

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"LOVE LETTERS OF A JAPANESE."*

"All the world loves a lover." Though we seem never to weary of fiction, true love stories are better, and so "all the world" must rejoice that these passionate, appealing letters should have been published, to give us an insight into so strange a love, "lit by the flame of idealism on an exotic altar."

The words quoted above are from the introduction to this volume, written by M. C. Stopes, the author of "A Journal from Japan," and, in addition to the introduction, it is an explanation which tells us that these letters are real love letters, and, "as in a novel, one follows in them the love between a man and a woman . . . The man is a native of Japan, cultured and thoughtful, and with the power of expressing himself, and, perhaps, not only his own personality, but a side of his nation's character, which the West has not often seen. In Vienna, both studying art, he met Mertyl Meredith, the English girl to whom these letters were addressed, and who, in her turn, wrote replies which are often full of charm." The letters speak for themselves, and give the crescendo and diminuendo of his love (hers knew no wane), passing from the formal "Dear Miss Meredith" to "Beloved Heart," "Dearest of All," and then abruptly returning to the original formality.

Writing from Naples, he says: "As pure and sweet as the moonlight of the silver moon, as warm as the heart of Vesuvius, so will be our love. O! heart of my love's fountain!" From Tokio: "I feel always so happy whenever I think of thee, sweet Mertyl, and my physical person is mysteriously electrified till the minutest point. O! there is nothing so sweet and happy as the state of electrification due to you, beloved!"

He was already married when he first met her, but he obtained a divorce from his wife, and felt himself free to marry again. "Dearest, every time I see a nice place for dwelling, I think we ought to live in such a place. Whenever I see pretty things, or convenient accommodation for household, I pay attention simply 'für uns.' I wish very much to be together soon, but when I think closer it cannot be sooner than two years after."

Very quaintly he speaks of his first marriage: "I must say that I was once married, and have a child, although the marriage was an error and the child a misprint, having never been accompanied with love. As you know, I did not properly know how to kiss, as I never learnt it from childhood. I have not even kissed my mother; it is not our custom."

In another letter: "Dear half, terribly sweet one . . . my former Frau was really wrong, and not I in the least. All who heard of it realised

that she was exceedingly wrong and awfully stupid. Her remorse came repeatedly since she left my house and begged me to marry her again. (Dearest, I hate her extremely, the more so when she begs such a thing.)"

The details of the divorce are specially interesting, and to quote from the introduction "not only do the letters contain poetry, a quaint philosophy and romance, but, more particularly the later ones, they are full of familiar details of Japanese life and customs of a kind foreigners cannot usually learn. The intimate account given by the lover of the private divorce proceedings, throws a beacon of light on Japanese home life."

He retains the custody of the child in his own home, for which act he is apologetic to his fiancée. "At present, my child is rather convenient in one way; because a child often tells the truth, and a maid cannot do any incorrect thing in my absence."

According to arrangement, at the end of two years, Mertyl Meredith arrives in Tokio for the marriage, in spite of the fact that her letters to him remain for weeks unanswered, and that at the eleventh hour, he suggests, "Perhaps better to come a year later." After *she has already arrived in Japan*, he writes: "The time of your coming is not ripe on my side. Also, I wish you will be prepared to return even for a few weeks, once more to England, before you come for ever." And finally he is assured that "now he is once more in his original state among Japanese, that his idea of love is changed. That I should have loved any lady in such a strong way as I loved you is quite out of my natural thought, and the thought of any Japanese. I think I told you in earlier times that love is thought to be immoral with us."

Mertyl Meredith, at the final parting, writes: "After the death of my soul, you know, my body will die rather soon." These words prove correct.

The fascination of the letters lies in the fact that they are genuine. To the English mind, Mertyl's actions are inexplicable.

H. H.

THE PRAYER.

If on a Spring night I went by,
And God were standing there,
What is the prayer that I would cry
To Him? This is the prayer:

"O Lord of Courage grave,
O Master of this Night of Spring!
Make firm in me a heart too brave
To ask Thee anything!"

JOHN GALSWORTHY in *English Review*.

A WORD FOR THE WEEK.

When you see a child looking like an angel, do not kiss it; you might make a real angel out of it.

* By S. A. Mortlake. (Stanley Paul & Co., 31, Essex St., London.)

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