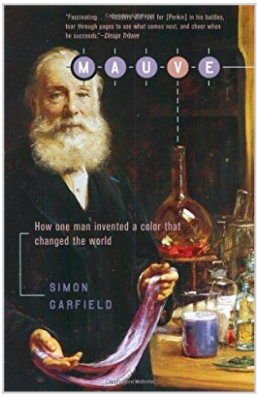

Mauve: How One Man Invented a Color That Changed the World

By Simon Garfield

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"Garfield's engaging story of William Perkin's accidental discovery is an informative mix of science, history, and biography."?*Boston Herald*

In 1856 eighteen-year-old English chemist William Perkin accidentally discovered a way to mass-produce color. In a "witty, erudite, and entertaining" (*Esquire*) style, Simon Garfield explains how the experimental mishap that produced an odd shade of purple revolutionized fashion, as well as industrial applications of chemistry research. Occasionally honored in certain colleges and chemistry clubs, Perkin until now has been a forgotten man.

"By bringing Perkin into the open and documenting his life and work, Garfield has done a service to history."?*Chicago Tribune* "[A]n inviting cocktail of Perkin biography, account of the dye industry and where it led, and social and cultural history up to the present."?*American Scientist* "Garfield leaps gracefully back and forth in time, as comfortable in the Victorian past as he is in the brave new world of petrochemicals and biochemistry."?*Kirkus Reviews* starred review. "[T]he delight of this book is seeing parallels to present-day trends."?"*New York Times Book Review* 8 pages of color illustrations

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Mauve: How One Man Invented a Color That Changed the World By Simon Garfield Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #323083 in Books
- Published on: 2002-05-17
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.30" h x .70" w x 5.50" l, .50 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 240 pages

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
In 1856, while trying to synthesize artificial quinine, 18-year-old chemistry student William Perkin instead produced a murky residue. Fifty years later, he described the event: he "was about to throw a certain residue away when I thought it might be interesting. The solution of it resulted in a strangely beautiful color." Perkin had stumbled across the world's first aniline dye, a color that became known as mauve.

"So what?" you might say. "A teenager invented a new color." As Simon Garfield admirably points out in *Mauve*, the color really *did* change the world. Before Perkin's discovery all the dyes and paints were colored by roots, leaves, insects, or, in the case of purple, mollusks. As a result, colors were inconsistent and unpredictably strong, often fading or washing out. Perkin found a dye that would always produce a uniform shade--and he pointed the way to other synthetic colors, thus revolutionizing the world of both dyemaking and fashion. Mauve became all the rage. Queen Victoria wore it to her daughter's wedding in 1858, and the highly influential Empress Eugénie decided the color matched her eyes. Soon, the streets of London erupted in what one wag called the "mauve measles."

Mauve had a much wider impact as well. By finding a commercial use for his discovery--much to the dismay of his teacher, the great August Hofmann, who believed there needed to be a separation between "pure" and "applied" science--Perkin inspired others to follow in his footsteps: "Ten years after Perkin's discovery of mauve, organic chemistry was perceived as being exciting, profitable, and of great practical use." The influx of bright young men all hoping to earn their fortunes through industrial applications of chemistry later brought significant advances in the fields of medicine, perfume, photography, and even explosives. Through it all, Garfield tells his story in clever, witty prose, turning this odd little tale into a very entertaining read. -- *Sunny Delaney*

From Library Journal
Since his discovery of the first synthetic dye in 1856, interest in William Perkin has undergone a resurgence approximately every 50 years. Garfield's (The End of Innocence: Britain in the Time of AIDS) biography follows in the footsteps of A Jubilee Proceedings (1906) and a centenary supplement to the organic chemistry journal Tetrahedron (1956). It focuses on Perkin as a pioneer, taking research from the burgeoning field of academic chemistry and applying it to industry. The creation of a popular dye from coal-tar (a plentiful industrial waste) when the field of dyeing was beholden to natural dyes, such as indigo and madder, made Perkin very rich and fleetingly famous. The book also chronicles the influence of this discovery throughout the industry and into other fields. That the use of stains and dyes eventually transformed biochemistry and medicine is ironic, given that Perkin was originally seeking a cure for malaria when he stumbled onto the mauve dye. Recommended for science collections in academic and large public libraries. Wade M. Lee, Univ. of Toledo Lib.
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From Scientific American
The man was William Perkin (1838-1907), an English chemist. The color was mauve, which he discovered by accident when he was 18. "While working on an experiment, I failed," he said many years later, "and was about to throw a certain black residue away when I thought it might be interesting." The experiment was an effort to make synthetic quinine, and the black residue was coal tar. Perkin's accidental discovery gave rise to industrial aniline and the modern synthetic-dye industry, as well as to a number of other processes employing

coal-tar derivatives. It also, Garfield says, "affected the whole nature of scientific investigation: for the first time, people realized that the study of chemistry could make them rich." Perkin became rich and received a knighthood. Garfield, a Londoner who writes about science, tells the Perkin and aniline stories well.

Editors of Scientific American

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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