

When We Play The Fool

Last night I stood in a tawdry place
And watched the ways of the human race.
I looked at a party of shrieking girls
Piled on a table that whirls and whirls,
And saw them thrown in a tangled heap,
Sprawling and squirming and several deep.
And unto the wife who was standing by,
'These are all angels to be,' said I.

I followed the ways of the merry throng
And heard the laughter and mirth and song.
Into a barrel which turned and swayed
Men and women a journey made,
And tumbling together they seemed to be
Like so many porpoises out at sea-
Men and women who'd worked all day,
Eagerly seeking a chance to play.

'What do you make of it all?' she said.
I answered: 'The dead are a long time dead,
And care is bitter and duty stern,
And each must weep when it comes his turn.
And all grow weary and long for play,
So here is laughter to end the day.
Foolish? Oh, yes, it is that,' said I,
'But better the laugh than the dreary sigh.

'Now look at us here, for we're like them, too,
And many the foolish things we do.
We often grow silly and seek a smile
In a thousand ways that are not worthwhile;
Yet after the mirth and the jest are through,
We shall all be judged by the deeds we do,
And God shall forget on the Judgment Day
The fools we were in our hours of play.'

Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959)