

THE FAMILY STORY

BARRETT : SAVED : THE : STEAMER.

IF I HAD slept a second longer, the steamer, with its 1,100 passengers and crew, would have crashed onto the rocks. Those who escaped drowning would have been scattered over the northern part of Ohio. There was a frightful pressure of steam, and the explosion would have come within thirty seconds after the machinery stopped. I guess it was Providence awoke me in time to save those lives," said Professor Barrett, and then gave in detail the unwritten log of the sidewheeler passenger steamer, the City of Buffalo.

Professor John P. Barrett, chief electrician of Chicago, is a man who has led an active life. From the nature of his various occupations he has encountered many perils. He has dodged the dangers of the deep, and those of the scientist's laboratory as well. His closest call was his first. It was more than forty years ago, but the remembrance of it is as clear and distinct as the signal code of the fire department. He was not alone in his danger, as the remark quoted in the beginning will indicate. The peril of the 1,100 others was greater, for they were sleeping. They never knew how near they came to continuing their slumber in eight feet of water or awakening at the business center of a boiler explosion. Just the turn of a wheel, the change of a vessel's course one foot in ten saved them from death. The incident for it was but an incident, although it pointed out to be one of the most appalling disasters in the history of the great lakes, definitely altered the line of Professor Barrett's life. Instead of developing into a jolly seadog—salt or fresh or both—he became one of the most generally known practical electricians of the United States. Let Professor Barrett tell why he gave up the life of a sea-faring man. He is a capable teller of stories.

"I began to sail the lakes when I was 19 years old," said he. "I was born in New York State and when a very small boy came to Chicago, where my father settled. Naturally I took great interest in the lake. It was about all there was to attract. I didn't confine my voyages to fresh water, either. I rounded the Horn, when it was hard work to get by it and was in Pacific coast going ships for five years. That has nothing to do with my failure to run the City of Buffalo on the rocks in Lake Erie, just east of Grand River. Fairport is the town there. I've got a mental photograph of the way the village looked as it lay sleeping in the breaking August day of more than forty years ago. It's a picture that doesn't fade with time."

"I was only 19 years old then, rather young to be quartermaster of the best steamer on the lakes, but that was the position I held. The City of Buffalo, of which I was one of the wheelmen, and the Western Metropolis, a sister side-wheeler, were running opposite to each other between Cleveland and Buffalo. It was before the two towns were connected by rail, and the New York Central had to carry its passengers for the West by boat from Buffalo. The traffic in freight as well as travelers was extremely heavy and the water transportation lines made many kinds of money, as the saying goes. Our two steamers, the City of Buffalo and the Western Metropolis, were two of the finest that ever turned a wheel in the great lakes. They were built for speed and for comfort both, and it was a joy and a delight to sit in their wheelhouses and help them eat up the distance. Twenty and twenty-two miles an hour was what they had laid out for them on the schedule and it was very tough weather indeed that kept them back of their time."

Professor Barrett grew enthusiastic as he spoke of the speed qualities of his early loves, and dilated on the beauty of their model and the fineness of their lines. "The City of Buffalo," he said, "was 330 odd feet long and you could stand sixty feet from her bows and touch either rail. She simply shot herself from Buffalo to Erie, and a second shot from Massassauga point landed her at Cleveland—but that isn't my story."

"We left Buffalo at 9 o'clock at night or near that hour and made Cleveland about 6 in the morning. I had the wheel from Buffalo to Erie—just half the distance—and from there my partner took the boat to Cleveland. One morning after we reached Buffalo, I didn't go to sleep. I was young then—less than 20, and I put in the day seeing Buffalo. I regarded it as my duty to know the town and become thoroughly acquainted. That night I was dead on my legs; plumb tired out. I asked my partner to take my end of the run and let me sleep until we reached Erie. I was still tired, but when he rented me out I took the wheel and we cleared away all right for the last half of the run. I got her out of the Massassauga Bay all easy and smooth and after rounding the point headed her for Cleveland. The course is as straight as a gun barrel. The night was the calmest, pleasantest I ever knew. It was in August, the lake was as smooth as a billiard table and the speed of the old Buffalo created just sufficient breeze to make it comfortable. I didn't feel sleepy—I simply was dead tired. The high swinging chair took the motion of the boat and I supposed coaxed me into a slumber. I don't know when

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"I was still shaking and trembling when we made Cleveland. I got her into the Cuyahoga and up against the landing all right and went down on deck. Just as I reached the gangway the oiler, whom I had seen out on the walking-beam, came up and said to the mate:

"Who was it at the wheel about half past 4 this morning? I—"

"The man never completed the sentence. I smashed him full in the face and he shot out through the freight gangway and into the middle of a pile of dockwalkers, to his great astonishment, and likewise the surprise of the roustabouts.

"Don't call me a liar, damn you! I roared, and then fell a-trembling again.

"My God, Barrett, you're crazy!" cried the mate, taking hold of me. "The man called no one liar."

"I shook him loose and jumped ashore. I found Captain Perkins in the office of the steamship company making formal report of his arrival.

"Captain," I said, "I came to ask you for my pay. I don't want to act as quartermaster any more."

"What kind of a joke are you trying to play on me, John?" he asked.

"No, but I'm in earnest. I'll never stand in the wheelhouse for another steamboat. I got to thinking about it coming up, and I'm a quitter. A wind vessel will do me all right, and I'm looking for a schooner now."

"John," he said, "you're sick, that's what's the matter with you. Take a few days and rest up. You're only a boy now, and look where you are—quartermaster of the best steamboat on any water, fresh or salt. You'll be a master before you're 25 and an owner by the time you are 30. Take a few days rest and think it over. Don't go off half-cock."

"Captain Perkins," I replied to him: "Captain Perkins, I'm right here to tell you that I wouldn't take the wheel of the City of Buffalo or any other steamer that ever slid sideways from the ways for the best \$10,000 that was ever minted. I have made up my mind and if you please I'd like to have my wages."

"He wrote an order for it and handed it over. 'If I did what's right, Barrett, I wouldn't pay you,' he said, rather huffy. 'It's unseamanlike to quit in the middle of a trip. I really ought to hold it up on you, but there's the order. Take it and go to the devil your own way. I've sailed the lakes and the seas forty years and you are tossing up the best chance I ever knew a 19-year-old boy to waste.'

"The next winter I was in New York, looking for a berth. We used to sail the lakes in summer and then go east and ship for short ocean voyages. On the docks I met Captain Perkins.

"You are just the man I want, John," he cried, making a rush for me in the crowd. "I've just been appointed captain of a steamer that runs between here and Aspinwall—down on the isthmus—and I want you and you know me, and I'm gladder than as if I found some money. I don't like strangers in my wheelhouse." And he started to drag me off to the steamer office to sign.

"I can't go you, captain," I told him. "I'm much obliged, but I never can perform with the steering gear of a steamboat again. I told you last summer wind sailing was more in my line."

"I thought you'd be over that crazy notion by this time. What made you throw up your berth? he asked suddenly.

"Then I told him the story. It made him so weak he sat down on a chaise table that was lying coiled up on the dock. He was white as a new sail cloth and trembled like a girl.

"Heavens and earth, John," he gasped, when he caught his wind, "with our head of steam on if we'd ever struck those rocks and the engines had stopped what would our boilers have done to us?"

"They would have sent us up to the tops of old man Hardy's sugar trees on the bluff, captain, and, being somewhat higher up than the rest of you, I would have headed the procession; but that's why I don't want to go as quartermaster."

"John," he said, wiping the sweat off his forehead with one hand and holding out the other in good-by—the perspiration started on the old man even in January, it's no wonder my shirt was wet in August—John, you are a wise young man. You know when to stop. I'll not urge you to ship with me, John. As a matter of fact, if you were to take my offer and go I would resign and you would steer for another skipper. Good-by, John, and God keep you. I must go to find me a quartermaster!"—Chicago Times Herald.

"Not a person aboard the boat had been awakened by the changing of the course. So far as I could ever learn—I wasn't making many inquiries—there was no one awake but myself and the engineers and firemen and one or two others. After I had pulled myself together I looked out of the front window of the wheelhouse. Directly below me sat the mate tipped back in an armchair asleep. He had dozed within an inch of death. After we had passed the Mentor headlands, seven or eight miles up the lake, an oiler, who had been projecting around below cleaning up the machinery, came up and climbed out on the walking-

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