



# *The Ball of the Woods*

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AN EDGAR GUEST COLLECTION

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THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL CURRICULUM

# Chapter 1

## An Introduction

It's wonderful when poems bring you delight as you read them. It's wonderful when poems fill your mind with beautiful images and messages. Nevertheless, it is *astounding* when a poem stays with you for years to come and changes the way you act and think.

This is exactly how poems by Edgar Guest have affected my own life. For example, years after reading a poem by Edgar Guest, I had a newborn baby that cried for hours a day and hardly slept at night. As I exhaustedly took care of my baby, lines from Edgar Guest's poem "Baby Feet" kept flooding my mind:

Tell me, what is half so sweet  
As a baby's tiny feet

Those lines repeatedly changed my mood from frustration to appreciation as I cared for my precious baby.

In addition, I often hear lines from Edgar Guest's poem "Silent" when I see flowers or magnificent trees, and my mind is turned to gratitude and deeper joy.

Too well I know what accident  
And chance and force disclose  
To think blind fury could invent  
The beauty of a rose.

I'm not alone in being changed by Edgar Guest's poetry. ESPN.com explains how Guest's poetry affected football player Kordell Stewart, who had a successful 11-year NFL career:

In *Truth*, Stewart's 2016 autobiography, he describes a particularly ugly scene after a game in Pittsburgh. "As I walked off the field and into the tunnel," he wrote,

“someone threw a cup full of beer at my head that gushed into my eyes. I looked up. A man looked me dead in the eyes and yelled ‘[a derogatory term]!’” Stewart walked away. Somewhere in the back of his mind was the Edgar Albert Guest poem “See It Through.” He had memorized it growing up and took comfort in the words “You may fail, but you may conquer/See it through!”<sup>1</sup>

When you’re up against a trouble,  
Meet it squarely, face to face;  
Lift your chin and set your shoulders,  
Plant your feet and take a brace.  
When it’s vain to try to dodge it,  
Do the best that you can do;  
You may fail, but you may conquer,  
See it through!

Black may be the clouds about you  
And your future may seem grim,  
But don’t let your nerve desert you;  
Keep yourself in fighting trim.  
If the worst is bound to happen,  
Spite of all that you can do,  
Running from it will not save you,  
See it through!

Even hope may seem but futile,  
When with troubles you’re beset,  
But remember you are facing  
Just what other men have met.  
You may fail, but fall still fighting;  
Don’t give up, whate’er you do;  
Eyes front, head high to the finish.  
See it through!

Kordell Stewart and I join millions of people who have been influenced by Guest in emphatic

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1. Steve Wulf, “Who’s Got Next? The Four Athletes Who Appeared on Our First Cover,” September 10, 2019, [https://www.espn.com/espn/story/\\_/id/27500438/got-next-four-athletes-appeared-our-first-cover](https://www.espn.com/espn/story/_/id/27500438/got-next-four-athletes-appeared-our-first-cover).

ways. His sagacious gift with words and his understanding of how to connect to the cares and joys of everyday people gave him the name the People's Poet and made him one of the most successful poetry writers in modern history, even though other poets of his day didn't take his poetry seriously.

Truly one of the most prolific poets of all time, Guest wrote well over 11,000 poems during his lifetime. His works appeared daily in hundreds of newspapers across America, making his name known in most homes in the country.

The following quotes give insight into the impact of Guest's poetry:

"Such poetry as that of Edgar A. Guest has the ring of genuineness, for it is based on

a deep, abiding faith in human nature—an essential goodness and loveliness. It is this human quality in his verse that has made Mr. Guest one of the favorite poets of America." —R. Marshall<sup>2</sup>

"He is both wise and witty; he is the best serum I know against pessimistic philosophy, indigestion, and bad temper." —Rev. Dr. Cavanaugh, President of the University of Notre Dame<sup>3</sup>

"He had what every person must have who goes far in the education of his fellow-man—enthusiasm, enthusiasm that no worry, no interruption, or disquieting news can take the edge from." —Edward H. Cotton<sup>4</sup>

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2. R. Marshall, *Edgar Guest: A Biographical Sketch* (n.p.: Reilly & Lee, 1920).

3. As quoted in Royce Howes and John S. Knight, *Edgar A. Guest: A Biography* (n.p.: Literary Licensing, 2011).

4. Edward H. Cotton, "Edgar A. Guest, the Fireside Poet," *The Christian Register*, December 7, 1922, 1161–62.

Perhaps Edgar Guest was beloved by people because he himself had a deep love for all people. He said, “I like people wherever I see them, whatever they are doing, whoever they are.”<sup>5</sup>

Proverbs 13:20 states: “He that walketh with wise men shall be wise.” As you journey through this book, feasting on the wisdom and wit of Edgar Guest, I hope you will be one of the people who becomes just a little better and one whose soul expands just a little more for having experienced the works of Edgar Guest.

Edward H. Cotton said it best: “Men are better after hearing Edgar Guest or reading his poems. . . . Fortunate are we who find the road somewhat rough and blinding in having such companions for the journey as Edgar Guest.”<sup>6</sup>

Edgar once wrote a poem titled “My Creed,” which

described the beliefs that drove his actions and the principles behind his poetry. As you study the poems in this book, you will see the foundations in the principles of this poem.

## My Creed

To live as gently as I can;  
To be, no matter where, a man;  
To take what comes of good or ill  
And cling to faith and honor still;  
To do my best, and let that stand  
The record of my brain and hand;  
And then, should failure come to me,  
Still work and hope for victory.

To have no secret place wherein  
I stoop unseen to shame or sin;  
To be the same when I’m alone  
As when my every deed is known;

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5. Edgar A. Guest, as quoted in Cotton, “Edgar A. Guest.”

6. Cotton, “Edgar A. Guest.”

To live undaunted, unafraid  
Of any step that I have made;  
To be without pretense or sham  
Exactly what men think I am.

To leave some simple mark behind  
To keep my having lived in mind;  
If enmity to aught I show,  
To be an honest, generous foe,  
To play my little part, nor whine  
That greater honors are not mine.  
This, I believe, is all I need  
For my philosophy and creed.