

THE AUTUMN YEARS OF WILHELMINA JANE MOLLETT.

BY HER SISTER LINA.

(Concluded from page 42.)

In November, 1922, Minnie experienced her first severe earthquake. It came in the night with violent upheavals that lasted for six minutes and were frequently repeated.

The ocean receded from its usual limit for hundreds of yards leaving the bed of Caldera bay exposed; the electric lighting was wrecked and Minnie escaped with one foot in a bedroom slipper and the other in a smart evening shoe, and clothed in a waterproof ever afterwards called the "run-away cloak," just as the Pacific on its return journey invaded the kitchen of her home.

Neighbours brought out a wicker chair from the rocking house and carried Minnie up to safer regions.

Somehow in the small cold hours of the day following that night of black gloom and disaster, Minnie found herself in the British Consulate surrounded by kindest hospitality, and cheered, fed and clothed, the little party of refugees began to make light of their adventures.

Telegraphic communication was broken off and no one knew what was happening beyond Caldera but Minnie testified to the cheerful, hopeful spirit which everyone fostered and kept up successfully.

Repeated upheavals had banished sleep, and in the morning the fugitives decided to travel to Copiapo which, being on an elevated plateau, might reasonably be supposed to have escaped.

Thus clothed in borrowed garments, by a train advancing slowly and cautiously, Minnie and her friends began their journey to Copiapo.

In some sections of the line there were long halts for testing the safety of the progress; on others actual repairs were needed and extended stops resulted.

But still high spirits prevailed in the carriage: Jokes on each other's funny get up, on the adventures of the night and on the narrow escape from the invading ocean. Laughter and good-humour were the order of the day.

No yammering or groaning from any one of that plucky group.

Until, coming down towards them during one of their long halts, they saw an old man, hurried and horrified, whose whole type might have served for Ahasuerus.

To him one of the party addressed the question:

"How stands it with Copiapo?"

"Malo, malo!" he groaned, "Ya' no has Copiapo!"
There is no more Copiapo).

Minnie found the Lyceum and most of its dependant buildings a mass of dusty ruins.

The play-ground was a refuge-camp.

The tent the older girls used for outdoor sketching was a valuable ward in which a wounded man and his family had been sheltered.

A play-house erected by the pupils of bamboos and waterproof paper was absolutely perfect and harboured two families.

Provisional tents of sacking, carpets, sheets or straw matting were picturesquely scattered about and "Francisca" our domestic pearl, stood guard over an improvised kitchen, her arrangement consisting of a large hole in the ground containing a fire and barred over to hold two giant

cooking-pots, one for water, one for soup. The latter she was placidly stirring.

"It is a blessing," she said, "and a special favour of the Virgin that we had our stores in for the month a day or two ago and that they stood the shock!"

And indeed it was, as most of the shops were heterogeneous muddles of waste.

Lina formed part of the general wreck and was warded in the kindergarten summer-house, a sketchy erection, that like other equally light arrangements had stood the shocks, or escaped the line of the upheaval by a seeming miracle.

Those who have passed through cataclysms know how after the first moment of panic the survivors show courage and self-sacrifice that are common to humanity and that heroism is not a quality confined to the chosen few.

At nightfall there was a great stillness in the emergency camp of the Lyceum of Copiapo, and not one of those who had escaped from wounds or death but could rest or watch with the heart's comfort of feeling that he or she had done something to help.

The friends of Minnie for whom these lines are written, need not be told that she was among the most valiant of

the brave, that her example of quiet self-possession and common-sense did more to uplift and help than any demonstrations of sympathy could have done. In fact she seemed quite at home among the ruins, choosing for her special snuggerly the shade of a spreading fig-tree at the foot of the kindergarten.

Equally at home were our next-door neighbours, an ex-officer of the British Army, twice wounded in the war and imprisoned in Germany, who, at the time was a valued official of the Anglo-South American Bank at Copiapo.

He and his young wife, recently a most active V.A.D., and a lovely baby had come to us over the divisional wall, stepping across its massive ruins into what was left of Lina's private garden, while their home crashed immediately behind them. The baby's face was scratched by a



WILHELMINA J. MOLLETT
In her Autumn Years.

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