

THE DEGENERATE GALLANTS.

("Mes jeunes cavaliers.")

[HERNANI, Act I., March, 1830.]

What business brings you here, young cavaliers?  
Men like the Cid, the knights of bygone years,  
Rode out the battle of the weak to wage,  
Protecting beauty and revering age.  
Their armor sat on them, strong men as true,  
Much lighter than your velvet rests on you.  
Not in a lady's room by stealth they knelt;  
In church, by day, they spoke the love they felt.  
They kept their houses' honor bright from rust,  
They told no secret, and betrayed no trust;  
And if a wife they wanted, bold and gay,  
With lance, or axe, or falchion, and by day,  
Bravely they won and wore her. As for those  
Who slip through streets when honest men repose,  
With eyes turned to the ground, and in night's shade  
The rights of trusting husbands to invade;  
I say the Cid would force such knaves as these  
To beg the city's pardon on their knees;  
And with the flat of his all-conquering blade

Their rank usurped and 'scutcheon would degrade.

Thus would the men of former times, I say,

Treat the degenerate minions of to-day.

LORD F. LEVESON GOWER (1ST EARL OF ELLESMERE.)

THE OLD AND THE YOUNG BRIDEGROOM.

("L'homme auquel on vous destina.")

[HERNANI, Act I.]

Listen. The man for whom your youth is destined,  
Your uncle, Ruy de Silva, is the Duke  
Of Pastrana, Count of Castile and Aragon.  
For lack of youth, he brings you, dearest girl,  
Treasures of gold, jewels, and precious gems,  
With which your brow might outshine royalty;  
And for rank, pride, splendor, and opulence,  
Might many a queen be envious of his duchess!  
Here is one picture. I am poor; my youth  
I passed i' the woods, a barefoot fugitive.  
My shield, perchance, may bear some noble blazons  
Spotted with blood, defaced though not dishonored.  
Perchance I, too, have rights, now veiled in darkness,--  
Rights, which the heavy drapery of the scaffold  
Now hides beneath its black and ample folds;  
Rights which, if my intent deceive me not,  
My sword shall one day rescue. To be brief:--  
I have received from churlish Fortune nothing  
But air, light, water,--Nature's general boon.

Choose, then, between us two, for you must choose;--  
Say, will you wed the duke, or follow me?

DONNA SOL. I'll follow you.

HERN. What, 'mongst my rude companions,  
Whose names are registered in the hangman's book?  
Whose hearts are ever eager as their swords,  
Edged by a personal impulse of revenge?  
Will you become the queen, dear, of my band?  
Will you become a hunted outlaw's bride?  
When all Spain else pursued and banished me,--  
In her proud forests and air-piercing mountains,  
And rocks the lordly eagle only knew,  
Old Catalonia took me to her bosom.  
Among her mountaineers, free, poor, and brave,  
I ripened into manhood, and, to-morrow,  
One blast upon my horn, among her hills,  
Would draw three thousand of her sons around me.  
You shudder,--think upon it. Will you tread  
The shores, woods, mountains, with me, among men  
Like the dark spirits of your haunted dreams,--  
Suspect all eyes, all voices, every footstep,--  
Sleep on the grass, drink of the torrent, hear  
By night the sharp hiss of the musket-ball  
Whistling too near your ear,--a fugitive

Proscribed, and doomed mayhap to follow me  
In the path leading to my father's scaffold?

DONNA SOL. I'll follow you.

HERN.           This duke is rich, great, prosperous,  
No blot attaches to his ancient name.  
He is all-powerful. He offers you  
His treasures, titles, honors, with his hand.

DONNA SOL. We will depart to-morrow. Do not blame  
What may appear a most unwomanly boldness.

CHARLES SHERRY.