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# SCHWARTZ: A HISTORY

By David Christie Murray

Author Of 'Aunt Rachel,' 'The Weaker Vessel,' Etc.

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## Contents

[SCHWARTZ: \\_\\_\\_\\_\\_ A](#)  
[HISTORY](#)

[I](#)

[II](#)

[III](#)

[IV](#)

# SCHWARTZ: A HISTORY

## I

I was expatriated by a man with an axe. The man and the axe were alike visionary and unreal, though it needed a very considerable effort of the will to hold them at mental arm's length. I had work on hand which imperatively demanded to be finished, and I was so broken down by a long course of labour that it was a matter of actual difficulty with me when I sat down at my desk of a morning to lay hold of the thread of last night's work, and to recall the personages who had moved through my manuscript pages for the past three or

four months. The day's work always began with a fog, which at first looked impenetrable, but would brighten little by little until I could see my ideal friends moving in it, and could recognise their familiar lineaments. Then the fog would disperse altogether, and a certain indescribable, exultant, feverish brightness would succeed it, and in this feverish brightness my ideal friends would move and talk as it were of their own volition.

But one morning—it was in November, and the sand-tinged foam flecks caught from the stormy bay were thick on the roadway before my window—the fog was thicker and more obdurate than common. I read and re-read the work of the day before, and the written words conveyed no meaning. In a dim sort of way this seemed lamentable, and I remember standing at the window, and looking out to where the white crests of the waves came racing shorewards under a leaden-coloured sky, and saying to myself over and over again, 'Oh, that way madness lies!' but without any active sentiment of dismay or fear, and with a clouded, uninterested wonder as to where the words came from. Quite suddenly I became aware of a second presence in the chamber, and turned with an actual assurance that some one stood behind me. I was alone, as a single glance about the room informed me, but the sense of that second presence was so clearly defined and positive that the mere evidence of sight seemed doubtful.

The day's work began in the manner which had of late grown customary, and in a while the fog gave way to a brilliance unusually flushed and hectic. The uninvited, invisible personage kept his place, until, even with the constant fancy that he was there looking over my shoulder, and so close that there was always a risk of contact, I grew to disregard him. All day long he watched the pen travelling over the paper, all day long I was aware of him, featureless, shadowy, expressionless, with a vague cheek near my own. During the brief interval I gave myself for luncheon he stood behind my chair, and, being much refreshed and brightened by my morning's work, I mocked him quite gaily.

'Your name is Nerves,' I told him within myself, 'and you live in the land of Mental Overwork. I have still a fortnight's stretch across the country you inhabit, and if you so please you may accompany me all the way. You may even follow me into the land of Repose which lies beyond your own territory, but its air will not agree with you. You will dwindle, peak, and pine in that exquisite atmosphere, and in a very little while I shall have seen the last of you.'

After luncheon I took a constitutional on the pier, not without a hope that my featureless friend might be blown away by the gusty wind, which came bellowing up from the Firth of Forth, with enough stinging salt and vivifying freshness in it, one might have fancied, to shrivel up a host of phantoms. I tramped him up and down the gleaming planks in the keen salt wind for half an hour, and he shadowed me unshrinkingly. With the worst will in the world I took him home, and all afternoon and all evening he stuck his shadowy head over my shoulder, and watched the pen as it spread its cobweb lines over the white desert of the paper. He waited behind my chair at dinner, and late at night, when the long day's work at last was over, he hung his intrusive head over my shoulder and stared into the moderate glass of much-watered whisky which kept a final pipe in company.

He had grown already into an unutterable bore, and when he insisted upon passing the night with me I could—but for the obvious inutility of the thing—have lost my temper fairly. He took his place at the bed-head, and kept it till I fell asleep. He was there when I awoke in the night, and probably because the darkness, the quiet, and the sense of solitude were favourable to him he began to grow clearer. Quite suddenly, and with a momentary but genuine thrill of fear, I made a discovery about him. He carried an axe. This weapon was edged like a razor, but was unusually solid and weighty at the back. From the moment at which I first became aware of it to that happy hour when my phantom bore departed and took his weapon with him, there was never a conscious second in which the axe was not in act to fall, and yet it never fell. It was always going to strike and never struck.

'You cannot be supposed to know it, my phantom nuisance,' I said, being ready to seek any means by which I might discredit the dreadful rapidity with which he seemed to be growing real; 'you cannot be supposed to know it, but one of these days you will furnish excellent copy. As a literary man's companion you are not quite without your uses. One of these days I will haunt a rascal with you, and he shall sweat and shiver at you, as I decline to sweat and shiver. You observe I take you gaily. I am very much inclined to think that if I took you any other way that axe might fall, and sever something which might be difficult to mend. So long as you choose to stay, I mean to make a study of you.'

Most happily I was able to adhere to that resolve, but I solemnly declare it made him no less dreadful. Sometimes I tried to ignore him, but that was a sheer impossibility. Very often I flouted him and jeered at him, mocked him with his own unreality, and dared him to carry out his constant threat and strike. But all day and every day, and in all the many sleepless watches of my nights, he kept me company, and every hour the threatened blow of the razor-edged axe seemed likelier to fall. But at last—thank Heaven—the work was done, I touched the two or three hundred pounds which paid for it, and I was free to take a holiday.

We had grown too accustomed to each other to part on a sudden, even then. I never saw him, for he was always behind me (and even when I stood before a mirror he was invisible but *there*), but he was no longer featureless. His eyes shone through a black vizard with one unwinking, glittering, ceaseless threat. He wore a slashed doublet with long hose reaching to the upper thigh, and he had a rosette on each instep. I can see quite clearly now the peculiar dull cold gleam the razor-edged axe wore as he stood in some shadowed place behind me, and the brighter gleam it had in daylight in the streets.

When I had borne with him until I felt that I could bear with him no longer, I took him, being back in town again, to a London physician of some eminence. The doctor took him somewhat gravely, insisted upon absolute mental rest, prescribed a tonic, laid down certain rules about diet, certain restrictions upon wine and tobacco, and ordered immediate change of scene.

To begin with I went to Antwerp, thence to Brussels, and thence, by the merest chance in the world, to Janenne, a little village in the Belgian Ardennes, at no great distance from the French frontier. I had no idea of staying there, and on the surface of things there was no reason why I should have prolonged my stay beyond a day or two. People visit Janenne in the summer time, and suppose themselves to have exhausted its

limited attractions in four-and-twenty hours. There is nothing at first sight to keep the stranger longer, but if he will only stay for a week he will inevitably want to stay for a fortnight, and if once he has stayed for a fortnight, his business is done, and he is in love with Janenne for the rest of his natural life. Rural quiet has made her home in Janenne, and contentment dwells with her, sleepy-eyed.

Even in the first week of December, the russet and amber-coloured leaves still cling to the branches of the huge old lime-trees of Lorette, and my lonely feet on the thick carpet of dead leaves below made the sole sound I heard there except the ceaseless musical tinkle of chisel and stone from the distant granite quarries—a succession of notes altogether rural in suggestion—like the tinkle of many sheep-bells. Even in that first week of December I could sit in the open air there, where the mild winter sunlight flashed the huge crucifix and the colossal Christ of painted wood, which poise above the toy chapel carved out of the live rock. The chapel and the crucifix are at one end of a lime-tree avenue a third of a mile long, and the trees are aged beyond strict local knowledge, gnarled and warty and bulbous and great of girth. You climb to Lorette by a gentle ascent, and below the rock-carved chapel lies a precipice—not an Alpine affair at all, but a reasonable precipice for Belgium—say, two or even three hundred feet, and away and away and away, the golden-dimpled hills go changing from the yellowish green of winter grass to the variously-toned grays of the same grass in mid-distance, and then to a blue which grows continually hazier until it melts at the sky-line, and seems half to blend with the dim pallid sapphire of a December sky.

Here, 'with an ambrosial sense of over-weariness falling into sleep,' would I often sit at the foot of the great crucifix, and would smoke the pipe of idleness, a little unmindful, perhaps, of the good London doctor's caution against the misuse of tobacco. It was here that I awoke to the fact one day that the man with the axe was absent. He had slipped away with no good-byes on either side, and I was blissfully alone again. The sweet peace of it, and the quiet of it no tongue or pen can tell. The air was balsamic with the odours of the pines which clothed the hillsides for miles and miles and miles in squares and oblongs and a hundred irregular forms of blackish green, sometimes snaking in a thin dark line, sometimes topping a crest with a close-cropped hog-mane, and sometimes clustering densely over a whole slope, but always throwing the neighbouring yellows and greens and grays into a wonderful aerial delicacy of contrast. The scarred lime trunks had a bluish gray tone in the winter sunlight, and the carpet at their feet was of Indian red and sienna and brown, of fiercest scarlet and gold and palest lemon colour, of amber and russet and dead green. And everywhere, and in my tired mind most of all, was peace.

I had been a fortnight at Janenne when my intrusive phantom left me on Lorette. I had made no acquaintances, for I was but feeble at the language, and did not care to encounter the trouble of talking in it. The first friendship I made—I have since spent three years in the delightful place, and have made several friendships there—was begun within five minutes of that exquisite moment at which I awoke to the fact that my phantom was away.

There was not a living creature in sight, and there was not a sound to be heard except the distant tinkle of chisel and stone, and the occasional rustle of a falling leaf, until Schwartz, the subject of this history, walked pensively round a corner eighty yards down the avenue, and paused to scratch one ear with a hind foot. He stood for a time with a thoughtful air, looked up the avenue and down the avenue, and then with slow deliberation, and an occasional pause for thought, he walked towards me. When within half a dozen yards he stopped and took good stock of me, with brown eyes overhung by thick grizzled eyebrows. Then he offered a short, interrogative, authoritative bark, a mere monosyllable of inquiry.

'A stranger,' I responded. 'An invalid stranger.' He seemed not only satisfied, but, for some unknown reason, delighted. He wagged the cropped stump of a gray tail, and writhed his whole body with a greeting that had an almost slavish air of charmed propitiation; and then, without a word on his side or on mine, he mounted the steps which led to the great crucifix, sate down upon the topmost step beside me, and nestled his grizzled head in my lap. I confess that he could have done nothing which would have pleased me more. I have always thought the unconditional and immediate confidence of a dog or a child a sort of certificate to character, though I know well that there is a kind of dog whose native friendliness altogether outruns his discretion, and who is doomed from birth to fall into error, and to encounter consequent rebuffs which must be grievous to be borne.

My new companion wore a collar, and had other signs that distinguished him from the mere mongrel of the village street, but he was of no particular breed. His coat was of a bluish gray, and though soft enough to the touch, had a harsh and spiky aspect. He came nearer to being a broken-haired terrier than anything else, but I seemed to discern half a dozen crosses in him, and a lover of dogs who asked for breed would not have offered sixpence for him.

## II

Somewhere about the year 1560 this tranquil and beautiful country was devastated by a plague which carried off hundreds of its sparse inhabitants, and left many villages desolate. The legends of the countryside tell of places in which no human life remained.

The people of Janenne, headed by the *doyen*, made a pilgrimage in procession to the shrine of Our Lady of Lorette, and offered to strike a bargain. They promised that if Janenne should be spared from the plague they and their descendants for ever would each year repeat that procession in honour of Our Lady of Lorette, and that once in seven years they would appear under arms and fire a salvo. Whether in consequence of this arrangement or not, Janenne escaped the plague, and from that year to this the promised procession has never been forgotten. In course of time it became less the local mode than it had been to carry arms, and nowadays the great septennial procession can only be gone through after a prodigious deal of drilling and preparation.

A week or two after my arrival the villagers began to train, under the conduct of a stout military-looking personage, who had been in the Belgian cavalry and *gendarmérie*, and was now in honourable retirement from war's alarms as a grocer. He traded under the name of Dorn-Casart—the wife's maiden name being tacked to his own, after the manner of the country. This habit, by the way, gives a certain flavour of aristocracy to the trading names over even the smallest shop windows. 'Coqueline-Walhaert, *negotiant*,' is the sign over the establishment wherein a very infirm old woman sells centimes' worth of sweetstuff to the *jeunesse* of Janenne, whilst her husband works at the quarries.

Monsieur Dorn is a man with a huge moustache, fat cheeks streaked with scarlet lines on a bilious groundwork, and a voice raspy with much Geneva and the habit of command. He rides with the unmistakable seat of an old cavalry man, and his behaviour on horseback was a marked contrast to that of the mounted contingent he drilled every day in the open place in front of the hotel. His steed, artfully stimulated by the spur, caracoled, danced, and lashed out with his hind feet, and Monsieur Dorn, with one fist stuck against his own fat ribs, swayed to the motion with admirable nonchalance. His voice, which has the barky tone inseparable from military command, would ring about the square like the voice of a commander-in-chief, and by the exercise of a practised imagination, I could almost persuade myself that I stood face to face with the horrid front of war.

When Monsieur Dorn was not drilling his brigade he was generally to be found at the Café de la Regence, smoking a huge meerschaum with a cherry wood stem and sipping Geneva. Even in this comparative retirement the halo of his office clung about him, and seemed to hold men off from a too familiar intercourse; but one afternoon I saw him unbending there. He was nearly always accompanied by a dog, spotlessly white, the most ladylike of her species I remember to have seen. Her jet-black beady eyes and jet-black glittering nose set off the snowy whiteness of her coat, and were in turn set off by it. She had a refined, coquettish, mincing walk, which alone was enough to bespeak the agreeable sense she had of her own charms. Perhaps a satiric observer of manners might have thought her more like a lady's-maid than a lady. A suggestion of pertness in her beady eyes, and a certain superciliousness of bearing were mingled with a coquetry not displeasing to one who surveyed her from the human height. To look important is pretty generally to feel important, but is, by no means, to be important. We discern this fact with curious clearness when we look at other people, but it is nowhere quite so evident as in what we call the brute creation. (As if we didn't belong to it!) Perhaps there are intelligences who look at us with just such a pitying amusement and analysis—*our* prosperous relatives, who started earlier in the race of life than we did, and met with better chances.

In spite of airs and graces, natural and acquired, Lil's claims to purity of race were small, though, like my older acquaintance, Schwartz, she was more a broken-haired terrier than anything else. Schwartz was simply and purely *bourgeois*. He had no airs and no pretensions; but Lil, whatever her genuine claims may have been, was of another stamp and fashion.

It was Lil who was the cause of Monsieur Dorn's unbending. The fat old *gendarme* was putting her through a set of tricks, which she executed with complete *aplomb* and intelligence. There was nothing violent in these exercises; nothing a dog of the best breeding in the world could have felt to derogate from dignity. She was much petted and applauded for her performances, and was rewarded by two or three lumps of sugar, which she ate without any of the vulgar haste characteristic of most dogs in their dealings with sweetmeats.

The language of the peasantry hereabouts is that same Walloon tongue in which old Froissart wrote his *Chronicles*. It is little more comprehensible to the average Frenchman than to the average Englishman, but its vocabulary is restricted, and the people who talk it have enriched (or corrupted) it with many words of French. When the loungers in the *café* began to talk, as they did presently, it amused me to listen to this unknown tongue; and whenever I heard '*la procession*' named, I enjoyed much the kind of refreshment Mr. Gargery experienced when he encountered a J.O., Jo, in the course of his general reading. *La procession* was not merely the staple of the village talk, but the warp and woof of it, and any intruding strand of foreign fancy was cut short at the dips of him who strove to spin it into the web of conversation. I myself ventured an inquiry or two, for all but the most ignorant speak French of a sort. Monsieur Dorn accepted a glass of *pequet* at my request (a fire-water, for a dose of which one halfpenny is charged, and upon which the unaccustomed stranger may intoxicate himself madly at an outlay of five-pence), and the fat and stately old fellow told me all about the origin and meaning of the pious form the village was then preparing to fulfil. He made the kindest allowance for my limited powers of speech, and bounteously fed my native sense of retiring humility with patronage.

The door of the *café* was open to the mild, fir-scented December air, though a crackling fire burnt noisily in the thin-ribbed stove. Lil made occasional excursions to the open doorway, looking out upon the passers-by with a keen alertness. She had some time returned from one of these inspections, and had curled herself at her master's feet, when I heard a singular and persistent tapping upon the unclothed floor, and looking round caught sight of my friend Schwartz, who was making a crouching and timid progress toward us, and was wagging his cropped tail with such vehemence that it sounded on the boards like a light hammer on a carpeted flooring. At first I fancied that he recognised me, and I held out to him an encouraging hand, of which he took no notice. That air of propitiatory humility which I had seen in him when we had first encountered on Lorette was exaggerated to a slavish adulation. There is no living creature but a dog who would not have been ashamed to show such a mixture of transport and self-depreciation. He fawned, he writhed, he rapped his tail upon the floor in a sustained *crescendo*. The dumb heart had no language for its own delight and humility. Anybody who takes pleasure in dogs has seen the *sort* of thing scores and scores of times. It was the quality of intensity which made it remarkable in Schwartz.

Lil, for whom this display of joy and humbleness was made, was altogether unmoved by it. She was not merely regardless of it, but ostentatiously disdainful. She took a coquettish lady's-maidish amble to the door, passing Schwartz by the way, and yawned as she looked out upon the street. Schwartz fawned after her to the door, and with a second yawn she repassed him, and returned to lie at the feet of the fat old *gendarme*. The absurd little drama of coquetry and worship went on until the old fellow arose with a friendly *bon jour*, to me, and a whistle to Lil, who followed him with a supercilious nose in the air. The despised Schwartz stood a while, and then set out after her at a ridiculous three-legged run, but before he had gone ten yards he

stopped short, looked after the retreating fair in silence, and then walked off with a dispirited aspect in the opposite direction.

So far as I could tell, my shadowy enemy with the axe had taken himself away for good and all, but I was so fearful of recalling him that I kept altogether idle, and in other respects nursed and coddled myself with a constant assiduity. But it is a hard thing for a man who has accustomed himself to constant mental employment to go without it, and in the absence of pens, ink, and paper, books and journals, the procession bade fair to be a perfect godsend. Even when the inhabitants of the village took to rising at four o'clock in the morning, and fanfaronaded with ill-blown bugles, and flaring torches, and a dreadful untiring drum about the street, I forbore to grumble, and when on Sundays they turned out in a body after mass to see their own military section drilled in the *Place* of the Hotel de Ville, one bored valetudinarian welcomed them heartily. The military section had got down uniforms from one of the Brussels theatres,—busbies and helmets, and the gloriously comic hats of the *garde civile*,—dragoon tunics, hussar jackets, infantry shell-jackets, cavalry stable-jackets, foresters' boots, dragoon jack-boots, stage piratical boots with wide tops to fit the thigh that drooped about the ankles,—trousers of every sort, from blue broadcloth, gold-striped, to the homely fustian,—and a rare show they made. They went fours right or fours left with a fine military jangle, and sometimes went fours right and fours left at the same time, with results disastrous to military order. Then it was good to see and hear the fat Dorn as he caracoled in a field-marshal's uniform, and barked his orders at the disordered crowd like a field-marshal to the manner born.

Monsieur Dorn being thus gloriously lifted into the range of the public eye, Lil seemed to take added airs of importance. I say *seemed*, but that is only because of the foolish and ignorant habit into which I was born and educated. Ever since I can remember, people have been telling stories to prove that dogs have some sort of intelligence, as if—except to the most stupid and the blindest—the thing had ever stood in need of proof. There is nothing much more fatal to the apprehension of a fact than the constant causeless repetition of it. And then the tales of the intelligence of dogs are told as a general thing with a sort of wide-eyed wonder, so that the dog's very advocates contrive to impress their readers with the belief that their commonplace bit of history is remarkable.

Of course there are clever dogs and dull dogs, just as there are sages and idiots, but any dog who was not a fool would have known and recognised his master's splendour and importance if he had belonged at this epoch to Monsieur Dorn. Lil saw him sitting up there in vivid colours, heard him shouting in a voice of authority, and saw people answer to that voice. There was not a Christian in the crowd who had a better understanding of the situation. To see her running in and out amongst the horses' feet, ordering the sham dragoons and hussars about in her own language, was to know she understood the thing, and had invested herself with some of her master's glory. Wherever she went, in and out and about, Schwartz, with his meek spikes raging in all directions, followed, close at heel. Almost everybody has seen the loud aggressive swaggering boy with the meek admiring small boy in his train. The small boy glorifies the other in his mind, setting him on a level with Three-Fingered Jack, or Goliath's conqueror, and the aggressive boy, feeling rather than understanding the other's reverence, does his best to look as if he deserved it. To see Lil swagger and to hear her bark, and to see the foolish humble Schwartz follow her, admiring her, believing in her, utterly borne away by her insolent pretence that the whole show was got up by her orders—to observe this was to see one half the world in little.

On other days Lil was as other dogs, except, perhaps, to the love-blinded eyes of Schwartz, but on Sundays, so long as the drills for the procession lasted, the field was all her own. One or two of her companions, carried away by her example, dared to run amongst the horses' feet and bark. They were promptly kicked into the ring of spectators, and Lil was left alone in her glory. Of course it all went with his own confiding nature, and the state of complete slavery in which he lived, to persuade Schwartz of her greatness. She deserves at least that one truth should be admitted. She never gave her admirer the least encouragement so far as I could see. She never in a chance encounter in the street paused to exchange good-morrow. She never so much as turned a head in his direction. She tolerated his presence and that was all. But wherever she went he shadowed her. He was not obtrusive, but was content to keep at heel, and to be permitted to admire. I have seen him sit for half an hour on a doorstep, a canine monument of patience, waiting for her to come out, and I have seen her travel about the *Place* in apparently purposeless zigzags and circles for the mere pride and vanity of knowing how closely he would follow her least reasonable movements.

A week or two before the grand event came off there was a prodigious excitement in Janenne. An idea, originating in the military spirit of Monsieur Dorn, had been industriously put about, a subscription had been set on foot for it, a committee had been appointed to superintend its working, and now the glorious fancy was actually translated into fact. The procession was to be supplemented by artillery, and now here was a time-eaten old gun, mounted on a worm-eaten old carriage, and trailed in harness of rope by two stalwart Flemish horses. Here also was gunpowder enough to wreck the village, and the Janennois, who for a moral people have a most astounding love of noise, were out at earliest dawn of light on Sunday morning to see the gun fired. The first firing was supposed to be an experiment, and everybody was warned to a safe distance when the gun was loaded, whilst Monsieur Dorn arranged a train of powder, and set a slow match in connection with it. When the bang came and the old iron stood the strain everybody went wild with joy, and even Monsieur Dorn himself was so carried away by the general enthusiasm that he tested the piece all morning. It was finally discovered that the powder was exhausted, and the hat had to be sent round again for a new subscription.

The annual procession is far and away the greatest event of the year at Janenne, and the septennial procession would of itself be enough to satisfy any resident in the village that he had lived if he had but seen it once. Nobody dreamed of spoiling the procession for the sake of a cart-load or so of gunpowder, and the hat was soon filled. Next Sunday Janenne enjoyed a new series of experiments on the big gun, and what with the banging of the drum, and the blowing of the bugle, and the flaming of torches in the dark morning, and the banging of the big gun from dawn till noon, and the clatter and glitter of the drill in the after part of the short winter day, the atmosphere of the village was altogether warlike.

The big gun gave Lil an added claim on the veneration of her admirer. On the morning of the second firing

she came demurely down to the field in which the artillery experiments were conducted, with an air of knowing all about it, and Schwartz, as usual, pursued her. The gun was sponged and loaded, and the charge was rammed home under Monsieur Dorn's supervision, Lil standing gravely by, and Schwartz grovelling in her neighbourhood. Then the old *gendarme* himself primed the piece, and taking a torch from a boy who stood near him applied it to the touch-hole. Out at the muzzle sprang the answering flame and roar, and away went Schwartz as if he had been projected by the force of the powder. Panic declared itself in every hair, and his usual foolish three-legged amble was exchanged for a pace like that of a greyhound. He had gone but a hundred yards at most, when reason resumed her seat. He stopped and turned, and after a little pause came back with an evident shamefacedness. Lil had stood her ground without the slightest sign of fear, and when Schwartz returned she took to looking so triumphantly, and superintended the subsequent operations with so much authority, that I am profoundly convinced of her intent to persuade her slavish follower that this was some new and astonishing form of bark of which she alone possessed the secret.

Schwartz was most probably willing to believe anything she told him. It is the way of some natures to confide, and it is the way of others to presume upon their confidence.

### III

Janenne is on the outskirts of the Forest Country, and in the shooting season the *chasseur* is a familiar personage. He arrives by evening train or diligence, half a dozen strong. He sups and betakes himself to the singing of comic songs with choruses, moistening and mellowing his vocal chords with plenteous burgundy. Long after everybody else has gone to bed, he tramps in chorus along the echoing unclothed corridor, and he and his chums open bedroom doors to shout Belgian scraps of *facetio* at each other, or to cast prodigious boots upon the sounding boards. Then long before anybody else has a mind to rise, he is up again promenading the corridor like a multiplied copy of the giant in the *Castle of Otranto*. He rolls away in the darkness with the cracking of whips and jingling of bells, and sleep and silence settle down again. At night he is back to supper with tales of big game multitudinous as Laban's flocks, and a bag unaccountably empty. That same evening he is away to desk or counter or studio in Brussels, Antwerp, or Liège, and Janenne falls back into its normal peace.

It was mid-December, and the snow was falling in powdery flakes, when a sportsman alighted at the Hotel des Postes, and at the first glance I knew him for a countryman. He was a fine, frank, free-hearted young fellow, one of the most easily likable of youngsters, and we were on friendly terms together before the first evening was over. He knew a number of people in the neighbourhood, had received a dozen invitations to shoot, or thereabouts, and meant to put up three weeks at Janenne, so he told me, shooting when sport was to be had, and on other days tramping about the country. He was accompanied by a bull-terrier, who answered to the name of Scrapper, a handsome creature of his kind, with one eye in permanent mourning.

'Of course he's no good,' said the young fellow, in answer to an observation of mine, 'but then he's perfectly tamed, and therefore he's no harm. He'll stay where he's told; and I believe the poor beggar would break his heart if I left him behind. Wouldn't you, old chap?'

The young sportsman went away to the chase next morning, taking his bull-terrier with him, and returning at night reported Scrapper's perfect good behaviour. In the course of that evening's talk I spoke of certain peculiarities I had noticed in the formation of the country, and my new acquaintance proposed that on an idle day of his next week we should take a walk of exploration. When the day came we started together, and I showed him some of the curiosities of nature I had noticed.

Round and about Janenne the world is hollow. The hills are mere bubbles, and the earth is honeycombed with caverns. By the side of the road which leads to Houssy a river accompanies the traveller's steps, purling and singing, and talking secrets (as shallow pebbly-bedded streams have a way of doing), and on a sudden the traveller misses it. There, before him, is a river bed, wide, white, and stony, but where is the river? If he be a curious traveller he will retrace his steps, and will find the stream racing with some impetuosity towards a bend, where it dwindles by apparent miracle into nothing. The curious traveller, naturally growing more curious than common in the presence of these phenomena, will, at some risk to his neck, descend the bank, and make inquiry into the reason for the disappearance of the stream. He will see nothing to account for it, but he will probably arrive at the conclusion that there are fissures in the river's bed, through which the water falls to feed the subterranean stream, of which he is pretty certain to have heard or read. If he will walk back a mile, against the course of the stream, will cross the main street of Janenne, strike the Montcourtois Road there, and cross the river bridge, he will see a cavern lipped by the flowing water, and in that cavern, only a foot or so below the level of the open-air stream, he will find its subterranean continuation. It has worked back upon itself in this secret way, by what strange courses no man knows or can guess. But that the stream is the same has been proved by a device at once ingenious and simple. Colouring matter of various sorts has from time to time been thrown into the water at its place of disappearance, and the tinted stream has poured, hours and hours afterwards, through the cavern, which is only a mile away, and stands so near the earlier stream that in times of rain the waters mingle there.

On the sides of the hills, and in the brushwood which clothes their feet, one finds all manner of holes and caves and crevices, some of them very shallow, and some of them of unknown depth. In the Bois de Janenne alone there are four or five of them.

All this has strictly to do with the history of Schwartz, as will by and by be seen.

When heavy rains fall the river is so swollen that the underground call upon its resources fails to drain it, and it foams above the fissures in full volume, so wild and deep that a passer-by would never guess of the curious trick of nature which is here being played. But the season being exceptionally dry, I was able to show my find, and from the spot of the stream's disappearance I led my acquaintance to the cavern. Here prowling

about in a light-footed and adventurous fashion the young Englishman found a hole in the wall of stone, and, venturing into it, discovered to his great delight a passage which seemed to lead into the very entrails of the hill. He proposed instantly to explore this, and I having that morning purchased of the local tobacconist a box of Italian vestas, each three or four inches long, and calculated to burn for several minutes, and having the same in my pocket at the moment, we set out together on a journey of adventure. The passage varied in width from six to three feet, and in height from eight feet upwards. The faint illumination of the big wax vestas often failed to touch the roof. The way was sometimes over ankle deep in a thick mud, and sometimes strewn with fragments of rock which had fallen from the roof; but we went on gaily until we came to a great slippery boulder, which blocked the passage for some three feet in height. My companion was in act to clamber over this, when the light I carried pinched my thumb and finger with sudden heat, and I dropped it on to the ground. I struck another, and found the youngster perched upon the boulder.

'Wait a moment,' said I, 'and let us see what is beyond. There may be a deepish hole there.'

We leaned over, and could see nothing. My companion got down from the boulder with a grave look.

'I was just going to jump when you spoke,' he said. 'Lucky I didn't. I wonder how deep it is?'

We hunted about for a stone, and by and by found one about the size of a man's head. This the youngster tossed over the boulder into the darkness, and we stood looking at each other, by the little clear-burning light of the wax match. I do not know how long we stood there, for time has a knack of magnifying itself beyond belief in such conditions, but it was long, long before an awful hollow boom came rolling to our ears from the depth. We turned without a word, and stumbled back towards the daylight, and when we reached it I looked at the young Englishman and saw that all the roses had faded from his healthy young cheeks, and that he was as gray as ashes.

'I was going to jump when you spoke,' he said. 'Precious lucky for me I didn't.'

I congratulated him very heartily on not having jumped, and our search for natural wonders being ended we went back to the hotel. We made inquiry there—at first in vain—about this inner cavern, but at last we came across the Garde Champêtre of the district, who told us that the depth was unknown. He and some of his friends had had the curiosity to try to measure it, but they never had rope enough.

It befell on the morning of the next day that I wandered out alone, and in the course of the first score yards encountered Schwartz, who was demonstrative of friendly civilities. I returned his salutations, and he gave me to understand in his own too-humble manner that he would like to accompany me. I let him know that I should be delighted by his society, and away we went together. The ground was firm with last night's frost and musical to the sabots of peasants and the iron-shod feet of horses. The hills and fields were covered with a powdery snow that threw their grays into a dark relief, and the air was so still that I could hear the bell-like tinkle of chisel and stone from the quarry nearly a mile away. We entered the Bois de Janenne together, and wandered through its branchy solitudes by many winding pathways. There is a main road running through this wood, cut by order of the commune for the pleasure of visitors, and the middle of this road was white with a thin untrodden snow. On either side this ribbon of white lay a narrower ribbon of gold where the pines had shed their yellow needles and the overhanging boughs had guarded them from the falling snow. The ground ivy was of all imaginable colours, but only yielded its secrets on a close examination, and did not call upon the eye like some of the louder reds and yellows which still clung to the trees. Here and there the *fusain* burned like a flame with its vivid scarlet berries—*chapeau de curé* the country people call them, though the colour is a little too gay for less than a cardinal's wearing. For the most part the undergrowth was bare, and the branches were either purple or of the tone of a ripe filbert, so that the atmosphere, with the reflected dull golds and bluish-reds and reddish-blues, was in a swimming maze like that of a sunset distance, though the eye could scarcely pierce twenty yards into the thick-grown tangle.

Schwartz and I rambled along, now and then exchanging a sign of friendly interest, and in a while we left the main path and wandered where we would. Suddenly Schwartz began to hunt and sniff and bark on what I supposed to be the recent trace of a rabbit or a hare, and I stood still to watch him. He worried industriously here and there until he disappeared behind a clump of brushwood, and then I heard a sudden 'Yowk!' of unmistakable terror. After this there was dead silence. I called, but there was not even the rustle of a leaf in answer. I waited a while and called again, but still no answer came. Not in the least guessing what had befallen the dog, I mounted the hillside and came to the clump of bushes behind which he had disappeared. There I found a hole some three feet wide and two in height, a hole with sides of moist earth, formed like an irregularly-shaped funnel, and affording at its farther end little more than room enough for a creature of Schwartz's size to pass. At the narrow end the earth was freshly disturbed.

I shouted down this reversed trumpet of a hole. I listened after every call I explored the place so far as I could with a six-foot wand cut from a near tree. I heard no movement, no whine of distress, and I touched nothing with the wand except the roof of the cavern into which poor Schwartz had fallen. At length I gave him up for dead, remembering the adventure of the day before, the terrible space of time which had elapsed before the echo of the fallen boulder came booming from the abyss, and thinking it as likely as not that Schwartz had fallen to an equal depth. When I got back to the hotel I told the tale as well as I could, and one of the servants took the news to Schwartz's master.

When once this lamentable accident had happened, it became surprising to learn how frequently its like had happened before. There was scarcely a sportsman in the village who had not his story of some such disappearance of a dog whilst out shooting. The poor beast would become excited in pursuit of game, would dash headlong into a set of bushes and emerge no more. Then a moment's examination would reveal the fatal cave. I am certain that I heard a good half-score of such histories. The cave, by the way, was not always fatal, for I heard of cases in which the dog had been known to find his way out of the underground labyrinth, and return home dreadfully thin and hungry, but otherwise undamaged. These cases gave me some faint hope for Schwartz, but as day after day went by the hope faded, and I made up my mind that I had seen the last of him. I was sorry to think so, for he had been very much a friend and a companion.

## IV

It was curious to notice how that unquestioning allegiance and admiration which the missing Schwartz had been used to bestow on Lil was now bestowed by her on the new-comer who answered to the name of Scrapper, and how in answer to all her advances and endearments Scrapper remained scornful and unreceptive. One knows a hundred poems and legends in which this form of vengeance is taken upon the cruel fair; in which the proud lady who has scorned the humble and faithful heart lives to be scorned in turn. Scrapper, probably unconscious of his mission as avenger, fulfilled it none the less on that account.

His master, being an Englishman, had the common English reverence for the Sunday, and would not shoot on that day, though by his conscientious abstention he missed, undoubtedly, the best battue the country-side afforded. We had a brief discussion as to the morality and propriety of the procession, and I pointed out to him that notwithstanding the military element by which it was so strongly marked, it was purely sacerdotal in origin and pious in intent, but he merely replied that as a form of religious exercise for a Sunday it struck him as being jolly rum. He added shortly afterwards that whether he looked at it or not the coves would do it, and that he therefore felt at liberty to watch them.

Scrapper displayed the profoundest interest in the business, and took upon himself the organisation of the whole affair, barking with so much authority, and careering about the cavalry squadron with such untiring energy that he threw Lil's efforts in that way into the shade, and in the course of a mere half-hour had superseded her. Then, just as Schwartz had been used, with every evidence of faith, to follow Lil, regarding her as the very mainspring of the military movement, Lil followed Scrapper. Mr. Herbert Spencer has shown that, in spite of the apparent unreasonableness of the fact, humbug and credulity are sworn companions. The savage mystery man, who knows what a humbug he himself is, is the first to yield allegiance and faith to the abler humbug, who has more tricks or bolder invention than he. So, Lil's groundless pretensions of a week ago did not seem in the least to prevent her from being imposed upon by the groundless pretensions of Scrapper, much as one might have thought her own career of imposture would have set her upon her guard. She had caught that very fawning method of appeal for a kind regard which had once distinguished Schwartz, and it was obvious that Scrapper could make no claim to which she would not be ready to give adhesion. It is in the very nature of poetical justice that it satisfies the emotions, and I was not displeased to see affairs take this sudden turn, to view the hard and despitful heart thus humbled.

It was on a Friday that Schwartz's chase had ended so disastrously. It was on the following Sunday that Lil laid down the honours of command at the feet of the new-comer. It was on the Sunday following, the ninth day clear from the date of the mischance, that the great event of the seven years took place. My young acquaintance had two or three days free of engagements, and he spent these in watching the preparations for the procession. He spoke French with a fluency and purity which excited my envy, and he spent most of his spare time among the village people, who talked and thought and dreamed of nothing but the procession. Wherever he went Scrapper accompanied him, and wherever Scrapper went Lil was to be seen following in fascinated admiration.

For a whole week the drum had known but little rest. I never learned the purpose of the proceeding, but every day and all day, from long before daylight till long after dark, somebody marched about the village and rattled unceasingly upon the drum. It could not possibly have been one man who did it all, for the energies of no one man that ever lived could have been equal to the task. Most of the time it was far away, and it only made two daily promenades past the hotel, but whenever I listened for it I could hear it, beating the same unwearied rataplan. Then at intervals all day and every day, the big gun boomed and the clarion blared until I used to dream that I was back at Plevna or the Shipka Pass, and could not get my "copy" to London and New York because Monsieur Dorn had filled the Houssy Wood with Cossacks from Janenne. It may be supposed that all this *charivari* was but an evil thing for a man as much in need of rest as I was, but I verily believe that the noise and bustle of the preparations, though they robbed me now and then of an hour of morning sleep, were almost as useful to me as the idleness I enjoyed, and the tranquil country air into which I could drive or wander afoot whenever the fancy for perfect quiet came upon me.

At last the great day dawned, and the great event dawned earlier than the day. At five o'clock the noise of drum and clarion began, and the light of torches flared on the painted fronts of houses—yellow and pink and blue—in the quaint old village street. A little later a band came by with shattering brass and booming drum, and for an hour or so the whole place was in a ferment. The cavalry came clattering into the *Place*, the hoarse voice of Monsieur Dorn barked through the orders which had by this time grown conventional, and his squadron jingled for the last time for seven years through the movements he had taught them at the expense of so much time and lung power. Then a strange foreboding sort of quiet, an unnatural tranquillity, settled upon everything and continued until near upon the hour of ten. A long waggon drawn by four oxen excited, by the freight it bore, a momentary curiosity, and brought faces to doors and windows. The air was keen to-day, and we were at the very season of mid-winter, but in the waggon which the four slow oxen dragged through the streets of Janenne were a dozen lofty shrubs reaching to a height of eight or nine feet at least, the which shrubs were one mass of exotic-looking blossom. I discovered later on that they were nothing more than a set of young pines with artificial paper flowers attached to every twig, but the effect as they went down the wintry street in their clothing of gold and rose and white with the live green of the fir peeping through the wealth of bloom was quite an astonishment in its way. These decorated shrubs were set at the church porch, and seemed to fill the whole of that part of the street with colour and light.

When the procession came at last there was one curious thing about it. Such a crowd of people—for Janenne took part in it—that there was scarcely anybody left to look at it. But then the processionists had the pleasure of looking at each other. The band came first, in blue blouse and clean white trousers. Then came the soldiery, a motley crew, with Monsieur Dorn at their head, drawn sword in hand, and next to him a personage who might have been translated clean from Astley's—a gentleman in long hose, with a flower on each shoe, and a hat of red velvet shaped like a bread tray, decorated with prodigious coloured feathers, and



a slashed doublet gay with many knots of bright ribbon. Years and years ago Janenne had a Count and a *château*. The ruins of the *château* still kept gray guard over the village street; but there is not even a ruin left of the old family. But in the day when Our Lady of Lorette stayed the local pestilence the existing Count of Janenne was pious enough to ride in the promised procession; and for a century or so the magnate of the village and its neighbourhood was never absent from the demonstration of thanksgiving. In a while, however, the Counts of Janenne took to wildish ways, and, leaving the home of their ancestors, went away to Paris and led extravagant lives there, gambling and drinking, and squandering their substance in other and even more foolish fashions, and at last there ceased to be estates of Janenne to draw upon, or even Counts of Janenne to draw. But before things came to this pass the absentee Counts had always sent a representative to join the procession to the shrine of Our Lady of Lorette; and it has come about that the legend has clung in the popular fancy even unto the present day. Somebody—anybody—gets himself up in theatrical guise, and rides at the head of the military forces, between the first rank and the commander-in-chief, as the representative of that extinct great house. On this occasion it was a red-cheeked shy young man, cousin to the chambermaid of the Hotel des Postes, a peasant proprietor who farmed, and still farms, some ten or a dozen hectares of sour land on the road to Montcourtois. The red-cheeked shy young man's female cousin exchanged a red-cheeked, shame-faced, rustic grin with him as he rode by, and the young man, in imitation of Monsieur Dorn, made his horse caracole, but being less versed in horsemanship than the old *gendarme*, had to hold on ignominiously by the mane in payment for his own temerity.

Following the military came a long array of little girls in white muslin, with sashes blue or red. Half a dozen nuns kept watch over them, pacing sombre in white head-dresses and black gowns by the side of all that smiling troop of glad hearts and childish faces. All the little girls carried bannerets of bright colour, and all went bareheaded, after the manner of the district, where no woman, short of the highest fashion, ever permits herself to wear hat or bonnet, except when going to mass or upon a railway journey. White childish locks, braided and shining, red locks, brown locks, black locks, with bright faces under all, went streaming by, and then a solemn priest or two headed a rambling host of lads with well-scrubbed cheeks and clean collars, and decent raiment of church-going Sunday black. Then came a flock of young women in white muslin, very starched and stiff, with blue bows and blue sashes. In front of these two stalwart wenches bore a flapping banner, inscribed 'La Jeunesse de Janenne'; and closing up the rank of Janenne's youth and rustic beauty came half a dozen chosen damsels, big limbed and strong, bearing on their shoulders a huge waxen statue of Our Lady of Lorette, and in her arms a crowned child, she herself being crowned with glittering tinsel, and robed in a glowing and diaphanous stuff, which only half revealed the white satin and spangles of the dress below it. Then a number of chubby-cheeked little boys in semi-ecclesiastical costume, improvised—no doubt under clerical supervision—by careful hands at home. Each little boy carried a fuming censer, and it was not difficult to see that they were well pleased with themselves and their office. After them came the *doyen* in full ecclesiastical costume, a little tawdry perhaps, for the village is but poor and with the best heart in the world can only imitate the real splendours from afar. Then following the *doyen* (who, by the way, marched under a canopy like the roof of an old-fashioned four-post bedstead) came the male choir of the church, chanting a musical service, which harmonised indifferently with the strains of the military band in front. Then the big gun, drawn by the two big Flemish horses. Then Jacques, Jules, André, François, Chariot, Pierre, Joseph, Jean, and all the rest, in sabots, short trousers, and blue blouses, marching bareheaded with reverent air, and with them Julie, and Fifine, and Nana, and Adèle, and other feminine relatives, all in their Sunday best, and all devout in mien. Then, at a little distance—the most astonishing and unlooked-for tail to all this village splendour and devoutness—Schwartz.

Schwartz himself, but Schwartz so changed, so lean, so woebegone, as hardly to be recognisable, even to the eye of friendship. Of all his diverse-raging hairs not one to assert itself, but all plastered close with an oily sleekness by a slimy clinging mud, the thin ribs showing plainly, and the hinder part of the poor wretch's barrel a mere hand-grasp. His very tail, which had used to look like an irregular much-worn bottle-brush, was thin and sleek like a rat's, and he tucked it away as if he were ashamed of it. His feet were clotted with red earth, and he walked as if his head were a burden to him, he hung it so mournfully and carried it so low.

My young English acquaintance, who, like myself, had been watching the procession, had posted himself a little farther down the road, with Scraper near at hand. Near to him, employing all the ingratiatory insinuating arts she knew, and so absorbed in Scraper that she forgot even to direct the procession, was Lil. To her, fawning and whining in such an excess of feeble joy as can be rarely known to dogs or man, came the half-starved, half-drowned creature. I was already halfway to Schwartz's rescue, with immediate milk, to be followed by soap and water, in my mind, but I stopped to see how Lil would receive the returned companion of old days. It is scarcely probable that dogs believe in ghosts, and yet it would have been easy to fancy that she saw in him at first some purely supernatural apparition, she recoiled with so obvious a surprise and terror when she first beheld him. The wretched, propitiatory, humbly-ecstatic Schwartz advanced, but she showed her gleaming teeth, and growled aversion. He stopped stock-still, and whined a little, and Lil responded furiously. I took the returned wanderer up in both hands, and carried him into the hotel scullery, and got milk for him. He lapped it with tears running down his muddy nose; and when I had had him washed and tucked away into an old railway rug, beside a stove in the little room, he lay there winking and blinking, and licked at his own tears with an expression altogether broken-hearted. I should have liked to have known something of the history of his subterranean wanderings, but that was only to be left to conjecture. I bade him be of better cheer, and went outside to wait for the return of the procession, and to smoke a cigar in the open air, and an hour later found that Schwartz had again disappeared. This time, however, he had merely gone home, and though for a day or two he was quite an invalid, he was soon about the streets again, completely rehabilitated.

And now I come to the relation of the one tragic fact which seemed to me to make this simple history worth writing. I hope that nobody will regard it as an invention, or will suppose that I am trading upon their sympathies on false pretences.

On the day of the young Englishman's departure I accompanied him to the railway station. Lil came down in attendance upon Scraper, and barked fiercely at the departing train which bore him away. Schwartz followed in humble pursuit of Lil, who, so far as I could understand affairs, had never forgiven him for intruding

himself in so unpresentable a guise, and claiming acquaintance whilst she was engaged in conversation with a swell like Scraper. From that hour she had refused to hold the slightest communion with him, showing her teeth and growling in the cruellest way whenever he approached her. In spite of this, Schwartz seemed to be persuaded that, in the absence of his rival, he still stood a chance, and day after day he followed her with the old fawning humbleness, and day after day she received him with the same anger and disdain.

On a certain Wednesday afternoon the air was wonderfully mild and dry. It was early in January, but the weather was so fine that I had not even need of an overcoat, as I sat in the sunshine smoking and reading. I had seen Monsieur Dorn enter the opposite house, taking Lil with him, and Schwartz had settled himself on the doorstep, as usual, to await her exit. I called him to me, and he crossed over, but soon returned and resumed his place, and sat there waiting still. After a considerable time the door opened, and Monsieur Dorn and Lil emerged together. I looked up at that moment, and saw Lil make a savage dart at her too-persistent worshipper. Monsieur Dorn beat them apart, but Schwartz had attempted no resistance. He was rather badly bitten, and when I picked him up the tears were running fast down his nose, and he was feebly licking at them, and whining to himself in a way which indicated the extremest weakness of spirit. I sat down with him, and comforted the poor-hearted creature, and he seemed grateful, for he licked my hand repeatedly, but he did not cease to whine and weep.

By and by I heard, though I did not notice it at the time, the warning whistle of the approaching train. The station is little more than a stone's throw from the hotel. Schwartz made a leap, licked my face, jumped from the bench, and ambled away. I never saw him alive again, for, on the testimony of the signalman, he ran down to the railway line, stretched himself upon one of the rails, and, in spite of a stone the man threw at him when the train had advanced dangerously near to him, he held his place until the wheels passed over his body.

His remains were buried in his master's back garden. I know that he knew full well what he was doing when he stretched himself upon the rail, and I know that his feeble and affectionate heart was broken before he did it.

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