

## CHAPTER XLII

IT was in an annexe of the big hospital at Denmark Hill that John saw his grandson, Antony, again, and Poppy had been brought with him on condition that she be very good, and not noisy. Antony was in London with a broken arm and other complications caused by too close proximity to a German 5.9 H.E. shell. Such were the terrible perversities of war that John felt quite glad, especially when he learned that Antony would never again be fit for active service.

Antony had been gazetted the day he was wounded. He was now Second-Lieutenant Woden of the London Regiment.

"Seems a bit selfish; Antony, but I am thankful to think that you will not go back. You are the last Woden of us all."

"Except Poppy."

John smiled and stroked Poppy's short, dark hair, which reminded him so much of Angeline's. He wanted an heir male; it was not yet a woman's world, though great strides were soon to be made; the sands of the old male ascendancy were running out.

"After all, if your left arm is permanently crooked, you have always got your right. Do you think you will get your 'ticket'?"

John was not an old man to fall behind the times in which he lived; he was ever abreast of them, even to colloquialisms.

"No; I expect I shall have a spot of leave when I am fit, and then get a 'cushy' job on the Staff. Don't want to be out of khaki while the war is on."

"We must try and get you down to Wolen as soon as you can be moved. I have let 'em have it as a convalescent home, Antony, but there are still rooms to spare."

"It will be jolly to see Woden again," said Antony, and then they fell to mutual reminiscences. How a friend of John had a son who, for a bet, had played on a barrel-organ "Die Wacht Am Rhein" in one of the most respectable suburbs in London, gaining many pennies, but no recognition of the tune. How Antony had heard the German gramophones and the voices in the enemy trench singing "Püppchen."

"Jove, Antony, when we came down on the Yankees at Gettysburg, I heard 'em singing 'John Brown's Body.' You are bringing it all back. . . . Antony, that was over fifty years ago. What an old, old man I am getting! Do you realise I am nearly ninety?"

"And still going about London like a two-year-old, grandpater, you're going to make your century."

"Damme, my boy, you make me feel young again. I have had a very nice life, but my later years have been somewhat troubled with ghosts."

"Lovely," broke in nine-year-old Poppy, who had been listening attentively. "Grandpa, I do want to see a real live ghost. Show me, please."

"Bless you, Poppy, I don't carry the beasts about in my pocket. I shall have to take you to Maskelyne and Cook's. . . . Antony, my boy, I think one of these pretty nurses is coming along the ward to turn us out. I cannot say how pleased I am to see you safe. I have been worried about you."

"I have been all right. Had a sniff of gas when they sent it over at Ypres in 1915, but it never sent me further than the C.C.S. After that I was fine until I stopped this lot. I think I have been very lucky."

John thought so too. They left the ward and went home to Prince's Gate.

"Why can't daddy come, too?" asked Poppy, plaintively.

"We'll have him back soon enough, Poppy. He is coming to us and never going away any more."

"Well," said Diane of New Orleans, "and how was the good grandson?"

"Sitting up and taking nourishment, Diane. I hope he will soon be home."

"We must make him comfortable and give him his medicine regularly. You know I have the recipes for the good cocktails," replied Diane of New Orleans. "I think, too, that he should have a pretty lady. After so much war he must have the distraction."

"I want to find him a wife, Diane. If you know any eligibles, you are at liberty to introduce them."

It was late in 1916. Many weary months of war had passed. The "one bright spot" of Ireland had recently become much too bright and was in process of being quenched. "BRITAIN'S GREATEST SOLDIER GONE" on the newspaper placards had shocked the British public with its simple horror.

Fiery colonels in club-rooms and literary gentlemen whose pens were mightier than their swords, were still telling us how the war might be won in a month!

We were out of Gallipoli and in Salonica. Greece was sitting on the rocky fence of neutrality.

"It was the fearful cheek of the Germans to take away Greece's army," Diane had said.

"It was," John had replied. "Of course, we took away her navy, but then that was for her own good." And then he had laughed.

Yes, there was much to laugh at, even in war-time.

Mr. Lloyd George had taken over No. 10 Downing Street from Mr. Asquith, supposedly to the great concern of the Germans. The only visible result at present was the great concern of Mrs. Asquith.

"A good man, Lloyd George," admitted John, "at least in war-time. I should say *this* war-time." The affair of the Boer War and the policeman's uniform was pushed into decent obscurity.

"An opportunist," growled a dissenting friend, who thought Mr. Asquith looked like a statesman.

"Opportunists are what we want now," replied John.

John, himself, even at ninety, had done his share. Woden was a convalescent home; the Woden works were turning out the best munitions in Britain. At Rotherhithe and in Rede, day and night they slaved to support the armies. His wealth was unsparingly used in the Cause.

"I wish they weren't wasting so much of it, though. It isn't good for these politicians to get into the habit of playing with millions. It will be difficult to get them out of it after the war."

"Are you losing money, grandpater?"

"No, Antony, I am making it. War is an extravagant customer. Some people have called me a profiteer; I don't mind. Profiteering is the other man's enterprise; business acumen is your own."

"Quite right," said Antony.

"I always knew I would leave you a good deal, Antony, when my time came, but it will be a good deal more than I thought possible. You will be a rich man when you succeed me. And perhaps——"

"Perhaps, what?"

John beamed at him. Those whom the gods love die young, but those whom the politicians love have to be very old, ere they obtain reward.

"It is a bit late for another rung on the ladder, Antony, but it is coming."

In the New Year of 1917 John was given the Earldom of Woden, and the Viscounty of Redehall.