

Our Cosmetic World

...then & now

by Joyce Bruné

If someone of the female sex were to step out of our history books into this century and witness the beautifying processes that exist in our society, undoubtedly, she would be unable to believe her eyes. For one thing, she would probably observe that women's facial features were often less prominent than they had been in her lifetime. She may meet a lady with a hooked nose one day, a few days later her nose would be impeccable. She may even come across a person with breasts the size of watermelons and notice later they had been shrunk (sucked out by microsuction) to perfection. Or breasts the size of mosquito bites that have been fattened up by implants. She could run into someone whose lips had been changed from thin to voluptuous and vice versa or hollow cheeks into well-rounded ones, or vice versa. Even eye-lids and foreheads that had been lifted, fat necks to slim ones, huge thighs and buttocks could be slimmed down and saggy knees fixed by liposuction, and so on and so forth.

If someone of the male sex were to step out of our history books he would be under the impression he was having hallucinations as I did when I was greeted by a friend.

'Why, Jonathan' I exclaimed, 'I hadn't recognised you!' I recalled the last time we had met he was slovenly, shabbily dressed with a 65 year-old paunch. So, when an elegant, slim, poised-looking man greeted me I had to plead guilty to not recognising even one of his traits and features. Blushing to the roots of his dark hair, which had previously given way to baldness he confided his secret to me. 'I went to a plastic surgeon who specialises in hair grafts' he said. 'The hair follicles were removed from the back of my head and transplanted singly into my thinning frontal patch. It now grows like freshly sown mustard and cress!' 'But Jonathan, it's remarkable! Its not only your hair but your whole appearance has changed.' His long pointed nose had been bobbed to perfection and his sagging facial muscles and wrinkled skin were as if ironed out – rejuvenating him, by at least ten years.

Aside from our advanced plastic-surgery and modern methods of beautifying ourselves, a cosmetician points out that the more natural means haven't really changed as much, over the centuries, as we tend to imagine. 'For example, Cleopatra is said to have used crocodile fat as a skin softener and bathed in asses milk.' Today, by



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comparison whale grease, tortoise and mink oils are used as a basis for various face creams. *'The ancient Egyptian women,' she said 'wore lipstick and rouge containing the extract of a seaweed called Fucas. To date, a secretion from the holothurian sea slug is useful in the preparation of some cosmetics.'* (At one time the secretion was used by the British navy as a shark repellent!) We put on mascara to darken our eyelashes. The ancient Egyptians used Kohl (a product from antimony) applying it with an ivory or wooden stick instead of with a brush as we do. Barley flour was and is still considered soothing for pimples and skin eruptions. In ancient times women would bleach their skin with white lead and chalk and they polished their teeth with pumice-stone. (Fortunately we draw the line at that!)

'Although against my interest to do so,' our cosmetician advises, *'it's quite unnecessary to spend ones' earnings on facial creams and lotions; the contents from your refrigerator can serve equally as well.'* She maintains that a head of lettuce chopped up, covered with rose or rainwater and left to draw for several hours can then be squeezed and strained to produce a lotion which has a toning effect on oily skin. She recommends also, unsalted bean water for greasy skin. (By comparison, in the 16th century it was the rage to take baths in bean water.)

In 16th century Europe they advised, washing ones' face with red wine to make it fairly ruddy. Today our cosmetician suggests that her clients use the following as a skin tonic: *'White wine for dry skins and red for oily skins owing to the large amount of tannic acid it contains.'* Another dry skin remedy out of the refrigerator is one of pure lard mixed with a few drops of fruit juice (raspberry or strawberry in summer and carrot, celery or orange in winter) and massaged well into the skin with long upward strokes to make the skin soft and fresh.

Whether we decide to follow the example of the women of history or use our own modern methods we can indeed be thankful we live in a very tolerant age. In contrast, the following is taken from a bill introduced in the English parliament in 1770. (Similar measures were passed in France and Italy.)

It reads:

'All women of whatever age, rank, profession or degree, whether virgins, maids or widows, who from and after the passing of this Act, impose upon, seduce and betray into matrimony any of His Majesty's subjects by scents, paints, cosmetic washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high-heeled shoes, or bolstered hips, shall incur the penalty of the law in force against witchcraft and like misdemeanours and their marriages, upon conviction, shall stand null and void.'



