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YELLOW FEVER

A SYMPOSIUM IN COMMEMORATION OF CARLOS JUAN FINLAY

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SOPER

THE JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE of PHILADELPHIA

22-23 SEPTEMBER
1955
The addresses in this symposium were designated as

**William Potter Memorial Lectures**

Mr. Potter was a member of the Board of Trustees of the Jefferson Medical College from 1894-1926 and its president from 1897-1926.
YELLOW FEVER

A Symposium in Commemoration of

Carlos Juan Finlay

JORGE BOSHELL M.
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PEDRO NOGUEIRA
ALEXANDER J. ORENSTEIN
OCTAVIO PINTO SEVERO
JOSEPH E. SMADEL
FRED L. SOPER

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These meetings were arranged in cooperation with officials of the Republic of Cuba and with officers of the Pan American Sanitary Bureau. It was the general feeling that the most appropriate tribute to Carlos Finlay would be found in an authoritative conference on yellow fever, a subject to which Finlay was completely dedicated.
Carlos J. Finlay, M. D. — 1833 - 1915

CLASS OF 1855, JEFFERSON MEDICAL COLLEGE

Carlos J. Finlay was born in Camaguey, Cuba, in 1833. His father was a Scotch physician, his mother was French. His early education was by private tutor. At the age of eleven he was sent abroad for schooling in France and in Germany. The process of education was frequently interrupted by illness but he achieved a solid foundation in the classics, history, mathematics, geography, physics, and languages. For the latter he had great facility and insisted upon this all of his life — breakfast was always in Spanish, lunch in English, and dinner in French. Presumably, he reserved German for certain other periods.

In 1853, at the age of 20, Carlos Finlay came to Philadelphia with his uncle, Philip de Barrès, and both registered at the Jefferson Medical College. But Finlay signed with the name Charles and on October 27th paid the matriculation fee of $5, and the course fee of $15. On the 17th of October, 1854, he registered for his second year. At that time he paid another fee of $15 and indicated that his preceptor was S. W. Mitchell. In reality he was the first pupil of Weir Mitchell and his first disciple. This was the beginning of their life-long friendship. He received his doctor's degree on March 10, 1855. No record of his thesis has been found.

Following his graduation he evidently spent an additional year with Weir Mitchell in Philadelphia but in 1856 he began a series of travels, which included a period in Paris of postgraduate study in ophthalmology. He finally began permanently to practice medicine in Havana in 1864. His great interest in epidemiology and public health began in 1867 when Havana suffered from a severe epidemic of cholera. His logical reasoning showed that the disease was water-borne and he traced one phase of the epidemic to the original case. His views were, however, so opposed to those of the time that his communication was refused publication.

During the next few years he undertook to investigate the matter of yellow fever in spite of his busy practice. The basic equipment was the microscope which he had brought from Philadelphia. His long series of publications on yellow fever began in 1872. In due course he became established as a foremost authority on this disease, first officially recognized in 1879 when the Governor General appointed him to cooperate with the United States Commission on Yellow Fever. He served several similar appointments in the following years; perhaps the most notable was as Chairman of the Yellow Fever Board organized in 1899 by the provisional government of Cuba. This group worked closely with the United States Army Board headed by Walter Reed.
In 1902, at the end of the occupation, Finlay became Chief Sanitary Officer of Cuba—a position from which he retired in 1909 at the age of 76.

In February 1881, as a representative of Cuba and Puerto Rico to the International Sanitary Conference in Washington, Finlay first presented his argument as to the necessity of an intermediate agent to explain the transmission of yellow fever. This idea was completely original, independent, and thoroughly heretical. In August of the same year, Finlay declared the vector to be the mosquito now known as *Aedes aegypti*. Prior to the latter announcement Finlay had undertaken the experimental inoculation of informed volunteers by the use of infected mosquitoes. He believed that he succeeded in these first attempts. His subsequent attempts (the total amounted to 102 during twenty years) were perhaps less convincing. In retrospect it is almost impossible to evaluate these experiments, for the difficulties in clinical diagnosis were then, as now, enormous. Certainly the theory was completely established by the work of the Army Board headed by Walter Reed. No reader of Finlay's original reports can escape the idea that this extraordinary man, without resources and without the spiritual support of his colleagues at the time, actually managed a very considerable affair of much daring and of enormous originality. Considering the state of knowledge of those times this man stood far ahead.

Although history has marked Finlay for his work on yellow fever, his interests were wide. He made significant contributions in the fields of leprosy, beriberi, filariasis, trichinosis, relapsing fever, cholera, tuberculosis, and many other topics.

Finlay was rather firm in his convictions. During twenty years he gained only one follower for his mosquito theory but he continued to proclaim it at every opportunity and was considered something of a crank. He added to his reputation as a determined individual when at the age of 65 he joined the American Army as a Contract Surgeon and undertook active duty with the troops in Cuba.

Jefferson Medical College recognized the quality of Finlay and his work by awarding him the honorary degree of Doctor of Science in 1902. It was also at about this time that he was proposed by his friend, Weir Mitchell, for honorary fellowship in the College of Physicians of Philadelphia. He received many honors in his lifetime from many nations and from many scientific bodies.

Carlos Finlay died on August 20th, 1915. By that time he had become a hero. The ensuing years have dealt well with the man and with his work. There is a Finlay Institute in Havana, a Laboratorio Carlos Finlay in Panama, a Finlay Institute in Colombia. There are Finlay streets in various cities. The Pan American Medical Congress celebrates Finlay's birthday, December 3rd, as the official Day of American Medicine. The commemoration of the centenary of Finlay's graduation is a proud time, for Jefferson is greatly honored by its relationship to the "poor practitioner" who became a prophet.
Welcome

William Potter Wear

Mr. William Potter Wear, a member of the Board of Trustees of the Jefferson Medical College of Philadelphia, is the grandson of Mr. William Potter, a member of the Board of Trustees from 1894-1926 and its president from 1897-1926, in whose honor the addresses in this symposium are designated as William Potter Memorial Lectures.

Muy distinguidos señores:

Tengo gran placer en darle a ustedes la bienvenida a Jefferson. Es un gran honor para Jefferson el rendir tributo a la memoria del distinguido hombre que fué Carlos Finlay.

Hace muchos años que no hablo el español y espero me perdonen ustedes mis faltas de gramática, pero quiero hablarles en vuestra propia lengua.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Jefferson is proud to honor the memory of such a distinguished man as Carlos Finlay. Jefferson is also proud of having so many distinguished visitors here today and on behalf of the Board of Trustees I wish to tell you how pleased we are to have you with us on this occasion.

To our Cuban friends I wish to say saludos amigos.
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McClellan Hall, Jefferson Medical College

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