

46 JOHN MAYNARD

A Ballad of Lake Erie.

Twas on Lake Erie's broad expanse
One bright midsummer day,
The gallant steamer Ocean Queen
Swept proudly on her way.
Bright faces clustered on the deck,
Or, leaning o'er the side,
Watched carelessly the feathery foam
That flecked the rippling tide.

Ah, who beneath that cloudless sky,
That smiling bends serene,
Could dream that danger awful, vast,
Impended o'er the scene, --
Could dream that ere an hour had sped
That frame of sturdy oak
Would sink beneath the lake's blue waves,
Blackened with fire and smoke?

A seaman sought the captain's side,
A moment whispered low;
The captain's swarthy face grew pale;
He hurried down below.
Alas, too late! Though quick, and sharp,
And clear his orders came,
No human efforts could avail
To quench th' insidious flame.

The bad news quickly reached the deck,
It sped from lip to lip,
And ghastly faces everywhere
Looked from the doomed ship.
"Is there no hope -- no chance of life?"
A hundred lips implore,
"But one," the captain made reply, --
"To run the ship on shore."

A sailor, whose heroic soul
That hour should yet reveal,
By name John Maynard, eastern-born,
Stood calmly at the wheel.
"Head her south-east!" The captain shouts,
Above the smothered roar, --
"Head her south-east without delay!
Make for the nearest shore!"

No terror pales the helmsman's cheek,
Or clouds his dauntless eye,
As, in a sailor's measured tone,
His voice responds, "Ay! ay!"
Three hundred souls, the steamer's freight,
Crowd forward wild with fear,
While at the stern the dreadful flames
Above the deck appear.

John Maynard watched the nearing flames,
But still with steady hand
He grasped the wheel, and steadfastly
He steered the ship to land.
"John Maynard, can you still hold out?"
He heard the captain cry;
A voice from out the stifling smoke
Faintly responds, "Ay! ay!"

But half a mile! a hundred hands
Stretch eagerly to shore.
But half a mile! that distance sped
Peril shall all be o'er.
But half a mile! Yet stay, the flames
No longer slowly creep,
But gather round that helmsman bold,
With fierce, impetuous sweep.

"John Maynard!" with an anxious voice
The captain cries once more,
"Stand by the wheel five minutes yet,
And we shall reach the shore."
Through flame and smoke that dauntless heart
Responded firmly still
Unawed, though face to face with death, --
"With God's good help I will!"

The flames approach with giant strides,
They scorch his hand and brow;
One arm, disabled, seeks his side,
Ah! he is conquered now!
But no, his teeth are firmly set,
He crushes down his pain,
His knee upon the stanchion pressed,
He guides the ship again.

One moment yet! one moment yet!
Brave heart, thy task is o'er,
The pebbles grate beneath the keel,
The steamer touches shore.
Three hundred grateful voices rise
In praise to God that he
Hath saved them from the fearful fire,
And from the engulfing sea.

But where is he, that helmsman bold?
The captain saw him reel, --
His nerveless hands released their task.
He sank beside the wheel.
The wave received his lifeless corpse,
Blackened with smoke and fire.
God rest him! Never hero had
A nobler funeral pyre!

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