

# Building One of the World's Great Schools of Medicine



**DEAN DAVISON**

"His office was on one of the busiest corridors-in the Medical School, with the door open always to students, house officers, personnel and faculty alike."

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might see part in New York, part in Chicago, and part in San Francisco, and the order didn't seem to make any difference to him. Dr. Davison probably had more unfinished parts of more movies floating around in his head than any man in the United States and he didn't jumble them up either. His criterion for a good movie corresponded to the degree of "fanny fatigue" that developed.

Unoccupied moments also were spent in authorship activities. Despite almost countless activities at the national and state levels, Dean Davison found time to write well over 200 scientific papers plus a book, *The Compleat Pediatrician*, which sold approximately 100,000 copies in its eight editions. The book editions were revised, he said, "in otherwise idle minutes on trains, steamers, and planes, in bars on ships and at airports, and at lectures, concerts, and medical meetings."

He once became so engrossed in revising some material while sitting through a paper being given by an old crony, that he failed to note that the subject had been changed at the last minute. At the conclusion he stood up and congratulated his colleague on a brilliant discussion of a topic which was never delivered.

*The Compleat Pediatrician* was begun in 1919, when Dr. Davison was on the Johns Hopkins pediatric staff, as a notebook record of easily forgotten facts and methods. The one-pound volume was kept at that weight for ease in carrying and tucking in a satchel. His greatest thrill and satisfaction occurred when he heard that *The Compleat Pediatrician* was the only medical book available after the surrender at Bataan during the second World War, and that it was used at Cabarra Tuan to calculate the dietary needs of the 13,000 American POW's.

Wilburt Davison was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan, in 1892, the son of a Methodist minister. Princeton gave him the A.B. degree in 1913, and thence he went to Oxford University, England, as a Rhodes Scholar. At Oxford, he began the business of tradition-breaking by calling on Sir William Osler, dean of the medical school, to request permission to complete the first two years of medical training in one year. "I was delightfully surprised," Dean Davison recalls, "when a small man came to the door and said cheerily before I could open my mouth, 'I am Sir William and have heard of your request which I think is very foolish but of course you can do anything you please and now let's have tea.' Taking the amazed me by the arm, he propelled me into the drawing room, introducing me to Lady Osler with 'Grace, here is a new American colt who is wrecking a medical school tradition. Give him some tea.'" This episode marked the beginning of Dr. Davison's affectionate devotion to Sir William, who profoundly influenced his thinking about many aspects of medical education. Dr. Davison earned the B.A. and B.Sc. degrees at Oxford, and got his M.D. from Johns Hopkins. In 1917 he married Atala Thayer Scudder of Glen Head, Long Island, to whom he had become engaged when she was at Bryn Mawr and he was at Princeton. Mrs. Davison, like her husband, is an M.D. and a pediatrician. The Davison's have three children, two of whom are physicians.

Dean Davison's 34 years at Duke have been marked by constant dissatisfaction with the status quo, with his mind always open to new ideas on how to spur the school toward the highest levels of excellence. The movement to train nonmedical men for positions as hospital administrators was inaugurated here. This is one of the few medical schools which includes nursing procedures in the medical curriculum, so that the students can instruct patients and relatives of patients. In accord with a practice of European medical education, Dean Davison encouraged students to spend one or more terms at medical schools other than Duke. He was instrumental in the establishment of loan funds for rural students in medicine—a step toward helping fill the need for physicians in rural areas of the South.

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**PEDIATRICIAN DAVISON**

"...while specialization in medicine was necessary, the success of total medical practice must depend on a substantial proportion of well-rounded generalists."