

CHAPTER XXXVII

“**I**RISE to address this historic House——”

The afternoon sun poured through the stained-glass windows of the House of Lords. It shone upon the scarlet benches, the red of the Woolsack, the lawn sleeves of the bishops, and the duller garb of the lords temporal.

Lord Woden made his speech on the second Home Rule Bill to an attentive House. His giant figure focussed all eyes; his clear, unfaltering voice could be heard in every part of the Gilded Chamber from the Throne to the Press Gallery. The speech was characteristic of the man; warning against hazardous and casual change; warning against the policy of blind negation——

“The time will come when we shall have to treat Ireland as we have treated Canada——”

The Bill was thrown out by 419 votes to forty-one. Lord Woden did not vote at all, for he believed both sides to be wrong, and that sooner or later there would have to be a compromise. It was to prove very much later.

“Wonderful fellow, old Woden,” said a noble marquess to a duke as the House rose.

“Yes. Shouldn’t like to come up against him on a dark night,” replied His Grace inconsequentially. “Thought he might go to pieces a year or two ago when his wife was killed in that Hampstead Railway affair, but he seems to be as strong as ever.”

“Woden’s sort never goes to pieces,” answered the marquess.

Meanwhile the best carriage and pair in London were taking Lord Woden back to Prince's Gate.

Wallington, the butler, opened the door, and then down the stairs came Diane of New Orleans.

"You are ready for your brandy and soda?"

"Two of them, Diane."

London society was rather shocked at the presence of Diane in the Woden *ménage*. It was so very "eighteenth century": all very well in that century, but in these prim and proper later Victorian days, decidedly scandalous. However, Lord Woden was so very rich and powerful and influential, that London society decided to tolerate the scandal, a very wise decision, considering that it could do nothing else. Leslie and Felicity had fumed and foamed; spoken of the reflection on Leslie's position in the Church: Lord Woden had smiled. Diane of New Orleans stayed on.

No one could ever replace Angeline, for she had been his wife. No one, perhaps, ever knew what a desperate blow her loss had been to John, outwardly impassive, inwardly stricken to the heart: Then courage had come to his aid: he realised that he still lived and was strong. It was then that he had sent for Diane of New Orleans.

The marquess had been quite right; Woden's sort never goes to pieces. He considered that he was not and never had been disloyal to Angeline, but his affections had ever been wide; he required more than one woman to complete his life and happiness. So it had been first Lucy and then Diane.

"There is a letter from Harry."

John frowned. Harry had not stayed long at the offices of his friends in Cape Town. Some wild idea of gaining gold had drawn him to the Rand; he was now in Johannesburg. There being no alluvial gold in the Witwatersrand veldt, it was necessary to have capital.

" . . . I can get a controlling interest in this mine for £10,000, and will guarantee that I shall have quadrupled it within the next six months. After all, father, the way I look at it, you owe me something. Send me £10,000 and let us consider it time to mutually forgive and forget.

"Your affectionate son,

"HARRY."

John handed the letter to Diane.

"Tell him I'll see him damned before I give him £10,000 to waste. And say if he does want forgiveness and forgetfulness, there is no reason whatever to start with a split infinitive."

Diane laughed. "He is a waster. He has not the *flair* for making money; only for spending it."

"I am unlucky in all my sons, Diane. Young Tim is the one I am looking to carry on my name. A fine lad. How I do not know, with such a blasted fool for a father."

Young Tim at Harrow was the pride of his grandfather's heart. One day, thought John, the boy would add fresh lustre to the family name. It gave him great comfort to think that he was, after Leslie, in direct succession to the title.

"You do not like Leslie because he is of the Church?" said Diane, shrewdly. "I do not like him either, because I am a Catholic. It is a good religion, the Catholic."

"I know nothing about the supernatural," said John, "and I do not believe anything. There is only one thing of which I am certain: if there is a future life, it will be quite different from that of any religion ever heard of."

Even so, he was not *quite* so sure a materialist as of old. The girl with the candle had been seen too many times for that! Diane crossed herself. She saw nothing inconsistent in being both a good Catholic and a good mistress.

"There is another letter from the lady at Easthampton."

"Delilah?" said John. "She is getting over her stuffiness now."

He remembered a few caustic words he had addressed to her before he left New York.

"You are an unsexed female, that is what you are, Delilah. You despise me and you despise your mother too. I don't care a damn, but we were neither of us worthy enough to kiss her little white feet. She was all woman, she was all beauty, love, innocence—everything, confound it, that you, her daughter, are not. You are suffering from sex-repression, and I'm sorry for you when the pressure becomes too much for the safety-valve."

Stern words, but quite true. Delilah had annoyed him, but he saw that she wanted for nothing. Indeed, she lived in luxury at Easthampton.

The years rolled on. 1894 was a very memorable year. Lord Rosebery won the Derby, to the great offence of his Nonconformist supporters. That tender plant, the Nonconformist conscience, was still in bloom in England. Britain and France were growling loudly at each other. The Tower Bridge was opened.

In the following year we very nearly went to war with the United States, greatly to the consternation of Diane.

"It will come to it yet," said John to her.

"No, no. I do not want to be your enemy instead of your pretty lady. I am Diane of New Orleans."

There was a good deal of affection between John and the young girl. Not the deep love that had been between himself and Angeline, or that he had felt towards Lucy. Diane was too much of a doll, too much of a toy.

However, there was no war with Diane's country, and in December came the ill-fated raid of Dr. Jameson and the Kaiser's telegram to President Kruger.

"There will soon be claws to be clipped," said Lord Woden.

It distressed him to hear from a friend in Johannesburg how greatly his son Harry was in opposition to his former countrymen. He appeared to have identified himself with

all the worst Irish-American elements in the gold city, and was in favour with many members of the Volksraad. It appeared that he was gaining a livelihood by running something in the nature of an illicit bar.

"He would be," said John, and dismissed him, for the time, from his mind.

The waters of passion in South Africa were running swift and strong, and this was unfortunate for Lord Woden in more ways than the sentimental. His ever-expanding interests had come in their tide to the South Africa shore. John watched the course of events and in April, 1899, at seventy-two years of age, decided to sail for Durban.

"You will take me?" pleaded Diane of New Orleans.

"No. You will stay here and look after my houses. Go and live at Woden this summer. The country will do you good."

"How can I live in the country, thinking that you will be running after the pretty Kaffir ladies?"

John laughed. "You need not distress yourself. I have no use for ladies who can use Day and Martin's blacking as complexion cream. Look cheerful, Diane, and I shall tell you a good joke. . . . They have made Leslie a bishop!"

It was true. In due course, Leslie would sit on the episcopal benches amongst the peers spiritual, whilst his father sat amongst the peers temporal.

"I wanted him to go to the Lords some day, but not in a white surplice," complained Lord Woden. He was rather hard on Leslie.

Diane laughed. It was a good joke.

So John sailed for Durban, and he was still in that city when the war cloud gathered behind the Drakensbergs. Troops began to come into South Africa. First in July, two companies of Royal Engineers, then the Royal Musters from home, the Dragoon Guards from India, and many more. Simultaneously the *condottieri* of all Europe came

to the Transvaal and the Orange Free State to offer their services for money. A steady trade in munitions of war developed in Delagoa Bay and Lorenço Marques.

On October 3rd they stopped and looted the Cape gold train. On the 11th, at five in the afternoon, we were at war.