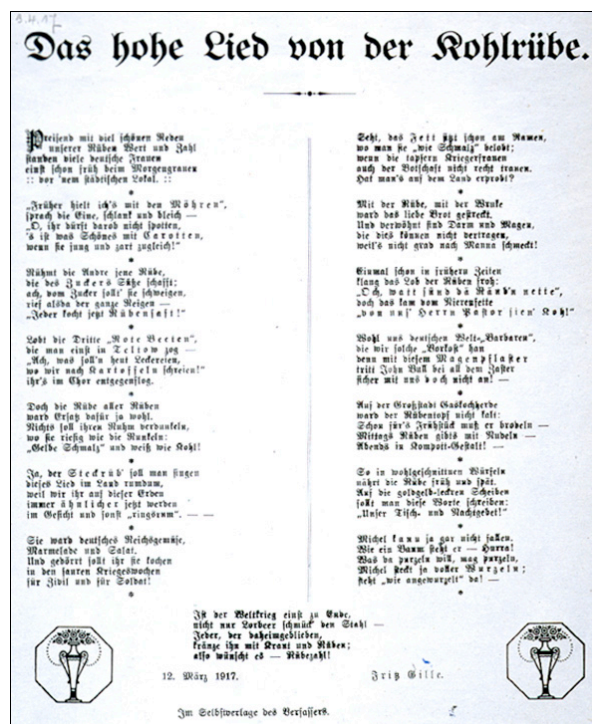


The Exalted Song of the Rutabaga (1917)

Abstract

Rationing on the home front during the First World War introduced many households to inferior substitute foods. Turnips and rutabagas became symbolic of war-time shortages. Recipes and techniques to hide or cover up the flavor of these vegetables did little to alter their distinctive taste. Here is an ironic German song about the rutabaga and its various guises.

Source



Praising the value and abundance
Of our beets with many fine speeches,
A multitude of German housewives once stood
At a local city market
In the early morning's grey light.
“I used to stick to carrots,”
Said one woman, thin and pale,
“Oh, you mustn't jest about this,
There is something beautiful in these roots,
Especially when they're both young and tender!”
When another woman raves about that beet
Which makes sugar oh so sweet,
The whole crowd cries in response
That she should keep quiet about sugar since
“Everyone is now stewing up beet juice!”
And when a third woman extols the “red beets”

That were once grown in Teltow near Berlin,
A chorus of voices answers her,
"Who cares today about such delicacies
When we are crying out for potatoes!"
But the beet of all beets
Has now indeed replaced that root.
Nothing can dim its fame
As a giant among root crops: it has
"Yellow lard" and is as white as cabbage!
Yes, the rutabaga should be praised
With this song throughout the land,
Since we here on earth are beginning
To resemble it more and more
In our faces and also "round about".--
So it became the German Imperial vegetable
Both marmalade and salad.
You should dry it and then cook it
For both civilians and soldiers
In these sour weeks of war!

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Look, the fat is already in the name
When the root is praised to be just "like lard,"
And even if the brave wartime women
Can not quite accept this wisdom,
Has anyone tried it out in the countryside?
With rutabaga, and with swede
The dear old bread was spread.
And this coddles both bowel and stomach
Which cannot quite endure
That it does not taste just like heavenly manna!
Once long ago in earlier times
The hymn to beets resounded merrily:
"Oh, what a nice topping we find
On the pastor's plate of cabbage!"
But this it seems was kidney lard, not rutabaga.
One may well refer to us in the German world as
"Barbarians," because of such a special dish,
Since with this kind of "stomach paving"
Even John Bull with all his loot
Simply can not compete with us.
On the gas stoves in all the big cities
The pots of rutabagas never grow cold:
They are already boiling for breakfast—
At lunch they serve rutabagas with noodles,
And in the evenings there's rutabaga compote.
And so when sliced into well-shaped cubes,
The rutabaga nourishes us from dawn till dusk.
On these tasty golden yellow slices
One should inscribe these words:
"Our grace and evening prayer!"
Hurray for Michel, the German soldier, who can not fall

And stands solid like a tree!
Whoever needs to tumble over, should tumble,
But Michel is indeed stuffed full of roots,
And stands “as if rooted” in the ground!
When the World War finally ends,
Not only laurel will adorn the victor’s steel helmet—
Crown everyone who has stayed at home
With cabbage and with beets,
So the wish of the mythical mountain spirit, Rübezahl!

March 12, 1917, Fritz Gille

Source: Deutsches Historisches Museum

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