

'PALE SYDNEY WOMAN MADE STRONG AND ROSY!'

Ian Warden uses the Newspapers Collection to explore the health worries and associated 'cures' of Australians 100 years ago

Alive and unwell in the Australia of 1908, would you have been likely to believe some of the incredible-sounding claims in advertisements for medical potions and contraptions? Would you, sickly and old, have been ready to believe that the wearing of the miraculous and 'world famous' Dr McLaughlin's Electric Belt would utterly cure you and make you 'strong and vigorous, with your veins full of youthful fire'? Would you have believed the claim for Bile Beans (as confirmed by the testimony of 'A Prostrated Postmaster')

that taking them would achieve 'the banishing [of] sick headaches from your life altogether'? Would you, suffering an asthma attack, have lit up one of Grimault's Indian Cigarettes, promising immediate relief for asthmatics?

The Australians of 100 years ago can be forgiven for health anxieties greater than ours today. They had rather more to be anxious about. The Grim Reaper was very busy then. There were no mass immunisations against common diseases and antibiotics were unknown (Alexander Fleming didn't discover penicillin until 1928). Life was considerably sicker, and shorter, in 1908. Between 1901 and 1910, Australian men had an average life expectancy of about 55.2 years, and women of about 55.8 years, whereas today the average non-

'Men! Don't Take Drugs!' reproduced from *Town and Country Journal*, 29 April 1908 (Sydney: Frank and Christopher Bennett, 1908) Newspapers and Microforms Collection mfm NX 442

Indigenous Australian man can expect to soldier on for 78.5 years, and the average non-Indigenous woman for 83.3.

The range of maladies and dangers that could whisk people away was far larger than now. The first ever edition of the *Australian Year Book*, published in 1908, shows in its chilling table, 'Causes Of Death—Australia 1905', that typhoid fever, tuberculosis, something called 'congestion, haemorrhage, and softening of the brain', pneumonia, diarrhoea and enteritis (especially in children under two years), nephritis and Bright's Disease (kidney ailments) and 'senile debility' were all major killers.

Children, and especially newborns, were by 2008 standards especially fragile. The *Year Book* recorded that



MEN! DON'T TAKE DRUGS!

WHY don't you stop it? You are not suffering, but dragging down your body with the same dragging disappointment. You are a "sickly body" and the only change to be made is to be made well. Why don't you stop this medicine habit? Why don't you get yourself out this medicine, remedy? Follow an old man's lead. Let the thing, being, along, along, along of this medicine. This is the electric belt. You can see every kind of medicine, but this is the only one that will cure you. You can see every kind of medicine, but this is the only one that will cure you. You can see every kind of medicine, but this is the only one that will cure you.

DR. McLAUGHLIN'S ELECTRIC BELT.

There is no stopping the when it comes to the weakness and pain. The Electric Belt is the best way of applying it. The Electric Belt is the best way of applying it. The Electric Belt is the best way of applying it.

FREE BOOK. If you want to be strong and vigorous, with your veins full of youthful fire, your eyes clear, your ears ringing and your feet firm, you will find this book, "The Electric Belt," worth every man should read, and which will bring you with energy to be proud of. It is a list of things that make a man feel like a champion. It is a list of things that make a man feel like a champion.

THE McLAUGHLIN CO.,
 Dept. 15 Linden Court, SYDNEY.

doctor advised

me to use SCOTT'S Emulsion, saying that a SCOTT'S did not do him good, not being world. Less than half a bottle cured him and he is now a fine healthy boy.



(Mrs.) J. BOUGHEN.
Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, 1908.

in 1906 there were 83.26 'infantile deaths' per 1000 live births. Today we find this startling: in contemporary Australia there are about five infant deaths per 1000. But in 1905 in Australia, one in every 12 infants didn't survive to his or her first birthday. It's no wonder, then, that so much of the medical advertising of 1908 is for foods and concoctions that promise to do wonders for fragile children. All early twentieth-century parents would have known, fearfully, of little children lost. Mrs J. Boughen testified with relief and gratitude in advertisements for Scott's Emulsion (a cod-liver oil) that her little son Norman, eight months old, had been brought back from the brink by less than half a bottle of the product and 'is now a fine healthy boy' (an artist's impression of the almost unbelievably bonny Norman confirms this).

In January of 1908, in a summer of ferocious heat (before air conditioning and the electric refrigerator), so many of the already vulnerable—the newborn and the frail aged—were killed by the heat that Melbourne's overstretched General Cemetery had to refuse applications for burials. 'My Dear Yarrie,' the columnist 'Johanna' wrote in her 'Melbourne Chatter' column for the *Bulletin* of 20 January 1908:

The weather is the only topic and the universal grief. Such heat has never been known within the memory of woman, and new babies and old grandmothers sail off every hour for the great Beyond [blown by] a draught of fire-hot wind.

If time travel enabled us to visit the Australia of 1908, the standards of water supply, sewage disposal, food quality and health education would alarm us, as would the ignorance (reflected and exploited by makers of remedies) of what kidneys, livers and the blood really were, of what they were for, and of what they could and could not be medicinally tweaked into doing.

And so, alive and unwell in the Australia of 1908, we too would have been anxious and medically credulous and disposed to want to believe improbable things. With tuberculosis such a killer, we would pin our hopes on Dr Derk P. Yonkerman's advertised claims that he had 'discovered a specific which has cured the deadly Consumption even in its far advanced stages'. We'd want to believe that by just the second box of Dr Williams' Pink Pills (they 'make new blood') we'd notice—like the 'Pale Sydney Woman Made Strong and Rosy!' in the advertisements—that the hitherto deathly pallor of our consumptive cheeks was turning to a rosy pinkness as pink as the amazing pills themselves.

Today, we are used to manufacturers' relatively modest and very specific claims for their products (perhaps forced on them by truth-in-advertising laws) but, in 1908, there can be a striking extravagance in the claimed array of maladies a potion or a contraption would banish.

Clarke's Blood Mixture, 'the finest blood purifier ever invented', is said to be just the remedy for 'scrofula, scurvy, eczema, blood poison, ulcers, skin and blood disease, bad legs, blotches, spots, blackheads, pimples, sores of all kinds', in addition to being 'the only real specific for gout and rheumatic pains, for it removes the cause from the Blood and Bones'. The long list of things supposedly cured by Moller's Hydroxyl-Free Cod-Liver Oil includes the dreaded consumption (tuberculosis). Horlicks' Malted Milk is :

a reliable food for the baby, a source of strength to the growing boy, a stamina giver for athletes, a stimulating blood-making food for anemic girls, a valuable tonic for shaken nerves, and a digestible and enjoyable food for old age.

Electrical 'cures' abounded in 1908. They had an aura of newness and of scientific promise. Let the makers of Widow Welch's Female Pills boast that their pills have been working

left:

'Doctor Advised ... Scott's Emulsion' reproduced from *Town and Country Journal*, 29 April 1908 (Sydney: Frank and Christopher Bennett, 1908) Newspapers and Microforms Collection mfm NX 442

below:

'Consumption Can Be Cured!' reproduced from *Punch*, 16 January 1908 (East Melbourne: John Joseph Halligan, 1908) Newspapers and Microforms Collection NX 104

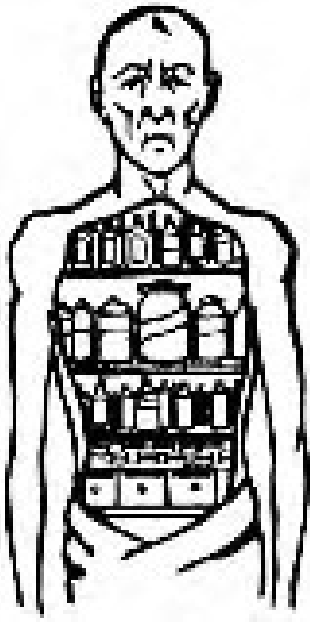
Consumption Can Be Cured.

Dr. Derk P. Yonkerman, who has become world renowned as the discoverer of a cure for CONSUMPTION.

A cure for consumption, the most deadly of all diseases, has been discovered by Dr. Derk P. Yonkerman, who has become world renowned as the discoverer of a cure for consumption. This cure is the result of a long and arduous search, and is the only one that has been found. It is a simple and easy-to-use remedy, and it has cured thousands of people who were once thought to be beyond hope. The cure is available in the form of a liquid, and it can be taken in a few drops several times a day. It is a powerful and effective remedy, and it is the only one that has been found. It is a simple and easy-to-use remedy, and it has cured thousands of people who were once thought to be beyond hope. The cure is available in the form of a liquid, and it can be taken in a few drops several times a day. It is a powerful and effective remedy, and it is the only one that has been found.

ABSOLUTELY FREE.

POSTAGE PAID.



above:
 'I Swallowed Drugs'
 reproduced from *Town and Country Journal*, 22 April 1908
 (Sydney: Frank and Christopher Bennett, 1908)
 Newspapers and Microforms Collection
 mfm NX 442

below:
 'Your Feet Will Sing the Praises of the Electric Foot Warmers'
 reproduced from the *Sydney Mail and New South Wales Advertiser*, 20 May 1908
 (Sydney: John Fairfax and Sons, 1908)
 Newspapers and Microforms Collection
 NX 182

wonders since 1787, but 'This is the electric age', advertisers of Dr McLaughlin's Electric Belt rejoiced, and the manufacturers pleaded:

Men! Don't Take Drugs! ... Why don't you stop this medicine habit? Why don't you avail yourself of the modern remedy? You don't need doctors; you don't need medicine ... You DO need Electric Life Force.

In one anti-potions advertisement for the miraculous belt, a forlorn man with a transparent torso confesses: 'I Swallowed Drugs—enough to stock a good-sized chemist's shop' and, arranged on the packed shelves of the medicine cupboard of his insides, we see a fabulous array of pill bottles and boxes.

Dr W. Carter Watson, of the authoritative-sounding Sydney Institute of Medicine and Electricity, recommends his 'Medico-Electric Cures' to treat:

promptly and surely ... neurasthenia, functional derangements, general weakness, debility, rupture, insomnia, brain fatigue, depression, gout, rheumatism, sciatica, lumbago, bladder and liver and lung trouble, catarrh, piles, epilepsy, spinal affections and all nerve, blood and skin diseases.

He advertises The Wonderful Elixir, a contraption offering:

a new and wonderful method of applying Electricity in your own home ... that generates Galvanic, Faradic, and Combined Currents, with attachments for all parts of the body. Every spark from its battery is a wave of life. Eulogised by the Press, Public and Leading Electricians.

The Union Company, with an advertisement illustrated by a pair of singing feet, swears that:

Your Feet Will Sing The Praises Of The Electric Foot Warmers ... Alternate plates of Copper and Zinc generate a mild and pleasant form of electric energy that promotes the circulation of the blood and thus tones up the entire system.

Some 1908 medical advertising is aggressively alarmist. Above a picture of a haggard, prostrate, pain-wracked soul of indeterminate sex and obviously at death's door, the manufacturers of Doan's Backache Kidney Pills counsel: 'Keep the Kidneys Healthy and You Will Live to a Good Old Age—Neglect Them and Suffering and Death Must Soon Follow.' Doan's assertion in its advertisements that 'Backache Is Really Kidney-Ache' seems especially wicked (since so much backache really is backache), but Doan's claim, 'Nearly All the Ills of Men and Women Can Be Traced to the Kidneys', was one of several made by manufacturers cashing in—with nephrology only in its ignorant infancy—on people's credulousness about the kidneys.

In 1908, the obese are regaled with graphic and unambiguous advertisements for Fatcure, the 'certain and reliable remedy for obesity'. The Fatcure advertisements are often alarmist and warn that corpulence may be fatal. Fatcure advertisements are also good examples of the ways in which in 1908, with photographs almost never used in advertisements, artists were able to radically embellish the already embellished truth. In one Fatcure advertisement with the legend 'FAT Which Is Desirable in a Prize Pig Is Not So in a Properly Conditioned Man Or Woman', a huge man and woman are looking at an enormous pig (wearing a rosette for first prize for fatness), to which they bear an unhappy porky resemblance.

YOUR FEET WILL SING THE PRAISES OF THE ELECTRIC FOOT WARMERS
 Very Comfortable and Healthy.
PROMOTE CIRCULATION. PREVENT GRAMP
 Cure Nerve Troubles. Avert Colds, Chills and Rheumatism.
Now only 3/6 per Pair. (Usual Price 5/6 per Pair)
 YOU will never suffer from Cold Feet while you wear these Electric Warmers. All day and night they will keep your feet warm and comfortable even in a tight boot. Alternate plates of Copper and Zinc generate a mild and pleasant form of electric energy that promotes the circulation of the blood and thus tones up the entire system. Positively PREVENTS GRAMP, cures Nerve Troubles, saves you from Colds and Chills and keeps the soles of your feet soft. Reduced to 3/6, 11, per Pair, and we give 50% Margin. See our list with prospect.
The UNION Co., 299 Elizabeth Street, Melbourne.

