



BY EDITH JULIA BAIN.

*Illustrated by* SIDNEY COWELL.



THE Empress Frederick of Germany (whose interest in the work of gentlewomen has never received adequate recognition from the Press) once said in private conversation that women would never advance to eminence in any profession while they continued to take so small an amount of interest in the work chosen for them.

There is considerable significance in these latter words, "chosen for them." Boys are at liberty to choose for themselves a profession or trade. Parents are told that lads whose desires are thwarted are likely to be among the non-successful ones of this world, and they hasten to gratify the wishes of those who have set their hearts on braving the perils that await them on the sea or on facing the dangers of a doctor's life in a great city. And the boy is happy. He may not be piling up riches, but he is doing the work in which he finds pleasure and for which nature has fitted him.

The girl is differently situated. Except in rare cases she is given no choice as to her life's work. If she is to earn her living at all she is trained as a teacher, although it may be that the task of teaching the young idea how to shoot is the opposite of delightful to her. Possibly she has the talent for compounding various ingredients which if cultivated would result in making her a good chemist, but the talent is ignored and she wastes her life and wears out her strength in

doing wearisome work for which she is not fitted.

Dispensing is not work which can be recommended to every young woman in search of employment. The profession of chemist is arduous, it is badly paid and preparation for it is expensive. The same objections apply in the case of boys; but parents still send their lads up for the examinations of the Pharmaceutical Society. They contend that a boy fascinated by chemicals must be a chemist or nothing at all.

The same contention is just as forcible when urged by a girl on her own behalf.

Many people will hold up their hands in horror at the mere notion of a woman preparing their potions, pills or plasters. "It is not nice work," they say. "There are disagreeable sights and smells which would simply kill a sensitive woman. And how can you trust a female when the slight mistake of confounding one white powder with another would cause instantaneous death? Oh no, I would never deal with a woman chemist, or at a shop where women were employed as dispensers."

Unfortunately men and women who talk in this strain forget the fact that the ordinary round of household duties calls for considerable accuracy and promptitude, and forget too that lady doctors are now an established fact of everyday life.

Another fact is forgotten. For the past forty years at any rate a large part of our English population have been content to be

served by women chemists. The presiding genius of a shop in some small country town enlists the services of wife or daughter in lieu of an assistant, and she, though unqualified by examination, dispenses medicines as well as the chemist himself.

An objection more serious than any raised by carping critics is the expense attendant on qualifying as a chemist. The examination fees amount to at least 7 guineas, and anyone going up for the three examinations—a course which is generally advised—must pay 10 guineas. In addition there are preparation expenses, which may be much or little, according to the pupil's means and capacity for work. A lady who has had considerable experience in preparing women for the examinations of the Pharmaceutical Society put the total cost at £100. On the other hand a Scottish lad managed to prepare for and pass the examinations for about a quarter of that sum. He, however, was apprenticed free of charge, and the three years' practice in dispensing demanded by the Pharmaceutical Society before the minor examination has been passed cost him nothing. A girl would probably have to pay a high fee for the privilege.

The first examination to be passed before the embryo chemist can be registered as apprentice or student costs 2 guineas, and is conducted wholly in writing. Latin, arithmetic and English grammar and composition are the three compulsory subjects. Anyone who has passed in these subjects at the university examinations, such as the Junior Oxford or Cambridge, or College of Preceptors, is at liberty to pay the fee of 2 guineas and forward her certificates to the Pharmaceutical Society's Board of Examiners, who will then grant her their certificate.

Thereafter she must for three years engage in practical dispensing and translation of prescriptions. Here, at the very outset of her career, begin her difficulties. The New Hospital for Women accepts dispensary pupils for six months at a time, and there are a few other places at which the same thing is done. Dotted all over London are dispensaries, established for charitable purposes, and the dispensing of medicines in these places is entrusted to students, who are sometimes, unfortunately, left without adequate supervision. "The end justifies the means," say the promoters, and we may congratulate ourselves that these promoters never appear in a police-court dock to answer the charge of manslaughter. Many, however, of these dispensaries are properly conducted, and there

the girl student will usually have no difficulty in finding her three years' work.

Boys are generally apprenticed to a chemist, but it is difficult to find a man willing to accept a girl-student; indeed we have had only one woman in London regularly apprenticed, although there are probably many irregular students.

When the girl-student has attained the age of twenty-one, and can produce a certificate declaring that she has been engaged in dispensing for three years, she is at liberty to pass the minor examination, which is purely technical. The fee for this is 5 guineas, and the candidate is obliged to have a knowledge of prescriptions, practical dispensing, pharmacy, and prescribed portions of materia medica, botany, chemistry and physics. In addition to the written tests a practical examination in these subjects has also to be passed.

After passing this examination the candidate is entitled to call herself a qualified chemist. The majority of women chemists have however, greatly to their credit, chosen to pass in addition the major or honours examination, the fee for which is 3 guineas. They are then eligible to be elected members of the Pharmaceutical Society.

Posts as dispensers in hospitals or as doctors' assistants are not difficult to obtain. A physician often prefers a secretary who has passed the examinations of the Pharmaceutical Society, or gained the easier and cheaper but less valuable certificates of the Apothecaries' Hall.

One woman chemist at least has gone to India, where she finds plenty of work, and another—the unassuming pioneer of all women chemists—carried on a shop in London for a considerable number of years.

The salaries paid vary with the work done. But in comparison with other professions women chemists are not badly paid. Several dispensers are in receipt of £80 and £100 a year.

This article would hardly be complete without some reference to the alteration which has taken place in the business of a chemist of late years. There is scarcely an old-fashioned chemist left. Instead we have drug-stores—an importation from America. The old system has given place to a newer one in which cash payments, small profits and quick returns are the leading features. Whether this is better for the male chemist or not we do not know, but it certainly ought to make things easier for the woman dispenser. American drug stores, when reared on native soil, are rarely thought complete unless a qualified woman is included among the staff.