

Professor Fernando da Fonseca

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The 26th of April 1996 marks one hundred years since the birth of Professor Fernando Fonseca, a prominent figure in Portuguese medicine, who with his total dedication, gave rise to great prestige and strong recollections.

Born and raised in Lisbon, it was here that he exercised a humanized and scientific clinical practice, and had many experiences that are avidly gathered by his numerous colleagues, friends, admirers and patients. Due to his long professional experience and the affability of his uncommon care and dedication, the majority of his patients also took their place among his legion of friends and admirers.

Gifted with an abundance of intelligence and empathy, his studies were crowned by brilliant results, whether in primary education, given by his parents, who were teachers, or in the schools Lapa and Pedro Nunes, where he had renowned teachers, or finally, at the School of Medicine, which he joined soon after the installation of the Republic, and studied with the celebrated generation of 1911.

Completing medical school in 1918, the Portuguese Expeditionary Corps (C.E.P.) was still taking on volunteers, and after enlisting, he went to the front line of combat with 123 Battalion. He took part in the final conflicts which, in Flanders, defeated the German armies, then returned to his Homeland where he was honored with the medals of Victory and of the Campaigns of the Portuguese Army, the Order of Christ and the Order of the Tower and Sword.

Returning to Portugal, he was nominated, after completing the documentary entrance examination, as second assistant of the first Medical Clinic, and from that time, he absorbed with delight the strong influence of Professor Pulido Valente. His degree thesis, which was put on hold when he enlisted in the army, was completed in 1920, and his uncommonly high score of nineteen points reflected the high value of his work, elaborated on a new theme – the study of cholesterol – which even today, is a subject of pri-



mordial importance in the biogenesis of ageing.

The Hospital de Santa Marta, converted into a School Hospital, was a fertile ground for theoretical studies and practical learning of young assistants, who lived in the hospital and worked intensely as a team, which led to the scientific modernization of our Internal Medicine at the apogée of German science.

And it was with this orientation, carved out by Pulido Valente, that he went to Germany at the end of 1923 to dedicate himself, in an intensive internship, to the study of the areas of medical science that most attracted him, namely, diseases of the kidneys, digestive system, nutrition and laboratory practice. Returning to Santa Marta, the journal *Lisboa Médica*, official publication of the Faculty, gathered together his prolific activity in articles and findings.

In 1929, he scaled another important peak in his medical career, gaining the position of assistant of the HCL in a public selection process. From then on, he began to work at the service 1 of the Hospital Curry Cabral, which is dedicated to the treatment of

tuberculosis. In this service, he gathered material, diversified, and wrote his work on “*O bacilo de Koch tem uma forma filtrável?*” (Does Koch’s bacilla have a filterable form?) which served as the thesis for the selection exams to become professor at the School of Medicine, held in 1933. This work, which won the Camara Pestana award of the Bacteriological Institute, was followed by his transfer to service 2 of the same hospital, dedicated to infectious diseases. He remained there until the end of his teaching career, which was abruptly halted in 1947.

But there were still another fourteen years that represented an extremely important phase of medicine in Lisbon and corresponded to the development of a new medical specialty, infectology, raising awareness of the problems of Public Health, and to the training of numerous physicians in promising careers, that this “Universidade do Rego” afforded them. The fact that the council of the Faculty awarded him the regency of the chair of Infectious/contagious diseases enabled him to transmit to his younger colleagues the spirit of the mission that this chair embodies.

The selection examination for the chair, in 1943, was of a high scientific standard, and having gained first place, he was awarded the regency of Propedeutic Medicine. Among his colleagues he was considered the best disciple of the School of Pulido Valente; among his students he was their Favorite Master, due to the brilliance and enthusiasm with which he taught them; among his patients he was the physician of Lisbon *par excellence*; beyond our borders he was a living intelligence that focuses attention on Portugal.

Practically all the chapters of infectious diseases are studied in the center of the Instituto de Alta Cultura, which operated in the Service that Professor Fonseca helped to build up, and the publications of these works followed in the national journals, as well as some foreign ones. His essays on exanthematous typhus, rickets, and malaria were innovative for their time, and are now viewed as classics.

The extensive preface that enriched the book “*Como evitar as doenças infecciosas*” (How to avoid infectious diseases) written by two of his collaborators summarizes, in a masterly way, the problems that the specialty gathers, and the only updating it requires is the addition of new knowledge. In 1946, he held the first course in infectious/contagious diseases, with lectures and practical documentation that was widely used and divulged among the subdelegates of Health

to whom the course was mainly dedicated. The course was repeated in 1947.

The year 1947 was a period of difficulty for Medicine in Lisbon, as it marked the compulsory resignation, allegedly for political reasons, of various prestigious professors of the Faculty. Fernando Fonseca, forced to resign from his chair and deprived of hospital practice, carried out reduced research at the Institute of Oncology, and sought refuge in clinical practice.

In his short time in the Chair, he was unable to set up the School, the foundations of which showed a promising future. His collaborators dispersed, the School, which was being set up, stopped and regressed, and it was in the safe harbor of private clinical practice that his exuberant activity revived and his name remains inerasable in the admiration of his colleagues and trust of his patients. At seventy nine years of age, another heart attack cut short the exemplary life of Fernando Fonseca, on which the sharp barbs of injustice only served to confer greater prominence and perennality. ■