

which she was secluded, were hung with tapestries each worth an earl's ransom—silver lamps, fed with the perfumed oils of the East, shed their soft light upon luxurious couches, and carpets woven in Persian looms; while all that art could invent of rich and rare, was bestowed upon the adornment of her exquisite beauty. But still she was only a prisoner in his hands, for Mordecai loved her wealth, and he sought to hide her from all eyes until his only son should return from his distant pilgrimage, when he hoped to secure her riches by giving her in marriage to the young Hebrew. But there was treason in the Jew's household; a domestic, whom he had ill-treated, told the tale of the veiled beauty to the Lord of Oxenham, and the glowing descriptions which he gave of her surpassing beauty, as well as of her ingots of fine gold, aroused the strongest passions in the nature of the sated courtier. By means of the servant, who was in the confidence of Zillah, the affair was arranged with the utmost secrecy and success. Letters, expressive of the most devoted affection, had been the agents employed by the Lord of Oxenham, to win the heart of the innocent recluse, and, although she never replied to them, save by the mouth of the treacherous domestic, yet, to a nature ardent as hers, they were quite sufficient to arouse new feelings in her girlish heart. She consented to an elopement, and they, who had never exchanged a word with each other, save by the intervention of a third person, now met at the altar to exchange a marriage vow. The first time Oxenham ever listened to her voice, it was while pronouncing the oath which bound her for ever to his side, and it was not until the marriage had been legally solemnized, that he learned the secret of her ready acquiescence in his suit. She stood before him in all the budding loveliness of girlhood—beautiful as a dream, but a cloud was upon the spirit which should have lighted up that glorious temple. She was like a child whose faculties had never been awakened—simple, artless, affectionate, but with a dimness of intellect which, while, it was far removed from idiocy, yet placed her in a lower scale of being than her seraphic beauty seemed at first to claim. Nothing but her enormous wealth could have reconciled John Oxenham to such a bride, whose very imbecility of mind rendered her peculiarly liable to the dangers of a court life, and he marked out, for vengeance, the treacherous servant, who, in the prosecution of revenge on the old Jew, had been careful to conceal all the mental de-

fiency of the helpless Zillah. But determining to lose no time in securing her rich dowry, the Lord of Oxenham applied to the King, and relating to the merry monarch the tale of his clandestine marriage, implored his majesty's aid in compelling the crafty guardian to relinquish her wealth. This he had little difficulty in obtaining, and the old man was glad to escape with a heavy fine in addition to the restoration of the bride's riches. But when the money was secure, and the King pressed Oxenham to present his Indian princess to the curious eyes of a court circle, he met with evasions and excuses. The sweetness and helplessness of the timid Zillah had awakened as much tenderness in the heart of the voluptuary, as he could now feel, and resolving, for her sake, as well as his own, to preserve her from the perils of the gay world, he hastened to bury her in the seclusion of Oxenham Hall. Loving her husband, as a child will love one who looks kindly upon it, with southern ardour, and with infantine fondness, Zillah asked no greater happiness than to be a petted plaything. Of the world, she knew nothing, and therefore the noble mansion in which she now found herself mistress, seemed, to her, a very paradise of joy. The anxiety with which Oxenham watched her every movement, lest the secret of her imbecility should be whispered among the servants, gave to his manner a solicitude which a clearer head than Zillah's might have construed into the watchfulness of affection. Quiet, gentle and silent, the young wife rarely spoke, unless to reply to her husband's voice, and then her utterance was hesitating and imperfect. Her words sounded rather like the murmers of a dreamer, and musical as were her tones, it was difficult to comprehend her meaning. Aware of this, her husband rarely addressed her in the presence of his domestics, and few of them had ever heard her voice. To one who could have beheld her moving gracefully through the stately apartments, or presiding in perfect silence and decorum at the solitary board, to which guests were never invited, she would have seemed the very perfection of womanly loveliness. But when she raised her usually downcast lids, there was a wild melancholy in her full black eyes that seemed almost startling, and this look, together with the peculiar accents in which she spoke, had excited, in the minds of the household, a strange and mysterious dread of her whom they styled "the Dark Ladye of Oxenham."

But the quiet of home could not long satisfy