



A Darkened House: Cholera in Nineteenth-Century Canada (Heritage)

Geoffrey Bilson

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From its first appearance in 1832 until the last scares of 1871, cholera aroused fear in British North America. The disease killed 20,000 people and its psychological effects were enormous. Cholera unsettled governments, undermined the medical profession, exposed inadequacies in public health, and widened the division between rich and poor. In a fascinating and disturbing book, Geoffrey Bilson traces the story of the cholera epidemics as they ravaged the Canadas and the Atlantic colonies.

The political repercussions were extensive, particularly in Lower Canada. Governments, both colonial and municipal, imposed various public health measures, including quarantine. These actions were always temporary and poorly enforced, and they sometimes met with violent opposition, especially among the poor and the immigrants, hit hardest by cholera. Even the panic that ensued from the periodic onslaughts of the disease could not overcome the prevailing laissez-faire attitude towards public health legislation. The medical profession was equally helpless. Doctors could neither cure the disease nor isolate its cause, and public sentiment against them ran high.

A Darkened House is important reading for those interested in Canada's social, political, and medical history.

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