

***R. D. BLACKMORE***



***EREMA; OR,  
MY FATHER'S  
SIN***

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# **Erema; Or, My Father's Sin**

**Enriched edition.**

*Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Olivia Whitlock*

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# Introduction

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Burdened by a stain she did not choose yet cannot escape, the heroine of *Erema; Or, My Father's Sin* presses against the hard edges of communal memory and legal suspicion, asking whether steadfast character, careful reasoning, and love can loosen the knot of inherited shame that tightens whenever a past crime is named, a whisper multiplies into judgment, and the very act of seeking truth threatens to deepen loss even as it promises deliverance, so that identity itself becomes a contested ground where filial loyalty, moral courage, and the stubborn half-lives of rumor struggle for the final word.

R. D. Blackmore's novel belongs to the Victorian tradition of domestic romance and mystery, published in the later nineteenth century when questions of reputation, character, and social order held intense imaginative sway. It unfolds within recognizably Victorian milieus—households marked by hierarchy, towns attentive to gossip, and landscapes observed with lingering attention—while also venturing into travel and displacement that complicate a single fixed setting. The book draws on popular forms of its era—family saga, moral inquiry, and investigative suspense—yet maintains a steady, reflective gravity, using the conventions of the time to probe how a private tragedy can be magnified by public scrutiny.

The premise is at once simple and compelling: a young woman narrates her life under the cloud of a scandal

attached to her father, and, coming of age, resolves to test the stories she has been told against facts she can discover. From an early refuge that keeps her safe but uninformed, she moves outward across new places and unfamiliar social circles, piecing together fragments of testimony, following hints, and encountering both generosity and hostility. Readers meet a measured first-person voice—earnest, observant, sometimes wry—that balances patience with urgency, allowing suspense to accumulate without sensationalism and making each small advance feel morally consequential.

At the heart of the novel stand themes that remain essential to Victorian fiction yet speak powerfully now: the inheritance of guilt and its transmission through name and kinship; the tangled relation between rumor, reputation, and legal truth; and the slow, painstaking labor of discerning justice amid partial evidence. Blackmore considers how memory can be both a lamp and a fog, how communities enforce judgment before courts do, and how the past organizes the present through fear and hope. The book asks what a person owes to the dead, and what the living may risk to keep faith with the facts.

Equally striking is the novel's insistence on female agency within constraining structures. The narrator is neither a passive sufferer nor a reckless challenger; she strategizes, weighs counsel, meets obstacles with dignity, and learns when to persist and when to wait. Her journey dramatizes Victorian debates about a woman's authority to question, to testify, and to interpret evidence that men around her claim to control. The family plot becomes a

crucible for education, not only in documents and dates but also in reading character, intention, and trust—skills that carry their own perils when desire and duty pull in different directions.

Stylistically, Blackmore's prose offers ample description without indulgence, turning landscapes and interiors into ethical weather: places feel charged with history, yet the narration maintains clarity and momentum. Scenes of quiet talk, legal intricacy, and sudden peril are stitched together by a deliberate architecture of clues, misdirections, and recognitions, inviting readers to savor observation as much as revelation. The novel's humane temper keeps its mysteries grounded; the stakes are intimate even when the implications broaden, and moments of tenderness or dry humor interrupt solemnity, ensuring that the pursuit of truth doubles as the making of a self capable of bearing it.

For contemporary readers, the book matters because it treats problems that have not dimmed: how reputations are made and unmade, how stories harden into verdicts, and how families carry the freight of old wrongs and uncertain facts. In an age of accelerating rumor and contested narratives, the novel's patient ethics—listening carefully, testing evidence, resisting easy certainty—feel bracing rather than quaint. It offers a portrait of resilience that is neither romantic bravado nor despair, proposing that justice, if it comes at all, arrives through character shaped by attention, fidelity, and the courage to face what truth may cost.

# Synopsis

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*Erema; Or, My Father's Sin* (1877) is a later novel by R. D. Blackmore, told in the first person by its young heroine, who looks back on a childhood shadowed by a sensational crime attributed to her father. The book opens with the memory of disgrace, exile, and a promise that frames the narrative: to learn the truth behind the accusation and, if possible, to redeem a stained name. Blackmore blends romance, mystery, and social observation as Erema matures from dependent child to determined inquirer, navigating the weight of inherited suspicion while keeping faith with a parent whose story remains half veiled.

Early chapters follow father and daughter beyond England, where the fugitive parent lives under an assumed quietness, haunted by a past he rarely explains. His brooding reserve, alternating with flashes of tenderness, shapes Erema's sense of duty and doubt. Circumstances leave her effectively orphaned, armed only with fragments—cryptic hints, a few documents, and names that may unlock the closed doors of a long-ago disaster. The promise to investigate, given in filial loyalty rather than legal strategy, establishes the book's central question: whether character can withstand scandal, and whether truth can be recovered from rumor hardened into public certainty.

Blackmore shifts the scene to the American West, where Erema finds shelter in a Californian sawmill community whose plain decency contrasts with the guarded formalities

she has known. Domestic kindness, hard work, and the rough justice of frontier life steady her, even as natural dangers and human malice remind her that safety is never complete. Here she gains the practical courage and allies she will need, including a steadfast household that becomes almost family and a friendship that deepens into delicate feeling. News from England, however, revives the unresolved question, and Erema resolves to cross the ocean to pursue it.

Back in Britain, the novel turns from wilderness trials to drawing-room combat and legal thickets. Erema is welcomed by a talkative retired officer related by marriage, whose seaside schemes and bustling goodwill provide both humor and base of operations. She learns to read the language of solicitors' caution, to sift hearsay from testimony, and to seek living witnesses who have slipped into obscurity. Estates, titles, and inheritances sketched in dusty ledgers form the worldly stakes, but reputation is the emotional one. Shunned in some quarters and tested in others, she confronts a society that readily believes scandal yet resists correction.

The inquiry gathers momentum through small discoveries: a mislaid letter, a name resurfacing where it should not, and discrepancies in old accounts. Erema's course knots together distant events—an old quarrel, a long-ago disappearance, and possible financial motives—into a pattern that may explain the original charge without fully revealing it. A watchful adversary, sensing exposure, attempts to intimidate and misdirect her, and an episode of peril underscores the costs of pursuing truth against

entrenched interest. Still, the moral axis holds: patience, fidelity to memory, and a refusal to accept convenient narratives as final.

As clues align, the social dimension sharpens. Competing claims to position complicate loyalties, and the possibility of personal happiness presses upon Erema at the very moment when self-forgetful duty demands its price. Blackmore stages interviews, confrontations, and a carefully arranged meeting where stories must be told under pressure, yet he keeps the decisive thread just out of view. The emerging picture casts doubt on the simplest version of guilt while hinting at layered motives—fear, pride, and advantage—that warped the past. Without prematurely disclosing the final turn, the build-up makes clear that vindication, if it comes, will be hard-earned.

Beyond its plot, the novel endures for its interplay of settings and temperaments: transatlantic contrasts, the comedy of practical minds meeting legal labyrinths, and an unshowy portrait of a young woman insisting on moral clarity. Blackmore's restraint favors steady accumulation over sensational revelation, allowing questions of inherited shame, social credulity, and personal agency to remain vivid. The close binds private feeling to public justice without easy triumphalism. Read now, *Erema; Or, My Father's Sin* resonates as a study of how character confronts calumny, how truth is pieced from partial voices, and how loyalty can be both burden and compass.

# Historical Context

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Published in 1877, *Erema; Or, My Father's Sin* by R. D. Blackmore situates a young woman's quest for familial vindication within the mid-nineteenth-century Anglo-American world. Blackmore (1825–1900), already acclaimed for *Lorna Doone* (1869), drew on Victorian tastes for romance grounded in recognizable social realities. The novel moves between England and the United States, using contrasting settings—established British institutions and a newer, more fluid American society—to frame issues of reputation and justice. Its chronology aligns with decades marked by rapid travel, mass migration, and expanding print culture, conditions that shape how rumor spreads, how evidence is pursued, and how character is judged.

In Britain, the legal and administrative framework underpinning the story included assize courts, the Court of Chancery, and the Metropolitan Police (founded 1829). A dedicated Detective Branch had existed since 1842, reflecting growing faith in organized investigation. Criminal trials and inquests were public events reported widely, and appeals to influential figures—from barristers to magistrates—were common paths to redress. The novel appeared in the era of the three-volume format, dominated by circulating libraries such as Mudie's Select Library, whose purchasing choices encouraged morally respectable narratives. The Elementary Education Act of 1870 was enlarging the reading

public, heightening scrutiny of characters' conduct and social standing.

The press environment that informs the novel's scrutiny of scandal changed dramatically after stamp and paper duties were repealed in 1855 and 1861, enabling cheaper newspapers and broader circulation. The 1843 Libel Act (Lord Campbell's Act) allowed truth as a defense, but the threat of libel suits coexisted with a competitive, often intrusive press. Mid-Victorian "sensation" fiction—exemplified by Wilkie Collins and Mary Elizabeth Braddon—explored crime, secrecy, and domestic upheaval. Blackmore, more rural and conservative in temper, nonetheless engages similar concerns about evidence and reputation. The ease with which rumor could damage a household, and the difficulty of publicly undoing it, are historically grounded pressures.

Victorian gender norms also shape the novel's premises. The "separate spheres" ideal emphasized female modesty and domestic influence, yet the period saw gradual change. Institutions for women's education grew (Bedford College, 1849; Girton College, 1869), and legal reforms such as the Married Women's Property Act 1870 began to alter women's economic status. Travel for women often required familial oversight, but literary heroines increasingly exercised moral judgment and investigative agency. Against this backdrop, a daughter's effort to clarify her family's honor reflects authentic debates about female autonomy, credibility, and virtue—how a woman could act publicly without forfeiting the respectability that society demanded of her.

The American scenes resonate with the history of the California Gold Rush (1848–1855) and its aftermath, which drew migrants from Britain and Europe and transformed San Francisco into a major Pacific port. Rapid resource extraction fostered timbering and saw-mills across the Sierra foothills, while weak formal institutions encouraged improvisational justice, including vigilante committees in 1851 and 1856. Transcontinental mobility, accelerated by steamships via Panama and, after 1869, the U.S. transcontinental railroad, allowed characters plausibly to cross oceans in pursuit of truth or safety. Blackmore uses this setting to contrast frontier opportunity and hazard with the older, codified social order of Victorian England.

Advances in transport and communications provide crucial background. Britain's dense railway network, established from the 1840s, linked provincial towns to London's legal and commercial hubs, facilitating swift inquiry and surveillance. Steamship lines such as Cunard and the White Star carried transatlantic passengers and mail on increasingly predictable schedules. The 1866 Atlantic telegraph cable and expanding inland telegraph networks compressed time in news transmission, even as physical evidence still required personal custody. These technologies made plausible a narrative in which letters, rumors, and official notices travel quickly, while personal testimony and character references—hallmarks of Victorian credibility—remain decisive in repairing or destroying reputations.

Questions of lineage, inheritance, and moral responsibility were pervasive in Victorian culture. Entailed

estates and primogeniture preserved family property but also heightened conflicts over legitimacy and rumor. Religious currents—from evangelical seriousness to Anglican orthodoxy—stressed individual conscience while recognizing the social reality of “family honor.” Scientific debates after 1859 about heredity reframed ideas of character and “taint,” yet law and custom still judged persons by conduct and testimony. The title’s emphasis on a father’s fault resonates with this milieu: a society anxious about ancestral burdens, yet convinced that truth, patiently assembled through witnesses and records, could disentangle personal identity from inherited suspicion.

Blackmore wrote as a conservative observer of modernization, living near London at Teddington and combining authorship with market-gardening. His fiction often valorizes rural steadiness and personal loyalty while distrusting urban speculation and sensational notoriety. *Erema* reflects its era by staging a contest between gossip and proof, old-world hierarchy and new-world mobility, and between institutional process and private conscience. Its cross-Atlantic frame acknowledges migration’s realities and the reach of empire and commerce without glorifying upheaval. The work ultimately mirrors Victorian faith in character-tested justice, critiquing the speed of public judgment while affirming that patience, evidence, and steadfast affection can prevail.

# **EREMA; OR, MY FATHER'S SIN**

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# CHAPTER I

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## A LOST LANDMARK

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“The sins of the fathers upon the children, unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me[1q].”

These are the words that have followed me always. This is the curse which has fallen on my life.

If I had not known my father, if I had not loved him, if I had not closed his eyes in desert silence deeper than the silence of the grave, even if I could have buried and bewailed him duly, the common business of this world and the universal carelessness might have led me down the general track that leads to nothing.

Until my father fell and died I never dreamed that he could die. I knew that his mind was quite made up to see me safe in my new home, and then himself to start again for still remoter solitudes. And when his mind was thus made up, who had ever known him fail of it?

If ever a resolute man there was, that very man was my father. And he showed it now, in this the last and fatal act of his fatal life. “Captain, here I leave you all,” he shouted to the leader of our wagon train, at a place where a dark, narrow gorge departed from the moilsome mountain track. “My reasons are my own; let no man trouble himself about them. All my baggage I leave with you. I have paid my share of the venture, and shall claim it at Sacramento[2]. My little girl and I will take this short-cut through the mountains.”

“General!” answered the leader of our train, standing up on his board in amazement. “Forgive and forget, Sir; forgive and forget. What is a hot word spoken hotly? If not for your own sake, at least come back for the sake of your young daughter.”

“A fair haven to you!” replied my father. He offered me his hand, and we were out of sight of all that wearisome, drearisome, uncompanionable company with whom, for eight long weeks at least, we had been dragging our rough way. I had known in a moment that it must be so, for my father never argued. Argument, to his mind, was a very nice amusement for the weak. My spirits rose as he swung his bear-skin bag upon his shoulder, and the last sound of the laboring caravan groaned in the distance, and the fresh air and the freedom of the mountains moved around us. It was the 29th of May—Oak-apple Day<sup>[1]</sup> in England—and to my silly youth this vast extent of snowy mountains was a nice place for a cool excursion.

Moreover, from day to day I had been in most wretched anxiety, so long as we remained with people who could not allow for us. My father, by his calm reserve and dignity and largeness, had always, among European people, kept himself secluded; but now in this rough life, so pent in trackless tracts, and pressed together by perpetual peril, every body's manners had been growing free and easy. Every man had been compelled to tell, as truly as he could, the story of his life thus far, to amuse his fellow-creatures—every man, I mean, of course, except my own poor father. Some told their stories every evening, until we were quite tired—although they were never the same twice over; but

my father could never be coaxed to say a syllable more than, "I was born, and I shall die."

This made him very unpopular with the men, though all the women admired it; and if any rough fellow could have seen a sign of fear, the speaker would have been insulted. But his manner and the power of his look were such that, even after ardent spirits, no man saw fit to be rude to him. Nevertheless, there had always been the risk of some sad outrage.

"Erema," my father said to me, when the dust from the rear of the caravan was lost behind a cloud of rocks, and we two stood in the wilderness alone—"do you know, my own Erema, why I bring you from them?"

"Father dear, how should I know? You have done it, and it must be right."

"It is not for their paltry insults. Child, you know what I think all that. It is for you, my only child, that I am doing what now I do."

I looked up into his large, sad eyes without a word, in such a way that he lifted me up in his arms and kissed me, as if I were a little child instead of a maiden just fifteen. This he had never done before, and it made me a little frightened. He saw it, and spoke on the spur of the thought, though still with one arm round me.

"Perhaps you will live to be thankful, my dear, that you had a stern, cold father. So will you meet the world all the better; and, little one, you have a rough world to meet."

For a moment I was quite at a loss to account for my father's manner; but now, in looking back, it is so easy to

see into things. At the time I must have been surprised, and full of puzzled eagerness.

Not half so well can I recall the weakness, anguish, and exhaustion of body and spirit afterward. It may have been three days of wandering, or it may have been a week, or even more than that, for all that I can say for certain. Whether the time were long or short, it seemed as if it would never end. My father believed that he knew the way to the house of an old settler, at the western foot of the mountains, who had treated him kindly some years before, and with whom he meant to leave me until he had made arrangements elsewhere. If we had only gone straightway thither, night-fall would have found us safe beneath that hospitable roof.

My father was vexed, as I well remember, at coming, as he thought, in sight of some great landmark, and finding not a trace of it. Although his will was so very strong, his temper was good about little things, and he never began to abuse all the world because he had made a mistake himself.

“Erema,” he said, “at this corner where we stand there ought to be a very large pine-tree in sight, or rather a great redwood-tree, at least twice as high as any tree that grows in Europe, or Africa even. From the plains it can be seen for a hundred miles or more. It stands higher up the mountainside than any other tree of even half its size, and that makes it so conspicuous. My eyes must be failing me, from all this glare; but it must be in sight. Can you see it now?”

“I see no tree of any kind whatever, but scrubby bushes and yellow tufts; and oh, father, I am so thirsty!”

“Naturally. But now look again. It stands on a ridge, the last ridge that bars the view of all the lowland. It is a very straight tree, and regular, like a mighty column, except that on the northern side the wind from the mountains has torn a gap in it. Are you sure that you can not see it—a long way off, but conspicuous?”

“Father, I am sure that I can not see any tree half as large as a broomstick. Far or near, I see no tree.”

“Then my eyes are better than my memory. We must cast back for a mile or two; but it can not make much difference.”

“Through the dust and the sand?” I began to say; but a glance from him stopped my murmuring. And the next thing I can call to mind must have happened a long time afterward.

Beyond all doubt, in this desolation, my father gave his life for mine. I did not know it at the time, nor had the faintest dream of it, being so young and weary-worn, and obeying him by instinct. It is a fearful thing to think of—now that I can think of it—but to save my own little worthless life I must have drained every drop of water from his flat half-gallon jar. The water was hot and the cork-hole sandy, and I grumbled even while drinking it; and what must my father (who was dying all the while for a drop, but never took one)—what must he have thought of me?

But he never said a word, so far as I remember; and that makes it all the worse for me. We had strayed away into a dry, volcanic district of the mountains, where all the snow-rivers run out quite early; and of natural springs there was none forth-coming. All we had to guide us was a little

**58** An astronomical term for the point in the Moon's (or another satellite's) orbit when it is nearest to the Earth; references to perigee are often linked to stronger tidal effects.

**59** Traditional fictitious names used in English common-law pleadings (especially historic ejectment actions) as placeholder plaintiffs and defendants in legal proceedings.

**60** A local or colloquial name used in the narrative for the bridge associated with a past killing; such nicknames often reflect local superstition or memory rather than any formal place-name.

**61** A frequent name and sign for English inns and ale-houses, the 'Green Man' image usually depicts a face surrounded by foliage and draws on longstanding folk and decorative motifs.

**62** A character in the novel described with the rank "Major," indicating a former or local army officer; in the text he acts as an energetic, interventionist local figure and adviser.

**63** A local miller in the story: "Master" here is an honorific used for a tradesman or older man, and Withypool is depicted as the mill-owner who controls the mill-pond and helps the narrator.

**64** A U.S. gold coin often called an "eagle" in 19th-century usage (commonly a \$10 gold piece); the narrator describes it as a large, handsome American gold coin larger than typical English coins.

**65** A reference to Alexander Pope's 18th-century English translations of Homer's works (Iliad and Odyssey), which

were widely read in Britain and often cited by Victorian writers.

**66** An allusion to the biblical "dial (or sundial) of Ahaz" (2 Kings/Isaiah), a traditional chronometric image from the Hebrew Bible; here it is used metaphorically to criticize unreliable timekeeping by the sun.

**67** Tinkers were itinerant metalworkers or repairers and 'tailors' boys' were young assistants or apprentices to tailors; the phrase here is a 19th-century way to refer to lower-status or working-class youths drawn to seaside resorts or jobs.

**68** A hurdy-gurdy is a mechanical stringed instrument played by turning a crank that bows the strings and using keys to change pitch; it was commonly used by street and folk musicians in Europe from the medieval period into the 19th century.

**69** Camlet is a woven fabric (historly made from silk mixed with goat, camel, or wool fibers) and a 'camlet pouch' is a small bag of that material; such pouches were used in past centuries for carrying valuables or small personal items.

**70** Lochnagar here refers to a Scotch whisky produced near Loch na Gar (Royal Lochnagar distillery) in Scotland; the name denotes a specific single-malt spirit that has been distilled under that name since the 19th century and is still known today.

**71** The Koh-i-noor is a famous large diamond originally from South Asia, long celebrated for its size and history; it entered British possession in the 19th century and has been

part of the British Crown Jewels, though its provenance and ownership have been subjects of historical dispute.

**72** A named partnership in the story presented as a firm of shady agents or informers; within the novel they function as a private, mercenary business involved in investigations and covert work rather than an actual historical company.

**73** Short for Goulard's extract, a 18th–19th-century topical astringent containing lead compounds once used in lotions and poultices; it is now recognised as toxic and is no longer a standard medical treatment.

**74** A tisane is an infusion made from herbs or other plant material (a herbal tea) rather than true tea from *Camellia sinensis*, commonly used as a restorative or soothing drink in the 19th century and today.

**75** Here listed among remedies and restoratives; the speaker appears uncertain of the word — it may be a confused reference to 'tiffin' (a light meal or refreshment) or another period term, so the precise meaning in this passage is uncertain.

**76** Hartshorn originally referred to ammonium carbonate obtained from the distillation of deer (hart) antlers and was used as a smelling salt or stimulant in the 18th–19th centuries; it appears here among reviving remedies.

**77** In classical mythology Proteus is a shape-changing sea-god; the name is commonly used metaphorically in English to mean a person capable of assuming many different forms or roles.

**78** Refers to the long gown worn by lawyers and judges; here used figuratively for the formal processes and authority of the law that could envelope or dispossess someone.

**79** An archaic idiom alluding to descent through the female line (the spindle being a traditional symbol of women and spinning); it indicates inheritance passing to daughters when the male line fails.

**80** A sexton is a church officer responsible for the care of the church and churchyard; Sexton Rigg is a character name that signals he is (or was) the parish sexton and therefore a witness to local burial or church matters.

**81** A barony is the rank, title, and landed estate of a baron in the British peerage system; such titles and associated estates were typically hereditary and often passed according to male-line succession rules.

**82** A horse-drawn passenger coach drawn by four horses, commonly used for long-distance travel in the 18th and 19th centuries.

**83** A 'fly' was a light, horse-drawn vehicle for hire or short journeys in 19th-century Britain; 'Rasper' here is likely the name or nickname of the owner/driver of that hired carriage.

**84** An older name for a barometer, an instrument that measures atmospheric pressure and was commonly used in the 19th century to predict weather changes.

**85** Refers to a proprietary or recently developed form of concrete marketed under a patent in the Victorian era, i.e., an early engineered building material rather than a generic modern concrete.

**86** Billingsgate was (and is) the principal fish market in London, historically noted for its wholesale fish trade and a reputation for coarse language among fishmongers.