
Falmouth

Katharine Lee Bates

Lovely it lies within the rose of dawn,
That village of my childhood by the sea,
A score of miles from railroads, that to me
Were marvelous as dragon-haunts agone.
A gardened group of dwellings, looking on
Each other neighborly, about the knee
Of the tall white meeting-house, whose spire was key
To heaven. In the spring the peach tree shone
Pink as the lips of shells from coral isle
Bordering our dooryard paths. Under the willows
A rusty anchor rested on the grass,
While peering over porch there watched us pass
A carven mermaid that had stemmed great billows,
A lonely mermaid with a fading smile.

That the world was wonderful and wide we knew,
For we had watched the vanishing of sails
On vague horizons, heard the vaunting tales
Of bronzed old seamen whose adventures grew
More terrible as pictured in tattoo
On arms and breast. The sculptured teeth of whales
Adorned our mantels. Lustrous shawls and veils
Gold-frosted made the splendid Orient true.
Our innocence danced on to ivory flutes
From joy to joy, nor can world wisdom smother
That primal trust, but when fierce tones declare
Their red Utopias, deep at the roots
Of life I know how simple 'tis to bear
Each other's burdens, loving one another.

Even those women widowed by the ocean,
So many, wore their sorrow like soft lace,
A folding quietness about the face.
And mothers whose glad boys forever bide
In cool green waters, moving with their motion,
Were comforted by voices of the tide.
There on our little strip of silver shore
The first possessor was the friendly giver.
Lads driving home at dawn from Herring River
Would lay their largest bluefish at the door
Where tread of son and husband came no more.
Our lame old hermit had no fear to shiver
In Christmas cold, for gay sleds would deliver
Wood freely gathered from the forest floor.

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The author of "America the Beautiful" was born in Falmouth, daughter of the Rev. William S. Bates, pastor of the First Congregational church. A bronze tablet on a boulder is in the yard of the former Bates house on Main Street near the Village Green.