

the vague fancies of girlhood, were now merged into a bright and beautiful reality, and could she have forgotten the dark cloud which overhung the fortunes of her house, she might have given up her heart to hope and happiness.—But a blight had early fallen upon her life, and even while listening to her lover's tenderness, she felt a cold misgiving of the approach of evil. Lord Delmaine was neither vicious in habit, nor depraved in heart—he was *only utterly selfish*. He admired Mary's singular beauty, he pitied her weakness of mind, (for such, appeared to him, her gloomy fancies,) and he coveted her noble fortunes. With such notions he set himself to the task of gaining her affections, and his worldly wisdom was more than a match for Mary's guileless ignorance. It was in one of these moments of confidence that she related to him the wild legend of her ancestor's crime and punishment. But the man of the world had little sympathy with the fanciful enthusiast. He smiled at her credulity, soothed her excited feelings, affected to sympathize in her melancholy, and inly resolved to wed her as quickly as possible, lest madness should snatch from his grasp the rich prize which he sought. With the enthusiasm so natural to her character, Mary had yielded up her whole heart to its new passion, and even while she looked forward to marriage as the seal of her broken vow and her fatal destiny, she resolved to wed the lover who wooed with such earnest fondness.

Many an ominous shake of the head was seen among the peasants, as Lord Delmaine led his bride from the church where they had plighted their vows.

"Ay, ay, it is a brave bridal," said an old, decrepit creature, as she hobbled to a seat on a tombstone, to watch the procession; "it is a brave *bridal*, but there will be a braver *burial*. Have they forgotten the curse of the Dark Ladye of Oxenham? With a woman came the curse, by a woman must it be fulfilled."

These words were not lost upon their hearers, and ere the sun set, they had clouded the brow, and troubled the spirit of the youthful bride. But Lord Delmaine bore her to the home of his fathers, and amid the society of new friends, and the gaieties of new scenes, she strove to forget the evil auguries of her fate.

But time passed on, and heavier trials befel the sensitive heiress of Oxenham. Yet how may the pen of the legendary describe the gradual growth of coldness, distrust, indifference, in two wedded hearts? How depict the pro-

gress of petty annoyances and trifling grievances, until they became serious evils and mighty wrongs. Lord Delmaine fancied himself a good husband, because he neither insulted his wife by open infidelities, nor restricted her from indulging her own tastes and pleasures. He surrounded her with luxuries, and prided himself upon the lavish expenditure with which he purchased them, but he had no idea that duty required him to watch over the excitable nature of his young wife, and to guard her from disappointment and sorrow. He was a good natured, careless, fashionable husband, and with a woman of worldly character, might have managed to live in peace, if not happiness. But he had chosen a wife whose morbid feelings had been cherished in solitude—whose imagination had always exceeded her judgment—who had never learned the mystic lore of the human heart. To such a woman, his neglect and indifference, his careless manner, and frequent absence from home, seemed the height of cruelty and insult. She brooded over wrongs in secret, and met him too often with murmurs and reproaches. The passionate nature of her race existed in full vigor in the fragile form of the last of the family, and the very strength of her affection for her husband, gave new bitterness to her anger at his estrangement. Lord Delmaine was incapable of comprehending fully the character of his susceptible wife; he knew not upon how nice a balance hung the faculties of her mind, or, it may be hoped, he would have been less careless of exciting her restless and moody spirit. He encountered her sorrow with indifference, her reproaches with anger, and finally wearied with the daily excitements of so stormy a life, Mary determined to return to the loneliness of Oxenham Hall. Lord Delmaine would scarcely have consented so readily to her desire, had he known that the darling wish of his heart—the birth of an heir, which could alone ensure to him the future possession of the Oxenham estates, was so near its fulfilment. But there was no longer any confidence between the husband and wife, and he saw her depart with scarce a semblance of regret.

It was with sad and troubled feelings that the Lady of Oxenham entered once more within the walls of the home which she had left a happy and loving bride. The omens which had saddened her spirit in the days of her childhood, had, many of them, been fulfilled, and others seemed verging towards their accomplishment. She believed that the curse had fallen upon her, and felt herself doomed to