

tigerish courses and guiding him into sundry deviations towards decency. She came to have great influence with him, so great that she was commonly, though of course quite erroneously, believed to be a member of the dreaded San Luang, the Midnight Court which held in its hand the lives and properties of all Siam. He conferred upon her a patent of nobility to which he munificently attached an estate in the recesses of some impenetrable jungle. He would have gladly raised her even to royal dignities, if she had been willing to accept a fraction of his conjugal condescensions. Of course she would none of him, either in whole or in part. She would have much preferred a nice little clean grave. Once he gave her a magnificent ring. She took it in perfectly good part, and entire singleness of eye. *Honi soit qui mal y pense*. But when he saw that her innocence had not caught the squint of its parable, he took care to have his ring back. Mongkut was a very thrifty potentate and but little versed in Platonics.

Although on pleasure he was bent,
He had a frugal mind.

Like the Athenians of Pericles he combined strict economy with the unerring taste of a real *connoisseur*.

Her life in that far country, as remote from the normal for her as if she had been whisked away to another planet, was rich in all kinds of fascination and stimulus. She had the eye for the picturesque city on the Meinam, the Venice of the East, built mostly on the water of the great river which is to Siam almost what the Nile is to Egypt; for its motley confusions of splendour and squalor, palaces and huts, ethereal temples and fetid dungeons, the blazing sunshine and black velvet shadows, the riot of luxuriant vegetation, the bizarre rites and customs, and all the manifold shapes and colours of that swarming and various life where man is either a splendid flower or else an abject weed upon the rubbish-heap. She made great progress too with her Eastern languages and literature and, as I have said already, drew liberally on the really profound stores of the king's learning in such matters.