

JOHN MAYNARD, PILOT.  
A FACT.

Beneath the starless midnight, o'er the waste  
Of broad Ontario sped the steamer on,  
A mighty, tireless messenger of haste,  
Flinging from steadfast signal-lamps, that shone  
On stern and mast-head, streaming lights that glide  
Along the heaving waters at her side.

On deck, no sound the midnight silence broke;  
Voices of day's confusion, hurrying feet,  
Had passed away; only the ponderous stroke  
Of engines, and the paddles' ceaseless beat,  
Went on; but o'er the crowd securely sleeping,  
Through the long hours, his vigilant watch is keeping

The pilot, old John Maynard, rough and grim,  
Fronting the night, and slowly, steadily  
The helm controlling; storm and gloom to him  
Are naught, who had lived his life upon that sea;  
And, as he toils, upon his lips there stray  
Words of a song his child had sung that day.

At midnight is a cry heard! From below,  
Like brigand springing forth from ambushade,  
Along the deck are darting flames, that grow  
Each moment mightier in their maddened raid,  
Flinging aloft vast smoke-clouds, and beneath  
Creeping with shrivelling touch and blasting breath.

"Fire! Fire!" the cry has pierced through many a dream  
Of calm, sweet fancies, joined in many a rout  
Of horrible imaginings that stream  
Through troubled spirits; quickly the dread shout  
Has spread, and all—the weak beneath the strong  
Crushed pitilessly—in fierce wild tumult throng

The bows, where yet the flame has come not—there,  
Huddling with shrieks and curses, women fall,  
Hiding their faces from the awful glare  
Of pillared fire behind them; others call  
For help—"The boats!"—but these are useless, none  
Can aid, and inch by inch their doom creeps on.

But hark! above men's voices and the roar  
Of conflagration, shouts the captain—" Men!  
Listen—the land is there; ten minutes more,  
All—saved or lost—will have been settled then!  
There's but one chance: 'tis if the pilot's hand  
Keep strong, to steer a straight course for the land!"

And then he shouted, "Are you there, my lad?"  
Quick answer came, "Ay, ay, sir!" Dashing on,  
The ship drove through the night, and watchers glad  
Thought they could see afar dim lights that shone  
Upon the land; but what of these, while close  
Behind, around, the flames devouring rose?

"All in the pilot's hands and God's!" Alone  
Beneath the pelting hail of fire he stands,  
The scathing blast and stifling smoke-clouds blown  
About his form, while from his quivering hands,  
Shrivelled and torn, the blood drips—round his head  
The circling flames are like an aureole spread.

"Two minutes more! Two minutes to the end!"  
Wrung from death's agony the answering cry,  
"Ay, ay, sir!" comes. Nearer the flames they bend  
To catch the last gasped words, " Sir—I—I'll try!"  
Broad looms the land, and now the keel is grating  
Upon the shore, where life and hope are waiting.

Straight, swift, and sure, the steamer dashes on,  
With staggering plunge upon the bank she leaps,  
Then parts amidships—the wild race is won!  
Man, woman, child, in safety each one creeps  
To the firm earth; but, as they touch the strand,  
John Maynard's soul has gained the better land!

C. E. BOURNE