

## CHAPTER IX

**I**N due course, John Woden and his ward arrived in London. During the whole of the journey he had secured for her the most comfortable rooms at inns and the best places on conveyances, including the Antwerp packet. These desirable results were accomplished partly by bribery and partly by personality.

John Woden had lived long enough in this world to observe that there were three main classes of people in it. In the first came the amiable and the weak. They got on very well with most others in life, made many friends who borrowed their money, advised and insulted them alternately, and saw to it that they had no inconvenient ideas of their own. They were generally liked and when they died, the hat was passed round more or less willingly for their widows and orphans.

In the second class were the incompetent aggressives. Though liable to nasty crashes, bluff and bluster often carried them a surprising way. "We must be very careful what we say to Henry, or he may be offended." No one had considered whether the first class might be offended or not; if they were it was put down to childish bad-temper. The bluff and bluster gentlemen oft bluffed and blustered successfully to the end, though if ever they were found out great was the fall thereof. Their kind friends would rush in with war-whoops, metaphorically speaking, to jump on them as they lay on the ground.

In the third class were the competent aggressives. They knew exactly when to be courteous, precisely when to be bulky, and never made any mistake about when to keep on

the velvet glove and to take it off the iron hand. What they wanted they expected, and they generally got it. The world was their oyster.

John Woden belonged as undoubtedly to the third class as his clerical father had belonged to the first. He was observant, and had seen that the usual result of helping lame dogs over stiles was to be bitten on the other side. He had noticed that vast masses of people expected something to be done for them instead of doing something for themselves. He had found that gratitude was the expectation of favours to come, and that the majority of mankind did not return good for evil, but evil for good.

So John arriving at the sane conclusion that the average man was not worth considering, refused to consider him.

John had many good qualities, but his head always ruled his heart. He had refused to marry Elizabeth Bonvill, because he recognised quite clearly that a second mistake could not annul the first. He had killed rebels without compunction and indeed with pleasure because these were the parasites of the world. Now he was shielding and protecting a helpless little girl, much more efficiently than her own people.

It is difficult to say exactly what his feelings were to Angeline. She was too young for love as man loves woman; much too young for any sex appeal. No such fantastic idea entered his head. It was a protective feeling he could not analyse. Perhaps—ever so slightly—the veil of the future was being raised for the sceptical John Woden?

“Do you love me, John?” she had asked abruptly on the boat, as children will.

“Angeline, of course.”

“And will you be sorry to hand me over to papa?”

“I shall rather, but I hope I shall see you sometimes after that. Will you be sorry to be handed back?”

“John, it’s a dreadful thing to say, but I shall. Of course, papa is papa, and I love him, but——”

"Go on."

"He worries me sometimes, John, and I know he worries mama too. He is so fussy. That's what I like about you : you are always calm. And when things don't go as papa likes, he bubbles——"

"Bubbles ?"

"Like a boiling kettle, John. All fluttery ; you know how the lid goes. Somehow he reminds me of that. And he expects people to do as he wants and they don't, and he just fumes. You always seem to get what you want, John, and you never fume."

"Never fume, Angeline. It is the sign of a vacillating mind."

"What's a vaseline mind, John ?"

"That was not the exact word, but it will do. A sort of weather-cock outlook, Angeline. Goes round and round. The sort of mind that can't get what it wants because it doesn't know what it wants."

"You've never met my papa, have you ?"

"No," said John.

"You seem to know him very well. I expect you've met someone like him."

"Scres."

"He is my dear papa, but he is trying sometimes. I don't really see much of him though except on Sundays. Do you like Sundays ? I don't."

"Why ?" asked John, evading her question.

"I had to go to the English church, and the man spoke for hours always. And me being told not to fidget. And no toys and nothing to read but the Bible. Of course, I don't mind the Bible ; some parts of it are nice. But I don't think my dolls would have hurt me, do you ?"

"Not a scrap. I'd have given them to you."

"You are a very understanding person, John. When I grow up, I shall have a hundred dolls and they'll all be brought out on Sundays and given extra nice dresses to

wear. And all my children shall have toffee to suck during the sermon; they will listen so much better. I know I should. I had a chunk once. Rosa gave it to me, but it stuck to my teeth and then the hymn came and I couldn't sing, and papa found out."

"What did he say?"

"I had such a whipping, John, and I couldn't sit down for hours."

John smiled and put a protecting arm round her. His opinion of Mr. Leslie was not improving.

In London, after much diligent inquiry, it was ascertained that Angeline's father was in Yorkshire. John's private opinion was that he ought to have been in Austria scouring the country for his wife and daughter. He might have stood a chance of being killed, which would possibly have been an improvement. However, he was alive and in Yorkshire, and it was necessary to hand over his daughter.

It was a long and tiring journey to Yorkshire in those days, but John, whose first journey it was in that direction, found plenty to interest in the growing industrialism of the North. Men were sinking pits for coal and smelting iron. As evening drew on the glow of the blast-furnaces inspired him.

"The altar-fires of Mammon," he murmured.

Redehall was nestling snugly in the country. There were woods and fields by the house of Mr. Leslie and all the way along the valley. Only a glow through the distant hills told of industrialism far away.

"That's grandpa's house," said Angeline.

John noted as significant that her first thought was of "grandpa's house" not of the father who might be inside it.

It was a country mansion of the smaller type, not much bigger than the white elephant of a vicarage where he had been born. How much of the ground adjoining belonged to the estate John did not know. Angeline enlightened him.

"It's a nice garden," she said, "and there's lots of currant and gooseberry bushes at the back. And that dark line is the wood, John; grandpa's wood. I just love it. I came over once before, you know. There's a pond and it's shallow at the edge and you can paddle. No one ever goes there and I had it all to myself and played Red Riding Hood and mermaids and wood syrups and all sorts of things."

"Wood *what*? Do you mean sylphs?"

"I 'spect that's it. John do you know everything?"

"No. One thing I don't know is how your father is going to receive me now. Or I him," he added under his breath. He knocked at the door.

It was open by a wooden-faced maid, who unbent as soon as she caught sight of Angeline.

"God bless us it's Miss Angeline. Your father and all have been in a rare way about you."

"Tell him I'm here, Susan, and this is Mr. John Woden, who has 'scorted me all the way from Vienna."

At that juncture a portly whiskered gentleman came out of the dining-room. John realised immediately that Angeline's beauty must have been derived from the distaff side of the family.

John observed that he limped badly and used a stick.

"Angeline, my dear child. So you have arrived. I have been so anxious about you."

She kissed him. "Papa, this is Mr. John Woden, who found me in Vienna and brought me all the way here."

"I am deeply obliged to you, sir," said Mr. Leslie, offering a flabby hand, "I had your letter announcing the sad news of my dear wife, and stating your intention of looking after my daughter. I myself owing to an unfortunate accident was unable to travel, otherwise I should have returned at once when those deplorable disturbances broke out."

Inwardly John wondered whether he would have been of any use, but he murmured polite condolences.

"Angeline, did not your mother tell you that I had broken my leg?"

"We never heard from you, papa, after you went away."

"Deplorable. So my letters went astray. I do not know," said Mr. Leslie, "what things are coming to. They were very different when I was a boy."

John was wondering at his apparent casualness with regard to the fate of his wife, when a lady came out of the dining-room. She was elderly, sharp and angular, and appeared to regard the world with a sour disfavour. She stared disdainfully at John, who returned her gaze steadily.

"Maria, this is the young man who has brought Angeline back. My sister, Mr. Woden."

"Pretty goings-on," snorted the lady, unexpectedly, "where's the child's mother?"

"Neither I nor any other person I know," answered John, rather nettled, "has the least idea where Mrs. Leslie can be."

"As to her falling into the Danube, or being burnt or the like," said Miss Maria, maliciously, "I don't believe it. A flighty piece, I always said. I have heard of these Austrian officers," she added, significantly.

"My dear, you must not say such things—and before strangers," murmured Mr. Leslie, deprecatingly, "I know that Isobel was a little reckless—too inclined to think that her youth had not yet gone—but I cannot believe——"

"Bah! You believe it well enough, or you wouldn't take the matter like you do."

John began to see daylight. He did not believe such suggestions for a moment, as they were obviously actuated by malice, but he could see that the weak charactered Mr. Leslie was influenced by his shrew of a sister.

"You've always been jealous and with reason and you know it," continued Miss Maria, "And you had better

watch Angeline too, or she'll be going the same way. Travelling all these days and nights with a young man. H'm."

"If your innuendos are meant for me, madam," said John, suavely, "I can only say that you must have a particularly foul and unpleasant mind, and advise you to be careful lest you drive me to consult my lawyers in the matter of slander."

Miss Maria crimsoned with wrath, and could hardly articulate. It was many long years since anyone had dared to talk to her like that.

"Come, come," said Mr. Leslie, secretly rather pleased at Maria's discomfiture. He wished he dared to talk to people like that—especially to Maria. "Be quiet, Maria, be quiet. I—I insist upon it." He was beginning to fume, which was the only time when he had courage to face anyone. "Let us offer you a little refreshment Mr. Woden."

John was about to refuse when he recollected how much his staying would annoy Maria.

"Thank you," he said, politely.