

*In an Asylum Garden*

FORBES WINSLOW'S primal memories will have been of well-guarded figures drifting in speechless gloom or noisy monologue through the halls and gardens of home. They were other than the family, but still important: to be respected but not feared. A lunatic asylum could be a stimulating place to be born into, and the children of psychiatrists are often extremely resilient, observant, and quick to mature. There was no infection as the son of the asylum developed a learnt, but finally instinctual, ability to weigh reality against the phantasms of the stricken adults who had lost control of their destiny.

This early association with the afflicted, who have lost all rivalry, cannot be blamed for a lifelong characteristic of Forbes Winslow, which never mellowed, but, if anything, hardened into an attitude of combat. He was markedly competitive, with a fierce drive to excel which sometimes degenerated into the use of devices calculated, in his own words, to steal a march on his peers.

One cause for such behaviour must lie in his position in the family. He was not the first-born, that vital distinction in a Victorian dynasty, and he always knew that his elder brother, Forbes Edward, was marked out to inherit the asylum from their distinguished father, Dr Forbes Benignus Winslow. There was no doubt, from the beginning, that both boys were to follow Benignus into lunacy practice, although, if their circumstances had been different, they could as equally have been intended for the Church, which was also a tradition in the Winslow family

No 'morbidity' therefore attaches to Forbes Winslow's choice of profession. Indeed, he had no choice. If, later, he was to enjoy the mystique and the kind of glamour of being at the cutting edge of psychiatry, this was no reflection on the naturalness of his finding himself so situated.

He will have learnt without tuition how to stand his ground, how to conduct a conversation with a patient, and, just as importantly, how to bring that conversation to a close. Benignus' humanity, at a

time when there was an atmosphere of optimism about the care of the mentally ill, set an example so compelling that any transgression would have been unthinkable.

The Winslows have always been good family men, and in this setting of a well-ordered asylum, the domestic life of the doctor in his private quarters was harmonious. Susannah, Forbes Winslow's mother, produced four children: the two boys, and then two girls – Susannah Frances and Constance. The elder, Susannah, was later to cause Forbes Winslow much mental anguish.

Forbes Winslow was born on January 31st, 1844, in the heart of Bloomsbury, in a house in Guilford Street. In his autobiographical work, *Recollections of Forty Years* (John Ouseley, 1910), he says that the Foundling Hospital (situated nearby indeed in Coram's Fields) made an indelible impression on his youthful mind.

He nearly spoils that appealing point by adding that within a few months of his birth he was taken to his father's asylum in Hammersmith. Benignus did in fact take the lease in December 1844, but he did not open the asylum until 1847, so that there may have been a transitional period. In the sturdy fashion of those days, it is possible that nurses may have told even so young a privileged child how the blunt sea-captain, Thomas Coram, could not bear to see naked and abandoned babies dying on the streets, and in this way an early model of care and duty could have been stamped into his childish awareness.

Charles Dickens, who had lived close by, in Doughty Street, from 1837-9, had kept up his interest in the Foundling Hospital, and it is a nice conceit to imagine that busy personage striding in tall hat oblivious of the embryonic famous alienist in his perambulator.

Winslow was a proud name. To be a direct descendant of a Pilgrim Father, to feel in the blood the iron resolve of those who sailed for two months in the *Mayflower*, grew corn, parleyed with painted Indians, and wrote a *Compact* to form a civil body politic, was a special distinction.

Those Victorian descendants of the Loyalists who had returned from America in a bitter reverse exile, after losing their property in the War of Independence (1775) had striven to re-establish them-

selves, and were, by now, well entrenched in the professional classes.

There had, true to form, been real achievement but they lacked the background of an ongoing 'pure' English family,<sup>1</sup> and there was no old money: it had to be earned. Their early origins, anyway, lay in trade. Edward Winslow, father of Pilgrim Fathers, was a salt-maker of Droitwich, Worcestershire.

Pride in their Puritan heritage strengthened their self-esteem, and, in the nineteenth century, Winslows of all sorts and degrees were prone to claim unbroken descent from the salt-maker's son, Edward Winslow, eminent, brave and diplomatic Governor of New Plymouth.<sup>2</sup> It was a harmless enough vanity.

Edward Winslow is the only Pilgrim Father of whom a portrait survives. His likeness, showing his strong, dour features, not at all aristocratic, used to hang in literally hundreds of Winslow homes on both sides of the Atlantic. The families had flourished, although later they were to shrink drastically.

However much Forbes Winslow may have prided himself on his resemblance to Edward—for the blueprint has proved durable—he was *not*, in fact, a direct lineal descendant of Edward Winslow, and there is a reprehensibility in his claiming that descent in his *Recollections*, which ought to be strictly accurate as to matters of record. He compounds the error by stating that a large book entitled the *Winslow Memorial*,<sup>3</sup> published in New York, traces his lineal descent from Edward Winslow.

The truth is that he was a *collateral descendant*.<sup>4</sup> Edward had four brothers. Forbes Winslow's ancestor was Edward's younger brother, 'John the Shipmaster', who followed Edward to New England one year afterwards, on the brig *Fortune*. The result of this false genealogical claim is that Forbes Winslow's entry in *Who's Who* carries a fundamental inexactitude, as does his father's entry in the

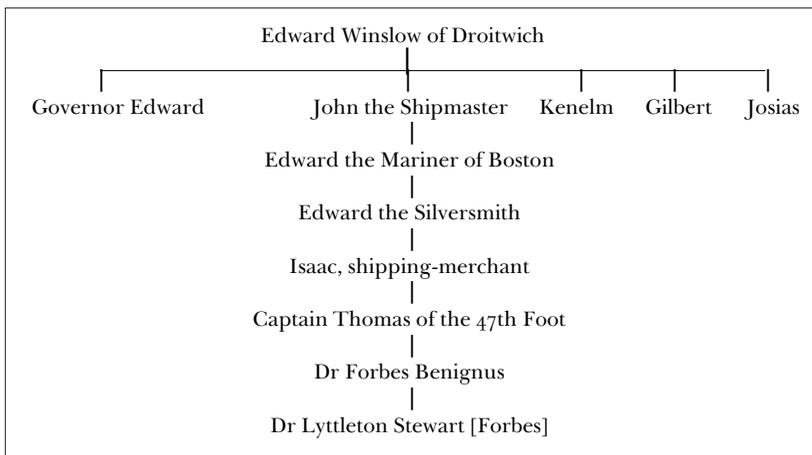
1. For this insight and other historical material *v.* the knowledgeable study, "*Mayflower*" *Heritage*, Harrap, 1957, written by the late Douglas Kenelm Winslow.

2. Not the first Governor of Massachusetts, as *per Recollections*, nor yet the first Governor of New Plymouth, who was, in fact, named Carver.

3. Presumably, *Winslow Memorial*, D.P. Holton, New York, 1877

4. It was Dr A.L. Wyman (*v. post* p.20fn) who first specified the collaterality, although he forebore comment.

*Dictionary of National Biography*. In another, more pardonable deviation, the adult Forbes Winslow was to tinker with his given Christian names of Lyttleton Stewart, and to insert Forbes, to be known thenceforth as Dr Lyttleton Stewart Forbes Winslow.



There is good documentary proof for this assertion in spite of the frustrating circumstance that Forbes Winslow's birth was not registered. The School records<sup>5</sup> clearly show the entry Lyttleton Stewart Winslow, and archives of Rugby School even state 'Took the name of Forbes-Winslow' (*sic*). His marriage certificate in 1866 tells us that he came to the church without a Forbes!

The motivation for this previously unsuspected artifice must lie in the fact that his admired father, whom he wished to emulate, if not surpass, was famously Dr Forbes Winslow. Significantly, too, his elder brother, Forbes Edward, bore the desired name. The second son was determined to annex the ancestral style of which he had been deprived, and it is very possible that he quietly took it over after the death of Benignus in 1874.<sup>6</sup>

Later descendants were to hyphenate the Forbes and Winslow. The name of Forbes had come into the family at the end of the eighteenth century, when Captain Thomas Winslow, Forbes

5. Berkhamsted and Rugby

6. In the Census Return for 1871 he is Lyttleton S. Winslow.