

LEGAL MATTERS.

A case at the Bodmin Assizes last week, when May Stibbs (aged 44) was charged with obtaining money by false pretences from the Earl of St. Germans, proves the necessity for the supervision and control of nursing homes. The accused pleaded poverty as her defence, saying that she and her husband were running a nursing home and wanted a temporary loan to carry on.

It was proved by the prosecution that she was living with the husband of another woman whom he had deserted.

The woman said that she fully intended to pay back the loan. She had no thought of making misrepresentations. She had lived with the man since 1913, and had come to look upon him as her husband.

She was sentenced to nine months' imprisonment in the second division, the judge characterising her as a thoroughly dishonest woman.

BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"THE FEAST OF THE LANTERNS."*

No doubt there are many of our readers who have waited with pleasurable anticipation for another novel from the pen of the author of "Mr. Wu"; and though the present story perhaps, in the opinion of some, may not have reached the same high-water mark as that vivid novel, yet we assure them that they may hail "The Feast of Lanterns" with much pleasure, both from an artistic and instructive point of view. It is an almost passionate championship of the Chinese people, and girds at the popular European estimate of them as a whole.

The story tells of an ancient Chinese family who were, and had been, all but barren of daughters. Two thousand years and more ago it had been foretold that in far years to come, when China should sink low and threaten to pass out into international nothing, a girl should be born to a prince of Ch'eng, a girl who would journey far from home, suffer and learn from foreign influence, and return to her homeland and save and restore it. The story deals with the partial fulfilling of this prophecy.

"Ch'eng Sho Yün, the head of the house now, had been so remarkable in ability, so remarkable in person, that she had added not meanly to the prestige of her husband's family. And when, in dying, he had decreed that she should rule in his stead, no one had resented it, and their eldest son least of all."

Ch'eng Yun carefully selected wives for her seven sons, and treated them with more self-indulgence than a daughter-in-law can claim as a right, for she knew that while sorrowful women, and women of self-control, are more apt to conceive sons, spoilt and self-indulgent wives are the

more apt to bear daughters. None proved childless. Babies came thick and fast—fat and beautiful babies. But when the grandmother who adored them sat apart and watched them askance and the lot numbered thirty-seven, there was not a girl child among them.

When her favourite daughter-in-law disappointed her for the third time, she shook her fist in the face of a god and slacked it of incense. Later we are told she gave it a good thrashing. Her anger was not a thing to be trifled with, and all her people avoided her as far as they could in these moods—"all but Ch'eng Chu'po, her youngest son and idol, who hung about her and pressed her hands and brought her a flower of her favourite oleander from the garden. And Ti-to-ti crawled from his basket where he had been licking a hurt paw, curled up on her robe's hem, and laid his tiny silk head on her tiny satin shoe." Ch'eng Chu'po was still unmarried, and his mother was torn between her jealousy at the thought of his future wife, and her wish that he should be the father of the much desired girl.

The beguiling descriptions of Chinese life and character and the fascinating environment of this family of distinction are painted with a brush that revels in colour and beauty. Very touching is the scene between mother and son when she informs him that the time has come, boy as he is, for his betrothal. He pleads for it to be delayed, and his adoring and autocratic mother consents that it shall not take place until after the Feast of Lanterns. "The lovers, the woman and her son, gayer in satin, silk and jewels than any flower in that flower-radiant place, planned how they'd make high holiday of every day left them before the Feast of Lanterns. She caught her youth back from his, and prattled to him as they went. Once she broke from him to chase a butterfly, and clapped her hands, applauding it, when it escaped and disappeared beyond a great forest of hollyhocks. She was telling her boy good-bye, and she would tell it, brave heart that she was, with laughter and with song and with jest and warm red wine." In passing must be noted the descriptions of the silk-worm industry and the gorgeous and picturesque ceremonies of the Feast of Lanterns, from which, delightful as they both are, we have not space to quote. Ch'eng Chu-po was destined to see his future bride before his lady mother had made choice for her son. He had, quite by accident, also seen her unveiled, which is contrary to all Eastern custom. "She wore no paint on this journeying. Her delicate face was amber cream and faint oleander pink. Her little curved mouth was redder than the rubies on her hand. The narrow brows were painted on her peachy amber skin with a sharp velvet brush, a daring stroke of black against the soft cream. Her eyes sparkled in the light, but were as soft as some young doe's. The boy trembled as he watched. Was she real? Could anything so beautiful be real?"

Mother, I have seen a girl!—a lady girl!"

It was the granddaughter of this charming vision that was destined, in part, to fulfil the

* By Lois Jordan Mills. Hodder & Stoughton.

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