

THE AUTUMN YEARS OF WILHELMINA JANE MOLLETT.

BY HER SISTER LINA.

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When news arrived in the Lyceum of Copiapo, Chili, of South America, that the Director's sister was embarking for this continent, great interest and kindly sympathy was shown by the entire staff, the members of which were not only colleagues and fellow-workers but loyal and valued friends of their headmistress.

And when, after much preparation and hopeful expectation, Minnie stepped from the train in Copiapo, to meet a sister she had not seen for all but twenty years, her first words were: "Well, here you have me!" and her second: "Here's my luggage-ticket! I suppose your man will look after that!"

She might have been at Charing Cross, returning to her usual quarters, after a casual trip.

Copiapo was recovering languidly from one of its worst quakes—and certainly did not show up its smartest—but, as Minnie motored through the billowing dust of the capital of desert Stecamo, and viewed the ruins to right and left, she made no comment, and showed no surprise, until we passed the staunch little theatre, valiantly erect and bright with posters of startling cinema functions. Then she remarked with decision:

"We'll go there this evening!"

And we did. In fact she bossed us from that day on.

A sumptuous high-tea, capable of waiting for the train, if delayed, had been prepared in the home adjoining the Lyceum, and after she had been taken to the best bedroom to wash and brush, Minnie did ample justice to it and to the welcome of a group of friends who were there to receive her.

Raising her cup of tea she bowed to them, apologised in English that she could not thank them in their own language and tell them in Spanish how much she appreciated their courtesy.

As a matter of fact they understood English and retired delighted with the new-comer. Left alone with her sister, Minnie was full of the West coast kindness. In Iquique she had stayed with Mr. and Mrs. Moody, English friends of her sister, who made her very much at home. In the port of Caldera our popular Vice-Consul and his lady, Mr. and Mrs. Mackenzie, came on board and took her to their pretty house on the heights of Caldera. Here she spent the night, attended with a beautiful hospitality that laid the base of a lasting friendship—a friendship that was to brighten many hours and days of the all but nine years she spent in Chili.

Deputations of serious little girls in regimental white overalls, with their respective class-badge, began to knock at the door with flowers for "the lady from England"; lunches and festive teas were organised in her honour, addresses in English offered in welcome, and very soon, when I returned to my home off duty, I would find a

cheerful group playing bridge in the large sitting-room given over to Minnie.

In South America, North Americans and English amalgamate into an English-speaking colony, especially in districts where the English element is scarce and are generally on very friendly terms.

Lively discussions on the modifications of rules went on, Minnie always upholding classical standards and opposing unnecessary changes.

"Whist was spoilt by unmeaning innovations," she opined, "now bridge is being spoiled."

Minnie's sister would listen to these arguments with a humiliating consciousness that even the principles of bridge were obscure to her.

She had also to be reminded, and friends taught, that she was no longer "Miss Mollett," but "Miss Lina Mollett."

"I am the eldest," said Minnie, "and Miss Mollett is *my* title."

While Lina was busy in the Lyceum, Minnie reorganised the home—re-hanging pictures, re-arranging furniture, teaching the delighted factotum "Francisca" English cookery.

This pearl of great domestic price was a willing pupil and a perfect understanding was established between the two.

To this day, if any difference of opinion arises on the subject of stews, jams or tarts, "Francisca" (who is a household fixture) has only to say: "Hi dijo" la Señorita Minnie" (so Miss Minnie told me) for all doubt to be silenced.

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Minnie never forgot her profession: Any illness or accident that called for help among her chosen group of associates would see her at once the vigilant careful sick-nurse.

Remonstrance was vain. She would forget her age, her comforts, the hour, sacrifice sleep, social claims and convenience to aid a sick friend.

More than one member of the English-speaking colony will bear testimony to the gentle hand and well-trained mind that helped

them back from the threshold of the shadow-land.

Then, when all was well, she would resume interest in the daily round, disliking all comment on her deed of mercy, fretting if the milk was late, if the water had not been carefully boiled and filtered, spending hours shopping and chatting with Mr. and Mrs. Mitchell, whose English store was quite near the Lyceum, reviewing the theatre posters, as if life itself depended on them and insisting on carrying Lina to those that caught her fancy, careless of the latter's objections that she generally retired at half-past nine.

"Do you good to get out of those nursery habits!" or words to that effect, she would exclaim.

Never shall I forget one serial thriller that ran through many Saturday nights. "The Hidden City" was its title. It led us through African jungles, through bloodthirsty villages peopled by undesirable blacks, over lonely tracks



MISS LINA MOLLETT,

Director, Lyceum of Copiapo, Ch li, when she first wrote for "The Nursing Record" in 1888.

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