

Falmouth

by 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 ago.
 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 trees 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

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.



New Bedford whalers. Courtesy Falmouth Historical Society.