

had laid a sheet of foul ice now thawed in the sunshine of faith.

"Why did I not die!" was the only thought that found utterance in the midst of a torrent of ideas that racked and ravaged her brain.

"My daughter," said the terrible judge, "there is a love which is unconfessed before men, but of which the secret is received by the angels with smiles of gladness."

"What is that?"

"Love without hope, when it inspires our life, when it fills us with the spirit of sacrifice, when it ennobles every act by the thought of reaching some ideal perfection. Yes, the angels approve of such love; it leads to the knowledge of God. To aim at perfection in order to be worthy of the one you love, to make for him a thousand secret sacrifices, adoring him from afar, giving your blood drop by drop, abnegating your self-love, never feeling any pride or anger as regards him, even concealing from him all knowledge of the dreadful jealousy he fires in your heart, giving him all he wishes were it to your own loss, loving what he loves, always turning your face to him to follow him without his knowing it—such love as that religion would have forgiven; it is no offence to laws human or divine, and would have led you into another road than that of your foul voluptuousness."

As she heard this horrible verdict, uttered in a word—and such a word! and spoken in such a tone!—Esther's spirit rose up in fairly legitimate distrust. This word was like a thunder-clap giving warning of a storm about to break. She looked at the priest, and felt the grip on her vitals which wrings the bravest when face to face with sudden and imminent danger. No eye could have read what was passing in this man's mind; but the boldest would have found more to quail at than to hope for in the expression of his eyes, once bright and yellow like those of a tiger, but now shrouded, from austerities and privations, with a haze like that which overhangs the horizon in the dog-days, when, though the