

JOHN MAYNARD.

FRED EMERSON BROOKS

John Maynard stood at the steamer's wheel;
A common sailor, but true as steel.
Looking for heroes, you'd pass him by
Unless you happened to catch his eye,
That lens of the soul where one looks through
To find out whether a man will do
To leave at a post when danger is rife,
And stand there firm at the cost of his life —
And then you'd agree, with Captain " Dan,"
That rough John Maynard was just the man.

Lake Erie was calm, the sky was clear;
The steamer sped, as the fallow deer
Darts through the grass on the prairie old;
'Twas life on deck, but death in the hold.
Little the joyful passengers knew,
As song rolled out o'er the water blue,
The echo sent back from the distant shore
Was Grief's *applause* and Death's *encore*.

The captain stood by the engineer;
His face turned pale with a sudden fear:
A burst of smoke — no need to inquire,
That crackling noise — "The steamer's on fire !"
Full quickly now his firm orders came:
"Do all you can to keep back the flame!
Give all the steam the engine will stand;
Our only hope is to make for land."

"John Maynard!" "*Aye, aye!*" "To the nearest shore!
Stand firm to the wheel as never before!
The steamer's afire! On you I depend
To save these souls! — Will you stand to the end?"
"*Aye, aye, sir!*" John's words were ever few —
'Tis always the case with men that *do*.

And still the captain's commands came loud,
And rang out clear o'er the wailing crowd:
"All passengers out on the for'a'd deck!
We'll do our best to keep it in check —

Shut passages up, all hatchways close;
Stand by, my good men, and man the hose!"

The passengers rush to the figure-head,
As if in flight from a terrible dread —
Close crowding up where there's little room,
Clinging despair on the neck of doom.

All hands have come up from down below;
Their battle short, a moment or so.
" The engine runs without engineer,"
The captain said, "but someone must steer:
Will you stand firm?" John made no reply:
He would not speak without his "Aye, aye!"
He thought of home that held all his joy;
His fond wife holding her bright-eyed boy,
With fat arms clinging to mother's neck,
But ready for romps at his father's beck;
Two loves outweighing the world to him: —
What need to die? 'Twas an easy swim;
He'd not be missed in the thick, black smoke; —
His hand e'en slipped from the tiller spoke:
" Shall I stand here and give up my life,
And leave to want my baby and wife —
Far worse to me than to stand and burn?"
But some voice whispered: " *'Tis now your turn.*"
Through rifts in the smoke those faces plead;
He thinks of Him once willing to bleed;
The voice of the captain pleads once more:
"Will you stand firm till we reach the shore?"
All, breathless, wait his final reply —
It comes at last, sailor-like: "*Aye, aye!*"

"Be calm!" said the captain, "wail no more!
A hero stands there— yonder the shore;
Have faith in him, though you can't see through
The thick, black smoke, yet he'll *die for you!*
There's no greater faith beneath the sky
Than that I place in Maynard's '*Aye, aye.*'"

Beneath the deck 'twas a fiery maze,
Like some great furnace all ablaze;
While hot smoke rose in its awful gloom,
As if to conceal that pilot's doom.
With one spot free where passengers stand,
The fiery demon rushes for land.

The pilot knows his moments are few: —
The smoke gives way, as the flames burst through
The upper deck and go roaring aft,
Then slowly creep up against the draft,
Like unbent sails crawling up the mast,
Till pilot house is enveloped at last.

The wheel and engine stop at the shore.
That hero's "*Aye, aye!*" — hushed evermore.

He stood there firm at the heated wheel;
He stood there firm till he felt the keel
Grate in the sand of the shallow shore —
Till human flesh could stand it no more:
And falling down on his funeral pyre,
His soul went up in *chariot of fire*.
Jehovah, the Captain, called him on high: --
John Maynard obeyed with his last "*Aye, aye!*"

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