TWENTY YEARS AFTER.

"Well, then, I decide."
"I have your word, then?"
"Yes, 'ts given. I shall fight heart and soul for Mazarin; but——."
"But!"
"But he must make me a baron."
"Zounds!" said D'Artagnan, "that's settled already. I answer for your barony."

On this promise being given, Porthos, who had never doubted his friend's assurance, turned back with him toward the castle.

CHAPTER XII.

IN WHICH IT IS SHOWN THAT IF Porthos WERE DISCONTENTED WITH HIS CONDITION, MUSQUETON WAS COMPLETELY SATISFIED WITH HIS.

As they returned toward the castle, D'Artagnan thought of the miseries of poor human nature, always dissatisfied with what it has, always desirous of what it has not.

In the position of Porthos, D'Artagnan would have been perfectly happy; and, to make Porthos contented, there was wanting—what?—five letters to put before his three names, and a little coronet to paint upon the panel of his carriage!

"I shall pass all my life," thought D'Artagnan, "in seeking for a man who is really contented with his lot."

Whilst making this reflection, chance seemed, as it were, to give him the he direct. When Porthos had left him to give some orders, he saw Musqueton approaching. The face of the steward, despite one slight shade of care, light as a summer cloud, seemed one of perfect felicity.

"Here is what I am looking for," thought D'Artagnan; "but, alas! the poor fellow does not know the purpose for which I am here."

He then made a sign for Musqueton to come to him.

"Sir," said the servant, "I have a favor to ask you."

"Speak out, my friend."

"I am afraid to do so. Perhaps you will think, sir, that prosperity has spoiled me?"

"Art thou happy, friend?" asked D'Artagnan.

"As happy as possible; and yet, sir, you may make me even happier than I am."

"Well, speak, if it depends on me."

"Oh, sir! It depends on you only."

"I listen—I am waiting to hear."

"Sir, the favor I have to ask of you is, not to call me 'Musqueton,' but 'Mouzon.' Since I have had the honor of being my lord's steward, I have taken the last name as more dignified, and endeavored to make my inferiors respect me. You, sir, know how necessary subordination is in an establishment of servants."

D'Artagnan smiled—Porthos lengthened out his name—Musqueton cut his short.
"Well, my dear Mouson," he said, "I rest satisfied. I will call thee Mouson; and, if it will make thee happy, I would not 'twist thee away any longer.'"

"Oh!" cried Musqueton, reddening with joy; "if you do me, sir, such an honor, I shall be grateful all my life—'tis too much to ask."

D'Artagnan was secretly touched with remorse—not at inducing Porthos to enter into schemes in which his life and fortune would be in jeopardy—for Porthos, in the title of baron, had his object and reward; but poor Musqueton, whose only wish was to be called Mouson—was it not cruel to snatch him from the delightful state of peace and plenty in which he was?

He was thinking on these matters, when Porthos summoned him to dinner.

While desert was on the table, the steward came in to consult his master upon the proceedings of the next day, and also with regard to the shooting party which had been proposed.

"Tell me, Mouson," said Porthos, "are my arms in good condition?"

"Your arms, my lord; what arms?"

"Zounds! my weapons."

"What weapons?"

"My military weapons."

"Yes, my lord; I think so, at any rate."

"Make sure of it; and, if they want it, have them rubbed up. Which is my best cavalry horse?"

"Vulcan."

"And the best back?"

"Bayard."

"What horse dost thou choose for thyself?"

"I like Rustand, my lord; a good animal, whose paces suit me."

"Strong, think'st thou?"

"Half Norman, half Mecklenburger; will go night and day."

"That will do for us. See to these horses. Clean up, or make some one else clean my arms. Then take pistols with thee, and a hunting-knife."

"Are we then going to travel, my lord?" asked Musqueton, rather uneasy.

"Something better still, Mouson."

"An expedition, sir?" asked the steward, whose nerves began to change into ilies.

"We are going to return to the service, Mouson," replied Porthos, still trying to restore his muscule to the military curl that it had lost.

"Into the service—the king's service?" Musqueton trembled; even his fat, smooth cheeks shook as he spoke, and he looked at D'Artagnan with an air of reproach, he staggered, and his voice was almost choked.

"Yes and no. We shall serve in a campaign, seek out all sorts of adventures, return, in short, to our former life."

These last words fell on Musqueton like a thunderbolt. It was these terrible former days which made the present so delightful; and
the blow was so great that he rushed out, overcome, and forgot to shut the door.

The two friends remained alone to speak of the future and to build canals in the air. The good wine which Musqueton had placed before them gave to D'Artagnan a perspective, shining with quadrupeds and pistols, and showed to Porthos a blue ribbon and a dead man: they were, in fact, asleep on the table when the servants came to beg them to go to bed.

Musqueton was, however, a little comforted by D'Artagnan, who, the next day, told him that in all probability war would always be carried on in the heart of Paris, and within reach of the Château du Vaux, which was near Corbeil, or Boweux, which was near Meun, and of Pourcehou, which was between Compiegne and Villars-Cotterets.

"But—finally—it appears," began Musqueton, timidly.

"Oh!" said D'Artagnan, "we don't now make war as we did formerly. To-day it's a sort of diplomatic arrangement; ask Planchet."

Musqueton inquired, therefore, the state of the case of his old friend, who confirmed the statement of D'Artagnan. "But," he added, "in this war prisoners stand a chance of being hung."

"The chance they do!" said Musqueton; "I think I should like the siege of Rochelle better than this war, then!"

Porthos, meantime, asked D'Artagnan to give him his instructions how to proceed on his journey.

"Four days," replied his friend, "are necessary to reach Blois; one day to rest there; three or four days to return to Paris. Set out, therefore, in a week, with your wife, and go to the Hôtel de la Cheverette, Rue Trequetonne, and wait for me there."

"That's agreed," said Porthos.

"As to myself, I shall go round to see Athos; for though I don't think his aid worth much, one must, with one's friends, observe all due politeness," said D'Artagnan.

The friends then took leave of each other on the very border of the estate of Pourcehou, to which Porthos escorted his friend.

"At least," said D'Artagnan and to himself, as he took the road to Villars-Cotterets, "at least I shall not be alone in my undertaking. That devil, Porthos, is a man of immense strength; still, if Athos joins us, well—we shall be three of us to laugh at Aramis—that little coward with his good luck."

At Villars-Cotterets he wrote to the Cardinal:

"My Lord,—I have already one man to offer to your Eminence, and he is well worth twenty men. I am just setting out for Blois. The Comte de la Père inhabits the castle of Brulehoux, in the environs of that city."