

WILHELMINA JANE MOLLETT'S EARLY DAYS. RECALLED BY HER SISTER LINA.

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It was in 1868 that those demigods the Grown-Ups, consulting with the Fates, decreed that the time was ripe for introducing both Minnie and Lina to the ante-chambers of classical scholarship. The English home was dismantled and the whole family removed to Hanover, where furnished rooms were taken, pending the formation of a permanent centre.

Minnie and Lina were placed as day-boarders in a private preparatory school, while their names were entered on the waiting list of the "Higher Daughters' School," one of Hanover's palatial and famous Secondary establishments.

Two large airy well-lighted rooms in an old patrician dwelling house received Miss L.'s little pupils, who sat round long tables with their books before them.

On the first schoolday a short examination relegated Minnie to the higher and Lina to the lower section.

Both children were bi-linguists from infancy, and, at this stage of their career could talk, read and write German almost as well as English. Minnie's morning classes happened to include history, and the little girl of ten created quite a sensation when Miss L. (the very capable head mistress) questioned her on English history.

"She knew more than Miss L.," exclaimed a small admirer in the play-hour. "She knew everything." Thus Minnie entered the recreation yard with a little halo already shining round her, and was quickly surrounded by a knot of adherents and introduced to the favourite game of "Black Man." For the benefit of those who do not know the game, I explain the rules.

The court was divided into three broad sections, marked off by grooves. By lot one pupil was elected "Black Man" and, as such, stood in the middle section. The other girls stood on one side, until one, several or all would shout tauntingly, "Who fears the Black Man?" and the valiant answers would sound "I don't," when all would storm across the middle plot, the Black Man after them. Those he touched were his and stood prisoners in his keeping, until some brave freeman in his turn touched them when they were again at liberty—but if the Black Man touched the deliverer, she too became a prisoner. This exciting game had probably a symbolical meaning to the long-dead children by whom it was played ages before little Minnie knew it, but to her generation it was simply an excuse for fun, racket and romping, while the pupils worked themselves up to a frenzy of excitement. Minnie, well used to hearty romps, was in the heart of the fun, escaping every time she crossed the Black Man's preserves, until a heavy pull at her long brown hair from behind stopped her and the Black Man caught her, just as she set her foot in his domains. Minnie turned, recognised her foe in the grinning face of a much larger girl, and simply, without loss of words, clenched her small fists and fell upon the astonished offender. A real fray resulted. Gracie, taken by surprise, was enveloped and pummelled before she quite realised what was happening. To her shrieks of wrath were added the screams of the spectators. The staff rushed out. Miss L., who was short and stout, seized hold of Gracie, the Swiss Mademoiselle of Minnie.

The combatants were parted. "You do not do this, little girl, in this school," remarked Mademoiselle reprovingly. "Teach her not to pull my hair," retorted Minnie. And it did. Eventually the antagonists became the best of friends.

A friendship, and a life-long one, Minnie did carry away from this preparatory school, for with her in class was a

dear child called Elspeth Frank, who for more than half a century was to be an influence for good in Minnie's moral development. This little girl was as precocious as Minnie herself, but in a different way; intellectually normally developed for her age, she had a sympathy and understanding of a far maturer age for all human suffering or even disappointment, and seemed instinctively to make it her task to help, alleviate and counsel with tender wisdom, bequeathed by many noble ancestors who had learned the meaning of life's darkest phases through years of a history that blackens past civilisations.

Like Minnie she dominated unconsciously, but unlike her, her actions were checked by a gentle philosophy, inherited from long lines of that most aristocratic and faithful of nations, the Hebrews.

While Minnie's impetuous nature was apt to carry her beyond the boundaries of prudence, influenced by the inspiration of a moment, Elspeth, with clearer vision, would glance to a far perspective of consequences, and with a tender humility point them out to her friend until having completely won Minnie's confidence, Elspeth had only to say, "One does not do this," for Minnie to pause, reflect and take the more prudent path of action.

With due respect to the teachers on Miss L.'s staff, I think the personal self-chosen guides Minnie selected as her friends had greater influence in her career than any professional instructors.

The personal family circle of the Franks often welcomed Minnie and her sister, and here the atmosphere of joy and benevolence seemed at times to give to it the sanctity of a festival of home and hospitality.

Mrs. Frank liked to see us romp with her children, and while always gentle, would laugh with them as heartily as the wildest of them. Once she took us to the Synagogue, and we sat up in a gallery, looking down on a scene of reverent formality that carried us back some thousands of years and awed us by its solemn grandeur.

Some one presented us at this time with the perfect model of a cooking stove in miniature. Elspeth was invited to come and cook. She was an advanced adept at this science, and despised waste of good provisions in many inventions. She cooked potatoes as they should be cooked, and mixed biscuits that could have been an honour to any meal, while Minnie specialised in fancy cakes, and I am sorry to say, Lina tried the effect of mixing all her share of the rations into one monstrous hash, which curiously was not unpalatable. Never shall I forget the fearful day when Elspeth suddenly uttered a scream of terror and stood by the stove with her pinafore in flames. Still less shall I forget the lightning initiative of Minnie, who seized a woollen rug, providentially lying on a chair at hand ready for mending, threw it round Elspeth and pressed out the flames with her arms. Minnie was barely eleven when this accident occurred, and thanks to her presence of mind her little play-fellow escaped with a fright, some tears and superficial burns, but not seriously hurt.

Among the many whose influence helped to develop Minnie's character at this impressionable age was the capable Professor of Swimming, taught in a large basin over the river Leine, attached to Hanover's justly famous "Roman Baths." Minnie was an apt and enthusiastic pupil. She retained her love for this exercise to the end of her life, and when nearly seventy, fearlessly attempted and achieved feats of endurance that daunted many a young swimmer.

Dancing, calisthenics, and skating on the wide flooded meadows about Hanover were all welcome exercises to the lively child, and in all and each she excelled.

Long walks with a father whose business now allowed him to live permanently with his family, are an unforgettable

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