America the Beautiful

~Other Speakers G-L: Amazing Hymn Stories:

It was the early summer of 1893. The Columbian Exposition in Chicago, which celebrated the 400th anniversary of Columbus’ discovery of America, was in full swing. A group of teachers and professors from Wellesley College, stopped off in Chicago enroute to Colorado.

Among them was thirty-four-year-old Katharine Lee Bates, a professor of English. The young women were profoundly impressed by all they saw in and about “The Windy City.”

Soon left Lake Michigan behind them as they continued their journey westward. Once in Colorado, they made the trip up the famous peak which was named for the American general who discovered it about 1806 (Zebulon Montgomery Pike).

While in Colorado, the group compared the Exposition (a man-made spectacle) with the magnificent Rocky Mountains and the view from Pike’s Peak (fashioned by the hand of God).

They also discussed about the two stones that played important parts in the nation’s history—the Ten Commandments and Plymouth Rock—and agreed that their fellow-citizens could couple the daring of the Pilgrims with the moral teachings of Moses.

Later that night, with the events of the trip vividly in her mind, Miss Bates sat down and expressed her dream of a Christian nation in these words:

O beautiful for spacies skies, For amber waves of grain;

For purple mountain majesties, Above the fruited plain.

America! America! God shed His grace on thee;

And crown they good with brotherhood, From sea to shining sea.

Before she laid her pen down she had written four stanzas, each closing with a prayer for her beloved America

—Adapted from Ernest K. Emurian

America the Beautiful[1]
(or O Beautiful for Spacious Skies)
1 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.

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

3 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 ev’ry 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.