

CHAPTER XVI

HAIR DYES, BLEACHES AND MANGE CURES

TO remain young, fresh and unfaded has become a mass byword, a world idea to which not only all women, but also many men actively subscribe. After the reckless years of youth have passed, we count the damage done and hasten to repair what is left, forced to it by conditions which are not of our own making. If, perchance, we have missed youth and its pleasures, we are sorry and want to catch up. We counterfeit youth, hoping that our spirits may find themselves revived by the contagion of the bloom of our cheeks and the luster of our hair. Many a man has saved his position as a wage earner, and woman hers as a successful companion, by cleverly hiding those signs which, rightly or wrongly, are associated with physical and mental depreciation.

The feminine cult of beauty and devotion to cosmetics is, of course, as old as the recorded

Hair Dyes, Bleaches and Mange Cures

history of women. It is only a generation or two, however, since those outside the frivolous associations of court and night life made beauty culture part of their own philosophy. Toward the end of last century, the large provincial cities of Europe could boast at the utmost of only one or two dealers in cosmetics, who were adequate for the small demand for creams, pomades and rouges. Much has changed within two generations. The provincial apothecary has been replaced by the wide-awake drug store which boasts that a large part of its income is derived from the sale of lipsticks and face rouge. A generation ago mothers held up their hands in horror when their daughters used a dab of powder to whiten a shiny nose, and they were certain that that girl who used rouge was on the path of the scarlet woman. Yet few women, mother and daughter alike, do not to-day consider make-up an essential to correct appearance. Coloring compounds, on the other hand, to darken faded and gray hair, on the scalp, or to paint eyebrows and eyelashes, have found their users among all classes since the middle ages.

The use of paint, powder and of hair dyes is

The Story of Hair

growing tremendously in the United States, with its prosperous population. Our society is a colorful pageant of make-believe. We, with our beauty shows, love the glorification of the superficial, the stunts and thrills of the moment. It is a reflex of the functioning of our great economic machine. The workingman may have his flivver, his radio, his telephone and his house full of high grade furniture purchased on the installment system. His wife and daughter wear silk from toe to chin, just as do the most affluent and high born. Each class believes it to be its duty to put up a social front—a show. The whole social structure is tuned up for it. Every one is told to make the best of his opportunities while opportunities exist, and that we take the opportunities superficially can only be expected. But behind the curtains there is often tragedy. The thatched cottage cannot forever be tinsel up to deceive the eye and to create the impression of the massive stone house. Especially not when the doors and sills begin to rot away and require “expert” attention.

The woman, bent on keeping up appearances, may hide the ravages of age skillfully with cos-

Hair Dyes, Bleaches and Mange Cures

metics for many years. When the skin begins to sag under her chin and the breakfast negligée shows signs of wear and she finds criticism in the eyes of her liverish spouse across the breakfast table, that woman knows that the sun will never rise again for her—unless she can find the youth and bloom she has lost. She recalls an advertisement which she has read somewhere and idly passed by—“‘———’ makes women beautiful! Telephone 0000 for an appointment. Experts only in attendance!”—“Makes women beautiful” is the great idea which strikes a responsive chord in a thousand eager breasts.

It is a curious thing that women never criticize or question a beauty doctor. Perhaps a feeling of inferiority keeps women silent and awe-stricken before the “expert” to whom they submit their longings for beauty. Certainly they are never so humble with the dressmaker, the grocer or the cook. In these matters the woman displays personal expert knowledge and in return gets much better service. The beauty doctor must be trusted. He makes his vocation mysterious and keeps his speech technical and beyond ordinary understanding. He can do

The Story of Hair

little harm, of course, where lotions and beauty creams, lipsticks and rouges are the means of rejuvenation. If they are badly applied the paint is washed off the canvas and a fresh start made. Faded hair, however, raises a vastly more serious problem, and here, unfortunately, everything is left to the "expert," and the title of "expert" often rests on a nebulous pedestal, is self-endowed, with the result that joy is often turned into sorrow and the eagerly expected improvement becomes disfigurement instead.

This chapter is, therefore, written to provide some guidance to those who feel for one reason or other that the color of their hair should undergo a change. The enormous extent to which hair coloring treatments are used in this country can be realized from the estimates of persons who have their fingers on the nation's beauty pulse. They calculate the number of dye applications given in beauty parlors or at home to run into many millions. In addition to this, a large quantity of chemicals is used for discoloring or bleaching hair.

The ordinary methods of changing the color of hair can roughly be put into three classes.

Hair Dyes, Bleaches and Mange Cures

There are the bleaches which include anything from natural sunlight to soda and ammonia shampoos, and golden washes and peroxide of hydrogen, commonly used by the professional. Then there are hair dyes proper whose purpose it is to cover up undesirable tints, such as gray or faded hair or hair previously bleached. A hair dye, in the technical meaning of the word, is an actual coloring substance added to the hair and which acts upon it instantaneously. Hair dyes do not act like house paint with which a dark beam can be painted over in a lighter color. A hair dye can only make hair darker and never lighter because the coating is too thin. A bleach or wash on the other hand can never make hair darker but only lighter because, by bleaching, the hair pigment already in the hair is taken out.

So-called "Restorers"

The hair restorer idea is often widely exploited by the unscrupulous advertiser. Every few years a tremendous advertising campaign crops up, heralding the "significant discovery made by a Spanish beggar" or some other dis-

The Story of Hair

tinctive tramp living in the wilds of Tibet or Mongolia—in any case, too far away and indefinite to be verified. The advertisement tells us how, by the application of the new “discovery,” dandruff will disappear, hair will assume a glossy sheen, and no matter how gray or faded it may be, will darken within a few days. “It is of the utmost importance,” the advertisement continues, “that the lotion be applied only to the scalp so that it may effectively penetrate down into the hair follicle and bring about a constitutional color change.” Who can apply a liquid to the scalp without having it run along the hair especially when the directions say that the lotion should be liberally applied? The unscrupulous advertiser banks upon this unavoidable happening for his “great discovery,” the new color restorer, which is nothing else but metallic salt dissolved in water. As the lotion runs along the hair it is taken up by the hair shafts. The water evaporates and the metallic salts remain. The first few days the effect is imperceptible but after a week or so the metallic salts, having now considerably increased through the several days of application, begin to oxidize on the same

Hair Dyes, Bleaches and Mange Cures

principle on which our table silver darkens if exposed to air. The hair now actually gets darker, changing to a duskier shade with every additional day until it has reached the limit of its color possibilities.

It is absolutely impossible to restore gray hair constitutionally by means of external treatments, or in any case if it is possible, science has not yet discovered any means of performing this miracle.

Silver and lead are the most popular metals used. The color thus imparted to hair usually endures and may deceive even the experienced eye because the colors are generally very flat metal colors with no trace of red in them. Naturally, as new hair grows constantly the liquid must be continually applied. In time the hair becomes saturated and also gradually may become darker than is desired. Metallic lotions of this kind are forbidden in some European countries because authorities contend they have the effect of eventually making the bones brittle in some instances.

There is another kind of hair restorer which contains sulphur. Sulphur does not dissolve. Therefore, it leaves a sediment at the bottom

The Story of Hair

of the bottle which needs shaking up before use. Silver and lead can also be mixed with sulphur to make it more effective. The principle of application is the same.

Among hair dyes of the instantaneous kind we know two forms now in the market. One kind is applied to the hair in paste form and another kind in liquid form. Red or Egyptian henna, derived from leaves of the henna tree growing in North Africa, is the basis of the former. The leaves are ground into powder or sold in dry condition. For use, the powder or the leaves, whichever is available, is thoroughly soaked with boiling water until a paste is obtained thin enough to penetrate between the hairs. The paste is then applied over the hair as hot as a person can stand it because the hotter it is applied the more effective it is as a coloring agent. Of all the hair dyes in the market Egyptian henna has the best reputation. Its acids seem not to affect the human system, and that they are harmless is proven by the fact that some African tribes color their teeth with henna. This vegetable, however, has a disadvantage in that it will only impart shades of red

Hair Dyes, Bleaches and Mange Cures

to the hair. These shades vary with the ground color of the hair itself. If, for instance, henna paste is applied to black hair there is no effect. If, on the other hand, it is applied to white hair, the result is a very bright orange color while in light brown hair the color becomes caroty and in mid-brown or dark brown hair, more of a chestnut hue.

In paste form, also, are applied numerous chemical hennas which are in the market and which give definite hues. Some of these hennas have natural henna as a basis or body to which is added silver, lead, copper or chemicals from the coal tar product class, such as paraphenaline. With these pastes, whose application is the same as that of vegetable henna, all colors can be produced according to the amount and nature of chemicals they contain. Naturally this can only be done on hair which is lighter than the actual color desired, for even with these colors, black cannot be reduced to brown unless the black hair is first bleached to a lighter shade.

The second kind of dye is a liquid formerly obtained from walnut and sage. This used to be the only kind known a hundred years ago

The Story of Hair

but with the advancement of chemistry it was gradually displaced and is now in the market only among the cheapest grades of dyes. Purely vegetable hair dyes are entirely unsatisfactory because they will not hold their color for more than a few weeks after which they turn an ugly burnished red.

The latest forms of hair dyes and those most successful as coloring agents, are derived from the tar class. These are applied as cold liquids by means of a brush and allowed to dry on the hair. As soon as they are dried the hair can be shampooed and the dye stays fast. However, these dyes share with the chemically prepared hennas certain dangerous elements through which occasionally a person is affected in an unpleasant manner. A swelling of the scalp or skin of the face and even of the body might follow the use of chemical hair dye in about one to every 10,000 users. However, in spite of the occasional outcry of "poisonous dyes" serious observers agree that the danger of hair dye infection is smaller in proportion to the extent of the use of dyes than is the poisoning of people through eating fresh strawberries or other raw

Hair Dyes, Bleaches and Mange Cures

foods. Moreover there are certain safeguards which reduce the risk to a minimum. Insurance companies recommend that the person who uses any kind of a hair dye which is new to the system or based on different ingredients than have been used heretofore, first apply some of it on a spot about the size of a silver dollar near the armpit forty-eight hours before actual use on the hair. If, after a time elapse of forty-eight hours there is no perceptible swelling, nothing is likely to follow the larger application to the scalp. Persons who use hair dyes should in any case undergo the treatment only when they feel in perfect physical condition. Women should not apply hair dyes during menstruation because at that time the system is sluggish and the sweat and sebaceous gland pores of the scalp are inactive and may permit chemicals to enter which normally could not do so. Likewise it is recommended not to apply hair dyes after violent agitations of the scalp, such as, permanent hair waving or the application of strong bleaches. Finally, persons who wish to undergo a coloring treatment of their hair must select the operators

The Story of Hair

with care. A great deal of the success or failure in hair dyeing rests with the person attending. An intelligent, experienced operator can dye a head of hair with the skill of an artist and with no more harm to the individual than is obtained by shampooing that very hair.