

HESTER.

BY JESSIE MCKAY.

"This way, Sir."

Dr. Lee followed his guide, a sharp little hotel runner, up long flights of stairs—through halls and corridors—past rows of numbered doors—till at last he stopped suddenly.

Before he could notice his arrival the door was opened quickly, yet softly, from within, and a lady's maid gazed anxiously and inquisitively at the doctor. She was about to usher him in when the boy grasped her apron.

"Well?" she demanded, interrogatively.

"Didn't I bring the doctor to yer all right?"

"Yes," she replied, rather tartly.

"Then, miss, don't you never go for to call a 'spectable boy names agin. Himp, indeed; what's a himp I'd like to know?"

It was the dubiousness of the term—the entire ignorance of cockney freedom with that particular rudiment of literature, the letter *h*—that had thrown a weight of mysterious inquiry on the lad's mind.

The girl drew a small bit of silver from about her person, and tossing it contemptuously on the carpet, said—"There, go and buy more marbles;" and immediately closed the entrance with the same cautious promptitude as before. Dan looked despondingly at the coin; but the love of evil conquered his disgust, and lifting it protestingly, he departed, with visions of "stonies" and other elaborate varieties firing his ambition.

Dr. Lee glanced inquiringly at the maid who responded—"My mistress was taken suddenly ill a short time ago—a fit it seemed; when she was able to speak she called your name. I ran out at once and asked that urchin—for I am a stranger in this city—if such a doctor lived here, and immediately sent him off for you.—Please to follow me, Sir."

She led the way into an adjacent room, where a lady in an elegant *dishabille* was lying on a couch.

The moment the girl had withdrawn the invalid arose with a low cry of joyful recognition, and, holding out her hands, exclaimed softly, lovingly, lingeringly,—

"Charlie!"

Dr. Lee paused, and a flush overspread his face; but it was only for a moment. He advanced courteously, and taking the proffered hand, said gently, "I am sorry to find you ill, Mrs. Maynard."

"Only Mrs. Maynard!" she murmured, with tremulous lip, and a shadow almost of despair stealing over her lovely face, "Oh, Charlie!"

"Quiet yourself, my dear madam," urged the Doctor, in the soothing tone one uses to a sick child, "I have come for the purpose of al-

leviating, not increasing, your illness. Pray tell me how you are afflicted?"

"I am better—it was nothing—oh Charlie—"

"But there must have been a cause," interrupted the Doctor, doubtless wishing to change the tenor of her thoughts.

"Yes, yes; there is a cause," she repeated with thrilling accent, "and it is not removed. When I went away so sad and desolate, and you blaming me—"

"I never blamed you, madam. When you transferred your love to another, it was only just to give him your hand also."

"Transferred my love!" she iterated scornfully, "you know I never loved him—you know it was only to please my parents that I gave up *your* love, Charlie. I can't bear to speak, or even think of those ten dreary years that followed. But they were gone at last—I was free, and I returned to my old home, where I am almost a stranger. I knew you had never married, and I hoped your heart had been true to me, even as mine had been true to you. To-day I called on an old acquaintance, Mrs. Grame, and there I heard what it would kill me to repeat, and it sent me back to the hotel blind with anguish. I went in hysterics, I suppose, and called on you in my agony. Margery heard me, and in her fright sent for you. But I am glad to see you, Charlie, and it can't be true—tell me that it is not true!"

Her plaintive, imploring utterance might have moved a less impressible man than Doctor Lee; it certainly affected him powerfully, though not, perhaps, in the manner she had intended.

Did this grave, high-minded gentleman imagine it a pretty delusion—a scene acted by the mistress, and abetted by the maid?

Perhaps so. And yet it cost an effort to throw the mantle of truth over that Ciren vision, not that the kind Doctor would for one moment have gone back to his old bonds; but his heart was tender towards the suffering, and he would gladly have spared pain and confusion to the woman who had once been his betrothed bride,—who had broken the contract for wealth and fashion. Those gilded apples of fortune had since fallen into his own hands, but he valued them less than the glance of a dark eye that watched for his coming.

"It is quite true," he said, after a moment's hesitation, "that I have offered my heart to Miss Moine, if that is what you heard at Mrs. Grame's," and his voice was full of tender compassion.

"A plain, quiet girl, without style or beauty; so they told me. But you cannot, cannot love