A Nation’s Strength

By: Ralph Waldo Emerson

What makes a nation’s pillars high  
And its foundations strong?  
What makes it mighty to defy  
The foes that round it throng?  
  
It is not gold. Its kingdoms grand  
Go down in battle shock;  
Its shafts are laid on sinking sand,  
Not on abiding rock.  
  
Is it the sword? Ask the red dust  
Of empires passed away;  
The blood has turned their stones to rust,  
Their glory to decay.  
  
And is it pride? Ah, that bright crown  
Has seemed to nations sweet;  
But God has struck its luster down  
In ashes at his feet.  
  
Not gold but only men can make  
A people great and strong;  
Men who for truth and honor’s sake  
Stand fast and suffer long.  
  
Brave men who work while others sleep,  
Who dare while others fly...  
They build a nation’s pillars deep  
And lift them to the sky.