

lead, among its independent principalities, in that process of assimilating western improvements in the outward utilities of life which has lately made such strides in Japan and China, as well as in Siam. He was a very shrewd man, too, as we have already seen, and not without a very pretty wit of his own. He could, for instance, put down insolent presumption with a caustic word, where annihilation by main force, the method more natural to him, would have been too expensive a pleasure. Here is part of a letter from him to Monsieur Auberet, the fire-eating French Consul for Napoleon the Third in the days when the Gallic cock with comb still uncut used to crow so loud and shrill, especially in the lands of the rising sun, with which that crested bird felt in himself a born affinity. The obstreperous Gascon had broken off a diplomatic conversation with His Siamese Majesty's cousin, the Chief Judge of the Royal Court of Equity, by seizing that sacrosanct magnate by the hair, driving him from the room and throwing his betel-box after him. In the following grave words of picturesquely scathing calm he received, from a master of the science, his lesson in the comparative values and distances of persons and things:—

“Sir:—The verbal insult or bad words without any step more-over from lower or lowest person is considered very slight and inconsiderable.” [One likes the beautiful generality of this!] “The person standing on the surface of the ground or floor Cannot” [delicious capital C!] “injure the heavenly bodies or any highly hanging Lamp or Globe”—that is “Cannot” injure the divine Mongkut himself or such lesser derivative luminaries as his Chief Judge—“by ejecting his spit from his mouth upwards it* will injure his own face without attempting of Heavenly bodies.” (Do you interpret the parable M. Auberet? If not, the next sentence will flash a light for you!) “The Siamese” (though called ‘inhabitants of benighted land’—if not the French!) “do not endeavour to injure heavenly bodies with their spit from mouth. . . .”

There was a great deal in old Maha's head! But in the seclusion of his harem, as Mrs. Leonowens,—who taught the sixty-seven royal children and such of the army of wives and

*The demonstrative “it” used as a relative—with much force and enviably royal superiority, reminding one of “Sigismundus Super Grammaticam,” to Lindley Murray.