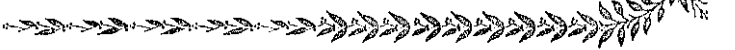




"Her Long-Lost Brother."

BY THOS. COTTLE.

Illustrated by H. P. Sealy.



IT was a hard task I had set myself, that of finding her long lost brother, who was supposed to be somewhere in New Zealand. I little knew how hard till I had been months on the quest. But, had the task been a thousand times as hard, I should have set forth none the less readily. For the reward of success was to be a princely one. It was her hand in marriage, and with that my soul was well satisfied, for I knew full well that Eileen Eady was not the girl to give her hand where she could not give her heart. She left that to the myriads of fashionable but senseless maidens who crowd the marriage markets of the world, and too often curse their own lives and those of the fools who listen to their blandishments and bid for them. And who shall say that they do not deserve to be so cursed?

Not once, but many times I implored her to fulfil the dearest wish of my heart, but her reply was ever to the same effect.

"No, dear, I cannot, will not, marry you until the uncertainty about the fate of my unfortunate brother is cleared up. You know that since my father's health has given way, he is fretting and worrying about poor Fred more than ever. I, his only daughter, could not leave him in this state. His one hope now is that Fred may be found and persuaded to return and comfort his declining years. You know also that we have reason to believe that he is in New Zealand somewhere. The solicitors whom my father employed there to search for him, wrote twelve months since

that a man they believed to be Fred was seen in Christchurch, but all trace of him was afterwards lost. Before we received this letter we had given him up altogether, but this had given us new hope which their subsequent letters have dashed to the ground, for each mail tells us that they have been so far unsuccessful."

As I gazed on the tall, beautiful girl at my side, and saw her deep blue eyes bedowed with tears, I swore that I would go out myself and find her brother or never set eyes on her again. At first, appalled by what the failure of my efforts might mean to us both, she endeavoured to dissuade me. But in vain, my mind was made up. I who knew this brother of hers, and knew too the depths of depravity into which he had fallen, far better than his pure-minded sister could know even had she heard all, was aware that he was not worth one pearly tear from those matchless eyes of hers. I felt that even if I could find him and persuade him to return, he would be no solace to his invalid father. I felt that it would be far better that he should not return. His father, an old fashioned country gentleman, was the soul of honour, Fred certainly was not.

It was not until a commission was purchased for him in a crack cavalry regiment that he had commenced the career which ended in his disappearance. Misled by their blind affection for him and his considerably careful avoidance of fouling even the vicinity of his own nest, his relations thought him sadly maligned and pitied him accordingly.