

COLLECTION
OF
BRITISH AUTHORS
TAUCHNITZ EDITION.

VOL. 2269.

EYRE'S ACQUITTAL BY HELEN MATHERS.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

*"I had happier died by thee
Than lived on as Lady Leigh."*

EYRE'S ACQUITTAL.

BY

HELEN MATHERS

(MRS. HENRY REEVES),

AUTHOR OF "SAM'S SWEETHEART," ETC. ETC.

COPYRIGHT EDITION.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LEIPZIG
BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

1884.

The Right of Translation is reserved.



EYRE'S ACQUITTAL.

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

“But think na ye my heart was sair,
 When I laid the mool on his yellow hair;
 O! think na ye my heart was wae
 When I turned about, away to gae?”

THE remote village of Lovel was one afternoon electrified by news of the death of its Squire, and the intimation that his body might be expected to arrive before night, under the care of his friend, Lord Lovel.

In less than an hour, Mr. Eyre's grave was being dug beside that of the woman whose lover and husband he had been, and of whose murder he was secretly believed to be guilty; though if he had killed her, it had been for love—because, though

he could endure to see her die, he could not brook the sight of himself degraded in her eyes, or, as others said, know himself supplanted in her love by his friend.

He had never been accused of the crime, nor even for some time suspected of it, and this was partly due to the fact that at his instigation a woman named Hester Clarke (formerly his mistress) had been tried for the murder, and, by circumstantial evidence, so nearly convicted, that her acquittal was indignantly declared by the Judge to be a gross miscarriage of justice.

But some extraordinary disclosures made by Mr. Eyre in the course of the trial had, in the eyes of many of those present, reversed the position of accuser and accused: while the ruthless lifting by his own hand of the curtain that had screened his inner life appalled the gazers, who in one scathing flash of light saw him stripped naked of his worldly robes, and as the man that God and his own heart had long known him.

He stood before them a man who for years had been at the mercy of a secret sin, himself the fatal