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# NOBLE ENDEAVOURS

*The Life of Two Countries,  
England and Germany,  
in Many Stories*

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## PART THREE

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1

# NOBLE ENDEAVOURS

On 28 June 1914, the Austrian Archduke and his wife were murdered by two Serbs at Sarajevo. Herbert Sulzbach, the son of a wealthy banker from Frankfurt-am-Main, had just turned twenty. Recording the event and its likely consequences – ‘dreadful things may be in store for Europe’ – young Sulzbach, in the first of thirteen small notebooks, noted that twenty was ‘a fine age for soldiering’. On 8 August, he signed up to fight. Four weeks later, he was on his way to the Western Front.

Sulzbach began the war as a German patriot. ‘We certainly did not want this war!’ he wrote on 21 October 1914, amid the smoking ruins of a French village and trenches filled with corpses. ‘We are only defending ourselves and our Germany against a world of enemies who have banded against us.’<sup>1</sup> Marching home from the Western Front four years later, a lieutenant decorated with the Iron Cross and a Front Line Cross of Merit, Sulzbach remained convinced of the rightness of Germany’s cause. ‘It is really marvellous,’ he wrote on 29 November 1918: ‘this whole march is wonderful and our home country really seems to have understood that we are undefeated and unconquerable.’<sup>2</sup>

Sulzbach's family were Jewish, as was his second wife Beate (a member of the celebrated Klemperer family that included the conductor, Otto, and his cousin Victor, the diarist). In 1932, he wrote a letter to a leading Berlin newspaper, *Der Tag*, in which he criticised the Nazi party. His only response was an anonymous note, warning him that his name had been noted. In 1937, he was identified as of Jewish blood and put on the Black List. Following the confiscation of Herbert's Berlin paper factory by the Nazis, Sulzbach and his wife emigrated to Britain. Made stateless in their homeland, the outbreak of war classified the couple as 'enemy aliens'.

In May 1940, Beate and Herbert Sulzbach were arrested by the British authorities and separately interned. They were still imprisoned on the Isle of Man in the autumn of 1940, when their small London house was hit by a Luftwaffe bomb and flattened.

In November 1940, Sulzbach was due for release; he had just obtained permission to fight for Britain as a private in the home-based Pioneer Corps. But it was his subsequent work in two POW camps for captured Germans that enabled Herbert Sulzbach to begin his greater task: the reconciliation of his two beloved countries, England and Germany.

When Britain declared war on Germany in August 1914, Frank Foley, an engine-fitter's son from Somerset, was studying philosophy in Hamburg. Disguised as a Prussian officer, the thirty-year-old Englishman made his way west to the mouth of the River Ems, where some sympathetic shrimp-fishers agreed to ferry the small and earnest-faced fugitive across the lagoon to their base in neutral Holland.

Frank Foley's brief period of service as an acting British captain at the front ended when he was shot in the lung at Ecooust on 21 March 1918 and sent home to England on sick leave. Recruited by British Intelligence after his recovery (he was fluent in German and French), Foley was despatched, first to Cologne (where he met Kay, his future wife), and then to Berlin, where

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 he was officially employed from 1921 as Head of British Passport Control. Unofficially (the Foreign Office provided no diplomatic status for Passport Control officers), Foley was employed by Mansfield Cumming, head of the British Secret Service in the city regarded, during Germany's chaotic post-war years, as the Service's leading overseas station.

Foley met Wilfrid Israel, the cultured heir to one of Berlin's leading department stores, shortly after his arrival in Berlin. Following the rise to power of the Nazis and their campaign to despoil and exile all German citizens designated as non-Aryan, Foley joined forces with Wilfrid Israel and their mutual friend Hubert Pollack, another British Secret Service agent. Pollack identified the families in need of visas; Wilfrid Israel provided the cash and vital contacts; Foley, at considerable risk (he regularly harboured Jews under his roof and also travelled to camps to rescue them), signed the visas. One of his last actions before leaving Berlin in August 1939 was to arrange eighty permits for young people hoping to reach Great Britain.

Foley's death in 1958 passed without notice in Britain; in the recently formed state of Israel, however, a grove of trees was planted in his honour. The idea had come from Hubert Pollack, who stated that the number of Jews rescued from death in Germany would have been tens of thousands less, 'yes, tens of thousands less, if an officious bureaucrat had sat in Foley's place. There is no word of Jewish gratitude towards this man that could be exaggerated.'<sup>3</sup> Benno Cohn, a former Jewish leader in Berlin who had worked with Foley and Mossad (an organisation originally dedicated to helping Jews to reach Palestine), added a tribute of his own during the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann. Foley, Cohn declared, had stood above all others of his time 'like a beacon. Captain Foley, Passport Control Officer in the British Consulate in the Tiergarten in Berlin [was] a man who in my opinion was one of the greatest among the nations of the world.'<sup>4</sup>

In July 2012, a plaque honouring Foley's achievement was

placed at the entrance to the Jewish cemetery at Golders Green where he, like Herbert Sulzbach, lies buried.

In 1948, speaking on the BBC, Herbert Sulzbach stated that the best envoys for future peace and understanding between Britain and Germany would be the German POWs who were finally being allowed to return to their homeland.

Sulzbach knew what he was talking about. In 1944, he had been transferred by the British from the Pioneer Corps to the 'Interpreters' Pool'. In January 1945, he was posted as a staff sergeant to Cultybraggan Camp, Comrie.

Built on the site of Agricola's old marching camp in Scotland, Comrie was already known for the hardened spirit of its Nazi inmates. On 22 December 1944, five young German POWs (the eldest was twenty-one) had beaten up a new arrival and hanged him backwards, over a water pipe.\* Wolfgang Rosterg's unforgivable crime had been to dare to criticise the Reich in a camp where 'When Jewish Blood Spurts from the Knife' was still being sung with fervour. What would such brutal men make of a slightly built Jewish interpreter who had fought for Britain in the recent war?

Bernard Braine, a politician paying tribute to Sulzbach at the memorial service held at the German Embassy in July 1985, described the dapper, blue-eyed Herbert as 'that greatest of all charmers'. Charm alone cannot explain the measure of Sulzbach's achievement. By 11 November 1945, he had persuaded all but a handful of the Comrie prisoners to acknowledge that Germany had been wrong and that its arrogance had led to misery. To stand beside Sulzbach on Armistice Day required some 4000 German POWs to volunteer their solemn promise to return home as good Europeans, 'and to take part in the reconciliation of all people and the maintenance of peace'.<sup>5</sup>

Encouraged by the remarkable response at Comrie, the newly

\* The five guilty youths were hanged at Pentonville on 6 October 1945.

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promoted Captain put his project forward at another camp. A large number of high-ranking SS officers were imprisoned at Featherstone Park in Northumberland from 1945–48; Sulzbach's mission was to send them home with a clear understanding of the principles and values of a liberal democracy. One simple way in which he drove his message home was to abolish any form of censorship, a fact that was approvingly noted by the POWs who edited *Die Zeit am Tyne*, the camp's newspaper. Captain Sulzbach's success was apparent from the fact that some 3000 liberated prisoners (who had little by then to gain from the process) would later write to thank him; many went out of their way to maintain contact with the remarkable man who had striven to cure them of their preconceptions.<sup>6</sup>

Herbert Sulzbach never stopped working for reconciliation between England and Germany, the two countries that he loved. A European branch of Featherstone was established at Düsseldorf by twenty-five former German POWs in 1960; annual meetings were held there until Sulzbach's death in 1985. From 1955 until 1973, Sulzbach made use of his position as cultural affairs officer at the German Embassy in London to spread further his belief in the power of tolerance and international friendship. Speaking at the tribute that marked Sulzbach's eightieth birthday in 1974, Bernard Braine praised his old friend for having led the way forward in restoring Anglo-German relations. Six years later, a group of former German POWs laid a plaque at Featherstone camp. It honoured their former interpreter as the man 'who dedicated himself to making the camp a seedbed of British-German reconciliation'.

Speaking once again on television in 1984, a year before his death, a white-haired Sulzbach told Channel 4 viewers that he had been working for reconciliation between his two beloved countries for nearly forty years. Recalling the war in which he had fought for the Kaiser ('It was then *our* Kaiser'), he described it as 'nearly a miracle that today, nearly seventy years later, my two

countries are allies and friends'. He spoke of his ardent conviction that the restored friendship between Britain and Germany would provide 'the foundation stone for a once to come United Europe'. 'But first,' he added, 'the old distrust must disappear.'<sup>7</sup>

Almost thirty years after Sulzbach made his final plea, the old distrust of which he spoke remains in place. The horrors inflicted by the Nazis cannot be forgotten and should never be forgiven. But it is time to remember that Britain's close-knit relationship with Germany predates the Third Reich by over 200 years. We abhor the idea of making comic stereotypes of any ethnic group; our justified attitude to the Nazis has made it unjustly acceptable to continue to treat Germans as an exception to that code of civilised behaviour. Herbert Sulzbach would be further saddened to note that Britain and Germany have failed to unite in providing today's Europe with a secure foundation. On the eve of marking the centenary of the opening of the hostilities that devastated the world and changed its history, old wounds gape rawly open.

The time has surely come to listen to Sulzbach's words. No two countries in Europe possess a stronger history of cultural and familial sympathy, trust and mutual respect than Britain and Germany. This book sets out the diverse stories of some of the people who contributed to the building of a house of shared dreams and aspirations, of mutual enlightenment and fruitful exchange. These are the stories of emperors, kings and queens (opening with the journey from Whitehall to Heidelberg of the future Winter Queen whose grandson became England's first Hanoverian monarch); of travellers, writers, artists, students and political exiles; of ambassadors, reformers and the families so closely woven into the fabric of both countries that, when war came, divided loyalties ripped them apart. 'I feel,' said a member of one such family, 'as if my mother and father have quarrelled.'

All these people have played their part. All, in their different ways, are remarkable; all deserve to be called noble for what they

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set out to achieve. All – glimpsed here only at the point where they contribute to the story of England and Germany – have earned their place in a history of the love and mutual admiration that two nations once shared – and that they deserve to share again.

2

EXILES AND TRAVELLERS

(1613–1782)

The marriage contract between two great Protestant powers had been signed in May 1612. In October, Prince Frederick, the sixteen-year-old Elector Palatine, arrived in London to meet his fresh-faced future bride, Elizabeth Stuart, daughter of King James I. A month later, King James's beloved eldest son, Prince Henry, died, plunging the court into mourning. It was decided, nevertheless, that the wedding celebrations should go forward, and – appropriately for a young couple so evidently in love – that the nuptials should take place on Valentine's Day. Celebrating what one masque named as *The Marriage of the Thames and the Rhine*, John Donne wrote in his 'Epithalamion' of the lovers as two phoenixes: 'Whose love and courage never shall decline / But make the whole year through, thy day, O Valentine.'

Elizabeth, having added seventeen pairs of silk stockings to her trousseau and received assurance that she could take along a cargo of favourite pets to her new home in Germany, gave orders for the performance of six Shakespeare plays at Whitehall. The decision to include among them *The Winter's Tale* would prove both apt and prescient.

In June 1613, Elizabeth arrived at her new home in what was then a Germany comprised of many small duchies and principalities. Seeking to make his bride at home in the great fortress of Heidelberg, set high above the River Neckar and looking out towards the distant Rhine, the young Elector ordered the creation of an English suite of rooms. Salomon de Caus, the great architect and hydraulic engineer who had laid out the gardens at Wilton in England, was summoned to create a Renaissance garden from a barren hillside. By 1620, when Heidelberg was sacked and the garden abandoned, de Caus had already created what was being described as the eighth Wonder of the World, an exercise in elegant playfulness that included a water organ, an animated statue, clockwork-driven singing birds, a 'Venus Fountain' and a magnificently dramatic double stairway.

Elizabeth loved the theatre. In England, she possessed her own troupe of actors. Today, plays are staged in the well of Heidelberg's grass moat; back then, actors surely made use of the wonderful new garden, strutting towards its highest terraced length through the new 'Elizabeth' arch (a nineteenth-birthday surprise from a loving husband, this ruddy, four-columned gateway featured ivy-entwined pillars thronged with little stone animals of the kinds Elizabeth loved best).

In 1613, the year of Elizabeth's marriage, London's famous Globe Theatre burnt down and was not rebuilt for a year. Possibly, the young Electress made use of London's loss that year to invite the actors out to Heidelberg. More probably still, a performance of *The Winter's Tale* was put on in Heidelberg in 1618, when talk of Bohemia was in the air. A Protestant ruler was being urgently sought for a country situated far away on the eastern borders of the German principalities, in what is now the Czech Republic. Bohemia was best known to Elizabeth from Shakespeare's play, written in 1610, as the birthplace of Prince Florizel and the haven of lost Perdita, the Sicilian Princess who, by marrying Florizel, will become Bohemia's happy queen.

Elizabeth and Frederick were themselves less fortunate. Offered the Bohemian throne, they were crowned in Prague on 7 November 1619. Losing both their Palatine lands and their new kingdom to the evidently superior Catholic forces of the Holy Roman Emperor within a single tragic year of their coronation, the defeated couple were forced to seek refuge at the Protestant court of The Hague. There, the formidable but desolate Elizabeth – best known today as the Winter Queen – lived out her lengthy widowhood in exile. Returning to England at last in 1661, when her nephew had been restored to the English throne as King Charles II, Elizabeth died the following year.

In England, Elizabeth's most loyal admirer, the Earl of Craven, had built a home in her honour: Ashdown House, an exquisite dolls' house of a Dutch mansion, fashioned from chalk and standing high on the windswept Berkshire Downs. Elizabeth never saw Lord Craven's shrine. Chalk, when wet, crumbles and dissolves; today, the windows of Ashdown are thinly veiled in white moisture, as if in mourning for the Queen who never took possession of this, the graceful tribute of a devoted cavalier.

Rupert of the Rhine, the dashing cavalry general who led the troops for his doomed uncle, Charles I, remains Elizabeth's best-known child. But it was Rupert's spirited sister Sophia, the Electress of Hanover, who provided England with its first German king.

The Royal Act of Succession of 1701 had granted England's throne to Sophia and her heirs in order to protect it from recapture by a deposed Catholic monarch (James II) at the time when William of Orange had no heirs and Anne, the queen-in-waiting, had lost her one surviving child. When the lively and intelligent Sophia died of a chill in 1714, just two months before the death of Queen Anne, the English throne was handed to the Electress's son, George, a German-speaking monarch who made no secret of his desire to remain comfortably ensconced at the Herrenhausen Palace, his family home in Hanover.

Visiting the Herrenhausen two years later, on her way to Constantinople, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (who thought England's stout new king an amiable fool), was startled to find the town of Hanover thronging with English visitors. The rosy cheeks and jet-black brows of the local girls put Lady Mary in mind of a Fleet Street waxwork display, but she informed her sister, back in England, that the palace gardens were very fine, the opera house superb ('much finer than that of Vienna') and that words could not do justice to the glory of German stoves, a heating system that permitted the consumption of oranges and lemons in deepest winter, 'and even pineapples, like Brazil'.<sup>1</sup> A hit with the King, Lady Mary left Hanover with the sense of having regained the ground she had lost the previous year with *Roxana*, a rashly witty skit that made fun of a royal court filled with untrustworthy foreigners.

James Boswell, passing through Hanover fifty years later, admired the palace and a spectacular avenue of limes (but not, for once in his amorous career, the local beauties). Travelling east from Leipzig (where he enjoyed a dish of larks), Boswell praised the castles perched above the River Elbe for their Scottish appearance, and – on arriving at Dresden – voiced his disgust with Frederick the Great for shelling the Saxon city during the recent Seven Years War: 'It was from mere spite that he did it.'<sup>2</sup>

Dresden apart, Boswell was desperate to meet a monarch who was revered almost as a deity in eighteenth-century England. Newly arrived in Berlin, the young Scot caught a glimpse of Frederick strolling in the palace garden at Charlottenburg and restrained himself, with difficulty, from performing an act of complete prostration before this figure of 'iron confidence'. A month later, however, poor Boswell was still only known to his hero as the wearer of a peculiar 'little cap'. Boswell's bright blue Ayrshire bonnet had caught Frederick's attention – but not, alas, his fancy – as he surveyed the eager onlookers at a royal parade.

Visiting England from his small principality beside the Elbe in the same year that Boswell made his tour of German courts, a