Chapter 10. Monsieur Porthos du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds.

Thanks to what Aramis had told him, D'Artagnan, who knew already that Porthos called himself Du Vallon, 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. It was, then, in the neighborhood of Noyon that he must seek that estate. His itinerary was promptly determined: he would go to Dammartin, from which place two roads diverge, one toward Soissons, the other toward Compiegne; there he would inquire concerning the Bracieux estate and go to the right or to the left according to the information obtained.

Planchet, who was still a little concerned for his safety after his recent escapade, declared that he would follow D'Artagnan even to the end of the world, either by the road to the right or by that to the left; only he begged his former master to set out in the evening, for greater security to himself. D'Artagnan suggested that he should send word to his wife, so that she might not be anxious about him, but Planchet replied with much sagacity that he was very sure his wife would not die of anxiety through not knowing where he was, while he, Planchet, remembering her incontinence of tongue, would die of anxiety if she did know.

This reasoning seemed to D'Artagnan so satisfactory that he no further insisted; and about eight o'clock in the evening, the time when the

vapors of night begin to thicken in the streets, he left the Hotel de la Chevrette, and followed by Planchet set forth from the capital by way of the Saint Denis gate.

At midnight the two travelers were at Dammartin, but it was then too late to make inquiries--the host of the Cygne de la Croix had gone to bed.

The next morning D'Artagnan summoned the host, one of those sly Normans who say neither yes nor no and fear to commit themselves by giving a direct answer. D'Artagnan, however, gathered from his equivocal replies that the road to the right was the one he ought to take, and on that uncertain information he resumed his journey. At nine in the morning he reached Nanteuil and stopped for breakfast. His host here was a good fellow from Picardy, who gave him all the information he needed. The Bracieux estate was a few leagues from Villars-Cotterets.

D'Artagnan was acquainted with Villars-Cotterets, having gone thither with the court on several occasions; for at that time Villars-Cotterets was a royal residence. He therefore shaped his course toward that place and dismounted at the Dauphin d'Or. There he ascertained that the Bracieux estate was four leagues distant, but that Porthos was not at Bracieux. Porthos had, in fact, been involved in a dispute with the Bishop of Noyon in regard to the Pierrefonds property, which adjoined his own, and weary at length of a legal controversy which was beyond his comprehension, he put an end to it by purchasing Pierrefonds and added that name to his others. He now called himself Du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds, and resided on his new estate.

The travelers were therefore obliged to stay at the hotel until the next day; the horses had done ten leagues that day and needed rest. It is true they might have taken others, but there was a great forest to pass through and Planchet, as we have seen, had no liking for forests after dark.

There was another thing that Planchet had no liking for and that was starting on a journey with a hungry stomach. Accordingly, D'Artagnan, on awaking, found his breakfast waiting for him. It need not be said that Planchet in resuming his former functions resumed also his former humility and was not ashamed to make his breakfast on what was left by D'Artagnan.

It was nearly eight o'clock when they set out again. Their course was clearly defined: they were to follow the road toward Compiegne and on emerging from the forest turn to the right.

The morning was beautiful, and in this early springtime 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. 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 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 little or nothing, but was happy as a hunting-hound in his old master's company.

At the extremity of the wood D'Artagnan perceived the road that 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 Duc de Longueville?"

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

"Zounds!" cried D'Artagnan, "don't call him Porthos, nor even Vallon; call him De Bracieux or De Pierrefonds; thou wilt knell out damnation to 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 giant had cleaved them with

blows from a hatchet.

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, others with thatch, seemed to acknowledge as their sovereign lord a pretty chateau, built about the beginning of the reign of Henry IV., and surmounted by four stately, gilded weather-cocks. D'Artagnan no longer doubted that this was Porthos's pleasant dwelling place.

The road led straight up to the chateau which, compared to its ancestor on the hill, was exactly what a fop of the coterie of the Duc d'Enghein would have been beside a knight in steel armor in the time of Charles VII. 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 has shrunk since he gave 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?"

At this exclamation the man on horseback 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--Mousqueton.

It was indeed Mousqueton--Mousqueton, as fat as a pig, rolling about with rude 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 Mousqueton, his fat cheeks swelling out and his whole frame perspiring with joy; "Monsieur

d'Artagnan! oh! what joy for my lord and master, Du Vallon de Bracieux de Pierrefonds!"

"Thou good Mousqueton! where is thy master?"

"You stand upon his property!"

"But how handsome thou art--how fat! thou hast prospered and grown stout!" and D'Artagnan could not restrain his astonishment at the change good fortune had produced on the once famished one.

"Hey, yes, thank God, I am pretty well," said Mousqueton.

"But hast thou nothing to say to thy friend Planchet?"

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

"My very self," replied Planchet; "but I wanted first to see if thou wert grown proud."

"Proud toward an old friend? never, Planchet! thou wouldst not have thought so hadst thou known Mousqueton well."

"So far so well," answered Planchet, alighting, and extending his arms to Mousqueton, 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 highly did they estimate the position of

Mousqueton.

"And now, sir," resumed Mousqueton, when he had rid himself of Planchet, who had in vain tried to clasp his hands behind his friend's fat back, "now, sir, allow me to leave you, for I could not permit my master to hear of your arrival from any 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 Porthos or his new one, "then he has not forgotten me?"

"Forgotten--he!" cried Mousqueton; "there's not a day, sir, that we don't expect to hear that you were made marshal either instead of Monsieur de Gassion, or of Monsieur de Bassompierre."

On D'Artagnan's lips there played one of those rare and melancholy smiles which seemed to emanate from the depth of his soul--the last trace of youth and happiness that had survived life's disillusions.

"And you--fellows," resumed Mousqueton, "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 Mousqueton rode off down the avenue on the grass at a hand gallop.

"Ah, 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 a yard broad; in short, it seems to me that nature herself wears a holiday garb, 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 perfume of fine roast meat, and to see the scullions in a row by the hedge, hailing our approach. Ah! sir, what a cook must Monsieur Pierrefonds 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 am lost; for a man so well off will never change his happy condition, and I shall fail with him, as I have already done with Aramis."