

Edgar Guest's
Home & Family Poems



For reading aloud, memorization, recitation, copywork, or just for fun!

Compiled by Teri Ann Berg Olsen

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EDGAR GUEST

If ever there were a “Poet Laureate” for homeschoolers, it surely would be Edgar A. Guest. His writings consist of light folksy verse centered around the joys of home and family, motherhood and fatherhood, the virtues of honest labor and plain living. Guest’s sentimental, optimistic poems are based upon the traditional values of small-town America. His poetry was widely read in the early 20th century.



Edgar Albert Guest was born in Birmingham, England, to Edwin and Julia Guest on August 20, 1881. The family moved to the United States in 1891 and settled in Detroit, Michigan, where “Eddie” was educated. After Edgar’s father lost his job in early 1893, the 11-year-old began working odd jobs after school. In 1895 he was hired as a copy boy for the *Detroit Free Press*. When Edgar was 17, his father died. Guest dropped out of high school to work full time at the newspaper, where he would remain employed for almost 65 years.

It did not occur to Guest to write poetry until late in 1898 when he was working as assistant exchange editor. His job consisted of gathering fillers from other newspapers with which they exchanged papers. Many of the items were verses, and Guest figured he might just as well write verse as clip it. Although the *Free Press* was choosy about publishing the literary efforts of staff members, they decided to publish his verse. Guest’s first poem appeared on December 11, 1898. From then on, he considered himself “a newspaper man who wrote verses.”

Guest became a naturalized U.S. citizen in 1902. He married Nellie Crossman in 1906. The couple had three children. Guest basically wrote what he lived, saying, “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.” Critics dismissed his writings as “banal, saccharine, and monotonous.” Nevertheless, Guest’s poems were so popular that he was given a weekly column of his own. His topical verses became the daily “Breakfast Table Chat,” which was syndicated to over 300 newspapers across the United States.

From his first published work in the *Detroit Free Press* until his death, Guest penned some 11,000 poems which were collected in more than twenty books, including *Home Rhymes* (1909), *A Heap o’ Livin’* (1916), *Just Folks* (1917), and *The Path to Home* (1919). Edgar Guest was known as “The People’s Poet.” He was also made Poet Laureate of Michigan, the only poet to have been awarded that title. Guest died in Detroit on August 5, 1959.

OUR HOUSE

We play at our house and have all sorts of fun,
An' there's always a game when supper is done;
An' at our house there's marks on the walls an' the stairs,
An' some terrible scratches on some of the chairs;
An' ma says that our house is surely a fright,
But pa and I say that our house is all right.

At our house we laugh an' we sing an' we shout,
An' whirl all the chairs and the tables about,
An' I rattle my pa an' I get him down too,
An' he's all out of breath when the fightin' is through;
Am' ma says our house is surely a sight,
But pa an' I say that our house is all right.

I've been to houses with pa where I had
To sit in a chair like a good little lad,
An' there wasn't a mark on the walls an' the chairs,
An' the stuff that we have couldn't come up to theirs;
An' pa said to ma that for all of their joy
He wouldn't change places and give up his boy.

They never have races nor rattles nor fights.
Coz they have no children to play with at nights;
An' their walls are all clean and their curtains hang straight,
An' everthing's shiny an' right up to date;
But pa says with all of its racket an' fuss,
He'd rather by far live at our house with us.

SPOILING THEM

"You're spoiling them!" the mother cries
When I give way to weepy eyes
And let them do the things they wish,
Like cleaning up the jelly dish,
Or finishing the chocolate cake,
Or maybe let the rascal take
My piece of huckleberry pie,
Because he wants it more than I.

"You're spoiling them!" the mother tells,
When I am heedless to their yells,
And let them race and romp about
And do not put their joy to rout.
I know I should be firm, and yet
I tried it once to my regret;
I will remember till I'm old
The day I started in to scold.

I stamped my foot and shouted: "Stop!"
And Bud just let his drum sticks drop,
And looked at me, and turned away;
That night there was no further play.
The girls were solemn-like and still,
Just as girls are when they are ill,
And when unto his cot I crept,
I found him sobbing as he slept.

That was my first attempt and last
To play the scold. I'm glad it passed
So quickly and has left no trace
Of memory on each little face;
But now when mother whispers low:
"You're spoiling them," I answer, "No!
But it is plain, as plain can be,
Those little tykes are spoiling me."

TOYS

I can pass up the lure of a jewel to wear
 With never the trace of a sigh,
The things on a shelf that I'd like for myself
 I never regret I can't buy.
I can go through the town passing store after store
 Showing things it would please me to own,
With never a trace of despair on my face,
 But I can't let a toy shop alone.

I can throttle the love of fine raiment to death
 And I don't know the craving for rum,
But I do know the joy that is born of a toy,
 And the pleasure that comes with a drum
I can reckon the value of money at times,
 And govern my purse strings with sense,
But I fall for a toy for my girl or my boy
 And never regard the expense.

It's seldom I sigh for unlimited gold
 Or the power of a rich man to buy;
My courage is stout when the doing without
 Is only my duty, but I
Curse the shackles of thrift when I gaze at the toys
 That my kiddies are eager to own,
And I'd buy everything that they wish for, by Jing!
 If their mother would let me alone.

There isn't much fun spending coin on myself
 For neckties and up-to-date lids,
But there's pleasure tenfold, in the silver and gold
 I part with for things for the kids.
I can go through the town passing store after store
 Showing things it would please me to own,
But to thrift I am lost; I won't reckon the cost
 When I'm left in a toy shop alone.

GOOD BOOKS

Good books are friendly things to own.
If you are busy they will wait.
They will not call you on the phone
Or wake you if the hour is late.
They stand together row by row,
Upon the low shelf or the high.
But if you're lonesome this you know:
You have a friend or two nearby.

The fellowship of books is real.
They're never noisy when you're still.
They won't disturb you at your meal.
They'll comfort you when you are ill.
The lonesome hours they'll always share.
When slighted they will not complain.
And though for them you've ceased to care
Your constant friends they'll still remain.

Good books your faults will never see
Or tell about them round the town.
If you would have their company
You merely have to take them down.
They'll help you pass the time away,
They'll counsel give if that you need.
He has true friends for night and day
Who has a few good books to read.

BEST WAY TO READ A BOOK

Best way to read a book I know
Is get a lad of six or so,
And curl him up upon my knee
Deep in a big arm chair, where we
Can catch the warmth of blazing coals,
And then let two contented souls
Melt into one, old age and youth,
Sharing adventure's marvelous truth.

I read a page, and then we sit
And talk it over, bit by bit;
Just how the pirates looked, and why
They flung a black flag to the sky.
We pass no paragraph without
First knowing what it's all about,
And when the author starts a fight
We join the forces that are right.

We're deep in Treasure Island, and
From Spy Glass Hill we've viewed the land;
Through thickets dense we've followed Jim
And shared the doubts that came to him.
We've heard Cap. Smollett arguing there
With Long John Silver, gaunt and spare,
And mastering our many fears
We've battled with those buccaneers.

Best way to read a book I've found
Is have a little boy around
And take him up upon your knee;
Then talk about the tale, till he
Lives it and feels it, just as you,
And shares the great adventure, too.
Books have a deep and lasting joy
For him who reads them to his boy.

HOME AND THE OFFICE

Home is the place where the laughter should ring,
And man should be found at his best.
Let the cares of the day be as great as they may,
The night has been fashioned for rest.
So leave at the door when the toiling is o'er
All the burdens of worktime behind,
And just be a dad to your girl or your lad--
A dad of the rollicking kind.

The office is made for the tasks you must face;
It is built for the work you must do;
You may sit there and sigh as your cares pile up high,
And no one may criticize you;
You may worry and fret as you think of your debt,
You may grumble when plans go astray,
But when it comes night, and you shut your desk tight,
Don't carry the burdens away.

Keep daytime for toil and the nighttime for play,
Work as hard as you choose in the town,
But when the day ends, and the darkness descends,
Just forget that you're wearing a frown--
Go home with a smile! Oh, you'll find it worth while;
Go home light of heart and of mind;
Go home and be glad that you're loved as a dad,
A dad of the fun-loving kind.

TO THE BOY

I have no wish, my little lad,
To climb the towering heights of fame.
I am content to be your dad
And share with you each pleasant game.
I am content to hold your hand
And walk along life's path with you,
And talk of things we understand—
The birds and trees and skies of blue.

Though some may seek the smiles of kings,
For me your laughter's joy enough;
I have no wish to claim the things
Which lure men into pathways rough.
I'm happiest when you and I,
Unmindful of life's bitter cares,
Together watch the clouds drift by,
Or follow boyhood's thoroughfares.

I crave no more of life than this:
Continuance of such a trust;
Your smile, whate'er the morning is,
Until my clay returns to dust.
If but this comradeship may last
Until I end my earthly task—
Your hand and mine by love held fast—
Fame has no charm for which I'd ask.

I would not trade one day with you
To wear the purple robes of power,
Nor drop your hand from mine to do
Some great deed in a selfish hour.
For you have brought me joy serene
And made my soul supremely glad.
In life rewarded I have been;
'Twas all worth while to be your dad.

THE PATH TO HOME

There's the mother at the doorway, and the children at the gate,
And the little parlor windows with the curtains white and straight.
There are shaggy asters blooming in the bed that lines the fence,
And the simplest of the blossoms seems of mighty consequence.
Oh, there isn't any mansion underneath God's starry dome
That can rest a weary pilgrim like the little place called home.

Men have sought for gold and silver; men have dreamed at night of fame;
In the heat of youth they've struggled for achievement's honored name;
But the selfish crowns are tinsel, and their shining jewels paste,
And the wine of pomp and glory soon grows bitter to the taste.
For there's never any laughter, howsoever far you roam,
Like the laughter of the loved ones in the happiness of home.

There is nothing so important as the mother's lullabies,
Filled with peace and sweet contentment, when the moon begins to rise—
Nothing real except the beauty and the calm upon her face
And the shouting of the children as they scamper round the place.
For the greatest of man's duties is to keep his loved ones glad
And to have his children glory in the father they have had.

So where'er a man may wander, and whatever be his care,
You'll find his soul still stretching to the home he left somewhere.
You'll find his dreams all tangled up with hollyhocks in bloom,
And the feet of little children that go racing through a room,
With the happy mother smiling as she watches them at play—
These are all in life that matter, when you've stripped the sham away.

MOTHER'S JOB

I'm just the man to make things right,
To mend a sleigh or make a kite,
Or wrestle on the floor and play
Those rough and tumble games, but say!
Just let him get an ache or pain,
And start to whimper and complain,
And from my side he'll quickly flee
To clamber on his mother's knee.

I'm good enough to be his horse
And race with him along the course.
I'm just the friend he wants each time
There is a tree he'd like to climb,
And I'm the pal he's eager for
When we approach a candy store;
But for his mother straight he makes
Whene'er his little stomach aches.

He likes, when he is feeling well,
The kind of stories that I tell,
And I'm his comrade and his chum
And I must march behind his drum.
To me through thick and thin he'll stick,
Unless he happens to be sick.
In which event, with me he's through—
Only his mother then will do.

THE TOY-STREWN HOME

Give me the house where the toys are strewn,
Where the dolls are asleep in the chairs,
Where the building blocks and the toy balloon
And the soldiers guard the stairs.
Let me step in a house where the tiny cart
With the horses rules the floor,
And rest comes into my weary heart,
For I am at home once more.

Give me the house with the toys about,
With the battered old train of cars,
The box of paints and the books left out,
And the ship with her broken spars.
Let me step in a house at the close of day
That is littered with children's toys,
And dwell once more in the haunts of play,
With the echoes of by-gone noise.

Give me the house where the toys are seen,
The house where the children romp,
And I'll happier be than man has been
'Neath the gilded dome of pomp.
Let me see the litter of bright-eyed play
Strewn over the parlor floor,
And the joys I knew in a far-off day
Will gladden my heart once more.

Whoever has lived in a toy-strewn home,
Though feeble he be and gray,
Will yearn, no matter how far he roam,
For the glorious disarray
Of the little home with its littered floor
That was his in the by-gone days;
And his heart will throb as it throbbed before,
When he rests where a baby plays.

THE GIFT OF PLAY

Some have the gift of song and some possess the gift of silver speech,
Some have the gift of leadership and some the ways of life can teach.
And fame and wealth reward their friends; in jewels are their splendors told,
But in good time their favorites grow very faint and gray and old.
But there are men who laugh at time and hold the cruel years at bay;
They romp through life forever young because they have the gift of play.

They walk with children, hand in hand, through daisy fields and orchards fair,
Nor all the dignity of age and power and pomp can follow there;
They've kept the magic charm of youth beneath the wrinkled robe of Time,
And there's no friendly apple tree that they have grown too old to climb.
They have not let their boyhood die; they can be children for the day;
They have not bartered for success and all its praise, the gift of play.

They think and talk in terms of youth; with love of life their eyes are bright;
No rheumatism of the soul has robbed them of the world's delight;
They laugh and sing their way along and join in pleasures when they can,
And in their glad philosophy they hold that mirth becomes a man.
They spend no strength in growing old. What if their brows be crowned with gray?
The spirits in their breasts are young. They still possess the gift of play.

The richest men of life are not the ones who rise to wealth and fame—
Not the great sages, old and wise, and grave of face and bent of frame,
But the glad spirits, tall and straight, who 'spite of time and all its care,
Have kept the power to laugh and sing and in youth's fellowship to share.
They that can walk with boys and be a boy among them, blithe and gay,
Defy the withering blasts of Age because they have the gift of play.

THE LITTLE ARMY

Little women, little men,
Childhood never comes again.
Live it gayly while you may;
Give your baby souls to play;
 March to sound of stick and pan,
 In your paper hats, and tramp
 just as bravely as you can
 To your pleasant little camp.
Wooden sword and wooden gun
Make a battle splendid fun.
Fine the victories you win
Dimpled cheek and dimpled chin.

Little women, little men,
Hearts are light when years are ten;
Eyes are bright and cheeks are red
When life's cares lie all ahead.
 Drums make merry music when
 They are leading children out;
 Trumpet calls are cheerful then,
 Glorious is the battle shout.
Little soldiers, single file,
Uniformed in grin and smile,
Conquer every foe they meet
Up and down the gentle street.

Little women, little men,
Would that youth could come again!
Would that I might fall in line
As a little boy of nine,
 But with broomstick for a gun,
 And with paper hat that I
 Bravely wore back there for fun,
 Never more may I defy
Foes that deep in ambush kneel—
Now my warfare's grim and real.
I that once was brave and bold,
Now am battered, bruised and old.

Little women, little men,
Planning to attack my den,
Little do you know the joy
That you give a worn-out boy
 As he hears your gentle feet
 Pitter-patting in the hall;
 Gladly does he wait to meet
 Conquest by a troop so small.
Dimpled cheek and dimpled chin,
You have but to smile to win.
Come and take him where he stays
Dreaming of his by-gone days.

TINKERIN' AT HOME

Some folks there be who seem to need excitement fast and furious,
An' reckon all the joys that have no thrill in 'em are spurious.
Some think that pleasure's only found down where the lights are shining,
An' where an orchestra's at work the while the folks are dining.
Still others seek it at their play, while some there are who roam,
But I am happiest when I am tinkerin' 'round the home.

I like to wear my oldest clothes, an' fuss around the yard,
An' dig a flower bed now an' then, and pensively regard
The mornin' glories climbin' all along the wooden fence,
An' do the little odds an' ends that aren't of consequence.
I like to trim the hedges, an' touch up the paint a bit,
An' sort of take a homely pride in keepin' all things fit.
An' I don't envy rich folks who are sailin' o'er the foam
When I can spend a day or two in tinkerin' 'round the home.

If I were fixed with money, as some other people are,
I'd take things mighty easy; I'd not travel very far.
I'd jes' wear my oldest trousers an' my flannel shirt, an' stay
An' guard my vine an' fig tree in an old man's tender way.
I'd bathe my soul in sunshine every mornin', and I'd bend
My back to pick the roses; Oh, I'd be a watchful friend
To everything around the place, an' in the twilight gloam
I'd thank the Lord for lettin' me jes' tinker 'round the home.

But since I've got to hustle in the turmoil of the town,
An' don't expect I'll ever be allowed to settle down
An' live among the roses an' the tulips an' the phlox,
Or spend my time in carin' for the noddin' hollyhocks,
I've come to the conclusion that perhaps in Heaven I may
Get a chance to know the pleasures that I'm yearnin' for to-day;
An' I'm goin' to ask the good Lord, when I've climbed the golden stair,
If he'll kindly let me tinker 'round the home we've got up there.

HIS EXAMPLE

There are little eyes upon you, and they're watching night and day;
There are little ears that quickly take in every word you say;
There are little hands all eager to do everything you do,
And a little boy that's dreaming of the day he'll be like you.

You're the little fellow's idol, you're the wisest of the wise;
In his little mind about you no suspicions ever rise;
He believes in you devoutly, holds that all you say and do
He will say and do in your way when he's grown up just like you.

Oh, it sometimes makes me shudder when I hear my boy repeat
Some careless phrase I've uttered in the language of the street;
And it sets my heart to grieving when some little fault I see
And I know beyond all doubting that he picked it up from me.

There's a wide-eyed little fellow who believes you're always right,
And his ears are always open and he watches day and night;
You are setting an example every day in all you do
For the little boy who's waiting to grow up to be like you.

DADDIES

I would rather be the daddy
 Of a romping, roguish crew,
Of a bright-eyed chubby laddie
 And a little girl or two,
Than the monarch of a nation
 In his high and lofty seat
Taking empty adoration
 From the subjects at his feet.

I would rather own their kisses
 As at night to me they run,
Than to be the king who misses
 All the simpler forms of fun.
When his dreary day is ending
 He is dismally alone,
But when my sun is descending
 There are joys for me to own.

He may ride to horns and drumming;
 I must walk a quiet street,
But when once they see me coming
 Then on joyous, flying feet
They come racing to me madly
 And I catch them with a swing
And I say it proudly, gladly,
 That I'm happier than a king.

You may talk of lofty places,
 You may boast of pomp and power,
Men may turn their eager faces
 To the glory of an hour,
But give me the humble station
 With its joys that long survive,
For the daddies of the nation
 Are the happiest men alive.

THE FINEST FELLOWSHIP

There may be finer pleasures than just tramping with your boy,
And better ways to spend a day; there may be sweeter joy;
There may be richer fellowship than that of son and dad,
But if there is, I know it not; it's one I've never had.
Oh, some may choose to walk with kings and men of pomp and pride,
But as for me, I choose to have my youngster at my side.
And some may like the rosy ways of grown-up pleasures glad,
But I would go a-wandering with just a little lad.
Yes, I would seek the woods with him and talk to him of trees,
And learn to know the birds a-wing and hear their melodies;
And I would drop all worldly care and be a boy awhile;
Then hand-in-hand come home at dusk to see the mother smile.
Grown men are wearisome at times, and selfish pleasures jar,
But sons and dads throughout the world the truest comrades are.
So when I want a perfect day with every joy that's fine,
I spend it in the open with that little lad o' mine.

LITTLE GIRLS

God made the little boys for fun, for rough and tumble times of play;
He made their little legs to run and race and scamper through the day.
He made them strong for climbing trees, he suited them for horns and drums,
And filled them full of revelries so they could be their father's chums.
But then He saw that gentle ways must also travel from above.
And so, through all our troubled days He sent us little girls to love.

He knew that earth would never do, unless a bit of Heaven it had.
Men needed eyes divinely blue to toil by day and still be glad.
A world where only men and boys made merry would in time grow stale,
And so He shared His Heavenly joys that faith in Him should never fail.
He sent us down a thousand charms, He decked our ways with golden curls
And laughing eyes and dimpled arms. He let us have His little girls.

They are the tenderest of His flowers, the little angels of His flock,
And we may keep and call them ours, until God's messenger shall knock.
They bring to us the gentleness and beauty that we sorely need;
They soothe us with each fond caress and strengthen us for every deed.
And happy should that mortal be whom God has trusted, through the years,
To guard a little girl and see that she is kept from pain and tears.

WHEN MOTHER SLEEPS

When mother sleeps, a slamming door
 Disturbs her not at all;
A man might walk across the floor
 Or wander through the hall
A pistol shot outside would not
 Drive slumber from her eyes—
But she is always on the spot
 The moment baby cries.

The thunder crash she would not hear,
 Nor shouting in the street;
A barking dog, however near,
 Of sleep can never cheat
Dear mother, but I've noticed this
 To my profound surprise:
That always wide-awake she is
 The moment baby cries.

However weary she may be,
 Though wrapped in slumber deep,
Somehow it always seems to me
 Her vigil she will keep.
Sound sleeper that she is, I take
 It in her heart there lies
A love that causes her to wake
 The moment baby cries.

THE OLD-FASHIONED PARENTS

The good old-fashioned mothers and the good old-fashioned dads,
With their good old-fashioned lassies and their good old-fashioned lads,
Still walk the lanes of loving in their simple, tender ways,
As they used to do back yonder in the good old-fashioned days.

They dwell in every city and they live in every town,
Contentedly and happy and not hungry for renown;
On every street you'll find 'em in their simple garments clad,
The good old-fashioned mother and the good old-fashioned dad.

There are some who sigh for riches, there are some who yearn for fame,
And a few misguided people who no longer blush at shame;
But the world is full of mothers, and the world is full of dads;
Who are making sacrifices for their little girls and lads.

They are growing old together, arm in arm they walk along,
And their hearts with love are beating and their voices sweet with song;
They still share their disappointments and they share their pleasures, too,
And whatever be their fortune, to each other they are true.

They are watching at the bedside of a baby pale and white,
And they kneel and pray together for the care of God at night;
They are romping with their children in the fields of clover sweet,
And devotedly they guard them from the perils of the street.

They are here in countless numbers, just as they have always been,
And their glory is untainted by the selfish and the mean.
And I'd hate to still be living, it would dismal be and sad,
If we'd no old-fashioned mother and we'd no old-fashioned dad.

THE STICK-TOGETHER FAMILIES

The stick-together families are happier by far
Than the brothers and the sisters who take separate highways are.
The gladdest people living are the wholesome folks who make
A circle at the fireside that no power but death can break.
And the finest of conventions ever held beneath the sun
Are the little family gatherings when the busy day is done.

There are rich folk, there are poor folk, who imagine they are wise,
And they're very quick to shatter all the little family ties.
Each goes searching after pleasure in his own selected way,
Each with strangers likes to wander, and with strangers likes to play.
But it's bitterness they harvest, and it's empty joy they find,
For the children that are wisest are the stick-together kind.

There are some who seem to fancy that for gladness they must roam,
That for smiles that are the brightest they must wander far from home.
That the strange friend is the true friend, and they travel far astray
And they waste their lives in striving for a joy that's far away,
But the gladdest sort of people, when the busy day is done,
Are the brothers and the sisters who together share their fun.

It's the stick-together family that wins the joys of earth,
That hears the sweetest music and that finds the finest mirth;
It's the old home roof that shelters all the charm that life can give;
There you find the gladdest play-ground, there the happiest spot to live.
And, O weary, wandering brother, if contentment you would win,
Come you back unto the fireside and be comrade with your kin.

VACATION TIME

Vacation time! How glad it seemed
When as a boy I sat and dreamed
Above my school books, of the fun
That I should claim when toil was done;
And, Oh, how oft my youthful eye
Went wandering with the patch of sky
That drifted by the window panes
O'er pleasant fields and dusty lanes,
Where I would race and romp and shout
The very moment school was out.
My artful little fingers then
Feigned labor with the ink and pen,
But heart and mind were far away,
Engaged in some glad bit of play.
The last two weeks dragged slowly by;
Time hadn't then learned how to fly.
It seemed the clock upon the wall
From hour to hour could only crawl,
And when the teacher called my name,
Unto my cheeks the crimson came,
For I could give no answer clear
To questions that I didn't hear.
"Wool gathering, were you?" oft she said
And smiled to see me blushing red.
Her voice had roused me from a dream
Where I was fishing in a stream,
And, if I now recall it right,
Just at the time I had a bite.

A BOY AND HIS DAD

A boy and his dad on a fishing-trip—
There is a glorious fellowship!
Father and son and the open sky
And the white clouds lazily drifting by,
And the laughing stream as it runs along
With the clicking reel like a martial song,
And the father teaching the youngster gay
How to land a fish in the sportsman's way.

I fancy I hear them talking there
In an open boat, and the speech is fair.
And the boy is learning the ways of men
From the finest man in his youthful ken.
Kings, to the youngster, cannot compare
With the gentle father who's with him there.
And the greatest mind of the human race
Not for one minute could take his place.

Which is happier, man or boy?
The soul of the father is steeped in joy,
For he's finding out, to his heart's delight,
That his son is fit for the future fight.
He is learning the glorious depths of him,
And the thoughts he thinks and his every whim;
And he shall discover, when night comes on,
How close he has grown to his little son.

A boy and his dad on a fishing-trip—
Builders of life's companionship!
Oh, I envy them, as I see them there
Under the sky in the open air,
For out of the old, old long-ago
Come the summer days that I used to know,
When I learned life's truths from my father's lips
As I shared the joy of his fishing-trips.

QUESTIONS

Would you sell your boy for a stack of gold?
Would you miss that hand that is yours to hold?
Would you take a fortune and never see
The man, in a few brief years, he'll be?
Suppose that his body were racked with pain,
How much would you pay for his health again?
Is there money enough in the world today
To buy your boy? Could a monarch pay
You silver and gold in so large a sum
That you'd have him blinded or stricken dumb?
How much would you take, if you had the choice,
Never to hear, in this world, his voice?
How much would you take in exchange for all
The joy that is wrapped in that youngster small?
Are there diamonds enough in the mines of earth
To equal your dreams of that youngster's worth?
Would you give up the hours that he's on your knee
The richest man in the world to be?
You may prate of gold, but your fortune lies,
And you know it well, in your boy's bright eyes.
And there's nothing that money can buy or do
That means so much as that boy to you.
Well, which does the most of your time employ,
The chase for gold — or that splendid boy?

WHEN PA COMES HOME

When Pa comes home, I'm at the door,
An' then he grabs me off the floor
An' throws me up an' catches me
When I come down, an' then, says he:
"Well, how'd you get along to-day?
An' were you good, an' did you play,
An' keep right out of mamma's way?
An' how'd you get that awful bump
Above your eye? My, what a lump!
An' who spilled jelly on your shirt?
An' where'd you ever find the dirt
That's on your hands? And my! Oh, my!
I guess those eyes have had a cry,
They look so red. What was it, pray?
What has been happening here to-day?
An' then he drops his coat an' hat
Upon a chair, an' says: "What's that?
Who knocked that engine on its back
An' stepped upon that piece of track?"
An' then he takes me on his knee
An' says: "What's this that now I see?
Whatever can the matter be?
Who strewed those toys upon the floor,
An' left those things behind the door?
Who upset all those parlor chairs
An' threw those blocks upon the stairs?
I guess a cyclone called to-day
While I was workin' far away.
Who was it worried mamma so?
It can't be anyone I know."
An' then I laugh an' say: "It's me!
Me did most ever'thing you see.
Me got this bump the time me tripped.
An' here is where the jelly slipped
Right off my bread upon my shirt,
An' when me tumbled down it hurt.
That's how me got all over dirt.
Me threw those building blocks downstairs,
An' me upset the parlor chairs,
Coz when you're playin' train you've got
To move things 'round an awful lot."
An' then my Pa he kisses me
An' bounces me upon his knee
An' says: "Well, well, my little lad,
What glorious fun you must have had!"

LITTLE MASTER MISCHIEVOUS

Little Master Mischievous, that's the name for you;
There's no better title that describes the things you do:
Into something all the while where you shouldn't be,
Prying into matters that are not for you to see;
Little Master Mischievous, order's overthrown
If your mother leaves you for a minute all alone.
Little Master Mischievous, opening every door,
Spilling books and papers round about the parlor floor,
Scratching all the tables and marring all the chairs,
Climbing where you shouldn't climb and tumbling down the stairs.
How'd you get the ink well? We can never guess.
Now the rug is ruined; so's your little dress.
Little Master Mischievous, in the cookie jar,
Who has ever told you where the cookies are?
Now your sticky fingers smear the curtains white;
You have finger-printed everything in sight.
There's no use in scolding; when you smile that way
You can rob of terror every word we say.
Little Master Mischievous, that's the name for you;
There's no better title that describes the things you do:
Prying into corners, peering into nooks,
Tugging table covers, tearing costly books.
Little Master Mischievous, have your roguish way;
Time, I know, will stop you, soon enough some day.

THE THINGS THEY MUSTN'T TOUCH

Been down to the art museum an' looked at a thousand things,
The bodies of ancient mummies an' the treasures of ancient kings,
An' some of the walls were lovely, but some of the things weren't much,
But all had a rail around 'em, an' all wore a sign "Don't touch."

Now maybe an art museum needs guards and a warning sign
An' the hands of the folks should never paw over its treasures fine;
But I noticed the rooms were chilly with all the joys they hold,
An' in spite of the lovely pictures, I'd say that the place is cold.

An' somehow I got to thinkin' of many a home I know
Which is kept like an art museum, an' merely a place for show;
They haven't railed off their treasures or posted up signs or such,
But all of the children know it—there's a lot that they mustn't touch.

It's hands off the grand piano, keep out of the finest chair,
Stay out of the stylish parlor, don't run on the shiny stair;
You may look at the velvet curtains which hang in the stately hall,
But always and ever remember, they're not to be touched at all.

"Don't touch!" for an art museum, is proper enough, I know,
But my children's feet shall scamper wherever they want to go,
And I want no rare possessions or a joy which has cost so much,
From which I must bar the children and tell them they "mustn't touch."

PICTURE BOOKS

I hold the finest picture books
Are woods an' fields an' runnin' brooks;
An' when the month o' May has done
Her paintin', an' the mornin' sun
Is lightin' just exactly right
Each gorgeous scene for mortal sight,
I steal a day from toil an' go
To see the springtime's picture show.
It's everywhere I choose to tread—
Perhaps I'll find a violet bed
Half hidden by the larger scenes,
Or group of ferns, or living greens,
So graceful an' so fine, I'll swear
That angels must have placed them there
To beautify the lonely spot
That mortal man would have forgot.
What hand can paint a picture book
So marvelous as a runnin' brook?
It matters not what time o' day
You visit it, the sunbeams play
Upon it just exactly right,
The mysteries of God to light.
No human brush could ever trace
A droopin' willow with such grace!
Page after page, new beauties rise
To thrill with gladness an' surprise
The soul of him who drops his care
And seeks the woods to wander there.
Birds, with the angel gift o' song,
Make music for him all day long;
An' nothin' that is base or mean
Disturbs the grandeur of the scene.
There is no hint of hate or strife;
The woods display the joy of life,
An' answer with a silence fine
The scoffer's jeer at power divine.
When doubt is high an' faith is low,
Back to the woods an' fields I go,
An' say to violet and tree:
"No mortal hand has fashioned thee."

A BOOK

“Now” - said a good book unto me -
“Open my pages and you shall see
Jewels of wisdom and treasures fine,
Gold and silver in every line,
And you may claim them if you but will
Open my pages and take your fill.

“Open my pages and run them o’er,
Take what you choose of my golden store.
Be you greedy, I shall not care -
All that you seize I shall gladly spare;
There is never a lock on my treasure doors,
Come - here are my jewels, make them yours!

“I am just a book on your mantel shelf,
But I can be part of your living self;
If only you’ll travel my pages through,
Then I will travel the world with you.
As two wines blended make better wine,
Blend your mind with these truths of mine.

“I’ll make you fitter to talk with men,
I’ll touch with silver the lines you pen,
I’ll lead you nearer the truth you seek,
I’ll strengthen you when your faith grows weak -
This place on your shelf is a prison cell,
Let me come into your mind to dwell!”

STORY-TIME

"Tell us a story," comes the cry
From little lips when nights are cold,
And in the grate the flames leap high.
"Tell us a tale of pirates bold,
Or fairies hiding in the glen,
Or of a ship that's wrecked at sea."
I fill my pipe, and there and then
Gather the children round my knee.
I give them all a role to play—
No longer are they youngsters small,
And I, their daddy, turning gray;
We are adventurers, one and all.
We journey forth as Robin Hood
In search of treasure, or to do
Some deed of daring or of good;
Our hearts are ever brave and true.
We take a solemn oath to be
Defenders of the starry flag;
We brave the winter's stormy sea,
Or climb the rugged mountain crag,
To battle to the death with those
Who would defame our native land;
We pitch our camp among the snows
Or on the tropics' burning sand.
We rescue maidens, young and fair,
Held captive long in prison towers;
We slay the villain in his lair,
For we're possessed of magic powers.
And though we desperately fight,
When by our foes are we beset,
We always triumph for the right;
We have not lost a battle yet.
It matters not how far we stray,
Nor where our battle lines may be,
We never get so far away
That we must spend a night at sea.
It matters not how high we climb,
How many foes our pathway block,
We always conquer just in time
To go to bed at 9 o'clock.

TOYS AND LIFE

You can learn a lot from boys
By the way they use their toys;
Some are selfish in their care,
Never very glad to share
Playthings with another boy;
Seem to want to hoard their joy.
And they hide away the drum
For the days that never come;
Hide the train of cars and skates,
Keeping them from all their mates,
And run all their boyhood through
With their toys as good as new.

Others gladly give and lend,
Heedless that the tin may bend,
Caring not that drum-heads break,
Minding not that playmates take
To themselves the joy that lies
In the little birthday prize.
And in homes that house such boys
Always there are broken toys,
Symbolizing moments glad
That the youthful lives have had.
There you'll never find a shelf
Dedicated unto self.

Toys are made for children's fun,
Very frail and quickly done,
And who keeps them long to view,
Bright of paint and good as new,
Robs himself and other boys
Of their swiftly passing joys.
So he looked upon a toy
When our soldier was a boy;
And somehow to-day we're glad
That the tokens of our lad
And the trinkets that we keep
Are a broken, battered heap.

Life itself is but a toy
Filled with duty and with joy;
Not too closely should we guard
Our brief time from being scarred;
Never high on musty shelves
Should we hoard it for ourselves.
It is something we should share
In another's hour of care—
Something we should gladly give
That another here may live;
We should never live it through
Keeping it as good as new.

THE JUNK BOX

My father often used to say:
"My boy don't throw a thing away:
You'll find a use for it some day."

So in a box he stored up things,
Bent nails, old washers, pipes and rings,
And bolts and nuts and rusty springs.

Despite each blemish and each flaw,
Some use for everything he saw;
With things material, this was law.

And often when he'd work to do,
He searched the junk box through and through
And found old stuff as good as new.

And I have often thought since then,
That father did the same with men;
He knew he'd need their help again.

It seems to me he understood
That men, as well as iron and wood,
May broken be and still be good.

Despite the vices he'd display
He never threw a man away,
But kept him for another day.

A human junk box is this earth
And into it we're tossed at birth,
To wait the day we'll be of worth.

Though bent and twisted, weak of will,
And full of flaws and lacking skill,
Some service each can render still.

FORGETFUL PA

My Pa says that he used to be
 A bright boy in geography;
An' when he went to school he knew
 The rivers an' the mountains, too,
An' all the capitals of states
 An' bound'ry lines an' all the dates
They joined the union. But last night
 When I was studyin' to recite
I asked him if he would explain
 The leading industries of Maine—
He thought an' thought an' thought a lot,
 An' said, "I knew, but I've forgot."
My Pa says when he was in school
 He got a hundred as a rule;
An' grammar was a thing he knew
 Becoz he paid attention to
His teacher, an' he learned the way
 To write good English, an' to say
The proper things, an' I should be
 As good a boy in school as he.
But once I asked him could he give
 Me help with the infinitive—
He scratched his head and said: "Great Scott!
 I used to know, but I've forgot."
My Pa says when he was a boy
 Arithmetic was just a toy;
He learned his tables mighty fast
 An' every term he always passed,
An' had good marks, an' teachers said:
 "That youngster surely has a head."
But just the same I notice now
 Most every time I ask him how
To find the common multiple,
 He says, "That's most unusual!
Once I'd have told you on the spot,
 But somehow, sonny, I've forgot."
I'm tellin' you just what is what,
 My Pa's forgot an awful lot!

RICH

Who has a troop of romping youth
About his parlor floor,
Who nightly hears a round of cheers,
When he is at the door,
Who is attacked on every side
By eager little hands
That reach to tug his grizzled mug,
The wealth of earth commands.

Who knows the joys of girls and boys,
His lads and lassies, too,
Who's pounced upon and bounced upon
When his day's work is through,
Whose trousers know the gentle tug
Of some glad little tot,
The baby of his crew of love,
Is wealthier than a lot.

Oh, be he poor and sore distressed
And weary with the fight,
If with a whoop his healthy troop
Run, welcoming at night,
And kisses greet him at the end
Of all his toiling grim,
With what is best in life he's blest
And rich men envy him.

THE RIGHT FAMILY

With time our notions allus change,
An' years make old idees seem strange—
Take Mary there—time was when she
Thought one child made a family,
An' when our eldest, Jim, was born
She used to say, both night an' morn':
"One little one to love an' keep,
To guard awake, an' watch asleep;
To bring up right an' lead him through
Life's path is all we ought to do."
Two years from then our Jennie came,
But Mary didn't talk the same;
"Now that's just right," she said to me,
"We've got the proper family—
A boy an' girl, God sure is good;
It seems as though He understood
That I've been hopin' every way
To have a little girl some day;
Sometimes I've prayed the whole night through—
One ain't enough; we needed two."
Then as the months went rollin' on,
One day the stork brought little John,
An' Mary smiled an' said to me;
"The proper family is three;
Two boys, a girl to romp an' play—
Jus' work enough to fill the day.
I never had enough to do,
The months that we had only two;
Three's jus' right, pa, we don't want more."
Still time went on an' we had four.
An' that was years ago, I vow,
An' we have six fine children now;
An' Mary's plumb forgot the day
She used to sit an' sweetly say
That one child was enough for her
To love an' give the proper care;
One, two or three or four or five—
Why, goodness gracious, sakes alive,
If God should send her ten to-night,
She'd vow her fam'ly was jus' right!

THE OLD-TIME FAMILY

It makes me smile to hear 'em tell each other nowadays
The burdens they are bearing, with a child or two to raise.
Of course the cost of living has gone soaring to the sky
And our kids are wearing garments that my parents couldn't buy.
Now my father wasn't wealthy, but I never heard him squeal
Because eight of us were sitting at the table every meal.

People fancy they are martyrs if their children number three,
And four or five they reckon makes a large-sized family.
A dozen hungry youngsters at a table I have seen
And their daddy didn't grumble when they licked the platter clean.
Oh, I wonder how these mothers and these fathers up-to-date
Would like the job of buying little shoes for seven or eight.

We were eight around the table in those happy days back them,
Eight that cleaned our plates of pot-pie and then passed them up again;
Eight that needed shoes and stockings, eight to wash and put to bed,
And with mighty little money in the purse, as I have said,
But with all the care we brought them, and through all the days of stress,
I never heard my father or my mother wish for less.

NO CHILDREN!

No children in the house to play--
It must be hard to live that way!
I wonder what the people do
When night comes on and the work is through,
With no glad little folks to shout,
No eager feet to race about,
No youthful tongues to chatter on
About the joy that's been and gone?
The house might be a castle fine,
But what a lonely place to dine!
No children in the house at all,
No fingermarks upon the wall,
No corner where the toys are piled--
Sure indication of a child.
No little lips to breathe the prayer
That God shall keep you in His care,
No glad caress and welcome sweet
When night returns you to your street;
No little lips a kiss to give--
Oh, what a lonely way to live!
No children in the house! I fear
We could not stand it half a year.
What would we talk about at night,
Plan for and work with all our might,
Hold common dreams about and find
True union of heart and mind,
If we two had no greater care
Than what we both should eat and wear?
We never knew love's brightest flame
Until the day the baby came.
And now we could not get along
Without their laughter and their song.
Joy is not bottled on a shelf,
It cannot feed upon itself,
And even love, if it shall wear,
Must find its happiness in care;
Dull we'd become of mind and speech
Had we no little ones to teach.
No children in the house to play!
Oh, we could never live that way!

TREASURES

Some folks I know, when friends drop in
To visit for awhile and chin,
Just lead them round the rooms and halls
And show them pictures on their walls,
And point to rugs and tapestries
The works of men across the seas;
Their loving cups they show with pride,
To eyes that soon are stretching wide
With wonder at the treasures rare
That have been bought and gathered there.

But when folks come to call on me,
I've no such things for them to see.
No picture on my walls is great;
I have no ancient family plate;
No tapestry of rare design
Or costly woven rugs are mine;
I have no loving cup to show,
Or strange and valued curio;
But if my treasures they would see,
I bid them softly follow me.

And then I lead them up the stairs
Through trains of cars and Teddy bears,
And to a little room we creep
Where both my youngsters lie asleep,
Close locked in one another's arms.
I let them gaze upon their charms,
I let them see the legs of brown
Curled up beneath a sleeping gown,
And whisper in my happiness:
"Behold the treasures I possess."

OLD-FASHIONED LETTERS

Old-fashioned letters! How good they were!
And nobody writes them now;
Never at all comes in the scrawl
On the written pages which told us all
The news of town and the folks we knew,
And what they had done or were going to do.
It seems we've forgotten how
To spend an hour with our pen in hand
To write in the language we understand.

Old-fashioned letters we used to get
And ponder each fond line o'er;
The glad words rolled like running gold,
As smoothly their tales of joy they told,
And our hearts beat fast with a keen delight
As we read the news they were pleased to write
And gathered the love they bore.
But few of the letters that come to-day
Are penned to us in the old-time way.

Old-fashioned letters that told us all
The tales of the far away;
Where they'd been and the folks they'd seen;
And better than any fine magazine
Was the writing too, for it bore the style
Of a simple heart and a sunny smile,
And was pure as the breath of May.
Some of them oft were damp with tears,
But those were the letters that lived for years.

Old-fashioned letters! How good they were!
And, oh, how we watched the mails;
But nobody writes of the quaint delights
Of the sunny days and the merry nights
Or tells us the things that we yearn to know—
That art passed out with the long ago,
And lost are the simple tales;
Yet we all would happier be, I think,
If we'd spend more time with our pen and ink.

A VOW

I might not ever scale the mountain heights
Where all the great men stand in glory now;
I may not ever gain the world's delights
Or win a wreath of laurel for my brow;
I may not gain the victories that men
Are fighting for, nor do a thing to boast of;
I may not get a fortune here, but then,
The little that I have I'll make the most of.

I'll make my little home a palace fine,
My little patch of green a garden fair,
And I shall know each humble plant and vine
As rich men know their orchid blossoms rare.
My little home may not be much to see;
Its chimneys may not tower far above;
But it will be a mansion great to me,
For in its walls I'll keep a hoard of love.

I will not pass my modest pleasures by
To grasp at shadows of more splendid things,
Disdaining what of joyousness is nigh
Because I am denied the joy of kings.
But I will laugh and sing my way along,
I'll make the most of what is mine to-day,
And if I never rise above the throng,
I shall have lived a full life anyway.

THE THINGS THAT HAVEN'T BEEN DONE BEFORE

The things that haven't been done before,
Those are the things to try;
Columbus dreamed of an unknown shore
At the rim of the far-flung sky,
And his heart was bold and his faith was strong
As he ventured in dangers new,
And he paid no heed to the jeering throng
Or the fears of the doubting crew.

The many will follow the beaten track
With guideposts on the way,
They live and have lived for ages back
With a chart for every day.
Someone has told them it's safe to go
On the road he has traveled o'er.
And all that they ever strive to know
Are the things that were known before.

A few strike out, without map or chart,
Where never a man has been,
From the beaten paths they draw apart
To see what no man has seen.
There are deeds they hunger alone to do;
Though battered and bruised and sore,
They blaze the path for the many, who
Do nothing not done before.

The things that haven't been done before,
Are the tasks worth while to-day;
Are you one of the flock that follows, or
Are you one that shall lead the way?
Are you one of the timid souls that quail
At the jeers of a doubting crew,
Or dare you, whether you win or fail,
Strike out for a goal that's new?

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 ever 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 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 "cannot be done," and you'll do it.

STICK TO IT

Stick to it, boy,
Through the thick and the thin of it!
Work for the joy
That is born in the din of it.
Failures beset you,
But don't let them fret you;
Dangers are lurking,
But just keep on working.
If it's worth while and you're sure of the right of it,
Stick to it, boy, and make a real fight of it!
Stick to it, lad,
Be not frail and afraid of it;
Stand to the gad
For the man to be made of it.
Deaf to the sneering
And blind to the jeering,
Willing to master
The present disaster,
Stick to it, lad, through the trial and test of it,
Patience and courage will give you the best of it.
Stick to it, youth,
Be not sudden to fly from it;
This is the truth,
Triumph may not lie far from it.
Dark is the morning
Before the sun's dawning,
Battered and sore of it
Bear a bit more of it,
Stick to it, even though blacker than ink it is,
Victory's nearer, perhaps, than you think it is!

SEE IT THROUGH

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 worse 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!

CAN'T

Can't is the worst word that's written or spoken;
Doing more harm here than slander and lies;
On it is many a strong spirit broken,
And with it many a good purpose dies.
It springs from the lips of the thoughtless each morning
And robs us of courage we need through the day:
It rings in our ears like a timely-sent warning
And laughs when we falter and fall by the way.

Can't is the father of feeble endeavor,
The parent of terror and half-hearted work;
It weakens the efforts of artisans clever,
And makes of the toiler an indolent shirk.
It poisons the soul of the man with a vision,
It stifles in infancy many a plan;
It greets honest toiling with open derision
And mocks at the hopes and the dreams of a man.

Can't is a word none should speak without blushing;
To utter it should be a symbol of shame;
Ambition and courage it daily is crushing;
It blights a man's purpose and shortens his aim.
Despise it with all of your hatred of error;
Refuse it the lodgment it seeks in your brain;
Arm against it as a creature of terror,
And all that you dream of you some day shall gain.

Can't is the word that is foe to ambition,
An enemy ambushed to shatter your will;
Its prey is forever the man with a mission
And bows but to courage and patience and skill.
Hate it, with hatred that's deep and undying,
For once it is welcomed 'twill break any man;
Whatever the goal you are seeking, keep trying
And answer this demon by saying: "I can."

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,
Sill 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;
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.

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