

WILBURT DAVISON

Here is the memorial I felt compelled to write in my personal journal:

June 26. A long distance telephone call from Grant Taylor, hard to hear. I thought he said he was in Houston, Texas. Then the words came through the buzzing of the wires. "Dr Wilburt Davison died at 10 o'clock yesterday, at Duke Hospital. Send his wife a note. There will be no memorial service. Take care of yourself. Goodbye!"

As we sat at tea looking over the green fields high above the blue of Lake Memphremagog, my wife and I were much moved by the passing of this dear friend, and recalled so many memories of "Davy."

At Princeton, although he and I were both in the Class of 1913, he was an oarsman and member of another club, so I saw little of him. He won the Rhodes Scholarship from New York and went to Oxford. I failed to win it in New Jersey. So I coached football at Princeton and taught school. I won the scholarship in 1914. But when the first world war broke out that autumn, I gave up all thought of going and started in my medical studies at the College of Physicians and Surgeons in New York.

At Christmas time a card from him reached me in New York. "Come on over, the classes are small and Americans are welcome." So, when Oxford accepted my cabled application, I said "goodbye" to my friends at P. & S. and sailed for England. Davison and Emile Holman and I were the only Americans doing what was called "The Physiology Schools" there.



Davison was a year ahead of us. He was in Merton College and I joined him there. T.S.Eliot was in Residence still, a student just as undistinguished then as either of us. I had my bedroom and "sitter" in Mob Quadrangle. I could look across at an angle to Davison's rooms. I found he was well known and very well liked because of his unique, out-spoken character, his brilliant mind and his physical prowess as an oarsman.

They told a story about him. It happened in his first year at Merton when a group of rather gay undergraduates set out to "rough up" his room. He heard them coming, switched off his lights, took off his clothes, and, when the deputation came up the stairs and entered his room, <sup>ing</sup> ~~he~~ <sup>they</sup> switched on the lights, <sup>There, he</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>silent and grim</sup> stood ~~there~~ before them naked, a towering young Hercules in the centre of the room, ready for the first to advance. They turned back, had a consultation, and selected another objective. And so they came to accept the man, with his breezy ways, his unpredictable energy and his roaring laughter, with admiration.

Sir William Osler, the Regius Professor of Medicine, and Lady Osler were very fond of Davy and often had him in their home. He accompanied Sir William when the latter went on his weekly consultation to one of the nearby war-hospitals.

On one occasion Sir William sent for Davison and me to come to his office ~~rooms~~ in the Oxford Museum. He invited us each to make a selection of his medical reprints which were kept there. When we took them to the Osler home



at 13 Norham Gardens, Sir William told us to leave them with him. He had them bound for us as a parting gift when we left Oxford.

Davison won a First Class in his final examinations, not an easy thing to do at Oxford. He was admitted to the Fourth Year as a medical undergraduate at Johns Hopkins. We roomed together there (1916-1917), as I was admitted to the Third Year.

We were alike in some ways, very different in others, but always understanding friends.

He was engaged to Atala Scudder during the Oxford and Hopkins period and I to Helen Kermott. They, too, were very different from each other. But each was perverse enough to wait for her medical student. And each has been a good and, I think, a happy wife through eventful years of work and play and common achievement.

It was characteristic of Wilburt Davison that he had large ideas. They took him out of his primary career and he seemed to bluff and to make what I called "snap diagnoses." The astonishing thing was that he worked so hard, behind the apparent bluff, and made it good.

When he went on to his graduate training in Pediatrics, I went into surgery and then returned to Oxford and London. When I came to New York as the youngest of neurosurgeons, I was not at all surprised to discover that Davy had made good his bluff of being an educator as well as a pediatrician. He was assistant to the brilliant young Dean of Medicine, Lewis Weed, at Johns Hopkins, as well as <sup>a</sup>children's doctor.



When wise men came from Duke in Durham, North Carolina, looking for a young man of vision who could plan and build a Medical School and spend an enormous endowment wisely, Lewis Weed pointed to Wilburt Davison. I suppose, when they approached him, Davy said, "Yes. Sure I can." He made good at what might have seemed, at first, a bluff in one so young.

And he wrote to me in New York and made a suggestion. It might have changed my life as his Christmas postcard did when he called on me to follow him to Oxford. He suggested I might come along with him to North Carolina as Professor of Surgery. We were tempted, my wife and I. But my sail-boat was set on another course and Davy found a better man to his purpose.

He was a "compleat paediatrician." He was also an effective educator and builder. He brought Oxford and Princeton and Johns Hopkins to a new home in what so many Americans would, with reason, call "God's Country." He was a good friend and a kindly physician in a world where people need humanity as well as science.

Wilder Penfield