

PHYSIOLOGY

Vitamin Treatment Offers Little Hope for Gray Hair

As Old Age Advances, Less Melanin Is Produced And Transferred to Hair, Anthropologist Explains

GRAYING hair on the head is like gray ashes on the hearth—a sign of dying fires. And there is little hope of permanently banishing the telltale sign of age through administration of vitamins or any other treatment, Dr. Ales Hrdlicka, Smithsonian Institution physical anthropologist, has just reported to the American Medical Association.

Hair color, Dr. Hrdlicka explained, is due to the presence in the hair of a dark pigment called melanin. It is produced by the body's oxidation processes, and is deposited in the hair by the blood. Count up all a lifetime's haircuts, and it will be seen that a considerable quantity of melanin is cast out of the body by this curious method of excretion.

But as age comes on, and the body's physiological fires burn lower, less and less melanin is formed and transferred to the hair, which thus turns gray and perhaps finally pure white.

Dr. Hrdlicka expressed doubt regarding stories of men's hair turning white in a single night through sudden terror or grief. Melanin once in the hair cannot be changed in response to mental stress or anguish, however great, he explained.

Concerning the possibility of reversing the graying process through the use of vitamins, he had this to say:

"If the hair and its pigment are viewed in this manner, and the normal graying is regarded as a gradual decline in the

production of melanin, it is difficult to see how any vitamin or other substance could restore former conditions.

"Something of this nature could conceivably be possible for a while in the early stages of the process, but would steadily grow more difficult with time until it became impossible. It would be in vain, it would appear, to expect now or in the future more from drugs or other substances than a possible delay of the graying process, with perhaps a moderate restoration of color for a time during the earlier stages of the graying period."

Science News Letter, March 28, 1942

HORTICULTURE

Cotton Picking Machines Require Special Breeds

COTTON must meet the harvester half-way, if successful machine harvesting of this number one textile crop is ever to replace the present back-bending, neck-blistering, finger-wearying method of hand picking, H. P. Smith and D. T. Killough of Texas A. and M. College declared at the meeting of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers in Houston.

Machines for harvesting cotton fall into two main classes, the two engineers explained: pickers and strippers. Pickers undertake to pull the lint out of the boll, duplicating the hand job by either mechanical or pneumatic means. Strippers tear boll and all from the plant, and try to extract the lint as cleanly as possible afterwards.

Both types of machines run into difficulties, because of the innate perverseness of the cotton plant itself. Wheat, corn and other crops now harvested by machinery are relatively simple jobs: they ripen all at the same time, they bear their fruit at or near the same level, they don't hang on too tightly. Cotton ripens unevenly at all levels on plants of varying height, with wide differences in "pluckability" of the lint.

● RADIO

Saturday, April 4, 1:30 p.m., EWT

"Adventures in Science," with Watson Davis, director of Science Service, over Columbia Broadcasting System.

Dr. R. G. Hoskins, of the Memorial Foundation for Neuro-Endocrine Research, Harvard Medical School, will present the highlights of the meeting of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology.

Tuesday, March 31, 7:30 p.m., EWT

Science Clubs of America programs over WRUL, Boston, on 6.04 and 11.73 megacycles.

T. Russell Mason, of the Massachusetts Audubon Society, will talk on "Are You Ready for the Birds?"

One in a series of regular periods over this short wave station to serve science clubs, particularly in the high schools, throughout the Americas. Have your science group listen in at this time.

Engineers, being mechanical-minded, have a tendency to build cotton-harvesting machines that really ought to do the job, and then are bewildered and annoyed when the cotton plant crosses them up. The answer, in the opinion of Messrs. Smith and Killough, lies partly in patiently trying to make the machine better adapted to its difficult crop, partly in trying to breed cotton varieties that will be less difficult for the machine to handle. Some success has been achieved in the latter direction, they indicated, but a great deal still remains to be accomplished before the perfect "machine" cotton can be proclaimed as ready for the fields.

Science News Letter, March 28, 1942

The United States has the only proved 2,000-horsepower *airplane engine* in the world, according to Dr. Jerome C. Hunsaker, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

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