

## CHAPTER XXXIX

**W**HEN the sun was setting over the Drakensburgs in a flood of red light, and Dundonald and his men rode on until challenged by the Ladysmith picket, that evening the town was free. No more did the enemy stand between her and the sea; there was once again a clear road to Durban.

The London crowds gathered outside the War Office in Pall Mall and cheered and went home through the March sunlight, more confident, more hopeful, though the fight was yet to be long and stern before victory could come.

Lord Woden was no longer in uniform. His wound had healed, and his great strength had almost returned to him. Nevertheless, there was no longer the desperate need of men in South Africa—week after week thousands were pouring into her harbours—and he was too old. So they thanked him and let him go, and soon a great ship was taking him through the blue waters of the Indian Ocean on his way home.

“There is still Antony.”

Antony was still at Haileybury, a sturdy boy of sixteen, very like his elder brother, who had gone down at Magersfontein. John thought of him and was a little comforted.

He was met in England by Diane of New Orleans.

“And how were the good Kaffir ladies?”

“Didn’t see much of them, Diane. Been too busy.”

“John, you know I do but tease you. Like myself, I know you draw the line against colour—even as we do in Louisiana. Come, we shall go down to Woden to-night.

I have your old room ready, and I have a new butler Wallington has retired, for he says that he is old."

"Old be damned! The man is years younger than I am."

John was recovering.

"I have promised him that you will give him a pension."

"The deuce you have! All right, Diane, he shall have one. He has been with me a long time now. . . . I shall always remember his coming into the library that evening the *Princess Alice* went down."

"John, you must not look so sad. You are in England, and it is spring, and here am I, Diane of New Orleans."

So they went down to Woden when spring was upon the Suffolk countryside, and peace came upon him in the company of Diane of New Orleans.

In January, 1901, Queen Victoria died.

Lord Woden bowed his head. "I remember my father bringing me to London to see her coronation. How he saved for weeks that he might afford the journey for us! And now—I am indeed old."

"God save the Queen" became "God save the King." At first the alteration came strangely.

The war ended in the following year.

"I am thankful that you had not to go to it, Antony. I want you to carry on my line."

It was the boy's great regret that he was too young and too late for the war, though John was greatly pleased. Already it had been settled that when he came down from Oxford he was to take the helm of his grandfather's many businesses. Antony seemed to have a natural aptitude for commerce.

"You will soon learn all that is necessary, my boy. I know all my concerns are stiff with competent managers and a competent staff—but I want a Woden at the head of them all. I am getting old, and after your father, you are the next in succession to my peerage—my money, everything I have."

"I'll do my best, grandpater."

"I am sure you will, my boy."

Lord Woden received an invitation to be present in the Abbey at the Coronation of King Edward VII.

"Odd, isn't it, that I should see the last Coronation as a small boy, and an infernally poor one, amidst the street crowds and this as a peer in the Abbey."

"Me, too?" said Diane.

"No; I am afraid that can't be done."

"But why? Are not all the lords taking their ladies?"

"Yes, Diane; but not their pretty ladies."

Diane smiled. She had a very nice smile.

It was a source of chronic indignation to Felicity that her father-in-law should be keeping house quite openly with Diane of New Orleans.

"I think it is positively wicked, Leslic. You are the holder of a bishopric, and everywhere you go, round every pulpit you ascend, there are people who know that your father is keeping a mistress—a harlot. The way people smile when they ask as to his health is disgusting."

"I can do nothing, my dear; absolutely nothing. On the few occasions I have mentioned the matter, my reception has been discouraging—*most* discouraging. He has told me that if I say any more, he will acquire a large *barem* and bring them all to hear me preach."

Felicity snorted. Mere words would not suffice. Her father-in-law had always annoyed her. For one thing he would persist in calling her Felix, and for another she was jealous of the affection subsisting between the old man and her son. However, Lord Woden had control of the family purse-strings, so it was necessary to be discreet.

In 1906 Antony Woden met a beautiful girl, fell in love with her and married. In 1907 she gave him a baby daughter, whom they called Poppy, and in so doing left him for another world.

It was not the formal sympathy of his father, nor the well-meant efforts of his mother which consoled him so much in that terrible time, as the honest, rugged affection of old Lord Woden.

Antony meant more to John than any of his own sons had ever done, except Billy who had been drowned in the Thames nearly thirty years ago.

"Time will heal it, old chap, and you must face the world for Poppy's sake. My little great-granddaughter.— I am indeed getting old."

For he was in his eightieth year, more supple and upright and younger-looking than many men in their sixties.

Still he lived on, taking a keen interest in the events of the world around him, Mr. Lloyd George's Budget and the fierce fight with the Lords which followed.

He went down to the House of Lords in 1911 to vote with the "Die-Hards" against the Parliament Bill, for Lord Woden was amongst the many who held that there was no tyranny more dangerous than that of the mob, no thinking more supine than that of the crowd at large.

"I have lived amongst all sorts and conditions of men all my life and see no reason in the system of counting heads irrespective of what is inside them. In the nature of things peoples are dissatisfied with their rulers; civilisation has gone on too fast for them; they would be happier in a more savage state. The lower orders are born into a condition of life they do not understand; they yearn to pull it down and establish a simpler one which will put no premium on brains and enterprise, and allow them to sleep and feed irrespective of the morrow. If civilisation is to endure, those desires must be crushed."

John had no animus against the workers; merely against those who were inflaming them for their own ends.

The Parliament Bill became an Act.

"And to think that damned fellow was not many years

since escaping from a back door in a policeman's uniform! Confound it, he is clever; there are some things about him which I cannot help but admire."

He was a keen observer of the great strikes which broke out about that period.

"The Liberal Party are raising the popular passions to serve their ends. Antony, my boy, Louis XVI of France did that when he helped our American colonists to their independence to spite us. He reaped a whirlwind when independent ideas came back across the Atlantic. Didn't he, Antony? Of course, they don't see the writing on the wall. Pity both our armies of political parties are led by asses, isn't it, my boy?"

"Blessed if I understand much about politics, grandpater."

"You can do anything you like, so long as you are successful and get away with it. Look at George Washington. Rebelled, successfully against his King, and we praise him to the skies—more shame to us. That fellow in Canada at the Red River—I hardly remember his name; no more do most people, but when they do, they curse him. It is the way of the world."

John very rarely went North now. For one thing, there were too many memories of Angeline in Redehall, memories of days that had been and would never be again. He would not so hurt himself, and for another, Redehall was not what it had been. Year by year, the little houses and the smoky chimneys had crept up the valley, until there were no more woods and fields—nothing but pavements and dust and arid bricks. The wood—her wood—had been the last to go.

The municipality had turned it into a public park.

"That was where I saw her nude amongst the green trees and by the cool water of the pool; she looked like a fairy in fairyland to me. My little Angeline! No, I shall never go back to Redehall."

It was not quite so much a wood now. Many of the trees had been cut down and smooth lawns laid in their stead, at the edges being tin notices, "Keep Off the Grass." There were gravel walks where rabbits had run, receptacles for paper which the public never used, and iron spiked railings all around.

No, John would not have liked Redehall Parl.

In 1912, Leslie and his wife decided to go to America.

"Going to swap lies and scandal with a lot of Yankee parsons at a conference, are you?"

"Father, how can you say such things?" protested Felicity. "At your age."

"Age be damned! I ought to know more the older I get, I suppose?"

"I fear, father, that you are leading Antony astray," said Leslie. "He will listen to nothing I say."

"Why should he? You have never learned anything worth teaching the boy—or anyone else. You are getting quite an old man now, Leslie, though you never will be as old a one as I am. You have some foolish idea that you ought to have respect from Antony and all the younger generation. Whatever qualities have you to inspire respect? I have seen more sense in a puppy dog."

"Really, father——"

"Don't talk nonsense to me, Leslie—Diane, Diane—oh, there you are! Pour me out a stiff brandy, and not too much soda in it. This son of mine makes me dry. . . . That's a good girl. . . . What ship are you going on, Leslie?"

"That new one—the *Titanic*."

"You bishops do do it in style. A windjammer was good enough for my first voyage—the old *Malvina* which went down off Charleston. I had to swim three miles to shore. I hope you don't have to swim to shore, Leslic. Nor you, Felix. You would have to undress, you know, and that might shock people."

"Father, you are quite impossible."

“ Send the bill for your expenses in to me, Felix, and don't talk nonsense. Diane! ”

“ Here am I, ” said Diane of New Orleans.

“ We are going down to Suffolk to-night, Diane. Wire them to have our room ready. ”