

John Maynard by H. Alger, Jr.

Author: Alger, Horatio, 1832-1899.

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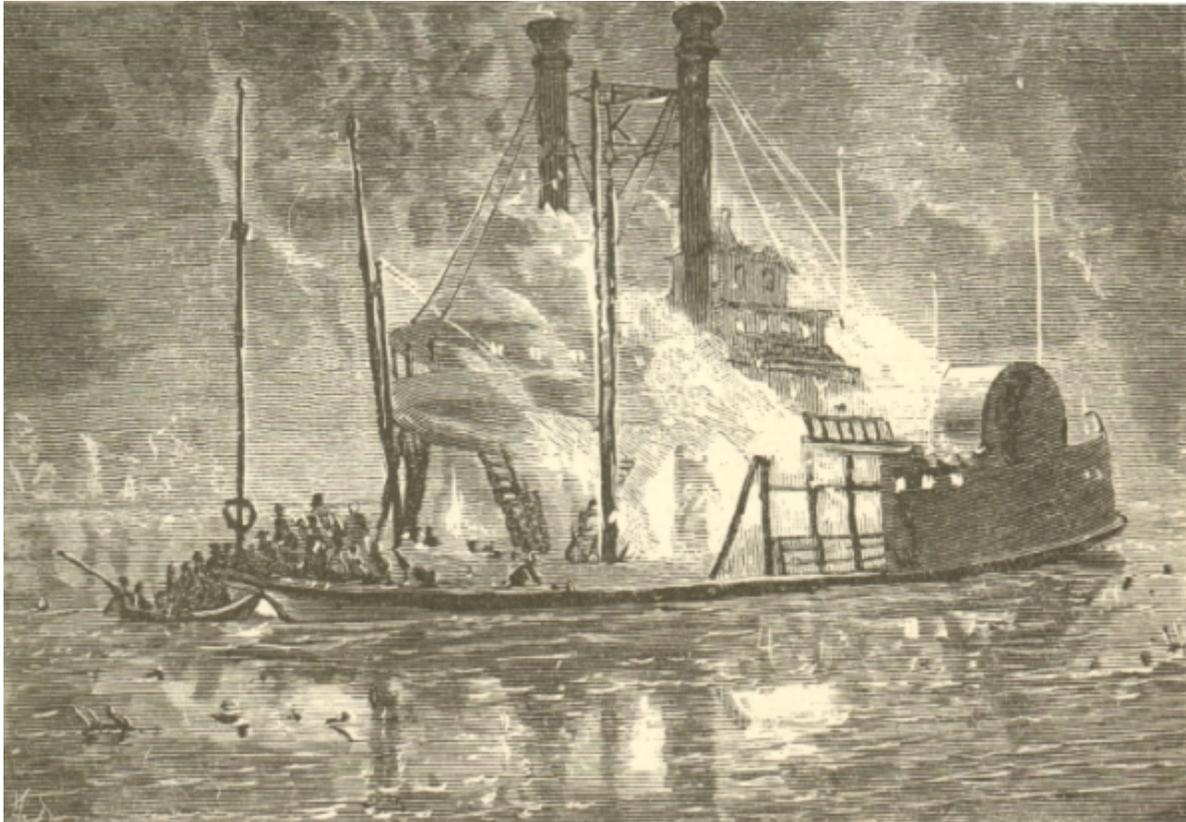
WAS on Lake Erie's broad expanse,
One bright midsummer day,
The gallant steamer Ocean Queen
Swept proudly on her way.
Bright faces clustered on the deck,
Or leaning o'er the side,
Watched carelessly the feathery foam,
That flecked the rippling tide.

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 effort could avail
To quench the 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 southeast!" the captain shouts,
Above the smothered roar
Head her southeast 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," with an anxious voice,
The captain cries once more,
"Stand by the wheel five minutes yet,
And we will reach the shore."

Through flames 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 hands and brow ;
One arm disabled seeks his side,
Ah, he is conquered now!
But no, his teeth are firmly set,
He crushes down the pain,—
His knee upon the staunchion 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 sunk beside the wheel.
The waves received his lifeless corpse,
Blackened with smoke and fire.
God rest him! Hero never had
A nobler funeral pyre!