# SO WELL REMEMBERED

BY

JAMES HILTON

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# PART ONE

THAT day so well remembered — a day, indeed, impossible to forget — was the First of September, 1921; on the morning of which George Boswell — then only Councillor Boswell, then sandy-brown-haired with not a trace of grey — woke before dawn, looked at his watch, and promptly slept again till Annie brought in the morning paper, a cup of tea, and some letters that had just arrived. Amongst them was a note from Lord Winslow's secretary, saying that his lordship would arrive at Browdley Station by the noon train, in good time for the foundation-stone-laying; and this made George very happy and proud, because Lord Winslow was not an ordinary kind of lord (a type which George, never having met any, imagined for himself and then proceeded to scorn on principle), but a special kind who had not only devoted a lifetime to public service but had also written several distinguished books.

At half-past seven George got up, put out his blue serge suit (the one reserved for big events), and shaved with especial care, scanning meanwhile the cheerful headlines of the paper propped against the mirror, and noting with approval, whenever he looked beyond it, the misty promise of a fine summer day. By eight he was at the breakfast-table, eating ham and eggs and exchanging good-humoured chatter with Annie, the elderly 'help' who looked after the house and did her best to overfeed him during his wife's absence; by nine he was at his desk, composing an article for the *Browdley and District Guardian*, which he owned and edited. He did not write easily as a rule, but this time the phrases came on a wave of exhilaration, for though he had a few private doubts that the Treaty of Versailles was all it should be, he was prepared to give the future the benefit of them, the more so as it was natural for him to give the future the benefit of anything. Anyhow by ten George had composed

a suitably optimistic editorial; noon saw him at the railway station to welcome Lord Winslow; by one o'clock he had made a short speech at the Town Hall luncheon; and by a quarter to two he was in his seat on the improvised dais at the corner of Mill Street, blinking in the sunshine and beaming his satisfaction to the four winds, one of which, then prevalent, wafted back the concentrated smell of Browdley's industries. But George did not mind that — indeed, it was the remembered perfume of his childhood, of days spent on the banks of the canal that threaded its way between factory walls, taking waste water hot from each one, so that a fog of steam drifted over the surface and spread a low-hanging reek of oil, chemicals, and machinery. Waiting on the platform for the ceremony to begin, George sniffed and was happy.

A great day for Councillor Boswell and for Browdley, and also (one gathered) for England and for the world. History, George reflected, could not have done a better job of dramatization — August Thirty-First, the Official End of the Great War (some sort of lawyers' technicality, but it still made good news) — September First, the Foundation-Stone-Laying of Unit One of the Mill Street Housing Scheme that was to replace some of Browdley's worst slums. A great day, indeed. George, as his glance roved around, was proud to have the dedicator (a Bishop) on his left, the guest of the occasion (Lord Winslow) on his right, and various local bigwigs beyond and behind; but he was proudest of all to see the crowd, and only wished it as large as it would have been if Browdley folk weren't such notorious slackers about civic affairs. He said so later, when he got up to speak, and was applauded for his downrightness. George, in fact, was invariably downright; it was natural for him, and a quality which, sometimes disconcerting but always good-humoured, did as well in Browdley as the smooth tongue of the diplomat, and perhaps better. There was a legend that when he had wanted a rich local manufacturer to donate a mansion for use as a municipal museum,

he had said: "See here, Bob, I'm not *asking* this — I'm *demanding* it. You and your folks have exploited this town for the best part of a century — if there was any justice you'd have been hanged long ago. But as there isn't — let's have that house." And he had got it.

Furthermore, George thought, it was a shame that only a few hundreds, instead of thousands, had turned out to welcome a man like Lord Winslow — or was it possible they didn't know how distinguished Lord Winslow really was? But George's personal enjoyment of the proceedings was not to be lessened — not even when the town brass band began to play Sousa rather badly in the shadow of a large Union Jack hung upside-down — a detail that remained unnoticed save by a solitary busybody who afterwards wrote a letter about it which the *Guardian* did not print. Altogether the scene was typical of many a quietly happy English occasion during those distant years when Englishmen could be quietly happy.

George's face was also typically English (which means, perhaps, nothing more than that he might have passed, in their respective countries, for a Dane, a Norwegian, a Swede, a German, or a Norman Frenchman, but not so easily for an Italian, a Greek, or a Spaniard); at any rate, he was blue-eyed and ruddy-cheeked, the mouth expanding into smiles of shy benevolence as greetings came from the crowd, the chin steady and square, with none of the false dynamism of the acute angle. George, at thirty-five, was a good-looking man, if one cared to call him that, but he seemed to merit some solider adjective than could be applied equally to youthful film-actors and tennis-champions; there was a touch of earthiness in him that matched well with his wide shoulders and strong hands and genial provincial burr. It was a quiet, almost a humorous touch, behind which, in a sort of ambush, there lurked ambitions and determinations that had already left their mark on Browdley.

This housing development was one of them — a modest triumph (George called it) of practical idealism over the

ninety per cent of apathy and ten per cent of pure selfishness that comprise idealism's biggest enemy. George could justifiably smile as he stared about him that September afternoon, for this was the first fruit of his Councillorship and the first post-war improvement in Browdley to get beyond the talking stage. Only George knew the struggle it had been through almost incredible thickets of vested interests and Government red tape; but here it was at last, something actually begun after all the argument, and his friends and fellow-citizens might well give him a cheer. Even the Mayor, who was among his strongest political opponents, could not restrain a reluctantly cordial smile.

George was telling the Bishop that he had been born in one of the slum houses just demolished — Number Twenty-Four, Mill Street, to be precise — and the Bishop was chaffing him about not having had it preserved as a place of historical interest with a mural tablet to commemorate the great event. George laughed and said he would have taken such an idea far more seriously twenty-odd years ago, and then he confessed that as a small boy he had once read how the desks at Harrow School were carved with the names of famous men; and that in order not to disappoint posterity he had carved his own name on the inside of the privy-door at the end of the backyard of Number Twenty-Four — not a very romantic substitute for a desk at Harrow, but the handiest available in his own limited world.

"Ah, dear me," exclaimed the Bishop, who was a Harrovian and a little shocked at first, but then when he looked at George's face, so clearly that of a man telling a simple story of something that had very simply happened, he was won over, as people nearly always were by George; so he added with a smile: "Ah, well — a harmless occupation, I daresay."

George went on without realizing the extent of his conquest: "Aye, it was the only place I was ever left alone in those days, because we were a large family, and a four-roomed house doesn't allow for much privacy. Fortunately

my father started work at six in the morning and didn't come home till six at night — I hardly saw him except on Sundays when he marched us all off to chapel."

" Ah, grand folks, those old Nonconformists," murmured the Bishop, turning on the magnanimity.

" He was a local preacher too," George continued, pointing suddenly up Mill Street. " There's the chapel, and there " — swinging his arm in the opposite direction — " there's Channing's Mill, where he worked——"

" *Channing's ?* Not — er — Channing and Felsby ? "

" Aye, that's what it used to be. You knew of it ? "

" I'm afraid so." The Bishop smiled ruefully. " I — er — I once had a few shares in it."

" You were better off than my father, then, because he had a lifetime in it. From the age of ten to the day he died — fifty years, and for half of every year, except on Sundays, he only saw daylight through the mill windows."

" Ah, terrible — terrible," murmured the Bishop.

George chuckled. " Maybe, but he didn't feel that way. I don't believe it ever occurred to him. He was quite content all week looking forward to Sunday."

" When he enjoyed his preaching, no doubt."

" You bet he did, and he was a dab hand at it too. I've heard him last a couple of hours, without a note, and fluent all the time."

The Bishop sighed. " Ah, that's a wonderful thing — to possess the gift of tongues, so that one never has to think for a word——"

" Maybe that's it," said George. " It's the thinking that spoils it." His eyes twinkled and his voice, as nearly as a voice can, nudged the Bishop in the ribs. " Once I remember my father started off a prayer with ' Oh God, if there be a God ' — but he said it in such a grand booming voice that nobody noticed it any more than he had."

" Except you," interjected Lord Winslow, who had been overhearing the conversation from the other side. George turned, a little startled at first, and then, seeing a smile on

his lordship's face, smiled back and replied thoughtfully: "Aye, that's so. I suppose I was always a bit of a one for noticing things."

By then the band had finished playing and it was time for George to open the proceedings. He did so in a speech that lasted a few minutes only; one of his virtues, innocently acquired because he regarded it as a drawback, was that ceremonial oratory did not come easily to him. But he had a pleasant voice and a knack of using simple words as a first-class workman uses tools; his newspaper editorials were not so good, because he 'polished' them too much. There was also a hint of the child in him that appeared now in his unconcealed and quite unconcealable pleasure; he could not help letting Browdley know how pleased he was, not only with the town for having elected him one of its councillors, but doubtless also with himself for having so well merited the honour. A certain inward modesty made tolerable, and even attractive, an outward quality that might have been termed conceit. And when, having briefly introduced Lord Winslow, he sat down amidst another gust of applause, the life of the gathering seemed to centre on his still beaming countenance rather than on the tall, thin, pallid stranger who rose to pay him conventional compliments.

Winslow, of course, was a much better speaker by any erudite standards. To the acceptable accent of English aristocracy and officialdom he added an air of slightly bored accomplishment that often goes with it, and the chiefly working-class audience gave him respectful attention throughout an address that was considerably above their heads. Had he been of their own class they might have shouted a few ribald interruptions, but they would not do this to a stranger so clearly of rank; indeed their patient silence implied a half-affectionate tolerance for 'one of the nobs' who eccentrically chose to interest himself in Browdley affairs instead of in the far more glamorous ones they imagined must be his own — the sort of tolerance that had

evoked an audible exclamation of " Poor little bugger ! " from some unknown citizen when, a few years back, a royal prince had passed through the town on an official tour. To Browdley folk, as they looked and listened now, it seemed that Lord Winslow was all the time thinking of something else (as indeed he was), but they did not blame him for it ; on the contrary, the cheers when he finished were a friendly concession that he had doubtless done his best and that it was pretty decent of him to have bothered to do anything at all.

Then the Bishop prayed, the foundation stone was well and truly laid, sundry votes of thanks were passed, the band played ' God Save the King ', and the ceremony petered out. But Councillor Boswell seemed loth to leave the scene of so much concentrated personal victory. He gripped Winslow's arm with proprietary zeal, talking about his plans for further slum-clearances while from time to time he introduced various local people who hung around ; and finally, when most had disappeared to their homes and the Bishop had waved a benign goodbye, George escorted his principal guest to the car that was to take him back to Browdley Station. It was not only that he knew Winslow was important and might at some future date do the town a service ; nor merely that he already liked him, for he found it easy to like people ; the fact was, Winslow was the type that stirred in George a note of genuine hero-worship —and in spite, rather than because, of the title. After all, a man couldn't help what he inherited, and if he were also a high Government personage with a string of degrees and academic distinctions after his name, why hold mere blue blood against him ? It was the truer aristocracy of intellect that George admired — hence the spell cast over him by Winslow's scholarly speech, his dome-like forehead, and the absent-minded professorial manner that George took to be preoccupation with some abstruse problem. He had already looked him up in *Who's Who*, and during the drive in the car through Browdley streets humility transformed

itself into naïve delight that an Oxford Doctor of Philosophy had actually accepted an invitation to have tea at his house.

George was also delighted at the success of his own ruse to side-track the Mayor and the other councillors and get Winslow on his own, and most delighted of all, as well as astonished, when Winslow said : " Good idea, Boswell — I had been on the point of suggesting such a thing myself. My train is not for an hour or so, I understand."

" That's right, no need to hurry," George replied. " And there's later trains for that matter."

Winslow smiled. " Well, we have time for a cup of tea, anyhow." And after a pause, as if the personality of George really interested him : " So you come of an old Browdley family ? "

" As old as we have 'em here, sir, but that's not so old. My great-great-grandfather was a farm labourer in Kent, and our branch of the family moved north when the cotton-mills wanted cheap labour. I haven't got any famous ancestors, except one who's supposed to have been transported to Australia for poaching." He added regretfully : " But I could never get any proof of it."

Winslow smiled. " At any rate, your father lived it down. He seems to have been a much respected man in Browdley."

George nodded, pleased by the tribute, but then went on, with that disconcerting frankness that was (if he had only known it, but then of course if he had known it, it wouldn't have been) one of his principal charms : " Aye, he was much respected, and for twenty years after he died I went about thinking how much I'd respected him myself, but then one day when I was afraid of something, it suddenly occurred to me it was the same feeling I'd had for my father."

" You mean you *didn't* respect him ? "

" Oh, I did that as well, but where there's fear it doesn't much matter what goes with it. There was a lot of fear in our house — there always is when folks are poor. Either

they're afraid of the landlord or the policeman or employers or unemployment or having another mouth to feed or a son getting wed and taking his wage with him — birth, marriage, and death — it's all summat to worry about. Even *after* death, in my father's case, because he was what he called God-fearing."

Winslow smiled again. "So you didn't have a very happy childhood?"

"I suppose it wasn't, though at the time I took it as natural. There was nothing cruel, mind you — only hardships and stern faces." George then confessed that during the first six years of his life he was rarely if ever told to do anything without being threatened with what would happen if he didn't or couldn't; and the fact that these threats were mostly empty did not prevent the main effect — which was to give him a first impression of the world as a piece of adult property in which children were trespassers. "Only they weren't prosecuted," he added, with a laugh. "They were mostly just yelled at. . . . D'you know, one of the biggest shocks of my life was after my parents died and I was sent to live with an uncle I'd never met before — to find out then that grown-ups could actually talk to me in a cheerful, casual sort of way, even though I *was* only a boy!"

"Yes, there must have been a big difference."

"Aye, and I'll tell you what I've often thought the difference was," George went on, growing bolder and smiling his wide smile. "Just a matter of a few quid a week. You see, my father never earned more than two-pound-ten at the mill, but my uncle had a little business that brought in about twice that. Not a fortune — but enough to keep away some of the fears."

"There's one fear, anyhow, that nobody had in those days," Winslow commented. "Wars before 1914 were so far off and so far removed from his personal life that the average Englishman had only to read about them in the papers and cheer for his side."

"Not even that if he didn't want to," George replied.

" Take my father and the Boers, for instance. Thoroughly approved of them, he did, especially old Kruger, whom he used to pray for as ' that great President and the victor of Majuba Hill, which, as Thou knowest, Lord, is situated near the border of Natal and the Transvaal Republic. . . .' He always liked to make sure the Lord had all the facts."

Despite Winslow's laugh, George checked his flow of reminiscence, for he had begun to feel he had been led into talking too much about himself. Taking advantage, therefore, of a curve in the street that afforded the view of a large derelict weaving-shed, he launched into more appropriate chatter about Browdley, its history, geography, trade conditions, and so on, and how, as Councillor, he was seeking to alleviate local unemployment. Winslow began to look preoccupied during all this, so George eventually stopped talking altogether as he neared his house — smiling a little to himself, though. He suspected that Winslow was already on guard against a possible solicitation of favours. " Or else he thinks I'm running after him because he's a lord," George thought, scornfully amused at such a plausible error.

The factor George counted on to reveal the error was the room in which they were both to have tea. It was not a very large room (in the small mid-Victorian house adjoining the printing-office in Market Street), but its four walls, even over the door and under the windows, were totally covered with books. One of George's numerous prides was in having the finest personal library in Browdley, and probably he had ; it was a genuine collection, anyhow, not an accumulation of sets for the sake of their binding, such as could be seen in the mansions of rich local manufacturers. Moreover, George really *read* his books — thoroughly and studiously, often with pencil in hand for note-taking. Like many men who have suffered deficiencies in early education, he had more than made up for them since — except that he had failed to acquire the really unique thing a good early education can bequeath — the ability to grow up and forget about it. George could never forget — neither on nor off the

Education Committee of which he made the best and most energetic chairman Browdley had ever had.

What he chiefly hoped was that during the interval before Winslow must catch his train back to London, they might have a serious intellectual talk — or perhaps the latter would talk, Gamaliel-wise, while George sat metaphorically at his feet.

Unfortunately the great man failed to pick up the desired cue from a first sight of the books; indeed, he seemed hardly to notice them, even when George with an expansive wave of the hand bade him make himself at home; though there was consolation in reflecting that Winslow's own library was probably so huge that this one must appear commonplace.

"Make yourself thoroughly at home, sir," George repeated, with extra heartiness on account of his disappointment.

"Thank you," answered the other, striding across the room. He stood for a few seconds, staring through the back window, then murmured meditatively: "H'm — very nice. Quite a show. Wonderful what one can do even in the middle of a town."

George then realized that Winslow must be referring to the small oblong garden between the house and the wall of the neighbouring bus-garage. So he replied quickly: "Aye, but it's gone a bit to pieces lately. Not much in my line, gardening."

"Must compliment you on your roses, anyhow."

"My wife, not me — she's the one for all that if she was here."

"She's away?"

"Aye — on the Continent. Likes to travel too — all over the place. But books are more in my line."

"It's certainly been a good season for them."

George wasn't sure what this referred to until Winslow added, still staring out of the window: "My wife's another enthusiast — she's won prizes at our local show."

George still did not think this a promising beginning to an intellectual conversation, but as Annie was just then bringing in the tea he said no more about books. Winslow, however, could not tear himself away from the spectacle of the roses — which were, indeed, especially beautiful that year. " Too bad," he murmured, " for anyone who loves a garden to miss England just now. . . . So you're not keen on foreign holidays, is that it, Boswell ? "

" Oh, I wouldn't say no if I had the chance, but I don't suppose I'd ever be as keen as Livia is. Anyhow, I've got too much to do in Browdley to leave the place for months on end."

" *Months ?* Quite a holiday."

" Aye, but it's not all holiday for her. She has a job with one of those travel tours — ' Ten Days in Lovely Lucerne ' — that kind of thing. Pays her expenses and a bit over."

" Convenient."

" For anyone who likes seeing the same sights with different folks over and over again. I wouldn't."

" Sort of guide, is she ? "

" I reckon so. She runs the show for 'em, I'll bet. She's got a real knack for managing folks when she feels like it."

" I wouldn't say you were entirely without it yourself."

" Ah, but with her it's an art." George was too genuinely modest to realize that his own sterling naïveté was just as good a knack, art, or whatever else it was. " Maybe you won't believe me, but when I was a young fellow I was so scared of meeting folks I could hardly get a word out. And even now I'm not as happy on a platform as I am sitting alone in this room with a good book." He jerked his head towards the surrounding shelves in another attempt to steer the conversation, and when Winslow did not immediately reply, he added more pointedly : " I expect you're a great reader yourself ? "

" Oh, fairly — when I can find the time."

" Aye, that's the worst of being in public life." At least they had *that* bond in common. " You know, sir, there's

only one reason I'd ever wish to be young again — *really* young, I mean," he added, as he saw Winslow smile, — " and that's to have summat I missed years ago — a right-down good education. . . . I'll never forget when I visited Oxford and saw all those lucky lads in the colleges. . . ." A sincere emotion entered his voice. " And the professors in their libraries — I tell you frankly, I . . . " He saw that Winslow was still smiling. " Well, I'll put it this way — there's only one thing I'd rather be than in politics, and that's one of those university dons, as they call 'em."

" Yet I doubt if many of them are doing any better work than you are here — judging by what I've seen today."

George was pleased again, but also slightly shocked by the comparison ; he could not believe that Winslow really meant it, and he was surprised that such a distinguished man should stoop to mere flattery. " Oh, come now, sir, I'll never swallow that. After all, think of the books they write — I've got shelves of 'em here — heavy stuff, I admit, but grand training for the mind."

" Yes, books are all right." Winslow gave a little sigh. " Though it's remarkable how little help they offer in some of the more curious problems of life." George was thinking this a rather strange remark when an even stranger one followed it. " Look here, Boswell, I'm going to do something I wasn't sure about before I met you — partly because I wasn't sure you were the right man, and partly because even if you were, I couldn't be positive how you'd take it."

George looked up with a puzzled expression. There flashed through his mind the intoxicating possibility that Winslow might be going to ask his advice about some matter of departmental policy — low-rent housing, say, or an extension of the school leaving age.

But Winslow continued : " Quite a coincidence meeting you like this. Several months ago when I promised to speak at your ceremony today I hadn't even heard of you — but when quite recently I did, I decided it might be a good chance to — to approach you — if — if you seemed the

sort of man who might be approachable. You see, it's a somewhat unusual and delicate matter, and there aren't any rules of etiquette to proceed by."

And then there flashed through George's already puzzled mind another though less welcome possibility — that Winslow was an emissary of the Government deputed to find out in advance whether George would accept a title in recognition of his ' public services ' to the town of Browdley. It was highly unlikely, of course, since he was a mere town councillor and did not belong to the Government party, but still, anything could happen when parties and politics were fluid and Lloyd George was reputed to cast a discerning eye upon foes as well as friends. Anyhow, George's reply would be a straight ' no ', because he very simply though a trifle truculently did not believe in titles.

He saw that Winslow was waiting for a remark, so he called his thoughts to order and said guardedly : " I'm afraid I don't quite catch on so far, but whatever it is, if there's any way I can help——"

" Thanks, that's very kind of you. I hope there is. So if you'll just let me go ahead and explain . . ."

George nodded, now more puzzled than ever ; he could not help thinking that Winslow was terribly slow in getting to the point, whatever it was. Meanwhile the great man had opened up into an account of a semi-official tour he had lately undertaken to inspect housing projects, mostly on paper, in some of the Continental countries. At this George nodded with enthusiastic comprehension, and to show that, even without foreign travel, he kept himself well abreast of such matters, he reached for a book that happened to be to hand. " You'll have seen it, I daresay," he interrupted eagerly. " I got the architect of our local scheme to adopt several of this fellow's ideas — I've always said we should all pool our post-war experience — Allies and ex-enemies alike. Take Vienna, for instance, where the Socialists are very strong——"

" Yes, yes indeed," Winslow agreed, though with a note

in his voice to check all chatter. However, he seemed willing enough to take Vienna, for he continued : " That was one of the cities I visited recently. Apart from business, I had a special reason because my son Jeff happens to be there too. He has a job — er — connected with the Embassy." He paused and pulled out a small pocket-book ; in it he found a snapshot which he passed to George. It showed a smiling young man in ski-costume in company with several pretty girls against a background panorama of snow-covered mountains. " Taken at Kitzbühl," he added.

George had not heard of Kitzbühl, but he knew a fine-looking fellow when he saw one, and now quite sincerely expressed his admiration. To reciprocate the intimacy he pointed to one of a number of photographs on top of a revolving bookcase of encyclopaedias. " Reminds me a bit of the lad just behind you."

Winslow turned to look and confirmed after scrutiny : " Yes, quite a resemblance. Your *son* ? I wouldn't have thought you were old enough——"

" I'm not. . . . That's one of my brothers — killed on the Somme on July First, Nineteen-Sixteen. Fifty thousand killed with him the same day — according to the records. Something for folks to remember when they attack disarmament."

" And *this* ? " said Winslow, still seemingly preoccupied with the photographs.

" That's my wife."

" Ah, yes."

George then felt it was time to relieve his guest of any further obligation to appear interested in his family, so he returned the snapshot with the comment : " Aye, he's a bonny lad — and brainy too, by the look of him."

" They seemed to think so at Oxford."

" He did well there ? "

" Pretty well."

" What did he get ? "