

Only A Building

You may delve down to rock for your foundation piers,
You may go with your steel to the sky;
You may purchase the best of the thought of the year,
And the finest of workmanship buy;
You may line with the rarest of marble each wall,
And with gold you may tint it, but then
It is only a building, if it, after all,
Isn't filled with the spirit of women and men.

You may put up a structure of brick and of stone,
Such as never was put up before;
Place therein the costliest woods that are grown,
And carve every pillar and door;
You may fill it with splendors of quarry and mine,
With the glories of brush and of pen,
But it's only a building, though ever so fine,
If it hasn't the spirit of women and men.

You may build such a structure that lightning can't harm,
Or one that an earthquake can't raze;
You may build it of granite and boast that its charm
Shall last to the end of all days.
But you might as well never have builded at all.
Never cleared off the bog and the fen,
If after it's finished its sheltering wall
Doesn't stand for the spirit of women and men.

For it isn't the marble, nor is it the stone,
Nor is it the columns of steel,
By which is the worth of an edifice known,
But by something that's living and real.

Edgar Albert Guest (1881-1959)