

FLORENCE E. WALL: GIRL CHEMIST, B.C.*

By MARSTON L. HAMLIN, PH.D.

IT IS TRITE but true that it is both a pleasure and an honor to be here—to tell you something of your brilliant Medalist's background, particularly her early background.

The honor is obvious, but the pleasure stems from the realization of Miss Wall's achievements since her very early professional life when I first met her.

During and immediately after World War I, Ricketts and Company was a well-known chemical consulting firm having an old-fashioned laboratory in an ancient loft building on Dutch Street in downtown Manhattan. It specialized in assaying and mineralogical analysis but was by no means limited to that field. Memories of those busy days in the uncertain post-war year crowd on me. It was in January of 1919 that I engaged a scrawny red-headed girl with clear Irish blue eyes to work for Ricketts in that old laboratory.

Florence worked with us as an assistant chemist under the direction of Thomas A. Shegog. She had limitless courage and energy, and we knew we had a personality among us. Hundreds of samples of brass for Mergenthaler, a hundred more of unusual ores from South America, essential oils rushed in on Washington's Birthday (only laboratory open, she the only one there!), a long and involved program of petroleum cracking research—it was all the same to Florence. She turned them out and her work was reliable.

Her earlier background may be gathered from the facts that she was born in Paterson, N. J. (she used to say that dyes and textile chemicals were in her blood), and was graduated from the College of St. Elizabeth just before World War I, with honors in both chemistry and English, and with Bachelors' degrees in both Arts and Education. As there were then very few types of positions open to girls interested in chemistry she first taught high school sciences in New York State. She seized the first opportunity to enter industrial work during the war, and before she came to Ricketts she had worked as a chemist for the Radium Luminous Material Corporation (on uranium ores and electroscopic determination of radium); also for the Seydel Manufacturing Company (on textile chemicals, ben-

* Before Cosmetics.

zoates, organic synthesis and fur dyes) and for the Fellows Medical Manufacturing Company, where she mastered the fine points of distilling essential oils from Dr. Gustave Drobegg, formerly chief chemist for your old friend, Dr. Alois von Isakovics.

In those wartime and postwar years, 1917–1921, jobs were fluid and positions insecure. I left Ricketts before Florence did and lost touch with her for many years, being myself somewhat of a professional nomad at that time.

A mere chronological recital of Florence Wall's subsequent progress would be only the bare framework of her life. What are her characteristics, her motives, the factors in her arrival at her present eminence?

I can sum them up as they appear to me. First, she has the admirable—but not too unusual—characteristics of intelligence, integrity and loyalty. But add to these restlessness, curiosity, ability to work untiringly, courage in entering new fields and a bit of Irish humor, and you have a unique human entity.

Her intelligence, integrity and loyalty are shown by her professional accomplishments and the esteem in which she is held. Her restlessness, by her love of travel; and her curiosity, by her desire to see things firsthand, and talk with others in their own language—whether French, German, Italian, Spanish, Portuguese or Swedish.

I am sure she has never stopped studying. To be a better editor, I know she took courses at the New York Employing Printers Association; and to bring herself up to date on “straight chemistry” for her work during World War II, she took the undergraduate course in organic chemistry at New York University.

Years ago when she turned in her final reports on her long petroleum research job (and their excellence foretold the high degree of skill she has developed in technical writing), we were still in the postwar industrial depression. Instead of hanging around here, feeling unhappy, she went to Europe for almost a year of travel and study. Still no congenial industrial work available when she returned, so she took a teaching position in Havana, Cuba, and came home by way of South America.

Her ability to work untiringly has been shown by, among other things, her editorship of *The Chemist* for two years, and her authorship of five books and more than 300 published articles. Of these, about 80 are on history of science, biographies, opportunities in chemistry—especially for women—and technical writing.

Finally, her courage has been shown by her mastery of so many inorganic and organic fields—mineral and metallurgical analysis, essential oils, petroleum, soaps, glycerin and, eventually, cosmetic chemistry. Her humor was the lubricant that kept this complex human mechanism working smoothly in good and bad weather.

In accordance with these wide interests she is a Fellow of The American Institute of Chemists, a member of the American Chemical Society, the Society of Medical Jurisprudence and this SOCIETY OF COSMETIC CHEMISTS.

And what has been the result to date of the functioning of this complex and effective reaction mixture?

At that time in the early twenties, after your Medalist turned to cosmetic chemistry, she resolved to bend her energies to putting this somewhat recondite, dope-book, cut-and-try field on a sound scientific basis. You know much better than I the phases of this effort, the work, the sweat and tears. But here is the end result—the first woman medalist of the SOCIETY OF COSMETIC CHEMISTS.

I give you Miss Florence Wall!

FLORENCE E. WALL: REBEL INTO PIONEER

BY HAZEL L. KOZLAY

FLORENCE E. WALL and I both entered the cosmetology field in the same year and met the following year, during 1925, when she already was working for Inecto, Inc., then the leading manufacturer of hair dyes, as director of technical advice.

She seemed to be exceptionally well-fitted for such a job. Dr. Ralph Evans had been looking for a woman chemist with teaching experience—someone who could use her hands. A requirement was a good background in organic chemistry, and Florence's experience in fur dyes probably had caught his eye.

Her job was to serve as liaison between the laboratory, where they were doing intensive research on dyes and other hair preparations, and the salon where these were tried out on models. She began in the most practical way; she dyed her first head of hair on her first afternoon with the company.

The laboratory work was soon sidetracked, however. Because she knew several languages, she was put on a special job of library research. Because she also could write effective letters, the officials had her establish a department of technical advice which involved handling all correspondence from cosmetologists and supervising all demonstrators on the road.

Then the directors decided to entrust her with the writing of a textbook on hair dyeing. This took her three months, and she completed it on her first anniversary with the company. It went to press bearing the title "Canitics," a word which she herself coined to designate "the art and science of hair dyeing."