

His Other Chance

He was down and out, and his pluck was gone,
And he said to me in a gloomy way:
'I've wasted my chances, one by one,
And I'm just no good, as the people say.
Nothing ahead, and my dreams all dust,
Though once there was something I might have been,
But I wasn't game, and I broke my trust,
And I wasn't straight and I wasn't clean.'
'You're pretty low down,' says I to him,
'But nobody's holding you there, my friend.
Life is a stream where men sink or swim,
And the drifters come to a sorry end;
But there's two of you living and breathing still—
The fellow you are, and he's tough to see,
And another chap, if you've got the will,
The man that you still have a chance to be.'
He laughed with scorn. 'Is there two of me?
I thought I'd murdered the other one.
I once knew a chap that I hoped to be,
And he was decent, but now he's gone.'
'Well,' says I, 'it may seem to you
That life has little of joy in store,
But there's always something you still can do,
And there's never a man but can try once more.
'There are always two to the end of time—
The fellow we are and the future man.
The Lord never meant you should cease to climb,
And you can get up if you think you can.
The fellow you are is a sorry sight,
But you needn't go drifting out to sea.
Get hold of yourself and travel right;
There's a fellow you've still got a chance to be.'

Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959)