



THE TIGER OF MYSORE

CHAPTER I

A LOST FATHER

THERE is no saying, lad, no saying at all. All I know is that your father the captain was washed ashore at the same time as I was. As you have heard me say, I owed my life to him. I was pretty nigh gone when I caught sight of him holding on to a spar ; spent as I was, I managed to give a shout loud enough to catch his ear. He looked round. I waved my hand and shouted, ' Good-bye, Captain ! ' Then I sank lower and lower, and felt that it was all over, when, half in a dream, I heard your father's voice shout, ' Hold on, Ben ! ' I gave one more struggle, and then I felt him catch me by the arm. I don't remember what happened, until I found myself lashed to the spar beside him. ' That is right, Ben,' he said cheerily, as I held up my head ; ' you will do now. I had a sharp tussle to get you here, but it is all right. We are setting inshore fast. Pull yourself together, for we shall have a rough time of it in the surf. Anyhow we will stick together, come what may.'

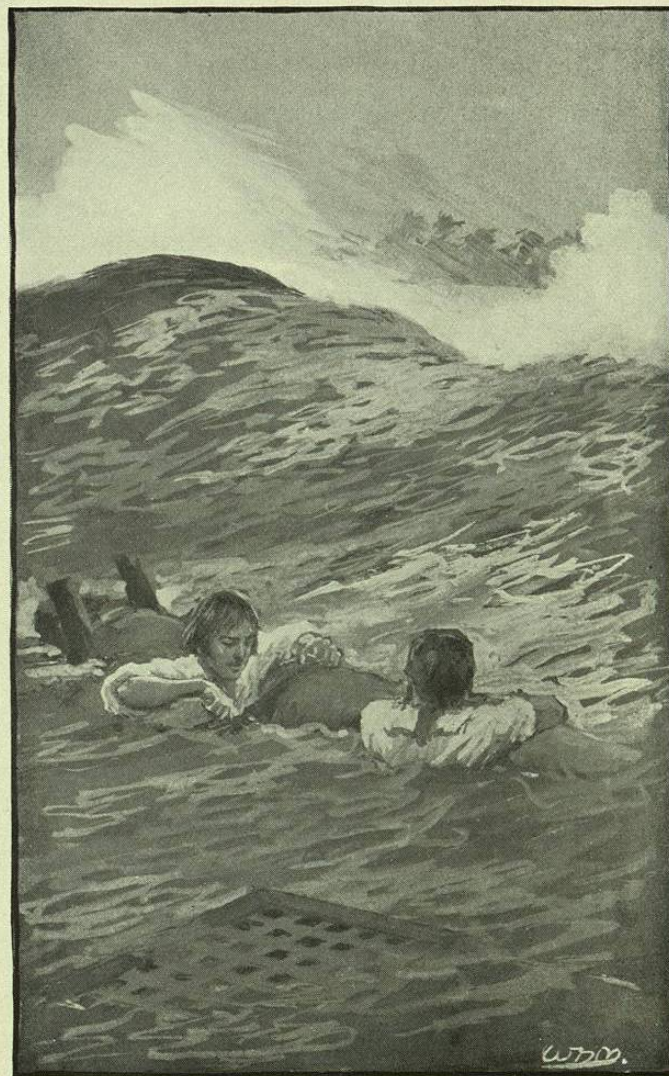
" As the waves lifted us up I saw the coast with its groves of cocoa-nuts almost down to the water's edge, and white sheets of surf running up high on the sandy beach. It was

not more than a hundred yards away, and the captain sang out 'Hurrah! There are some natives coming down; they will give us a hand.' Next time we came up on a wave he said, 'When we get close, Ben, we must cut ourselves adrift from this spar, or it will crush the life out of us; but before we do that I will tie the two of us together.'

"He cut a bit of rope from the raffle hanging from the spar, and tied one end round my waist and the other round his own, leaving about five fathoms loose between us.

"'There,' he shouted in my ear. 'If either of us gets chucked well up and the natives get a hold of him, the other must come up too. Now mind, Ben, keep broadside on to the wave if you can, and let it roll you up as far as it will take you; then, when you feel that its force is spent, stick your fingers and toes into the sand and hold on like grim death.' Well, we drifted nearer and nearer until, just as we got to the point where the great waves tumbled over, the captain cut the lashings and swam a little away, so as to be clear of the spar; then a big wave came towering up; I was carried along like a straw in a whirlpool. Then there was a crash that pretty nigh knocked the senses out of me. I do not know what happened afterwards. It was a confusion of white water rushing past and over me. Then for a moment I stopped, and at once made a clutch at the ground that I had been rolling over. There was a big strain and I was hauled backwards as if a team of wild horses were pulling at me. Then there was a jerk, and I knew nothing more till I woke up and found myself on the sands, out of reach of the surf.

"Your father did not come to for half-an-hour; he had been hurt a bit worse than I had, but at last he came round. Well, we were kept three months in a sort of castle place, and then one day a party of chaps with guns and swords came into the yard where we were sitting. The man who seemed the head of the fellows who had been keeping us prisoners, walked up with one who was evidently an officer over the



THE CAPTAIN AND BEN LASH THEMSELVES TO THE SPAR.

chaps as had just arrived. He looked at us both, and then laid his hand on the captain; then the others came up. The captain had just time to say, 'We are going to be parted, Ben. God bless you! If ever you get back, give my love to my wife, and tell her what has happened to me, and that she must keep up her heart, for I shall make a bolt of it the first time I get a chance.' The next day I was taken off to a place they call Calicut. There I stopped a year, and then the rajah of the place joined the English against Tippoo, who was lord of all the country, and I was released. I had got by that time to talk their lingo pretty well, though I have forgotten it all now, and I had found out that the chaps who had taken your father away were a party sent down by Tippoo, who, having heard that two Englishmen had been cast on shore, had insisted upon one of them being handed over to him. It is known that a great many of the prisoners in Tippoo's hands have been murdered in their dungeons. He has sworn over and over again that he has no European prisoners, but every one knows that he has numbers of them in his hands. Whether the captain is one of those who have been murdered, or whether he is still in one of Tippoo's dungeons, is more than I or any one else can say."

"Well, as I have told you, Ben, that is what we mean to find out."

"I know that is what your mother has often said, lad, but it seems to me that you have more chance of finding the man in the moon than you have of learning whether your father is alive or not."

"Well, we are going to try, anyhow, Ben. I know it's a difficult job, but mother and I have talked it over, ever since you came home with the news, three years ago, so I have made up my mind and nothing can change me. You see, I have more chances than most people would have. Being a boy is all in my favour; and then, you know, I talk the language just as well as English."

"Yes, of course that is a pull, and a big one; but it is a desperate undertaking, lad, and I can't say as I see how it is to be done."

"I don't see either, Ben, and I don't expect to see until we get out there; but, desperate or not, mother and I are going to try."

Dick Holland, the speaker, was a lad of some fifteen years of age; his father, who was captain of a fine East Indiaman, had sailed from London when he was nine, and had never returned. No news had been received of the ship after she touched at the Cape, and it was supposed that she had gone down with all hands, until, nearly three years later, her boatswain, Ben Birket, had entered the East India Company's office, and reported that he himself, and the captain, had been cast ashore on the territories of the Rajah of Coorg, the sole survivors, as far as he knew, of the *Hooghley*. After an interview with the Directors, he had gone straight to the house at Shadwell inhabited by Mrs. Holland. She had left there, but had removed to a smaller one a short distance away, where she lived upon the interest of the sum that her husband had invested from his savings, and from a small pension granted to her by the Company.

Mrs. Holland was a half-caste, the daughter of an English woman who had married a young rajah. Her mother's life had been a happy one; but when her daughter had reached the age of sixteen she died, obtaining on her deathbed the rajah's consent that the girl should be sent to England to be educated, while her son, who was three years younger, should remain with his father. Over him she had exercised but little influence; he had been brought up like the sons of other native princes, and, save for his somewhat light complexion, the English blood in his veins would never have been suspected.

Margaret, on the other hand, had been under her mother's care, and as the latter had always hoped that the girl would,

at any rate for a time, go to her family in England, she had always conversed with her in that language, and had, until her decreasing strength rendered it no longer possible, given her an English education.

In complexion and appearance she took far more after her English mother than the boy had done, and, save for her soft, dark eyes, and glossy, jet-black hair, might have passed as of pure English blood. When she sailed, it was with the intention of returning to India in the course of a few years; but this arrangement was overthrown by the fact that on the voyage, John Holland, the handsome young first mate of the Indiaman, completely won her heart, and they were married a fortnight after the vessel came up the Thames. The matter would not have been so hurried had not a letter she posted on landing, to her mother's sister, who had promised her a home, received an answer written in a strain which determined her to yield at once to John Holland's pressing entreaties that they should be married without delay. Her aunt had replied that she had consented to overlook the conduct of her mother in uniting herself to a native, and to receive her for a year at the rectory, but that her behaviour in so precipitately engaging herself to a rough sailor, rendered it impossible to countenance her. As she stated that she had come over with a sum sufficient to pay her expenses while in England, she advised her to ask the captain—who, by the way, must have grossly neglected his duties by allowing an intimacy between her and his mate—to place her in some school where she would be well looked after until her return to India.

The Indian blood in Margaret's veins boiled fiercely, and she wrote her aunt a letter which caused that lady to congratulate herself on the good fortune that had prevented her from having to receive under her roof a girl of so objectionable and violent a character. Although the language that John Holland used concerning this letter was strong indeed, he was well satisfied, as he had foreseen that it was not probable Mar-

garet's friends would have allowed her to marry him without communicating with her father, and that the rajah might have projects of his own for her disposal. He laid the case before the captain, who placed her in charge of his wife until the marriage took place. Except for the long absences of her husband, Margaret's life had been a very happy one, and she was looking forward to the time when, after another voyage, he would be able to give up his profession and settle down upon his savings.

When months passed by and no news came of the *Hooghley* having reached port, Mrs. Holland at once gave up her house and moved into a smaller one; for although her income would have been sufficient to enable her to remain where she was, she determined to save every penny she was able for the sake of her boy. She was possessed of strong common-sense and firmness of character, and when Ben Birket returned with his tale, he was surprised at the composure with which she received it.

"I have always," she said, "had a conviction that John was still alive, and have not allowed Dick to think of his father as dead; and now I believe as firmly as before that some day John will be restored to me. I myself can do nothing towards aiding him. A woman can do little here; she can do nothing in India, save among her own people. I shall wait patiently for a time; it may be that this war will result in his release. But in the meantime I shall continue to prepare Dick to take up the search for him as soon as he is old enough. I hear once a year from my brother, who is now rajah, and he will be able to aid my boy in many ways. However, for a time I must be patient and wait. I have learnt to wait during my husband's long absences; and besides, I think that the women of India are a patient race. I trust that John will yet come home to me, but if not, when it is time we will try to rescue him."

Ben said nothing at the time to damp her courage, but he

shook his head as he left the cottage. "Poor creature," he said. "I would not say anything to discourage her, but for a woman and boy to try to get a captive out of the claws of the Tiger of Mysore is just madness."

Each time he returned from a voyage Ben called upon Mrs. Holland. He himself had given up every vestige of hope when it was known that the name of her husband was not among the list of those whom Tippoo had been forced to release. Margaret Holland, however, still clung to hope. Her face was paler, and there was a set, pathetic expression in it; so when she spoke of her husband as being still alive, Ben would sooner have cut out his tongue than allow the slightest word indicative of his own feeling of certainty as to the captain's fate, to escape him, and he always made a pretence of entering warmly into her plans. The training, as she considered it, of her son, went on steadily; she always conversed with him in her father's language, and he was able to speak it as well as English. She was ever impressing upon him that he must be strong and active. When he was twelve she engaged an old soldier, who had set up a sort of academy, to instruct him in the use of the sword and in such exercises as were calculated to strengthen his muscles and to give him strength and agility. Unlike most mothers, she had no word of reproach when he returned home from school with a puffed face or cut lips, the signs of battle.

"I do not want you to be quarrelsome," she often said to him, "but I have heard your father say that a man who can use his fists well is sure to be cool and quick in any emergency. You know what is before you, and these qualities are of far more importance in your case than any book learning; therefore, Dick, I say, never quarrel on your own account, but whenever you see a boy bullying a smaller one, take the opportunity of giving him a lesson while learning one yourself. In the days of old, you know, the first duty of a true knight was to succour the oppressed, and I want you to be a true