

## CHAPTER XLIV

"ISN'T my daddy's friend coming to see us ever, gran'pa? The one he called 'Tom'?"

"Poppy, I don't know."

Poppy's lips were tremulous and her eyes very bright with unshed tears as she thought of daddy and Diane. She was a soldier's daughter, and clenched her little hands and kept her courage.

"Can't you find him, gran'pa?"

"Dear, I am making all the inquiries I can. But I do not know his name. Your father was about to tell me, when the guns started and he never replied."

"I would like to find him. He saved my daddy's life once, and if—if he had been here he might have saved it again."

"Poppy, dearest, don't cry."

"I'm not goin' to cry. It—it isn't done, is it, grandpa? But—but—I wish I were an angel, then I could drop bombs on the Germans."

She said this with an intensity of feeling which bereft the words of all but pathos.

"Antony gone? And Diane? I wonder why I am left alone—why I live on and on, and see my sons and my grandsons swept away!"

John's life was very empty now. Who was left to him? Delilah in Long Island; he had never had much community of feeling with her. Tom; that name had painful associations; somehow he felt that the possessor had died long since.

"My first-born son, I wish I had had that letter—I

might have moulded his life differently. Well, it can't be helped now; I must carry on until my own time comes. . . . There is always Poppy."

All the affection he had left in the world was concentrated now on Poppy: dark-haired Poppy with the blue eyes, so like Angeline. After him, she would be Countess of Woden and the heiress of all his wealth.

All the care in the world was lavished on Poppy.

John took her down to Woden, and in the pleasant countryside, unchanged by war and the years, the dark cloud which had been upon them both, lifted in the course of time.

"I wonder why Antony's friend never came? Is he dead too, or a prisoner?"

The question remained unanswered. Perhaps he had joined the great company of those who do not grow old—

The great retreat of March, 1918, had come and gone. A momentous year, 1918. We were very near to losing the war; nearer than we had ever been since the hectic days after Mons. Russia, deflected from her allegiance by the scum who had usurped the Throne of the Czars, had played a traitor's part. The true Russia had gone under; perhaps, at some future time, to rise again.

The troops of the United States were pouring into France. Some said that that country had only made war to safeguard her investments, which was probably correct, but that was no reflection on the bravery of her men. The true America is not that of the Federal Reserve Bank, glutted with European gold; not that of the New England mamas. Not that of the Puritan witch-doctors, smelling out heresy, or of the bone-dry saints. It is that of the men who came over with the American Army.

In 1918 it was a case of retreat, dig-in and fight again.

"Had we that spirit in 1781," said the old Earl of Woden, "all North America from the Pole to the Rio Grande would still be under the British flag."

Then the Armistice came, and London went into the throes of a second and a greater "Maffeking." It burned the guns in the Mall, turned up the lights, became very drunk, and who shall blame it?

Turn up the lights, and on with the dance. Only eight million men are dead in Europe; gone into the last darkness in the holocaust of war. Only twenty million wounded. Only some thousands of millions of our wealth is gone, and we become for generations the bondslaves of New York!

They are foxtrotting in the hotels, and there is a cheery chink of glasses from the bars.

"Have another drink, old man? We've won the war."

And lost the supremacy of the seas to—the United States.

Never mind; we have won the war, even if we are to lose the peace. Now khaki is one-stepping with its beautiful partners. Coloured silk stockings, bare white breasts and warm young bodies under frilly frocks!

In the lesser resorts, pretty and not so pretty ladies; family parties from Brixton and Wood Green; bull-necked Jews from the Aldgate hinterland and many more.

All lights and bands and dancing now.

Yes, we have won the war.