

me? Can I confound the plights of my child with the wind moaning through the forest? Madness!" she repeated, in a sadder, softer tone; "Ah! it is perhaps because I am mad that my eyes are seald with tears, my looks blanched with grief, and that I wander, a vagabond sorceress, amidst these wilds!"

"It is--it must be she!" exclaimed Carmen, and taking the hand of the Seigneuresse, she would have addressed her; but she, recalled to herself by this action, placed a finger on the half-opened lips of the young slave, and said, with a gentle smile,

"Despair not, my daughter! we shall meet again ere long."

"Adelaide!" murmured Donna Carmen.

"Hush!" interrupted the Seigneuresse; "Margaret bids you all adieu for some days. Michel! see to it that you treat them well!" and she rapidly departed, leaving the inmates of the tent silent and absorbed in the different thoughts to which this interview had given rise.

XXXIII.

THE DUEL.

In the mean time the Leopard had not remained indifferent to the fate of his nephew, although the latter had often in his heart reproached him with it. The day after Margaret's departure, he entered the tent of Michel le Basque, and seating himself on the ground, saluted his comrade as if he had simply come on a friendly visit. After a few minutes passed in silence, he rose and helped himself--according to a custom of the Brethren of the Coast--to powder and shot from Michel's store. Le Basque remained in silent astonishment at seeing him act thus indifferently, and without even looking to his nephew, who was employed in stretching a hide in the corner of the tent. A quarter of an hour elapsed without a word on either side, and the Leopard then broke silence.

"Thou hast not forgotten our ancient friendship, Michel! Thou rememberest that thou didst once thyself intercede with me for Joachim. Thou knowest how I love the son of my brother?"

"To what does this tend?" asked Michel.

"I had hoped," continued the Leopard, "that my comrade would not treat like an African negro or Spanish slave, a brave youth who had been his companion."

"I am master of my own servants," replied Le Basque rudely, "and owe account to no man."

"It is true," returned the Leopard, "no law can force thee to be humane and generous. But if you are not such, neither is there ought to pre-

vent me saying--Michel, the Leopard despises thee!"

Le Basque grew pale, and rising from his seat exclaimed;

"Well, if you will have it, be it so! I hate this youngster, who unceasingly though silently defies me. He is my bounden servant, and such he shall remain until the term of our agreement."

"Very well!" replied the Leopard calmly, "then we must fight. Michel! for thou canst not strike my nephew but it seems that my own flesh writhes under the lash. My blood flows in the veins of this young man, and in him I feel myself insulted."

"O my uncle!" interrupted Joachim with emotion, endeavouring to seize the hand of his advocate.

"Silence!" cried the latter harshly, biting his lip however to restrain his feelings. "I will, to thy work--and leave the free buccaneer to his!"

Michel le Basque still hesitated to accept the challenge thus given him, and the Leopard opening the calabash that served him as hunting horn, began to scatter on the ground the powder he had taken a few minutes before. This was a token of renunciation of all friendship and fellowship, and was the most grievous insult that one adventurer could show another.

"Not that--not that!" murmured Michel.

"You wish then that I should use thine own powder and ball against thyself?" said the Leopard, glad to escape what he considered a hard task. "Be it so! I will retain them, out of the regard I still bear thee. In return, look that thou bearest thyself bravely, without weakness or hesitation--just as if thou hadst to do with a Spanish *lançero*."

Le Basque had commenced loading his fusil almost tremblingly, but at this moment he noticed Carmen and Joachim exchanging a glance--of hope, it might be--and jealous rage lent him new firmness.

"Fear, not weakness or hesitation on my part," he cried; "my hand shall be as steady as your own, Leopard! No, no! my good servants!" he muttered to himself, "I am not yet under ground."

The duel, amongst the Brethren of the Coast, had its special rules and statutes, and was a very frequent mode of determining any disputes that arose. The presence of two seconds and of a surgeon was generally requisite, and if either of the parties received a wound through the treachery or unfairness of his antagonist, the latter was immediately seized by the witnesses, bound to a tree and shot.

On the present occasion the Leopard