

CHAPTER XXII

THERE was, no doubt, as John Woden had said, that with the ship's papers made out for Nassau, a lot of impertinence from Federal cruisers would be saved them. In that year of 1863 the blockade of the Confederate coast was as effective as a blockade of some 3,000 miles of coast can possibly be. By making the jumping-off place Nassau or Havana, the risk of inquisitiveness from the North was restricted to some few hundred miles.

There were a lot of people anxious to break that cordon. The life-blood of the South was cotton. Wilmington, Charleston, Savannah, every Confederate port was glutted with it, whilst Lancashire starved because it had little for its mills. To exchange that cotton for arms and ammunition was the dearest wish both of the blockade-runners and the Confederate Government. So it came to pass that the few hundred miles of sea between Cuba or the Bahamas were crossed by many venturesome ships, the one desire of whose masters and owners was to keep themselves to themselves until safely into a Southern port.

There is no doubt that the North would willingly have searched British ships for Southern arms anywhere between the Old Head of Kinsale and the coast of Virginia. Lord Palmerston, however, had strong views on such a point. "I don't know if you mean to stand this, but I'll be damned if I do." So the North desisted; it was not until after Nassau had been reached that the danger point for the *Malvina* would come. After that, there would certainly be danger; considering the tremendous nature of the

task, the North was conducting a very effective blockade. The measure of its success was the difference between cotton *f.o.b.* Charleston and cotton *c.i.f.* Liverpool. The greater that difference the more effective the stranglehold. And the difference was immense.

The *Malvina* being a sailing-ship, certainly could not give her heels to anything under steam, which might pursue. She hoped rather to escape notice, like a respectable old lady, who in later life develops a weakness for dubious ways and endeavours to cloak it with the garment of an early impeccability. The *Malvina* had been a respectable West Indiaman in her time, and had come down in the world. Her papers from Nassau would be made out for Boston, a highly respectable centre of light and learning: her devious route on account of Confederate privateers. Her cargo would ostensibly be for the Federal armies. If no Northern ship inquired, with guns to back the inquiry, she would turn suddenly into a Southern port under cover of darkness, even as the once nice old lady might suddenly enter a public-house.

As adversity might influence the one, so would war the other, for war, like adversity, makes strange bedfellows. The old West Indiaman scurried the dangerous seas in company with a good many doubtful craft.

"I shall leave you at Nassau, Angeline."

"Oh, John. Why?"

"My dear, you don't suppose I shall let my wife stay on a blockade-runner?"

"You will come ashore with me too?"

"I don't know," said John. "I should rather like to go to Charleston. I have never been in America. When the war is over there will be possibilities in these States, United or disunited."

He would say no more for the present, though Angeline, fearful for him, wanted him to promise to keep away from the war zone.

There was another matter on his mind. Old John Turner kept persistently aloof. He was kind and gentle to Angeline, quite forgiving her for any trespass, but who could have refrained from being kind and gentle to Angeline? No man, born of woman, could have looked at her dark hair and blue eyes and kept from loving her. To John, he was always cold and distant, and this was a little puzzling to him, for though in his time he had given many men and one woman cause to hate him, being inclined to temper his justice with but little mercy, there was no reason that he could see why this man should dislike him. He resolved to find out.

"Captain Turner," he said, one morning, with his usual directness, "you have to satisfy my curiosity on this matter. I have a good many enemies in this world, but I usually know why they are my enemies. I do not know why you are. Will you tell me?"

"Mr. Woden," answered the other stiffly. "You are the owner of most of the cargo in the holds, and the friend of the owners of this ship. It does not become me to read you lectures and criticise you."

"Am I so low in your estimation? Do you think I should make trouble for you out of vindictiveness?"

"No, sir. I tell you that you are too ruthless a man to indulge in petty spite. But my ways are not your ways, Mr. Woden."

"Nor if I read you aright, is it one of your ways to bear enmity in secret. I invite your confidence, Captain Turner."

Old Turner flushed. "So be it, sir. I have no use for a man who makes money his god."

"You think I do that?"

"I know you do. I have friends in Redehall."

"So have I," said John. "They put me into Parliament."

"Where you took the oath 'on the true faith of a Christian,'" replied Turner, contemptuously.

John nodded.

"And you are an infidel?"

"I am an infidel."

"Then you ask, Mr. Woden, what I have against you? You are too prominent a man, sir, for your ways not to be known. You never enter the House of God."

"Since I left school I have entered it three times. Once for a ceremony of marriage—we were already married, but my wife would have the ceremony. Twice for the baptism of my sons."

"I wonder, sir, how you hold your seat in Parliament in a Christian country."

"So do I sometimes. I think, perhaps, that they are not so Christian in Redhall as they would have you believe. Captain Turner, I may be an infidel, but I am not a hypocrite. I do not go to any church because I do not believe in any religion. I went on the only occasions of which I have told you because my wife would have it so. I took the oath because Parliament would have it so, and exacted it from me. I serve the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland and not the Kingdom of Heaven. Some day such professions of belief will not be required. As they were required, I gave them with mental reservations."

"And you think you are not a hypocrite?" said the captain, grimly.

"I think so as much as you think I am. It was a case of *force majeure*. But by all that you, at least, hold holy, man, do you hate me because I do not share your faith? Is that your Christian charity?"

"Mr. Woden, you are a hard man. What of the workmen you have discharged at your whims—their wives and children, who could starve as far as you cared?"

"I see the gossips have been busy. I have never discharged a competent workman. I pay those who are worth it better than any man in England. I have no use for weaklings, and as for their wives and children, I was not

asked if they might get married and breed, so I cannot see that I have any responsibility in that way."

"You are a young man yet, Mr. Woden, but some day you will be old and grey, even as I am. You will think differently, then. It will not have profited you then to have loved no one but yourself."

John looked at Angeline, who was sitting, sunburnt and lovely, a little distance away by the starboard rail.

"Yes," said the old man, following his gaze, "you love her. But is it her soul, Mr. Woden, since you gave me leave to speak freely? Is it her soul or her body you love? My wife has gone from me these many years, but I cared for her when she was old as I did when she was a young girl. I wonder if you will do the same."

"All I can say to that," observed John, "is that she is my wife. She is not the pretty toy of a *barem*; she is the mother of my sons."

There was a slight pause. Then:

"You think money will buy everything, don't you, Mr. Woden?"

"It is the greatest thing in the world, since you press the point. No friend is so sure to stand by you as a satisfactory bank balance. It may not buy you health, but it will buy you the best medical advice. It will buy every aid to happiness, for all you shake your head. Of course, there are some things it will not purchase—I remember you refused my kindly offer in the Irish Sea."

"I may be a master-mariner, but I was born a gentleman," said the old man, simply.

John looked at him. He had the clue now to much that had puzzled him; it was pride of birth.

"I humbly beg your pardon for what I did, if I gave offence. But since I too have my pride, I ask leave to place the thousand pounds I offered in your hands without reservation. You may give it to the crew, or your church, or throw it into the sea."

"I accept and shall do good with it. I shall pray for you, Mr. Woden, and try and think more kindly of you when you leave me at Nassau."

"I shall not leave you at Nassau. My passage is paid for Charleston."

"It will be dangerous."

"All the better," said John Woden. "I am getting bored with safety."

He excused himself and went over to Angeline.

"Just been having a little chat with the captain," he said in answer to her inquiries.