

knight. You will get thrashed sometimes, no doubt, but don't mind that; perhaps next time you will turn the tables."

Dick acted upon this advice, and by the time he was fifteen had established a reputation among not only the boys of his own school, but of the district. In addition to his strength and quickness, he had a fund of dogged endurance and imperturbable good temper that did not fail him, even on the rare occasions when, in combats with boys much older than himself, he was forced to admit himself defeated. The fact that he fought, not because he was angry, but as if it were a matter of business, gave him a great advantage, and his readiness to take up the cause of any boy ill-treated by another was so notorious that "I will tell Dick Holland" became a threat that saved many a boy from being bullied. Ten days before his conversation with Ben his mother had said,—

"Dick, I can stand this no longer; I have tried to be patient for six years, but I can be patient no longer. I feel that another year of suspense would kill me. Therefore I have made up my mind to sail at once. The voyage will take us five months, and perhaps you may have to remain some little time at my brother's before you can start. Now that the time is come, I think that perhaps I am about to do wrong, and that it may cost you your life. But I cannot help it, Dick; I dream of your father almost every night, and I wake up thinking that I hear him calling upon me to help him. I feel that I should go mad if this were to last much longer."

"I am ready, mother," the boy said earnestly. "I have been hoping for some time that you would say you would start soon; and though I have not, of course, the strength of a man, I think that will be more than made up by the advantage I should have as a boy, in looking for my father; and at any rate, from what you tell me, I should think that I am quite as strong as an average native of your country. Anyhow, mother, I am sure that it will be best for us to go now. It must have been awful for you, waiting all this time, and though

you have never said anything about it, I have noticed for a long time that you were looking ill, and was sure that you were worrying terribly. What would be the use of staying any longer? I should not be very much stronger in another year than I am now, and a year would seem an age to father."

And so it was settled, and Mrs. Holland at once began to make preparations for their departure. She had already, without saying anything to Dick, given notice that she should give up the house. She had, during the six years, saved a sum of money amply sufficient for the expenses of the journey and outfit, and she had now only to order clothes for herself and Dick, and to part with her furniture. Ben, on his return, had heard with grave apprehension that she was about to carry out her intention; but as he saw that any remonstrance on his part would be worse than useless, he abstained from offering any, and warmly entered into her plans. After an hour's talk he had proposed to Dick to go out for a stroll with him.

"I am glad to have a talk with you, Ben," Dick said. "Of course, I have heard from mother what you told her when you came home, but I shall be glad to hear it from you, so as to know exactly how it all was. You know she feels sure that father is still alive; I should like to know what your opinion really is about it. Of course it will make no difference, as I should never say anything to her; but I should like to know whether you think there is any possibility of his being alive."

To this Ben had replied as already related. He was silent when Dick asserted that, desperate or not, he intended to carry out his mother's plan.

"I would not say as I think it altogether desperate, as far as you are concerned," he said thoughtfully. "It don't seem to me as there is much chance of your ever getting news of your father, lad; and as to getting him out of prison if you do come to hear of him, why, honest, I would not give a quid of baccy for your chance; but I don't say as I think that it is an

altogether desperate job, as far as you are concerned yourself. Talking their lingo as you do, it's just possible as you might be able to travel about in disguise without any one finding you out, especially as the Rajah, your uncle, ought to be able to help you a bit, and put you in the way of things, and perhaps send some trusty chap along with you. There is no doubt you are strong for your age, and being thin and nothing but muscle, you would pass better as a native than if you had been thick and chunky. My old woman tells me as you have a regular name as a fighter, and that you have given a lesson to many a bully in the neighbourhood. Altogether there is a lot in your favour, and I don't see why you should not pull through all right; at any rate, even should the worst come to the worst, and you do get news somehow that your poor father has gone down, I am sure it will be better for your mother than going on as she has done for the last six years, just wearing herself out with anxiety."

"I am sure it will, Ben. I can tell you that it is as much as I can do sometimes not to burst out crying when I see her sitting by the hour, with her eyes open, but not seeing anything or moving as much as a finger—just thinking, and thinking, and thinking. I wish we were going out in your ship, Ben."

"I wish you was, lad; but it will be five or six weeks before we are off again. Anyhow, the ship you are going in—the *Madras*—is a fine craft, and the captain bears as high a character as any one in the Company's fleet. Well, lad, I hope that it will all turn out well. If I could have talked the lingo like a native, I would have been glad to have gone with you and taken my chances. The captain saved my life in that wreck, and it would only have been right that I should risk mine for him, if there was but a shadow of chance of its being of use; but I know that in a job of this sort I could be of no good whatsoever, and should be getting you into trouble before we had gone a mile together."

"I am sure that you would help if you could, Ben; but of course you could be of no use."

"And when do you think of being home again, lad?"

"There is no saying, Ben—it may be years; but however long it takes I sha'n't give it up until I find out for certain what has become of my father."

"And ain't there a chance of hearing how you are getting on, Dick? I shall think of you and your mother often and often when I am on deck keeping my watch at night, and it will seem hard that I mayn't be able to hear for years as to what you are doing."

"The only thing that I can do, Ben, will be to write if I get a chance of sending a messenger, or for my mother to write to you to the office."

"That is it. You send a letter to Ben Birket, boatswain of the *Madeira*, care of East India Company, Leadenhall Street, and I shall get it sooner or later. Of course I shall not expect a long yarn, but just two or three words to tell me how you are getting on, and whether you have got any news of your father. And if you come back to England, leave your address at the Company's office for me, for it ain't an easy matter to find any one out in London unless you have got their bearings right."

Ten days later Mrs. Holland and Dick embarked on the *Madras*. Dick had been warned by his mother to say nothing to any one on board as to the object of their voyage.

"I shall mention," she said, "that I am going out to make some inquiries respecting the truth of a report that has reached me, that some of those on board the *Hooghley*, of which my husband was captain, survived the wreck, and were taken up the country. That will be quite sufficient. Say nothing about my having been born in India, or that my father was a native rajah. Some of these officials—and still more, their wives—are very prejudiced, and consider themselves to be quite different beings to the natives of the country. I found

it so on my voyage to England ; at any rate, we don't want our affairs talked about ; it will be quite sufficient for people to know that we are, as I said, going out to make some inquiries about the truth of this rumor."

"All right, mother. At any rate, the captain has told you that he will look after you and make things comfortable for you, so we need not care about anything else."

"We certainly need not care, Dick ; but it is much more agreeable to get on nicely with every one. I was very pleased when Captain Barstow called yesterday and said that, having heard at the office that the Mrs. Holland on the passenger list was the widow of his old shipmate, John Holland, he had come round to see if there was anything that he could do for her, and he promised to do all in his power to make us comfortable. Of course, I told him that I did not regard myself as Captain Holland's widow—that all we knew was that he had got safely ashore, and had been taken up to Mysore, and as I had a strong conviction he was still alive, I was going out to endeavor to ascertain from native sources whether he was still living. 'Well, ma'am, I hope that you will succeed,' he said. 'All this is new to me. I thought he was drowned when the *Hooghley* went ashore. Anyhow, Mrs. Holland, I honour you for making this journey just on the off chance of hearing something of your husband, and you may be sure I will do all I can to make the voyage a pleasant one for you.' So you see we shall start favourably, Dick, for the captain can do a great deal towards adding to the comfort of a passenger. When it is known by the purser and steward that a lady is under the special care of the captain, it ensures her a larger share of civility and special attentions than she might otherwise obtain."

As soon as they went on board, indeed, the captain came up to them.

"Good-morning, Mrs. Holland," he said. "You have done quite right to come on board early. It gives you a

chance of being attended to before the stewards are being called for by twenty people at once." He beckoned to a midshipman. "Mr. Hart, please tell the purser I wish to speak to him.—So this is your son, Mrs. Holland? A fine, straight-looking young fellow ; are you going to put him in the Service? You have a strong claim, you know, which I am sure the Board would acknowledge."

"Do you know, Captain, it is a matter that I have hardly thought of—in fact, I have for years been so determined to go out and try and obtain some news of my husband, as soon as Dick was old enough to journey about as my protector, that I have not thought, as I ought to have done, what profession he should follow. However, he is only fifteen yet, and there will be time enough when he gets back."

"If he is to go into the Service, the sooner the better, ma'am—one can hardly begin too young. However, I don't say there are not plenty of good sailors afloat who did not enter until a couple of years older than he is—there is no strict rule as to age. Only fifteen, is he? I should have taken him for at least a year older. However, if you like, Mrs. Holland, I will put him in the way of learning a good deal during the voyage. He might as well be doing that as loafing about the deck all day."

"Much better, Captain. I am very much obliged to you, and I am sure that he will be, too."

"I should like it immensely, Captain," Dick exclaimed.

At this moment the purser came up.

"Mr. Stevenson," the captain said, "this is Mrs. Holland. She is the wife of my old friend John Holland—we were midshipmen together on board the *Ganges*. He commanded the *Hooghley*, which was lost, you know, five or six years ago, somewhere near Calicut. There were two or three survivors, and he was one of them, and it seems that he was taken up the country ; so Mrs. Holland is going out to endeavour to ascertain whether he may not be still alive, though perhaps de-

tained by one of those native princes. Please do everything you can to make her comfortable, and tell the head steward that it is my particular wish she shall be well attended to. Who is she berthed with?"

The purser took the passenger list from his pocket.

"She is with Mrs. Colonel Williamson and the wife of Commissioner Larkins."

The captain gave a grunt of dissatisfaction. The purser went on. "There is a small cabin vacant, Captain. Two ladies who were to have it—a mother and daughter—have, I hear this morning, been unexpectedly detained, owing to the sudden illness of one of them. Their heavy baggage is all in the hold, and must go on, and they will follow in the next ship. Shall I put Mrs. Holland in there?"

"Certainly; this is most fortunate. I don't think that you would have been comfortable with the other two, Mrs. Holland. I don't know the colonel's wife, but Mrs. Larkins has travelled with us before, and I had quite enough of her on that voyage."

"Thank you very much, Captain. It will indeed be a comfort to have a cabin to myself."

Dick found that he was berthed with two young cadets, whose names, he learned from the cards fastened over the bunks, were Latham and Fellows. Half-an-hour after the arrival of the Hollands on board, the passengers began to pour in rapidly, and the deck of the *Madras* was soon crowded with them, their friends, and their luggage. Below, all was bustle and confusion. Men shouted angrily to stewards; women, laden with parcels, blocked the gangway, and appealed helplessly to every one for information and aid; sailors carried down trunks and portmanteaus; and Mrs. Holland, when she emerged from her cabin, having stowed away her belongings and made things tidy, congratulated herself on having been the first on board, and so had not only avoided all this confusion, but obtained a separate cabin, which she might not otherwise

have been able to do, as the captain would have been too busy to devote any special attention to her. After having handed her over to the care of the purser, Captain Barstow had spoken to the second officer, who happened to be passing.

"Mr. Rawlinson," he said, "this is the son of my old friend, Captain Holland. He is going out with his mother. I wish you would keep your eye upon him, and let him join the midshipmen in their studies with you in the morning. Possibly he may enter the Service, and it will be a great advantage to him to have got up navigation a bit before he does so; at any rate it will occupy his mind and keep him out of mischief. A lad of his age would be like a fish out of water among the passengers on the quarter-deck."

"Ay, ay, sir. I will do what I can for him." And he hurried away.

Dick saw that, for the present, there was nothing to be done but to look on, and it was not until the next morning, when the *Madras* was making her way south, outside the Goodwins, that the second officer spoke to him.

"Ah, there you are, lad! I have been too busy to think of you, and it will be another day or two before we settle down to regular work; however, I will introduce you to one or two of the midshipmen, and they will make you free of the ship."

Dick was indeed already beginning to feel at home. The long table, full from end to end, had presented such a contrast to his quiet dinner with his mother, that, as he sat down beside her and looked around, he thought he should never get to speak to any one throughout the voyage. However, he had scarcely settled himself when a gentleman in a naval uniform, next to him, made the remark:

"Well, youngster, what do you think of all this? I suppose it is all new to you?"

"It is, sir. It seems very strange at first, but I suppose I shall get accustomed to it."

"Oh, yes. You will find it pleasant enough by-and-bye.

I am the ship's doctor ; the purser has been telling me about you and your mother. I made one voyage with your father ; it was my first, and a kinder captain I never sailed with. I heard from the purser that there seems to be a chance of his being still alive, and that your mother is going out to try and find out something about him. I hope most sincerely that she may succeed in doing so ; but he has been missing a long time now. Still, that is no reason why she should not find him ; there have been instances where men have been kept for years by some of these rascally natives—why, goodness only knows, except, I suppose, because they fear and hate us, and think that some time or other an English prisoner may be useful to them. Your mother looks far from strong," he went on, as he glanced across Dick to Mrs. Holland, who was talking to a lady on the other side of her ; " has she been ill ? "

" No, sir ; I have never known her ill yet. She has been worrying herself a great deal ; she has waited so long, because she did not like to go out until she could take me with her. She has no friends in England with whom she could leave me. She looks a good deal better now than she did a month ago. I think directly she settled to come out, and had something to do, she became better."

" That is quite natural," the doctor said. " There is nothing so trying as inactivity. I have no doubt that the sea air will quite set her up again. It performs almost miracles on the homeward-bound passengers. They come on board looking pale and listless and washed out ; at the end of a month at sea they are different creatures altogether."

The purser had taken pains to seat Mrs. Holland at table next to a person who would be a pleasant companion for her, and the lady she was now talking to was the wife of a chaplain in the army. She had, a year before, returned from India in the *Madras*, and he knew her to be a kind and pleasant woman.

Dick did not care for his cabin mates. They were young fellows of about eighteen years of age ; one was a nephew of

a Director of the Company, the other the son of a high Indian official. They paid but little attention to him, generally ignoring him altogether, and conversing about things and people in India in the tone of men to whom such matters were quite familiar.

In three or four days Dick became on good terms with the six midshipmen the *Madras* carried ; two of them were younger than himself, two somewhat older, while the others were nearly out of their time, and hoped that this would be their last trip in the midshipmen's berth. The four younger lads studied two hours every morning under the second officer's instruction, and Dick took his place at the table regularly with them. Mathematics had been the only subject in which he had at all distinguished himself at school, and he found himself able to give satisfaction to Mr. Rawlinson in his studies of navigation. After this work was over, they had an hour's practical instruction by the boatswain's mate, on knotting and splicing ropes, and in other similar matters.

In a fortnight he had learned the names and uses of what had at first seemed to him the innumerable ropes, and long before that had accompanied one of the midshipmen aloft. On the first occasion that he did so, two of the topmen followed him, with the intention of carrying out the usual custom of lashing him to the ratlines until he paid his footing. Seeing them coming up, the midshipman laughed, and told Dick what was in store for him. The boy had been as awkward as most beginners in climbing the shrouds, the looseness and give of the ratlines puzzling him ; but he had for years practised climbing ropes in the gymnasium at Shadwell, and was confident in his power to do anything in that way. The consequence was, that as soon as the sailors gained the top, where he and the midshipman were standing, Dick seized one of the halliards and with a merry laugh came down hand over hand. A minute later, he stood on the deck.

" Well done, youngster," said the boatswain's mate, who

happened to be standing by, as Dick's feet touched the deck. "This may be the first time you have been on board a ship, but it is easy to see that it isn't the first, by a long way, that you have been on a rope. Could you go up again?"

"Yes, I should think so," Dick said. "I have never climbed so high as that, because I have never had the chance; but it ought to be easy enough."

The man laughed. "There are not many sailors who can do it," he said. "Well, let us see how high you will get."

As Dick was accustomed to go up a rope thirty feet high, hand over hand, without using his legs, he was confident that, with their assistance, he could get up to the main-top, lofty as it was, and he at once threw off his jacket and started. He found the task harder than he had anticipated; but he did it without a pause. He was glad, however, when the two sailors above grasped him by the arms, and placed him beside them on the main-top.

"Well, sir," one said, admiringly, "we thought you was a Johnny Newcome by the way you went up the ratlines, but you came up that rope like a monkey. Well, sir, you are free up here, and if you weren't it would not make much odds to you, for it would take half the ship's company to capture you."

"I don't want to get off paying my footing," Dick said, pulling five shillings from his pocket and handing them to the sailors; for his mother had told him that it was the custom on first going aloft to make a present to them, and had given him the money for the purpose. "I can climb, but I don't know anything about ropes, and I shall be very much obliged if you will teach me all you can."

CHAPTER II

A BRUSH WITH PRIVATEERS

DICK was surprised when, on descending to the deck, he found that what seemed to him a by no means very difficult feat had attracted general attention. Not only did half a dozen of the sailors pat him on the back with exclamations expressive of their surprise and admiration, but the other midshipmen spoke quite as warmly, the eldest saying, "I could have got up the rope, Holland, but I could not have gone up straight, as you did, without stopping for a bit to take breath. You don't look so very strong, either."

"I think that it is knack more than strength," Dick replied. "I have done a lot of practice at climbing, for I have always wanted to get strong, and I heard that there was no better exercise."

When, presently, Dick went aft to the quarter-deck, Captain Barstow said to him, "You have astonished us all, lad. I could hardly believe my eyes when I saw you going up that rope. I first caught sight of you when you had climbed but twenty feet, and wondered how far you would get at that pace. I would have wagered a hundred guineas to one that you would not have kept it up to the top. Well, lad, whatever profession you take to, it is certain that you will be a good sailor spoilt."

They had now been three weeks out, but had made slow progress, for the winds had been light, and mostly from the south-west. "This is very dull work," the doctor said to Dick one day at dinner. "Here we are, three weeks out, and still hardly beyond the Channel. There is one consolation: it is not the fault of the ship; she has been doing well under the circumstances, but the fates have been against her