

## AMERICA THE BEAUTIFUL

O beautiful for spacious skies,  
For amber waves of grain,  
For purple mountain majesties  
Above the fruited plain!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!

O beautiful for pilgrim feet,  
Whose stern, impassioned stress  
A thoroughfare for freedom beat  
Across the wilderness!  
America! America!  
God mend thine every flaw,  
Confirm thy soul in self-control,  
Thy liberty in law!

O beautiful for heroes proved  
In liberating strife,  
Who more than self their country loved,  
And mercy more than life!  
America! America!  
May God thy gold refine  
Till all success be nobleness  
And every gain divine!

O beautiful for patriot dream  
That sees beyond the years  
Thine alabaster cities gleam  
Undimmed by human tears!  
America! America!  
God shed His grace on thee  
And crown thy good with brotherhood  
From sea to shining sea!

*Katharine Lee Bates*

**America the Beautiful** was written in its original form, more literary and ornate than the present version, in the summer of 1893. I was making my first trip west. After visiting at Chicago the World's Fair, where I was naturally impressed by the symbolic beauty of the White City, I went on to Colorado Springs. Here I spent three weeks or so under the purple range of the Rockies, which looked down with surprise on a summer school. This had called to its faculty several instructors from the east, Dr. Rolfe coming from Cambridge to teach Shakespeare, Professor Todd from Amherst for lectures on Astronomy, Professor Katharine Coman from Wellesley for a course in Economics. My own subject, which seemed incongruous enough under that new and glowing sky, was English Religious Drama.

We strangers celebrated the close of the session by a merry expedition to the top of Pike's Peak, making the ascent by the only method then available for people not vigorous enough to achieve the climb on foot nor adventurous enough for burro-riding. Prairie wagons, their tail-boards emblazoned with the traditional slogan, "Pike's Peak or Bust," were pulled by horses up to the half-way house, where the horses were relieved by mules. We were hoping for half an hour on the summit, but two of our party became so faint in the rarified air that we were bundled into the wagons again and started on our downward plunge so speedily that our sojourn on the peak remains in memory hardly more than one ecstatic gaze. It was then and there, as I was looking out over the sea-like expanse of fertile country spreading away so far under those ample skies, that the opening lines of the hymn floated into my mind. When we left Colorado Springs the four stanzas were pencilled in my notebook, together with other memoranda, in verse and prose, of the trip. The Wellesley work soon absorbed time and attention again, the note-book was laid aside, and I do not remember paying heed to these verses until the second summer following, when I copied them out and sent them to **The Congregationalist**, where they first appeared in print July 4, 1895. The hymn attracted an unexpected amount of attention. It was almost at once set to music by that eminent composer, Silas G. Pratt, and re-published, with his setting, in **Famous Songs**, issued in 1895 by the Baker and Taylor Company. Other tunes were written for the words and so many requests came to me, with still increasing frequency, to permit its use in various publications and for special services that, in 1904, I re-wrote it, trying to make the phraseology more simple and direct.

The new form first appeared in the **Evening Transcript** of Boston, November 19, 1904. After the lapse of a few years, during which the hymn had run the gauntlet of criticism, I changed the wording of the

opening quatrain of the third stanza. The hymn as printed above is the final version, of which I retain the copyright, not as a matter of money-making, for I have given hundreds, perhaps thousands, of free permissions for its use, but in order to protect it from misprints and conscious alterations. The only condition I make with these permissions is that the republication should scrupulously follow the authorized version, of which, tutored by sore experience, I now invariably enclose a printed copy. I can illustrate the need of this precaution from a single line,

"O beautiful for patriot dream,"

which I have seen in more than one newspaper copy

"O beautiful for patriot drum,"

but which reached its climax of effect as printed in a church leaflet for a farewell meeting to the young soldiers of the town, boys self-conscious enough in their new khaki without the blushes induced by the chorused compliment,

"O beautiful for patriot dress."

These permissions which I so gladly give have been, in summary, for the reproduction of the words in church hymnals and Sunday School song books of nearly all the denominations; in the special song books of many schools and colleges, as well as in a large number of regularly published song books, poetry readers, civic readers, patriotic readers and the like, for school and college use in general; in manuals of hymns and prayers, and anthologies of patriotic prose and poetry, issued by the Government, War Work Councils and National Service Committees, for our soldiers and sailors, Training Camps, Boy Scouts, for the benefit of the Red Cross; and in countless periodicals, from **St. Nicholas** to the **Phi Beta Kappa Key**. Its use is constantly asked for church leaflets and community programs, especially for the services of Memorial Day, Thanksgiving, Children's Sunday, Home Missions Sunday, Washington's Birthday, Lincoln's Birthday, Fourth of July, and for special occasions, as Grand Army reunions, patriotic mass-meetings, concerts, masques and pageants, flag-raisings, Columbus Day, meetings for immigrants, civic welcomes for new citizens, goodbyes for enlisted men. Its use has been given, also, to the Peace Foundation, the Fellowship of Reconciliation and various Peace Societies. The hymn has gone far afield with the Young Men's Christian Association, the Young Women's Christian Association, the Society of Christian Endeavor and the observance of the Sunday School Centennial. The Australian Christian Endeavorers have adopted it, setting it to music of their own and substituting the word Australia for America. It is sung in Canada with the refrain "O Canada" and in Mexico with the refrain "Mi Méjico." It has gone into reform schools

and prisons, college settlements, men's clubs, Councils of Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the Jewish Women's Council, the rites of the Camp Fire Girls, and has been translated, for the benefit of our immigrants, into Italian and German. It is sung at the Ford Hall meetings, at Hampton, at Silver Bay, in Vacation Bible Schools. In 1922 it was adopted by the American Federation of Women's Clubs as their official song.

But here comes a difficulty. Over sixty original settings, some of them by distinguished musicians, have been written for the hymn, which thus suffers from an embarrassment of riches. It is associated with no one tune. The original setting which has, thus far, won widest acceptance is that of the former Municipal Organist of Portland, Will C. Macfarlane (sold by Cressey and Allen, 534 Congress Street, Portland, Maine). His tune, which is played on the city chimes of Springfield, Mass., he has made the theme of a spirited march, **America the Beautiful**, arranged for band music. In an octavo published by Oliver Ditson Company are included four settings, one by Clarence G. Hamilton, professor of music at Wellesley College and another by W. W. Sleeper, formerly pastor of the Wellesley Congregational Church. Both these settings have found favor with choruses and made their way into various hymnals. This octavo carries, also, settings by William Arms Fisher, musical editor of the Boston house of Ditson. Other tunes that have a strong following are those of the celebrated composer, Horatio W. Parker (in the **Methodist Sunday School Hymnal**), Charles S. Brown (in **Junior Carols**, Society of Christian Endeavor), John Stainer (in the **Pilgrim Hymnal**), J. A. Demuth, professor of music at Oberlin (in **Oberlin's Favorite Hymns**, published by Arthur P. Schmidt), and Herbert G. Peabody of Fitchburg, Mass., (published by H. W. Gray Company of New York). Other attractive settings, published, privately printed or yet in manuscript, have their special circles, and the words have been fitted to various old tunes, as those of **Auld Lang Syne**, **The Harp that Once through Tara's Halls**, **The Son of God goes forth to War** and **O Mother Dear Jerusalem**. To this last, **Materna**, by S. A. Ward, in many hymnals and well known throughout the country, **America the Beautiful** is at present most often sung.

That the hymn has gained, in these twenty odd years, such a hold as it has upon our people, is clearly due to the fact that Americans are at heart idealists, with a fundamental faith in human brotherhood.

KATHARINE LEE BATES