

"Yes, Mrs. Seaforth; one is always interested in a ship when one gets down as far as this. She may be another Indiaman, and although the *Madras* has no claim to any great speed in a light breeze like this, one never likes being passed."

The explanation was considered as sufficient, and nothing more was said on the subject. By sunset the upper sails of the stranger could be made out from the deck of the *Madras*. Mr. Green again went up and had a look at her.

"She is coming up fast," he said, when he rejoined the captain. "She keeps so dead in our wake that I can't make out whether she is a brig or a three-master; but I fancy that she is a brig, by the size and cut of her sails. I can see the other craft plainly enough now; she is eight or ten miles west of the other and has closed in towards her since I made her out before. I have no doubt that she is a large schooner."

"Well, it is a comfort that they are not a few miles nearer, Mr. Green. There is no chance of their overtaking us before morning, so we shall be able to keep our watches as usual, and shall have time to get ready for a fight if there is to be one."

"The sooner the better, sir, so that it is daylight; it is quite certain that they have the legs of us."

In the morning when Dick came up he found that the wind had quite died away, and the sails hung loosely from the yards. Looking astern, he saw two vessels; they were some six miles away, and perhaps two miles apart. As they lay without steerage way they had swung partly round, and he saw that they were a brig and a schooner. The former he had no doubt, from her lofty masts and general appearance, was the same the *Madras* had passed six days before. As the passengers came up they were full of curiosity as to the vessels.

"Of course, we know no more actually than you do yourselves," the captain said, as some of them gathered round and questioned him, "but I may as well tell you frankly that we have very little doubt about their being two French priva-

teers. We passed them during the gale, and had some hopes that we should not see them again; but in the light breeze we have been having during the last few days they have made up lost ground, and I am afraid we shall have to fight them."

Exclamations of alarm broke from some of the ladies who heard his words.

"You need not be alarmed, ladies," he went on. "We carry twelve guns, you know, and I expect that all of them are of heavier metal than theirs. The *Madras* is a strongly-built ship, and will stand a good deal more hammering than those light craft will, so that I have no doubt we shall give a good account of ourselves."

After breakfast the hatches were opened and the gun-cases belonging to the passengers brought on deck. Scarce one of them but had a rifle, and many had in addition a shotgun. The day passed without any change in the positions of the vessels, for they still lay becalmed.

"Why don't they get out their boats, and tow their vessels up?" Dick asked the doctor.

"Because they would be throwing away their chances if they did so. They know that we cannot get away from them, and we might smash up their boats as soon as they came within range. Besides, their speed and superior handiness give them a pull over us when fighting under sail. They may try to tow up during the night, if they think they are strong enough to take us by boarding, but I hardly think they will do so."

The night, however, passed off quietly, but in the morning a light breeze sprang up from the east, the sails were trimmed, and the *Madras* again began to move through the water. By breakfast time, the craft behind had visibly decreased their distance. The meal was a silent one. When it was over the captain said, "As soon as those fellows open fire, ladies, I must ask you all to go down into the hold. The sailors have already cleared a space below the water-line large enough for

you, and they will take down some cushions and so on to make you as comfortable as possible under the circumstances. Pray do not be alarmed at any noises you may hear; you will be below the water-line and perfectly safe from their shot, and you may be sure that we shall do our best to keep the scoundrels from boarding us; and I will let you know from time to time how matters are going."

The unmarried men at once went up on deck; the others lingered for a short time behind, talking to their wives and daughters, and then followed.

"The wind has strengthened a bit, Mr. Green," the captain said, "and I fancy we shall get more."

"I think so too, Captain."

"Then you may as well get off the upper sails and make her snug. Get off everything above the top-gallant; then, if the wind increases, we shall not want to call the men away from the guns."

The crew had, without orders, already mustered at quarters. The lashings had been cast off the guns, the boatswain had opened the magazines, and a pile of shot stood by each gun, together with cases of canister and grape-shot for close work. Boarding-pikes and cutlasses were ranged along by the bulwarks. The men had thrown aside their jackets, and many of those at the guns were stripped to the waist. Some of them were laughing and talking, and Dick saw, by their air of confidence, that they had no doubt of their ability to beat off the assault of the privateers.

The latter were the first to open the ball. A puff of smoke burst out from the brig's bows, followed almost instantly by one from the schooner. Both shots fell short, and for a quarter of an hour the three vessels kept on their way.

"We have heavier metal than that," the captain said cheerfully, "and I have no doubt we could reach them; but it is not our game to play at long bowls, for it is probable that both of them carry a long pivot gun, and if they were to draw

off a bit, they could annoy us amazingly, while we could not reach them."

Presently the privateers opened fire again. They were now about a mile away, and the same distance from each other. Their shot fell close to the Indiaman, and two or three passed through her sails. Still no reply was made. The men at the guns fidgeted and kept casting glances towards the poop, in expectation of an order. It came at last, but was not what they had expected.

"Double-shot your guns, men," the captain said.

Scarcely was the order obeyed when the brig, which was now on the port quarter, luffed up a little into the wind and fired a broadside of eight guns. There was a crashing of wood: the *Madras* was hulled in three places; two more holes appeared in her sails; while the other shot passed harmlessly just astern of her. There was an angry growl among the sailors as the schooner bore away a little and also fired her broadside. Except that a man was struck down by a splinter from the bulwarks, no damage was done.

"Bear up a little," the captain said to the second officer, who was standing by the helmsman. "I want to edge in a little towards the brig, but not enough for them to notice it. Now, gentlemen," he went on to the passengers, "I have no doubt that most of you are good shots, and I want you, after we have fired our broadside, to direct your attention to the brig's helmsmen. If you can render it impossible for the men to stand at the wheel, we will make mincemeat of this fellow in no time. Directly I have fired our port broadside, I am going to bring her up into the wind on the opposite tack, and give him the starboard broadside at close quarters. Don't fire until we have gone about, and then pick off the helmsmen if you can. Get ready, men." The brig was now but a little more than a quarter of a mile distant. "Aim at the foot of his mainmast," he went on. "Let each man fire as he gets the mast on his sight."

A moment later the first gun fired, and the whole broadside followed in quick succession.

“Down with the helm! Hard down, sheets and tacks!”

The men whose duty it was to trim the sails ran to the sheets and braces. The *Madras* swept up into the wind, and as her sails drew on the other tack she came along on a course that would take her within a hundred yards of the brig. As she approached, three rifles cracked out on her poop. One of the men at the helm of the brig fell, and as he did so, half a dozen more shots were fired; and as his companion dropped beside him, the brig, deprived of her helm, flew up into the wind. Three men ran aft to the wheel, but the deadly rifles spoke out again. Two of them fell; the third dived under the bulwark, for shelter.

“Steady, men!” the captain shouted. “Fetch her mainmast out of her!”

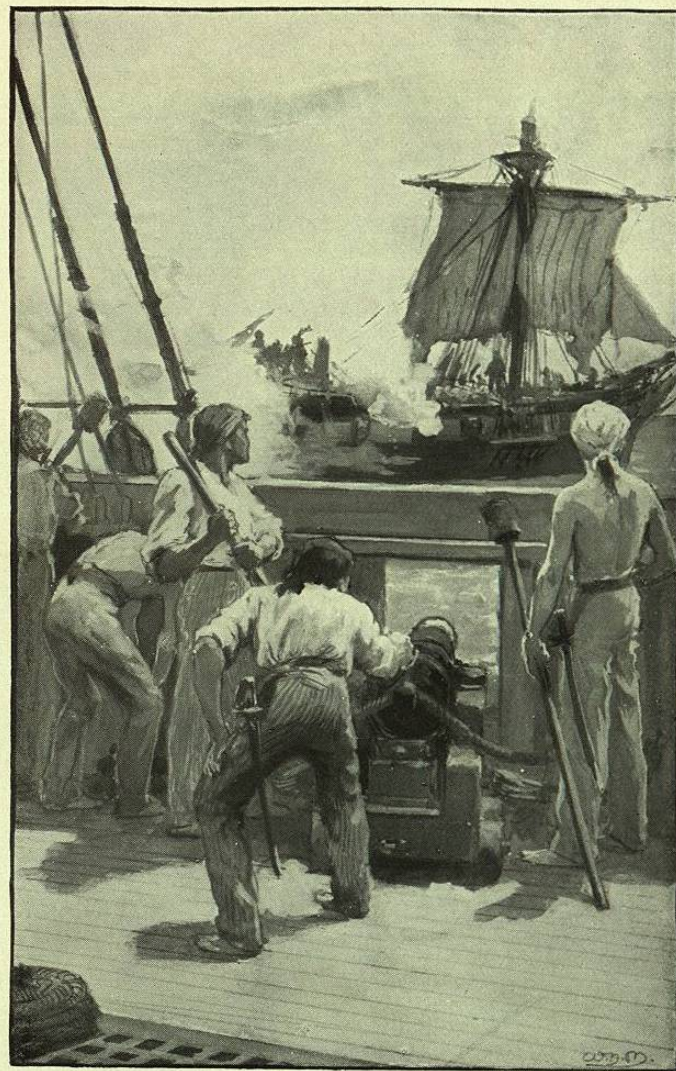
As they swept along under the stern of the brig, each gun of their other broadside poured in its fire in succession, raking the crowded deck from end to end. A moment later the mainmast was seen to sway, and a tremendous cheer broke from the *Madras* as it went over the side, dragging with it the foretopmast with all its gear.

“Down with the helm again!” the captain shouted. “Bring her head to wind, and keep her there!”

The first officer sprang forward to see that the order was carried into effect, and a minute later the Indiaman lay, with her sails aback, at a distance of a hundred yards, on the quarter of the brig.

“Grape and canister!” the captain shouted, and broadside after broadside swept the decks of the brig, which, hampered by her wreckage, was lying almost motionless in the water. So terrible was the fire that the privateer’s men threw down the axes with which they were striving to cut away the floating spars, and ran below.

“Double-shot your guns, and give her one broadside be-



THE "MADRAS" BEATS OFF TWO FRENCH PRIVATEERS.

tween wind and water!" the captain ordered. "Haul on the sheets and braces, Mr. Green, and get her on her course again—the schooner won't trouble us now."

That craft had indeed at first luffed up, to come to the assistance of her consort; but on seeing the fall of the latter's mast, and that she was incapable of rendering any assistance, had again altered her course, feeling her incapacity to engage so redoubtable an opponent single-handed. Three hearty cheers broke from all on board the *Madras*, as, after pouring in a broadside at a distance of fifty yards, she left the brig behind her and proceeded on her way.

"Then you don't care about taking prizes, captain?" one of the passengers said, as they crowded round to congratulate him upon his easy and almost bloodless victory.

"No, taking prizes is not my business; and were I to weaken my crew by sending some of them off in a prize, I might find myself short-handed if we met another of these gentlemen, or fell in with bad weather. Besides, she would not be worth sending home."

"The brig is signalling to her consort, sir," Mr. Green said, coming up.

"Ay, ay; I expect she wants help badly enough. I saw the chips fly close to her water-line as we gave her that last broadside."

"They are lowering a boat," one of the passengers said.

"So they are; I expect they haven't got more than one that can swim. I think she is settling down," the captain said, as he looked earnestly at the wreck astern. "See how they are crowding into that boat, and how some of the others are cutting and slashing to get the wreckage clear of her."

"She is certainly a good bit lower in the water than she was," the first officer agreed. "The schooner has come round, and won't be long before she is alongside of her."

There was no doubt that the brig was settling down fast. Men stood on the bulwarks and waved their caps frantically to

the schooner; others could be seen, by the aid of a glass, casting spars, hen-coops, and other articles, overboard, and jumping into the water after them; and soon the sea around the wreck was dotted with heads and floating fragments, while the wreckage of the mainmast was clustered with men. When the *Madras* was a mile away, the schooner was lying thrown up head to wind fifty yards from the brig, and her boats were already engaged in picking up the swimmers. Suddenly the brig gave a heavy lurch.

"There she goes!" the captain exclaimed. A moment later the hull had disappeared, and the schooner remained alone.

By this time the whole of the ladies had ascended from their place of safety to the poop, and a general exclamation broke from the passengers as the brig disappeared.

"The schooner will pick them all up," the captain said. "They must have suffered heavily from our fire, but I don't think any will have gone down with her. The boat which has already reached the schooner must have taken a good many, and the mainmast and foretopmast and spars would support the rest, to say nothing of the things they have thrown overboard. There is one wasp the less afloat."

No further adventure was met with throughout the voyage. They had a spell of bad weather off the Cape, but the captain said it was nothing to the gales they often encountered there, and that the voyage as a whole was an exceptionally good one; for even after the delays they had encountered at the start, the passage had lasted but four months and a half. They touched at Point de Galle for news, and to ascertain whether any French war-ships had been seen of late along the coast. A supply of fresh vegetables and fruit was taken on board, as the vessel, after touching at Madras, was to go on to Calcutta. A few of the passengers landed at Point de Galle, but neither Dick nor his mother went ashore.

"You will have plenty of opportunities of seeing Indians

later on, Dick," Mrs. Holland had said; "and as the gigs will not take all ashore, we may as well stop quietly here. I heard the captain say that he would weigh anchor again in four hours."

Dick was rather disappointed, but as they would be at Madras before long, he did not much mind. Ten days later they anchored off that town. Little was to be seen except the fort, a number of warehouses, and the native town, while the scenery contrasted strongly with that of Ceylon, with its masses of green foliage with hills rising behind. For the last fortnight Mrs. Holland had been somewhat depressed. Now that the voyage was nearly over, the difficulties of the task before her seemed greater than they had done when viewed from a distance, and she asked herself whether, after all, it would not have been wiser to have waited another two or three years, until Dick had attained greater strength and manhood. The boy, however, when she confided her doubts to him, laughed at the idea.

"Why, you know, mother," he said, "we agreed that I had a much greater chance as a boy of going about unsuspected, than I should have as a man; besides, we could never have let father remain any longer without trying to get him out. No, no, mother, you know we have gone through it over and over again, and talked about every chance. We have had a first-rate voyage, and everything is going on just as we could have wished, and it would never do to begin to have doubts now. We have both felt confident all along. It seems to me that of all things we must keep on being confident, at any rate until there is something to give us cause to doubt."

On the following morning they landed in a surf-boat, and were fortunate in getting ashore without being drenched. There was a rush of wild-looking and half-naked natives to seize their baggage; but upon Mrs. Holland, with quiet decision, accosting the men in their own language, and picking out four of them to carry the baggage up to one of the vehicles

standing on the road that ran along the top of the high beach, the rest fell back, and the matter was arranged without difficulty. After a drive of twenty minutes, they stopped at a hotel.

"It is not like a hotel, mother," Dick remarked, as they drew up; "it is more like a gentleman's house, standing in its own park."

"Almost all the European houses are built so here, Dick, and it is much more pleasant than when they are packed together."

"Much nicer," Dick agreed. "If each house has a lot of ground like this, the place must cover a tremendous extent of country."

"It does, Dick; but as every one keeps horses and carriages, that does not matter much. Blacktown, as they call the native town, stands quite apart from the European quarter."

As soon as they were settled in their rooms, which seemed to Dick singularly bare and unfurnished, mother and son went out for a drive in one of the carriages belonging to the hotel. Dick had learned so much about India from her that, although extremely interested, he was scarcely surprised at the various scenes that met his eye, or at the bright and varied costumes of the natives. Many changes had taken place during the seventeen years that had elapsed since Mrs. Holland had left India. The town had increased greatly in size. All signs of the effects of the siege by the French, thirty years before, had been long since obliterated. Large and handsome government buildings had been erected, and evidences of wealth and prosperity were everywhere present.

CHAPTER III

THE RAJAH

"NOW, mother, let us talk over our plans," Dick said, as, after dinner, they seated themselves in two chairs in the veranda, at some little distance from the other guests at the hotel. "How are we going to begin?"

"In the first place, Dick, we shall to-morrow send out a messenger to Tripataly, to tell my brother of our arrival here."

"How far is it, mother?"

"It is about a hundred and twenty miles in a straight line, I think, but a good bit farther than that by the way we shall go."

"How shall we travel, mother?"

"I will make some inquiries to-morrow, but I think that the pleasantest way will be to drive from here to Conjeveram. I think that is about forty miles. There we can take a native boat, and go up the river Palar past Arcot and Vellore, to Vaniambaddy. From there it is only about fifteen miles to Tripataly. I shall tell my brother the way I propose going. Of course, if he thinks any other way will be better, we shall go by that."

"Are we going to travel as we are, mother, or in native dress?"

"That is a point that I have been thinking over, Dick; I will wait and ask my brother which he thinks will be the best. When out there I always dressed as a native, and never put on English clothes except at Madras. I used to come down here two or three times every year with my mother, and generally stayed for a fortnight or three weeks. During that time we always dressed in English fashion, as by so doing we could live at the hotel and take our meals at public tables without excit-