IDLE WORDS.

O idle words!
Why will ye never die,
But float forever in the sky,
Dimming the stars that shine in memory,
Destroying hope and causing love from earth to flee.
Ill-omened birds.

O idle words!
Preying upon the heart,
Leaving with wounds a deadly smart;
Expiring breath that taints the very air,
Will ye forever leave your victims to despair?
Ill-omened birds.

O idle words!
How many are the tears
That ye have caused to flow; the fears
Ye have begot and made to mountains grow,
Crushing the innocent beneath a weight of woe,
Ill-omened birds.

O idle words!
Your flight is ever on,
In heaven darkening the sun;
By weary journeys without delay,
To wend your dreary way unto the judgment-day,
Ill-omened birds.

—Every Other Saturday.

MIRIAM DOUGLAS.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, sir, but the lock on your satchel is broken, making things unsafe, besides being a very shabby old bag, sir, begging your pardon." So quoth Eliza, relict of Josiah Nims, the sexton, to her lodger, the Rev. Julius Byron.

"What a bore exclaimed this gentleman, "When I really haven't the time to attend to anything except these letters."

"I have an errand which takes me past Piper and Tipson's; I could buy you a new satchel, if you would trust me. Going among all these fine people at the wedding with your lock tied up with a bit of string wouldn't do at all, sir."

"Thank you, Mrs. Nims; I have great trust in your judgment, and should be obliged if you would attend to this matter for me, and save me going into town."

As the door closed after his landlady, the Rev. Julius Byron resumed his writing with a sigh of relief. As he sat leaning his head on his disengaged hand—a hand beautiful enough to atone for plainness in all other features had Nature willed him to be plain—Julius Byron was an ideal picture of a student—brown eyes with a fairy, dreamy look, hair long enough to show a tendency to wave loosely back from his forehead, and a pale, clear complexion, set off by a golden brown velveteen coat, which he wore when in his study. Twenty-nine years old, undeniably handsome, gifted with winning manners, and shepherd of a flock most willing to be guided, Julius Byron, as if by a miracle, had escaped being spoiled and petted into effeminacy. His safeguard lay, perhaps, in a pair of soft eyes which had held him spellbound for a few rapturous weeks, and the witchery of which had lasted over three years of almost total separation.

Miriam Douglas, dispensing tea and gingerbread to a horde of charity-children in the park at Mount Edgecombe, was one of the prettiest and dantiest of modern Hebes, in a muslin dress in color matching forget-me-nots and her eyes equally well, and with roses at her waist and throat which stole their delicate tint from her cheeks. Miriam was seventeen that day, and the blue muslin was her first long dress; to this the lassie paid far more attention than to the admiring gaze of two dreamy brown eyes. After the feast there were offerings of flowers, good wishes and rather too many kisses and embraces from the charity-children, and among her other trophies Miriam Douglas carried away the heart of the Rev. Julius Byron. Had she known this it would have affected her less than the consciousness that the Barclay girls, her former playmates, were curiously admiring the grown-up womanish arrangement of her bright silky hair.

There were a few tennis parties and five o'clock teas after this, during which Mr. Byron worshiped this divinity from afar. She seemed a little in awe of him, and rarely spoke to him more than five minutes at a time. What a delightful task it would be to chase away the timidity from the soft, fawn-like eyes, and how pleasant to think that the sea-shell pink stole to her cheeks from joy at his approach.

Fate, however, cruelly interfered with Mr. Byron's dream of awakening loving confidence in the bosom of this bashful maiden of seventeen. In three short weeks, before he had made any perceptible headway, Miriam was summoned to the bedside of a dying relative, and Julius Byron was called to a parish in a commercial town.

Three long years this idyl had been in the past; and through all this time the memory of Miriam Douglas excluded any other love from the young clergyman's heart, though many were the goddesses willing to be therein enshrined.

He wondered at himself; she had slipped completely out of his material existence; he knew not where she was, or if she was dead, or worse—married. Still, with all this uncertainty, he could not forget her, and a voice within him seemed to whisper that they should meet again.

The rapid skimming of his pen over the white page was stayed for the second time by a heavy footstep at the door outside; and Mrs. Nims, panting and crimson from the ascent of the stairs, exclaimed—

"There, sir; you could not have found a better or cheaper satchel yourself, if you had searched the town from end to end. Piper and Tipson say on their oath that it is a first-rate one and you needn't fear exchanging with any one by mistake, for they had only one of the kind. This decided me to take it, for being rather an absent-minded gentleman, you might easily pick up the wrong bag."

"Thank you, Mrs. Nims, thank you; each time that you do anything for me you give me fresh cause to admire your clever management and forethought.

In the wedding to take place on the following day, Mr. Byron felt no particular interest. The contracting parties were almost strangers to him, as were also the guests, with the exception of Willis Howard, a school-chum of days gone by, and a friend ever since of the young clergyman.

Owing to the illness of the bride's mother, the ceremony was performed at home. It was a pretty wedding, the bride graceful, sweet and pale as a lily in her sheeny fleecy drapery; and among the guests was the subdued merriment which prevails when the entertainers exhibit unreservedly the signs of joy and sorrow—the smile and tear both coming from the heart.

After the ceremony, Mr. Byron betook himself to a dressing-room to fold his surplice and replace it in the satchel chosen by Mrs. Nims. While so engaged a letter was handed to him with the word "Immediate" written conspicuously on the envelope. The contents were as follows:

"Marlow Hall, Thursday, 18th.

"If the Reverend Julius Byron could find it convenient to officiate at a private baptism this afternoon at Marlow Hall, he would confer a great favor on the undersigned. Mr. Byron is requested to pardon the apparent brusquerie of this notice, as the case is urgent. The two p. m. train stops at Portland station, where a carriage will be in waiting.

Stanfield Marlow."

"You will go, I suppose?" said Willis Howard, to whom Mr. Byron presently showed his note.

"Of course; one cannot refuse such a summons. It is probably a question of life or death."

"I am due at Uxmore to-night—rather a different errand from yours—a masquerade party. I'm sorry we are not traveling in the same direction."

"I am sorry also. Do you know anything of the people at Marlow Hall, Howard?"

"Never heard of them before. Are they strangers to you?"

"Entirely so."

"Now good-bye, old fellow; my traps are all stowed away on the train, and I had better follow them. Take care of yourself among those mysterious strangers."

In the bustle and confusion at the station Mr. Byron's satchel was mislaid; but he presently caught sight of the familar object on a distant table, and felt inwardly thankful for its ungainly proportions and the huge brass diamond which made it easily recognized.

At Portland a respectably-dressed man in charge of a wagonette came forward to meet Mr. Byron; and during the drive to the Hall the former discoursed freely upon the existing state of affairs there. A son and heir to the fine estate had arrived, and there had been great rejoicing; but within the twenty-four hours their joy had been turned to mourning by a dispatch summoning the newly-made father to the death-bed of his only sister in Germany. The young mother seemed to feel a presentiment of misfortune, and she had insisted upon baby's being baptized before the departure of its father. The clergyman of the parish was temporarily absent; hence Mr. Byron's hasty summons. The ceremony would be performed in the chapel connected with the Hall, and would be very quiet, being witnessed only by the father and grandfather of the child, with possibly one or two guests.

After lunching in a somber richly decorated dining hall Mr. Byron was shown to a bed-room, with the intimation that his services in the chapel would be required in an hour if convenient to him.

There was something strange and interesting about the fine old mansion, so lately a scene of rejoicing, and now silent as an empty church. No members of the family were visible, and the great house seemed deserted, save for a few silent-footed servants.

As the time for the baptism drew near Mr. Byron asked to be conducted to the vestry-room. To make sure that everything was in readiness he opened his satchel, when, to his consternation, instead of drawing forth a neatly-folded surplice he held up before his astonished gaze a doublet and hose of scarlet and gray satin, such as might be seen on the stage in "As You Like It."

Alas for the veracity of Messrs, Piper and Tipson and the credulity of the worthy Mrs. Nims! The so-called unique bag had so many duplicates, and Mr. Willis Howard had happened to take that very morning in which to stow away his fancy ball costume.

Here was a predicament indeed for the Reverend Julius Byron! In desperation he flew to the wardrobe in the vestry room. Vain hope! Not a shred of the other clergyman's vestments hung there. What was to be done? Even if in extreme cases the church rules permitted the clergy to officiate without robes in the sacred edifice—and for the moment Mr. Byron was too bewildered whether this would be permissible or not—how could he explain the annoying mistake to these strangers? They, already so troubled, would think him an untrustworthy, careless trifler.

In his perplexity he rang for the man who had already waited on him.

"Is there a lady in the house with whom I could speak a few moments?" Mr. Byron asked.

"My mistress' cousin is here; but she does not leave the invalid's rooms for anything just at present."

"Then I'll write my message in a note."

He stated the case as clearly as he could on paper, and dispatched the servant with it. In answer the lady sent her maid to inquire if search had been made everywhere in the vestry-room for a surplice. He sent back that further search was useless.

After some moments of—to him—terrible suspense—for the time was almost come for him to appear in the chapel—the maid returned, and with deep blushes and a nervous twitching of her apron-hem began—

"My young lady told me to tell you, sir, that if you would not think it any harm, she would send you her—— Oh, no, I don't mean that, sir! She said I was not to say who it belonged to, but she would cut the bands off the sleeves and the lace from the neck, and it would be long, and nobody would notice that it was a nightgown, sir; and, if you don't mind, sir, I would go and fetch it at once, for there is no time to lose."

The girls concluding words were only too true; and however much he might have hesitated at her suggestion in cooler moments, he was thankful now for any solution of the difficulty.

"Tell your mistress that I shall be very grateful for the loan she proposes, if she thinks the deception will not be discovered."

The servant vanished and was soon on the spot again with a snowy linen night-gown. The neck at the back had been torn down to admit broader shoulders, and a linen handkercheif had been hastily stitched in to hide the rent. Most of the ornamentation had been cut away; but enough remained to prove that the garment belonged to a lady of very dainty tastes.

Thankful for this semblance of a surplice, and too hurried to feel amusement, Mr. Byron arrayed himself, entered the chancel, and the service began at once. He observed, with a sigh of thankfulness that the chapel was very dark; and this enabled him to read without much nervousness. Two gentlemen came forward with the baby and its nurse, and for a brief time during the service the young clergyman saw indistinctly the slender figure of a lady standing in the dimly-lighted aisle. Before the end of ceremony her feelings seemed to overcome her, for she left the church stifling what might have been a sob, but which sounded strangely like a laugh.

What Mr. Byron feared would be a trying ordeal was soon over, and he reentered the vestry room with a much lighter heart then when he left it. While disrobing, a name in indelible ink on the gown attracted his attention. Perhaps he should have respected his fair benefactress' wish to remain unknown; but the temptation was too strong. He turned to the light and read the name—"Miriam Douglas"—under the tucks and embroidery of the robe which he had just discarded.

Was it a coincidence, or had a kind fate led him to the shrine of his idol? The uncertainty was not to be borne.

"Will you ask Miss Douglas if she can grant me five minutes' interview before I go?" he said to the girl who came, in great trepidation, for the novel surplice.

In a cosy little reception room Julius Byron was presently received by her who had been the companion of his happiest dreams during more than three years. The blushing bashfulness had vanished, leaving in its stead a graceful womanly dignity. She was a sweeter, fairer Miriam even than of old, "divinely tall and most divinely fair."

"Oh, Mr. Byron, how horrified you must be! You signed initials only to your note; and I little suspected to whom I was offering that garment. I recognized you at once in church, and, in spite of the solemnity of the occasion, I had to laugh. It was such an uncommonly bad fit!"

"It was a great boon to me, and I shall be everlastingly grateful to you for coming to the rescue."

A sudden indifference as to the hours of departing trains seemed to take possession of Mr. Byron, and he found himself with a certain amount of equanimity accepting an invitation to spend the night at the Hall.

At the conclusion of her visit to her cousin, Mrs. Marlow, Miriam betook herself to the house of a friend, who extended many informal invitations to Mr. Byron as well.

One soft fragrant evening, among the June roses, Julius Byron told his love story; and Miriam listened with a look in her eyes that told her lover that he spoke not in vain.

* * * * *

"How provoked you, in your turn, must have been at finding my surplice instead of the fancy gown!" said Mr. Byron to his friend Willis, when they again met.

"I was in a rage at first, I admit," answered Mr. Howard. But affairs turned out not so bad after all. I put on the surplice to see how it became me, when one of the maids, catching a glimpse of me through the window, set up a scream, declaring that she had seen a ghost. This brought a lot of visitors out of their rooms, among whom, to my surprise, was Edith Fulton—my Edith you know. We had quarreled and parted, never to meet again; but the ridiculous feature of this scene removed the ice between us, and—. Well, Byron, I have blessed the memory of your surplice ever since!"

"That contretemps of the satchels was a lucky thing for us both."

"Piper and Tipson and their humbugs forever!" exclaimed young Howard.

Fretting.

From the Baptist Weekly.

This morning I got up as cross as a bear. I felt as rough and tingy as a chestnut burr. I was all out of sorts, and it seemed to me it would be a pleasure to snap up anybody who spoke to me as short as I could.

Most likely I would have done so and set the whole household by the ears for the rest of the day, but that I have had such moods before and learned by experience the best way to manage them. "Now," thought I, "my best plan is not to influence the whole family, but to remain neutral and let them influence me." Accordingly I tried to control myself a little and await events.

"Well, the two elder children got up merry and as happy as crickets. Papa was in a pretty humor, and the baby sat in her high chair and displayed all her little airs and graces and her newest funny little capers, and we must all look and admire, so by the time breakfast was over I was laughing and smiling as cheerfully as the rest, and passed a pretty comfortable day after all.

And as I was thinking of this at evening I thought how easy a little fretting might have upset the whole family and spoiled the day.

Now, fretting is both useless and unnecessary; it does no good and a great deal of harm; yet it is almost a universal sin. More or less we are given to it. We fret over almost anything. In summer because it is too hot, and in winter because it is too cold; we fret when it rains because it is wet, and when it does not rain because it is dry; when we are sick or when any body else is sick. In short if anything or everything does not go just to suit our particular whims and fancies, we have just one grand refuge—to fret over it.

I am afraid that fretting is much more common among women than among men. We may as well own the truth, my fair sisters, it isn't altogether pleasant. Perhaps it is because the little worries, cares and vexations of our daily life harass our sensitive nerves more than the extended enterprises which generallly take the attention of men. Great wants develop great resources, but the little wants and worries are hardly provided for, and like the nail which strikes the saw, they make not much of a mark, but they turn the edges terribly. I think if we looked upon all the little worries of one day as one great united worry, self-control to meet it would be developed. But as they generally come—only one or two little things at a time—they seem so very little that we give way, and the breech one made in the wall, soon grows larger.

I know that many a mother has turned her son against her own sex, and made him dread and dislike the society of women, by her example constantly set before him. I know that many a mother has brought up and developed a daughter just like herself, who, in her turn, would wreck and ruin the comfort of another family circle. And knowing all this, I know we ought to set our faces against this useless, sinful, peace-destroying and home-disturbing habit of fretting.

English Letter Writing.

The English write more letters than any other people in the world, according to the Postoffice report just issued. The average annual number of written communications reaches 41 per head—37 letters and 4 post-cards for each person—being nearly double the amount of twenty years ago. Correspondence increases three times more than the rate of population, and in the year ending March 31 last no fewer than 1,322,086,900 letters passed through the post, besides 153,586,100 cards, 294,594,500 book packets, and 142,702,300 newspapers. In Christmas week the average number of postal missive passing through the Central Office is estimated at 13½ millions, but last Christmas the number rose to 15,400,000. This increase entailed the employment of 1,200 additional hands besides the 1,800 usually employed in the Central Office. No other nation approaches these numbers, for even in the United States, which comes second in the matter of correspondence, only 21 letters are sent per head, the next highest figures being 17 in Germany, 16 in France, 7 in Italy, and 5 in Spain.

An Inducement for Immigration.

Mr. Geo. Hamilton, from his quiet and orderly down east home, was in Missouri looking for a farm, when a land agent showed him through Ray county, and offered the following inducements to settle there: "There is no such land elsewhere in Missouri, and the society can not be surpassed. Do you see that house over there? Well, there is where the Ford brothers lived, and where poor Charlie committed suicide. And also that one across the field? Wood Hite was killed in that house. Over yonder a little ways is the old homestead of the James family. If you could only stay over until to-morrow I would take pleasure in introducing you to Frank, whom we expect over from Boonville to spend a day or two with us. About six miles further on we come to the Mormon settlement. All good people to live among. We have about 500 of them, voters in this county." Mr. Hamilton took the next train home. He won't settle in Missouri.

WOULD-BE ACTRESSES.

Queer Ideas of Certain Young Women.

From the New York Sun.

"When a young woman gets the idea into her head that she is cut out for an actress you can never convince her that she is mistaken," said a theatrical manager recenty. "I have been in the business thirty-two years now, and have acted in the capacity of manager for five stars and a great many companies. In that time I have met scores of young women who were stage-struck. Eighteen out of every twenty have turned out to be flat and dismal failures, but every one of them had an excuse to offer for her non-success. As a rule, it is the poetic and sentimental side of an actress' life which catches young women. Then, too, the romantic fancies which are so much encouraged by indiscriminate novel reading, and the stories of such writers as Ouida tend to give them a false idea of the life they are actually obliged to lead. They say that a painter will sometimes look at the subject he is trying to put on canvas so long and so earnestly that the subject itself becomes imprinted on his mind, and when he looks at his painting he does not see what is actually daubed on the canvas, but sees the subject itself. That is the reason so many painters whine about the unappreciative public and the cruelty of the critics. The same thing is true of girls who are anxious to become actresses.

"You have heard girls relate 'Curfew Shall Not Ring To-Night?' Yes. Then you will understand what I mean. You have seen a girl rise among a party of friends in a back parlor, strike a dramatic attitude and begin a poem. As she proceeds toward the climax you have heard the piteous shriek and yelp, the mouthing, gulping and gasping, and the final sigh. It is to you and everybody else in the room but her a silly bit of ranting. Do you know what it is to the girl? To her it is soul. You can never convince her that she is not giving the most stupendous elocutionary effect, and throwing a wealth of pathos and feeling into the lines.

"The same is true of a girl after she gets on the stage. People snicker at the bad acting of a poor actress, and never realize for a moment not only that she is doing her best, but that it is to her a great performance. She feels that she is as perfect as she can be in the lines, and hence she does not understand the indifference of the audience. I don't know of a better illustration of the perseverance which a woman will show in pushing herself before the public than that of a young woman who came on here last season from San Francisco. She is well known out there as a society woman, and is quite popular among the amateur actors. It is said that her people are well to do, and she has certainly spent a great deal of money of late. She decided to become a professional actress, and, with the usual modesty of such aspirants, made arrangements to begin her career at the top of the ladder. With all respect to her, and I esteem her very highly as a lady, it must be said that she possessed fewer advantages in a personal way for the career of an emotional actress than any woman I ever saw. She was very thin and round-shouldered and extremely awkward. Her face was not only of a common-place type, but it was of such a character that it was utterly impossible to make it up so that it would look attractive from the front. When I tell you that she was also unable to dress becomingly, you will perhaps suspect that she lacked some of the elements that go to make a successful and popular actress. She had a series of costumes made for the role in which she was to make her debut here. Each one was more grotesque than the last. As I have said, she was fragile and light. The dress-maker constructed a serious of costumes which would have been too big, too gaudy and too heavy for a woman fifty pounds heavier than she was. The actress came on here, hired a theater and made a debut. She had a good company to support her, and it is said that her experiment cost her family $5,000. She made an instantaneous and distinct failure. She played Jalia, Pauline and one or two other standard romantic characters. She proved conclusively that she couldn't act at all."

"Did she give up the stage and go back to San Francisco?"

"Not a bit of it. She insisted that every one of her audiences for a week in New York, that every circle in the city, and that every candid man whose advice she asked was leagued against her. She stuck to the stage. She is at it yet. About a week ago I saw a dispatch in one of the dramatic papers which told of the hard treatment she had been subjected to in one of the small towns in the interior of the state, where she was traveling about with a small company of her own. The audiences were very rude. The fact is, they almost mobbed her. All this is discouraging, but it will have no effect on the young woman. She will probably keep on acting forever.

"There are hundreds of women whose careers on the stage are very similar to this, except that they do not have the money to provide a company of their own. They appear as stars for one consecutive night, and are then forced to take any sort of a place that offers in a traveling company. Half the girls who are now playing servants' parts in small theaters or dancing about in variety shows began their careers as Juliet or Julia."