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WHAT THEY COST AND WHAT THEY CONTAINED

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One hundred years ago (1909) the British Medical Association published a book entitled 'SECRET REMEDIES; what they cost and what they contain'. Thousands of copies were sold. The purpose of the publication was to attack quackery and to discredit the manufacturers of popular proprietary medicines.

During the nineteenth century there had been a large growth in sales of proprietary medicines. Many of these medicines were of little or no use as remedies but were heavily advertised in newspapers, magazines and in fliers. There was, at that time, no legal requirement to state the ingredients. The gullible public was only too keen to buy. If they cured themselves it would save them expensive doctor's bills. Diseases claimed to be cured included Tuberculosis, Bright's Disease, Diabetes, Epilepsy and Cancers.

The British Medical Association had already published, their analysis of various medicines in the British Medical Journal. It decided to publish 'SECRET REMEDIES' in order to take their findings to the general public. They also quoted a price for the ingredients to illustrate the profits of the manufacturers. Over one hundred and twenty medicines were analysed and costed.

This paper studies the book and discusses its effect on the general public regarding the sales of the proprietary medicines that were featured within its pages.