

***MÓR
JÓKAI***



***THE POOR
PLUTOCRATS***

Mór Jókai

The Poor Plutocrats

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PREFACE

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"Szegény Gazdagok" is, perhaps, the most widely known of all Maurus Jókai's masterpieces. It was first published at Budapest, in 1860, in four volumes, and has been repeatedly translated into German, while good Swedish, Danish, Dutch and Polish versions sufficiently testify to its popularity on the Continent. Essentially a tale of incident and adventure, it is one of the best novels of that inexhaustible type with which I am acquainted. It possesses in an eminent degree the quality of vividness which R. L. Stevenson prized so highly, and the ingenuity of its plot, the dramatic force of its episodes, and the startling unexpectedness of its *dénouement* are all in the Hungarian master's most characteristic style. I know of no more stirring incident in contemporary fiction than the terrible wrestling match between strong Juon the goatherd and the supple bandit Fatia Negra in the presence of two trembling, defenceless women, who can do nothing but look on, though their fate depends upon the issue of the struggle—and we must go back to the pages of that unsurpassed master of the weird and thrilling Sheridan Le Fanu to find anything approaching the terror of poor Henrietta's awful midnight vigil in the deserted *csárda* upon the lonely heath when, at the very advent of her mysterious peril, she discovers, to her horror, that her sole companion and guardian, the brave old squire, cannot be aroused from his drugged slumbers.

There is naturally not so much scope for the display of Jókai's peculiar and delightful humour, in a novel of incident like the present tale as there is in that fine novel of manners: "A Hungarian Nabob." Yet even in "Szegény

Gazdagok," many of the minor characters (e.g., the parasite Margari, the old miser Demetrius, the Hungarian Miggs, Clementina, the frivolous Countess Kengyelesy), are not without a mild Dickensian flavour, while in that rugged but good-natured and chivalrous Nimrod, Mr. Gerzson, the Hungarian novelist has drawn to the life one of the finest types we possess of the better sort of sporting Magyar squires.

Finally, this fascinating story possesses in an eminent degree the charm of freshness and novelty, a charm becoming rarer every year in these globe-trotting days, when the ubiquitous tourist boasts that he has been everywhere and seen everything. Yet it may well be doubted whether even he has penetrated to the heart of the wild, romantic, sylvan regions of the Wallachian and Transylvanian Alps, which is the theatre of the exploits of that prince of robber chieftains, the mighty and mysterious Fatia Negra, and the home of those picturesque Roumanian peasants whom Jókai loves to depict and depicts so well.

R. NISBET BAIN.

POOR PLUTOCRATS

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CHAPTER I

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BOREDOM

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"Was it you who yawned so, Clementina?"

Nobody answered.

The questioner was an old gentleman in his eightieth year or so, dressed in a splendid flowered silk Kaftan, with a woollen night-cap on his head, warm cotton stockings on his feet, and diamond, turquoise, and ruby rings on his fingers. He was reclining on an atlas ottoman, his face was as wooden as a mummy's, a mere patch-work of wrinkles, he had a dry, thin, pointed nose, shaggy, autumnal-yellow eyebrows, and his large prominent black eyes protected by irritably sensitive eyelids, lent little charm to his peculiar cast of countenance.

"Well! Will nobody answer? Who yawned so loudly behind my back just now?" he asked again, with an angry snort. "Will nobody answer?"

Nobody answered, and yet there was a sufficient number of people in the room to have found an answer between them. In front of the hearth was sitting a young woman about thirty or thirty-five, with just such a strongly-pronounced pointed nose, with just such high raised eyebrows as the old gentleman's, only her face was still red (though the favour of Nature had not much to do with that perhaps) and her

eyebrows were still black; but her thin lips were just as hermetically sealed as the old man's, when she was not speaking. This young woman was playing at Patience.

In one of the windows sat a young girl of sixteen, a delicate creature of rapid growth, whose every limb and feature seemed preternaturally thin and fragile. She was occupied with some sort of sewing. At another little sewing-table, immediately opposite to her, was a red-cheeked damsel with a frightful mop of light hair and a figure which had all the possibilities of stoutness before it. She was a sort of governess, and was supposed to be English, though they had only her word for it. She was reading a book.

On the silk ottoman behind lay the already-mentioned Clementina, who ought to have confessed to the sin of yawning. She was a spinster already far advanced in the afternoon of life, and had cinder-coloured ringlets around her temples and a little bit of beard on her chin. She was no blood relation of the family but, as an ancient companion to a former mistress of the house, had long eaten the bread of charity under that roof. She was now engaged upon some eye-tormenting, fine fancy work which could not have afforded the poor creature very much amusement.

The old gentleman on the sofa used to divert himself the whole day by assembling as many human beings around him as possible and driving them to desperation by his unendurable nagging and chiding; they, on the other hand, had by this time discovered that the best defence against this domestic visitation was never to answer so much as a word.

"Of course! Of course!" continued the old gentleman with stinging sarcasm. "I know what a bore it is to be near me and about me. I see through it all. Yes, I *know* that I am an unendurable old fellow on whom not a single word should be

wasted. I know well enough that you are not sitting here beside me because you like to be here. Who compels you to? I certainly shall not prevent anybody's petticoat from going away by laying hold of it. The gate is not closed. Nothing easier than to be off. Yet nobody likes the idea, eh? Ah-ha! It is possible that when the eye of old Lapussa no longer sees, the heart of old Lapussa may no longer remember. Besides, nobody can tell exactly when the old man may die. Indeed they are waiting for his death every hour—he is beyond eighty already. A most awful bore certainly. Ah ha! The old fool is unable to get up any more, he is not even able to strike anybody. If he cries out, nobody is afraid of him; but, at any rate, he has strength enough to pull the bell-rope, send for his steward, tell him to go to the office of the *alispán*^[1] there ferret out and bring back his last will and testament—and then he can dictate another will to his lawyer quite cosily at his ease."

[1] Vice-lieutenant of the county.

And in order to emphasize his words more terribly, he there and then gave a tug at the bell-rope.

Yet for all that nobody turned towards him; the lady kept dealing out the cards, the young girl continued working beads into her sampler, the governess went on reading, and the old spinster was still intent upon some delicate operation with her needle—just as if nobody had spoken a word.

In answer to the bell an ancient serving-man appeared in the doorway, and the old gentleman, after waiting a little to see from the countenances of those present (he could observe them in the mirror opposite) whether his allusion to his will had produced any effect, and finding no notice taken of it whatever, said in a sharp, petulant voice: "Louis!"

The servant approached the sofa and then stood still again.

"My dinner!"

This was the end of the awe-inspiring threat.

The old gentleman observed, or rather, suspected, some slight amusement in the company present.

"Miss Kleary!" he observed irritably, "don't you observe that Henrietta is looking out of the window again? I am bound, Miss, to direct your attention to the fact that I consider such a thing decidedly unbecoming in a young lady."

"Dear Grandpapa.....!" began the accused.

"Silence! I did not speak to Henrietta, I spoke to Miss Kleary. Miss Henrietta is still a child who understands nothing. I neither address her nor attempt to explain anything to her. But I keep Miss Kleary in this house, I pay Miss Kleary a princely salary, in order that I may have some one at hand to whom I can explain my educational ideas. Now my educational ideas are good; nay, Miss, I think I may even say that they are very good. I will therefore beg you to do me the favour to stick to them. I know what ought and what ought not to be allowed young girls; I know that....."

The young girl's face blushed beneath the reproachful look of the old tyrant, whilst the governess rose defiantly from her place, and in order that she might wreak her anger upon some one, industriously proceeded to pick holes in Henrietta's sewing and effectually spoil her whole day's work.

Thus, it will be perceived, only one person had the right to speak; the only right the other people had was not to listen to him.

But there was someone else in the background who had better rights than anybody, and this someone now began to hammer with his fists on the door, that very door at which

the oldest and most trusty domestics hardly dared to tap—began, I say, to hammer with his fists and kick with his heels till everyone was downright scared.

This was the little grandson, the old gentleman's spoiled darling little Maksi.

"Why don't you let in little Maksi?" cried the old gentleman, when he heard him. "Open the door for little Maksi; don't you know that he is not tall enough to reach the door-handle? Why don't you let him come to me when he wants to come?"

At that moment the footman opened the door and the little family prince bounded in. It was a pale little mouldy sort of flower, with red eyes and a cornerless mouth like a carp, but with the authentic family nose and the appurtenances thereof, which took up so much room as to seriously imperil the prospects of the rest of the head growing in proportion. The little favourite was wearing a complete Uhlan costume, even the four-cornered chako was stuck on the side of his head; he was flourishing a zinc sword and grumbling bitterly.

"What's the matter with little Maksi? Has anybody been annoying him?"

Grandpapa succeeded at last in making out that on running out Maksi had tripped over his sword, that his tutor had wanted to take it away, that Maksi had thereupon drawn his weapon and made the aggressor's hand smart with it, and that finally he had fled for refuge to grandpapa's room as the only place where he was free from the persecutions of his instructors.

Grandpapa, in a terrible to do, began to question him: "Come here! Where did you hit yourself? On the head, eh! Let us see! Why, it is swollen up—quite red in fact! Put some opodeldoc on it! Clementina, do you hear?—some

opodeldoc for Maksi!" So the family medicament had to be fetched at once; but Maksi, snatching it from the worthy spinster's hand, threw it violently to the ground, so that the whole carpet was bespattered with it.

Nobody was allowed to scold him for this, however, as grandpapa was instantly ready with an excuse: "Maksi must not be vexed," said he. "Does not Maksi wear a sword by his side already? Maksi will be a great soldier one of these days!"

"Yes," replied the lad defiantly, "I'll be a general!"

"Yes, Maksi shall be a general; nothing less than a general, of course. But come, my boy, take your finger out of your mouth."

The English governess here thought she saw an opportunity of insinuating a professional remark.

"He who would be a general, must, first of all, learn a great deal."

"I don't want to learn. I mean to know everything without learning it. I say, grandpapa, if you've lots of money, you will know everything at once without learning it, won't you?"

The old man looked around him triumphantly.

"Now that I call genius, wit!" cried he.

And with that he tenderly pressed the little urchin's head to his breast and murmured: "Ah! he is my very grandson, my own flesh and blood."

He was well aware how aggravated all the others would be at these words.

Meanwhile the footman was laying a table. This table was of palisander wood and supported by the semblance of a swan.

It could be placed close beside the ottoman and was filled with twelve different kinds of dishes. All these meats were cold, for the doctor forbade his patient hot food. The old gentleman tasted each one of the dishes with the aid of his finger-tips, and not one of them pleased him. This was too salt, that was too sweet, a third was burnt, a fourth was tainted. He threatened to discharge the cook, and bitterly complained that as he did not die quickly enough for them, they were conspiring to starve him. They might have replied that he had ordered all these things himself yesterday; but nobody took the trouble to contradict him any longer, so gradually the storm died away of its own accord and the old man, turning towards Maksi, tenderly invited him to partake of the disparaged dishes.

"Come and eat with me, Maksi, my darling."

"That I will," cried the little horror, grabbing at everything simultaneously with both hands.

"Oh, fie, fie!" said grandpapa gently. "Take Maksi out for a ride and let the lacquey go with him instead of his tutor!" The old gentleman then pushed the little round table aside and signalled to the footman that he was to put all the dishes carefully away, as he should want to see them again on the morrow. The footman conscientiously obeyed this command—which was given regularly every day—and locked up all the dishes well aware that he would get a sound jacketting if he failed to produce a single one of them when required to do so.

The old man knew well enough that there was not a servant in the house who, for any reward on earth, would think of touching any food that had ever lain on his table; indeed, they held it in such horror that they used regularly to distribute it among the poor. In order therefore that the very beggars might have nothing to thank him for, he had the

food kept till it was almost rotten before he let them have it. As for his own family, he had not dined at the same table with them for ten years.

It was certainly not a sociable family. For example, the old gentleman's widowed daughter, red-cheeked Madame Langai, did not exchange a single word with her father for weeks at a time. At first he had expected her to remain in the same room with him till nine o'clock every evening, dealing out cards for him or boring herself to death in some other way for his amusement. She endured it for a whole month without a word; but at last, one evening, at seven o'clock, she appeared before him in evening dress and said that she was going to the theatre.

Old Lapussa glared at her with all his eyes.

"To the theatre?" cried he.

"Yes, I have ordered a box."

"Really? Well, I hope you will enjoy yourself!"

The lady quitted him with a shrug. She knew that from that moment she would inherit a million less than her elder brother; but nevertheless she went to the theatre regularly every day, and never stirred from her box so long as there was any one on the stage who had a word to say.

The Lapussa family was of too recent an origin for the great world to take much notice of it, and the fame of its fabulous wealth went hand in hand with the rumour of a sordid avarice which was not a recommendable quality in the eyes of the true gentry. The Lapussas were, in fact, not of gentle blood at all, but simply rich. Madame Langai's elder brother, John, was notoriously the greatest bore in the town, whom nobody, from the members of his own family down to his coffee-house acquaintances, could endure for a moment.

Only his father made much of him. For all his great wealth, he was very stingy and greedy; he even lent money at usury to his best friends. Our amusing little friend Maksi was this man's son. The slender, fanciful damsel, Henrietta, who appeared in that family like an errant angel specially sent there to be tormented for the sins of her whole race, was the orphan daughter of another son of old Lapussa, who had lost father and mother at the same time in the most tragical manner; they had both been drowned by the capsizing of a small boat on the Danube. Henrietta herself had only been saved with the utmost difficulty. She was only twelve years old at the time, and the catastrophe had had such an effect upon her nerves that ever afterwards she collapsed at the least sign of anger, and often fell a weeping for no appreciable cause. Since the death of her parents, who had loved her dearly, Henrietta had been obliged to live at her grandfather's house, where nobody loved anybody.

But no, I am mistaken. She had a brother, Koloman by name, who was a somewhat simple but thoroughly good-natured youth. He used to appear very rarely among his relations because they always fell foul of him. The poor fellow's sole fault was that he was in the habit of regularly selling his new clothes. Still, I am doubtful, after all, whether this can fairly be imputed to him as a fault at all, for although it was always being dinned into his ears that his family was immensely rich, he was never blessed with a penny to spend in amusing himself with his comrades, and therefore had to do the best he could to raise the wind. Another failing of Koloman's was that he would not learn Latin, and in consequence thereof he had to suffer many things. Old Lapussa and his son John indeed had no notion whatever of the Latin tongue. The former in his youthful days had never gone to school at all, because he was occupied in building up a business. The latter had not gone to school in *his* youth because by that time his people were

already rich and he considered it beneath him. The consequence was that neither father nor son had a proper idea on the simplest subjects, except what they picked up on their travels. Still that was no reason why Koloman should not learn, but as the tutor had his hands full already with little Maksi, Koloman was obliged to go to the national school in order to become a wiser man than his forbears.

Poor Henrietta often slaved away for hours at a time with her younger brother sitting at the table by her side, helping him to struggle through the genders, declensions, conjugations, or whatever else the infernal things were called; and the end of it all was that, at last, she learnt to know Latin better than Koloman, and secretly translated all his exercises from Cornelius Nepos and the Bucolics of Virgil for him.

But we must not linger any longer over these Latin lessons, for a much more important event claims our attention—Mr. John is coming home, and we must hasten forward to admire him.

Mr. John Lapussa was a perfect prototype of the whole family. His extraordinarily lanky pinched figure seemed even lankier than it was by nature because he always carried his head so high: he peered down from that elevation upon humanity at large as if there was something the matter with his eyes which prevented him from properly raising the lids. In him the dimensions of the family nose were made still more remarkable by an inordinately tiny chin and thin compressed lips. His moustache was shaved down to the very corners of his mouth, only a little mouse-tail sort of arrangement being left on each side, which was twisted upwards and dyed black with infinite skill. His costume was elegant and ultra-refined, and only differed from the fashion in being extra stiff and tight-fitting. Moreover, all the buttons of his shirt and his waistcoat were precious stones,

and he had a plenitude of rings on his fingers which he delighted to show off by ostentatiously adjusting his cravat in the course of conversation, or softly stroking the surface of his superfine coat.

Mr. John entered the room without looking at a soul, and paced up and down it with his hands behind his back. Then he suddenly caught sight of his father, kissed his hand and resumed his dignified saunter. It was evident that he was bursting for some one to speak and ask him what was the matter.

Clementina was the first to speak.

"Your honour!" said she.

"What is it?" he asked, lifting his head still higher.

"I have finished the embroidery for your shirt front which your honour was pleased to command."

His honour with a haughty curl of the lip condescended to glance down upon the proffered embroidery. I am afraid Clementina was a poor physiognomist, she might have noticed from his face how utterly indifferent he was to her and her embroidery, which he regarded with puckered eyes and screwed-up mouth.

"No good. Those flowers are too big; it is the sort of thing the Wallachian peasants stitch on to their shirts." And with that he took up Clementina's scissors from the work-table and deliberately snipped into little bits the whole of the difficult piece of work which the worthy woman had been slaving away at for a week and more, finally pitching it away contemptuously while she sat there and stared at him dumfounded.

"John, John!" said the old man in mild remonstrance.

"To show me such rubbish when I am mad! When I am wroth! When I am beside myself with fury!"

"Why are you angry, and with whom?"

John went on as if he did not mean to tell the cause of his anger. He flung himself into an armchair, crossed his legs, plunged his hands into the depths of his pockets and then, starting up, began to pace the room again.

"I am furious."

"Then what's the matter?" enquired the old man anxiously.

John again flung himself into an armchair and cocked one leg over the arm of the chair: "It is all that good-for-nothing Hátszegi!" he cried. "The fellow is a villain, a scoundrel, a robber!"

"What has he done?"

"What has he done?" cried John, leaping to his feet again, "I'll tell you. Yesterday he sent word to me by his broker that he would like to buy those houses of ours in the Szechenyi Square which I have offered for sale. Wishing to save broker's expenses I went to see him myself at twelve o'clock. Surely that is the most convenient time for paying business calls. At least I have always supposed so. I entered his ante-chamber and there stood a flunkey. He told me I must wait! Told *me* forsooth—*me*, John Lapussa—that I must cool my heels in an ante-chamber, at an inn, to please that wretched Hátszegi. Very well. I waited. I sent him a message that I *would* wait. Meanwhile I found I could not sit down anywhere, for the rascal had piled dirty boots and brushes on all the chairs. Presently the rascal of a servant came back and told me that his master could not see me then, would I come back again in the afternoon—I, John Lapussa, forsooth! Absolutely would not speak to me, but told me to

come again another time! Thou dog, thou wretched rascal!
But wait, I say, that's all!"

At this the old man also grew excited.

"Why did you not box his ears?" cried he.

"I'll do it, and do it well. I'll not stand it. What! send a Lapussa packing! It cannot be overlooked. I shall immediately go and find two seconds and challenge him to a duel."

"Nay, John, don't do that! Don't even box his ears in the street, but give a street-porter ten shillings to cudgel him well as he comes out of the theatre; that will be best!"

"No, I will kill him. I will shed his blood. He who insults me in a gentlemanly manner must be shown that I can revenge myself like a gentleman. I will wipe off the score with pistols —with pistols I say."

The old man and the female members of the family were duly impressed by this bragging, or rather all except Madame Langai, who was getting ready for the theatre and took no notice of the general conversation.

Mr. John was much put out by her indifference. "Matilda," he asked, "what do *you* say? Ought I not to fight, after such an insult?"

Madame Langai answered the unavoidable question with a cold smile: "I would only say that if anyone angers you another time you had better expend your wrath upon him before dinner, for if you nurse your wrath till after dinner you spoil the whole thing."

Mr. John listened to her in silence and then resumed his promenade with his hands behind his back snorting furiously. Suddenly he snatched up his cap and rushed out.

"John, John, what are you going to do?" the old man called after him in a supplicating voice.

"You'll very soon see, I'll warrant you," and he banged the door behind him.

The old man turned reproachfully towards Madame Langai. "Why did you irritate him when he was mad enough already?" he cried. "What will you gain by his death? He has a son who will inherit everything, you know. Yes, everything will belong to little Maksi."

Madame Langai calmly went on tying her bonnet strings.

"I know what fiery blood he has," mumbled the old man. "When he is angry he will listen to nobody, and is capable of facing a whole army. We must prevent this duel somehow. And you are actually preparing to go to the theatre when things have come to such a pass? You are actually going to see a comedy!"

"The actor Ladislaus plays just the same parts on the stage as John does off the stage," replied Madame Langai bitterly. "And I am as little afraid of John's rhodomontade as I am of the result of stage duels. Don't be afraid! He'll come to no harm."

A lacquey now entered to announce that the coach was ready, and Madame Langai, adjusting her mantilla, went to the playhouse where the actors were, at least, amusing.

CHAPTER II

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A NEW MODE OF DUELLING

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Old Lapussa always liked to have under his eye, night and day, some one or other whom he could plague and worry. Till eight o'clock every evening he was fully occupied in tormenting the whole family. Then Madame Langai went to the theatre and Henrietta and the governess had to sit down at the piano in the large drawing-room till it was time to put the child to bed. But when Clementina and the domestics had had supper and there was no longer anybody else with him, the turn of the night nurse began.

The duties of a night nurse are never very enviable or diverting at the best of times, yet penal servitude for life was a fate almost preferable to being the nocturnal guardian of old Demetrius Lapussa. The unhappy wretch who was burdened with this heavy charge had to sit at Mr. Lapussa's bed from nine o'clock at night till early the following morning and read aloud to him all sorts of things the whole time. Old Demetrius was a very bad sleeper. The whole night long he scarcely slept more than an hour at a time. His eyes would only close when the droaning voice of some one reading aloud made his head dizzy, and then he would doze off for a short time. But at the slightest pause he would instantly awake and angrily ask the reader why he left off, and urge him on again.

The reader in question was a student more than fifty years old, who, time out of mind, had been making a living by fair-copying all sorts of difficult manuscripts. He was an honest, simple creature who, in his time, had tried hard to push his way into every conceivable business and profession without ever succeeding till, at last, when he was well over fifty, he was fortunate enough to fall in with an editor who happened to know that Demetrius Lapussa wanted a reader, and recommended the poor devil for the post. He knew Hungarian, Latin, and Slovack well enough to mix them all up together; German he could read, though he did not understand it, but this was not necessary, for he was not expected to read for his own edification.

This worthy man, then, grew prematurely old in reading, year out year in, aloud to Mr. Demetrius, one after another, all the German translations of French novels procurable at Robert Lempel's circulating library without understanding a single word of them. Mr. Demetrius had, naturally, no library of his own, for reading to him, in his condition, was pretty much the same as medicine, and who would ever think of keeping a dispensary on his own premises? I may add that the reader received free board and lodging and ten florins a month pocket-money for his services.

On that particular night when Mr. John flung out of the house in such a violent rage, Mr. Demetrius was particularly sleepless. I know not whether Monte Cristo, the first volume of which honest Margari happened to be reading just then, was the cause of this, or whether it was due to the old man's nervousness about the terrible things John was likely to do, but the fact remains that poor Margari on this occasion got no respite from his labours. At other times Margari did manage to get a little relief. Whenever he observed that Mr. Demetrius was beginning to draw longer breaths than usual he would let his head sink down on his

book and fall asleep immediately till the awakened tyrant roused him out of his slumbers and made him go on again. But now he was not suffered to have a moment's peace.

Monte Cristo had already been sitting in his dungeon for some time when Madame Langai's carriage returned from the theatre. Then Mr. Demetrius rang up the porters to inquire whether Mr. John had also returned home. No, was the answer. At eleven o'clock Mr. John had still not returned. Meanwhile Monte Cristo's neighbour had traced the figure on the floor of the dungeon. Mr. Demetrius here demanded a fuller explanation of the circumstances. "How was that, Margari?" he enquired.

"I humbly beg your honour's pardon, but I don't understand."

"Very well, proceed!"

Every time a door below was opened or shut, Mr. Demetrius rang up the porter to enquire whether Mr. John had come in, to the intense aggravation of the porter, who appeared in the door of the saloon with a surlier expression and his hair more and more ruffled on each occasion, inwardly cursing the fool of a student who had not even wit enough to send an old man asleep, and envying the other servants who at least were able to sleep at night without interruption.

And still Margari went on reading.

By this time Monte Cristo had had himself sewn up in a sack and flung into the sea as a corpse.

"Would you have dared to have that done to you, Margari?" interrupted Mr. Demetrius.

"If I had a lot of money I might, begging your honour's pardon, but a poor devil like me is only too glad to live at any price," replied Margari, whose answer naturally had no

relation whatever to the text, not a word of which he understood.

"You are a simple fellow, Margari; but go on, go on!"

Margari gaped violently, he would have liked to have stretched himself too, but he bethought him in time that his coat had already burst beneath his armpits, and he had no wish to make the rent still larger, so he let it alone and proceeded with his bitter labour.

By the time Monte Cristo had swum back to dry land, Margari's eyelids were almost glued to his eyes and still the old gentleman showed no sign of drowsiness. Mr. John's threat had kept Mr. Demetrius awake all night, and consequently had kept poor Margari awake too. Once or twice an unusually interesting episode excited the old man's attention, and for the time he forgot all about John's duel—for example, when Monte Cristo discovered the enormous treasure on the island—and he would then rouse up Margari and make him go and find a map and point out the exact position of Monte Cristo's island. Margari searched every corner of the sea for it, and at last looked for it on the dry land also without finding it. Tiring at length with the fruitless search he proposed, as the best way out of the difficulty, that he should write on the afternoon of the following day to Monsieur Alexander Dumas himself to explain to his honour where the island used to be and whether it still existed.

"What a blockhead you are," said the old man, "but go on, go on!"

Margari gave a great sigh and looked at the clock on the wall, but, alas! it was still a long way from six o'clock. At last, however, while he was still reading, the clock *did* strike six. Margari instantly stood up in the middle of a sentence, marked the passage with his thumb-nail so as to know at

what word to begin again on the following evening, turned down the leaf and closed the book.

"Well! is that the end of it?" enquired Mr. Demetrius in angry amazement.

"I humbly beg your honour's pardon," said Margari with meek intrepidity, "there's nothing about reading *after six* in our agreement"—and off he went. Mr. Demetrius thereupon flew into a violent rage, cursed and swore, vowed that he would dismiss his reader on the spot, and as the morning grew lighter fell into a deep, death-like, narcotic sleep from which he would not have awakened if the house had come tumbling about his ears. When he did awake, about ten o'clock, his first care was to make enquiries about Mr. John. Then he sent the porter to the police station to inform the authorities that his son and Mr. Hátszegi, who were both staying at the Queen of England inn, were going to fight a duel, which should be prevented at all hazards. A police constable, at this announcement, flung himself into a hackney-coach and set off at full speed to make enquiries. Half an hour later a heyduke was sent back to the porter to tell him that either the whole affair must be a hoax, as nothing was known of a duel, or else that the two combatants must already be dead and buried, as not a word could be heard of either of them. Luckily, towards the afternoon, Mr. John himself arrived in a somewhat dazed condition, like one who has been up drinking all night. The members of the family were all sitting together as usual in Mr. Demetrius's room, listening in silence to his heckling, when the tidings of Mr. John's arrival reached him. Demetrius immediately summoned him. He sent back word at first that he was lying down to try to sleep, which was an absurd excuse for even the richest man to give in the forenoon; on being summoned a second time he threatened to box the porter's ears; only the third time, when

Clementina was sent with the message that if he did not come at once, his sick father would come and fetch him, did he respond to the call and appear before them in a pet.

"Well, thou bloodthirsty man, what has happened? What was the end of it?"

"What has happened?" repeated John with monstrously dilated eyes. "What marvel do you expect me to relate?"

"Clementina, Miss Kleary, Henrietta, retire," cried the old man; "retire, go into the next room. These are not the sort of things that children should hear."

When they had all withdrawn except Madame Langai, Demetrius again questioned his son: "Now then, what about this affair, this *rencontre* with Hátszegi; did you challenge him, did you meet him?"

"Eh? Oh—yes! Naturally. Of course I sought him out, I have only just come from him. We have been making a night of it together at the Queen of England. I can honestly say that he is a splendid fellow, a gallant, charming gentleman. He has really noble qualities. I am going to bring him here this afternoon. You shall all see him. Even you will like him, Matilda. But now, adieu, I must really have a little sleep, we were drinking champagne together all night. Oh, he is a magnificent, a truly magnificent character."

Mr. Demetrius said not a word in reply, but he compressed his thin lips and wagged his head a good deal. Nobody made any observation. Mr. John was allowed to go to bed according to his desire. A little time after he had withdrawn, however, the old man said to Madame Langai: "What are you doing Matilda?"

"I am trying to guess a rebus which has just appeared in 'The Iris.'"

"Don't you think that what John has just said is rather odd?"

"I have not troubled my head about it one way or the other."

"I can see through it though. John wants to pay off Hátszegi in his own coin. He has invited him here this afternoon in order to keep him waiting in the ante-chamber, and then send him word that he can't see him till to-morrow. Oh! Jack is a sly lad, a very sly lad, but I can see through him. I can see through him."

Mr. John passed the whole afternoon in his father's room; he did not even go to his club. No doubt he was awaiting his opportunity for revenge. He amused himself by sitting down beside his niece, stroking her hand, admiring the whiteness of her skin, and, drawing the governess into the conversation, enquired how Henrietta was getting on with her studies, whether she had still much to learn in English and French, and whether she was not, by this time, quite a virtuoso at the piano. He insinuated at the same time that it would be just as well, perhaps, if she made haste to learn all that was necessary as soon as possible, because she was no longer a child, and when once a woman is married she has not very much time for study.

"By the way, Henrietta," he added suddenly, "have you chosen a lover yet?"

Henrietta was too much afraid of him even to blush at this question, she only glanced at him with timid, suspicious eyes and said nothing.

"Don't be afraid, sisterkin," continued Mr. John encouragingly. "I'll bring you such a nice bridegroom that even your grandpapa, when he sees him, will snatch up his

crutches in order to go and meet him half-way." Here the old man growled something which John smothered with a laugh. "Yes, and if he won't give you up we'll carry you off by force."

Henrietta shuddered once or twice at her uncle's blandishments, like one who has to swallow a loathsome medicine and has caught a whiff of it beforehand.

The porter interrupted this cheerful family chat by announcing that his lordship Baron Hátszegi wished to pay his respects to Mr. Lapussa.

Mr. Demetrius immediately raised himself on his elbows to read from Mr. John's features what he was going to do. Would he tell the lacqueys to turn Hátszegi out of the house? or would he send him word to wait in the ante-chamber, as he himself had waited at Hátszegi's, and then put him off till the morrow? Oh! John would be sure to do something of the sort, for a very proud fellow was John.

But, so far from doing any of these things, Mr. John rushed to the door to meet the arriving guest and greeted him aloud from afar in the most obliging, not to say obsequious, terms, bidding him come in without ceremony and not make a stranger of himself. And with that he passed his arm through the arm of his distinguished guest and, radiant with joy, drew him into the midst of the domestic sanctum sanctorum and presenting him in a voice that trembled with emotion: "His lordship, Baron Leonard Hátszegi, my very dear friend!"

And then he was guilty of the impropriety of introducing his guest first of all to his father and his niece, simply because they happened to be the nearest, only afterward he bethought him of turning towards Matilda to introduce her, whereupon Matilda's face assumed a stony expression like

that of the marble maiden in Zampa, to the great confusion of John, who felt bound to enquire in a half-whisper: "Why, what's the matter?"

"You dolt," she whispered back, "have you not learnt yet that the lady of the house should be introduced to her guests not last, but first?"

John's first impulse was to be shocked, his second was to be furious, but finally he thought it best to turn with a smile to Baron Hátszegi, who courteously helped him out of his embarrassment by observing: "It is my privilege to be able to greet your ladyship as an old acquaintance already. Many a time have I had the opportunity of secretly admiring you in your box at the theatre."

"Pray be seated, sir...!"
