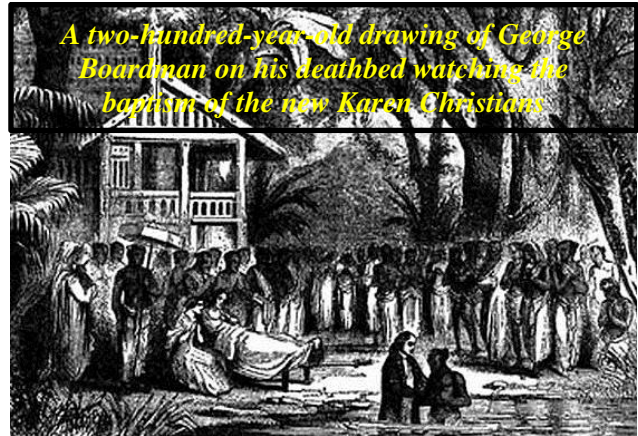


The Disease Called Consumption

George Boardman had been feeling tired and unwell for months. He was having trouble breathing and was even coughing up blood. He was becoming very thin. He and his wife Sarah didn't

need a doctor to tell them that he had the dreaded disease, the disease that claimed one out of every seven deaths—in some places, one out of three. Nothing could be done to stop this disease that consumed people. In fact, the way it consumed people was the very reason that for centuries it had been called *consumption*.



In the 1700s and 1800s, people believed that diseases were caused by bad air. They tried to be very careful about what air they breathed. They didn't have any idea about diseases being caused by tiny creatures inside our bodies. In the 1670s, Anton van Leeuwenhoek invented the microscope and first saw the “little beasties” that would later come to be known as bacteria, but people had no understanding about what these creatures did in our bodies.

In the 1870s, both Joseph Lister and Ignaz Semmelweis taught that doctors should wash their hands and carefully clean their medical equipment. This teaching was so radical that at first many people scoffed at such a notion.

In 1882, after many years of study, Robert Koch discovered the bacteria related to the terrible disease of consumption. He called it *Mycobacterium tuberculosis*, which some people shortened to “TB.” He showed that it was passed around by sneezing and coughing and touching, rather than through “bad air.”

An antibiotic became available in the 1940s that was effective in killing the TB bacteria. The deadly disease that consumed people was finally under control.