

"No, no!" A lecture, Professor: a lecture!" shouted a dozen voices.

Professor Ballentine smiled with quiet satisfaction.

"Thank you, gentlemen, we will take an early opportunity of beginning."

The boys devoted several days to improving their home. Each day added some new discovery to their list. Each night they lighted the signal light, keeping placed in it a candle found in the cook's stores when the oil gave out.

One afternoon, through some carelessness, the life-boat got loose and floated down the stream. Ned recovered it near the beach, and as the afternoon was fine, determined to sail around the rocks and see if the wreck was still in its old position.

By paddling from the stern he managed the boat quite easily, and once in view of the wreck decided on a brief visit to it.

He reached it at last, secured the boat to its side and clambered up the side of the dismantled Neptune.

"While I am here I may as well select some articles that will be of use at the camp," he soliloquized; and he became so absorbed in his task that the hours sped unnoticed away.

He had gathered quite a bundle of various useful articles, and had brought them on deck, when he noticed that it had become strangely and suddenly dark.

A morning breeze swept from the offing, and for the first time since the arrival on the island, the sky was overcast.

"I must hasten ashore: a storm is evidently coming up," murmured Ned, with some apprehension.

He climbed to the rail to draw the life-boat nearer to the ship.

No rope met his grasp. A thrill of terror pervaded his frame.

The life-boat was adrift, and he was alone on the wreck of the Neptune.

## CHAPTER XXI.

### THE SIGNAL LIGHT.

The sea had become rough, and the tide now covered the near shore quite a distance inland, making the beach seem a long distance off.

A mere speck bobbing up and down on the waves, Ned saw the life-boat drifting north.

"There is no time to lose," he muttered, grimly, as his first emotion of fear passed away. "I must reach the shore, and at once."

But how? It was probably half a mile to the nearest coast, and the waves each moment beat more fiercely among the breakers.

"I cannot venture in that boiling flood now," decided Ned. "I wonder if the old ship will stand the storm? If so, I might remain here until it is over."

The Neptune seemed tightly wedged in between the rocks, but Ned underestimated the force of a tempest on that dangerous coast.

He was startled at the rapidity with which the storm came on. Night seemed to break suddenly.

He looked with wonder at the distant headland. Myriads of strange birds flocked towards it, and he could plainly hear the babel of their cries.

The driving rain and the sweeping tempest came down at last. The Neptune strained and groaned. Ned clung to the rail as, with a grinding plunge, the ship was swept from the rocks and into the sea.

He had expected that the movement would cause the ship to sink, but, to his surprise, it righted itself and tossed to and fro on the waves.

His eyes, fixed in the direction of the beach, beyond which the camping place was, Ned noticed suddenly a light.

It was the binnacle lantern. The boys, undoubtedly unaware of his desperate situation, had lit the signal, as was their wont every night at dark.

Ned could only cling to the ship and wait for developments. It seemed to be beating down shore, and for the present was free of the breakers.

He shuddered, however, as he saw that its course took in the jagged rocks of the headland, and that should it strike these it would be dashed to pieces in a very few moments.

"A light!" he cried, suddenly.

His eyes, sweeping the ocean, had seen a bright glow in the distance. It tossed up and down on the waves.

"It's a ship!" he cried, excitedly. "If they see the island light, will they come towards it? What is that? Another light, and it is leaving the larger one."

Ned Darrow forgot his perilous position for the next half hour, as he watched the two lights he had discovered.

He could theorize as to what they meant. A passing ship had seen the signal, and a small boat had been sent ashore to visit it. He could see the lesser light dance on the waves, and go where the larger ship would not have dared to venture, direct to the rocks where the signal hung suspended, and there remain motionless for some time.

The signal lamp was lowered, he could make that out. Then the light below began to dance again, and traced its way back to the vessel.

"A boat has visited the shore. It will return to the ship and report that the island is inhabited, and the ship will wait till the storm is over and rescue us," cried Ned, excitedly.

Crash!

With a terrific blast of the tempest there mingled the sound of breaking timbers. The Neptune had struck the rocks.

There was no time to plan now; he must act quickly. As he saw the wreck recede and dash against the headland alternately, Ned Darrow understood that it would soon go to pieces.

He caught up a dozen cork life-preservers tied together, and went to the rail.

Then clasping them tightly, he dropped into that hissing, boiling flood of waters.

The rocks grazed him, the waves blinded him, but he held on manfully.

He floated round the headland, was driven shorewards, and finally fell exhausted but safe on the beach which he had left a few hours previous.

When he arose to his feet he cast a quick glance seawards.

The light of the ship was a dancing star fast disappearing, as though driven forward by the storm.

Then he clambered to the rocks. A sailor's knot secured the signal rope.

"Some one did visit the shore!" he cried.

Then Ned Darrow uttered an ejaculation of mingled excitement and suspense.

For the piece of rope that had held the bottle had been cut clean in twain by a quick stroke of a sharp knife.

The *round robin* was gone.

(To be Continued.)