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THE WHITE BIRD OF OXENHAM.

“Destiny may delay but not forget punishment.”—*Shakspeare.*

NEAR the village of Oakhampton, in the wild and picturesque county of Devonshire, stand the remains of a large, antiquated building, erected in the time of Elizabeth, and still known among the peasantry, by the name of Oxenham Hall. One wing is still in perfect preservation, and its massive and cumbrous architecture would lead one to wonder how so noble a structure could become ruinous, if the blackened and crumbling walls of the dilapidated portion did not immediately solve the mystery by exhibiting the traces of the action of fire. To the superstitious, the old Hall is an object of dread, and he would be brave indeed who should venture within its grass-grown courts after the sun had set. Indeed, it is generally believed through the district, that a curse hangs on the place, and the utter desolation in which it stands, offers a more reasonable excuse than is usually to be found for popular superstition. The immense size of the apartments, which still remain, the rich oak carvings which decorate the wainscoting, and the large window once filled with the beautiful stained glass, attest the former splendours of the place. But the mouldy tapestry which flaps mournfully to the wind as it sweeps through the broken casement, and a moth-eaten state-bed, over whose velvet draperies the spider has woven his web for years, are all that remain of the costly furniture which once adorned the mansion. The ravages of fire in the left wing of the Hall, have left nothing but blackened masses of stone, save in one angle of the building, where the peasants, in shuddering horror, point out the sleeping-chamber of the Lady of Oxenham and tell you, that although the fire originated in that chamber, it

is the only one which was not entirely consumed. It is true that only a few half burnt rafters remain by which to mark the fatal spot in which the ancestral curse on the house of Oxenham was finally fulfilled in the extinction of the race.

Belonging to an ancient and noble family, the Oxenhams had long borne a distinguished part in the stirring scenes of camp and court. Always prosperous, they had acquired, by kingly largess and wealthy alliance, a princely fortune; and when, in the reign of the unfortunate Charles I., the chief of the family joined the royalist party, he sacrificed to his loyalty one of the richest estates in the kingdom. He had the grief of learning how vain had been his sacrifices, when, from his prison in the tower, he heard the cries of the populace, proclaiming the murder of his monarch. Not many days after the execution of the King, the summons of death came to the unhappy Lord of Oxenham, and, wearied with a life of turmoil, he would have laid his head calmly on the block, even as one lies down on the pillow of his nightly rest, had it not been for the ties of affection which still bound him to existence. His wife and only son remained in close concealment, suffering privation and want, not daring to venture from their humble retreat, and it was their future fate which weighed heavily on the heart of the doomed prisoner. Unable to convey any written token of his affectionate remembrance, he charged his faithful servant to bear to the Lady of Oxenham, his last farewell, together with a ring of plain black enamel, inscribed with the single word “Spes,” thereby indicating that she had more to hope from his death than from his prolonged imprisonment, since the parliament would scarcely pursue a lone widow and a fatherless boy. In the old records of the house of Oxenham, still preserved amid the archives of the Delmaine family, is the following letter, writ-