

David Can Be a Goliath

It has been jocularly rumored in Britain that David Paradine Frost, now 38, aims to be Prime Minister by his 50th birthday. "Not so," swears Producer-Director Ned Sherrin, who gave Frost his first big job on TV. "David would quite like to be Prime Minister. And the Queen. And the Archbishop of Canterbury. But being only one would limit him a bit." Indeed. It might even be argued that if all three offices could be made into one, with David as all-purpose Augustus, Britannia would in short order rule the air waves and carve out a whole new empire based on entertainment, the late 20th century equivalent of territorial conquest.

David Frost, the deferential, attentive, calculating, smily, terribly appreciative interviewer and talk-show "host" is an imposing entertainer-imperator. His far-flung enterprises range from packaging TV shows to film production and pop concerts, from book publishing to an investment company.

He is worth at least \$5 million—which makes him considerably richer than most of the mighty or the flighty he interviews. Though he refers to his corporate conglomerate as "my cottage industry," Paradine,* Ltd. (the name, not incidentally, almost rhymes with paradigm) grosses an estimated \$20 million a year. In addition to the \$1 million he expects to garner from his Nixon interviews, he hopes to get a few farthings from his glossy Cinderella movie musical, *The Slipper and the Rose*; an eight-part TV series, *Crossroads of Civilization*, which is being shot on a \$2.5 million budget in Iran; and *Nessie*, a \$7.5 million sci-fi extravaganza on the Loch Ness monster, to be filmed later this year.

If in his cathode-ray persona Frost seems a modest chap, he sometimes seems—in Churchillian parlance—to have much to be modest about. He is not an intellectual, a scholar or a wit, a raconteur or a connoisseur, a trained reporter, a facile writer or even a modest warbler. However, even his fiercest foes concede that Frost is an artful, intelligent questioner whose disarming manner often coaxes confidences from a subject who might simply dry up under more abrasive handling. On *The David Frost Show*, which ran for three years in the U.S. (it went off the air in mid-1972), the host occasionally elicited startling admissions, like Ted Sorensen's statement that Senator Ted Kennedy, his longtime friend and associate, could not in the aftermath of Chappaquiddick run for President.

Both the manner and the matter

*Paradine was a Huguenot ancestor who fled to England from Flanders in the 16th century.

of Frost have made him the target of intense criticism—and plain envy—among British journalists, some of whom complain that he turned television interviews into a form of show biz. Some years ago, during a brief lull in Frost's career, acerbic Journalist Malcolm Muggeridge predicted that Frost would sink without a trace. Instead, har-rumped The Mug later, "he rose without a trace."

Unfair. At 23, just down from Cambridge University, Angry Young Man David Frost presided over a rude, crude, outrageously nery weekly show that revolutionized British television and became a footnote in the modern-history books. *That Was the Week That Was*, fondly known as *TW3*, lampooned and lacerated the Establishment, poo-pooed every fat-cat institution from advertising to Buckingham Palace—and emptied British pubs on Saturday nights. Imported by NBC-TV in 1963, the American version of *TW3* lasted two pallid seasons. Frost seemed to have lost ire and interest—or at least good gagwriters. In fact, he was concentrating on the endeavors that were to make him King Frost. He "went soft," as some old mates put it.

Frost interviewed Candidate Richard Nixon in 1968—so softly that in 1970 President Richard Nixon ferried Frost and Mum to the White House, where the Englishman was appointed to produce a show in celebration of the American Christmas. Mona Frost still keeps a fondly inscribed photograph of the Nixons in an honored place in her Suffolk bungalow.

Or maybe Puritan Frost was merely reverting to form. The only son of a church-mouse-poor Methodist minister, he was at 17 a spellbinding lay evangelist. He preached love and practiced thrift. He still does. Almost uniquely among showfolk, Frost seldom has been known to throw tantrums. He is almost as solicitous toward employees as he is toward celebrities, and treats autograph hunters as tenderly as his audiences or his relatives. He is indiscriminately ingratiating. Not since Ed Sullivan has anyone on television back-patted, hugged and smooched so rapturously. His wide-eyed, basset-unctuous, hand-kneading style on *The David Frost Show* reminded some viewers of Uriah Heep. "It's been a joy having you here!" he tells the dullest talk-show guest.

Stage-door groupies do not throng after Frost. He is sallow-skinned, pouchy-eyed. His suits are rumped; the thin brown hair barely conceals a balding pate. He gulps pills to avert the double vision he gets from migraines. He

gnaws his fingernails. His voice is flat and distinctly non-U. He wears blue suede shoes.

But in more elegant circles he is found amply attractive. Among the dozens of desirables he has "escorted" have been Liv Ullmann, Bibi Andersson and Diahann Carroll. He seems unluckier in the bridal suite than in the board room, however. After a celebrated long-term engagement, Diahann turned around and married (briefly) a Las Vegas clothier. And then there was Karen Graham. A Texas-born model and *Vogue* cover girl, she received the unqualified blessing of David's Mum

GLOBE PHOTOS INC.



FROST & FLAME CAROLINE CUSHING

("She's just like one of the family") and was about to get Frosted by Billy Graham in Manhattan. Two days before the Big Day, she got hitched instead to a Chicago businessman. Frost's current love is comely Caroline Cushing, ex-wife of Howard Cushing, the millionaire socialite.

His ladies are loyal to him, at least *de* hitching *post facto*; not one has an unkind word to say about David. That goes for some of his old Angries pals. Says Bernard Levin, one of the toughest and brightest of British journalists and a star of the old *TW3*: "David not only has genuine ability but also human qualities of kindness, generosity, good nature and sympathy." Frost's self-judgment is more modest: "The aim of everything I do is to leave the audience a little more alert, a little more aware, a little more alive." Richard Nixon must feel that way this week.