



# The Forgotten Plague: How the Battle Against Tuberculosis Was Won - And Lost

*By Frank Ryan*

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Ryan, a physician, offers a history of the cure for tuberculosis, including accounts of the people and scientists involved. The final chapter spells out a renewed threat in the congruence of AIDS and tuberculosis.

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## **The Forgotten Plague: How the Battle Against Tuberculosis Was Won - And Lost** By Frank Ryan **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Ryan traces the history of tuberculosis, its apparent cures and contemporary reemergence.

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From Library Journal

Tuberculosis, Ryan reminds us, is not just a disease of gracefully suffering artists in period costumes.

Shockingly, 1.7 billion people worldwide are infected, including 10 million Americans. Aggravated by AIDS and homelessness, new and often drug-resistant cases threaten to unleash what has been called "the greatest public health disaster since the bubonic plague." Ryan, a Fellow of the Royal Academy of Physicians and a Member of the New York Academy of Sciences, narrates the history of the search for a cure of this terrifying disease. He describes both the tedious drudgery and the seemingly mystical flashes of insight of an international group of brilliant scientists, including four Nobel Prize winners. They combated a "sinister chameleon" of a disease for which cure after cure was developed, only to be discarded after TB bacteria mutated into new variations that left promising therapies apparently useless. A compelling picture of the process of scientific research as well as a troubling look at an emerging public health crisis, Ryan's book is recommended for all libraries.

- *Kathy Arsenault, Univ. of South Florida, St. Petersburg*

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From Kirkus Reviews

A lively account of how scientists worked for years to tame tuberculosis--only to find the disease rebounding with increased virulence as drug-resistant strains developed and as the emergence of the AIDS virus triggered a surge in deadly TB infections. Ryan (a fellow of the UK's Royal Academy of Physicians), pays homage to the men of science who conquered TB, one of humanity's oldest plagues and a killer of a billion people during the past two centuries alone. He recounts at length and in detail the lives of those whose work led to the discovery of the drugs used to treat TB. We see Ren, Dubos, for instance, searching diligently for antibiotics among soil microorganisms at N.Y.C.'s Rockefeller Institute while his young wife is dying of TB at a sanatorium miles away, and we watch Gerhard Domagk working doggedly on sulphonamides under horrendous conditions in war-torn Germany and then being forced by the Nazis to turn down the Nobel Prize. Ryan's style often is highly charged: Tuberculosis is "the greatest killer in history"; scientific discoveries are greeted with "incandescent excitement"; AIDS is a "new phantasmagoria of terror." Meanwhile, personal tragedies and triumphs make up the first three-quarters of the book, but the real message lies in the finale: Although an entire generation in the West has grown up with little knowledge of, or experience with, TB, the disease is making a comeback, this time as a superbug, resistant to every drug. If action is not taken quickly, the results of the present epidemic will be, in Ryan's words, "apocalyptic." Dramatic, sometimes even melodramatic, writing in the historical parts may heighten the book's appeal to some, but it lessens the credibility of the genuine alarm being sounded in the conclusion. (Twenty-four b&w photographs--not seen) -- *Copyright ©1993, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.*

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