

CHAPTER XXXI

IT was a desperately sad John who gazed upon the wreckage of Chicago. Now Lucy had gone, he realised how much she had meant to him; every little trick and turn of speech came back to torment him. And he had known her such a short time in all; so few years. Such a little while together, and so long apart.

"*They're sure not to let me in Heaven now I've gone pagan.*" He remembered her voice, as she had said that, how she had spoken of her Harry "*way down at Bull Run.*" Well, if there were that Heaven in which he did not believe, he knew Lucy would have entered it; his dear Lucy, so wrong in the eyes of the world, so right and so pure in herself.

All Chicago might be burned down from the river to the lake, but all that it meant to John was that he had lost Lucy.

However, in sun and shade, the future must be considered, and man must make his plans for it while he lives. He had a daughter; it was obviously impracticable to take her to England. Something else must be done with her.

"I don't want to live in Chicago any more," said the aunt, tearfully. "I have lost Lucy and I have lost everything."

"I shall give you a new house somewhere else, if you will look after Delilah," said John, solving his problem.

• "ALL GONE BUT WIFE, CHILDREN AND ENERGY."

It was the bombastic placard of an estate agent outside a wooden shack on the ruins of his former home.

John, seeing it as he left, smiled for the first time for many days, and then was sad again.

It was the word "wife" which saddened him. Lucy had never been that but she had been his.

He finally settled his daughter and the old lady in the village of Easthampton, Long Island, at the foot of the Shinnecock Hills. The house was small, but there was a large garden, and the sight of the rose trees even under the winter snows made him catch his breath.

Lucy had loved roses.

He returned to Liverpool, and the breath of many miles of salt air cleared his distracted brain. We came and went, he reflected; the years ticked on and on, and we grew old. In a short while he would be even as Lucy.

"Only the dead never die."

It was a quaint saying of someone, years ago—many years away from him, now.

"Now, who said that?"

Why it was his father, the Suffolk vicar, who had said that thirty years and more before that present time. John remembered now.

A little grimly he thought of his father's steadfast belief and his own unbelief, of his father's dire poverty and his own abundant wealth.

"I wonder if he would have been proud of me? Proud and sorry both, I think."

Peace came to his mind. The steamer came into Liverpool and there was Angeline on the quay, with her two eldest sons on Christmas holiday, and she had never even heard of Lucy!

"It's a strange world," thought John.

"Did you have a good voyage, dear? You look tired."

"I am a little tired, Angeline."

There was one matter which had been bothering him. It was something little Delilah had said: plain, practical

Delilah, with a precocity about her which he was beginning to dislike.

"Mother woke up, and there was a girl in our room with a candle. . . . I don't know who she was. . . . I saw her too. . . ."

"Nonsense, 'Lilah. How—how could any such person have come in your room?"

"She was! . . . Just before the fire came."

Back, years and years ago, to the little shop in the Strand the night old Mr. Brown had died. *That* was what the doctor had said.

"I don't believe in ghosts," said John, obstinately to himself, and had tried to forget the matter.

Yes, mentally and physically, he was a little tired. He felt that the best cure for this tiredness was more work.

There were his boys growing up and plans to be made for their future. His interests were ever expanding. Already he was looking to his sons to succeed him.

Plenty of plans and plenty of work. Which of his sons would help him to carry on in the years to be?

He was somewhat disappointed in Leslie, his eldest-born. The boy was too bookish, too dreamy. "High-falutin'" was how someone had described him. William—Billy, as he was always called, was more likely to carry on the family name and interests.

He wished it had been his eldest-born. If he should acquire an hereditary title—John Woden was ambitious—his eldest son would succeed to it. It was a pity that Leslie was a boy so gentle, so "correct" in all his ways. He was never punished at school. That was symptomatic. It would have been a relief to John to hear that Leslie had had to "bend over" to take "six."

Leslie most annoyingly reminded him of Delilah. John wondered what perverse ancestor had bequeathed these characteristics which he noticed in these two children of his by different mothers.

An annoying little beast, Delilah. Talking nonsense about girls with candles.

Then he remembered that Lucy had seen her too.

"I'll forget it." He kissed Angeline affectionately and entered into the peaceful house at Redehall, as one who entered another and a different world.

Redehall was not so peaceful as it had been. The smoky chimneys and the dingy little houses were creeping up the valley, more and more, year after year.

There was no need to live there. His managers could look after his interests on the spot; he could direct from afar.

It was from this decision that, in 1872, he moved to London and took the big house in Prince's Gate.

He was now a very rich man indeed. Year after year his interests had grown. It was a time when Britain sold her goods to the whole world without challenge: a time of Imperial expansion and a vast prosperity.

John Woden still possessed all his old fire and zest, his keen insight, his boundless ambition at forty-five. Some of the elasticity of youth had gone as middle age had come, but he could still bend an iron bar with his hands; still match, did he care, his herculean strength against men years younger than himself.

He was quite philosophical about his increasing years, recognising that it is but the way of nature and that our minds grow, too, with the passing of the inexorable days. At twenty, to be thirty seems terribly old; at thirty we know we are still young; at forty we hope we are; at fifty we think we are young for our years. At sixty we do not care.

Besides, Angeline was still young, seemingly less than her age of thirty-three. Her hair was still dark, her eyes blue, her sweet little body still lissom and beautiful. So was she in John's eyes.

Their sons were growing up to manhood. Leslie still

formal and a model of correct behaviour ; Billy vivacious, assertive keen. As for young Harry, he seemed to partake of the qualities of both his elder brothers and some of his own.

In 1874 two notable events happened. Young Harry went to school, being thereby promoted in the scheme of life, and his father also climbed another rung of the ladder. After Mr. Disraeli's victory at the General Election, in which Sir John Woden had helped manfully, Mr. Disraeli was very pleased with him. Sir John Woden, Kt., became Sir John Woden, Bart.

Even while he held Angeline in his arms, caressing her whilst she prattled about his new honour, his thoughts went back to that evening in Chicago, when Lucy had taken him for a baronet and he had said that it might come. Lucy and the roses, Lucy and the rabbits, Lucy and the little lights in the wood in Pennsylvania! It was strange how the memories of a man's past would float round him at inconsequent moments.

Yet there were the memories of the little girl with one bare foot, whom he had carried through the streets of Vienna, the small lost ghost who had flitted before him through the darkened city. Memories of the wood "syrup" whose white, soft skin had glimmered in the sunlight at Redehall, adding a fresher beauty to the green woods and summer sky.

Women had meant much to John Woden, and he had the feeling that they would mean much more before he had run his course.

"I am very proud of you, John," Angeline gazed up at him very fondly.

"Not prouder than am I of you," he said, and caressed her again.