

NED DARROW;
OR,
THE YOUNG CASTAWAYS.

CHAPTER XIII. *Continued.*

IN half an hour more he knew the contents of the box. He had cut and torn away one end of it, and reaching in found a dozen or more pasteboard packages.

He drew one forth and lit the candle, eagerly surveying the prize. It was a package of oatmeal.

He pulled a wry face at the prospect of a dry meal, but he was hungry, and the knowledge that he could not starve with such a prolific store, made him feel relieved and happy again.

But an hour later a new demand caused him untold anxiety. An intolerable thirst had seized him. At first he grew alarmed, then he reflected that although the probability of the storage of water below decks was very remote, some of the numerous casks and barrels around might contain some thirst-satisfying liquid.

His first effort on a small cask held tightly in place by other parcels around it, was a failure. He bored a hole in the head of the cask. A tiny stream dripped from it, a strong pungent odour penetrated the hold.

"Liquor!" he ejaculated, as he hastily plugged up the tap. "Better no water than that."

Ned was not discouraged. He immediately selected one of the largest barrels. It was with some difficulty that he penetrated the head. A few drops fell on his hand, and then as it became augmented to a small stream, he applied his lips to the orifice.

"Water!" he gasped, tumultuously, a grateful sob escaping him.

It was water, brackish and bitter to the taste, warm and unpalatable, but it assuaged his thirst. He stopped the stream with a wooden peg, and sat down contented.

The water was undoubtedly mineral water from some

spring in California, and its unpleasant taste Ned ascribed to possible medicinal qualities represented by the presence of strong chemical elements.

Day and night were alike to the imprisoned lad, but he calculated that several days must have passed when the monotony of his existence was broken upon by a number of strange and startling episodes.

Twice the ship had stopped in some port, as he could determine from the motion of the same. He hoped that she was about to unload her cargo, but the hold was apparently not visited.

It was, seemingly, about a day after the last stop of the ship, that Ned noticed that her course became more erratic. She seemed to progress more rapidly, and at times would twist and roll so that he was several times flung clear across the narrow space he occupied.

He could hear the chains rattle and the timbers strain and creak, and he feared at one mighty lurch of the schooner that the cargo would topple over and crush him.

"There must be a terrible storm raging," he murmured, concernedly.

Ned was unable to sleep, and was quite ill from the motion of the Neptune, which seemed to be struggling with a violent gale at sea. He suddenly felt a perceptible moisture on the slippery floor. It increased to a slight flood a few moments later.

At first he feared the barrel of water was leaking, but he found the peg intact. Then, as the water became ankle deep, he uttered a cry of awful dread.

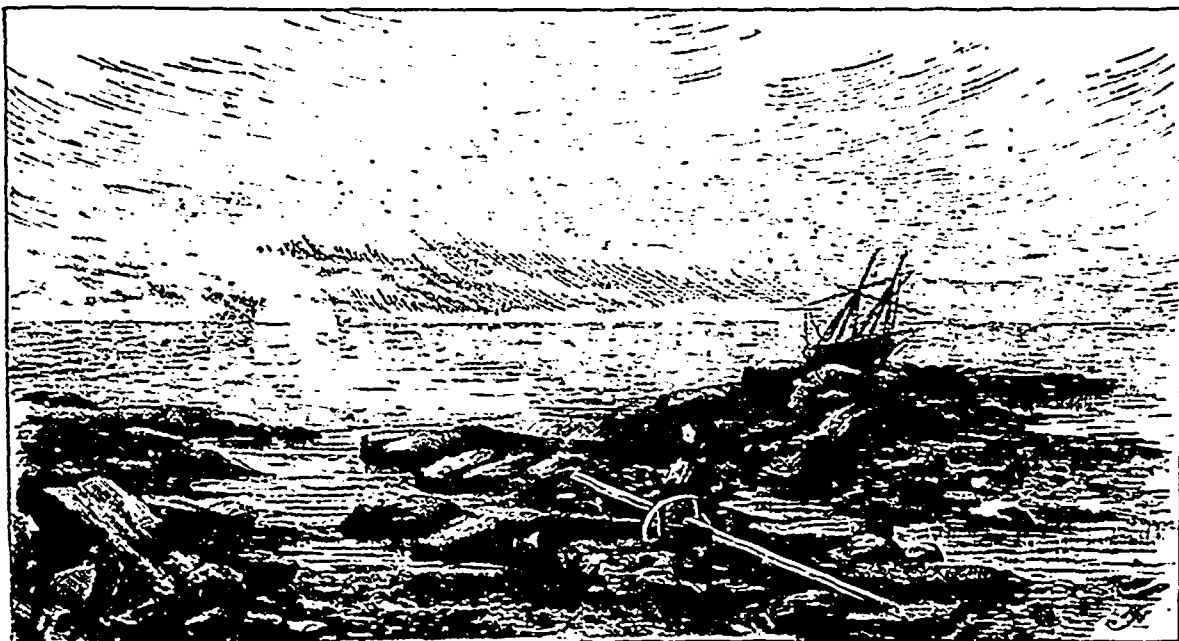
There could be but one reasonable theory as to the presence of the water.

The Neptune had sprung a-leak, and the water was fast filling the hold.

Death in a new form menaced him. In the face of this peril, hopelessly abandoning himself to his fate, Ned Darrow fell to his knees and prayed long and fervently for courage and deliverance.

Suddenly he started, and fixed his eye on the blank darkness before him. Abruptly before his vision a dim chink of light seemed to appear.

It grew in luminous radiance, it outlined a square space in the wall of merchandise. A box was withdrawn from its place, and Ned, transfixed with joy, saw two rough faces appear beyond the opening.



A LONELY WRECK UPON A LONLIER SHORE.