

"The colony!" he cried with an oath. "A colony with two solitary colonists! a colony that has ruined all its owners and is a thousand louis d'ors in debt! That for a colony!"

He snapped his fingers contemptuously and commenced roaring a ribald tavern song, beating time with his hands upon the oaken table till it rang again. Biencourt wild with rage sprang to his feet and drew his sword; Imbert stooped unsteadily down and caught his from the floor with his monstrous hand and the fight began.

It was a weird scene for the room lay wrapped in shadow and the scant firelight falling pallidly on their faces served in place of candles. Behind each the other saw a vast black background with angry eyes gleaming from out it, while between, the swords writhed and twisted and caught the light in long pale crimson flashes. Biencourt, who was the younger and more active, first touched Imbert on the arm. They paused momentarily while a cloth was bound upon the wound, then began again with greater fury than before. This time Imbert's giant strength slowly but surely beat Biencourt's opposition down. He felt his head begin to swim before the furious onslaught, his guard failed and Imbert ran him through the left shoulder.

He sank slowly into a chair and Imbert flung his sword with a whirring crash into a dark corner of the room. Then he knelt by Biencourt's side, all the drunken bravado vanished from his face.

"I've hurt thee, lad," he said morosely.

"No, old pirate, only a scratch," answered Biencourt coolly, "but I had to live awhile longer and my courage needs no proving. It was a foolish quarrel, though after all a little blood-letting is no bad thing."