

## CHAPTER XL

“ THE *TITANIC* SUNK IN TWO MILES OF WATER! ”

SUCH were the placards of the evening papers which Lord Woden saw as he came out of Liverpool Street Station.

“ Simmons, what’s this? What the devil has happened to that steamer? I thought she was unsinkable! ”

The chauffeur touched his cap, and looked perturbed. “ Your lordship has not heard——? ”

“ I have heard nothing. ”

“ She struck an ice-berg, my lord. I hear there are over fifteen hundred people drowned. ”

The man knew that his master’s son and that son’s wife had been on board.

“ There are some saved. I trust that his lordship, the bishop—— ”

John Woden shook his head. “ Simmons, there is something—I am not going to tell you what—there is something which makes me think that my son is dead. Now buy me an *Evening Standard*. ”

As the car rolled along to Prince’s Gate, John read through the details of the tragedy, which had shocked the world. How the great ship, the last thing in maritime construction, the fastest, the biggest steamer on the seas had gone to her fate. Of the maiden voyage she had never completed. Of the fact that so great was her size that even when she was mortally wounded many of her passengers were unaware of it, until they had heard the tramp of others going on deck.

Diane touched his sleeve rather timidly, for his face was terse and set.

"Perhaps the good Leslie and Felix are among the saved?"

"Diane, do you remember in New York long since when you came screaming to me of a girl with a candle? That was when my Angeline—left me. And but two nights ago——"

"I saw her again, I, Diane of New Orleans, but I did think that she was one of the maids. John, there are so many maids at Woden. Tell me, why does this girl come not at all to you, yourself? Always to others as you have told me—to me, Diane of New Orleans and others?"

"I do not know."

"And who is she, John?"

"Diane, that I *think* I know. . . . Some day, I may tell you."

John was very silent. There had never been much community of feeling between Leslie and himself, but Leslie was his son, his eldest born, the first little child born to Angeline. John knew that he was gone and "Felix" too even before the lists came out.

"Perhaps I was a bit hard on him?" thought John.

Antony was waiting at Princes' Gate.

"Grandpater! You know——"

"Yes, my dear lad, I know. My son, and your father. A sad business, Antony. Poor old Leslie."

Later that night, he asked Antony a surprising question.

"Antony, do you believe in ghosts? Not the things of the séance-rooms, but real ghosts—apparitions?"

"I? I have never seen any, grandpater. I cannot say."

"I wonder?" said John, "I wonder? I thought I believed in nothing at all. Now, six times have others seen—what? When I see it myself, shall my own end come? And, why? I did not turn her into the streets;

I would have helped her, but she would not take my aid."

"Grandpater, what are you saying?"

"Nothing. I am only overwrought. I am an old man, and have seen too much; sometimes I think—when I am very tired—that I have lived too long. We are both overwrought to-night, Antony; we had better go to bed. Antony, take care of yourself. You are all I have in the world now; you and Poppy."

So with no sons now left, with only Antony and Poppy, old John Woden lived on.

1913 came. There were rumours of naval holidays. The stormclouds were beating up in Ireland. The Suffragettes were proving the fitness of women for the vote by burning down old churches, and assaulting cabinet ministers.

The New Year of 1914 was rung in by a peal of bells. It was to be a wonderful year—a year of peace and prosperity. Spring ripened into a glowing summer. The holiday crowds flocked to the warm blue seas and the golden sands, to the green woods and the white lanes.

On June 28th, the Archduke Francis Ferdinand and his wife were killed at Sarajevo by a young fool.

"The damned young scoundrel. I hope they string him up," said Lord Woden. "Now there will be trouble."

He and Diane were in Suffolk. All over Europe the holiday-makers revelled in that wonderful summer—at Ostende, Scarborough, Paris-Plage—all those pretty places and more.

Almost unnoticed at first, the fleets and the armies began to move. The air was pregnant with destiny.

Hour by hour the situation grew more tense. During that last ghastly week in July the holiday-makers began to come back—at first in small crowds.

"Of course, there is nothing in it, old man, but the wife is nervous. You know what women are."

The small crowds became a rushing mob, fighting for

places on the trains and steamers. All over Europe men were arming and stocks and shares tumbling.

## STOCK EXCHANGE CLOSED

Lord Woden saw that placard as he came back to London with Diane. He saw the run on the banks for gold; went to Lloyd's, where rates were rising hour by hour.

"It looks like the real thing this time, Diane." They were going through Piccadilly in the car now. The streets were thronged with excited crowds.

"So Milord Roberts was right."

"He was right, Diane, and how right we have yet to learn."

Bank Holiday—the most momentous England has ever known, dawned upon an expectant world. Towards nightfall the crowds began to gather in front of Buckingham Palace; a demonstration of confidence in their King in the dark days which were before him and his Empire.

Eleven o'clock. The last stroke of the hour died away. Britain had declared war on Germany.