1 Masks and Faces

A sociable Victorian woman, just eighteen years old, developed a sunburn at a charity garden party, "when for a moment I stood without raising my sunshade to the direct glare of the sun." Her friend Abigail sent her a recipe to relieve the "troublesome redness," with the assurance "that she had tried it and that it had proved most satisfying." The instructions read: "To a pint of white wine vinegar put a full handful of well-sifted wheat bran, steeping it for several hours and adding the yolks of five eggs with two grains of ambergris. Distill and bottle for fourteen days." If she used the mixture, "a polished whiteness of the complexion will ensue." So wrote a proper young lady of the 1860s in her book of beauty secrets, marked "private papers" and found years later by her niece.[1]

The recipe captures much of what was distinctive about cosmetics in the nineteenth century, before the rise of a mass beauty industry. At that time, most American women did not wear visible face makeup, although they avidly sought recipes to improve their complexions and achieve the ideal of white, genteel beauty. Following her friend's instructions, this young woman would have found all the ingredients but

one in the kitchen; a druggist would have supplied the ambergris, used in perfumes as a fixative. The recipe itself supposedly originated long ago in a Spanish royal court and, like many nineteenth-century "beauty secrets," boasted an old pedigree.

In contrast, "Mary C.," a St. Louis housewife, chose to lighten and beautify her complexion by "painting" her skin. At age twenty-four, she began applying a commercial skin lightener, Laird's Bloom of Youth, to her face, influenced, perhaps, by illustrated advertisements that promised beauty, wealth, and social power: "With this essential a lady appears handsome, even if her features are not perfect." In 1877, she was admitted to the St. Louis Female Hospital, her arms paralyzed from the elbows down. At first, she denied using hair dyes or cosmetics and was released, only to be readmitted sixteen months later in worsened condition. Finally she confessed that she had been applying Bloom of Youth for years. Moreover, she said that after her first hospital stay a lady had advised her to mix "a quarter of a pound of white flake and two ounces of glycerine" as a skin lightener. Alternating this mixture with a bottle of Bloom of Youth, she made the two preparations last "generally about three weeks." Not long thereafter, Mary C. died of lead poisoning. Publishing the case in a medical journal, her physician condemned women's vanity as he exposed a dangerous commercial product.[2]

These two women had much in common in their pursuit of beauty: They desired a lighter complexion, mixed their own preparations—and tried to conceal their behavior. Choosing a homemade whitening lotion or a commercially manufactured lead-based paint, however, carried different implications. In the nineteenth century, Americans insisted on a fundamental distinction between skin-improving and skin-masking substances. The word *cosmetic* usually referred to creams, lotions, and other substances that acted on the skin to protect and correct it. Paints and enamels, in contrast, were white and tinted liquids, mainly produced commercially, that covered the skin. "Paints must not be confounded with Cosmetics, which often really do impart whiteness, freshness, suppleness, and brilliancy to the skin," instructed one

George W. Laird Co., Bloom of Youth Advertisement, around 1870.

writer; "these consequently assist Nature, and make amends for her defects." Paints, however, masked Nature's handiwork to hide expression and truth behind an "encrusted mould," a "mummy surface."[3] Depending on their composition, face powders were identified either as paint or cosmetic; starch and rice powders were often used as skin protectors, while lead-based powders were classified as paints. Tinted powders and paints were highly controversial materials that aroused social, ethical, and health concerns. Skin-improving cosmetics were not: From urban ladies to farm wives, women were familiar with these substances as part of their knowledge of beauty and the body.

Nineteenth-century American women inherited a tradition of cosmetic preparation, which freely borrowed from a variety of sources and reached back through the centuries. Englishwomen in the 1600s and 1700s knew "cosmetical physic," as it was called, just as they understood how to cook, preserve, garden, and care for the sick. Blending housewifery, therapeutics, and aesthetics, cosmetic preparation was a branch of useful knowledge women were expected to master. They learned to identify herbs, gather roots, distill their essences, and compound simple skin remedies. Clearing the complexion, producing good color, or taking away the effects of smallpox, these cosmetics combined the arts of beautifying with the science of bodily care.[4]

Early cookbooks, household manuals, and medical treatises commonly included recipes for "Beautifying Waters, Oils, Ointments, and Powders," codifying formulas once circulated orally. Indeed, some of these household guides acknowledged the oral tradition by citing a "traveller," "a great professour of Art," or an "outlandish Gentlewoman" as the source of recipes. These works did not strictly distinguish between cures for disease and cosmetics for beautifying. Medicinal waters to treat dyspepsia and consumption differed little, in materials and preparation, from toilet waters to perfume the body or relieve sunburn. Nicholas Culpeper's popular *London Dispensatory*, for example, included "such Medicines as adorn the Body, adding comeli-

ness & beauty to it." As Culpeper observed, "Beauty is a blessing of God, and every one ought to preserve it."[5]

Brought to the colonies by English immigrants, the cosmetic formulas of Culpeper and others blended with American Indian, French, Spanish, as well as African traditions in ways now difficult to disentangle. Native Americans used indigenous plants and their own systems of therapeutics to treat skin problems. Some of these cures became popularized as "Indian medicine." John Gunn, a doctor practicing on the Tennessee frontier and author of a book on domestic medicine, recommended puccoon root steeped in vinegar for skin disorders; known as "Indian paint," puccoon root was used in Algonquin remedies. Slaves followed simple cosmetic and grooming techniques that originated in West Africa but also borrowed from American Indian and European practices. They applied substances from the kitchen or garden, smoothing down hair with grease or reddening cheeks with crushed berries. Some continued to plait their hair, make cornrows, or use headwraps in the West African manner, while others tied their hair with string or used other methods to straighten it and then arrange it in Anglo-American styles.[6]

Similar practices sometimes surfaced in different folk cultures and distinct regions. For example, the custom of using the "warm urine of a little boy" as a cosmetic, recounted by several generations of Mexican Americans, also appears in early Anglo-American manuals as a cure for skin disorders and freckles. John Gunn, for instance, advised that a blue dye containing indigo and urine, "made by country people to color their cloth," would heal the skin.[7]

Like household hints and cooking recipes, cosmetic knowledge spread by word of mouth, within families and between neighbors. Women often compiled their own recipe books and passed them on to their daughters. Scattered among food recipes and medical formulas were instructions for compounding cosmetics. The cookbooks of two New England women, a Mrs. Lowell and Mrs. Charles Smith, for instance, contained recipes for making tooth powder, cold cream, and salve for soreness after breast-feeding, all preparations with a thera-

peutic or sanitary purpose. Occasionally a beauty recipe appeared: Mrs. Smith wrote down instructions for an almond paste to perfume the body, while Mrs. Lowell included a tinted lip salve, from a recipe dating back to 1694, that required "sallad oyl," redwood, and balsam. Eleanor Custis Lewis, the granddaughter of George Washington, often made pots of lip salve from wax, hogs' lard, spermaceti, almond oil, balsam, alkanet root, raisins, and sugar. "This was Grandmama's lip salve & I never knew any so good," she wrote.[8]

Recipes for cosmetics began to be published in the United States in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. By this time, methods of physical care formerly treated as a single body of knowledge had split into such distinct "disciplines" as medicine, cooking, and grooming. Physicians and pharmacists increasingly claimed the medical and pharmaceutical dimensions of health care as their own. But throughout the nineteenth century, natural healing recipes and hygienic practices remained women's domain. Indeed, women's authority in these areas may have been strengthened early in the century, as a popular health movement emphasizing self-help, prevention, and natural remedies gained ground.[9]

Women's access to information about cosmetics expanded even more with the publishing boom of the 1840s and 1850s. Ladies' guides to beauty and fashion self-consciously addressed bourgeois women—and all those who aspired to that rank. Like etiquette books, they explained how to navigate the genteel social world by cultivating a well-groomed face and form; cheaper paperback editions carried the same message to female millworkers and domestic servants. At the same time, household encyclopedias compiled cosmetic recipes in voluminous works that offered, as one put it, "anything you want to know." These peculiarly American creations promoted family self-sufficiency, good citizenship, and do-it-yourself virtue, even as they plagiarized one another. Sold throughout the United States, often by traveling agents and peddlers, the compendiums could be found in farming, artisan, as well as middle-class households.[10]

The two genres diverged in tone, reflecting different class and cul-

tural orientations. Encyclopedias were haphazard acculumations of beauty knowledge, cataloguing page after page of recipes with only an occasional warning or moral judgment. Simple garden substances—the juice of elderberries or burned cork to darken lashes, for example—could yield satisfactory results with no one the wiser. The ladies' guides, in contrast, worried over questions of women's health and morality, but nevertheless recited harmful formulas for beautifying—and even painting—the face. Still, both genres point to the growing importance of maintaining a good appearance in an increasingly commercial and mobile society.

Recipes in such household manuals and beauty guides frequently presumed a notion of the body and health based on the ancient theory of the humors. In this view, four humors or bodily fluids—blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile—exist in different proportions to determine a person's health. The humors in turn produce four human temperaments—sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, and melancholic—that reveal themselves in the appearance and condition of the skin. Humoralism regarded the inner and outer aspects of the body not as separate, bounded entities but as elastic dimensions in flux. A good complexion thus was a matter of temperament, health, and spirit.[11]

Sir Hugh Plat in his 1651 cookbook, *Delights for Ladies,* illustrates the basic principle. An attorney with a red, pimpled face, who had spent freely on medicine to no avail, was told to line "double linnen socks of a pretty bigness" with bay salt "well dryed and powdered," then "every Morning and Evening dry his socks by the fire, and put them on again." According to Plat, the lawyer's face cleared in fourteen days: The salt had pulled out moisture and cooled the body through the feet, which modulated the flow of bodily fluids and reduced "exceeding high and furious colour" in the face. Although socks full of salt may have been an extreme measure, early English manuals commonly recommended barley water, vinegar, wine, and lemons to cool the blood or draw out ruddiness.[12]

Many cosmetic recipes also affirmed popular beliefs in the power of nature's cycles, astrology, and magic. They cautioned housewives to

concoct simple compounds using only herbs, roots, and flowers. To remove freckles, Plat advised, "Wash your face in the wane of the Moon with a sponge morning and evening with the distilled water of Elder leaves, letting the same dry into the skin." Others instructed readers on how to gather May dew, considered the purest of waters, or invoked the curative powers of spring by insisting on strawberry-water, frog-spawn water, the juice from birch saplings, or the dew from young vines.[13]

These beliefs did not survive the new medical techniques and scientific discoveries of the Enlightenment. In the volatile struggle among apothecaries, barber-surgeons, chemists, and medical doctors, humoralism in particular was discredited as a framework for medical treatment. Nevertheless, these various therapeutic traditions persisted as a source of lore about health, hygiene, and beauty, and as a lexicon for reading individual character in the human face. Nineteenth-century American beauty guides and household encyclopedias warned that freckles were difficult to eradicate because it was "dangerous to drive back the humors which produce them." Recipes called for virgin milk and the first juice of spring plants. Some recipes even followed principles of medieval alchemy, like the "cosmetic juice" made by filling a hollowed-out lemon with sugar, covering it with gold leaf, and roasting it in a fire. A British journalist observed in 1838 that the "superstition" about bathing the face in May dew was "not yet quite extinct"; indeed, folklorists recorded such beliefs among Americans of different ethnic backgrounds as late as the 1950s and 1960s.[14]

One old tradition, also deriving from the humors, survived the Enlightenment intact: the importance of regular habits of breathing, eating, sleeping, excretion, and emotional control. These habits were known as hygienic regimen or the "non-naturals," so called because they did not form part of the living body but nevertheless affected bodily fluids, humoral balance, and complexion. Culpeper's *Pharmocopoeia* warned, for example, that applying external beauty preparations would do no good unless the bowels were clean. Hygienic regimen only became more important in nineteenth-century American culture, which especially endorsed cleanliness, diet, and temperance

as the path toward a sanitized, well-regulated body and beautiful complexion. "If you mind these things," *Gunn's Domestic Medicine* noted, "you need care nothing about *cosmetics* and *lotions,* and such nonsense, which always sooner or later do immense injury." Experts advised bathing in various mineral waters of different temperatures and washing the face only in pure spring water. One writer declared, "It were better to wash twenty times a day, than to allow a dirty spot to remain on any part of the skin." Cool water baths and vegetable diets that did not "produce much animal heat" were recommended to people with ruddy complexions.[15]

The reciprocal relation of the inner and outer body became a staple of the burgeoning trade in drugs and elixirs. Warning against exclusive reliance on external treatments, one vendor advised ingesting arsenic wafers to improve a poor complexion, in addition to moderate diet, frequent bathing, and exercise. Nerve tonics and blood purifiers promised to cure "disfiguring humors, humiliating eruptions, itching and burning tortures, loathsome sores," and every other skin affliction by correcting internal imbalances. The Potter Drug Company hedged its bets, urging consumers both to swallow its Cuticura patent remedy and to apply it to the skin to relieve skin disorders.[16]

By the mid-nineteenth century, the expansion of the market began to transform women's knowledge of beauty preparations. A growing commerce in herbs, oils, and chemicals enabled women to secure formerly exotic and costly substances. Women continued to mix simple complexion recipes—horseradish and sour milk, lemon juice and sugar—but many now sought ingredients available only at pharmacies or general stores. A recipe for Turkish rouge, for instance, instructed women to "get three cents worth of alkanet chips at any druggist's." Although people living in the country's interior often could not afford or even acquire unusual ingredients, drug wholesalers and distributors used new transportation networks to extend their availability greatly. Domestic and imported drugs, spices, dyes, and essences, as well as

commercially made beauty preparations, filled their catalogues. These businesses increasingly referred to visible powders and paints as cosmetics, to make them more acceptable by blurring the distinction between skin-masking and skin-improving products. Although paint continued to be a term of moral censure, cosmetics gradually became the general name for all beauty preparations.[17]

Women who did not make their own cosmetics had two choices. They could go to a pharmacist (or, less often, a hairdresser) who compounded preparations under a "house" label, or they could purchase commercial products made by perfumers and "patent cosmetic" firms. The distinction was not a trivial one, for it pitched local druggists using standard formulas against remote manufacturers of secret skin remedies and beauty aids.

Druggists' invoice records and daybooks suggest the small but perceptible place of cosmetics in nineteenth-century trade. Urban and small-town druggists alike kept collections of cosmetics recipes, drawing upon published formularies and testing their own inventions. Edward Townsend, a Philadelphia druggist, wrote down recipes for skin problems from many sources and frequently logged their effectiveness. One cold cream would "keep sweet during warm weather," a freckle lotion was "said to be a good article," he noted in his formulary. Townsend, like most druggists, compounded generic versions of cosmetics women knew by name, from old standbys like Gowland's Lotion to such newer brand-name goods as Miner's Cold Cream and Hunter's Invisible Face Powder.[18] George Putney and Bryan Hough, small-town pharmacists in New York and New Jersey, also had on hand ingredients to compound their own cosmetics. A few commercial preparations, including cologne, hair oil, shaving cream, pomades, and skin whitener, appeared on their shelves in the 1860s. Stock from wholesalers increased gradually in the decades that followed. In the 1880s, for instance, Putney offered a cold cream from the big wholesale drug supplier McKesson & Robbins in addition to the cream he put up himself.[19]

As Putney's and Hough's businesses suggest, it took commercial

preparations a long time to establish themselves. There was no identifiable "cosmetics industry" in the nineteenth century, no large and distinct sector of the economy devoted to beauty products. In 1849, the value of manufactured toiletries throughout the United States totalled only $355,000. Although sales grew through the 1800s, they remained small in scale compared to the widespread popularity of such consumer goods as patent medicines and soaps. Still, the trade catalogues, advertisements, broadsides, and advice books of the period reveal a growing interest in these products.[20]

A variety of manufacturers made commercial preparations. Apparently, the most desirable came from abroad. Commercial agents imported precious cosmetics and paints to sell in fashionable American shops; these included English lotions, French perfumes, Portuguese rouge dishes, and "Chinese Boxes of Color," containing color-saturated papers of rouge, pearl powder, and eyebrow blacking. Some American drug wholesalers and retailers also began to branch into cosmetics manufacturing, and a small number of businesses whose primary products were hair goods, perfume, or even house paint made cosmetics a sideline. The Philadelphia firm T. W. Dyott, for example, began in 1814 as an importer and wholesaler of drugs, chemicals, and dye stuffs, and soon produced a line of cosmetics, including cold cream, skin lotion, hair powder, and pomatum. The firm touted its Balm of Iberia, which swiftly "improves the skin to perfection; rendering it smooth, white, odoriferous and healthy." Dyott maintained a large warehouse, advertised in newspapers and broadsheets, and sold through agents, mainly concentrated along the Eastern seaboard but extending as far west as the Missouri Territory. The company was among the first merchandisers to develop a national market, but cosmetics were a fraction of its trade.[21]

Perfumers too played an important part in the early beauty business. Requiring specialized knowledge of essences and distillation, perfumery was considered a skilled craft distinct from the drug trade. According to several perfumers, American demand for fragrant creams and lotions was "general" and came from all social classes: "The po-

made of the fashionable belle becomes . . . the bear's grease of the kitchen maid." In addition to importing cosmetics from Paris and London, American manufacturers, often emigrants from France, began to make cheap and popular imitations. By mid-century, the Philadelphia firms of Jules Hauel, Roussel, and Bazin not only dominated perfume manufacturing, but produced full lines of beauty products.[22]

The most controversial beauty aids on the market were made by patent cosmetics companies. Historically monarchs in early modern Europe had granted patent rights to encourage innovation and industry. In the nineteenth century, however, the term "patent" simply referred to medicines and beauty preparations sold through specific techniques of national advertising and distribution. By disseminating trade cards, almanacs, and handbills, patent cosmetic manufacturers often bypassed traditional distributors and retailers to address consumers directly. They competed fiercely with one another, using psychological appeals and before-and-after pictures, touting secret formulas and miraculous transformations. Dr. Gouraud's cosmetics and Jones's preparations, for example, sparred in the pages of the New York *Daily Tribune*, with such rhymes as this:

> Do you hear that lady talk?
> See her face destroyed by chalk;
> Once't was white, but now, 'tis yellow,
> Coarse and rough, and dark and sallow.

The themes of elite fashion and social contest often characterized the sales pitch for patent cosmetics. Thus Laird's Bloom of Youth, with its deadly ingredients, advertised itself through tableaux of high society—ladies at dinner, gossiping about a rival's face and form; a languid beauty gazing into her mirror; a fashionable woman the center of attention at a ball.[23]

City dwellers could purchase commercial cosmetics in a variety of outlets. In the mid-nineteenth century, hairdressers and specialty stores sold combs, perfumes, and toilet articles in New York, Philadel-

phia, and Boston. Carroll and Hutchinson, a New York fancy goods dealer whose motto was "we deal in the beautiful," invited ladies "to call during their promenade in Broadway," examine the shop's artwork, and browse the jewelry, stationery, and cosmetics for sale.[24]

Women in smaller cities and towns, far removed from the centers of fashion, also had access to these products. A sales agent sold Gouraud's in the factory town of Lowell, Massachusetts, and claimed that the "articles seem to be selling very well, considering there is no advertising done here." These complexion creams and rouges may have held a particular appeal for the Yankee women who worked in the textile mills and whose modish style expressed their newfound sense of independence and urbanity.[25]

Peddlers and traders even carried the cheaper brands into distant farming and frontier communities. Although the "patent-nostrum men have their head-quarters in the cities," warned one writer, "it is the shelves of country stores that they load with their quack stuff." Self-help manuals often advised would-be entrepreneurs to peddle cosmetics; these wares could "command a quick sale and insure a full pocket."[26]

Although the commerce in beauty aids remained limited, critical voices grew ever louder. While sellers claimed their wares rapidly improved and beautified the complexion, many advice writers and physicians argued otherwise, noting that the dramatic brilliance imparted to the skin was short-lived. At best, these goods covered up flaws, acting locally on the face rather than healing skin problems. Constant use, doctors warned, damaged the epidermis and internal organs and led to death.

The secrecy surrounding patent cosmetics, especially those "advertised with high-sounding names," heightened the alarm. Americans distrusted cosmetics sold in the market, and with reason: Mercury, lead, and arsenic appeared in the formulas of a number of fashionable beauty preparations. Moreover, the exorbitant price of these toiletries, "sold at twelve to fifteen times above the actual cost," contributed to the impression of hucksterism. It seems manufacturers had already

learned a cardinal principle of selling cosmetics: that consumers measured the value of "beauty secrets" not by how cheap they were but how dear. Buyers also rightly worried that distant manufacturers evaded responsibility for their products' defects. Actress Lola Montez expressed the opinion of many: Women should become their "*own manufacturer*—not only as a matter of *economy*, but of *safety*."[27]

These objections to patent cosmetics echoed the common view that costly chemical compounds and mineral paints were dangerous, unlike traditional homemade preparations. Patent compounds were also associated with social climbers and urban sophisticates concerned more with making a good appearance than with living a virtuous life. For many observers, the commodity form of cosmetics quite literally represented the corrosive effects of the market economy—the false colors of sellers, the superficial brilliance of advertisers, the masking of true value. Abolitionist and journalist Lydia Maria Child singled out Gouraud's and Jones's shrill handbills as troubling signs of a new "commercial age" in American life. She satirized patent cosmetics advertising—the exclusive beauty secret that everybody could purchase—but also observed how skillfully pitchmen appealed to human vanity.[28] Warning against imitations, adulteration, deceitful advertising, and unfair pricing, advice writers began to address women not only as household manufacturers but also as consumers who were increasingly negotiating the world of commerce.

The outcry over commercial beauty preparations focused especially on the morality of masking or transforming features and raised anew longstanding questions about women's nature and social role. Powder and paint had always been more identified with the feminine than the masculine in Anglo-American culture, but in the eighteenth century, their use was as much a matter of class and rank as gender. In England, enamel, rouge, white powder, masks, and beauty patches were instruments of fashion that covered pockmarks, drew attention to good features, and served as props in the spectacle of court society and posh

urban life. Elite colonists of both sexes imitated the aristocratic mode and sought the grooming aids of apothecaries and hairdressers. Powder and paint proclaimed nobility and social prestige, as essential to fashionable high culture as ornamental clothing and tea drinking.[29]

A challenge to this view came during the American Revolution. In a republican society, manly citizens and virtuous women were expected to reject costly beauty preparations and other signs of aristocratic style. The transformation in self-presentation was most pronounced in men, who spurned luxurious fabrics, perfume, and adornments as effete and unmanly. In a personal declaration of independence, Benjamin Franklin discarded his periwig. The "great masculine renunciation," as fashion historians call it, replaced spectacular male display, once considered an essential symbol of monarchial rule, with a subdued and understated appearance. Republican ideals of manly citizenship reinforced the idea: Men need not display their authority, since their virtue was inherent. The democratization of American politics after 1830 further advanced the new view of male self-presentation. The point of no return may have occurred in 1840, when Representative Charles Ogle, in a speech before Congress, attacked Martin Van Buren's presidency *and* his manhood by ridiculing the toiletries on Van Buren's dressing table. Corinthian Oil of Cream and Concentrated Persian Essence no longer endorsed the gentleman of rank but intimated the emasculated dandy.[30]

As a mercantile and manufacturing class gained power, businessmen avoided artificiality in appearance in an effort to gain trust in the marketplace. In turn, men who adorned their features were treated with contempt. Novelist Sara Willis, for instance, disdained a "be-curled, be-perfumed popinjay"; Walt Whitman said of a "painted" man on Broadway, with "bright red cheeks and singularly jetty black eyebrows," that he "looks like a doll." Of course men continued to pay attention to the mirror. Shaving paraphernalia, hair dyes and "rejuvenators," bay rum and brilliantine were all sold on the market throughout the nineteenth century. Barber supply catalogues featured face washes, colognes, tinted talcum powders, and "cosmetique," a

perfumed waxy substance used to touch up gray hair. Except for shaving and hair care, however, cosmetic practices among men became largely covert and unacknowledged.[31]

Women also were encouraged to shun paints and artifice in the service of new notions of female virtue and natural beauty. Early nineteenth-century literature bound the feminine to ideals of sexual chastity and transcendent purity. These views took root under the growing authority of the middle class, which perceived beautifying as the "natural disposition of woman," but only as it reflected those feminine ideals.[32]

A belief in physiognomic principles, that outer appearance corresponded to inner character, underlay these views and echoed the earlier belief in humoralism. Reinvigorated by Johann Kaspar Lavater in the 1780s, physiognomy and its nineteenth-century cousin phrenology claimed to reveal personality through the study of facial and bodily features. These pseudosciences classified men in terms of a diverse range of occupations and aptitudes. When it came to women, however, their subject was solely beauty and virtue. Thus physical beauty originated not in visual sensation and formal aesthetics, but in its "representative and correspondent" relationship to goodness.[33]

Assessments of female beauty, however, often unconsciously reversed the physiognomic equation, submerging individuals to types and reducing moral attributes to physical ones. Hair, skin, and eye color frequently stood as signs of women's inner virtue. The facial ideal was fair and white skin, blushing cheeks, ruby lips, expressive eyes, and a "bloom" of youth—the lily and the rose. Although some commentators disagreed, most condemned excessive pallor or coarse ruddiness. Nor was the ideal an opaque white surface, but a luminous complexion that disclosed thought and feeling.

If beauty registered women's goodness, then achieving beauty posed a moral dilemma. Sisters Judith and Hannah Murray neatly captured the middle-class viewpoint in their 1827 gift book, *The Toilet,* made by hand and sold for charity. Each page carried a riddle in verse and an image of a cosmetic jar, mirror, or other item typically found in

a lady's boudoir. The pictures were pasted onto the page in such a way that when lifted, they revealed the answer to the puzzle. "Apply this precious liquid to the face / And every feature beams with youth and grace." A pot of "universal beautifier"? No, the secret lay in "good humour." In like manner, the only "genuine rouge" was modesty, the "best white paint" innocence. These riddles must have had a wide appeal. *Harper's Bazaar* described an "old-fashioned" fair in 1872, where a girl sold for a dime little packages "said to contain the purest of cosmetics"—the Murrays' moral recipes.[34]

The Murray sisters acknowledged the allure of cosmetics in elegant bottles, but maintained that only virtue could produce the effects they promised. Even so, their gift book reinforced the widespread belief that beauty was simultaneously woman's duty and desire. *Godey's Lady's Book,* the arbiter of middle-class women's culture, took up the theme, advocating "moral cosmetics" in tales of sad appearances transformed by plain soap and clean living. In "Lucy Franklin," an unattractive woman whose complexion combined the "colour of dingy parchment" with a "livid hue" becomes lovely under the guidance and friendship of an older woman. Happiness, the story concludes, is "a better beautifier than all the cosmetics and freckle washes in the world."[35]

Etiquette books addressed to African Americans, published later in the nineteenth century, similarly distinguished between cosmetic artifice and the cultivation of real beauty from within. Mary Armstrong, training Hampton Institute students to display signs of middle-class refinement and modesty, considered the use of visible cosmetics disgraceful. "Paint and powder, however skillfully their true names may be concealed under the mask of 'Liquid Bloom,' or 'Lily Enamel,' can never change their real character, but remain always unclean, false, unwholesome," she insisted.[36]

Nothing was more essential to beauty than self-control and sexual purity. "Those who are in the habit of yielding to the sallies of passion, or indeed to violent excitement of any kind," cautioned Countess de Calabrella, "will find it impossible to retain a good complexion." Management of emotion nevertheless coexisted with "management of the

complexion," as one guide called it: pinching cheeks or biting lips to create a rosy hue, or wearing colors, especially in bonnet linings, to produce the optical effect of lightening the skin.[37] The ideal of pure, natural beauty disguised the way women's appearances were in fact dictated by middle-class cultural requirements.

The new feminine ideal challenged but did not entirely displace earlier perceptions of women as sexually corrupt, deceitful, and vain, vices that face paint had long signified. In his 1616 *Discourse Against Painting and Tincturing*, Puritan Thomas Tuke had endorsed the use of washes made with barley, lemons, or herbs, the cosmetics of domestic manufacture. But, he warned, "a painted face is a false face, a true falshood [*sic*], not a true face." Women who painted usurped the divine order, as poet John Donne put it, taking "the pencill out of God's hand." Indeed, some viewed the cosmetic arts as a form of witchcraft. The specter of "designing women" led the English Parliament in 1770 to pass an act that annulled marriages of those who ensnared husbands through the use of "scents, paints, cosmetic washes, artificial teeth, false hair, Spanish wool, iron stays, hoops, high-heeled shoes and bolstered hips." That a woman with rouge pot and powder box might practice cosmetic sorcery suggests both an ancient fear of female power and a new secular concern: In a rapidly commercializing and fluid social world, any woman with a bewitching face might secure a husband and make her fortune.[38]

Nineteenth-century moralists continued to view face paint as "corporeal hypocrisy," a mask that did not conceal female vice and vanity. They invoked Jezebel, the biblical figure who represented the dangerous power of women to seduce and arouse sexual desire. Painting her eyes with kohl and loving finery, "Oriental" Jezebel was "the originator and patroness of idolatry," whose arrogance and pride brought death and destruction. Her example taught that women had a duty to spurn adornment, submit to authority, and cultivate piety.[39]

To most Americans, the painted woman was simply a prostitute who

brazenly advertised her immoral profession through rouge and kohl. Newspapers, tracts, and songs associated paint and prostitution so closely as to be a generic figure of speech. In New York, "painted, diseased, drunken women, bargaining themselves away," could be found in theaters, while in New Orleans, "painted Jezebels exhibited themselves in public carriages" during Mardi Gras. Mining camp balladeers sang:

> *Hangtown Gals are plump and rosy,*
> *Hair in ringlets mighty cosy.*
> *Painted cheeks and gassy bonnets;*
> *Touch them and they'll sting like hornets.*[40]

The older view of the painted woman informed the efforts of the middle class to distinguish itself from a corrupt upper class. In *Godey's Lady's Book*, face paint and white washes often appeared as the potent temptations of dissolute high society to be avoided by respectable young ladies. New York journalists at mid-century exposed the "ultra-fashionable" woman as all art and no substance. James McCabe offered a typically harsh assessment in 1872:

> She is a compound frequently of false hair, false teeth, padding of various kinds, paint, powder and enamel. Her face is "touched up," or painted and lined by a professional adorner of women, and she utterly destroys the health of her skin by her foolish use of cosmetics. . . . So common has the habit of resorting to these things become, that it is hard to say whether the average woman of fashion is a work of nature or a work of art.[41]

Lurid accounts described the "enamelling studio" as a den of female vice, where fashionable women could "get their complexions 'made up' by the 'quarter' or 'year.' " The enameller first "filled up the ugly self-made wrinkles and the natural indentations, with a plastic or yielding paste," wrote photographer H. J. Rodgers. "Then the white enamel is

Trade card satirizing the fashionable woman, around 1870.

carefully laid on with a brush and finished with the red." Fast women, it seemed, would do anything for beauty—paint their veins blue, powder the hands white, remove superfluous hair, expose their eyes to dangerous chemicals. Belladonna gave a "languishing, half-sentimental, half-sensual look," chemist Arnold Cooley noted, while prussic acid helped "fashionable ladies and actresses, to enhance the clearness and brilliancy of their eyes before appearing in public."[42]

Such descriptions of the "aesthetic side to vice" drew upon well-worn images of the painted woman to rein in contemporary women's behavior. Anxiety focused especially on the family, perhaps because the nascent feminist movement, the growth of women's wage work and migration to cities, even the rise of fashion itself all implied that women were loosening familial bonds and duties to pursue individual ends. Uneasy commentators described women who used their wits and beauty to gain advantage in the marriage market, wives more interested in dress than motherhood, and—the conclusive sign of female degradation—women who frequented both the enameller's studio and the abortionist's clinic.[43]

Occasionally a writer revealed the deeper psychic and cultural dread paint provoked, its power to attract and repulse. Richard Henry Dana came across painted women in the dance halls and saloons of Halifax in 1842. One prostitute in particular caught his eye. She was the "best looking at a distance," and Dana approached her, seeking to rescue her from sin, yet slipping into the role of virtuous seducer, a situation the prostitute herself sensed and manipulated. Upon closer in-

"FALSE FACES."—AN "ENAMELING" STUDIO ON BROADWAY.

From George Ellington, The Women of New York, *1869.*

spection of the woman, however, he wavered between fascination and loathing: "every sign of health, natural animation & passion had left her, & with a wasted form, hectic & fallen cheek, glassy eyes, & a frisette fastened to her head, she looked like a painted galvinised corpse." Despite his sympathy toward a fallen woman once "handsome and in better circumstances," he could not contain his fear of corruption from a woman whose painted face was a mask of death.[44]

Abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison exposed the sexual resonance hidden in the formulaic phrase *painted woman.* In 1829, before he had achieved fame in the antislavery movement, Garrison was engaged to be married. When a friend wrote him that his fiancée wore visible cosmetics, he replied, "So!—Mary Cunningham '*paints*'—does she?" Garrison imaginatively combined the art of seduction with that of a cosmetician:

> She shall buy her own brushes, *with her own money;* but, if she insist upon it, I'll be the painter—and a rare one I should make! Something, perhaps, after this sort: Hold your head steadily, dearest—so—very still—you shall look in the glass presently—a little more vermilion, a denser flame of health on this cheek—I like to see the *blood,* Mary, mounting up to the very temples, commingling with that lily whiteness—your eyebrows are hardly coal black—a little darker, in order to give a deeper brilliance to your starry eyes, or rather to their light—shut your mouth, and draw back that little saucy tongue, you pretty witch, for I'm going to put a ruby blush upon your twin (not thin) lips, *after I've kissed them*—there—softly—softly—smack goes the brush. . . .[45]

Garrison knew well the ideal of beauty in his time—the white skin, red blush, and dark brows—and played with these colors in what quickly evolved into a sexual fantasy. After disowning her expenditures on the tools of beauty, he asserted the conjugal prerogatives of his paintbrush. Painted women supposedly invited a sexual encounter; here painting the face *was* a sexual encounter.

Mary Cunningham may have sparked an explosion of desire in Garrison, but she soon disappeared from his life and letters. Five years later and now leader of the antislavery movement, he placed cosmetic artifice within a safe, moral, middle-class compartment. In letters to Helen Benson, soon to be his wife, Garrison praised her simplicity in "rejecting all tawdry ornaments and artificial aids to the embellishment of your person." He observed: "Truly, not one young lady out of ten

thousand, in a first interview with her lover, but would have endeavored falsely to heighten her charms, and allure by outward attractions." What impressed him about Helen was the truthfulness of her self-presentation in the marriage market. Her tasteful, unadorned appearance indicated both her sexual purity and social respectability. "I know you do not paint—your fair cheeks; but can't you paint mine?" he teased, complimenting Helen's talents as an amateur portraitist as well as her natural beauty.[46] Garrison's musings took two directions: toward an expression of sexual desire, ultimately to be repressed in favor of the pure womanly ideal, and toward an elaboration of middle-class respectability and taste.

Cosmetics and paints marked distinctions between and within social classes; they also reinforced a noxious racial aesthetic. Notions of Anglo-American beauty in the nineteenth century were continually asserted in relation to people of color around the world. Nineteenth-century travelers, missionaries, anthropologists, and scientists habitually viewed beauty as a function of race. Nodding in the direction of relativism—that various cultures perceive comeliness differently—they nevertheless proclaimed the superiority of white racial beauty. Some writers found ugliness in the foreign born, especially German, Irish, and Jewish immigrants. Others asserted the "aesthetic inferiority of the ebony complexion" because it was all one shade; Europeans' skin, in contrast, showed varied tints, gradations of color, and translucence. And because appearance and character were considered to be commensurate, the beauty of white skin expressed Anglo-Saxon virtue and civilization—and justified white supremacy in a period of American expansion.[47]

Aesthetic conventions reinforced this racial and national taxonomy. Smithsonian anthropologist Robert Shufeldt, for example, classified the "Indian types of beauty" in North America in an illustrated 1891 publication. The women he considered most beautiful were posed as Victorian ladies sitting for their photographic portrait. In contrast, the

camera rendered those he classed as unattractive in the visual idiom of ethnography: half-naked bodies, direct stare, and frontal pose.[48] Tellingly these women also used paint on their faces and hair, which to white critics illustrated the "lingering taint of the savage and barbarous." According to Darwinians, the use of paint even impeded evolutionary progress: If men used visual criteria to choose the best mate, cosmetic deception thwarted the process of natural selection.[49]

A light complexion preoccupied not only the educated in science and letters, but was the governing aesthetic across the social spectrum. Traveling to a "lonely, out-of-the-way place, where the people are all sunburnt and rough-skinned, and even the pretty girls are sadly tanned by exposure to the weather," itinerant photographers in the 1850s and 1860s discovered that customers expected a white face without wrinkles, blemishes, or freckles on their portraits. One woman, invoking

"A Belle of Laguna" and "Mohave Women" in Robert Shufeldt, Indian Types of Beauty, *1891.*

the facial ideal, demanded that her face be "*white* with a *blush* on it." Sitters were especially conscious of skin color in group photographs that invited comparisons. While middle-class patrons, schooled in the conventions of portraiture, accepted the artistic use of half tints, country folk and working people resisted shading and contouring. An itinerant photographer's experiment with chiarascuro ended in failure in Bennington, Vermont, for no one would buy pictures "where one side of the face is darker than the other, altho it seems to stand out better and look richer." One of H. J. Rodgers's clients refused his photograph with the objection, "the face looks dirty, just like a nager."[50]

No one defined the antipode of the dominant American beauty ideal more starkly than African Americans. Kinky hair, dirty or ragged clothing, apish caricatures, shiny black faces: White men and women had long invoked these stereotypes to exaggerate racial differences, dehumanize African Americans, and deny them social and political participation.

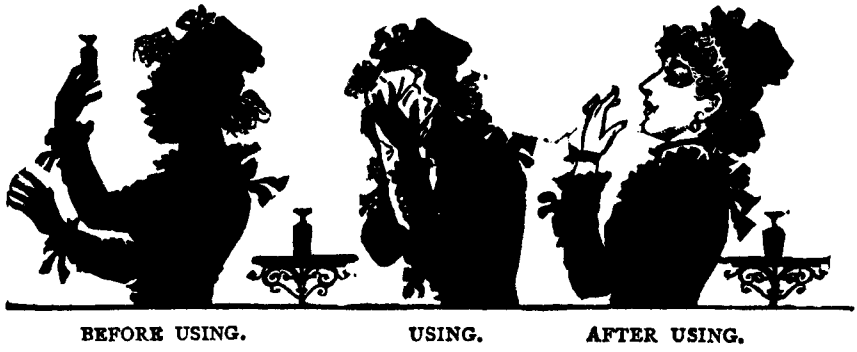
In the antebellum period, slaves audacious enough to cross over into the white mistress's "sphere" of beauty and fashion endured severe punishment. Delia Garlick, for instance, recalled the beating she received when she imitated her mistress's cosmetics use: "I seed [her] blackin' her eyebrows wid smut [soot] one day, so I thought I'd black mine jes' for fun. I rubbed some smut on my eyebrows an' forgot to rub it off, an' she kotched me." The mistress "was powerful mad an' yelled: 'You black devil, I'll show you how to mock your betters.' " Picking up a stick, she beat Delia unconscious. For this Southern mistress, fashionability, including the use of beauty preparations, underscored the class and racial hierarchy of the plantation. Significantly, she refused her slaves "clothes for going round," providing only "a shimmy and a slip for a dress"; "made outen de cheapest cloth dat could be bought," such clothes were a badge of slavery.[51]

By beautifying herself, Delia had defiantly claimed recognition as an individual and a woman as she burlesqued her mistress's feminine airs. Continually made aware of the social significance of appearances, nineteenth-century African Americans understood the power and pleasures

of "looking fine" in the face of destructive stereotypes. Yet, observed antebellum author Harriet Jacobs, herself a former bondswoman, physical beauty contained a cruel irony, for it inflamed white men's sexual abuse of black women.[52]

Racist representations proliferated in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Evolutionary science fitted African-American bodies into new visual classifications of inferiority based on facial angles and physiognomic measurements. Trade card advertising and minstrelsy caricatured the plantation slave's appearance to negate black Americans' efforts to define themselves as modern and self-respecting. One minstrel song, "When They Straighten All the Colored People's Hair," mocked an increasingly popular form of hair styling. For white Americans, sustaining a visual distinction between white and black masked an uncomfortable truth, that Africans and Europeans were genealogically mixed, their histories irrevocably intertwined.[53]

In advice manuals and formula books, white fears of losing their superior racial identity underwrote old anxieties about cosmetic artifice. An etiquette book warned that the use of tinted lip salve gave the mouth a "shriveled, purplish" look "of a sick negress." One tale about cosmetic washes containing lead or bismuth appeared repeatedly. Intended to whiten the skin, these preparations produced the opposite effect when they came into contact with sulphur in the air. The setting for this story varied—a public lecture, a laboratory, a bath—but in each case the cosmetic-using woman was humiliated because her lily white complexion had muddied and darkened. The most explicit of these stories appeared in 1890, in a period of deepening racial tension. At a mineral-spring resort, a fashionable lady envied for her perfect and supposedly natural complexion decided to take a therapeutic bath. Advised by the attendant to wash her face of any cosmetics, she grew indignant at the inference, ignored the warning, and proceeded to the bathhouse. Tragedy ensued: "Suddenly there was a sound of sorrow from the little room, and our belle rushed frantically forth, with her face and neck about the color of those of a dingy mulatto." Responding to these fears an advertisement for Hagan's Magnolia Balm exposed the



Detail, Lyon's Manufacturing Co., "The Secret of Health and Beauty," an advertising pamphlet for Hagan's Magnolia Balm.

class and racial overtones of products ostensibly sold simply to remove tan or diminish freckles: It crassly promised not only to lighten skin color but also to transform the stereotyped countenance of a backward, rural black woman to that of a genteel white lady.[54]

In answer, black writers unmasked white hypocrisy through narratives that turned upon deceptive appearances, mistaken identities, and passing. In a short story by Gertrude Dorsey Brown, for instance, wealthy white partygoers laughingly put on blackface for a masquerade ball, secure that it would wash off. But this is no ordinary preparation. Unable to remove the blacking, the revelers become black, forced to endure the indignities of Jim Crow. The internal purity of the white lady, without the sign of white skin, could not protect her from harassment. African Americans lived with these conditions daily, Brown observed. Appearance indexed the moral and social status of an entire population, but, she argued, complexion was not commensurate with character.[55]

Before the rise of a mass-market cosmetics industry, American women may not have been awash in cosmetics, but they were far from unfamiliar with them. Different approaches to attaining facial beauty—home-

made preparations, diet and exercise, and nerve tonics—flourished in these years. Paints and patent cosmetics too had a small following. Even as a market for cosmetic preparations slowly materialized, however, older traditions of therapeutics and beautifying continued to inform American habits. Thus preparations to improve the quality of the complexion, made of safe organic substances by women in the home, caused little concern. Commercial preparations, especially paints, were literally another matter: Made from dangerous chemicals and secret formulas, they acted against the body, nature, ethics, and social order. Masking paint, wicked women, tarnished merchandise, sexual corruption, racial inferiority: The world of rouge pots and powder boxes was a very threatening one indeed. Still, some women purchased and painted. Advertisers and advice writers alike acknowledged as much. "As you ladies will use them," one "distinguished doctor" testified, "I recommend 'Gouraud's Cream' as the least harmful of all the skin preparations."[56] Embedded within the warnings about patent cosmetics was tacit recognition of a desire among women to enhance appearance, to possess cosmetic secrets, even to employ volatile, dangerous products in the pursuit of beauty.