TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"Do you not see that the wind has blown off my hat?"

Aramis rushed after the fugitive, but D'Artagnan took advantage of the circumstance to find a place in the hedge not so thick, where his glance could penetrate to the supposed cavalier. At that instant, the moon, inquisitive, perhaps, like D'Artagnan, came from behind a cloud, and by her light D'Artagnan recognized the large blue eyes, the golden hair, and the classic head of the Duchess de Longueville.

Aramis returned, laughing; one hat on his head, and the other in his hand; and he and his companion resumed their walk toward the convent.

"Good!" said D'Artagnan, rising and brushing his knees; "now I have thee—then art a Frondeur, and the lover of Madame de Longueville."

CHAPTER X.

MONSIEUR PORTHOS DU VALON DE BRACIEUX DE PIERREFONDS.

Thanks to what Aramis had told him, D'Artagnan, who knew already that Porthos called himself Du Valon, was now aware that he styled himself, from his estate, De Bracieux—and that he was, on account of this estate, engaged in a lawsuit with the Bishop of Noyon.

At eight o'clock in the evening, he and Planchet again left the hotel of the Cheverete, quitting Paris by the Port Saint Denis.

Their route lay through Dru man,—and then, taking one of two roads which branched off to Compiegne, when it was necessary to inquire the situation of the estate of Bracieux.

They traveled always at night; and having fallen at Villars-Cottretes that Porthos was at the property which he had lately bought, called Pierrefonds, they set out, taking the road which leads from Villars-Cottretes to Compiegne.

The morning was beautiful; and in this early spring-time the birds sang on the trees, and the sunbeams shone through the misty glades, like curtains of golden gauze.

In other parts of the forest the light could scarcely penetrate through the foliage: and the stems of two old oak trees—the refuge of the squirrel, startled by the travelers—were in deep shadow.

There came up from all nature in the dawn of day a perfume of herbs, flowers, and leaves, which delighted the heart; and D'Artagnan, sick of the closeness of Paris, thought that when a man had three names of his different estates joined one to another, he ought to be very happy in such a paradise; then he shook his head, saying, "If I were Porthos, and D'Artagnan came to make to me such a proposition as I am going to make to him, I know what I should say to it."

As to Planchet, he thought of nothing.

At the extremity of the wood D'Artagnan perceived the road which had been described to him; and at the end of the road he saw the towers of an immense feudal castle.

"Oh! oh!" he said, "I fancied this castle belonged to the
ancient branch of Orleans. Can Porthos have negotiated for it with the Due de Longueville?"

"Faith!" exclaimed Planchet, "here's land in good condition; if it belongs to Monsieur Porthos, I shall wish him joy."

"Zounds!" cried D'Artagnan, "don't call him Porthos, nor even Vallon: call him De Bracieux or De Pierrefonds: thou wilt ruin my mission otherwise."

As he approached the castle, which had first attracted his eye, D'Artagnan was convinced that it could not be there that his friend dwelt: the towers, though solid, and as if built yesterday, were open and broken. One might have fancied that some gauze had cheese them with bows from a matchet.

On arriving at the extremity of the castle, D'Artagnan found himself overlooking a beautiful valley, in which at the foot of a charming little lake, stood several scattered houses, which, humble in their aspect, and covered, some with tiles, and others with thatch, seemed to acknowledge as their sovereign lord a pretty château, built about the beginning of the reign of Henry IV., and surmounted by some stoutly weather-cocks. D'Artagnan felt now no doubt of this being the dwelling of Porthos.

The road led straight up to the château, which, compared to its ancestor on the hill, was exactly what a top of the coterie of the Ducs d'Engbien would have been beside a knight in steel armor in the time of Charles VI. D'Artagnan spurred his horse on, and pursued his road, followed by Planchet at the same pace.

In ten minutes D'Artagnan reached the end of an alley regularly planted with fine poplars, and terminating in an iron gate, the points and crossed bars of which were gilt. In the midst of this avenue was a nobleman, dressed in green, and with as much gilding about him as the iron gate, riding on a tall horse. On his right hand and his left were two footmen, with the seams of their dresses laced. A considerable number of clowns were assembled, and rendered homage to their lord.

"Ah!" said D'Artagnan to himself, "can this be the Seigneur du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds? Well-a-day! how he is wrinkled since he has given up the name of Porthos!"

"This cannot be Monsieur Porthos," observed Planchet, replying, as it were, to his master's thoughts. "Monsieur Porthos was six feet high, this man is scarcely five."

"Nevertheless," said D'Artagnan, "the people are bowing very low to this person."

As he spoke, he rode toward the tall horse—to the man of importance and his valets. As he approached, he seemed to recognize the features of this individual.

"Jesu!" cried Planchet, "can it be he?"

At this exclamation, the man on horsecap turned slowly, and with a lofty air, and the two travelers could see, displayed in all their brilliancy, the large eyes, the vermilion visage, and the eloquent smile of Musqueton.

It was, indeed, Musqueton—Musqueton, as fat as a pig, rolling about with ruder health, puffed out with good living, who, recognizing D'Artagnan, and acting very differently from the hypocrite Bazin, slipped off his horse, and approached the officer, with his hat
off, so that the homage of the assembled crowd was turned toward
this new sun, which eclipsed the former luminary.

"Monsieur D'Artagnan! Monsieur D'Artagnan!" cried Musqueton,
his fat cheeks swelling out, and his whole frame perspiring
with joy. "Monsieur D'Artagnan! what joy for my lord and
master De Vailly de Breuciex de Pierrefoist!"

"Thou good Musqueton! where is thy master?"

"You are on his property."

"But how handsome thou art—how full thou'est prospered and
grown stout!" and D’Artagnan could not restrain his astonishment
at the change which good fortune had produced upon the once
famished one.

"Hey, yes, thank God, I am pretty well," said Musqueton,

"But dost thou say nothing to the friend Planchet?"

"How, my friend Planchet! Planchet! art thou there?" cried
Musqueton, with open arms, and eyes full of tears.

"My very self," replied Planchet; "but I wanted first to see if
they've got good news!"

"Proud toward an old friend? never. Planchet! thou wouldn't
not have thought so haberd thou known Musqueton well?"

"So far so well," answered Planchet, smiling, and extending
his arms to Musqueton, the two servants embraced with an
emotion which touched those who were present, and made them
suppose that Planchet was a great lord in disguise, so greatly did
they estimate the position of Musqueton.

"And now, sir," resumed Musqueton, when he had rid himself
of Planchet, who had in vain tried to clasp his hand round his
friend’s back, "now, sir, allow me to leave you, for I could not
permit my master to hear of your arrival from any one but myself;
he would never forgive me for not having preceded you."

"This dear friend," said D’Artagnan, carefully avoiding to utter
either the former name borne by Portos, or his new one; "then he
has not forgotten me?"

"Forgotten? Not!" cried Musqueton; "there’s not a day, sir,
that we don’t expect to hear that you were made marshal, either in-
stead of Monsieur de Gassion, or of Monsieur de Basanopierre."

On D’Artagnan’s lips there played one of those rare and mean
chaly smiles which seemed to come from the depth of his heart; the
last trace of youth and happiness which had survived disappoint-
ment.

"And you—follows," resumed Musqueton, "stay near Monsieur
le Comte d’Artagnan, and pay him every attention in your power,
whilst I go to prepare my lord for his visit."

And mounting his horse, Musqueton rode off down the avenue,
on the grass, in an easy gallop.

"As, there!—there’s something promising," said D’Artagnan.

"No mysteries, no cloak to hide one’s self in—no cunning
policy here; people laugh outright, they weep for joy here. I see
nothing but faces of a yard broad; in short, it seems to
me that Nature herself wears a holiday suit, and that the trees,
instead of leaves and flowers, are covered with red and green ribbons
as on gala days."

"As for me," said Planchet, "I seem to smell from this place
even a most delectable smell of roast meat, and to see the scullions
in a row by the hedge, biding our approach. Ah! sir, what a cook
must Monsieur Perceval have, when he was so fond of eating
and drinking, even whilst he was only called Monsieur Porthos!"
"Say no more!" cried D'Artagnan. "If the reality corresponds
with appearances, I'm lost; for a man so well off will never change
this happy condition—and I shall fall with him, as I have already
done with Aramis."

CHAPTER XI.

H ow D'Artagnan, in Discovering The Retreat of Porthos,
Perceives That Wealth Does Not Produce Happiness.

D'Artagnan passed through the iron gate, and arrived in front
of the château. He allighted—as he saw a species of plant on the
steps. Let us do justice to D'Artagnan; that, independent of
every selfish wish, his heart palpitated with joy when he saw that
tall form and martial demeanor, which recalled to him a good and
brave man.

He ran to Porthos and threw himself into his arms; the whole
body of servants, arranged in a circle at a respectful distance, looked
on with humble curiosity. Mustapha, at the head of them, wiped
his eyes. Porthos put his arm in that of his friend.

"Ah! how delightful to see you again, dear friend! " he cried,
in a voice which was now changed from a baritone into a bass;
"you've not then forgotten me?"

"Forget you! oh! dear Du Vallon, does one forget the happiest
days of one's youth—one's dearest friends—the dangers we have
dared together? on the contrary, there is not an hour that we have
passed together that is not present to my memory."

"Yes, yes," said Porthos, trying to give his mustache a curl
which it had lost whilst he had been alone. "Yes, we did some
fine things in our time, and we gave that poor Cardinal some thread
to unravel."

And he heaved a sigh.

"Under any circumstances," he resumed, "you are welcome,
my dear friend; you will help me to recover my spirits; to-morrow
we will hunt the hare on my plain, which is a superb tract of land,
or we'll pursue the deer in my woods, which are magnificent. I
have four runners, which are considered the swiftest in our county,
and a pack of hounds which are unequalled for twenty leagues
round."

And Porthos heaved another sigh.

"But, first," interposed D'Artagnan, "you must present me to
Madame du Vallon."

"A third sigh from Porthos."

"I lost Madame du Vallon two years ago," he said, "and you
find me still in affliction on that account. That was the reason why
I left my Château du Vallon, near Corbeil, and came to my estate,
Bracieu. Poor Madame du Vallon! her temper was uncertain, but
she came at last to accustom herself to my ways and to understand
my little wishes."