

Chapter LV. Porthos's Will.

At Pierrefonds everything was in mourning. The courts were deserted--the stables closed--the parterres neglected. In the basins, the fountains, formerly so jubilantly fresh and noisy, had stopped of themselves. Along the roads around the chateau came a few grave personages mounted on mules or country nags. These were rural neighbors, cures and bailiffs of adjacent estates. All these people entered the chateau silently, handed their horses to a melancholy-looking groom, and directed their steps, conducted by a huntsman in black, to the great dining-room, where Mousqueton received them at the door. Mousqueton had become so thin in two days that his clothes moved upon him like an ill-fitting scabbard in which the sword-blade dances at each motion. His face, composed of red and white, like that of the Madonna of Vandyke, was furrowed by two silver rivulets which had dug their beds in his cheeks, as full formerly as they had become flabby since his grief began. At each fresh arrival, Mousqueton found fresh tears, and it was pitiful to see him press his throat with his fat hand to keep from bursting into sobs and lamentations. All these visits were for the purpose of hearing the reading of Porthos's will, announced for that day, and at which all the covetous friends of the dead man were anxious to be present, as he had left no relations behind him.

The visitors took their places as they arrived, and the great room had just been closed when the clock struck twelve, the hour fixed for the reading of the important document. Porthos's procureur--and that was naturally the successor of Master Coquenard--commenced by slowly unfolding the vast parchment upon which the powerful hand of Porthos had traced his sovereign will. The seal broken--the spectacles put on--the preliminary cough having sounded--every one pricked up his ears. Mousqueton had squatted himself in a corner, the better to weep and the better to hear. All at once the folding-doors of the great room, which had been shut, were thrown open as if by magic, and a warlike figure appeared upon the threshold, resplendent in the full light of the sun. This was D'Artagnan, who had come alone to the gate, and finding nobody to hold his stirrup, had tied his horse to the knocker and announced himself. The splendor of daylight invading the room, the murmur of all present, and, more than all, the instinct of the faithful dog, drew Mousqueton from his reverie; he raised his head, recognized the old friend of his master, and, screaming with grief, he embraced his knees, watering the floor with his tears. D'Artagnan raised the poor intendant, embraced him as if he had been a brother, and, having nobly saluted the assembly, who all bowed as they whispered to each other his name, he went and took his seat at the extremity of the great carved oak hall, still holding by the hand poor Mousqueton, who was suffocating with excess of woe, and sank upon the steps. Then the procureur, who, like the rest, was considerably agitated, commenced.

Porthos, after a profession of faith of the most Christian character,

asked pardon of his enemies for all the injuries he might have done them. At this paragraph, a ray of inexpressible pride beamed from the eyes of D'Artagnan.

He recalled to his mind the old soldier; all those enemies of Porthos brought to earth by his valiant hand; he reckoned up the numbers of them, and said to himself that Porthos had acted wisely, not to enumerate his enemies or the injuries done to them, or the task would have been too much for the reader. Then came the following schedule of his extensive lands:

"I possess at this present time, by the grace of God--

"1. The domain of Pierrefonds, lands, woods, meadows, waters, and forests, surrounded by good walls.

"2. The domain of Bracieux, chateaux, forests, plowed lands, forming three farms.

"3. The little estate Du Vallon, so named because it is in the valley."
(Brave Porthos!)

"4. Fifty farms in Touraine, amounting to five hundred acres.

"5. Three mills upon the Cher, bringing in six hundred livres each.

"6. Three fish-pools in Berry, producing two hundred livres a year.

"As to my personal or movable property, so called because it can be moved, as is so well explained by my learned friend the bishop of Vannes--" (D'Artagnan shuddered at the dismal remembrance attached to that name)--the procureur continued imperturbably--"they consist--"

"1. In goods which I cannot detail here for want of room, and which furnish all my chateaux or houses, but of which the list is drawn up by my intendant."

Every one turned his eyes towards Mousqueton, who was still lost in grief.

"2. In twenty horses for saddle and draught, which I have particularly at my chateau of Pierrefonds, and which are called--Bayard, Roland, Charlemagne, Pepin, Dunois, La Hire, Ogier, Samson, Milo, Nimrod, Urganda, Armida, Flastrade, Dalilah, Rebecca, Yolande, Finette, Grisette, Lisette, and Musette.

"3. In sixty dogs, forming six packs, divided as follows: the first, for the stag; the second, for the wolf; the third, for the wild boar; the fourth, for the hare; and the two others, for setters and protection.

"4. In arms for war and the chase contained in my gallery of arms.

"5. My wines of Anjou, selected for Athos, who liked them formerly; my wines of Burgundy, Champagne, Bordeaux, and Spain, stocking eight cellars and twelve vaults, in my various houses.

"6. My pictures and statues, which are said to be of great value, and which are sufficiently numerous to fatigue the sight.

"7. My library, consisting of six thousand volumes, quite new, and have never been opened.

"8. My silver plate, which is perhaps a little worn, but which ought to weigh from a thousand to twelve hundred pounds, for I had great trouble in lifting the coffer that contained it and could not carry it more than six times round my chamber.

"9. All these objects, in addition to the table and house linen, are divided in the residences I liked the best."

Here the reader stopped to take breath. Every one sighed, coughed, and redoubled his attention. The procureur resumed:

"I have lived without having any children, and it is probable I never shall have any, which to me is a cutting grief. And yet I am mistaken, for I have a son, in common with my other friends; that is, M. Raoul Auguste Jules de Bragelonne, the true son of M. le Comte de la Fere.

"This young nobleman appears to me extremely worthy to succeed the valiant gentleman of whom I am the friend and very humble servant."

Here a sharp sound interrupted the reader. It was D'Artagnan's sword, which, slipping from his baldric, had fallen on the sonorous flooring. Every one turned his eyes that way, and saw that a large tear had rolled from the thick lid of D'Artagnan, half-way down to his aquiline nose, the luminous edge of which shone like a little crescent moon.

"This is why," continued the procureur, "I have left all my property, movable, or immovable, comprised in the above enumerations, to M. le Vicomte Raoul Auguste Jules de Bragelonne, son of M. le Comte de la Fere, to console him for the grief he seems to suffer, and enable him to add more luster to his already glorious name."

A vague murmur ran through the auditory. The procureur continued, seconded by the flashing eye of D'Artagnan, which, glancing over the assembly, quickly restored the interrupted silence:

"On condition that M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne do give to M. le

Chevalier d'Artagnan, captain of the king's musketeers, whatever the said Chevalier d'Artagnan may demand of my property. On condition that M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne do pay a good pension to M. le Chevalier d'Herblay, my friend, if he should need it in exile. I leave to my intendant Mousqueton all of my clothes, of city, war, or chase, to the number of forty-seven suits, in the assurance that he will wear them till they are worn out, for the love of and in remembrance of his master. Moreover, I bequeath to M. le Vicomte de Bragelonne my old servant and faithful friend Mousqueton, already named, providing that the said vicomte shall so act that Mousqueton shall declare, when dying, he has never ceased to be happy."

On hearing these words, Mousqueton bowed, pale and trembling; his shoulders shook convulsively; his countenance, compressed by a frightful grief, appeared from between his icy hands, and the spectators saw him stagger and hesitate, as if, though wishing to leave the hall, he did not know the way.

"Mousqueton, my good friend," said D'Artagnan, "go and make your preparations. I will take you with me to Athos's house, whither I shall go on leaving Pierrefonds."

Mousqueton made no reply. He scarcely breathed, as if everything in that hall would from that time be foreign. He opened the door, and slowly disappeared.

The procureur finished his reading, after which the greater part of those who had come to hear the last will of Porthos dispersed by degrees, many disappointed, but all penetrated with respect. As for D'Artagnan, thus left alone, after having received the formal compliments of the procureur, he was lost in admiration of the wisdom of the testator, who had so judiciously bestowed his wealth upon the most necessitous and the most worthy, with a delicacy that neither nobleman nor courtier could have displayed more kindly. When Porthos enjoined Raoul de Bragelonne to give D'Artagnan all that he would ask, he knew well, our worthy Porthos, that D'Artagnan would ask or take nothing; and in case he did demand anything, none but himself could say what. Porthos left a pension to Aramis, who, if he should be inclined to ask too much, was checked by the example of D'Artagnan; and that word exile, thrown out by the testator, without apparent intention, was it not the mildest, most exquisite criticism upon that conduct of Aramis which had brought about the death of Porthos? But there was no mention of Athos in the testament of the dead. Could the latter for a moment suppose that the son would not offer the best part to the father? The rough mind of Porthos had fathomed all these causes, seized all these shades more clearly than law, better than custom, with more propriety than taste.

"Porthos had indeed a heart," said D'Artagnan to himself with a sigh. As he made this reflection, he fancied he heard a groan in the room above

him; and he thought immediately of poor Mousqueton, whom he felt it was a pleasing duty to divert from his grief. For this purpose he left the hall hastily to seek the worthy intendant, as he had not returned. He ascended the staircase leading to the first story, and perceived, in Porthos's own chamber, a heap of clothes of all colors and materials, upon which Mousqueton had laid himself down after heaping them all on the floor together. It was the legacy of the faithful friend. Those clothes were truly his own; they had been given to him; the hand of Mousqueton was stretched over these relics, which he was kissing with his lips, with all his face, and covered with his body. D'Artagnan approached to console the poor fellow.

"My God!" said he, "he does not stir--he has fainted!"

But D'Artagnan was mistaken. Mousqueton was dead! Dead, like the dog who, having lost his master, crawls back to die upon his cloak.