Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History

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sufferers over a period of 150 years, Living in the Shadow of Death addresses the changing balance of authority between American patients and their caretakers, in contending with long-term invalidism and early death. Rothman is especially attuned to the gendered character of suffering for middle-class European-Americans, men as well as women, before the bacteriological paradigm shift that followed Villemin, Pasteur, and Koch. Start by marking “Living in the Shadow of Death: Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History” as Want to Read: Want to Read saving… Tuberculosis—once the cause of as many as one in five deaths in the U.S.—crossed all boundaries of class and gender, but the methods of treatment for men and women differed radically. While men were encouraged to go out to sea or to the open country, women were expected to stay at home, surrounded by family, to anticipate a lingering death. This look at tuberculosis allows us insight into ordinary Americans’ anti-slavery efforts, the East Coast prejudice against the Irish immigrant, America’s gender bias, and most poignant, how health panics can rob citizens of their liberty and even familial rights. Subtitled “Tuberculosis and the Social Experience of Illness in American History,” the book chronicles the medical and societal treatment of tuberculosis in the United States from the perspective of individuals who suffered from the disease. The author includes illness narratives derived from letters and diaries of the afflicted; her analysis spans the period in American history from the nineteenth through the first half of the twentieth century. The book is divided into four sections. Stigma, exclusion, and the experience of institutionalization as both imprisonment and release from responsibility are all relevant to the human issues in present-day discussions of health policy.