and when at fifteen she left school, having remained there longer than the generality of girls are permitted by their unwise parents, Millicent's general inform-

ation far surpassed that of many, even her superiors in rank of life and advantages. Few could make such bread, butter, and cheese, or rear such poultry, or cook a dinner, to equal Millicent, and "out of nothing," as her mother used to say,—for Millicent, amongst her other qualifications, possessed that admirable one of a thorough knowledge of economy. She wasted nothing; a joint of meat seemed to go twice as far if Millicent had the management of it; and in sick-cookery there was not her equal for miles round. All this made her a most valuable neighbour to the poor of Wetherley, who sent for her to ask advice and assistance on every occasion. On the evening in question she was about to rise from her seat and enter the cottage to get the supper, when a little ragged girl, shuffling with slipshod shoes along the road, stopped before the gate and asked if that was Mrs. Ray's.

"Yes, my dear; what is it?"

"I want Millicent Ray to come down and see our baby," answered the child in a low, drawling tone.

"I am Millicent Ray; is the baby ill?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know! what did you want me to see the baby for then?"

"Mother sent me."