

Lost Opportunities

'When I am rich,' he used to say,
'A thousand joys I'll give away;
I'll walk among the poor I find
And unto one and all be kind.
I'll place a wreath of roses red
Upon the bier of all my dead;
I'll help the struggling youth to climb;
In doing good I'll spend my time;
To all in need I'll friendly be
The day that fortune smiles on me.'

He never guessed that being kind
Depends upon the heart and mind
And not upon the purse at all;
That poor men's gifts, however small,
Make light some weary traveler's load
And smooth for him his troubled road.
He never knew or understood
The fellowship of doing good.
Because he had not much to spare
He thought it vain to give his share.

Yet many passed him, day by day,
He might have helped along the way.
He fancied kindness something which
Belongs entirely to the rich.
And so he lived and toiled for gold,
Unsympathetic, harsh and cold,
Intending all the time to share
The burdens that his brothers bear
When he possessed great wealth, and he
Could well afford a friend to be.

His fortune came, but, oh, too late;
The poor about him could not wait.
They never guessed and never knew
The things that he had meant to do.
Few knew how much he'd planned to give
If God had only let him live.
And when at last his form was cold,
All that he'd left on earth was gold.
A kindly name is something which
A man must earn before he's rich.

Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959)