

The seven years in Siam had broken Mrs. Leonowens' health and had left her as far as ever from her main object in going there, which was, as we saw, to obtain the means of educating her children. She had, however, amassed much raw material of knowledge and experience, convertible into the necessary coin by the diligent exercise of her quite marked literary talent. So, on her return to England, she wrote her first book: "An English Governess at the Court of Siam." In order at once to establish her health and make the most of this exceedingly interesting and well-written work, vividly reflecting as it did for English-speaking readers the many-coloured charm of the far East, and opening up a glimpse into the intimacies of life there, such as was entirely new to western literature, she was very wisely advised to go to the United States. The book was likely to sell quite extensively in America, and the only way to wrest a reasonable share in the profits for the authoress from the grabbing of the pirate-publishers then infesting that country, was to be on the spot. So it was that she came to make her home on this continent, at Staten Island to begin with. Here she spent many productive and happy years, in writing—it was at Staten Island she composed her "Romance of the Harem," her most popular and thrilling effort—teaching, and lecturing, and in the society of many stimulating and significant people. Those were the great days of American literature and Boston culture, ere Mary Baker Eddy and Billy Sunday were dreamt of, days which seem already so far away and, alas! at present, so little likely to return. It was a happy moment in the life of that wonderful nation, remarkable for many things at this moment but surely not least remarkable for the astounding disparity between their enormous wealth and numbers—one hundred millions of well-fed white people—and the scraggy exiguity of their spiritual output. Mrs. Leonowens had the good fortune to catch them before the invasion of their lean years, and enjoyed the acquaintance of a brilliant company of kindred spirits, such as she would have sought in vain to-day—Mr. and Mrs. Fields, R. D. Owen, R. W. Gilder, St. Gaudens, Madame