

month old. Orphanage and an early separation from all the ties of kindred, seemed destined to be the punishment of the ill-fated family for the crime of their ancestor, but ever, at the moment of death, the "white bird of Oxenham" was seen to hover around the pillow of each of the race.

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"Bird of the snowy breast,
Bird of the raven plume,
Hidest thou thy distant nest
Where the sweet spices bloom?
Art thou from distant shore
Borne on the blast?
Over the ocean's roar
Safe hast thou past?

But the bird swept by—it might not stay,
For it bore a soul on its wings away!

"Bird of the raven wing,
Why art thou come?
Is it that joyous spring
Wakes the bee's hum?
Is it that wintry skies
Frown o'er thy distant home?
E'en as the swallow flies,
Thus hast thou come?

But the bird swept by, for he came on the breath
Of the charnel vault to the bed of death!"

Such is the fragment of a song, still remembered by many in Oakhampton, as having been composed by the last lady of Oxenham, and it is with her fate is connected the desolation of the old Hall. Mary Oxenham was the last of her family, and the extinction of the name of Oxenham was now certain. The curse had lost none of its force as it descended through the several generations—each had fallen an early victim to death—each had been succeeded by an infant heir, until, at length, the birth of a female seemed to betoken the speedy downfall of the family honours. Bred up in loneliness and seclusion, Mary had learned to ponder too deeply on the misfortunes of her house, until her excited imagination led her to the dizzy verge of that fearful precipice where reason trembles, and is often overthrown. Allowed to follow the bent of her own will, with no near relatives to watch over her infancy and youth, she was indebted to an aged priest, who had long been an inmate of Oxenham Hall, for all the knowledge which she possessed. Firmly attached to the Catholic religion, she delighted to pore over the legends of saints and martyrs, to yield her fancy to the dreams of mystic faith, and to revel in the wild imaginations of the cloistered monks of olden time. The

good Father Jerome, who might have directed the energies of her active mind to more useful pursuits, allowed her thus to waste her early years, in the hope that he should thereby confirm her in the faith of her fathers, not doubting but that he should be able, at some future time, to control the vagaries of her eccentric temper. He died, however, ere she attained the age of womanhood, and Mary, in an agony of grief, vowed to herself, as she stood beside his grave, that her life should hereafter be dedicated to the quiet cloister. It was the vow of an impassioned and sorrowing child, seeking to fulfil what she believed to have been the wish of her kind guardian, but Mary remembered it in bitterness and anguish at a later period. There was something in her isolated condition peculiarly calculated to excite the imagination. The mistress of a noble mansion, filled with records of past glories, and abounding in traditions of olden times, the last of a race to whom a curse was supposed to cling, and destined, (according to the legend) in her own persons, to fulfil the penalty of her ancestor's guilt, it is not strange that the lonely heiress of Oxenham should have found that meditation was but another name for incipient madness. The style of her beauty was as remarkable as her character. Her figure was one of perfect symmetry, but of the smallest possible proportions—her features were exceedingly delicate and regular, but her complexion was of the darkest tint, while her thick raven hair, which she wore in loose curls, falling almost to her feet, together with her large, lustrous black eyes, gave a singular wildness to her appearance. Her very countenance bore testimony to her dreamy temper, and no one could look upon her without feeling that she was a visionary enthusiast, but little fitted for a world of dull realities. The few who were admitted within the precincts of Oxenham Hall, could not fail to observe the wonderful resemblance between the portrait of the "Dark Ladye of Oxenham," and the living face of her latest descendant.

But the time came when her self-imposed vow of seclusion was to be forgotten, and stronger passions to be awakened in the heart of the imaginative girl. The Lord Delmaine, prompted first by a wish to add the broad lands of Oxenham to his paternal inheritance, sought the lonely orphan in her Hall, and whispered those words of love, which, when heard for the first time, rarely fall on a heedless ear. A new world was immediately opened to Mary. The dreams of wild romance