

# The Love Letters of Abelard and Heloise (-)

## The Love Letters of Abelard and Heloise



ed. by Israel Gollancz and Honnor Morten  
[1901]

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Some have it that romantic love was an invention of the Middle Ages. If so, then the true story of Pierre Abelard and Heloise is one of the templates of this narrative. Both Abelard and Heloise were prominent intellectuals of twelfth century France. Abelard, of noble birth and eighteen years the senior of Heloise, was a prominent lecturer in philosophy. Abelard was an adventurous thinker, and was constantly at odds with the Church. On several occasions he was forced to recant and burn his writings. Heloise was a strong-willed and gifted woman who was fluent in Latin, Greek and Hebrew, and came from a lower social standing than Abelard. At age 19, and living under her uncle Fulbert's roof, Heloise fell in love with Abelard, who she was studying under. Not only did they have a clandestine affair of a sexual nature, they had a child, Astrolabe, out of wedlock. Discovered by the Fulbert (who was a Church official), Abelard was assaulted by a hired thug and castrated, and Heloise entered a convent. Abelard was exiled to Brittany, where he lived as monk. Eventually Heloise became abbess of the Oratory of the Paraclete, an abbey which Abelard had founded. It was at this time that they exchanged their famous letters, presented in this book. The letters, originally written in Latin, are passionate both in the remembrance of lost love, and the attempt to reconcile that love with their respective monastic duty to remain chaste. The tension between these two poles generates a huge amount of emotional electricity. This includes a long poem by

Alexander Pope about the lovers,  
notable for the phrase eternal  
sunshine of the spotless  
mind.-J.B. Hare

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