

MONTHLY COLUMN FOR SOAP, PERFUMERY & COSMETICS

JUNE 1999

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Consultant

Nauseating Nostalgia 2

This month's column carries on the theme of last month, so if you missed the last episode, here is the story so far. The year was about 1896 and marketing people told even bigger fibs than they did today. A product that performed only one or two tasks was quite rare, and in most cases a simple bar of soap could cure life-threatening diseases and help you wash away any excess weight.

In those days, of course, there were no surfactants, so people had to use soap or a dry shampoo. I found some excellent advice in Jane Gordon's book "Technique for Beauty", published in 1940. *As a general rule, a shampoo is necessary every two or three weeks in the country, and every week, ten days, or two weeks in town (well that's decisive). In my opinion, pure Castile soap makes the best shampoo. You can get this soap in long bars for approximately a shilling a bar. The best way to make the shampoo is as follows: flake off two ounces of soap, place in two pints of water, bring to the boil, and strain the soapy water through coarse muslin.*

After two washes and five rinsings you were advised to use a vinegar rinse to remove any last traces of soap, especially if the hair is inclined to be greasy. *"The disadvantage of this rinse is that it leaves the hair smelling rather unpleasant; but it makes the hair much easier to set, and can be used as a setting potion"*. So basically, after hours of hard work grinding up soap, boiling it, straining it and umpteen stages of cleansing your precious locks you ended up smelling like a chip shop.

She also recommended lemon juice (half a lemon to 2 pints water), which again removed any last vestiges of soap, but it *left the hair a little harsh and stiff*. An egg rinse was made by mixing the yolk of one fresh egg in a cupful of water, rubbing it in thoroughly and then followed by several more rinses. *This rinse tends to brighten the hair, and prevents light hair from going mousy or dark.*

The traditional use of chamomile is mentioned, where a handful thrown into a pint of boiling water, cooled and strained through muslin was used as a last rinse. *This is excellent for fair hair, and can be used as a colour tonic to keep hair a light shade.*

Finally, *"...the hair should be dried with large coarse hand-towels, and finished off by brushing with a clean brush if possible in sunlight.*

It is hardly surprising that hair tended to thin or fall out. However, all was not lost, and there were numerous products to replace falling hair, which from the descriptions have not been surpassed even by today's modern technology.

The second of this month's tips relates to a product called "Capsuloids" (an ingested product in a pear-shaped gelatin capsule sold for 2s 3d for 36 capsules). The claims ran as follows: *"Capsuloids have that particular and remarkable effect on the hair through the medium of the blood, which is so well and widely known. Capsuloids not only cause the death of those harmful germs which we have proved to be the cause of falling out and prematurely grey hair, but they restore the injured growing cells of the hair roots, and nourish them, and cause them to multiply so that the roots become firm and grow rapidly, producing thick and luxuriant hair, and where there has been premature greyness, it also cured. Recent scientific investigation has definitely proved this, and has demonstrated that hair cannot be made to grow by using external preparations"*.

An exposé by the British Medical Association in a book called "Secret Remedies – what they cost and what they contain" printed in 1909 gave an analysis, which showed the product to be haemoglobin (1.97 grain), Olive oil/oleic acid (0.54 grain), Balsam of Peru and purified storax (0.17 grain) per capsule. Cost of 36 capsules was estimated by the BMA to be 1d, which is a marketing man's dream with a 27 times 'mark up'!

No doubt having achieved this new luxuriant head of hair you would want to have one of the finest implements to look after it, and what could be better than Dr. Scott's Electric Hair Brush of 1883. This was not only in daily use by the Queen, but also by Prince Albert and the Princess of Wales.

If that was not enough, the Pall Mall Electric Association of London (the manufacturers) claimed that it would restore the hair, prevent baldness, cure headaches in five minutes and also cure neuralgia in the same period of time. A useful and reassuring piece of news was that it had bristles and not wires, which meant that it would be of no use on your suede Hush Puppies.

The presence of a compass in the box is not immediately apparent (answers on a postcard please).

Having shared just a brief overview of the wonderful history to our industry, I have to say chaps (and chapesses) that our marketing colleagues are right, we are just not delivering the new ideas and goods.

A soap that just *cleans and moisturises* is hardly rocket science. The Advertising Standards Authority, the Medicines Control Agency, the 6th Amendment, the Trade Descriptions Act, and

all the other bureaucratic do-gooders have taken every last drop of creative pack copy out of our industry. If we said half the things that were said on labels a hundred years ago, nobody today would believe it anyway, but at least we could have had the fun of writing something that was enjoyable, barely truthful and totally controversial.