

beyond a certain limit. When that is reached you long for a quiet corner in which to rest."

Many and varied conditions of life were familiar to Minnie in those Paris years and her power of sympathy was freely exercised. There was neat old "Madame" who arrived in the Passy home-flat to do the cooking, of which the base was always *pot-au-feu*.

Madame had lived right through the siege of Paris, and, while rapidly peeling onions or potatoes, would discourse upon unforgettable events of that epoch—far more lifelike and human than any we had been taught to consider in College in the history classes.

"There was a day," sighed Madame, "a day, when Pompom the poodle disappeared. A lovely dog, mes demoiselles, one of the family, Ah! What would you! He gave us meat for the soup that day. The children wondered at the good *pot-au-feu*. They never knew till years afterwards. For them Pompom had been sent to the country."

Many incidents of her Paris life faded from Minnie's memory, but old Madame and her siege of Paris stories did not. "Do you remember the poodle?" she would say after more than half a century.

Beloved of Minnie were the forsaken gardens of Saint Cloud palace. The silent grass-grown avenues, sweet with imperial violets, run wild, spoke to her of banished monarchs, of the courteous Napoleon, of his beautiful wife and, above all, of the handsome boy-prince, who for years was her romantic ideal of young manhood.

One day Minnie was introduced to Victor Hugo's "Miserables." She read the unabridged edition straight through in an incredibly short time, without skipping a word. As is generally the case it left a life-long mark.

Besides studying French and drawing in Paris and constantly helping her Mother, Minnie was very busy in actual productive and creative work at this stage of her development. Her father, John William Mollett, had accepted a commission to write a series of biographies for Messrs. Sampson Low's Great Artist Series and as his duties on the exhibition staff were exacting, his daughter virtually produced a considerable part of the first biography, Rembrandt, under his direction.

She delighted in this literary work, the first she ever did for the press.

When the exhibition closed and wound up its affairs, John Mollett received the gold medal and title of Officier de l'Instruction Publique for distinguished service and arranged to leave his family in Paris with their mother, while he fulfilled a contract that called him to Africa.

All was settled when on the eve of his departure his wife passed home in her sleep, and Minnie and her five younger brothers and sisters were motherless. The terrible ordeal of the funeral following, as it does in France, so close upon the pang of parting—the hurried dissolution of the Passy Home, the adieux to friends and sympathisers, to places full of association and beauty, to lovely Paris, as a well-protected English girl would know it from her parent's side, and, worst of all, her father's hurried departure to a far land, gave Minnie her first personal insight into life's tragedy.

She rose heroically to the occasion, and it was not with selfish lamentations that she met the ordeal. There were the younger ones to think of. Two maiden aunts, (of blessed memory) arrived at this stage and be-mothered the six orphans. Three were carried off to the house of their maternal grandmother, while Minnie, Lina and the small Godfrey travelled to England with a beloved Aunt Jane and were made much of in the hospitable home of dear Grandmamma Mollett. Time passed, healed, and set the problem of the future.

Lina went to the Continent to continue special studies and live with her maternal Grandmother. To the versatile

Minnie all careers seemed open, but only one appealed: the nursing of the sick.

"I want to do something really useful in the world," she opined, "something really wanted." In vain the family opposed her choice, explaining that real professional nursing exacted much sacrifice, offered many views of life that would be repugnant to her, would force her to contemplate and study repulsive problems. "I know," she insisted—"I know nursing and all medical work must present such problems, but I know I can face them." She would not be shaken and some one suggested that she should have her way. "Opposition will only make her more headstrong. Let Minnie really know what professional nursing in a big hospital means, and she will be cured of her obstinacy in a fortnight."

So things were arranged and Minnie was entered as a probationer, on trial, at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, London, under the able Matronship of Miss Manson—a leader who had the royal gift of inspiring confidence in her subalterns, of reading and appreciating their talent, of placing the right worker in the right place. To her Minnie owed much of her professional success in after life, much of the enthusiasm that was sustained by a generous friendship, a faith in the nobility of her work, that never flagged until the end.

Meanwhile Minnie's family expected her back in a short time, disgusted and quite cured of all desire to be a nurse, but they were disappointed. From the first day of her probationership to the end of her life Minnie was utterly faithful to her profession.

She never swerved from the conviction that "to slay the dragon of uncleanness, to bind the broken, to raise the fallen, to strengthen the weak" was the noblest work man or woman could follow out—and in that sense she passed on her ideals to her own probationers in the years when she herself rose to be a teacher and a leader.

In the *Nursing Record* some of her lessons to her pupils have been reprinted and the article on "Purity" (3rd May, 1888) gives a clear insight into her mental view of nursing and the respect due to it by its professional followers. "Nothing is more dangerous," she says, "than the first weakness of moral strength, and a nurse is mainly dependant on her own strength and character, on the thoroughness of her own self-discipline for power to resist self-indulgence and laxity of moral courage," while the article entitled "Sympathy" (July 19th, 1888) and "Culture" (June 14th, 1888) extend and carry out the ideals in which she certainly must have been grounded and encouraged in the early days at St. Bartholomew's. All honour to her leaders and fellow-workers.

Speaking of her career in the 70th year of her life and shortly before she passed away, she remembered that her busiest years in hospital were her happiest. "I enjoyed them all," she said.

She loved to remember those who had helped and befriended her on her way, to recall the incidents of their professional activities, to appreciate their success, valour and independence.

Those who have known her in the arena can best understand her merits, her influence for good, unconsciously spreading pure and noble ideals, valiant to uphold them to the death.

The above article concludes the series of Miss Wilhelmina Mollett's early days, contributed by her sister Lina. Before publishing those of her last years in Chile we are desirous, and her sister is desirous, that we should record some reminiscences of her professional career. Will any Nurse who knew Miss Mollett and worked with her at Southampton or elsewhere, communicate with the Editor?

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)