

THE LITTLE BEACON KEEPER.

BY JULIA K. HILDBRETH.

The Mississippi River is a dangerous and disagreeable river to navigate, owing to its muddy, uneven banks and shallow water. Even in broad daylight, unless piloted with great care, large steamers often run aground, and then all the crew and even some of the passengers will work hard for hours to free themselves from their unpleasant and perilous position. At night this river in some places would be perfectly impassable, and not even the boldest or most foolhardy captain would venture to carry his vessel through the yellow water, if it were not for the lanterns hung upon poles driven into the mud at short intervals apart. These lanterns are kept burning by people hired by the Government for a small sum of money.

In a wild and almost uninhabited place in Tennessee, called Kennesaw, close by the banks of the Mississippi River, lived a boy named Hugh Davis. Although he was but fifteen years old, he supported his mother and little sister by keeping the beacon, and also by the sale of vegetables from a small garden which he cultivated with great care. Three years before my story begins his father, who was a sailor, had left his family for a six months' voyage. At the end of that time, while they were still hopefully expecting his return, news came that the vessel he sailed in had been wrecked and all on board lost. His wife felt his loss so keenly that she fell ill, and for a long time was unable to leave her room. So Hugh applied for the post of beacon keeper, and when his mother grew a little better they moved to the small cottage they now occupied.

One evening, when the great black clouds flying across the sky and a high wind told that a storm was near, Hugh said to his little sister Margery: "I am going to light the beacon now, Margery. Would you like to come with me?"

"Yes, indeed, Hugh," answered Margery; "only wait one moment until I tie my bonnet on tight, because the wind blows so hard that it will switch my hair all over my eyes and blind me."

"Take care of her, Hugh," said their mother, anxiously, as she peered out of the window at the fast-darkening sky. "It must be very rough on the river to-night."

"Yes, mother dear," replied Hugh; "we will be very careful."

Then Hugh put his tin box of matches in his pocket, and taking his sister's hand, left the house.

Close by the river was a steep stony hill which must be crossed before coming to the bank of the river, where Hugh's heavy old boat lay.

It was almost dark when they reached this hill, and as Hugh hurried Margery along the rough path, he said: "I am afraid we are late to-night, or else those black clouds make it look so. What a gust of wind!"

He exclaimed, as a blast struck them and blew his hat from his head. He turned quickly to recover it. As he did so his foot slipped, and he fell among the jagged rocks. Hugh sprang to his feet at once, but sank directly down again with a groan.

"Are you hurt?" inquired Margery, wistfully.

"I am afraid I have sprained my ankle," answered Hugh, trying to rise once more. But he found that he could not rest his foot upon the ground without great agony.

"Oh, poor Hugh, do not try to walk," cried Margery, anxiously watching his painful movements.

"But, Margery, it is so very late," replied Hugh; "and in this mist and darkness there will surely be some accident if the light is not up. Then I should lose my place, and what will become of you and mother! I must reach the beacon if I have to crawl on my hands and knees. It seems to me as though I could hear the boat coming now. And only to think, Margery, the place where my beacon is hung is one of the worst on the river. The rock extends yards beyond it, just under the surface of the water. Should anything happen to a steamer there, it would be dreadful. So you see I must light the beacon."

After Hugh had moved on a few steps he discovered that his match-box was missing, so Margery returned to look for it. After searching around a long time she found the box on the spot where Hugh had fallen. As she stooped to pick it up a thought flew

through her mind, and she said to herself: "I could light the lantern, if only Hugh would let me. I know how to row a little—enough to reach the post, and I am sure I could let down the beacon, for I have often done it."

So Margery ran back quickly to Hugh, who was still slowly and painfully moving forward, and said, coaxingly, "Let me go this once, Hugh. You will never reach the river in time with your poor hurt foot."

"No, no," answered Hugh, hastily; "you are too small, and might be swept away by the wind."

"Why, Hugh," replied Margery, indignantly. "I am not so very small. I am eight and a half, and ever so tall for my age. Do please let me go."

"I will tell you what you may do," said Hugh, after a moment's pause: "run on ahead and get everything ready: untie the boat and put in the oars. But keep the boat close to the shore until I reach her."

"Very well," replied Margery, as she sprang forward, delighted at being trusted even thus far. Very soon she had left Hugh far behind. The boat was easily unfastened, and the oars slipped into their places. Margery kept them in her hands as she seated herself in the centre of the boat to wait for Hugh. After sitting there a short time, looking first at the black, stormy sky and then at the misty dark river beneath her, she thought she heard Hugh approaching.

"How heavily he steps!" thought Margery, turning toward the land. "Poor fellow, how his sprained ankle must hurt!"

The sound kept on, but Hugh did not appear.

"It is the boat!" cried Margery at last, springing up and looking down the river. "He will never come in time."

Not more than half a mile away she saw the head-light of one of the largest steamers approaching. It appeared to be steering directly toward the rock where the lantern usually hung. The mist was heavy and thick, and the wind blew in violent gusts; even little Margery knew the terrible danger the boat ran in grounding on such a night as this; so without wasting a moment she seized one of the oars in both hands, and pressing it against the bank with all her might, sent the boat out into the water, then seating herself again, she grasped both oars firmly in her hands, and began struggling against the wind. At first Margery thought her boat did not move at all, but presently, to her great joy, she found that little by little she was nearing the beacon pole.

The sky was very black now, and when Margery looked at the dark water, and heard the regular beat of the paddles of the swiftly approaching steamer, she grew dreadfully frightened, and would have liked to be back on shore again if it had not been for the unlighted lantern and the great boat's peril. So, trying to forget her own danger, she rowed bravely on.

As it was only a short distance in reality to the rock, Margery soon found herself abreast of it. She secured her boat hastily by throwing the rope attached to it around the pole.

The beacon, or lantern, was drawn up and down by means of a slender rope run through a pulley at the top of the pole, and it was secured in its place by winding the rope around a button at the lower end of the pole.

It was the work of a moment to unfasten the rope and lower the lantern, but it was not so easy to light the lamp inside, for each time Margery struck a match the wind blew it out, and, besides, the boat rocking up and down made her very unsteady. Once she glanced over her shoulder at the steamer. How near it seemed! It had passed the beacon just below, and was now bearing down directly toward her; she knew this by the position of the lights on board that shone through the thick mist like stars.

"If I don't light the lamp soon," said Margery to herself, "they will run right upon the rock. They are coming so fast, and Hugh says this is the most dangerous part of the river." As she struck another match, the lantern on the seat beside her toppled over, and the lamp rolled into the bottom of the boat. She picked it up quickly, but was horrified to find that it had fallen into a pool of water, and that the wick was soaking wet. All the matches in the box would not light it now until it had been dried.

"Oh dear! oh dear!" cried Margery,

covering her eyes with her hands. "I can not think what to do now. If I only had something to make a bonfire of, I might perhaps save the steamer yet. But there is nothing dry anywhere around, not even a scrap of paper." At that moment a fierce gust of wind tore her sun-bonnet from her head, as she threw out her arm to catch it, her hand struck the lamp, and a thought came into her mind, and springing to her feet, she cried "I can make a torch, if only there is time."

Then, without one glance at the steamer, she tore off her apron, which was a large sun-bonnet around the handle of one of the oars. Then opening the lamp, she poured the oil it contained over this great wad of cotton cloth until it was completely soaked through. Seizing a handful of matches, she struck them all together upon the inner part of the lantern, and, before the wind had time to blow them out, applied the flame to the strange torch. In a moment there was a glorious blaze, and Margery sprang upon the gunwale of the boat, waving the oar over her head. The instant she did so the whistle of the steamer gave such a loud, sharp shriek that Margery almost fell into the water.

Recovering herself quickly, she balanced herself more firmly, and continued to move the torch backward and forward. The flame lit up the water on all sides, and shone brightly over little Margery herself. Her head was uncovered, and her long hair streamed out behind her like a yellow veil. Her face was pale, and her eyes looked earnestly on the steambot. Margery's heart now began to beat loud and fast, for she was afraid that her beacon had been lighted too late to save the huge boat. But after a great many loud whistles and shrieks, she saw that it moved much slower. Those on board had discovered their danger just in time, and were doing all in their power to send the vessel out into the stream again, for the pilot had been steering directly for the rock where the beacon usually hung. In two minutes more he would have struck upon it, and in the panic this would have caused many lives might have been lost.

As the vessel moved slowly forward, and finally stopped within a few feet of her, Margery saw that the Captain and several men were leaning over the side, shading their eyes with their hands, and endeavoring to see who it was that held the torch. Presently the Captain cried out:

"Why, it is little Margery Davis. Where is Hugh, Margery?"

"Hugh hurt himself as he was coming to light the lantern, so I came in his place," answered Margery.

"All alone?" inquired the Captain, wondering "But how did you come by the torch?"

"The lamp fell in the water, and so I made this out of my sun-bonnet and apron soaked in oil," said Margery, in a rather frightened voice, for while she was speaking a great many people came and stood by the rail to listen and hear what she was saying. When she had finished, one of the men cried out:

"Three cheers for little Margery Davis, the girl who saved our boat!"

Then they all shouted "Hurrah for Margery!" so loudly and heartily that little Margery laughed.

All at once there seemed to be some kind of commotion on deck, and a large man, with a sunburned face, and high light beard, pushed the people right and left as he forced his way to the front.

"Margery Davis, did you say?" cried he. "Let me see the little girl, mates."

After looking at her a moment he began to climb over the side of the vessel. Margery was terribly frightened when he sprang lightly into her boat, and taking the torch from her hand, held it so that the light fell full upon her face. Then lifting her in his arms, he said, in a trembling voice, "How came you here all alone? Where are your mother and Hugh?"

Margery thought he was angry, because he looked so strangely, and the tears came to her eyes as she answered:

"Mother is at home, and really and truly Hugh would have come and lit the beacon only he fell and hurt his foot. I ran on first, and when I saw the boat I knew he would never be in time. Please do not scold him."

The strange man did not answer Margery, but turning to the crowd on the steambot he said, "This is my little girl, mates. I

have been from home three years. She does not remember me, but I am proud of her."

At this the men gave three more cheers, and the Captain said, "Welcome home, Davis." Then he let down a lighted lantern to replace the old one, and turning to Margery, said:

"Thank you, Margery. You have done a grand thing for so small a girl, and I shall not forget it." He then gave orders for the boat to move on.

As soon as they were alone, Margery looked earnestly into the face of the man who held her hand, and said, "Are you really my papa?"

"Yes," answered he, softly, "and are you glad to see me?"

"Oh yes, indeed," replied Margery, kissing him. "But mamma will be almost too glad, for she has been crying about you ever and ever so long."

After Margery's father had swung the lantern, he rowed the boat to shore, where he found Hugh in a dreadful fright about Margery.

As he was so much older than the little girl, he remembered his father at once, and welcomed him with delight. His ankle was still painful, so his father assisted him to walk home. And Margery ran before to bear the good news to her mamma.

On the whole length of the Mississippi River's banks there was no happier family to be found that stormy night than the Davis family.

The next day Margery's father received a letter from the Captain of the vessel she had saved, telling him there was a good position awaiting him on board his boat.

Then in a few weeks the family left the small shabby house they had lived in, and moved to a much larger and pleasanter home.

Hugh, who had long since recovered from his injury, gave up his post of beacon tender, and now goes to one of the finest schools in the place.

Mr. Davis is at home very often, for he only makes short trips now. Little Margery sometimes accompanies him on these trips and then she is so petted by the Captain and all the crew that her father declares he is afraid she will be spoiled. But this has not happened yet, for she is still the same kind and thoughtful girl she was when she lit the torch to save the vessel from grounding on the beacon rock.—*Harper's Young People.*

TAKE WINE OR DIE.

An editor of some very popular works, and a man of immense energy, felt, as he expressed it, "below par," and went two hundred miles to see his family physician.

"My good friend," said the doctor, "you must take two glasses of wine a day, or you will die." Yes, he would die. Nothing but wine would save him. He must take that or die. Resolved to have another medical opinion, Mr. S. returned to the Metropolis, and went to consult Sir James Clark.

"Sir," said the eminent man "what are your habits?"

"I am a teetotaler, Sir James."

"Then, sir, you will get better all the sooner!"

So he did not drink wine, and he is not dead yet. He has done noble service for God and man for many years since his family doctor predicted his certain and speedy death. The fact is, alcoholic prescriptions often hasten death instead of preventing it, and many people have died through "drops of brandy" who would have lived had they resorted to beef tea, milk, oatmeal porridge, fresh air, cold water, and plenty of rest.—*Union Signal.*

CREAM PUFFS. They are excellent, and were never known to fail to puff, as is sometimes the case with other recipes. One cup of hot water, one-half cup of butter, boil together, stirring in a cupful of dry flour while boiling. When cold add three eggs not beaten. Drop by tablespoonsful on a buttered tin, and bake in a quick oven twenty-five minutes, being careful not to open the oven door more than is absolutely necessary. This makes fifteen puffs. For the cream: One cup of milk, one-half cup of sugar, one egg and three tablespoonsful of flour. Boil as for your custard, flavor with vanilla. When both this and the puffs are cool, open, and fill. Please let me know if you like these.

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