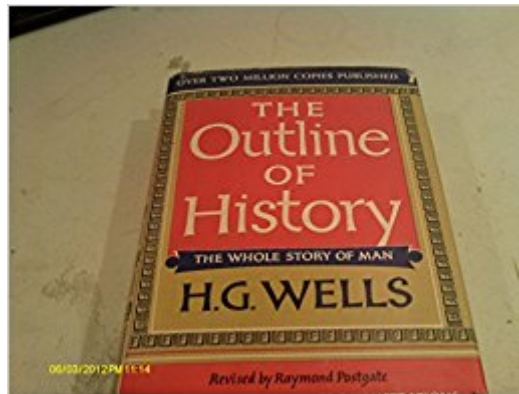




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Rats, Lice And History: A Study In Biography



Synopsis

1963 Little Brown hardcover, reprint. Hans Zinsser (As I Remember Him: the Biography of R.S.). The classic chronicle of the impact disease and plagues have had on history and society over the past half-millennium. Intriguingly fascinating and entertaining reading for anyone who is interested in how society copes with catastrophe and pain. Relevant today in face of the worldwide medical calamity of AIDS. Continuously in print since its first publication in 1934, with over 75 printings. -

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

1963 Little Brown hardcover, reprint. Hans Zinsser (As I Remember Him: the Biography of R.S.). The classic chronicle of the impact disease and plagues have had on history and society over the past half-millennium. Intriguingly fascinating and entertaining reading for anyone who is interested in how society copes with catastrophe and pain. Relevant today in face of the worldwide medical calamity of AIDS. Continuously in print since its first publication in 1934, with over 75 printings. -

Wonderful wealth of historic knowledge and analysis in a digressive story-telling style. I personally enjoyed it so much and found it so useful that I bought this hard copy to replace my paperback published in the late '60s that's just about had it now. Have had the book for 20 years and kept it in a treasured spot. Looking eagerly forward to re-reading. The basic premise is that micro-organisms have had more impact on human history than human intent or understanding, as explained by one of the pioneers of modern sciences -- a breathtaking breadth of history and conceptual captures. and fun!

This 1963 copy of "Rats, Lice, and History" was the 33rd time it had been reissued since first appearing in 1934. I can't imagine Dr. Zinsser's grumpily discursive, masterfully written, and

ultimately profound biography of typhus fever ever going completely out of print. Stylistically the only work I can compare it to is Gibbon's "Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire". Where Gibbon occasionally dipped his pen in vinegar and excoriated the Christians, Zinsser dips his pen in hydrochloric acid and savages all of the quaint human customs that have kept Typhus alive and thriving. He shows much more affectionate sympathy for the louse than he does for the General or the Politician. In the interests of research, Zinsser carried pill boxes of lice under his socks for weeks at a time before taking "advantage of them for scientific purposes." He is not able to tear himself away from these little creatures and address the true subject of his biography, i.e. the typhus germ, until Chapter 12! However, the journey to Chapter 12 is well worth taking because along the way, Zinsser wittily savages modern biographers, psychoanalysis, astronomers and physicists who "scamper back to God" (Biologists evidently are much less prone to being 'born again'), and of course, all of the wars that have given Typhus countless opportunities to murder lice and humans alike. "Rats, Lice, and History" should be required reading for would-be writers for its style, would-be Generals for its lessons on how soldiers really die, and for anyone else who is interested in a passionate, eminently witty, one-of-a-kind history of medicine.

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