

Fashions in Makeup
Richard Corson
(Universe Books, \$30)

Considering the incredible success of the cosmetics business, there are surprisingly few good histories of the subject.

While the history of costume and hair-dressing is easy to trace in pictures, the exact use of cosmetics before the ascendancy of photography and film is much more difficult to assess. Portraits of elegant folk have always tended to show ideally tinted faces which give very little idea of how their makeup, if any, may have looked to the eye. Moralists and satirists, on the other hand, provide vigorously graphic descriptions of thick layers of white curd or streaky and greasy red cheeks, which are difficult to match up with the smooth and creamy paintings. Manuals that give recipes and advice have existed since the dawn of time, and at least one may learn from them what final effects were considered desirable, as well as what means were used.

Fashions in Makeup deals with all these conflicting forms of evidence about cos-

metics, beginning with the ancient Egyptians and proceeding through Western civilization until the most recent moments. This satisfying book has a great many illustrations and a brisk, well-written text, illuminated by the right amount of graceful humor.

There are good artist's renderings of



A 17th-century belle applying makeup

metics containers and dispensers and many relevant cartoons and advertisements. Changes in the fashionable ideal face are the most interesting to trace from the works of art—the lashless, browless look of the Renaissance, for example, followed by the thick brows and lustrous, languorous eyes of the Baroque period, or the once-desirable double chin superseded by the hollow cheek of modern times.

Mr. Corson's book is full of recipes from all periods which sound either frightful, disgusting and dangerous (including such things as lead, mercury and arsenic) or amazingly cheap and simple (white wax, oil of almond and rose water). But the curious facts emerge that however poisonous white lead repeatedly proved to be, women used it on their faces for centuries, to the despair of critics; that however cheaply cosmetics could be made, women have always loved to spend a lot of money on them; and that no matter how dreadful most men said it looked, women continued to use makeup and break hearts as well.

—Anne Hollander

Currently writing a book on dress and art

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