

THE "OLD FRITZ" CULT

Goebbels Reviews The Glories of Frederick The Great

BERLIN'S UFA film corporation used to turn out "Old Fritz" pictures, boosting Frederick the Great as the unconscious forerunner of National Socialism. So stale did they become by repetition that only an acute shortage of good films, home-grown or imported, could have persuaded the long-suffering German people to pay their hard-earned, hard-taxed pfennigs to see Otto Gebuehr in the title-role.

It was all rather pathetic, this Fritz-cult. True, Goethe and many others among the gilded youth of Germany in Frederick's day tended to look on cantankerous Old Fritz as the symbol of their country's striving towards unity and greatness. Said Goethe: *Wir waren alle fritzisch gesinnt* ("We were all fritz-conscious").

But the monarch himself heartily despised his countrymen as uncivilised bores, sent his execrable French verses to Voltaire for polishing up, and only the French, whom he aped, could have described him as *tout ce qu'il y a de plus allemand*—"as German as could be."

Such details were forgotten by UFA.

It would not have done to stress too much the cultural bankruptcy of their hero, his failure to understand and appreciate the literary men who were many times his intellectual superior. Better to reproduce Frederick in the most romantic light, and hope the German people would not complain that their Hero Number One, Siegfried of the *Nibelungen*, was a shifty crook with a panzer skin, while Hero Number Two, *der alte Fritz*, was by way of being a bigoted tyrant.

An Actor-Monarch

Way back in the early 'twenties Otto Gebuehr was a small-time actor, playing parts of all sorts—until someone discovered his resemblance to Frederick II, King of Prussia, known as "the Great." From that day Otto would not touch any other part.

He started to identify himself with Old Fritz. Both his flat in Berlin's famous Kurfuerstendamm and his country house outside the city were transformed into rococo museums which looked like 18th century islands in the 20th century capital.

Two greyhounds always accompanied this actor-monarch as their counterparts had sniffed along at Frederick's side. Actor Gebuehr walked with a bent

back, spoke in an abrupt manner, and used the same mixture of bad German and goodish French which was typical of Frederick's court of Sans-Souci, near Potsdam.

So well, in fact, was Otto Gebuehr playing his part that his friends regarded him as slightly cracked.

The first to spread the rumour that Gebuehr was indeed off his head were the actors and artists around Goebbels, for the Propaganda Minister had come to the conclusion that if any more Frederick films were produced, the German people would become so sodden with Prussian glory and past Prussian victories that Adolf Hitler would seem pretty small beer in comparison with Otto-Fritz.

No Victories Now

Now, according to *News Review*, Goebbels has revived the old series with a new edition of the Prussian King. The leading part is once more played by Otto Gebuehr.

He appears clad in the blue uniform of the old-time Prussian Grenadiers, topped with wig and three-cornered hat, clutching the corporal's stick with which, when more drunk than usual

with Frederician glamour, he beat up his valet, and speaking in a voice which in his own words, cuts through steel.

But, apart from its hero, this is a film with a difference — this time, none of Frederick's great victories, once fed to the audience in ladlefuls, is shown. Nothing of Rossbach, nothing of Leuthen. Instead, the whole film centres round the Battle of Kunersdorf, when Frederick got such a thwacking that out of 40,000 men he brought back about 3000.

In fact, only the difficulties of his enemies and a policy of starving the male Prussian into enlisting made it possible for him to rally again.

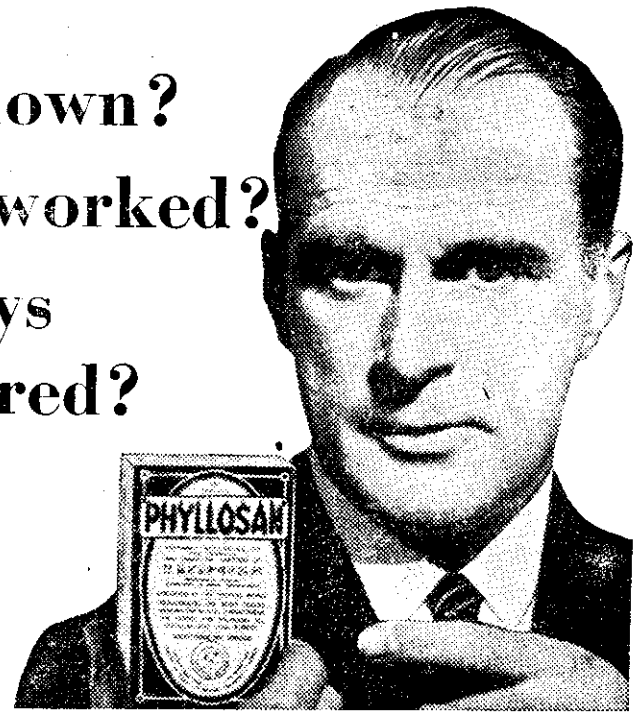
Dr. Goebbels's idea apparently is: let not the German people despair, though there should be many more Stalingrads in the future. It is but the fortune of war, and the Fuehrer will pull them through in the end as Frederick did.

This is certainly a new propaganda idea—but the German people are grown sadder, wiser, and more sceptical. They may even look up their pre-1933 history books and discover that Frederick was never in such a spot as the one in which Adolf Hitler finds himself to-day.



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