were an easy task to lay bare, as he had already done, his own heart; his love, his anxiety, his disappointment, his despair, but to invade the sanctity of Marguerite's heart, to lay bare the miserable secret which burdened her life—and now bid fair to destroy not only happiness but life itself—seemed impossible. For a moment it seemed as if it were better that he should meet whatever fate the trial held in store for him than unveil the mystery of her life at the bidding of his friends. The blood forsook his brain; he could not think; then rushing back to his heart, left his cheeks pallid, as he cast about in his mind for words with which to begin, for her sake, the pitiful story. His words came brokenly as he spoke; telling them first of the mountain home where dwelt love and peace and happiness; of the fond parents and their only child, whom they cherished as the idol of their heart; of the tragic death of the father, leaving a desolate home—and of a heart-broken wife, the only protector of their child.

"A mere child," he cried, "over whom scarce sixteen summers had passed, when *he, the monster, the serpent*, entered this paradise, to rob it of its chiefest treasure." His voice was broken by a sob, and his breath came fast, in keeping with the pulsing of his heart. He seemed to lose sight of his surroundings. He forgot that he was speaking to others; he thought aloud.

"It was into the seclusion of this home—this life—the innocent life of a young girl, he came—a mere child, pure as the lilies she wore on her breast." At the thought, Darrall's face was transformed. His livid, trembling lips could scarce frame the words he wished to utter; they were incoherent.

"He dared to fold her in his arms, to bid her good-bye!—to pollute her chaste lips with a kiss ——. Then—with false viows of love, with false promises, he lured this innocent, trusting child, who knew nothing of the world, to leave with him her home; lured her away from her mother's protecting care, she thinking, that, like her father, he meant to 'steal her away,' as her father had said he would have stolen her mother, if his suit had been denied." For a moment he paused—for his mind was in a tumult—only for a moment—while he sought fitting words for Marguerite's vindication.

"Don't forget, my friends, she was young, very young; without experience of the world and its ways. The false—seemed true to her. The dastard's honied words, had all of the sweetness of a true man's vows. As she listened she gave him her faith—and—and he gave to her in return—he gave to her—a false name; bound her to him with a false ceremony of marriage. *He ruined her life and left her! But—he left her with a soul unsullied by contact with his gross nature.*" Completely unnerved by the recital, Darrall paced back and forth, the narrow confines of his cell, while Sothern and Randolph talked together in low tones apart.

Having finally succeeded in regaining sufficient composure to proceed with his story, Darrall resumed his seat.

"My friends, there is but little left to add to this recital of Marguerite's story, which I see has stirred you, as it has me. It was by degrees that the mother learned of the wrong to her child; for in the wildness those days news traveled slowly. Sothern supplied to me the missing link, accounting for his sudden departure. In her own heart the mother buried her secret, and with loving wiles, persuaded her daughter to accompany her to Virginia, representing that she had business with her husband's financial agent, Col. Carter, to whom she revealed her secret anxiety. The suspense, the strain of the concealment of her fears for her child, combined with the grief with which her heart was already burdened, soon told upon her health. Her physician ordered a change of scene. Col. Carter advised her return to the ancient home of her people in the south of France.

"The journey was made to no purpose. *Marguerite was there.* Her devoted love and tender solicitude served to keep the wounded heart bleeding, and it was not long until the mother realized that no physician could bind up the wounds of a broken heart."

After a few moments' silence, with faltering words, Darrall told how, one night, calling the little Marguerite, for she was still a child, to her bedside, the mother broke to her, gently as she could, the pitiful story of her betrayal, saying she would have kept it from her always if it had been best, but she could not, since it must influence her whole future life; how she had said to her, 'Since you have no kindred to avenge your wrong, forget it and seek happiness in the pursuits so loved by your father. *Until you have learned of this man's death, you can not seek happiness in love.*'

He told them of how, all night long, Marguerite lay upon her bed awake, her melancholy, tearless eyes fixed upon the stars, longing, praying for death; and the morning found her still lying with unclosed eyes, unheeding all about her.

"Suddenly she remembered her mother. It was past her usual hour of waking, yet from her chamber she heard no sound. Rising softly from her bed, she stole into her mother's room, where she found her sleeping sweetly, it seemed, her hands calmly folded over the fond heart—now at rest.

"Marguerite understood. She did not cry out alarmed. Fondly she stroked the shapely hands, cold to the touch. Gently she pressed kisses upon the unresponsive lips and brow and cheeks, murmuring 'While your "little one" was praying for death, the white-winged messengers bore you away.' That was all. When they found them, Marguerite had swooned beside her mother and knew nothing for many days."

The story ended. Darrall buried his face in his hands, overcome with the recital.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

"This is the story, as I heard it at the time," said Sothern, who had listened with close attention to all of the details. "I knew her and loved her as a boy in his teens loves a pretty child."

Upon Judge Randolph, Marguerite's story made a deep impression. Plunged in serious thought he recalled the conversation with his wife that night in Darrall's home, and understood now all of the unconventionalities and contradictions in Marguerite's character, which had so perplexed her?

After a few moments Darrall resumed. "I was stunned by the revelation of such iniquity—the great wrong that she had suffered. Her joyless life only stirred my love to depths more profound. Having thus laid bare these cruel circumstances, taking my hand in hers, her eyes filled with tears, she said in a broken whisper, as if bidding farewell to life:

"'Now you know all, and you see why I cannot allow you to link your life with mine. We must say good-bye; our last good-bye w enough, but this is far worse since we k must be forever.' Still stupefied, I scarcely what she was saying.

"'Good-bye? Where are you going Margu

"'I am going away from joy, love, happ all that makes life worth the living. I sometimes—so sore is my heart—that it well if I were going away from life itself. thought of that sometimes. Now that you all, do you not see?—'

"'I see nothing but your innocence and misfortune. I know nothing but my love f which is strong enough to lift you above proach.'

"She pressed my hand for answer, he trembling so she could not speak. Liftin eyes to the heavens she fixed them upo clouds which, drifting across the patches o sky above the tree tops, almost shut out th light which flecked the green sward at ou Her hand still rested passive in mine; c the other over it I asked.

"'Is this all, dear one?'

"'*All? Is it not enough?* Knowing what you still love me—want me?'

"Then lifting my hand to her lips she it, and pressed it to her wet cheek.

"'I still love you—want you, and the privilege of helping you to blot out tha rowful past.'

"'That is nobly said, dear heart, but d think that I love you so poorly as to be w to burden you with my misfortune?'

"Ceasing her struggle to free her hand mine, and speaking with serious earnestnes resolution, she continued:

"'I have tried to spare you this pain; you bear me witness that I did. I withdrew from the world. I returned to the solitude befits me, to which I am accustomed; I hi self—'

"'But I have found you, my love!' I rupted, impulsively girdling her with my 'and please God nothing shall separate us

"For a little space she lay in my arms Wholly unnerved, she was weeping silently couraged by her silence Iwhispered:

"'Tell me, dear on you have consented.

"Withdrawing from my embrace lifting her tear-s face to mine, she an slowly, but firmly:

"'I can never b wife, dear heart. M I love you, I realize can never be you Your life is so pleasant things; so promise for the that you will soon g any distress or disa ment you may fee that you know tha impossible; that it be.'

"'But I do not that it is impossible swered hotly. 'Becau have met, and be ceived by one ignobl do you think all m alike? Tell me, M ite, is it because y afraid to trust asked anxiously.

"'Afraid to trus My dear love! I think so poorly of that?' her voice be a deep hurt. 'It is I I am afraid that harm you. Not a hour of my life wou that I would not fe deeply I had wronge in thus taking adv of your great pity love for me. I wo ways be dreading t day would come t arms about your might prove a mills drag you down; that you might some day the sorr gain you had made changing your fresh honest love, for mi abused.'

"He fell upon his knees and begged me to spare his life."