

"I had no idea we knew so many people. Quite a numerous assemblage."

"Isn't it?" she rejoined, exultantly. "Nice-looking people, too, are they not, Vaughan?"

"Well, I can't say much for the gentlemen, Carry—white cravats with human appendages to them, for the most part. Just now, they look remarkably like cockchaffers spinning on pins, but, perhaps, you never saw that cruel schoolboy operation? You may see a highly graphic illustration of it in that long young officer who is waltzing with Miss Windleton."

"You must not laugh at my guests. Do you see that gentleman standing by the door? That is Mr. Bracebridge, Sir John's only son, just returned from travelling in the East. Don't you think him picturesque-looking?"

"Picturesque? Yes, I suppose so. Pictures are of various kinds. Do you admire *that* style of picture?"

"I do," she returned, looking up with her candid eyes; "he looks pleasant, good, and intelligent. And I believe he is so."

"Do you—Innocence?" He laughed, as he returned the look, "Well, I know nothing about him; but, as a general rule, I hate fellows with eccentric beards and *outré* style; a sure sign of a coxcomb, take my word for it."

As he spoke, the gentleman they were discussing navigated his course with some difficulty through the dancers, and came up to them. His mission was to ask Miss Maturin to dance the next quadrille, and she had half bowed her head in acquiescence, when Vaughan interfered.

"Caroline, do you forget you promised it to me?"

She looked at him, wondering and perplexed. Mr. Bracebridge still stood in the attitude of appeal, but with ready courtesy smoothed away the embarrassment at once.

"The next following, then, may I hope for?"

"If you please," cried Caroline, artlessly enough showing her own pleasure. The gentleman with the beard then moved away, and Caroline looked up to Vaughan inquiringly.

"You did not ask me to dance," she said, gravely; "why did you say I had promised? I did not even know you intended to dance at all."

"Well, I intended to ask you, and I knew, if I had, you would have agreed. Besides, I did not want our conversation interrupted by that stupid, broad-shouldered animal."

But Caroline did not smile. She examined her bouquet with some seriousness.

"You don't mean to say you are disappointed? Shall I call him back,