

## CHAPTER I

### THE IMPORTANCE OF HAIR

A MEMBER of the House of Commons startled Parliament and the people of Great Britain several years ago by declaring that "the British nation spends more money on hair lotions than on its fleet." In this declaration he indicated in striking fashion the extent of popular interest in hair, an interest that embraces every man and woman of every country, civilized or uncivilized. No individual, however ignorant of, or apathetic toward most of the important questions of his day, ever fails to rack his brain over the mystery of the hair covering of his head and to speculate and theorize about it.

The poet who first said "Woman's hair is her crowning glory" created a successful advertising slogan for scores of hair restorers and lotions. And he stated an incontrovertible fact. Indeed, can a bald-headed woman successfully arouse the emotion of love? Her eyes may have

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the limpid beauty of the sky, her skin the natural blush of the peach, her lips the classic cupid's bow, yet the ensemble, crowned by a shiny, hairless pate is a subject for jest rather than adoration. But, blind she may be and irregular of features, yet her possession of wavy, glossy hair will render her attractive to elemental man.

A person, phlegmatic to the point of accepting with utmost serenity the loss of property or money, does not fail to become dejected and panicky at the sight of his first combful of fallen hairs. A battleship, more or less, is of relatively little importance to him when he sees a vision of himself denuded of his hair, his scalp a skating rink for venturesome flies. In the secrecy of his room he submits to every treatment that enjoys contemporary favor. He changes his diet to stave off the catastrophe of baldness; he loads himself down with tonics and soaps. As he sees the covering of his scalp falling off, rapidly and inexorably, like shingles from a neglected roof, he speculates as to when and how it will end and why this calamity has befallen him.

The mother of the baby girl is agitated. Her

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darling's hair does not curl into pretty ringlets like those of other children, without the torture of kid and paper curlers. Or, perhaps, she is dismayed because the little scalp is very slightly hair covered at the end of the child's first year, and this despite the fact that at birth it had three inches of long black hair. The birth hair has fallen out, and the new growth has come with incredible slowness. Why? Is this the way of nature? Then why does she not perform similar feats in the animal kingdom? Why is she so capricious with mankind?

What is this thing we call hair that has the psychic power to rouse man's deepest feelings—of admiration as of anxious concern? What is its origin, its reason for being? Why its vagaries and its inconsistencies?

So great, so universal is mankind's curiosity about hair, that these questions have always found ready answers. Indeed, if one asks for any information about hair he is immediately enmeshed in a labyrinth of contradictory theories, in mazes of back fence logic and club chair science. There is always a "latest theory," and no matter how absurd a careful analysis may

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show it to be, every popular theory is certain of a hearing, a following, and temporary freedom from contradiction. Many of the popular beliefs about hair are of commercial origin and for commercial purposes only. But the fact remains that one hundred million persons are losing their hair every day, some more, some less, and the charlatan who has miracle-working concoctions to sell, as well as the purveyor of honest advice, has eager followers. But, alas, the former more than the latter.

Among the numerous theories that mislead mankind, the barber's is given the widest credence. The barber says "There's nothing like shaving, singeing or cutting to make hair grow." It is his experience that as one begins to shave he must shave more and more frequently. When the fuzzy down appeared on the cheeks and chin of the adolescent youth, he came self-consciously into the barber shop for his first shave. He repeated the performance in a month. Thenceforth, his visits were fortnightly; later, weekly; and finally, daily. "What better proof," demands the barber, "is required to show that hair is made to grow faster by shaving?" That a

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time comes when the hair growth is stationary—even though shaving is continued—does not affect the barber's argument. Either he does not know that at a certain age beard growth becomes stable, or he prefers not to defeat his own logic. For this theory he finds collateral proof in the field of arboriculture. "Does not the cutting and pruning of trees make them grow healthier and stronger? And if that be so, pruning and cutting must, of course, have the same effect on hair."

The manufacturer of hats, attempting to stimulate his trade, finds "hair specialists" willing to testify that the practice of going without a hat is a deadly crime against the scalp, that the actinic rays of the sun are sure to cause baldness. The hatless fresh-air crank contradicts him and sets up a different theory. The freak whose hair is ten feet long fills the magazines and the tabloid press with stories of how the "miracle" was wrought, just as the illiterate Indian squaw, celebrating her one hundredth birthday in her little log hut, pontificates on the principles of longevity. "To have long hair," claims the freak, "brush it daily for half an

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hour as I did and rub in bear grease as my mother did to my hair when I was young." But she fails to reveal that her sister's hair, similarly treated, never reached a length of twenty inches and that her brother is bald from crown to forehead. The child-hygienist advises the young mother to wash her infant's hair and scalp each day to keep it "clean and healthy" and yet, scalp crusts form and eczema develops, and only the abandonment of water and soap will cure the affliction. The stage beauty, the mayor, the matinee idol, the opera singer, the congressman and other public figures, all have theories according to their individual experiences which they assiduously serve for public consumption, through the medium of newspaper interviews.

A traveler returns from Andalusia, or some other intriguingly romantic spot. He tells the ship-news reporters at the pier that "the most striking of all the impressions received during my journey was that of the beauty of the Andalusian woman's hair." He declares that no hair of any race in the world can compare with hers, and how did she get it?—what was the

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secret? Simply this: that all the señoras and señoritas rub into their hair and scalp an excretion from a plant which only grows on Andalusian soil. Needless to say, the traveler has brought with him a quantity of this elixir "for the benefit of the American woman's hair." Thus a new theory is born and a new nostrum added to the hundreds already on the market. "Crushed chicken bones from either young or old chickens, boiled in soup furnish lime, and lime is an absolute necessity for hair"—"Carrots, eaten raw, contain iron without which no hair would look healthy and rich," declares a physician and hair specialist in a book recently published in New York. To several thousand persons, this statement becomes gospel. In fairness, a good word can be said for all of these theories and on behalf of all the zealous men and women who promulgate them. The victim, bearing in mind that a person's cold feet may be the cause of a violent aching of his teeth, has a vague idea that all things are inter-related and is not too severe in the examination of a newly offered panacea. Hope flickers anew from the dying embers in his despondent breast and hope

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is the greatest source of transitory human happiness.

Men of scientific background and book learning have also trodden this field of research for centuries and have offered us solutions, according to their findings, which, however, are hardly more convincing than those of our modern pseudo-scientists. To the ancients belongs a theory that our hair was a vapor or excrement of the brain arising from the activity thereof. In David Ritchie's "Treatise on the Hair," published in 1770 in London, England, we find this statement: "For such as is the matter of the brain, such is the vapor of hair arising from it in color, quantity and quality and the ancients were in their observations thereon very particular. For Aristotle, Galen, Hippocrates, etc., having laid down rules for discovering the temper, talents, wit, judgment and imagination, etc., of men and women, esteemed the hair a principal sign from which they drew their observations; and are often quoted by Huartes, a Spanish physician, in his 'Examen des Ingenios,' or 'Trial of Wits' for the same purpose. . . ." Yet, despite the apparently mis-

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leading character of the words employed, we are constrained to commend the wisdom of Aristotle and his fellow philosophers and physicians for pointing out that there exists a subtle and significant relationship between the hair and its individual possessor.

Modern science, however, seems to have been in a hurry in its definition of human hair. The belief of the ancient wise men that our hair had a deeper meaning has been dismissed by present day searchers after truth in favor of the definition that it is an "epithelial dermal extension." They would have us believe that our hair consists of the same substance as our scalp and that since the hair is connected with the scalp it must be classed as an extension thereof. It grows out to a certain length and having attained that growth, its mission in life is fulfilled and it hangs in its place until a mysterious something makes it fall. The phrase "epithelial dermal extension" has a very erudite ring once we have acquired the ability to roll it fluently into the ears of a distracted half-bald client, but it is no more accurate than would be a definition of the Woolworth Building as "an extension of the

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earth's crust" in view of the fact that the material of the building is that of the earth from which it extends.

Of all man's physical attributes, hair has, at all times, unquestionably been the subject of greatest individual concern, and be it regretfully admitted, the subject of most profound neglect by sober-minded scientists. In the course of their investigations laboratory workers have analyzed it, found the constituents of hair, identified it as "keratin" and classed it with the nails of the hands and feet, the bird's feathers and the horse's hoofs, as non-vital extensions of the epidermis. They have found variations of keratin in various races and recorded this fact, too. But into the deeper relationship between hair and the human organism, they did not venture. The investigator, research worker as well as physician, has preferred to dismiss the matter with an airy declaration that our hair is "of no importance whatsoever to the welfare of the race." This may or may not be so, but the man on the road to baldness has a different opinion. He is a pragmatist and therefore not at all interested in a chemical analysis of that

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which remains in his comb and brush. He wants to know—"Why have I hair and why do I lose it?" In spite of all definitions and all the reassurances of his physician that hair really doesn't matter he will not be parted from it willingly. He doesn't care for scientific reasons. He just doesn't want to lose his hair. He looks better with hair on his head than without it, and he cannot be otherwise convinced.

As we have noted, the ancients had more intuition in the matter than modern science has. They gave our hair a meaning which the scalp extension theory does not acknowledge. The experienced observer of hair conditions knows that the evidence in favor of the Aristotelian theory is overwhelming in every stratum of culture and in every economic class. But he hesitates often to credit his own observations because he is not aware of a very important fact—that the modern theory of scalp extension rests on false premises. That is why it has made so little progress. It may have derived its origin from a superficial observation by a writer who believed that to be impressive one must be dogmatic. Such a mistake was easily possible.

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Hair "scientists" are misled every day by similar superficialities. The "scientist" watches his daughter's hair—or perhaps his housekeeper's—grow until it reaches a certain length when it apparently "ceases to grow." He observes it for years and finds the hair still the same length. He interviews a few friends, and, his experience ended, he draws his conclusions. But what he saw was merely an optical illusion—and—it, as such, naturally led to a false conclusion. Aristotle was the greatest student of natural sciences, as well as the greatest philosopher of his time. One day he looked into his housekeeper's mouth, counted her teeth and found the number to be twenty-eight. Not one fallen out. Then he counted the teeth of the most perfect of his male slaves and found thirty-two . . . and down on the papyrus went a "discovery" that females have four teeth less than males. Aristotle's statement was believed for hundreds of years until women began to count their own teeth and found that they were equal to the male in the number of teeth—and that the theory had no basis in fact. The explanation of this centuries-old error lies, no doubt, in the circumstance that

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Aristotle's housekeeper—as it often happens with members of either sex—did not have her wisdom teeth whereas his male subject possessed them. If the great Aristotle was capable of error in so obvious a matter, shall we be too harsh with lesser men?

We learn in a book called "Our Hair" written by R. Müller, M.D., of New York, that "human hair grows at the rate of one-half inch per month until it has reached a length of fourteen inches when its growth slows up only to stop altogether on reaching a length of thirty inches. This statement gives rise to a train of questions, the answers to which the Doctor gives no clue. Is our hair alive before it reaches the length of thirty inches and does it then die, and, therefore, stop growing or, alternately, does the blood furnish the substance for new hair cells when the hair is below thirty inches, discontinuing to do so after it has reached this length? Has the body, then, a sort of stop watch that tells the inner organism that the hair protruding from the scalp is now thirty inches long? A theory on baldness has, no doubt, sprung from this assumption for we encounter a statement that man

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becomes bald because he has exhausted his hair substance through the demands made on his system by cutting his hair short in younger years and thereby accelerating its growth, while women have permitted their hair to grow long and have retained the excrement within their bodies.

Recently, too, another scientist, Professor Fleecy (England), entertained a scientific convention at Oxford with a paper pertaining to evolution and hair which contained this statement: "The human race lost its hair because in antediluvian times the enormous hair growth on their bodies was an impediment which they removed by singeing with glowing embers from the camp fires. The process of singeing their hair at that time required a great deal of courage as it had to be done with glowing pieces of wood extracted from the camp fires." "But," the professor continues—"the singed antediluvian was amply compensated for the removal of his hair by an increased speed, and, in addition, was greatly admired by the opposite sex. . . . Gradually, a general custom of singeing

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grew up, with the result that nature deprived the human race of its hair."

Dr. Müller and Professor Fleecy both share the viewpoint that our hair is a scalp extension. Why the singeing of our prehistoric ancestor's hair should have deprived him of it, is difficult to understand. Our sheep have been sheared for thousands of years to provide clothing for the human race and yet sheep seemingly continue to produce the same amount of wool! It is doubtful whether antediluvian man still had his hair when he was able to build camp fires or, alternately, that he could use and organize this element when he was still covered with hair. Rather, it must be believed, that the human race had then already made so much progress toward civilization, that it had deprived itself of its hair by natural course and that mankind felt the cold, built fires and put on clothing, as substitutes for the warm covering which the body had ceased to provide.

The other theory, that human hair grows at a certain rate of speed to a certain length, can be proven to be erroneous without entering the speculative field of deductions. If our hair

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grows faster or slower according to its length it must be alive, and Dr. Müller admits that it is dead—that it has no nerves or circulation. What then induces it to grow faster when short than when long, and what has that large majority of women to say whose hair, even in pre-bob time, never attained the length of thirty inches, in spite of cutting, singeing and the application of many nostrums? Or others, whose hair grew to many feet in length? Neither theory gives a complete story. It does not show on what basis the scalp extends itself into those tiny filaments which we know as hair, or ceases to do so when singed, yet grows faster when cut.

It is obvious that there must be another explanation, an incontrovertible truth to explain the phenomenon of our hair. Aristotle, Galen and Hippocrates had some inkling of this. They offered a clue to serious searchers, a clue that has been rejected and scorned for thousands of years. There *is* a vital connection between the individual and his hair produce, and alternately a vital connection between his hair and his happiness. Our hair to-day is what mankind and man-made civilization have made it. Forces

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within ourselves and greater than ourselves have ordered it. It is our task in the succeeding chapters to examine these forces and learn how they have operated through the ages and in the present day.