

Christmas Offerings.
We come not with a costly store,
O Lord! like them of old,
The masters of the stately lore,
From Ophir's shore of gold.
No weavings of the incense tree
Are with the gifts we bring;
No odorous myrrh of Araby
Blends with our offering.
But faith and love may bring their best,
A spirit keenly tried
By fierce affliction's fiery test,
And seven times purified:
The fragrant graces of the mind,
The virtues that delight
To give their perfume out, will find
Acceptance in thy sight.
—Foster's Cyclopaedia.

Selected Serial.
MARGIE'S MISSION.

BY MARIE OLIVER.
Author of "Ruby Hae Hoon," "Old and New Friends," "Saba's Discipline," etc., etc.

CHAPTER V.—Continued.

While speaking, Lois's face had undergone a complete change. The vivid color had crept into her cheeks. Her eyes sparkled with eagerness, and her voice trembled with the old tenderness Ruth remembered so well. She repeated the words again:
"Think of it, Ruth! Music, art, dress, society, travel! Everything heart can wish." Then she waited.
Y-s; Ruth was thinking of it. Her imaginative mind swept the broad Atlantic to a far-off shore, where she saw the doors to the halls of knowledge open wide to admit her. Every unkind word Lois had uttered within the last five minutes, was blotted out by this unlooked-for proof of her affection. But she hesitated. She looked first at uncle Toby's cottage just peeping through the trees, then up at the big house Lois called "home," then at Lois herself. Then she spoke.
"And to win the blessings I have so often coveted, I must deny my Master," she said.
Lois shrugged her shoulders uneasily.
"Why, of course not," she returned. "Do I deny that there is a God? You may read your Bible and pray as much as you like, if you'll do it when I'm not round. But if I'm a part of the world (and I mean to be while I live), I shall expect you to be also. I can't have that sober face about me all the time. But in return for your society, friendship and affection, you shall share equally with me in all papa sees fit to give. Come, Ruth dear, don't say no. Remember it is an offer you won't get every day. I was coming over this very night to see you about it. My unkind words of a moment ago were only to try you. Of course we must always be friends. We always have been, always must be. So think well, Ruth."

"I have thought, Lois," Ruth spoke with an effort. "I fully realize what I am losing in declining your generous offer; but if its acceptance forbids me remaining true to the vows I have so lately taken on me, I must put it away from me. You little know the struggle it costs me, for though I have no special talent like you, I have always desired an education. But, Lois, the Master I have promised to love and serve, I cannot be false to. And besides, I have ties binding me to Maplewood which you have not. I cannot leave my brother and sisters, much as my heart cries out for a share of those things which have fallen to your lot. I came this afternoon to ask for a little of the love you once had for me, and to learn the cause of your estrangement. If it is because I am a Christian, our paths in life must separate, unless you will become one too. No, Lois, don't urge me. Believe me, I appreciate your great kindness, but I cannot accept on the conditions named. It would be wicked."

"Esaun sold his birthright for a mess of pottage," said Lois with a laugh, "but I find you are not as greedy. Well, I hadn't much faith my offer would be accepted, but I thought I'd try. Now I shall have to ask Nora Waite. Catch her letting an opportunity like this slip. She isn't a goose like you. O, Ruth! I wish you'd say yes. I cannot, will

not go without you. It has been the dream of my life."

Lois was crying now. All her pride and coldness was forgotten, and she lay sobbing in the arms open to receive her. With the knowledge that she was soon to leave the friend of her youth, had come an overwhelming sense of her nearness, to her gay heart. She recalled her gentleness, her strict integrity, her lofty purposes, and her pure life, and she made one more effort to gain her own way. But Ruth was firm. She kissed Lois. She soothed her. She lavished all the old endearing names on her, but her heart instead of going out to her friend, clung the closer to the dear ones in Maplewood.

Lois stopped crying at last. Chagrin and indignation conquered affection. Angriily pushing Ruth away, she gathered up her garden tools.

"I'm foolish to plead with one so stubborn," she said. I have had my labor for my pains, and I'll spare myself further mortification. Good-by, Ruth! I'm sorry I asked you, but I meant well."

She turned without a look at the sorrowful face beside her, and walked away toward the house. Ruth heard the hall door open and shut, then in a moment more the sound of a piano. Lois was burying her disappointment in music. For Ruth there was no such solace. But she carried all her sorrows to the Mercy Seat, and waited till the Burden rolled away. Well, it was all over between her friend Lois and herself. All their little confidences and exchange of girlish hopes had come to an end. God's providence had interfered and marked out separate paths for the two who were once all in all to each other. She would probably never know why Lois had sinned so deeply against her, for she was going away, while Ruth was to remain in Maplewood. But she would not suffer her mind to dwell on what had been; and though she continued to go in and out of the little cottage, it was months before either uncle Toby or aunt Kizzie learned the story of Ruth's self denial.

CHAPTER VI.
STONES AND STUBBLE.

Each life its mission here fulfills,
And only He may know the end,
And loving Him we may be strong
Though storm or sunshine He may send.
—M. D. Brine.

Uncle Toby, I should think you would get tired of doing the same things over and over, night after night."

Margie was helping uncle Toby with his evening chores. She had been out to the barn with him to give the hungry chickens their evening meal; had waited patiently while he fed and milked Brown Bess, and now stood by the old-fashioned well watching him lower the bucket over its moss-grown sides.

Margie loved to hear the funny little splash it made when it struck the water, and to see the strong iron hook push it deeper and deeper till great bubbles closed over the top, and the pole shivered and creaked under the unusual weight. She loved to hear the drip, drip, as the little streams ran through the seams of the bucket, and fell back again into the well, as though unwilling to leave their cool, damp home; but to-night she seemed thinking of something else as she stood with her eyes fixed intently on uncle Toby's warm face which he wiped every now and then with his red bandana handkerchief. As she uttered the remark, she drew closer to him, as if in sympathy, saying:

"You are tired, aren't you, uncle Toby?"

"Well," answered the good old man, as he emptied the bucket into the yellow pail at his feet, "you see the weather is warm—beats all what a hot August we are having—and I'm not as young as I used to be. But I don't know as I get tired doing what the Lord has seen fit to give me. We all have a mission, and it mine is weaving baskets, drawing water and tending cattle, instead of riding in my carriage. I don't know as I ought to complain."

"What is a mission, uncle Toby?" asked Margie.

Uncle Toby hesitated. He put down his pail of water. "I don't know as I can give you just the definition found in the dictionary," he said. "My education isn't the best that ever was, but maybe I can explain it so you will understand. The Lord has given a mission to every man he has put into the world; that is, he has given him a certain work to do. Christ had a mission. His was to save souls. Now if a person finds he has one talent more than his neighbor, it is his duty to improve it as much as he can, and fulfil his mission to the best of his ability. I don't know as I've made it very plain to you, Margie, for I'm not much good at such things. You had better ask Ruth. She'll tell you all about it."

"I think I understand it, uncle Toby," Margie had dropped on the grass under the apple-tree, and was slowly pulling a few of the white violets growing there. A robin flew out from the branches above her head, singing a song as he went. Margie watched him out of sight. "Even that bird has a mission," she said thoughtfully. "I wonder if I have one, uncle Toby? I can't sing like the robin, or draw water and tend cattle like you."

"No," said uncle Toby, "you can't do any of those things."

"Well, what can I do?" Margie looked up with a wistful expression on her face. "I don't seem to be good for anything but to go to school, come home and eat my supper, and go to bed. That wouldn't be called a mission, would it?"

"I don't see why not," Uncle Toby picked up his pail again. "You are doing the best you can in your little sphere. Maybe the Lord will give you other work before long."

Margie stretched herself in the shade of the apple-tree, where she lay watching uncle Toby going up the path to the house, a yellow pail in each hand, and the rim of his straw hat beading and nodding under his unsteady movements. A moment more and he had disappeared within the old porch, leaving Margie to find a new object to look at.

The setting sun threw queer lights over the little garden. The pine grove on the hill looked dark and gloomy. The shadows under the apple-tree grew longer and deeper. The birds had gone to their nests. Here and there a stray chicken walked sleepily about, and the light in the little kitchen warned Margie it was time for her to go in.

She got up slowly, her mind too much occupied with her new thoughts to pay attention to the mist and dampness. Ruth did not know what had come over the child that night, she seemed so quiet. Was she sick? No. Was she tired? A little. Well, she must have studied too hard. If she would sit in her lap she would rock her a little while before she went to bed. To be sure she was getting a pretty big girl, but Ruth hoped to be able to rock her for many years to come.

Margie was never known to refuse sister Ruth's sympathy, and pushing the big arm-chair up to the western window, waited till Ruth had seated herself, when she climbed into her lap. Mildred drew a cricket to Ruth's feet, and Ruth rocked and talked, and talked and rocked, looking away with thoughtful eyes in the direction of Lois's home. How still and gloomy the great house looked, with the blinds tightly closed and the hall door closely barricaded. The flowers in the garden blossomed at their own sweet will, and in some beds the weeds were as tall as the flowers.

As Lois said, Nora had not refused the opportunity offered her, and the two had gone away from Maplewood in the best of spirits, looking wonderfully pretty in their neat travelling suits and becoming hats. Ruth had never heard from them, but she often pictured their new school life, and in thinking of that, fell to wondering if the old pleasant days when she and Lois were all in all to each other, would ever come again. Ah! but Lois was many thousands miles away, while she sat in uncle Toby's cottage, rocking Margie, with Mildred at her knee.

A night's rest made Margie Morton forget about her anxiety to find out

her mission in this great world, but her Heavenly Father did not forget; and much to her surprise and Ruth's pain, the coveted work came to her before she was ready.

Uncle Toby had been in a brown study for several days. Something seemed to trouble him. Aunt Kizzie fancied he had taken cold; and for several nights insisted on his drinking a generous supply of boneset tea before going to bed, greatly to his disgust, as he never could endure boneset. But aunt Kizzie's favorite medicine failed to revive his drooping spirits, and at last she went to Ruth in meek despair, declaring she "couldn't see for the life of her what ailed father. He was sick and yet he wasn't. Any way, he wouldn't dose, and she was struck all in a heap."

Ruth felt confident that uncle Toby needed sympathy more than medicine; so she followed him one night into the little sitting-room where he had gone to rest awhile before commencing his evening chores and dropping on a cricket at his feet, clasped her fingers over the wrinkled hand lying on his knee.

To be continued.

Christmas Morning.
"Christmas times has come again,
Christmas pleasures bringing,
Let us join our voices now,
Christmas songs be singing."

At Christmas-tide, if any one should be happy, it should be the children, down upon whom the dear Saviour ever looks lovingly, but most of all on this glad day, I imagine, does the Christ-child's blessing come into the hearts of those who love Him, filling them with a peculiar happiness, and making Christmas Day especially to be remembered among all the days of the year. I love to see the children happy at Christmas tide, but I want them to know the meaning of the holiday and the gifts.

I want the grown-up readers of the *Youth's Visitor* to do all in their power to make not only the children in their own homes happy on that day and join in their innocent mirth, but may they carry the Christmas blessing to those who know little or nothing about it. Greet the little ones with a bright face and a "Merry Christmas." Do not think such things childish. Remember that ere Christmas comes again some little form may be missing, and some sweet voice hushed forever on earth. Margaret Fuller Ossoli, in a letter written the last Christmas of her life, after describing the delight of her child over some beautiful toys sent him that morning, says: "You would laugh to know how much remorse I feel that I never gave children more toys in the course of my life. I regret all the money I ever spent on myself or in little presents for grown people, hardened sinners. I did not know what pure delight could be bestowed."

Little Susie toddling in reminds me of a sweet-faced, golden-haired little girl, who last Christmas was almost beside herself with joy over her Christmas tree. After it was lighted up in the evening she entertained her friends with such music as they will never forget. Although only five years old she had a beautiful voice. In less than two months after, her voice was hushed on earth, and Christmas comes this year to a home from which it seems as if the light had gone out, for she was the only child.

Her precious life went out in singing. A short time before she died she sang tremblingly, for she was very weak, the first verse of "Jesus Loves Me," and in a few minutes was with Jesus, who loves the little ones.

My dear reader, love this Saviour, whose coming we celebrate on Christmas Day, and you need not fear should you be summoned instantly to meet Him, but may enter into His presence with sniging.

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