Chapter 6. D'Artagnan in his Fortieth Year.

Years have elapsed, many events have happened, alas! since, in our romance of "The Three Musketeers," we took leave of D'Artagnan at No.

12 Rue des Fossoyeurs. D'Artagnan had not failed in his career, but circumstances had been adverse to him. So long as he was surrounded by his friends he retained his youth and the poetry of his character. He was one of those fine, ingenuous natures which assimilate themselves easily to the dispositions of others. Athos imparted to him his greatness of soul, Porthos his enthusiasm, Aramis his elegance. Had D'Artagnan continued his intimacy with these three men he would have become a superior character. Athos was the first to leave him, in order that he might retire to a little property he had inherited near Blois; Porthos, the second, to marry an attorney's wife; and lastly, Aramis, the third, to take orders and become an abbe. From that day D'Artagnan felt lonely and powerless, without courage to pursue a career in which he could only distinguish himself on condition that each of his three companions should endow him with one of the gifts each had received from Heaven.

Notwithstanding his commission in the musketeers, D'Artagnan felt completely solitary. For a time the delightful remembrance of Madame Bonancieux left on his character a certain poetic tinge, perishable indeed; for like all other recollections in this world, these impressions were, by degrees, effaced. A garrison life is fatal even to the most aristocratic organization; and imperceptibly, D'Artagnan, always in the camp, always on horseback, always in garrison, became (I know not how in the present age one would express it) a typical trooper. His early refinement of character was not only not lost, it grew even greater than ever; but it was now applied to the little, instead of to the great things of life--to the martial condition of the

soldier--comprised under the head of a good lodging, a rich table, a congenial hostess. These important advantages D'Artagnan found to his own taste in the Rue Tiquetonne at the sign of the Roe.

From the time D'Artagnan took quarters in that hotel, the mistress of the house, a pretty and fresh looking Flemish woman, twenty-five or twenty-six years old, had been singularly interested in him; and after certain love passages, much obstructed by an inconvenient husband to whom a dozen times D'Artagnan had made a pretence of passing a sword through his body, that husband had disappeared one fine morning, after furtively selling certain choice lots of wine, carrying away with him money and jewels. He was thought to be dead; his wife, especially, who cherished the pleasing idea that she was a widow, stoutly maintained that death had taken him. Therefore, after the connection had continued three years, carefully fostered by D'Artagnan, who found his bed and his mistress more agreeable every year, each doing credit to the other, the mistress conceived the extraordinary desire of becoming a wife and proposed to D'Artagnan that he should marry her.

"Ah, fie!" D'Artagnan replied. "Bigamy, my dear! Come now, you don't really wish it?"

"But he is dead; I am sure of it."

"He was a very contrary fellow and might come back on purpose to have us hanged."

"All right; if he comes back you will kill him, you are so skillful and

so brave."

"Peste! my darling! another way of getting hanged."

"So you refuse my request?"

"To be sure I do--furiously!"

The pretty landlady was desolate. She would have taken D'Artagnan not only as her husband, but as her God, he was so handsome and had so fierce a mustache.

Then along toward the fourth year came the expedition of Franche-Comte. D'Artagnan was assigned to it and made his preparations to depart. There were then great griefs, tears without end and solemn promises to remain faithful--all of course on the part of the hostess. D'Artagnan was too grand to promise anything; he purposed only to do all that he could to increase the glory of his name.

As to that, we know D'Artagnan's courage; he exposed himself freely to danger and while charging at the head of his company he received a ball through the chest which laid him prostrate on the field of battle. He had been seen falling from his horse and had not been seen to rise; every one, therefore, believed him to be dead, especially those to whom his death would give promotion. One believes readily what he wishes to believe. Now in the army, from the division-generals who desire the death of the general-in-chief, to the soldiers who desire the death of the corporals, all desire some one's death.

But D'Artagnan was not a man to let himself be killed like that.
After he had remained through the heat of the day unconscious on the battle-field, the cool freshness of the night brought him to himself.
He gained a village, knocked at the door of the finest house and was received as the wounded are always and everywhere received in France. He was petted, tended, cured; and one fine morning, in better health than ever before, he set out for France. Once in France he turned his course toward Paris, and reaching Paris went straight to Rue Tiquetonne.

But D'Artagnan found in his chamber the personal equipment of a man, complete, except for the sword, arranged along the wall.

"He has returned," said he. "So much the worse, and so much the better!"

It need not be said that D'Artagnan was still thinking of the husband.
He made inquiries and discovered that the servants were new and that the mistress had gone for a walk.

"Alone?" asked D'Artagnan.

"With monsieur."

"Monsieur has returned, then?"

"Of course," naively replied the servant.

"If I had any money," said D'Artagnan to himself, "I would go away;

but I have none. I must stay and follow the advice of my hostess, while thwarting the conjugal designs of this inopportune apparition."

He had just completed this monologue--which proves that in momentous circumstances nothing is more natural than the monologue--when the servant-maid, watching at the door, suddenly cried out:

"Ah! see! here is madame returning with monsieur."

D'Artagnan looked out and at the corner of Rue Montmartre saw the hostess coming along hanging to the arm of an enormous Swiss, who tiptoed in his walk with a magnificent air which pleasantly reminded him of his old friend Porthos.

"Is that monsieur?" said D'Artagnan to himself. "Oh! oh! he has grown a good deal, it seems to me." And he sat down in the hall, choosing a conspicuous place.

The hostess, as she entered, saw D'Artagnan and uttered a little cry, whereupon D'Artagnan, judging that he had been recognized, rose, ran to her and embraced her tenderly. The Swiss, with an air of stupefaction, looked at the hostess, who turned pale.

"Ah, it is you, monsieur! What do you want of me?" she asked, in great distress.

"Is monsieur your cousin? Is monsieur your brother?" said D'Artagnan, not in the slightest degree embarrassed in the role he was playing.

And without waiting for her reply he threw himself into the arms of the Helvetian, who received him with great coldness.

"Who is that man?" he asked.

The hostess replied only by gasps.

"Who is that Swiss?" asked D'Artagnan.

"Monsieur is going to marry me," replied the hostess, between two gasps.

"Your husband, then, is at last dead?"

"How does that concern you?" replied the Swiss.

"It concerns me much," said D'Artagnan, "since you cannot marry madame without my consent and since----"

"And since?" asked the Swiss.

"And since--I do not give it," said the musketeer.

The Swiss became as purple as a peony. He wore his elegant uniform, D'Artagnan was wrapped in a sort of gray cloak; the Swiss was six feet high, D'Artagnan was hardly more than five; the Swiss considered himself on his own ground and regarded D'Artagnan as an intruder.

"Will you go away from here?" demanded the Swiss, stamping violently,

like a man who begins to be seriously angry.

"I? By no means!" said D'Artagnan.

"Some one must go for help," said a lad, who could not comprehend that this little man should make a stand against that other man, who was so large.

D'Artagnan, with a sudden accession of wrath, seized the lad by the ear and led him apart, with the injunction:

"Stay you where you are and don't you stir, or I will pull this ear off. As for you, illustrious descendant of William Tell, you will straightway get together your clothes which are in my room and which annoy me, and go out quickly to another lodging."

The Swiss began to laugh boisterously. "I go out?" he said. "And why?"

"Ah, very well!" said D'Artagnan; "I see that you understand French. Come then, and take a turn with me and I will explain."

The hostess, who knew D'Artagnan's skill with the sword, began to weep and tear her hair. D'Artagnan turned toward her, saying, "Then send him away, madame."

"Pooh!" said the Swiss, who had needed a little time to take in D'Artagnan's proposal, "pooh! who are you, in the first place, to ask me to take a turn with you?"

"I am lieutenant in his majesty's musketeers," said D'Artagnan, "and consequently your superior in everything; only, as the question now is not of rank, but of quarters--you know the custom--come and seek for yours; the first to return will recover his chamber."

D'Artagnan led away the Swiss in spite of lamentations on the part of the hostess, who in reality found her heart inclining toward her former lover, though she would not have been sorry to give a lesson to that haughty musketeer who had affronted her by the refusal of her hand.

It was night when the two adversaries reached the field of battle. D'Artagnan politely begged the Swiss to yield to him the disputed chamber; the Swiss refused by shaking his head, and drew his sword.

"Then you will lie here," said D'Artagnan. "It is a wretched bed, but that is not my fault, and it is you who have chosen it." With these words he drew in his turn and crossed swords with his adversary.

He had to contend against a strong wrist, but his agility was superior to all force. The Swiss received two wounds and was not aware of it, by reason of the cold; but suddenly feebleness, occasioned by loss of blood, obliged him to sit down.

"There!" said: D'Artagnan, "what did I tell you? Fortunately, you won't be laid up more than a fortnight. Remain here and I will send you your clothes by the boy. Good-by! Oh, by the way, you'd better take lodging in the Rue Montorgueil at the Chat Qui Pelote. You will be well fed

there, if the hostess remains the same. Adieu."

Thereupon he returned in a lively mood to his room and sent to the Swiss the things that belonged to him. The boy found him sitting where D'Artagnan had left him, still overwhelmed by the coolness of his adversary.

The boy, the hostess, and all the house had the same regard for D'Artagnan that one would have for Hercules should he return to earth to repeat his twelve labors.

But when he was alone with the hostess he said: "Now, pretty Madeleine, you know the difference between a Swiss and a gentleman. As for you, you have acted like a barmaid. So much the worse for you, for by such conduct you have lost my esteem and my patronage. I have driven away the Swiss to humiliate you, but I shall lodge here no longer. I will not sleep where I must scorn. Ho, there, boy! Have my valise carried to the Muid d'Amour, Rue des Bourdonnais. Adieu, madame."

In saying these words D'Artagnan appeared at the same time majestic and grieved. The hostess threw herself at his feet, asked his pardon and held him back with a sweet violence. What more need be said? The spit turned, the stove roared, the pretty Madeleine wept; D'Artagnan felt himself invaded by hunger, cold and love. He pardoned, and having pardoned he remained.

And this explains how D'Artagnan had quarters in the Rue Tiquetonne, at the Hotel de la Chevrette.

D'Artagnan then returned home in thoughtful mood, finding a somewhat lively pleasure in carrying Mazarin's bag of money and thinking of that fine diamond which he had once called his own and which he had seen on the minister's finger that night.

"Should that diamond ever fall into my hands again," he reflected, "I would turn it at once into money; I would buy with the proceeds certain lands around my father's chateau, which is a pretty place, well enough, but with no land to it at all, except a garden about the size of the Cemetery des Innocents; and I should wait in all my glory till some rich heiress, attracted by my good looks, rode along to marry me. Then I should like to have three sons; I should make the first a nobleman, like Athos; the second a good soldier, like Porthos; the third an excellent abbe, like Aramis. Faith! that would be a far better life than I lead now; but Monsieur Mazarin is a mean wretch, who won't dispossess himself of his diamond in my favor."

On entering the Rue Tiquetonne he heard a tremendous noise and found a dense crowd near the house.

"Oho!" said he, "is the hotel on fire?" On approaching the hotel of the Roe he found, however, that it was in front of the next house the mob was collected. The people were shouting and running about with torches. By the light of one of these torches D'Artagnan perceived men in uniform.

He asked what was going on.

He was told that twenty citizens, headed by one man, had attacked a carriage which was escorted by a troop of the cardinal's bodyguard; but a reinforcement having come up, the assailants had been put to flight and the leader had taken refuge in the hotel next to his lodgings; the house was now being searched.

In his youth D'Artagnan had often headed the bourgeoisie against the military, but he was cured of all those hot-headed propensities; besides, he had the cardinal's hundred pistoles in his pocket, so he went into the hotel without a word. There he found Madeleine alarmed for his safety and anxious to tell him all the events of the evening, but he cut her short by ordering her to put his supper in his room and give him with it a bottle of good Burgundy.

He took his key and candle and went upstairs to his bedroom. He had been contented, for the convenience of the house, to lodge in the fourth story; and truth obliges us even to confess that his chamber was just above the gutter and below the roof. His first care on entering it was to lock up in an old bureau with a new lock his bag of money, and then as soon as supper was ready he sent away the waiter who brought it up and sat down to table.

Not to reflect on what had passed, as one might fancy. No, D'Artagnan considered that things are never well done when they are not reserved to their proper time. He was hungry; he supped, he went to bed. Neither was he one of those who think that the necessary silence of the night brings counsel with it. In the night he slept, but in the morning, refreshed

and calm, he was inspired with his clearest views of everything. It was long since he had any reason for his morning's inspiration, but he always slept all night long. At daybreak he awoke and took a turn around his room.

"In '43," he said, "just before the death of the late cardinal, I received a letter from Athos. Where was I then? Let me see. Oh! at the siege of Besancon I was in the trenches. He told me--let me think--what was it? That he was living on a small estate--but where? I was just reading the name of the place when the wind blew my letter away, I suppose to the Spaniards; there's no use in thinking any more about Athos. Let me see: with regard to Porthos, I received a letter from him, too. He invited me to a hunting party on his property in the month of September, 1646. Unluckily, as I was then in Bearn, on account of my father's death, the letter followed me there. I had left Bearn when it arrived and I never received it until the month of April, 1647; and as the invitation was for September, 1646, I couldn't accept it. Let me look for this letter; it must be with my title deeds."

D'Artagnan opened an old casket which stood in a corner of the room, and which was full of parchments referring to an estate during a period of two hundred years lost to his family. He uttered an exclamation of delight, for the large handwriting of Porthos was discernible, and underneath some lines traced by his worthy spouse.

D'Artagnan eagerly searched for the heading of this letter; it was dated from the Chateau du Vallon.

Porthos had forgotten that any other address was necessary; in his pride he fancied that every one must know the Chateau du Vallon.

"Devil take the vain fellow," said D'Artagnan. "However, I had better find him out first, since he can't want money. Athos must have become an idiot by this time from drinking. Aramis must have worn himself to a shadow of his former self by constant genuflexion."

He cast his eyes again on the letter. There was a postscript:

"I write by the same courier to our worthy friend Aramis in his convent."

"In his convent! What convent? There are about two hundred in Paris and three thousand in France; and then, perhaps, on entering the convent he changed his name. Ah! if I were but learned in theology I should recollect what it was he used to dispute about with the curate of Montdidier and the superior of the Jesuits, when we were at Crevecoeur; I should know what doctrine he leans to and I should glean from that what saint he has adopted as his patron.

"Well, suppose I go back to the cardinal and ask him for a passport into all the convents one can find, even into the nunneries? It would be a curious idea, and maybe I should find my friend under the name of Achilles. But, no! I should lose myself in the cardinal's opinion. Great people only thank you for doing the impossible; what's possible, they say, they can effect themselves, and they are right. But let us wait a little and reflect. I received a letter from him, the dear fellow,

in which he even asked me for some small service, which, in fact, I rendered him. Yes, yes; but now what did I do with that letter?"

D'Artagnan thought a moment and then went to the wardrobe in which hung his old clothes. He looked for his doublet of the year 1648 and as he had orderly habits, he found it hanging on its nail. He felt in the pocket and drew from it a paper; it was the letter of Aramis:

"Monsieur D'Artagnan: You know that I have had a quarrel with a certain gentleman, who has given me an appointment for this evening in the Place Royale. As I am of the church, and the affair might injure me if I should share it with any other than a sure friend like you, I write to beg that you will serve me as second.

"You will enter by the Rue Neuve Sainte Catherine; under the second lamp on the right you will find your adversary. I shall be with mine under the third.

"Wholly yours,

"Aramis."

D'Artagnan tried to recall his remembrances. He had gone to the rendezvous, had encountered there the adversary indicated, whose name

he had never known, had given him a pretty sword-stroke on the arm, then had gone toward Aramis, who at the same time came to meet him, having already finished his affair. "It is over," Aramis had said. "I think I have killed the insolent fellow. But, dear friend, if you ever need me you know that I am entirely devoted to you." Thereupon Aramis had given him a clasp of the hand and had disappeared under the arcades.

So, then, he no more knew where Aramis was than where Athos and Porthos were, and the affair was becoming a matter of great perplexity, when he fancied he heard a pane of glass break in his room window. He thought directly of his bag and rushed from the inner room where he was sleeping. He was not mistaken; as he entered his bedroom a man was getting in by the window.

"Ah! you scoundrel!" cried D'Artagnan, taking the man for a thief and seizing his sword.

"Sir!" cried the man, "in the name of Heaven put your sword back into the sheath and don't kill me unheard. I'm no thief, but an honest citizen, well off in the world, with a house of my own. My name is--ah! but surely you are Monsieur d'Artagnan?"

"And thou--Planchet!" cried the lieutenant.

"At your service, sir," said Planchet, overwhelmed with joy; "if I were still capable of serving you."

"Perhaps so," replied D'Artagnan. "But why the devil dost thou run

about the tops of houses at seven o'clock of the morning in the month of January?"

"Sir," said Planchet, "you must know; but, perhaps you ought not to know----"

"Tell us what," returned D'Artagnan, "but first put a napkin against the window and draw the curtains."

"Sir," said the prudent Planchet, "in the first place, are you on good terms with Monsieur de Rochefort?"

"Perfectly; one of my dearest friends."

"Ah! so much the better!"

"But what has De Rochefort to do with this manner you have of invading my room?"

"Ah, sir! I must first tell you that Monsieur de Rochefort is----"

Planchet hesitated.

"Egad, I know where he is," said D'Artagnan. "He's in the Bastile."

"That is to say, he was there," replied Planchet. "But in returning thither last night, when fortunately you did not accompany him, as his carriage was crossing the Rue de la Ferronnerie his guards insulted

the people, who began to abuse them. The prisoner thought this a good opportunity for escape; he called out his name and cried for help. I was there. I heard the name of Rochefort. I remembered him well. I said in a loud voice that he was a prisoner, a friend of the Duc de Beaufort, who called for help. The people were infuriated; they stopped the horses and cut the escort to pieces, whilst I opened the doors of the carriage and Monsieur de Rochefort jumped out and soon was lost amongst the crowd. At this moment a patrol passed by. I was obliged to sound a retreat toward the Rue Tiquetonne; I was pursued and took refuge in the house next to this, where I have been concealed between two mattresses. This morning I ventured to run along the gutters and----"

"Well," interrupted D'Artagnan, "I am delighted that De Rochefort is free, but as for thee, if thou shouldst fall into the hands of the king's servants they will hang thee without mercy. Nevertheless, I promise thee thou shalt be hidden here, though I risk by concealing thee neither more nor less than my lieutenancy, if it was found out that I gave one rebel an asylum."

"Ah! sir, you know well I would risk my life for you."

"Thou mayst add that thou hast risked it, Planchet. I have not forgotten all I owe thee. Sit down there and eat in security. I see thee cast expressive glances at the remains of my supper."

"Yes, sir; for all I've had since yesterday was a slice of bread and butter, with preserves on it. Although I don't despise sweet things in proper time and place, I found the supper rather light."

"Poor fellow!" said D'Artagnan. "Well, come; set to."

"Ah, sir, you are going to save my life a second time!" cried Planchet.

And he seated himself at the table and ate as he did in the merry days of the Rue des Fossoyeurs, whilst D'Artagnan walked to and fro and thought how he could make use of Planchet under present circumstances. While he turned this over in his mind Planchet did his best to make up for lost time at table. At last he uttered a sigh of satisfaction and paused, as if he had partially appeased his hunger.

"Come," said D'Artagnan, who thought that it was now a convenient time to begin his interrogations, "dost thou know where Athos is?"

"No, sir," replied Planchet.

"The devil thou dost not! Dost know where Porthos is?"

"No--not at all."

"And Aramis?"

"Not in the least."

"The devil! the devil! the devil!"

"But, sir," said Planchet, with a look of shrewdness, "I know where

Bazin is."

"Where is he?"

"At Notre Dame."

"What has he to do at Notre Dame?"

"He is beadle."

"Bazin beadle at Notre Dame! He must know where his master is!"

"Without a doubt he must."

D'Artagnan thought for a moment, then took his sword and put on his cloak to go out.

"Sir," said Planchet, in a mournful tone, "do you abandon me thus to my fate? Think, if I am found out here, the people of the house, who have not seen me enter it, will take me for a thief."

"True," said D'Artagnan. "Let's see. Canst thou speak any patois?"

"I can do something better than that, sir, I can speak Flemish."

"Where the devil didst thou learn it?"

"In Artois, where I fought for years. Listen, sir. Goeden morgen,

mynheer, eth teen begeeray le weeten the ge sond heets omstand."

"Which means?"

"Good-day, sir! I am anxious to know the state of your health."

"He calls that a language! But never mind, that will do capitally."

D'Artagnan opened the door and called out to a waiter to desire Madeleine to come upstairs.

When the landlady made her appearance she expressed much astonishment at seeing Planchet.

"My dear landlady," said D'Artagnan, "I beg to introduce to you your brother, who is arrived from Flanders and whom I am going to take into my service."

"My brother?"

"Wish your sister good-morning, Master Peter."

"Wilkom, suster," said Planchet.

"Goeden day, broder," replied the astonished landlady.

"This is the case," said D'Artagnan; "this is your brother, Madeleine; you don't know him perhaps, but I know him; he has arrived from

Amsterdam. You must dress him up during my absence. When I return, which will be in about an hour, you must offer him to me as a servant, and upon your recommendation, though he doesn't speak a word of French, I take him into my service. You understand?"

"That is to say, I guess your wishes, and that is all that's necessary," said Madeleine.

"You are a precious creature, my pretty hostess, and I am much obliged to you."

The next moment D'Artagnan was on his way to Notre Dame.