

It was even believed, and indeed to some extent by the king himself, whose experience had left him but little faith in human disinterestedness, that she must have amassed great riches from the gratitude of her *protégées*. He did not see, for all his shrewdness, that the whole secret of her power lay precisely in the fact that all she did was done for love and not for money; that one single "tical"¹ for value received would have completely punctured it and deflated her.

But it was a terribly wearing life. Her own ordinary work would have been enough for three persons—her teaching and her charge of the king's foreign correspondence, complicated as was the latter task by his frequent changes of mind, taking back of moves, and cool demands that she should absolve him from any resulting awkwardness by pretending to have misunderstood his meaning before and restating it according to his present improved reinterpretation. Her rôle as a general court of appeal, and special providence for suppliants, in that atmosphere of crawling intrigue and rampant savagery, was a heavy addition to her burdens. Still worse was it to look on helpless at so much that she had no power to interfere in. On one occasion she was only saved by a timely swoon from seeing an entirely innocent young woman, who had aroused her keenest sympathies, burnt alive in front of her window.²

After the death of his younger brother and his scandalous annexation of the beautiful widow who was, however, saved from his clutches by the self-sacrifice of one of her women,³ the King became flatly impossible. It was as though he had been possessed by a devil. Every day one or other of the women was scalded by the ebullitions of his deadly temper. The palace was full of sighs and groans and tears. Mrs. Leonowens did not escape the typhoon even in her own person. His Majesty had arranged with Sir John Bowring,

¹Siamese currency.

²As a lesson to her. She had pleaded for pardon.

³This heroine made successful arrangement for her royal mistress's escape; remained to take her place, and cut out her own tongue so that no information could be extorted from her.