

DIPHThERIA FROM THE PUBLIC HEALTH ASPECT

by

Glen Howard Burnell

Doctor of Medicine (M.D.)

1920

**Please note:** This page created as the thesis lacks a title page.

# DIPHTHERIA FROM THE PUBLIC HEALTH ASPECT

-----000-----



I have chosen the above title for this paper because I do not pretend to have solved all the problems surrounding this protean disease.

<sup>for this district</sup> I have endeavoured, with some measure of success, to evolve a practical method for dealing with a disease which has been, and still is, the cause of a vast amount of preventable illness and death.

That some such scheme is urgently required is evident from the fact that during 1918 there were in the Commonwealth of Australia 19,018 cases of diphtheria with 607 deaths, this number of notifications of diphtheria being vastly greater than that of any other notifiable infectious disease. This serious state of affairs called forth from the Medical Journal of Australia on May 3rd. 1919 an editorial headed "A perennial Defect" in which, inter alia, the writer says "The disease is definitely preventible and should be prevented".

"It has been stated that the efficiency of a health department can be measured by the incidence of diphtheria in the area under its control. Judged from this standpoint, health control needs revision in the Commonwealth."

That the same feeling obtains in other quarters is evident from many other articles published recently. Dr. Cumpston, Chief of the Commonwealth Quarantine Service in addressing the Public Questions Society of the Melbourne University in August<sup>1919</sup> said "The present system of nominal control of transmissible diseases of bacterial origin in Australia has been a demonstrated failure. Something has been achieved.....but there has been no intelligent effort to control the personal infection factor in these diseases".

Again "It is beyond question that there is a growing feeling of public dissatisfaction with present conditions of private medical practice and a growing and insistent demand that disease and ill-health must be prevented.....Tinkering with drains and the recurrent futility of resultless meetings of various statutory boards is not preventive medicine, and is not likely to improve the general level of the health of the people. Until Governments recognise that there is an enormous uncultivated field for effort in preventing illness of all kinds, not only infectious diseases.....preventive medicine in Australia will remain what it is at present, the only branch of medical science in which practical application of advancing knowledge is not being made."