

Ideals

Better than land or gold or trade
Are a high ideal and a purpose true;
Better than all of the wealth we've made
Is the work for others that now we do.
For Rome grew rich and she turned to song
And danced to music and drank her wine,
But she sapped the strength of her fibres strong
And a gilded shroud was her splendor fine.

The Rome of old with its wealth and wine
Was the handiwork of a sturdy race;
They built well and they made it fine
And they dreamed of it as their children's place.
They thought the joys they had won to give,
And which seemed so certain and fixed and sure,
To the end of time in the world would live
And the Rome they'd fashioned would long endure.

They passed to their children the hoarded gold,
Their marble halls and their fertile fields!
But not the spirit of Rome of old,
Nor the Roman courage that never yields.
They left them the wealth that their hands had won,
But they failed to leave them a purpose true.
They left them thinking life's work all done,
And Rome went down and was lost to view.

We must guard ourselves lest we follow Rome.
We must leave our children the finer things.
We must teach them love of the spot called home
And the lasting joy that a purpose brings.
For vain are our Flag and our battles won,

And vain are our lands and our stores of gold,
If our children feel that life's work is done.
We must give them a high ideal to hold.

Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959)