

Edgar Guest

Born August 20, 1881
Birmingham, England

Died August 5, 1959
Detroit, Michigan



Edgar Albert Guest (aka **Eddie Guest**) was a prolific American poet who was popular in the first half of the 20th century and became known as the **People's Poet**.

Edgar Guest - Biography

On August 20, 1881, Edgar Guest was born in Birmingham, England, to Edwin and Julia Wayne Guest. The family settled in Detroit, Michigan, in 1891. When Edwin lost his job in 1893, eleven-year-old Edgar between working odd jobs after school.

In 1895, the year before Henry Ford took his first ride in a motor carriage, Eddie Guest was hired as a copy boy for the *Detroit Free Press*, where he would work for almost sixty-five years. His father died when the poet was seventeen, and Guest was forced to drop out of high school and work full time at the newspaper. By the end of that year -- the year he should have been completing high school -- Guest had a reputation as a scrappy reporter in a competitive town. He worked his way up from a copy boy to a job in the news department.

It did not occur to Guest to write in verse until late in 1898 when he was working as assistant exchange editor. It was his job to find timeless items from other newspapers to use in the *Free Press* as fillers. Many of the items were verses. Guest figured he might just as well write verse of his own as clip it from elsewhere, and so he submitted one of his own. His first poem appeared on December 11, 1898.

More contributions of verse and observations led to a *weekly* column, "Blue Monday Chat," and then a *daily* column, "Breakfast Table Chat" which was syndicated to over three-hundred newspapers throughout the United States. Readers loved it.

Guest married Nellie Crossman in 1906. The couple had three children. His brother Harry printed his first two books, *Home Rhymes* and *Just Glad Things*, in small editions. His verse quickly found an audience and the Chicago firm of Reilly and Britton began to publish his books at a rate of nearly one per year. His collections include *Just Folks* (1917), *Over Here* (1918), *When Day Is Done* (1921), *The Passing*

Throng (1923), *Harbor Lights of Home* (1928), and *Today and Tomorrow* (1942).

From 1931 to 1942, Guest broadcast a weekly program on NBC radio. It was one of early radio's longest-running radio shows. In 1951, a television series "A Guest in Your Home" appeared on NBC TV.

But Edgar A. Guest remained, at heart and in fact, a newspaper man. He considered himself "a newspaper man who wrote verses." In 1939, he told "Editor & Publisher," "I've never been late with my copy and I've never missed an edition. And that's seven days a week." For more than 30 years, there was not a day that the *Free Press* went to press without Guest's verse on its pages. Since worked for the *Free Press* for more than six decades, thousands of Detroiters were born, grew up and had children of their own before a *Free Press* ever arrived at their homes without Guest's gentle human touch!

Shunned by "those highbrow, longhair intellectual critics and writers," Guest followed a clear and simple formula to journalistic success: "I take simple everyday things that happen to me and I figure it happens to a lot of other people and I make simple rhymes out of them."

He published more than twenty volumes of poetry and was thought to have written over 11,000 poems. Sales ran into the millions and his most popular collection, "It Takes a Heap o' Livin'," sold more than a million copies by itself. His *Collected Verse* appeared in 1934 and went into at least eleven editions.

Guest has been called "the poet of the people." Most often, his poems were fourteen lines long and presented a deeply sentimental view of everyday life. Edgar Guest died on August 5, 1959.

Don't Quit

When things go wrong, as they sometimes will,
When the road you're trudging seems all up hill,
When the funds are low, and the debts are high,
And you want to smile, but you have to sigh,
When care is pressing you down a bit,
Rest if you must, but don't you quit.

Life is queer with it's twists and turns,
As everyone of us sometimes learns,
And many a failure turns about,
When he might have won had he stuck it out.
Don't give up though the pace seems slow,
You may succeed with another blow.

Success is failure turned inside out,
The silver tint of the clouds of doubt,
And you never can tell how close you are,
It may be near when it seems so far,
So stick to the fight when you're hardest hit,
It's when things seem worse,
That you must not quit.

It Couldn't Be Done

Somebody said that it couldn't be done,
But, he with a chuckle replied
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.

So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
On his face. If he worried he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.

Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;
At least no one has done it";
But he took off his coat and he took off his hat,
And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.

With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
Without any doubting or quiddit,
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.

There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
There are thousands to prophesy failure;
There are thousands to point out to you one by one,
The dangers that wait to assail you.

But just buckle it in with a bit of a grin,
Just take off your coat and go to it;
Just start to sing as you tackle the thing
That "couldn't be done," and you'll do it.

True Nobility

Who does his task from day to day
And meets whatever comes his way,
Believing God has willed it so.
Has found real greatness here below.

Who guards his post, no matter where,
Believing god must need him there,
Although but lowly toil it be,
Has risen to nobility.

For great and low there's but one test:
'Tis that each man shall do his best.
Who works with all the strength he can
Shall never die in debt to man.

Hard Luck

Ain't no use as I can see
In sittin' underneath a tree
An' growlin' that your luck is bad,
An' that your life is extry sad;
Your life ain't sadder than your neighbor's
Nor any harder are your labors;
It rains on him the same as you,
An' he has work he hates to do;
An' he gits tired an' he gits cross,
An' he has trouble with the boss;
You take his whole life, through an' through,
Why, he's no better off than you.

If whinin' brushed the clouds away
I wouldn't have a word to say;
If it made good friends out o' foes
I'd whine a bit, too, I suppose;
But when I look around an' see
A lot o' men resemblin' me,
An' see 'em sad, an' see 'em gay
With work t' do most every day,
Some full o' fun, some bent with care,
Some havin' troubles hard to bear,
I reckon, as I count my woes,
They're 'bout what everybody knows.

The day I find a man who'll say
He's never known a rainy day,
Who'll raise his right hand up an' swear
In forty years he's had no care,
Has never had a single blow,
An' never known one touch o' woe,
Has never seen a loved one die,
Has never wept or heaved a sigh,
Has never had a plan go wrong,
But allas laughed his way along;
Then I'll sit down an' start to whine
That all the hard luck here is mine.

The Little Orphan

The crowded street his playground is, a patch of blue his sky;
A puddle in a vacant lot his sea where ships pass by:
Poor little orphan boy of five, the city smoke and grime
Taint every cooling breeze he gets throughout the summer time;
And he is just as your boy is, a child who loves to play,
Except that he is drawn and white and cannot get away.

And he would like the open fields, for often in his dreams
The angels kind bear him off to where are pleasant streams,
Where he may sail a splendid boat, sometimes he flies a kite,
Or romps beside a shepherd dog and shouts with all his might;
But when the dawn of morning comes he wakes to find once more
That what he thought were sun-kissed hills are rags upon the floor.

Then through the hot and sultry day he plays at "make-pretend,"
The alley is a sandy beach where all the rich folks send

Their little boys and girls to play, a barrel is his boat,
But, oh, the air is tifling and the dust fills up his throat;
And though he tries so very hard to play, somehow it seems
He never gets such wondrous joys as angels bring in dreams.

Poor little orphan boy of five, except that he is pale,
With sunken cheeks and hollow eyes and very wan and frail,
Just like that little boy of yours, with same desire to play,
Fond of the open fields and skies, he's built the self-same way;
But kept by fate and circumstance away from shady streams,
His only joy comes when he sleeps and angels bring him dreams.

Faith

This much I know:
God does not wrong us here,
Though oft His judgments seem severe
And reason falters 'neath the blow,
Some day we'll learn 'twas better so.

So oft I've erred
In trifling matters of my own concern;
So oft I've blundered at the simplest turn,
Chosen the false path or the foolish word
That what I call my judgment seems absurd.

My puny reason cries
Against the bitter and the cruel blows,
Measuring the large world by the inch it knows,
Seeing all joy and pain through selfish eyes,
Not knowing hurt and suffering may be wise.

But I have come to see,
So vast God's love, so infinite His plan
That it is well it was not left to man
To alter or to say what is to be,
When reason failed, faith also then would flee.

God knoweth best!
Through the black night and agony of grief
Faith whispers low: "Hold fast to your belief!
In time His purpose He shall manifest,
Then shall you learn how greatly you were blest."

The Proof Of Worth

Though victory's proof of the skill you possess,
Defeat is the proof of your grit;
A weakling can smile in his days of success,
But at trouble's first sign he will quit.
So the test of the heart and the test of your pluck
Isn't skies that are sunny and fair,
But how do you stand to the blow that is struck
And how do you battle despair?

A fool can seem wise when the pathway is clear
And it's easy to see the way out,
But the test of man's judgment is something to fear,
And what does he do when in doubt?

And the proof of his faith is the courage he shows
When sorrows lie deep in his breast;
It's the way that he suffers the griefs that he knows
That brings out his worst or his best.

The test of a man is how much he will bear
For a cause which he knows to be right,
How long will he stand in the depths of despair,
How much will he suffer and fight?
There are many to serve when the victory's near
And few are the hurts to be borne,
But it calls for a leader of courage to cheer
The men in a battle forlorn.

It's the way you hold out against odds that are great
That proves what your courage is worth,
It's the way that you stand to the bruises of fate
That shows up your stature and girth.
And victory's nothing but proof of your skill,
Veneered with a glory that's thin,
Unless it is proof of unfaltering will,
And unless you have suffered to win.

Follow A Famous Father

I follow a famous father,
His honor is mine to wear;
He gave me a name that was free from shame,
A name he was proud to bear.
He lived in the morning sunlight,
And marched in the ranks of right.
He was always true to the best he knew
And the shield that he wore was bright.

I follow a famous father,
And never a day goes by
But I feel that he looks down to me
To carry his standard high.
He stood to the sternest trials
As only a brave man can;
Though the way be long, I must never wrong
The name of so good a man.

I follow a famous father,
Not known to the printed page,
Nor written down in the world's renown
As a prince of his little age.
But never a stain attached to him
And never he stooped to shame;
He was bold and brave and to me he gave
The pride of an honest name.

I follow a famous father,
And him I must keep in mind;
Though his form is gone, I must carry on
The name that he left behind.
It was mine on the day he gave it,
It shone as a monarch's crown,
And as fair to see as it came to me
It must be when I pass it down.

He Who Serves

He has not served who gathers gold,
Nor has he served, whose life is told
In selfish battles he has won,
Or deeds of skill that he has done;
But he has served who now and then
Has helped along his fellow men.

The world needs many men today;
Red-blooded men along life's way,
With cheerful smiles and helping hands,
And with the faith that understands
The beauty of the simple deed
Which serves another's hour of need.

Strong men to stand beside the weak,
Kind men to hear what others speak;
True men to keep our country's laws
And guard its honor and its cause;
Men who will bravely play life's game
Nor ask rewards of gold and fame.

Teach me to do the best I can
To help and cheer our fellow man;
Teach me to lose my selfish need
And glory in the larger deed
Which smoothes the road, and lights the day
For all who chance to come my way.

A Child Of Mine (To All Parents)

I will lend you, for a little time,
A child of mine, He said.
For you to love the while he lives,
And mourn for when he's dead.

It may be six or seven years,
Or twenty-two or three.
But will you, till I call him back,
Take care of him for Me?

He'll bring his charms to gladden you,
And should his stay be brief.
You'll have his lovely memories,
As solace for your grief.

I cannot promise he will stay,
Since all from earth return.
But there are lessons taught down there,
I want this child to learn.

I've looked the wide world over,
In search for teachers true.
And from the throngs that crowd life's lanes,
I have selected you.

Now will you give him all your love,
Nor think the labour vain.

Nor hate me when I come
To take him home again?

I fancied that I heard them say,
'Dear Lord, Thy will be done!'
For all the joys Thy child shall bring,
The risk of grief we'll run.

We'll shelter him with tenderness,
We'll love him while we may,
And for the happiness we've known,
Forever grateful stay.

But should the angels call for him,
Much sooner than we've planned.
We'll brave the bitter grief that comes,
And try to understand.

The Wrist Watch Man

He is marching dusty highways and he's riding bitter trails,
His eyes are clear and shining and his muscles hard as nails.
He is wearing Yankee khaki and a healthy coat of tan,
And the chap that we are backing is the Wrist Watch Man.

He's no parlour dude, a-prancing, he's no puny pacifist,
And it's not for affectation there's a watch upon his wrist.
He's a fine two-fisted scrapper, he is pure American,
And the backbone of the nation is the Wrist Watch Man.

He is marching with a rifle, he is digging in a trench,
He is swapping English phrases with a poilu for his French;
You will find him in the navy doing anything he can,
For at every post of duty is the Wrist Watch Man.

Oh, the time was that we chuckled at the soft and flabby chap
Who wore a little wrist watch that was fastened with a strap.
But the chuckles all have vanished, and with glory now we scan
The courage and the splendor of the Wrist Watch Man.

He is not the man we laughed at, not the one who won our jeers,
He's the man that we are proud of, he's the man that owns our cheers;
He's the finest of the finest, he's the bravest of the clan,
And I pray for God's protection for our Wrist Watch Man.