

An Autobiography  
in Brief  
of  
Katharine Lee Bates

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"The spirit weaveth wings  
From earth's few, fragile years  
For what far journeyings  
Beyond what flaming spheres!"

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1930



**KATHARINE LEE BATES**

"I will sing unto the Lord a new song."—(from the epitaph at Miss Bates' grave, Oak Grove Cemetery, Falmouth, Massachusetts.)

## Katharine Lee Bates

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Died in Wellesley, March 28, 1929.

(Data compiled by herself)

### Birth:

At Falmouth, Mass., a village on the heel of Cape Cod, August 12, 1859.

(For Falmouth, see in "America the Beautiful" poems entitled "Home," "The Falmouth Bell," "The Falmouth Church," and in "The Retinue," "When Cap'n Tom Comes Home.")

### Ancestry:

English on the father's side; on the mother's, English with a strain of Irish (Dalrymple). The original immigrant was Clement Bates, a tailor, who arrived, with wife, five children and two servants, at Hingham, Mass., on the Elizabeth, 1635. (See in The Retinue the poem Lydd, and in Fairy Gold the poem Rebecca and Abigail, both written for reunions of the Bates family. See also, for the Irish descent, Our Family Crest in Fairy Gold.)

### Parentage:

Rev. William Bates, Congregationalist, who died in Falmouth, his second pastorate, September 10, 1859, at the age of forty-three. He was the son of Rev. Joshua Bates, President of Middlebury College, Vermont, 1818-39, and of Anna Poor, his wife. The death of the new pastor, already beloved for his genial qualities and Christian character, left his widow with the slightest material resources and with four young children. Cornelia Frances Bates, daughter of Samuel W. Lee of Northampton, Mass., and of Electa Bacon, his wife, was a graduate of Mount Holyoke in the time of Mary Lyon and remained an eager student, especially of Botany and the languages, until her death (January 21, 1908) at the age of eighty-one. She was over seventy when she began the study of Spanish, acquiring an excellent reading knowledge. (See Becquer's Romantic Legends of Spain, translated by Cornelia Frances Bates and Katharine Lee Bates. See also in America the Beautiful the sonnets entitled The Rest is Silence, in The Retinue the sonnet This Tattered Catechism, and in The Youth's Companion, April 27, 1922, the poem When Lincoln Died.)

### Childhood:

Spent in Falmouth, then twenty miles from any railroad, a friendly little village that practised a neighborly socialism without having heard the term. The village school gave the rudiments of education, and the elder children went on to Lawrence Academy across the way, but Katharine had not yet attained that dignity when, short-

ly before her twelfth birthday, the family moved to Grantville (now Wellesley Hills). She was a shy, near-sighted child, always hiding away with a book. It was in vain that unclothed dolls were given her to beguile her into sewing. She would promptly spin a romance that left them wrecked on a desert isle and obliged to wrap themselves in raiment of oak leaves secured by thorns and grasses.

#### Education:

Three years in the Wellesley High School, from which she graduated in 1874, and two years in the Newton High School, more advanced, graduating in 1876, prepared Katharine for Wellesley College, opened in the autumn of 1875. The oldest son, Arthur Lee Bates, later president of the Union Mutual Life Insurance Company of Portland, Maine, had left home at sixteen to earn his livelihood and help with the family budget. Though still a clerk on a small salary, he was able, by patient self-denial, to advance the money for Katharine's college course. Entering Wellesley in 1876, she duly graduated with the B. A. degree in 1880. During the college years she had contributed a few poems and stories to weekly papers and magazines. (See *America the Beautiful* for the poem *Sleep*, but little changed from the form in which it was accepted by Mr. Howells for *The Atlantic Monthly*, in Katharine's sophomore year.) She was class-day poet at Wellesley as she had been at the Newton High School, and two very small volumes of her verse, *The College Beautiful* and *Sunshine*, were printed by the Wellesley Alumnae in 1887 and 1890 respectively for the benefit of college funds.

#### Teaching:

At Thanksgiving, 1880, was begun the work of teaching in which she was engaged until June, 1925, when she retired as Professor Emeritus. Taking the first chance that came, the young graduate taught Latin, Algebra and English in the Natick High School through June, 1881. Declining reappointment, she accepted the invitation of the Misses Eastman, who opened Dana Hall as a preparatory school for Wellesley in the autumn of that year, to teach the classics, adding Geometry for the first few terms to her several courses in Greek and Latin. Dana Hall, under the leadership of those gallant sisters, was a place to love, and it was half reluctantly that, in 1886, the offer of Alice Freeman, then President of Wellesley, (later Mrs. George Herbert Palmer), of a college instructorship, in either English literature or Greek was accepted. Here came another difficult choice, but the desire to work in English prevailed. In 1888, the rank was advanced to that of associate professor, and in 1891, after study at Oxford, England, and taking an M. A. degree from Wellesley, the full professorship was given. This carried with it the charge of the English literature department, a heavy responsibility involving much detail, as the department was one of the largest in the college. This burden was dropped in 1920, when warnings of breaking health secured for Professor Bates exemption from college routine tasks and a class program of four hours instead of the regulation time. In addition to the year at Oxford, Miss Bates enjoyed four Sabbatical years,—in France and Spain, 1898-99; in Switzerland, Italy, Egypt and Palestine, 1906-7;

in Norway, Denmark and Spain, 1913-14; and at home, recovering from illness, 1920-21. A number of summer vacations, moreover, were spent abroad, in travel and in literary research. In 1914 Middlebury College conferred on the granddaughter of its early President the degree of Litt. D., and she received from Oberlin this same degree, in 1916, partly in recognition of the wide use of her hymn *America the Beautiful*. On her retirement from teaching, in 1925, Wellesley conferred on her the degree of LL. D. Continuing to reside in her Wellesley home, Miss Bates gave her main effort to writing.

### Writing:

The writings of this busy life, which, falling in the day of small college salaries, was usually hard pressed for money, are in the main an extension of classroom interests or an outgrowth of holiday experiences. Under the first head fall the editions of English classics, Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*, 1889; *Ballad Book*, 1890; Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice*, 1894; *Midsummer Night's Dream*, 1895; *As You Like It*, 1896; Keats' *The Eve of St. Agnes*, 1902; Lenox Edition of Hawthorne's *Romances*, 1902; Ruskin's *King of the Golden River*, 1903; *Early Poems of Alice and Phoebe Cary*, 1903; Tennyson's *Princess*, 1904; *Selections from Tennyson's Idylls of the King*, 1905; Hawthorne's *Our Old Home*, 1906; and a school history of *American Literature*, 1908. Under the second head fall *The English Religious Drama*, fruit of those first studies in the Bodleian; *Spanish Highways and Byways*, and, for children, *In Sunny Spain with Pilarica and Rafael*; as well as an account of a literary journey, mainly by driving, through the western counties of England, *From Gretna Green to Land's End*. *The Story of Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims*, re-told in modern verse, smacks both of the classroom and of vacation. Some of the pleasures of the home life are hinted in *Sigurd Our Golden Collie*, prose chapters with poems on animals, especially dogs and birds, tucked in between. From college friendships resulted the co-operation with Katharine Coman, then professor of history and economics, in *English History told by English Poets*, and in the preparing for the press, after the death of Sophie Jewett, poet, a beloved colleague in the English literature department, of her *Folk Ballads of Southern Europe* in her own English versions, and of her edition of *De Amicis' Cuore*, called in her abridged translation *The Heart of a Boy*. Other books were done in response to special circumstances. While waiting twenty-eight days, quarantined in a Boston attic, to see if smallpox, to which there had been exposure, would develop, Miss Bates beguiled the time by writing a young people's story, *Rose and Thorn*, for a prize contest, and used the money, \$700., for her first trip to Europe. A second juvenile, *Hermit Island*, followed this. Her first volume, issued the year after graduating from college, was a compilation from the poets, *The Wedding Day Book*, which did not prove prophetic. An edition for schools of *Mabie's Norse Stories* was related to her special delight in Norse literature. A critical edition, in the *Belles Lettres* series, of two of Thomas Heywood's plays, a little volume that involved, in addition

to prolonged home labors, several English summers on hunt in the British Museum and through church registers and probate registries from Lincolnshire to Kent, is the most scholarly (and least known) of her books.

Though writing a lyric or a ballad now and then, the pressure of constant teaching and prose writing deferred from year to year and from decade to decade any sustained attention to poetry. It was not until 1911 that Miss Bates ventured to collect her fugitive verse into the volume *America the Beautiful*, published by Thomas Y. Crowell Company and now out of print. A collection of verses for children followed in 1916, under title, taken from the opening play, of *Fairy Gold*, E. P. Dutton & Company, the publishers, issued a later volume, 1918, of war poems and nature poems, *The Retinue*, and in 1922 *Yellow Clover*, written in remembrance of her closest friend, Katharine Coman, who died in 1915. In 1923 came one more juvenile, *Little Robin Stay Behind and Other Plays in Verse for Children*, and in 1926 *The Pilgrim Ship*, a collection of her poems bearing on Palestine and kindred themes,—issued as was *Robin*, by The Woman's Press. Reprint of *Land's End to Gretna Green* was published in 1929.

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*America the Dream*, arranged for publication by Miss Bates prior to her death was published in 1930.  
*Selected Poems*, published in 1930.

