

## CHAPTER X

**I**T was six years before John again met Angeline. At first he had childish letters from her, and sent delightful chatty ones back to her; telling her all the latest London news. But apparently her correspondence was subject to a censorship, at least as far as the inward mail was concerned. In some of her first letters to him, she advised him to be careful because of it. Eventually he received a letter from her aunt, intimating that in her opinion, Angeline was too big to correspond with him any longer, and that if he sent her any more letters Angeline would be whipped on receipt of each and every one.

John wrote back to Miss Maria, giving her an unvarnished opinion of her morals, and general character. He, however, desisted from writing to Angeline, on account of the trouble which might ensue for her.

He had several times thought of going North to see her, but she had told him that her father and aunt were so hostile to the idea when it was mooted that he dropped it.

They were years of boom and prosperity for John Woden. He had never told Mr. Brown about Angeline, but on his return from Yorkshire, set up agencies and opened new accounts with great vigour. Expansion, and again expansion was his creed. He bought and sold and presently there was enough spare money for the big new shop in Piccadilly. Another year and he was buying and trading in the wholesale market, and the money poured in, in an ever increasing shower.

And every night the candle burned in Lizzie's old room, but she never came.

Unknown to Mr. Brown John had renewed the search, and was spending money lavishly in the attempt. He felt that here there was an account out against him, and he desired to put the affair square in his mind.

It was the influence of Angeline which moved him. He wondered-sometimes what she would have thought had she known.

Mr. Brown was getting very feeble. They still lived in the old shop in the Strand, a much damper place in those days than now. The Embankment had not yet been built. In the winter of 1852-3 Mr. Brown developed a cough which no nostrum in his own or any other establishment could cure.

"Look here, uncle, this place is doing you no good. It's too damp. You had better go away to the South of France or somewhere like that. We can afford it."

"It's wonderful, my boy. We were always so poor before you came, and now we are getting rich. But I won't leave England; I never have and never shall."

"Now, don't be silly. You must get rid of that cough."

"It may get rid of me," said Mr. Brown with a gleam of humour, "Besides—if Lizzie came back——"

"If Lizzie came back," answered John, firmly, "I should treat her and my son with every courtesy—every respect—every consideration to which she may be entitled."

"Will you promise that after I am dead, John?"

"I promise. But you're not dead yet. You are going to live to be a hundred."

The other shook his head. "You might, my boy; you are such a strong young giant. But I—I'm worn out, John. I think I'm going soon."

"Going? Where?"

"To Heaven," said Mr. Brown, solemnly.

"Take my advice and make it the South of France."

"No, John, I don't want to do that. If my time has

come, it has come. I am getting old, and I am beginning to wonder—have I wasted my time ? ”

“ I daresay that you have wasted some of it the same as we all have. ”

“ But have I done all the good in the world I ought to have done ? ”

“ I daresay you have done more, ” said John, “ The fact is, uncle, if you have worn yourself out, it is because you have helped others overmuch. When I came here, I found a steady stream of spongers, sponging on you for cash and free medicine and anything else possible. Your energies were sapped to support a string of incompetents, who would be much better pole-axed. ”

“ John, my boy, aren't you a little hard ? ”

“ I have no use for incompetence, uncle. I reward ability. Look at the assistants ! I pay Jenkins more than any chemist's assistant in London. Why ? Because he is worth it. I found Smith of no use at all, so I dumped him on the pavement. In other words, I discharged him on Saturday. ”

“ He has a wife and two children, John. ”

“ That is not my concern, uncle. It is Smith's private business, with which I should not presume to interfere. I look round me and read the papers and find the wife and children plea entered to keep employed the unemployable, to save the defaulter from the dock and the prisoner from the transports and the jails. Must bachelors only answer for their sins ? If so, marriage is the first safeguard of the fool and the criminal. ”

“ It is very logical, John, ” said Mr. Brown, “ but I don't like it. ”

“ Dear old uncle ! What a soft heart you have ! I am always ready to help those who are worth it. ”

“ It is those who are not worth it, who need our help most. ”

“ Who's being logical now ? You had better go to bed

and rub yourself with camphorated oil. I'll look after your candle—oh, yes, two of them if you like."

"I thought I saw Lizzie yesterday," said Mr. Brown, half to himself.

John swung round. "You did? Where?"

"I looked out of the window and there was a woman passing and she looked in—sadly I thought—and for a moment I thought it was my Lizzie. But—it couldn't have been?"

"Couldn't it?"

"No, John, because this woman was—foul. You know; one of those poor things. God forgive me for calling them foul. They are what men and fate have made them. And my Lizzie would never be that. So it could not have been she?"

John remained silent.

"I had a burst of coughing and could not move. And when I did she had gone in the crowd," said Mr. Brown. It was evident he was not completely satisfied and at ease.

"Better get to bed, uncle."

"All right, John. You won't forget the second candle?"

"No."

In the middle of the night, John heard moaning and going to his uncle found the white sheet near his mouth stained scarlet. He had burst a blood vessel. John raised him up and raced for a doctor.

When the doctor came he shook his head.

"He can't last an hour. Get me some hot water and a sponge, and I'll make him as comfortable as I can."

John went to the kitchen, calmly but rather miserably. He liked his uncle, with all the affection of a strong man for a weak one.

"Here you are," said John to the doctor, "Anything else-I can do?"

"No! You can send your maid to bed. I shan't want her any more."

"Maid? What maid?" John looked at him inquiringly.

"The girl in white who came in here, holding a candle."

John gazed at him in silence.

"I asked her a question or two, but she never spoke. Deaf, I suppose? Just stayed by me holding the candle. But I shan't want her any more. She left the room just before you came up."

"Did my uncle speak to her?"

"Yes, he called her 'Lizzie'."