

## CHAPTER VII

**J**OHN WODEN crossed the Channel not very long before Louis Philippe crossed in the other direction, quite hurriedly, disguised as Mr. William Smith. Much encouraged by this and previous events in Sicily, the underworld in Germany particularly, but also in other places began to get very restive indeed. By the time John Woden had done in Paris what business a most excited and hot-headed Paris was capable of doing, Vienna itself, to which he desired to proceed, was in the hands of a revolutionary committee of safety.

That, of course, was the name given to it by its creators. It was safe only to those who had nothing to lose, but any decent person, having regard to the sanctity of his women-folk, for instance, found it very unsafe indeed. The human wolf-packs of the Continental slums were in full cry, ready to glut their appetites on rapine and plunder; to take to their savage selves the women and the goods of cleaner, better men.

In Paris, John Woden had been able to take a hand in combating the disgruntled workmen at the street fighting which took place when those gentry found that the Second Republic did not mean a new heaven and a new earth, with work relegated to hell. He had no particular sympathy with the Second Republic, but he liked such a government better than one by the mob. He had seen that mob, and, like all mobs, it was composed of men whose instincts had gone right down to the animal. He saw the oafish faces, the unintelligent, greedy eyes, the utter bestiality.

Within him there awoke a desire to kill and cleanse the earth from their presence. He offered his services.

"When I shoot," said John, grimly, "I shoot to kill."

He soon killed his first man. It was late at night, but the city was surging with the uproar of a socialist insurrection. At the barricades stood young men who had learned the history of 1793, and old men who had lived it, both alike resolved that France should never see the same again. The stalwart John Woden stood beside them, fighting for a country which was not his own, for a republic he did not like, but knowing that he fought the battle of civilisation.

There was a rush at the barricade. A huge sandy-haired man, his face aflame with drink, a grotesque red rosette on his shoulder, rushed at John. He brandished a vast axe. John fired.

It was grotesque to see the great body stop and sway, the welling of blood on the dirty blue blouse, the odd heap into which the dead man sank. He was too busy reloading and firing at the time, but afterwards in the years to come, he always looked back to his first "kill" with a pleased contemplation. It was so complete and satisfactory.

When the fighting was ended, John decided to go on to Vienna. He had had a very interesting and enjoyable holiday in Paris, and had killed a great many socialists, but life could not be all pleasure. It was time to go somewhere else.

Vienna was still in the hands of the so-called committee of safety, but there was an energetic General Windischgrätz in the vicinity. He had already made things most unpleasant for Prague, and had reduced a crowd of roaring revolutionaries to tame cats. He now proposed to give his services to Vienna.

"It ought to be entertaining," thought John. "I shall go to Vienna."

And go to Vienna he did, but the strange turn which

was to be given to his life by this journey was quite unguessed.

The "Committee of Safety" at that moment was rather like a drunken man beginning to sober. It had had quite a jolly time and had done a great deal of damage along with other things too unpleasant to mention. Now Windischgrätz was in the neighbourhood, and his way with revolutionaries was short and sharp, and likely to terminate young "red" lives. It was a case of the morning after; and revolutionaries, like drunkards, rarely think of the morning after until it arrives.

The Committee began to think of its own safety and none too soon.

When John arrived in Vienna, he found that the Austrian troops under General Windischgrätz were already in possession of part of the capital and many prisoners. Resistance was being made, but the general, unlike many generals before and since, was a man who knew his business. There would soon be peace on earth in that neighbourhood, excepting always for those who were destined to find peace under it.

. Still at that time it was not a very safe place for any young man to go about on business, and John decided that before seeing what the local chemists were doing it would be a good idea to see what the Austrian troops were doing, and possibly help them. He made his way to where he imagined G.H.Q. to be.

It was getting late at night. Sounds of firing echoed over the houses and the glares of many fires lighted the sky.

The streets he was traversing became quieter and more suburban. It was very dark; it was not a time when municipalities were extravagant in lighting, and there were more important matters to require attention. It seemed a deserted world with its close shuttered houses and its silent streets.

And yet he was not alone. Twice in front of him he

had seen a little white figure, like a small lost ghost, and almost unconsciously he followed it. But it seemed anxious to avoid him, and when he quickened his pace it appeared to break into a run. The light was very bad, and he could not quite make out what it was.

Then he became aware that he was being followed. Already it had seemed once or twice that there had been voices some way behind, and on turning quickly, he observed a group of figures sink into the shadow of a wall.

He walked on quite calmly, listening intently for the following footsteps. The little white ghost had gone. He turned a corner and retired into the shadow of some trees.

Four men halted rather irresolutely outside his hiding place.

"He went this way," said one in German. "Curse it, where is he now?"

"He cannot be far. We should have closed on him before," grumbled another, "These Englishmen are all worth the robbing, believe me."

"Come on, or we'll lose him." The party moved off.

"Now I wonder," thought John, stepping out and looking after the retreating figures, "how they observed me? Can my surly landlord have had something to do with this? He looked rather villainous."

He was on the point of turning back, and leaving his adversaries on a false scent, when there came to him a piercing cry from the darkness ahead. Someone needed help and it sounded like a girl. He bounded towards the sound. The cry came again, and ended abruptly as though a hand had been clasped over the mouth of the caller.

It was the four dark figures who had planned to rob him and in between the little ghost in white.

At the sound of his running they looked towards him, and burst into a chorus of exclamations. Here was the

prey they had tracked, coming as it seemed like a lamb to the slaughter; one lamb, if a rather big one to four slaughterers. The man who held the little white ghost retained his hold; his three comrades advanced menacingly to John: the foremost drew a knife.

He never had time to use it. A fist like a lump of iron shot out; there was an odd fifteen stone of bone and muscle behind it. It caught the man with the knife, clean under the jaw; he was lifted from his feet and fell on his back in the roadway with a crash, quite insensible.

Before the other two had quite grasped what had happened, they found their dirty collars seized with the grip of a vice; they were swung round and their heads met with a crash. A myriad lights flashed before their eyes. Once again, and they were pitched helpless and groaning beside their comrade.

The fourth man had gazed open mouthed. He released his burden—John could now see that it was a little girl—with the evident intention of taking to his heels. And probably John would have let him do so, had he not let the girl drop with a callous brutality, as one tosses a bone to a dog. With a bound John was on him, one hand squeezing the front of his throat. The man tried to get at his knife, but a twist of the wrist sent it flying.

John backed him against a wall, and smiled down grimly at the terrified face.

“The red rosette, I see,” he observed, caustically, “One of the representatives of the people.”

He spoke in English; the man did not understand him, but the menace in John’s voice was very evident.

“Let me see if you have robbed anyone else to-night.” With a quick turn, he had the man’s hands behind his back pressing against the wall; and kept him there with the pressure of one knee, whilst he proceeded to search him.

It had been in John’s mind to thrash the man and send

him about his business, the thrashing to vary according to the plunder disclosed, but in the first pocket was something soft, and as he drew it out, his eyes grew cold as steel, for it was a woman's hand, laden—perhaps over-laden with rings, but still a woman's.

The man's jaw dropped as John looked at him. His throat had been released but nothing came from him but a frightened gasp.

John nodded at him very slowly.

"I'm sorry I don't believe in hell, Mr. Scum-of-the-under-world; I'd like to think of you burning there to-night."

With a sudden upward pull, he raised the man until his neck was resting against the edge of the brick wall. Then with one hand he pressed back his face.

"You've had a jolly time, plundering and burning, and now you're just going to die, and I hope it hurts."

There was a sharp crack, the struggles ceased and the robber went limp. With a heave John tossed the body over the wall.

What the occupants of the house appertaining would think when they found it in the morning was not a matter to which John gave any consideration.

The little girl was still standing watching him. She did not appear in the least frightened at his proceedings; she evidently recognised a friend. John gazed at her; she was apparently between nine and ten years of age, and was quite beautiful; had short dark hair cropped like a boy's to the nape of her neck; and wore a white garment, which appeared to be a nightgown. This latter impression was indeed heightened by the fact that she had on one little red slipper; the other small foot was bare.

"*Wer bist du?*" asked John, in rather halting German, "*Bist du verloren?*"

The child looked up at him. "I'm Angeline," she answered, "and you can speak English to me. I'm not an Austrian girl." There was the ring of pride in her tones.

"You're British? What on earth are you doing here, and at this time of night? And dressed like that?"

"I'll tell you 'cos I like you. But can we go somewhere else, sir? I'm afraid these might wake up." She indicated the unconscious men in the roadway.

"Certainly. Where is your home?"

"It was at the back of the *Theresestrasse*, but I don't think I have a home now. I believe it is all burnt."

"The deuce it is? Well, we'll go and see anyway. and you can't walk like that." He stooped and gathered up the little figure into his strong arms. "Now tell me where to go."

She gave detailed though rather vague directions. She had been wandering about for some time, and in conditions which had precluded a careful observation of the way she had come. Nevertheless, for a child of her age, she seemed unusually observant.

"You are rather clever," said John, who found a strange fascination in this dark-haired, half-clad little English girl.

She looked up at him half-boldly, half-shyly.

"You know I think you're rather nice."

"Why do you think that?" asked John, oddly pleased.

"You're so big and strong, and you rescued me like—like Little Red Riding Hood from the Wolf."

John laughed down at her smiling, contented face. "I remember the tale," he said, "But I thought you were a little white ghost—Angeline. That's a pretty name—Angeline."

"What's your's, please?"

"You can call me John."

"I mustn't do that, sir."

"Why ever not? It's my own name. And I don't want to be called 'sir'—anyway, by you."

"Papa and Mama say I must always show respect to my elders."

"That's all nonsense. It depends on the elders. I can only give you about twelve years anyway, little Miss Angelina, and I want to be called 'John'."

"Very well, John."

They were talking quite like old friends now. Acting on an inexplicable impulse, he bent his head and kissed her.

"Again, please," she said, demurely.

"You are greedy. Here goes." He kissed her once more.

"I expect mama would be shocked."

"In that case," suggested John, "it would be advisable to spare the feelings of mama by refraining from telling her."

"I never would tell her. Our maid, Rosa, says it's wrong to tell 'bout kisses. I saw her with the gardener. She says no real lady ever tells 'bout kisses."

"Rosa would appear to have some sound common sense. But you were going to tell me, I think, some more about yourself—how you come to be wandering about Vienna at mid-night in a nightgown and one slipper, and why you think your house is burnt."

"Well, we've lived in the *Theresestrasse* ever since I was quite a little girl, and papa went home to England on business just before the fighting started."

"A most diplomatic time to go home on business," commented John, drily.

"Grandpa died and left him a house and he had to go and get it. And then the fighting started and he couldn't get back, and they wouldn't let us go. All the servants went, and this afternoon mama said it wasn't safe and she couldn't stand it any longer, and she went to try and find General Vindy——"

"Who? Oh, Windischgrätz! Go on."

"She wanted to ask him for soldiers, 'cause the people round here had started looting. What's looting?"



"I forget the precise legal definition, but it may be understood as a species of robbery or burglary. Go on."

"You know I like you when you speak that way, just as though I was a grown-up young lady. It's so—so dignified."

"I am glad to have given satisfaction, Angeline, but aren't we wandering a little from the subject?"

"Excuse me, John. So we were. Well, mama went and it got dark, and she didn't come back. Then I got some supper from the kitchen—a lovely supper—lots of things I'm *never* supposed to have. And I upset a tray and broke lots of cups. I expect I'll be spanked for that, but it was worth it."

John chuckled. "Unless the fire has covered up the traces of your crime. If it has I should preserve a discreet silence. If it hasn't, I should be as silent as possible."

"Tisn't easy being spanked, John, as I daresay you know. But I was going to tell you about the fire."

"Ah, yes, we seem some time coming to that. Incidentally, am I keeping on the right road?"

"Oh, yes. I'll tell you when to turn. When it got dark, I undressed and put myself to bed. And then I heard someone below moving about. I thought it was mama with the soldiers. And I wanted to have a peep at them so I looked over the top of the stairs. But it wasn't soldiers; lots of horrid men were putting papa's things into sacks, and I heard one of them say in German—I can speak German, you know—'Upstairs and then we'll burn the place.' So I ran down the back stairs in quite a hurry and I was rather frightened, and I lost one slipper in the garden. And then I wandered about—and—you know all the rest, John, dear."

John gave the matter some rapid thought. He had no knowledge of Angeline's father, but it would seem on the face of it as though that gentleman possessed tact in large

quantities or courage in little. It was emphatically not a time to leave a wife and daughter. The non-return of the mother was disquieting. Finally the neighbourhood seemed dangerous.

They turned the corner. For some time John had become aware that they were nearing the glow of a large fire, which was ominous.

They turned a corner and saw a house blazing to the skies.

"That's the house," said Angeline, calmly, "I wonder where mama is?"

"Wait here and hide by this gate, while I have a look round, and if anyone finds you call out at once as loud as you can."

He went nearer, under cover as far as possible. The air was very hot and the gardens were brilliantly lighted by the flames which wrapped the building from end to end and door to roof. The neighbourhood seemed deserted.

He returned to Angeline and gathered her once again into his arms.

"Come on," he said, "we'll see if we can find the general, and ask him to find your mama. And if not——"

"And if not, what, John?"

"I'll take you back to England and find your papa, though how you are to travel about with one shoe off and one shoe on, and nothing but a little white nightie passes my comprehension."

"There are shops," she reminded him, with dignity.

"So there are Angeline. I must be getting woolly-headed in my old age."

"You're not old. You're a nice young man, John. Will you ever be old?"

"Yes Angeline, and so will you, barring accidents. A most unpleasant prospect, but we shall have to get used to it—some day."

"Lots of things we don't like we get used to, John."

"A most profound observation, Angeline. I congratulate you on your clarity of thought."

"I don't quite know what that means, John, but I'm getting awfully sleepy. May I go to sleep in your arms?"

"Most certainly, if you so desire."

"Kiss me good-night then, please, and wake me up when you have found mama."