

# **THE LITTLE PILGRIM:**

Further Experiences

By Margaret O. (Wilson) Oliphant

# I.

## THE LITTLE PILGRIM IN THE SEEN AND UNSEEN.

The little Pilgrim, whose story has been told in another place, and who had arrived but lately on the other side, among those who know trouble and sorrow no more, was one whose heart was always full of pity for the suffering. And after the first rapture of her arrival, and of the blessed work which had been given to her to do, and all the wonderful things she had learned of the new life, there returned to her in the midst of her happiness so many questions and longing thoughts that They were touched by them who have the care of the younger brethren, the simple ones of heaven. These questions did not disturb her peace or joy, for she knew that which is so often veiled on earth,—that all is accomplished by the will of the Father, and that nothing can happen but according to His appointment and under His care. And she was also aware that the end is as the beginning to Him who knows all, and that nothing is lost that is in His hand. But though she would herself have willingly borne the sufferings of earth ten times over for the sake of all that was now hers, yet it pierced her soul to think of those who were struggling in darkness, and whose hearts were stifled within them by all the bitterness of the mortal life. Sometimes she would be ready to cry out with wonder that the Lord did not hasten His steps and go down again upon the earth to make all plain; or how the Father himself could restrain His power, and did not send down ten

legions of angels to make all that was wrong right, and turn all that was mournful into joy.

'It is but for a little time,' said her companions. 'When we have reached this place we remember no more the anguish.' 'But to them in their trouble it does not seem a little time,' the Pilgrim said. And in her heart there rose a great longing. Oh that He would send me! that I might tell my brethren,—not like the poor man in the land of darkness, of the gloom and misery of that distant place, but a happier message, of the light and brightness of this, and how soon all pain would be over. She would not put this into a prayer, for she knew that to refuse a prayer is pain to the Father, if in His great glory any pain can be. And then she reasoned with herself and said, 'What can I tell them, except that all will soon be well? and this they know, for our Lord has said it; but I am like them, and I do not understand.'

One fair morning while she turned over these thoughts in her mind there suddenly came towards her one whom she knew as a sage, of the number of those who know many mysteries and search into the deep things of the Father. For a moment she wondered if perhaps he came to reprove her for too many questionings, and rose up and advanced a little towards him with folded hands and a thankful heart, to receive the reproof if it should be so,—for whether it were praise or whether it were blame, it was from the Father, and a great honor and happiness to receive. But as he came towards her he smiled and bade her not to fear. 'I am come,' he said, 'to tell you some things you long to know, and to show you some things that are hidden to

most. Little sister, you are not to be charged with any mission—'

'Oh, no,' she said, 'oh, no. I was not so presuming—'

'It is not presuming to wish to carry comfort to any soul; but it is permitted to me to open up to you, so far as I may, some of the secrets. The secrets of the Father are all beautiful, but there is sorrow in them as well as joy; and Pain, you know, is one of the great angels at the door.'

'Is his name Pain? and I took him for Consolation!' the little Pilgrim said.

'He is not Consolation; he is the schoolmaster whose face is often stern. But I did not come to tell you of him whom you know; I am going to take you—back,' the wise man said.

'Back!' She knew what this meant, and a great pleasure, yet mingled with fear, came into her mind. She hesitated, and looked at him, and did not know how to accept, though she longed to do so, for at the same time she was afraid. He smiled when he saw the alarm in her face.

'Do you think,' he said, 'that you are to go this journey on your own charges? Had you insisted, as some do, to go at all hazards, you might indeed have feared. And even now I cannot promise that you will not feel the thorns of the earth as you pass; but you will be cared for, so that no harm can come.'

'Ah,' she said wistfully, 'it is not for harm—' and could say nothing more.

He laid his hand upon her arm, and he said, 'Do not fear; though they see you not, it is yet sweet for a moment to be there, and as you pass, it brings thoughts of you to their minds.'

For these two understood each other, and knew that to see and yet not be seen is only a pleasure for those who are most like the Father, and can love without thought of love in return.

When he touched her, it seemed to the little Pilgrim suddenly that everything changed round her, and that she was no longer in her own place, but walking along a weary length of road. It was narrow and rough, and the skies were dim; and as she went on by the side of her guide she saw houses and gardens which were to her like the houses that children build, and the little gardens in which they sow seeds and plant flowers, and take them up again to see if they are growing. She turned to the Sage, saying, 'What are—?' and then stopped and gazed again, and burst out into something that was between laughing and tears. 'For it is home,' she cried, 'and I did not know it! dear home!' Her heart was remorseful, as if she had wounded the little diminished place.

'This is what happens with those who have been living in the king's palaces,' he said with a smile.

'But I love it dearly, I love it dearly!' the little Pilgrim said, stretching out her hands as if for pardon. He smiled at her, consoling her; and then his face changed and grew very grave.

'Little sister,' he said, 'you have come not to see happiness but pain. We want no explanation of the joy, for that flows freely from the heart of the Father, and all is clear between us and

Him; but that which you desire to know is why trouble should be. Therefore you must think of Him and be strong, for here is what will rend your heart.'

The little Pilgrim was seized once more with mortal fear. 'O friend,' she cried, 'I have done with pain. Must I go and see others suffering and do nothing for them?'

'If anything comes into your heart to do or say, it will be well for them,' the Sage replied: and he took her by the hand and led her into a house she knew. She began to know them all now, as her vision became accustomed to the atmosphere of the earth. She perceived that the sun was shining, though it had appeared so dim, and that it was a clear summer morning, very early, with still the colors of the dawn in the east. When she went indoors, at first she saw nothing, for the room was darkened, the windows all closed, and a miserable watch-light only burning. In the bed there lay a child whom she knew. She knew them all,—the mother at the bedside, the father near the door, even the nurse who was flitting about disturbing the silence. Her heart gave a great throb when she recognized them all; and though she had been glad for the first moment to think that she had come just in time to give welcome to a little brother stepping out of earth into the better country, a shadow of trouble and pain enveloped her when she saw the others and remembered and knew. For he was their beloved child; on all the earth there was nothing they held so dear. They would have given up their home and all they possessed, and become poor and homeless and wanderers with joy, if God, as they said, would have but spared their child. She saw into their hearts and read all this there; and knowing them, she knew it without

even that insight. Everything they would have given up and rejoiced, if but they might have kept him. And there he lay, and was about to die. The little Pilgrim forgot all but the pity of it, and their hearts that were breaking, and the vacant place that was soon to be. She cried out aloud upon the Father with a great cry. She forgot that it was a grief to Him in His great glory to refuse.

There came no reply; but the room grew light as with a reflection out of heaven, and the child in the bed, who had been moving restlessly in the weariness of ending life, turned his head towards her, and his eyes opened wide, and he saw her where she stood. He cried out, 'Look! mother, mother!' The mother, who was on her knees by the bedside, lifted her head and cried, 'What is it, what is it, O my darling?' and the father, who had turned away his face not to see the child die, came nearer to the bed, hoping they knew not what. Their faces were paler than the face of the dying, upon which there was light; but no light came to them out of the hidden heaven. 'Look! she has come for me,' he said; but his voice was so weak they could not hear him, nor take any comfort. At this the little Pilgrim put out her arms to him, forgetting in her joy the poor people who were mourning, and cried out, 'Oh, but I must go with him! I must take him home!' For this was her own work, and she thought of her wonderings and her questions no more.

Some one touched her on the shoulder, and she looked round; and behind her was a great company of the dear children from the better country, whom the Father had sent, and not her,—lest he should grieve for those he had left behind,—to come for the child and show him the way. She paused for a moment,

scarcely willing to give him up; but then her companion touched her and pointed to the other side. Ah, that was different! The mother lay by the side of the bed, her face turned only to the little white body which her child had dropped from him as he came out of his sickness,—her eyes wild with misery, without tears; her feverish mouth open, but no cry in it. The sword of the angel had gone through and through her. She did not even writhe upon it, but lay motionless, cut down, dumb with anguish. The father had turned round again and leaned his head upon the wall. All was over,—all over! The love and the hope of a dozen lovely years, the little sweet companion, the daily joy, the future trust—all—over—as if a child had never been born. Then there rose in the stillness a great and exceeding bitter cry, 'God!' that was all, peeling up to heaven, to the Father, whom they could not see in their anguish, accusing Him, reproaching Him who had done it. Was He their enemy that He had done it? No man was ever so wicked, ever so cruel but he would have spared them their boy,—taken everything and spared them their boy; but God, God! The little Pilgrim stood by and wept. She could do nothing but weep, weep, her heart aching with the pity and the anguish. How were they to be told that it was not God, but the Father; that God was only His common name, His name in law, and that He was the Father. This was all she could think of; she had not a word to say. And the boy had shaken his little bright soul out of the sickness and the weakness with such a look of delight! He knew in a moment! But they—oh, when, when would they know?

Presently she sat outside in the soft breathing airs and little morning breezes, and dried her aching eyes. And the Sage who

was her companion soothed her with kind words. 'I said you would feel the thorns as you passed,' he said. 'We cannot be free of them, we who are of mankind.'

'But oh,' she cried amid her tears, 'why,—why? The air of the earth is in my eyes, I cannot see. Oh, what pain it is, what misery! Was it because they loved him too much, and that he drew their hearts away?'

The Sage only shook his head at her, smiling. 'Can one love too much?' he said.

'O brother, it is very hard to live and to see another—I am confused in my mind,' said the little Pilgrim, putting her hand to her eyes. 'The tears of those that weep have got into my soul. To live and see another die,—that was what I was saying; but the child lives like you and me. Tell me, for I am confused in my mind.'

'Listen!' said the Sage; and when she listened she heard the sound of the children going back with a great murmur and ringing of pleasant voices like silver bells in the air, and among them the voice of the child asking a thousand questions, calling them by their names. The two pilgrims listened and laughed to each other for love at the sound of the children. 'Is it for the little brother that you are troubled?' the Sage said in her ear.

Then she was ashamed, and turned from the joyful sounds that were ascending ever higher and higher to the little house that stood below, with all its windows closed upon the light. It was wrapped in darkness though the sun was shining, the windows closed as if they never would open more, and the people within

turning their faces to the wall, covering their eyes that they might not see the light of day. 'O miserable day!' they were saying; 'O dark hour! O life that will never smile again!' She sat between earth and heaven, her eyes smiling, but her mouth beginning to quiver once more. 'Is it to raise their thoughts and their hearts?' she said.

'Little sister,' said he, 'when the Father speaks to you, it is not for me nor for another that He speaks. And what He says to you is—' 'Ah,' said the little Pilgrim, with joy, 'it is for myself, myself alone! As if I were a great angel, as if I were a saint. It drops into my heart like the dew. It is what I need, not for you, though I love you, but for me only. It is my secret between me and Him.'

Her companion bowed his head. 'It is so. And thus has He spoken to the little child. But what He said or why He said it, is not for you or me to know. It is His secret; it is between the little one and his Father. Who can interfere between these two? Many and many are there born on earth whose work and whose life are ordained elsewhere,—for there is no way of entrance into the race of man which is the nature of the Lord, but by the gates of birth; and the work which the Father has to do is so great and manifold that there are multitudes who do but pass through those gates to ascend to their work elsewhere. But the Father alone knows whom he has chosen. It is between the child and Him. It is their secret; it is as you have said.'

The little Pilgrim was silent for a moment, but then turned her head from the bright shining of the skies and the voices of the children which floated farther and farther off, and looked at the house in which there was sorrow and despair. She pointed

towards it, and looked at him who was her instructor, and had come to show her how these things were.

'They are to blame,' he said; 'but none will blame them. The little life is hard. The Father, though He is very near, seems far off; and sometimes even His word is as a dream. It is to them as if they had lost their child. Can you not remember?—that was what we said. We have lost—'

Then the little Pilgrim, musing, began to smile, but wept again as she thought of the father and the mother. 'If we were to go,' she said, 'hand in hand, you and I, and tell them that the Father had need of him, that it was not for the little life but for the great and beautiful world above that the child was born; and that he had got great promotion and was gone with the princes and the angels according as was ordained? And why should they mourn? Let us go and tell them—'

He shook his head. 'They could not see us; they would not know us. We should be to them as dreams. If they do not take comfort from our Lord, how could they take comfort from you and me? We could not bring them back their child. They want their child, not only to know that all is well with him,—for they know that all is well with him,—but what they want is their child. They are to blame; but who shall blame them? Not any one that is born of woman. How can we tell them what is the Father's secret and the child's?'

'And yet we could tell them why it must be so?' said the little Pilgrim. 'For they prayed and besought the Lord. O brother, I have no understanding. For the Lord said, "Ask, and it shall be given you;" and they asked, yet they are refused.'

'Little sister, the Father must judge between His children; and he must first be heard who is most concerned. While they were praying, the Father and the child talked together and said what we know not; but this we know, that his heart was satisfied with that which was said to him. Must not the Father do what is best for the child He loves, whatever the other children may say? Nay, did not our own fathers do this on earth, and we submitted to them; how much more He who sees all?'

The little Pilgrim stole softly from his side when he had done speaking, and went back into the darkened house, and saw the mother where she sat weeping and refusing to be comforted, in her sorrow perceiving not heaven nor any consolation, nor understanding that her child had gone joyfully to his Father and her Father, as his soul had required, and as the Lord had willed. Yet though she had not joy but only anguish in her faith, and though her eyes were darkened that she could not see, yet the woman ceased not to call upon God, God, and to hold by Him who had smitten her. And the father of the child had gone into his chamber and shut the door, and sat dumb, opening not his mouth, thinking upon his delightful boy, and how they had walked together and talked together, and should do so again nevermore. And in their hearts they reproached their God, the giver of all, and accused the Lord to His face, as if He had deceived them, yet clung to Him still, weeping and upbraiding, and would not let Him go. The little Pilgrim wept too, and said many things to them which they could not hear. But when she saw that though they were in darkness and misery, God was in all their thoughts, she bethought herself suddenly of what the poet had said in the celestial city, and of the songs he sang, which were a wonder to the Angels and

Powers, of the little life and the sorrowful earth, where men endured all things, yet overcame by the name of the Lord. When this came into her mind, she rose up again softly with a sacred awe, and wept not, but did them reverence; for without any light or guidance in their anguish they yet wavered not, died not, but endured, and in the end would overcome. It seemed to her that she saw the great beautiful angels looking on, the great souls that are called to love and to serve, but not to suffer like the little brethren of the earth; and that among the princes of heaven there was reverence and awe, and even envy of those who thus had their garments bathed in blood, and suffered loss and pain and misery, yet never abandoned their life and the work that had been given them to do.

As she came forth again comforted, she found the Sage standing with his face lifted to heaven, smiling still at the sound, though faint and distant, of the children all calling to each other and shouting together as they reached the gate. 'Oh, hush!' she said; 'let not the mother hear them! for it will make her heart more bitter to think she can never hear again her child's voice.'

'But it is her child's voice,' he said; then very gently, 'they are to blame; but no one will be found to blame them either in earth or heaven.'

The earth pilgrims went far after this, yet more softly than when they first left their beautiful country,—for then the little Pilgrim had been glad, believing that as all had been made clear to her in her own life, so that all that concerned the life of man should be made clear; but this was more hard and encompassed with pain and darkness, as that which is in the doing is always more hard to understand than that which is

accomplished. And she learned now what she had not understood, though her companion warned her, how sharp are those thorns of earth that pierce the wayfarer's foot, and that those who come back cannot help but suffer because of love and fellow-feeling. And she learned that though she could smile and give thanks to the Father in the recollection of her own griefs that were past, yet those that are present are too poignant, and to look upon others in their hour of darkness makes His ways more hard to comprehend than even when the sorrow is your own.

While she mused thus, there was suddenly revealed to her another sight. They had gone far before they came to this new scene. Night had crept over the skies all gray and dark; and the sea came in with a whisper which sounded to some like the hush of peace, and to some like the voice of sorrow and moaning, and to some was but the monotony of endless recurrence, in which was no soul. The skies were dark overhead, but opened with a clear shining of light which had no color, towards the west,—for the sun had long gone down, and it was night. The two travellers perceived a woman who came out of a house all lit with lamps and firelight, and took the lonely path towards the sea. And the little Pilgrim knew her, as she had known the father and mother in the darkened house, and would have joined her with a cry of pleasure; but she remembered that the friend could not see her or hear her, being wrapped still in the mortal body, and in a close enveloping mantle of thoughts and cares. The Sage made her a sign to follow, and these two tender companions accompanied her who saw them not, walking darkling by the silent way. The heart of the woman was heavy in her breast. It was so sore by

reason of trouble, and for all the bitter wounds of the past, and all the fears that beset her life to come, that she walked, not weeping because of being beyond tears, but as it were bleeding, her thoughts being in her little way like those of His upon whose brow there once stood drops as it were of blood; and out of her heart there came a moaning which was without words. If words had been possible, they would have been as His also, who said, 'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' For those who had wounded her were those whom in all the world she loved most dear; and the quivering of anguish was in her as she walked, seeking the darkness and the silence, and to hide herself, if that might be, from her own thoughts. She went along the lonely path with the stinging of her wounds so keen and sharp that all her body and soul were as one pain. Greater grief hath no man than this, to be slain and tortured by those whom he loves. When her soul could speak, this was what it said 'Father, forgive them! Father, save them!' She had no strength for more.

This the heavenly pilgrims saw,—for they stood by her as in their own country, where every thought is clear, and saw her heart. But as they followed her and looked into her soul—with their hearts, which were human too, wrung at the sight of hers in its anguish—there suddenly became visible before them a strange sight such as they had never seen before. It was like the rising of the sun; but it was not the sun. Suddenly into the heart upon which they looked there came a great silence and calm. There was nothing said that even they could hear, nor done that they could see; but for a moment the throbbing was stilled, and the anguish calmed, and there came a great peace. The woman in whom this wonder was wrought was astonished, as

they were. She gave a low cry in the darkness for wonder that the pain had gone from her in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye. There was no promise made to her that her prayer would be granted, and no new light given to guide her for the time to come; but her pain was taken away. She stood hushed, and lifted her eyes; and the gray of the sea, and the low cloud that was like a canopy above, and the lightening of colorless light towards the west, entered with their great quiet into her heart. 'Is this the peace that passeth all understanding?' she said to herself, confused with the sudden calm. In all her life it had never so happened to her before,—to be healed of her grievous wounds, yet without cause; and while no change was wrought, yet to be put to rest.

'It is our Brother,' said the little Pilgrim, shedding tears of joy. 'It is the secret of the Lord,' said the Sage; but not even they had seen Him passing by.

They walked with her softly in the silence, in the sound of the sea, till the wonder in her was hushed like the pain, and talked with her, though she knew it not. For very soon questions arose in her heart. 'And oh,' she said, 'is this the Lord's reply?' with thankfulness and awe; but because she was human, and knew so little, and was full of impatience, 'Oh, and is this *all*?' was what she next said. 'I asked for *them*, and Thou hast given to *me*—' then the voice of her heart grew louder, and she cried, with the sound of the pain coming back, 'I ask one thing, and Thou givest another. I asked no blessing for me. I asked for them, my Lord, my God. Give it to them—to them!' with disappointment rising in her heart. The little Pilgrim laid her hand upon the woman's arm,—for she was afraid lest our Lord

might be displeased, forgetting (for she was still imperfect) that He sees all that is in the soul, and understands and takes no offence,—and said quickly, 'Oh, be not afraid; He will save them too. The blessing will come for them too.'

'At His own time,' said the Sage, 'and in His own way.'

These thoughts rose in the woman's soul. She did not know that they were said to her, nor who said them, but accepted them as if they had come from her own thoughts. For she said to herself, 'This is what is meant by the answer of prayer. It is not what we ask; yet what I ask is according to Thy will, my Lord. It is not riches, nor honors, nor beauty, nor health, nor long life, nor anything of this world. If I have been impatient, this is my punishment,—that the Lord has thought, not of them, but of me. But I can bear all, O my Lord! that and a thousand times more, if Thou wilt but think of them and not of me!'

Nevertheless she returned to her home stilled and comforted; for though her trouble returned to her and was not changed, yet for a moment it had been lifted from her, and the peace which passeth all understanding had entered her heart.

'But why, then,' said the little Pilgrim to her companion, when the friend was gone, 'why will not the Father give to her what she asks? for I know what it is. It is that those whom she loves should love Him and serve Him; and that is His will too, for He would have all love Him, He who loves all.'

'Little sister,' said her companion, 'you asked me why He did not let the child remain upon the earth.'

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