John Hay

Executive Mansion
May 1874
ON GUARD.

BY JOHN G. NICOLAY.

IN the black terror-night,
On yon mist-shrouded hill,
Slowly, with footstep light,
Stealthy and grim and still,
Like ghost in winding sheet
Risen at midnight bell,
Over his lonely beat
Marches the sentinel!

In storm-defying cloak —
Hand on his trusty gun —
Heart, like a heart of oak —
Eye, never-setting sun ;
Speaks but the challenge-shout,
All foes without the line,
Heeds but, to solve the doubt,
Watchword and countersign.

Camp-ward, the watchfires gleam
Beacon-like in the gloom ;
Round them his comrades dream
Pictures of youth and home.
While in his heart the bright
Hope-fires shine everywhere,
ON GUARD.

In love's enchanting light
Memory lies dreaming there.

Faint, through the silence come
From the foes' grim array,
Growl of impatient drum
Eager for morrow's fray;
Echo of song and shout,
Curse and carousel glee,
As in a fiendish rout
Demons at revelry.

Close, in the gloomy shade —
Danger lurks ever nigh —
Grasping his dagger-blade
Crouches th' assassin spy;
Shrinks at the guardsman's tread,
Quails 'fore his gleaming eyes,
Creeps back with baffled hate,
Cursing his cowardice.

Naught can beguile his bold,
Unsleeping vigilance;
E'en in the fireflame, old
Visions unheeded dance.
Fearless of lurking spy,
Scornful of wassail-swell,
THE CAVALRY CHARGE.

With an undaunted eye
Marches the sentinel.

Low, to his trusty gun
Eagerly whispers he,
"Wait, with the morning sun
March we to victory.
Fools, into Satan's clutch
Leaping ere dawn of day:
He who would fight must watch,
He who would win must pray."

Pray! for the night hath wings;
Watch! for the foe is near;
March! till the morning brings
Fame-wreath or soldier's bier.
So shall the poet write,
When all hath ended well,
"Thus through the nation's night
Marched Freedom's sentinel."

THE CAVALRY CHARGE.

BY FRANCIS A. DURIVAGE.

WITH bray of the trumpet
And roll of the drum,