

# MICHAEL O'HALLORAN

By Gene Stratton-Porter

**SYNOPSIS**  
Mickey O'Halloran is a newsboy who finds and educates a little girl, Lily Peaches. His life at once becomes a struggle to supply the comforts of life to the little girl.

Mickey, while on a trip in the country some poor girl from the city for two weeks and Mickey, in return, promises to take Lily Peaches to the farm. Mickey is engaged to marry a girl who lives in a cabin with her father and Bruce they move out of the city for the summer.

(Continued from Yesterday.)  
"You've not heard from her since that note," he asked. "You don't know where she is?"  
"No," said Leslie. "I haven't an idea where you could find her; but because of her lawyer superintending the hospital repairs, because of the wonderful way things are being done, Daddy thinks it's sure that the work is in John Haynes' hands, and that she is directing it through him."

"If it were not for the war, I would know," said Mr. Minturn. "But understanding her as I do—"  
"I think instead of understanding her so well, you scarcely know her at all," said Leslie gently. "You may have had a few months of her real nature to begin with, but when her rearing and environment ruled her life, the real woman was either perverted or had small chance. Do you ever stop to think what kind of a man you might have had if your life you had been forced and influenced as Nellie was?"

"Good Lord!" cried Mr. Minturn. "Exactly," agreed Leslie. "That's what I'm telling you." She had got to the realization of the fact that her life had been husks and ashes; so she went to beg you to help her in a way, but when she saw that you were not saying it was your fault; I'm not saying I blame you; I'm merely stating facts."

"Margaret blames me!" said Mr. Minturn. "She thinks I'm enough at fault that I never can find happiness until I locate Nellie and learn whether she is with her mother and friends, or if she really means what she said about changing, enough to go ahead and be different from principle."

"Her change was radical and permanent."  
"I've got to know," said Mr. Minturn. "But I've no faith in her ability to change, and no desire to meet her if she has."

"Impossible," he cried.  
"Go find her," said Leslie. "You must to regain peace for yourself."

James Minturn returned a troubled man, but with viewpoint shifting so imperceptibly he did not realize what was happening. On his way he decided to visit the hospital, repugnant as the thought was to him. From afar he was amazed at sight of the building. He knew instantly that it must have been the leading topic of conversation among his friends purposely avoided in his presence. Marble pillars and decorations had been freshly cleaned, the building was snowdrift white; it shone through the branches of big trees surrounding it like a fairy palace. At the top of the steps leading to the entrance stood a marble group of heroic proportions that was wonderful. It was a seated figure of Christ, but cut with the face of a man of his station, occupation, and race, garbed in simple robe, and in his arms, at his knees, leaning against him, a group of children: the lean, sick and ailing, such as were carried to him for healing. Cut in the wall above it in large gold-filled letters was the admonition: "Suffer little children to come unto me."

That group was the work of a student and a thinker who could carry an idea to a logical conclusion, and then carve it from marble. The thought it gave James Minturn, arrested before it, was not the stereotyped idea of Christ, not the conventional reproduction of childhood. It impressed

ed Mr. Minturn's brain that the man of Galilee had lived in the form of other men of his day, and that such a face, filled with infinite compassion, was much stronger and more forceful than that of the mild feminine countenance he had been accustomed to associating with the Saviour.

He entered the door to find his former home filled with workmen, and the opening day almost at hand. Everywhere was sanitary whiteness. The reception hall was ready for guests, his library occupied by the matron; the dining-hall a storeroom, the second and third floors in separate wards, save the big ballroom, now whiter than ever, its touches of gold freshly cleaning, beautiful flowers in tubs, canaries singing in a brass house filling one end of the room, tiny chairs, coats, every conceivable form of comfort and amusement for convalescing little children. The pipe organ remained in place, music boxes and wonderful mechanical toys had been added, rugs that had been in the house were spread on the floor. No normal man could study and interpret the intention of that place unperpet. All over the building was the same beautiful whiteness, the same comfort, and thoughtful preparation for the purpose it was designed to fill. The operating rooms were perfect, the whole the result of loving thought, careful execution, and uncounted expense.

He came in time to the locked door of his wife's suite, and before he left the building he met her lawyer. He offered his hand and said heartily: "My sister told me of the wonderful work going on here; she advised me to come and see for myself. I am very glad I did. There's something bigger than the usual idea in this that keeps obtruding itself."

"I think that too," agreed John Haynes. "I've almost quit my practice to work out these plans, by any chance?"  
"They are my wife's, by any chance?"  
"All hers," said Mr. Haynes. "I

only carry out her instructions as they come to me."  
"Will you give me her address?" asked Mr. Minturn. "I should like to tell her how great I think this is."  
"I'll carry a packet for you that came with a bundle of plans this morning," said Mr. Haynes. "Perhaps her address is in it. If it isn't I can't give it to you, because I haven't it myself. She's not in the city, all her instructions she sends some one, possibly at her mother's home, and they are delivered to me. I give my communications to the boy who brings her orders."  
"Then I'll write my note and give it to him."  
"I'm sorry Minturn," said Mr. Haynes, "but I have my orders in the event you should wish to reach her through me."  
"She doesn't wish to hear from me?"  
"I'm sorry no end, Mr. Minturn, but—"  
"Possibly this contains what I want to know," said Mr. Minturn. "Thank you, and I congratulate you on your work here. It is humane in the finest degree."

James Minturn went to his office and opened the packet. It was a complete accounting of every dollar his wife was worth, this divided exactly into thirds, one of which she kept, one she transferred to him, and the other she placed in his care for her sons to be equally divided between them at his discretion. He returned and found the lawyer had gone to his office. He followed and showed him the documents.

"What she places to my credit for our sons, that I will handle with the utmost care," he said. "What she puts at my personal disposal I do not accept. We are living comfortably, and as expensively as I desire to. There is no reason why I should take such a sum at her hands, even though she has more than I would have estimated. You will kindly re-

turn this deed of transfer to her, with my thanks, and a note I will enclose."  
"Sorry Minturn, but as I told you before, I haven't her address. I'm working on a salary I should dislike to forfeit, and my orders are distinct concerning you."  
"You could give me no idea where to find her?"  
"Not the slightest," said the lawyer. "Will you take charge of these papers?" he questioned.  
"I dare not," replied Mr. Haynes. "Sorry Minturn, but perhaps if you should see my instructions in the case, you'd understand better. I don't wish you to think me disoblige."  
Mr. Minturn took the sheet and read the indicated paragraph written in his wife's clear hand.

"Leslie Winton was very good to me my last day in Multipolis. She was with me when I reached a decision concerning my future relations with Mr. Minturn, and I am quite sure when she knows of our separation she will feel that it would not have occurred had James known of this decision of mine. It would have made no difference; but I am convinced Leslie will think it would, and that she will go to James about it. I doubt if it will change his attitude but if by any possibility it should, and if in any event whatever he comes to you seeking my address, or me, I depend on you to in no way help him. If it should happen that you could, for this reason I am keeping it out of your power, unless I make some mistake that points to where I am. I don't wish to make any mystery of my location, or to disregard my intention that it is barely possible Leslie could bring Mr. Minturn to, concerning me. I merely wish to be left alone for a time; to work out my own expiation. If there be any; and to test my soul until I know for myself whether it is possible for a social leopard to change her spots. I have got to know absolutely that I am beyond question a woman fit to be a wife and mother, before I again trust myself in any relation of life toward any one."  
Mr. Minturn returned the sheet, his face deeply thoughtful. "I see her point," he said. "I will deposit the papers in a safety vault until she comes, and in accordance with this, I shall make no effort to find her. My wife feels that she must work out her own salvation, and I am beginning to realize that a thorough self-investigation and revelation will not hurt me. Thank you. Good morning."

CHAPTER XV.  
A Particular Nix.  
Peaches awakened early the following morning, but Mickey was watching beside her to help her remember, to prompt, to soothe, to comfort and to teach. He followed Mrs. Harding to the kitchen and from the prepared food selected what he thought came closest filling the diet prescribed by the Sunshine Nurse, and then he carried the tray to a fresh, cool Peaches beside a window opening on a grassy, tree-covered lawn. Her room was bewildering on account of its many, and to the child, magnificent furnishings. She found herself stretching, twisting and filled with a wild desire to walk, to see the house, the little girl and the real baby, the lawn beyond her window, the flower-bed, the red berries where they grew, and the birds and animals from which came the most amazing sounds.

After doing everything for Peaches he could, Mickey went to his breakfast. Mary Harding and Bobbie were so anxious to see the visitor they could scarcely eat. Knowing it was no use to try forcing them, their mother excused them and they ventured as far as the door. There they stopped, gazing at the little stranger, while she stared back at them; but she was not frightened, because she knew who they were and that they would be good to her, else Mickey would not let her come. So when Mary, holding little brother's hand, came peeping around the door-casing, Peaches withdrew her attention from exploration of the strip of lawn in her range and concentrated on them. If they had come bounding at her, she would have been frightened, but they did not. They stood still, half afraid, watching the tiny white creature, till suddenly she smiled at them and held out her hand.

"I like you," she said. "Did you have red berries for breakfast?"  
Mary nodded and smiled back.  
"I think you're a pretty little girl," said Peaches.  
"I ain't half as pretty as you," said Mary.  
"No—course you ain't," she admitted. "Your family don't put your ribbon on you 'til night, do they?"  
Peaches put mine on this morning 'cause I have to look nice and be just as good, else I have to be took back to the hot room. Do you have to be nice, too?"  
"Yes, I have to be a good girl, said Mary.  
"What does your family do to you if you don't mind?"  
"I ain't going to tell, but it makes me sad," said Peaches. "What does yours do to you?"  
"I ain't going to tell either," said Peaches. "But I get jus' as good: 'What's your name?'"  
"Mary."  
"What's his?"  
"Bobbie. Mostly we call him little brother. Ain't he sweet?" asked Peaches.  
"Jus' a Precious Child! Let him mark on my slate!"  
Mickey hurried to the room. As he neared the door he stepped softly and peeped inside. It was a problem with him as to how far Mary and Bobbie could be trusted. Having been with Peaches every day he could not accurately mark improvements, but he could see that her bones did not protrude so far, that her skin was not the yellow, glisteny horror it had been, that the calloused spots were going under the steady rubbing of the nightly oil massage, so lately he had added the same treatment to her feet; if they were not less bony, if the skin were not soft and taking on a pinkish colour, Mickey felt that his eyes were unreliable.

Surely she was better! Of course she was better! She had to be! She ate more, she sat up longer, she moved her feet where that they had hung helpless. She was better, much better, and for that special reason, now was the time to watch closer than before. Now he must make sure that a big strong child did not drag her from the bed, and forever undo all he had gained. Since he had

written Dr. Carrel, Mickey had rubbed in desperation, lest he had asked help before he was ready for it; for the Sunshine Lady had said explicitly that the sick back could not be operated until the child was stronger. He was working according to instructions.

Mickey watched. Any one could have seen the delicate flush on Peaches' cheek that morning, the hint of red on her lips, the clearing whites of her lovely eyes. She was helping Bobbie as Mickey had taught her. And Bobbie approved mightily. He lifted his face, put up his arms and issued his command: "Take Bobbie!"  
"No! No, Bobbie," cautioned Mary. "Mother said no! You must stay on the floor! Sister will take you. You mustn't touch Peaches 'til God makes her well. You asked Him last night, don't you know? Mother will spank something awful if you touch her. You must be careful 'til her back is well, mother said so, and father too; father said it crosses that mother, don't you remember?"  
"Mustn't touch!" repeated Bobbie, drawing back.

Mickey was satisfied with Mrs. Harding's instructions, but he took the opportunity to emphasize a few points himself. He even slipped one white, bony foot from under the sheet, and showed Mary how sick it was, and how carefully it must be rubbed before it would walk.

"I can rub it," announced Mary. "Well don't you try that," cautioned Mickey.  
"Why go on and let her!" interposed Peaches. "Go on and let her! After today you said you'd be gone all day, an' if rubbing in the morning and evening is good, maybe more would make me walk sooner. Mickey I ain't ever said it, 'cause you do so much an' try so hard, but Mickey, I'm just about dead to walk! Mickey, I'm so tired being lifted, I want to, like other folks!"  
"Well, that's the first time you ever said that."

(Continued in the Morning Bee.)  
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