

In Search of Beauty

Polly and Freddie

By Sir F. W. Keeble. Pp. iv + 275. (London and Toronto: William Heinemann, Ltd., 1936.) 10s. 6d. net.

SIR FREDERICK KEEBLE was born in 1870. He was educated at Alleyn's School, Dulwich, and Caius College, Cambridge. His botanical researches earned for him the degree of Sc.D. (Cantab.) and the F.R.S. In succession he has been professor of botany in University College, Reading (now the University of Reading), editor of the *Gardeners' Chronicle*, director of the Royal Horticultural Society's Gardens at Wisley, controller of the Horticulture Food Production Department of the Board of Agriculture, an assistant secretary of the Board of Agriculture, Sherardian professor of botany at the University of Oxford, director of Nitram, Limited, and the adviser in agriculture to Imperial Chemical Industries, Limited. His contacts have been those of an accomplished scientific worker held in esteem by his fellows, a writer, a civil servant, an Oxford professor, a director of one of the units of the great industrial merger, Imperial Chemical Industries, the husband of one of the great tragedy actresses of our time and the neighbour of some of the most distinguished contemporary poets, archaeologists and scientific workers.

The author's own and the varied interests of his friends and associates could have provided him with abundant material for a chronological survey

of men and matters which his facile pen, wit and urbanity could have embellished into a work which would have given the greatest pleasure to his wide circle of acquaintances. But he has deliberately discarded the conventional technique of the biographer and written an autobiography which is a mixture of fantasy, allegory and fact, calculated to appeal to children as well as adults, to scientific workers who can take a delight in brilliant and charming exposition of the subject matter of science as well as to that wider circle of readers who do not resent the intrusion of an explanation of the facts of Nature into a book which has its full measure of human interest.

Throughout the book are staged the boy Freddie and next-door neighbour big-girl Polly, whom the author has endowed with the patience, sympathy, charm and inspiring qualities of a gallery of fair women. To this dream Polly he declares he owes his outlook on his work and his fellows, and to his early memories of Freddie he attributes his desire to quicken the interest of the children of to-day in the beauties of Nature. These he unfolds in delightful studies of growth, fertilization, budding, the green marine worm, the amoeba, fascinating commentaries on evolution and mutation, and an illustration of the quality of the man Pasteur by a description of his experiments on anthrax. This appreciation of Pasteur is the finest thing in the book, a copy of which should be in every home.

A. G. C.

Early Chemistry and Geology

A Dictionary of Assyrian Chemistry and Geology
By Dr. R. Campbell Thompson. Pp. xlviii + 266. (Oxford: Clarendon Press; London: Oxford University Press, 1936.) 21s. net.

THE classification of objects was a favourite pursuit of Assyrian scribes, as is shown by the long lists preserved in Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh. Such texts were generally bilingual, that is, both the ancient Sumerian and the later Babylonian names are given, and sometimes explanations are appended. Stones, earths and metals naturally take their place in these lists, and in the accumulation of miscellaneous texts in cuneiform writing now published there is much scattered information about these materials.

Dr. Campbell Thompson's book is devoted to the collection of this information in an intelligible order, to the examination of the evidence provided by the names and by the uses to which the materials were put, and to the identification of the stones, earths and metals intended. That task must have been very arduous, as anybody who refers to the book will readily see; it demanded not only the work of a lifetime on the Assyrian language and writing, but also a special study of early geology, chemistry and manufacturing processes. There are, for example, important texts describing the making of glass, in the decipherment and interpretation of which Dr. Thompson has himself played the principal part. With the help of experts on glass, he has determined the character of the