
DEATH FROM COSMETICS?

In an article describing unhealthful fashions, Ellen G. White included the following statement in an article regarding dangerous fashionable fads:

"Many are ignorantly injuring their health and endangering their life by using cosmetics. They are robbing the cheeks of the glow of health, and then to supply the deficiency use cosmetics. When they become heated in the dance the poison is absorbed by the pores of the skin, and is thrown into the blood. Many lives have been sacrificed by this means alone" (*The Health Reformer*, October 1871).

Some have wondered how the use of cosmetics alone could prove fatal. In today's world, with government testing and consumer safety guidelines, adverse reactions to cosmetics are essentially limited to skin irritation and allergies. But this was not the case in the 19th century, as noted in this consumer bulletin issued by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration: "The European cosmetic known as ceruse was used faithfully--and fatally, because it was mainly white lead--by wealthy women from the second century until well into the 19th century to make their faces look fashionably pale" (Dori Stehlin, *FDA Consumer*, November 1991; revised May 1995).

In 1871, when Ellen White prepared the article in question, "enameling" was the latest cosmetic fad, "which is nothing less than painting the face with lead paint, and for this purpose are used the poisonous salts of lead" (Sara Chase, M.D. in *The Health Reformer*, October 1871, p. 125). Another deadly concoction was vermilion, made from mercuric sulphide. In such an environment, it is not surprising that Ellen White should alert her readers to the real life and health threats posed by such products.