Título: Invisible Enemies. Stories Of Infectious Disease

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Seven major killers are discussed here in up-to-date, straightforward essays, about 30 pages for each, with four or five images of worthies, posters, cartoons and the like. The emphasis is historical and clinical: what happened, what still happens and what is done for it. Not much of the laboratory is here, little talk of viral strains or physiology; the scene is implicitly hospital, office or sickbed, a familiar level well suited to readers 12 years old and up. "Leprosy," long misnamed and misunderstood, is a fascinating chapter. Hansen's disease--it was he who found the germ in the 1870s--is in fact the least contagious of all the scourges discussed in the book. It was false fear that has doomed leprosy sufferers: a Greek term for a blotchy skin disease was used to translate the Old Testament Hebrew term for "unholy." The patients had varied facial disfigurements, sometimes specific numbness in hands, feet, even eyelids, all very rarely fatal. On so slight a curse they were exiled and rejected for 2,000 years. The World Health Organization thinks it may effectively end the public health problem--that is, reduce the prevalence of leprosy to one person in 10,000 worldwide in a few years. The U.S. caseload is below that now, at about 7,000 cases. Smallpox is extinct, barring biological warfare. Plague is carried in the U.S. mainly by prairie dogs; antibiotics and rat catchers may soon end it in cities. Cholera was all but ended by understanding that its fatalities were brought on by dehydration; copious drinks of water cure patients in a day or two (with a little salt and sugar to help it down). But malaria rages on; maybe a Chinese botanical drug of high promise will eventually succeed. And tuberculosis might be met with enough money, but the battle against HIV/AIDS is still at crisis