



LIFE'S ASSURANCE.

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'Twas a wild dream!—I had grown old—
 Dim was my aching sight—and cold—
 The blood that crept, in languid course,
 Through each dried vein. Tired Nature's force
 Was spent; yet, yet I longed to live—
 To mingle in earth's crowd—to give
 Another sigh, another tear,
 To those who were by kindred dear—
 To those who were my heart best loved. I wept,
 In the dark thought that Time had swept,
 Remorseless, many a blooming flower,
 The sunshine of my spirit's hour
 Of happiness, away!—Alone
 I wandered forth: no soothing tone—
 No blessing breathed, in accents dear—
 No "Speed thee, Heaven!" to charm and cheer—
 Was mine. I came—and went; a sigh
 Hailed me with its sad minstrelsy;

Shrieks of despair the rude gale swelled,
And demons of the night-storm yelled,
At my departure.—*Could* it be—
She, the beloved one!—where was *SHE*?

Ha! 'twas a sudden flash! that spire,
Seen through the lightning's lurid fire,
Had met my gaze before! Deep, deep,
In Memory's page, awake, asleep,
It dwelt in sacred vividness,
Through weal, through woe, my soul to bless.
MARY!—My vows!—The bright, bright ray
That shone upon our favoured day—
The joyous peal that on our ear
Rang its glad changes, full and clear—
The words that, 'neath that sacred shrine,
Proclaimed thee mine—*for ever* mine!—
Yet sweetly haunted me—when, lo!
A change came o'er my dream of woe!
It was a rapid, sudden change,
To darkness—mist—moonlight—a range
Of mountains in the distance; then,
A desert heath, from press of men
Removed; and then, a fitful sky
Of battling clouds—of anarchy—

From which the moon, with sullen ray,
Looked down on mortal man's decay.
The place of tombs was frowning there:
Beneath that beam, so coldly fair,
The bones of beauty, youth, and age,
Were bleaching. Winter's fiercest rage,
And summer's gale—the breeze, the blast—
O'er that lone scene unheeded passed,
Nor waked the sleepers.

Midnight dews—

Damp graves—and night's pale flowers, diffuse
A chilling sadness.—Hark! What sound
Is that from yonder humble mound
Of ungrassed earth?—Poor FIDO here?
Man's fond unfailing friend, whose fear,
Whose hope, joy, sorrow, peace, and love,
Dwell in his master's eye! Above
The world's cold Janus-smile I greet
Thy honest welcome at my feet!

What means that look—that piteous moan?
Ah, 'tis a *recent* grave! The stone—

Sad land-mark, reared by hands of earth
 O'er the last home of buried worth—
 The name—the story—may reveal,
 Of him who now has ceased to feel
 The thrill of bliss—the throb of woe—
 The pang young minds are doomed to know,
 When Disappointment's withering glance
 Dissolves the spell of fond romance
 That on the heart's proud beatings hung,
 And songs of hope and gladness sung—
 Pæans that told of future fame—
 The heaven-born lay—the deathless name!

I read:—"MARY, *the honoured wife*"—
 MARY!—my worshipped love! the life
 Of life! *My Mary*—art *thou* gone?

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Another change.—Lo, now there shone
 A glorious sun in Heaven;—and yet
 The yew-tree's sable pall was wet
 With tears of night;—and yet the mound—
 Not grassless *now*, but osier-bound—
 Was there;—and still the moaning gale
 Sighed o'er that stone—that tribute frail.

But time had dimmed its freshness—moss
Crept o'er the words that spoke the loss
My widowed soul had known.—Beneath
A rank and deadly nightshade wreath
These broken lines I read:—“ *Here sleeps
Her husband*”—“ *LIFE'S ASSURANCE*”—“ *weeps*”—
“ *In anguish weeps.*”

The vision fled—
I was no more amongst the dead—
The world's swift stream—the rushing throng—
Carried me with its tide along,
Like a seared leaf that yet lives on,
When all its kindred leaves are gone.—
Strange, that amidst the ceaseless strife,
Though joy was dead, I longed for life!
Those words—those words—that vision still
Haunted my heart and brain. The *will*,
Without the *power* to live, was mine!
O, for some voice—some voice divine—
To whisper to my secret ear,
“ *Life—Life's ASSURANCE—waits thee HERE!*”
That instant, smiling through the storm,
My mental glance descried a form,

Attired in robes of dazzling white,
 With lip of rose, and eye of light.
 That lip—that eye—had blessed my gaze
 In other, brighter, happier days—
 When love was warm, when life was new,
 And years like minutes swiftly flew!
 In her white hand a cup she bore—
 The cup I quaffed in days of yore.
 'Twas HOPE—and thus she spake:—" O, drink!
 And though upon the gloomy brink
 Of the dark grave, yet thou shalt *live*—
 The draught shall LIFE'S ASSURANCE give!"

Life! Life!—O, magic words, whose power
 Wrought on my heart in that wild hour
 Of visioned woe!—I drained the bowl—
 That nectar of a fainting soul!
 Would gracious Heaven my days prolong?
 Yes! for methought my limbs grew strong;
 My breast no longer owned despair,
 For HOPE—the syren HOPE—was there!

I gazed around—what words were those?

What mansion that so stately rose?

Ha! "LIFE'S ASSURANCE!"—Breathe I yet!
I rushed within the gate—I met
The fleshless form—the orbless eye—
The breast without a heart—a sigh—
That man's worst foe declared! Around—
Huge folios—bags of gold—embrowned
With dust of time:—Was gold the price
Of earth's *still* longed-for Paradise?
"Ah! give me years of vigour—health—
And take, O, take my sordid wealth!"

The spectre grimly smiled, and said:—
"Thou fool—go, rest thee with the dead!
Behold yon feeble withered crone—
Like *thee*, she'd breathe, a thriftless drone—
Like *thee*, she'd live o'er life again,
Through years of feverish grief and pain.
To-morrow, she must meet her doom—
To-morrow, rest within the tomb!

"**THY** days are numbered, too. Away!
Thy mother earth now chides thy stay!
Go—and, within her silent home,
Await the life—*the life to come!*"

With gaunt and outstretched arm he gave
 A scroll—my passport to the grave.
 I shrank, and read with gasping breath—
 “*Thy LIFE'S ASSURANCE* is alone through *DEATH!*”

T. H.