

Chapter XVIII. In which D'Artagnan seeks Porthos, and only finds Mousqueton.

When D'Artagnan had perfectly convinced himself that the absence of the Vicar-General d'Herblay was real, and that his friend was not to be found at Melun or in its vicinity, he left Bazin without regret, cast an ill-natured glance at the magnificent Chateau de Vaux, which was beginning to shine with that splendor which brought on its ruin, and, compressing his lips like a man full of mistrust and suspicion, he put spurs to his pied horse, saying, "Well, well! I have still Pierrefonds left, and there I shall find the best man and the best filled coffer. And that is all I want, for I have an idea of my own."

We will spare our readers the prosaic incidents of D'Artagnan's journey, which terminated on the morning of the third day within sight of Pierrefonds. D'Artagnan came by the way of Nanteuil-le-Haudouin and Crepy. At a distance he perceived the Castle of Louis of Orleans, which, having become part of the crown domain, was kept by an old concierge. This was one of those marvelous manors of the middle ages, with walls twenty feet in thickness, and a hundred in height.

D'Artagnan rode slowly past its walls, measured its towers with his eye and descended into the valley. From afar he looked down upon the chateau of Porthos, situated on the shores of a small lake, and contiguous to a magnificent forest. It was the same place we have already had the honor of describing to our readers; we shall therefore satisfy ourselves with naming it. The first thing D'Artagnan perceived after the fine trees, the May sun gilding the sides of the green hills, the long rows of feather-topped trees which stretched out towards Compiègne, was a large rolling box, pushed forward by two servants and dragged by two others. In this box there was an enormous green-and-gold thing, which went along the smiling glades of the park, thus dragged and pushed. This thing, at a distance, could not be distinguished, and signified absolutely nothing; nearer, it was a hogshead muffled in gold-bound green cloth; when close, it was a man, or rather a poussa, the inferior extremity of whom, spreading over the interior of the box, entirely filled it; when still closer, the man was Mousqueton--Mousqueton, with gray hair and a face as red as Punchinello's.

"Pardieu!" cried D'Artagnan; "why, that's my dear Monsieur Mousqueton!"

"Ah!" cried the fat man--"ah! what happiness! what joy! There's M. d'Artagnan. Stop, you rascals!" These last words were addressed to the lackeys who pushed and dragged him. The box stopped, and the four lackeys, with a precision quite military, took off their laced hats and ranged themselves behind it.

"Oh, Monsieur d'Artagnan!" said Mousqueton, "why can I not embrace your knees? But I have become impotent, as you see."

"Dame! my dear Mousqueton, it is age."

"No, monsieur, it is not age; it is infirmities--troubles."

"Troubles! you, Mousqueton?" said D'Artagnan, making the tour of the box; "are you out of your mind, my dear friend? Thank God! you are as hearty as a three-hundred-year-old oak."

"Ah! but my legs, monsieur, my legs!" groaned the faithful servant.

"What's the matter with your legs?"

"Oh, they will no longer bear me!"

"Ah, the ungrateful things! And yet you feed them well, Mousqueton, apparently."

"Alas, yes! They can reproach me with nothing in that respect," said Mousqueton, with a sigh; "I have always done what I could for my poor body; I am not selfish." And Mousqueton sighed afresh.

"I wonder whether Mousqueton wants to be a baron, too, as he sighs after that fashion?" thought D'Artagnan.

"Mon Dieu, monsieur!" said Mousqueton, as if rousing himself from a painful reverie; "how happy monseigneur will be that you have thought of him!"

"Kind Porthos!" cried D'Artagnan, "I am anxious to embrace him."

"Oh!" said Mousqueton, much affected, "I shall certainly write to him."

"What!" cried D'Artagnan, "you will write to him?"

"This very day; I shall not delay it an hour."

"Is he not here, then?"

"No, monsieur."

"But is he near at hand?--is he far off?"

"Oh, can I tell, monsieur, can I tell?"

"Mordioux!" cried the musketeer, stamping with his foot, "I am

unfortunate. Porthos is such a stay-at-home!"

"Monsieur, there is not a more sedentary man than monseigneur, but--"

"But what?"

"When a friend presses you--"

"A friend?"

"Doubtless--the worthy M. d'Herblay."

"What, has Aramis pressed Porthos?"

"This is how the thing happened, Monsieur d'Artagnan. M. d'Herblay wrote to monseigneur--"

"Indeed!"

"A letter, monsieur, such a pressing letter that it threw us all into a bustle."

"Tell me all about it, my dear friend," said D'Artagnan; "but remove these people a little further off first."

Mousqueton shouted, "Fall back, you fellows," with such powerful lungs that the breath, without the words, would have been sufficient to disperse the four lackeys. D'Artagnan seated himself on the shaft of the box and opened his ears. "Monsieur," said Mousqueton, "monseigneur, then, received a letter from M. le Vicaire-General d'Herblay, eight or nine days ago; it was the day of the rustic pleasures, yes, it must have been Wednesday."

"What do you mean?" said D'Artagnan. "The day of rustic pleasures?"

"Yes, monsieur; we have so many pleasures to take in this delightful country, that we were encumbered by them; so much so, that we have been forced to regulate the distribution of them."

"How easily do I recognize Porthos's love of order in that! Now, that idea would never have occurred to me; but then I am not encumbered with pleasures."

"We were, though," said Mousqueton.

"And how did you regulate the matter, let me know?" said D'Artagnan.

"It is rather long, monsieur."

"Never mind, we have plenty of time; and you speak so well, my dear Mousqueton, that it is really a pleasure to hear you."

"It is true," said Mousqueton, with a sigh of satisfaction, which emanated evidently from the justice which had been rendered him, "it is true I have made great progress in the company of monseigneur."

"I am waiting for the distribution of the pleasures, Mousqueton, and with impatience. I want to know if I have arrived on a lucky day."

"Oh, Monsieur d'Artagnan," said Mousqueton in a melancholy tone, "since monseigneur's departure all the pleasures have gone too!"

"Well, my dear Mousqueton, refresh your memory."

"With what day shall I begin?"

"Eh, pardieux! begin with Sunday; that is the Lord's day."

"Sunday, monsieur?"

"Yes."

"Sunday pleasures are religious: monseigneur goes to mass, makes the bread-offering, and has discourses and instructions made to him by his almoner-in-ordinary. That is not very amusing, but we expect a Carmelite from Paris who will do the duty of our almonry, and who, we are assured, speaks very well, which will keep us awake, whereas our present almoner always sends us to sleep. These are Sunday religious pleasures. On Monday, worldly pleasures."

"Ah, ah!" said D'Artagnan, "what do you mean by that? Let us have a glimpse at your worldly pleasures."

"Monsieur, on Monday we go into the world; we pay and receive visits, we play on the lute, we dance, we make verses, and burn a little incense in honor of the ladies."

"Peste! that is the height of gallantry," said the musketeer, who was obliged to call to his aid all the strength of his facial muscles to suppress an enormous inclination to laugh.

"Tuesday, learned pleasures."

"Good!" cried D'Artagnan. "What are they? Detail them, my dear Mousqueton."

"Monseigneur has bought a sphere or globe, which I shall show you; it fills all the perimeter of the great tower, except a gallery which he

has had built over the sphere: there are little strings and brass wires to which the sun and moon are hooked. It all turns; and that is very beautiful. Monseigneur points out to me the seas and distant countries. We don't intend to visit them, but it is very interesting."

"Interesting! yes, that's the word," repeated D'Artagnan. "And Wednesday?"

"Rustic pleasures, as I have had the honor to tell you, monsieur le chevalier. We look over monseigneur's sheep and goats; we make the shepherds dance to pipes and reeds, as is written in a book monseigneur has in his library, which is called 'Bergeries.' The author died about a month ago."

"Monsieur Racan, perhaps," said D'Artagnan.

"Yes, that was his name--M. Racan. But that is not all: we angle in the little canal, after which we dine, crowned with flowers. That is Wednesday."

"Peste!" said D'Artagnan; "you don't divide your pleasures badly. And Thursday?--what can be left for poor Thursday?"

"It is not very unfortunate, monsieur," said Mousqueton, smiling.
"Thursday, Olympian pleasures. Ah, monsieur, that is superb! We get together all monseigneur's young vassals, and we make them throw the disc, wrestle, and run races. Monseigneur can't run now, no more can I; but monseigneur throws the disc as nobody else can throw it. And when he does deal a blow, oh, that proves a misfortune!"

"How so?"

"Yes, monsieur, we were obliged to renounce the cestus. He cracked heads; he broke jaws--beat in ribs. It was charming sport; but nobody was willing to play with him."

"Then his wrist--"

"Oh, monsieur, firmer than ever. Monseigneur gets a trifle weaker in his legs,--he confesses that himself; but his strength has all taken refuge in his arms, so that--"

"So that he can knock down bullocks, as he used to formerly."

"Monsieur, better than that--he beats in walls. Lately, after having supped with one of our farmers--you know how popular and kind monseigneur is--after supper, as a joke, he struck the wall a blow. The wall crumbled away beneath his hand, the roof fell in, and three men and

an old woman were stifled."

"Good God, Mousqueton! And your master?"

"Oh, monseigneur, a little skin was rubbed off his head. We bathed the wounds with some water which the monks gave us. But there was nothing the matter with his hand."

"Nothing?"

"No, nothing, monsieur."

"Deuce take the Olympic pleasures! They must cost your master too dear; for widows and orphans--"

"They all had pensions, monsieur; a tenth of monseigneur's revenue was spent in that way."

"Then pass on to Friday," said D'Artagnan.

"Friday, noble and warlike pleasures. We hunt, we fence, we dress falcons and break horses. Then, Saturday is the day for intellectual pleasures: we adorn our minds; we look at monseigneur's pictures and statues; we write, even, and trace plans: and then we fire monseigneur's cannon."

"You draw plans, and fire cannon?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"Why, my friend," said D'Artagnan, "M. du Vallon, in truth, possesses the most subtle and amiable mind that I know. But there is one kind of pleasure you have forgotten, it appears to me."

"What is that, monsieur?" asked Mousqueton, with anxiety.

"The material pleasures."

Mousqueton colored. "What do you mean by that, monsieur?" said he, casting down his eyes.

"I mean the table--good wine--evenings occupied in passing the bottle."

"Ah, monsieur, we don't reckon those pleasures,--we practice them every day."

"My brave Mousqueton," resumed D'Artagnan, "pardon me, but I was so absorbed in your charming recital that I have forgotten the principal object of our conversation, which was to learn what M. le

Vicaire-General d'Herblay could have to write to your master about."

"That is true, monsieur," said Mousqueton; "the pleasures have misled us. Well, monsieur, this is the whole affair."

"I am all attention, Mousqueton."

"On Wednesday--"

"The day of the rustic pleasures?"

"Yes--a letter arrived; he received it from my hands. I had recognized the writing."

"Well?"

Monseigneur read it and cried out, "Quick, my horses! my arms!"

"Oh, good Lord! then it was for some duel?" said D'Artagnan.

"No, monsieur, there were only these words: 'Dear Porthos, set out, if you would wish to arrive before the Equinox. I expect you.'"

"Mordioux!" said D'Artagnan, thoughtfully, "that was pressing, apparently."

"I think so; therefore," continued Mousqueton, "monseigneur set out the very same day with his secretary, in order to endeavor to arrive in time."

"And did he arrive in time?"

"I hope so. Monseigneur, who is hasty, as you know, monsieur, repeated incessantly, 'Tonne Dieu! What can this mean? The Equinox? Never mind, a fellow must be well mounted to arrive before I do.'"

"And you think Porthos will have arrived first, do you?" asked D'Artagnan.

"I am sure of it. This Equinox, however rich he may be, has certainly no horses so good as monseigneur's."

D'Artagnan repressed his inclination to laugh, because the brevity of Aramis's letter gave rise to reflection. He followed Mousqueton, or rather Mousqueton's chariot, to the castle. He sat down to a sumptuous table, of which they did him the honors as to a king. But he could draw nothing from Mousqueton,--the faithful servant seemed to shed tears at will, but that was all.

D'Artagnan, after a night passed in an excellent bed, reflected much upon the meaning of Aramis's letter; puzzled himself as to the relation of the Equinox with the affairs of Porthos; and being unable to make anything out unless it concerned some amour of the bishop's, for which it was necessary that the days and nights should be equal, D'Artagnan left Pierrefonds as he had left Melun, as he had left the chateau of the Comte de la Fere. It was not, however, without a melancholy, which might in good sooth pass for one of the most dismal of D'Artagnan's moods. His head cast down, his eyes fixed, he suffered his legs to hang on each side of his horse, and said to himself, in that vague sort of reverie which ascends sometimes to the sublimest eloquence:

"No more friends! no more future! no more anything! My energies are broken like the bonds of our ancient friendship. Oh, old age is coming, cold and inexorable; it envelopes in its funeral crepe all that was brilliant, all that was embalming in my youth; then it throws that sweet burthen on its shoulders and carries it away with the rest into the fathomless gulf of death."

A shudder crept through the heart of the Gascon, so brave and so strong against all the misfortunes of life; and during some moments the clouds appeared black to him, the earth slippery and full of pits as that of cemeteries.

"Whither am I going?" said he to himself. "What am I going to do! Alone, quite alone--without family, without friends! Bah!" cried he all at once. And he clapped spurs to his horse, who, having found nothing melancholy in the heavy oats of Pierrefonds, profited by this permission to show his gayety in a gallop which absorbed two leagues. "To Paris!" said D'Artagnan to himself. And on the morrow he alighted in Paris. He had devoted ten days to this journey.