

John Maynard

by

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Translation:

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“Who is John Maynard?”

“John Maynard, he was our helmsman who
Held out 'til he brought us safely through,
Saved us and wears a hero's crown above,
For us he died, and his reward our love,
John Maynard.”

Across Lake Erie the “Swallow” wings,
Foam like snow the ship's bow rings.
Detroit to Buffalo she makes her way
All hearts aboard feel free and gay
And passengers with kith and kin
Can see the shore in the twilight dim
And chattering to John Maynard say
“Helmsman, how much further away?”
He looks ahead, then around and explains,

“Still thirty minutes . . . half an hour
remains.”

Every heart is cheerful and every heart feels free
When from below a cry suddenly:
“Fire!” was the awful shout
As smoke from cabin and hatch poured out,
First smoke, then flames, a blazing glow,

And still twenty minutes to Buffalo.

And passengers crowd around the bow,
The colorful mass pressed together now;
At the bowsprit there's still air and light
But at the helm the smoke's grip is tight:
A moan is heard, “Where are we? Do you
know?”

And still fifteen minutes to Buffalo.

The wind increases but the smoke cloud stays.
Towards the helm the captain turns his gaze.
He can discern his helmsman no more
But through the speaking tube implores,
“Still there, John Maynard?” “Yes, sir. I am.”
“Head to the beach! Into the surf!”
“Yes, sir. I'll ram.”
And the people cheer on: “Please don't let go!”

And still ten minutes to Buffalo.

“Still there, John Maynard?” Then this reply
With a dying man's voice: “Yes, sir, I'll try.”
And into the surf, amid rocks and stone,
He guides the “Swallow” steering alone.
Should rescue come it will only come so,
Rescue: the beach of Buffalo.

The vessel's broken, it smolders like coal.
All have been saved, all save one soul.

All the city bells peal, their tones upswell
To heaven from each church and chapel.
A ringing and tolling, all else is silent.
Just one goal on which all are bent:
Ten thousand or more make up the train,
And none in the crowd the tears can restrain.

The coffin's lowered, upon flowers laid.
With flowers they then close the grave
And cut in the marble in letters of gold
The city's debt of thanks is told:
“Here rests John Maynard. In smoke and flame
He held onto the rudder with might and main.
Saved us and wears a hero's crown above.
For us he died, and his reward our love.
John Maynard.”