William Perkin Encyclopedia Article

William Perkin

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Contents

William Perkin Encyclopedia Article.....1

Contents.....2

William Perkin.....3

William Perkin

1838-1907

English organic chemist who produced the first synthetic dyestuff in 1856 and founded the synthetic organic chemical industry. In attempting to produce quinine from aniline by oxidation, Perkin found that he produced a substance that when dissolved in alcohol produced a brilliant purple color and was able to dye many fabrics. By modifying the structure of aniline, Perkin and others were able to produce a whole range of colors. In 1874 Perkin retired from the chemical business to devote himself to basic scientific research. One of the products of this research was the synthesis of a substance named coumarin that had a vanilla-like smell. This became the basis for the beginning of the synthetic perfume industry.