

An account of the story of John Maynard  
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THERE seems somehow to be a great difference in the world's estimation between a civil and a military *Hero*. But some deeds have been recorded of noble heroism in private, unmilitary station, which have not been excelled on the hardest-fought field that ever tasked the strategy or tested the bravery of the most renowned of the world's great generals.

He was "as brave as Napoleon," who, some three or four years ago, at an extensive fire in some inland town in Massachusetts, having heard that a keg of powder was stored in an apartment of a building that was on fire, entered through the gathering flame and smoke, and without saying a word to impart fear to those who were endeavoring to quell the conflagration, bore from the burning building the already half-charred repository of the dreadful elements whose explosion would have carried "swift destruction" to a score of his fellow-men, and deposited it in a place of safety. *There* was a "brave man"—brave in a good, a humane cause.

John Maynard was a brave man—one of the "bravest of the brave."

Do you remember him, reader? Probably not. If you have heard of him at all, you have forgotten him. But his name is recorded "in the dispatches" of *Humanity*. He was nothing but a helmsman, a great many years ago, of a steamboat, called "The Jersey," on Lake Erie. He was a bluff, weather-beaten sailor, tanned by many a stormy tempest; but he had a good and tender heart in his bosom, and was called "Honest John Maynard" from one end of Lake Erie to the other.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon, and the nearest land, in the neighborhood of the town of Erie, on the southern shore of the lake, was about ten miles distant. The captain, coming up from his cabin, called out to a sailor:

"Dick Fletcher, what's all that smoke coming out of the hold?"

"It's from the engine-room, I guess," said the man.

"Go down quick and *see*," said the captain, "and let me know. No noise—no alarm—quietly, now."

The sailor went below, and in a minute came back:

"*The hold's on fire!* captain."

The captain rushed down, and found the account was but too true. Some sparks had fallen on a bundle of tow; no one had seen the accident; and now not only much of the baggage, but the sides of the vessel were in a smouldering flame.

All on board, passengers as well as sailors, were called together; and two lines being made, one on each side of the hold, buckets of water were passed and re-passed; they were filled from the lake, flew along a line of ready hands, were dashed hissing on the burning mass, and then passed on to the other side to be re-filled. For some minutes it seemed as if the flames were subdued.

In the meantime the women were clustering round John Maynard. He was the only man unemployed who was capable of answering their questions.

"How far is it to land?" asked one.

"How long shall we be in getting in?" inquired another.

"Is it very *deep*?" asked a third, in an agony of terror.

"Can they see us from the shore?" demanded a fourth, in tones of despair.

The helmsman answered as well as he could: "There *was* no boat; it had been left at Buffalo to be repaired;" they "might be seven miles from shore"—they "would probably be in in forty minutes;" he "couldn't tell how far the fire *had* reached," &c.; "but," he added, "we are all in great danger; and I think if there was a little less *talking* and a little more praying, it would be all the better for us, and none the worse for the boat."

"How does she head?" shouted the captain.

"West sou'-west, sir," answered Maynard.

“Keep her sou’ by west,” cried the captain; “we must go ashore *any where!*”

Just at that moment a draught of wind blew back the flames, which soon began to blaze up more furiously against the saloon, and the partition between it and the hold was soon on fire. Then long wreaths of smoke began to find their way through the skylight; and the captain seeing this, ordered all the women forward.

The engineer now put on his utmost steam; the American flag was run up and reversed, in token of distress; and water was flung over the sails, to make them hold the wind.

And still John Maynard stood by the wheel, though he was now cut off, by a sheet of smoke and flame, from the ship’s crew.

Greater and greater grew the heat. The engineers fled from the engine-room, the passengers were clustering round the vessel’s bow; the sailors were sawing off planks on which to launch the women; the boldest were throwing off their coats and waistcoats, and preparing for one long struggle for life.

And still the coast grew plainer, and plainer; the paddles as yet worked well; they could not be more than a mile from shore, and boats were even now starting to their assistance.

“John Maynard,” cried the captain.

“Ay, ay, sir!” said John.

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“Can you hold on five minutes longer?”

“I’ll *try*, sir.”

And he *did* try. The flames came nearer and nearer; a sheet of smoke would sometimes almost suffocate him; his hair was singed, and his blood seemed on fire with the fervent heat. Crouching as far back as he could, he held the wheel firmly with his left hand, till the flesh shriveled, and the muscles cracked in the flames. And then he stretched forth his right, and bore the agony without a scream or a groan!

It was enough for him that he heard the cheer of the sailors to the approaching boats; the cry of the captain, “The women first—every man for himself—and God for us all!”

“And these were the last sounds he heard.” How he perished was never certainly known. Whether, dizzied by the smoke, he lost his footing in endeavoring to come forward, and fell overboard, or whether he was suffocated by the dense smoke, his comrades could not tell.

At the moment the vessel struck the boats were at her side; passengers, sailors, and captain leaped into them, or swam for their lives. *All*, save he to whom they all owed every thing, escaped.

The body of John Maynard sleeps in peace by the side of green Lake Erie; his spirit was commended to his FATHER’S hands.

Better than fame won at the cannon’s mouth in the ardor of conquest; far better than battle “for that which perisheth,” is the lasting renown of this soldier of Humanity.

It is a pleasure to think that when years have rolled away his memory will be perpetuated, even in these desultory pages.

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