



LIVING OR DEAD?

“WE are all alike,” said a sear dead branch
 To his fellow-boughs on a leafless tree;
 “They say I am dead! Then what are
 you?
 You are brown and dry; you are just like me.”

Then another branch made quick reply,
 As he waved his bare arms to and fro;
 “Friend, which is living and which is dead
 We may not tell, but the spring will show.”

And the winter passed, and the spring breathed soft,
 Till the barren earth began to wake;
 And the green grass blades came peeping forth,
 And the flowers bloomed freshly for her sake.

And the swift life-sap in the naked trees
 Went thrilling up from the very root—
 Like blood from the heart to the finger tips—
 And tingling keen into every shoot;

Till the new-born strength that was in them hid
 Burst into emerald foliage new;
 And the sun gazed down on the dancing leaves,
 From his golden throne in the upper blue.

And all was happiness, all was life,
 Save only in that one poor dead bough,
 Whose bare brown limbs in the flush of spring
 Stood cold and brittle amid the glow.

No sap went thrilling beneath the bark,
 No buds came bursting in pink and green;
 But death in the midst of life was there,
 As sad a sight as ever was seen.

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O worldly spirit, so dead to God!
 O human heart, with thy love grown cold!
 Sayest thou thus to thy poor shrunk self,
 “I am only what others have been of old;

“This is not death, it is winter sleep;
 Worse than my fellows I cannot be,
 I am but waiting for sun and shower
 To bring fresh beauty and life to me?”

O fool, and blind! No shower and sun
 Can quicken the sapless, or fill it up;
 O sinner, thou feedest on ashes grey,
 And drinkest out of an empty cup.

Cry out for help while yet there is time;
 And the Husbandman quickly will come to thee,
 And prune this cankered death away,
 Setting the life-sap running free.

Then, when the showers begin to fall,
 And the dews to rise, and the sun to glow,
 Thy life shall burst into leaves and flowers,
 And that thou livest God's Spring shall show.

M. E. R.

