



IRON GAME HISTORY



VOLUME 4 NUMBER 5 & 6

August 1997

An Explanation

We begin this double issue of *IGH* with an apology for having taken so long to get it into your hands. What happened is that for most of the last academic year we both thought we would be leaving The University of Texas at Austin and taking our Physical Culture Collection and ourselves to another university. Accordingly, we decided last winter to print the next issue only after we knew for certain where we would be. As it happened, however, two universities were interested in having us and our collection, we were torn between the two, and the months dragged on without a decision. Both universities offered us good positions and both were anxious to help us refine and organize our holdings. Even so, to create two professorial positions and make room for a collection which takes up almost five thousand square feet of space involves complicated negotiations and takes time. Thus the delay.

Although we had sought out neither position, we were open to the offers because we were disappointed that a place for our collection had not been created as plans were drafted several years ago for the remodeling of Gregory Gym, where our library and related materials had been housed for over a decade. We thought that a move might allow us to maintain and operate the Collection in a way which would make it more accessible to fans and scholars of the iron game. Since we acquired the Otley Coulter Collection over twenty years ago, it has been our dream and firm intention to do everything we could to bring together the most comprehensive collection of materials in the world in the field of physical culture, to make that collection available to iron gamers around the country and world, and to see that the collection is properly housed and organized so that it

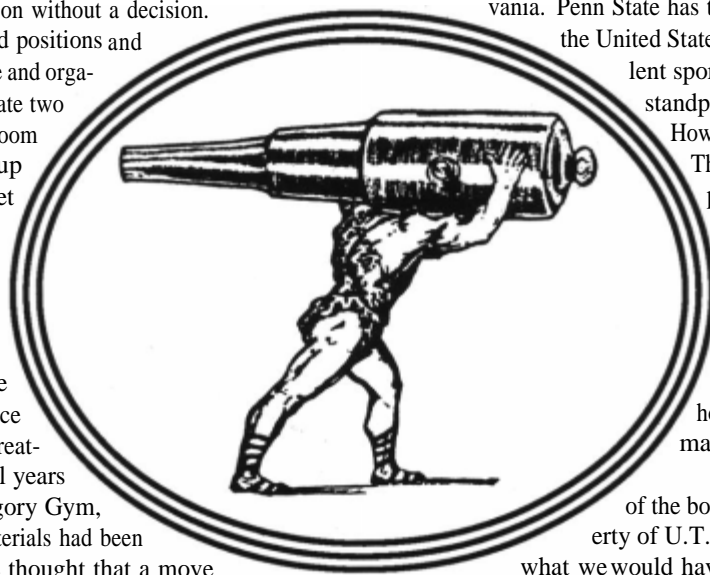
will live long after we are no longer here to care for it.

In any case, as grateful as we are to The University of Texas for having given us the space to house the Collection for the past fifteen years, we thought that we should listen carefully to the offers of a university would be willing to significantly improve our working conditions and provide us space and staff which would help us realize our dream. As it happens, the most attractive of these two offers came from Penn State University in State College, Pennsylvania. Penn State has the best Sport History program in the United States and they already have an excellent sports archive, so from an academic standpoint it seemed to be an ideal fit.

However, as we thought about leaving The University of Texas, where our patron —the late Roy J. McLean —had worked, collected materials about lifting, and taught weight training for fifty years, we realized that our dream was tightly interwoven with Mac's dream of having such a collection housed at his (and our) beloved alma mater.

Another factor is that some of the books in the Collection are the property of U.T. and would not have been part of what we would have transferred to Penn State. We

also have family, friends, and academic colleagues in this area we would have sorely missed had we left. So, for these and other related reasons, we finally reached what has been the most difficult decision in our professional lives — the decision to stay here in Austin. Having made the decision, we are filled with determination to work with various agencies of the University and create a permanent, well-funded home for the Collection, a home that will insure the Collection a long a productive life. This work has begun and we will



inform you of progress as it occurs.

As soon as we made the decision to stay, we put the finishing touches on this issue, after having decided to do two issues in one as a way of apologizing to those of you who have been our supporters through the years. One of the problems we've faced from time to time as we've produced *IGH* is the problem of having to severely edit long articles. Accordingly, beginning with the next issue, we will increase the size of an average issue from twenty-four to thirty-six pages. In order to be able to print the journal without taking a loss, we will issue approximately four issues a year instead of six. As subscribers, you will still get the number of pages for which you have paid, but they will be printed in issues which will be approximately fifty percent longer, thus allowing us to print such

articles as the one about Apollon you'll find on page twenty.

Again, we apologize for the delay and we ask for your understanding in this matter. We also ask for your continued support and we would appreciate any input you have regarding articles, format, and so on. As you might imagine, it takes quite a bit of time and effort to put *IGH* together. It is a strictly non-profit venture for us and for all of our writers, who pitch in to make it happen for the same reasons we began and continue it—we love the Iron Game and we want to honor our pioneers. Just as Robert Oppenheimer said as he accepted the Nobel Prize, "I have stood on the shoulders of giants." Our intention is to honor those giants by describing their accomplishments accurately so that those who have come lately to our game will understand what manner of men and women have gone before.

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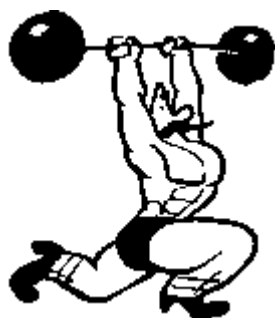
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WEIGHTLIFTING 'S NON-LIFTING PATRON SAINT



Jim Murray



A man who never lifted weights boosted general acceptance of weight training as much as anyone else — and more than most. His name: Dr. Peter V. Karpovich.

Dr. Karpovich was one of the most respected exercise physiologists of his time, teaching and conducting innovative experiments in what he called his “junkshop laboratory” at Springfield (Massachusetts) College. Springfield was and still is renowned for training physical educators, including countless physical directors at YMCAs throughout the country.

One student at Springfield College during the 1940s was Fraysher Ferguson, an outstanding weightlifter and gymnast. Ferguson was instrumental in having a group from York — Bob Hoffman, John Grimek, and John Davis — visit the college and give a demonstration. At the time, Dr. Karpovich believed — as did most physicians, coaches and physical educators — that lifting weights caused men to become “musclebound,” slow, inflexible, and clumsy. When he saw Grimek and Davis in action, he was astounded at how quickly they moved and was especially impressed by the grace, flexibility, and coordination of the massively muscled Grimek.

Dr. Karpovich, a man with a marvelous sense of humor, loved to tell jokes on himself. Here is one of his favorites. To set the scene, he had heard as a young man that a professional wrestler or strongman could not reach to scratch between his shoulder blades and had to pay a boy to do this scratching. When Dr. Karpovich became a physician he was strongly opposed to weightlifting because he remembered this story, although he had never tried to verify it. Then an opportunity to test this story presented itself.

Here's how he told the story on himself: “One day Bob Hoffman visited Springfield College to give a lecture and to demonstrate weight lifting. He brought along John Grimek and John Davis. The lecture and demonstration were very impressive. During the

question period, the opportunity arose to test the legend. Very sweetly, (I) said, addressing Mr. Hoffman ‘Will you please ask Mr. Grimek to scratch his back between the shoulder blades?’ There was silence. Hoffman looked at Grimek, Grimek looked at Hoffman. Then they and everybody else looked at (me).

“Said Hoffman, ‘And why do you want Grimek to scratch his back?’

“ ‘Because I have been told that weight lifters are so musclebound that they cannot scratch their backs.’

“ ‘Well, John,’ said Hoffman addressing Grimek, ‘oblige the doctor and scratch your back.’ And Grimek did, first with one hand, then with the other. He scratched from above the shoulder and then from below. David did the same. The audience roared with laughter at (my expense).

“Both men had huge muscles and, therefore, *should have been* muscle-bound. But they were like the bumblebee who flies, though expert aviation engineers have proved mathematically that a bumblebee cannot fly. The anecdote only illustrates how strongly we may cling to our prejudices and pass on unfounded ‘information.’”

Recalling the incident, Grimek remembers that he was very annoyed at being asked to do such a silly thing. He went far beyond back-scratching, giving Dr. Karpovich a display of gymnastics and flexibility that astounded him. Grimek showed full splits, backbends, handstands, and bent forward to place his elbows close to the floor without bending his knees. Needless to say, Dr. Karpovich was impressed.

Being an open-minded scientist, Dr. Karpovich reasoned that if he had been wrong about weightlifters being “musclebound,” the conventional belief that weightlifters were necessarily slow might also be wrong. Because the most noticeable difference between weight

trainers and other athletes is in the “over development” of their arms, shoulders, and chests, he devised a machine that measured the speed with which a test subject could turn a handle in front of his chest, using these “overdeveloped” muscles.

Dr. Karpovich tested three groups —sedentary liberal arts students, vigorous physical education students, and experienced weightlifters. Much to his surprise, the speed of the weightlifters’ muscular contraction exceeded that of the athletic physical education students, who were second, and the liberal arts students, who finished last.

Having shattered another of his own erroneous beliefs, Dr. Karpovich decided to test another common assumption —that lifting weights was dangerous in that it produced a lot of injuries. He surveyed 31,702 men participating in weightlifting and found that the incidence of injuries was very low (1.5%) and that most injuries were minor, consisting of “pulled” muscles and tendons. The incidence of hernias was twenty times less than among an average selection of people.

This was the background when I was asked, in 1955, to prepare a book on weight training for the Prentice-Hall publishing company. Because the book would include specific training for weight lifting competition as well as for athletic conditioning and general strength and fitness, I wanted to have John Terpak work with me on the manuscript. (I considered Terpak the best weightlifting coach.) Prentice-Hall agreed with the idea of a co-author, but wanted someone well-known and respected in physical education circles. They asked me to provide the names of prominent men in physical education who also knew something about weightlifting.

I knew of three, in particular, who had studied weight training and gave Prentice-Hall the names of C. H. McCloy, University of Iowa; Dick Ganslen, University of Arkansas; and Peter Karpovich. (I was unable to persuade the publisher to include a third author, but did include the percentage system Terpak had used successfully as a guest coach of the Mexican national team. As far as I know, John Terpak was the first to use this systematically.) I had cited the Karpovich reports on speed of muscular contraction and incidence of injuries in a book I wrote for the Barnes Sports Library in 1954 (*Weight Lifting and Progressive Resistance Exercise*, later acquired by Ronald Press and still later by John Wiley & Son). I had considerable correspondence with McCloy and was able to persuade him to contribute to *Strength & Health*. I also had some correspondence with Ganslen, who had been a pole vault champion before he began

coaching and teaching.

The staff at Prentice-Hall was familiar with Dr. Karpovich and also his wife, who taught at Columbia University and wrote about rehabilitative physical training under her maiden name, Josephine Rathbone. Prentice-Hall actually made the selection of the coauthor and arranged for me to meet with Dr. Karpovich in New York City at an apartment leased to Josephine Rathbone, near Columbia. At that point I didn’t know that Ms. Rathbone was actually Mrs. Karpovich and thought to myself “that old rascal must have a paramour in the city!” In retrospect, I should have known better but never having met the good doctor I had no idea what a man of impeccable character he was.

The meeting with the Karpoviches was delightful. I was impressed with his knowledge and obvious intelligence and charmed by his friendliness and excellent sense of humor. We agreed to proceed with the book, each of us to review the others’ work, but to write independently.

It wasn’t until much later that I realized he had wanted to meet in order to evaluate my knowledge and especially my character before he would agree to collaborate. I went to New York thinking I was doing him a favor by letting him in on the project! Remember, I was only twenty-nine years old at the time and thought being editor of *Strength & Health* and having authored a book at twenty-eight made me quite an important fellow indeed! Looking back, I’m as proud of the fact that Dr. Karpovich was willing to work with me as of anything I’ve done in my seventy years. Peter Karpovich was a brilliant man, a fine person, and one of only a few prominent people I’ve known that I thought more highly of the longer I knew him.

As we worked on the book, exchanging portions as we completed them, Dr. Karpovich complained that I was eulogizing Bob Hoffman. I assured him that I was being objective and that Bob would not think I was praising him excessively —Bob wouldn’t have thought it possible to do that! At one point during the discussion he said, “You know, I wouldn’t have agreed to work with Bob Hoffman on a book.”

I defended the references to Bob, saying that although it was true that he greatly exaggerated his own athletic achievements and made unsupportable claims for the effects of his nutritional products, these exaggerations and claims were not included in what I had written. I pointed out that Bob had inspired countless young people to live healthier lives by acquiring the exercise habit and had supported the sport of Olympic weightlifting to the point that —

at the time —the U.S. team was the world's best.

In the end, Dr. Karpovich, always a reasonable man, withdrew his objections to my “eulogy” of Hoffman and we finished the book. An amusing aspect of the successful launch of *Weight Training in Athletics* in 1956 (revised in 1983) was that Dr. Karpovich became an instant expert on everything connected with weight training. In the book, he wrote Part II, seventy-two of 214 pages, and confined his contribution to what he knew about weight training — the scientific evidence on its effects that had been accumulated to that time. With tongue in cheek, he would often introduce me as a young man he had taught “everything he knows about weight lifting.” If that didn’t get a laugh, he would realize the person or persons believed he was serious, so he would explain.

One intriguing training question he forwarded was from a Dr. Von Saltza, who said his daughter was a promising swimmer and he wanted to increase her strength for the sport. He was experimenting with various approaches, such as having her wear heavy gloves while practicing swimming. I responded that I thought it would be better for her to practice the skills unencumbered, unless he wanted to have her tow a “wind sock” for drag, which wouldn’t affect the movements of her arms and legs. I also suggested some general strengthening exercises with weights. I wish I could remember the specific exercise recommendations, because Chris Von Saltza became a champion swimmer.

Dr. Karpovich had no patience with what he called “snake oil salesmen” who sold dietary aids he considered unproven. He pointed out that champion athletes came from every part of the world

and all walks of life, with widely varying diets. In fact, it was his skepticism about poorly designed studies of special nutrients that — along with my medical writing experience —made me skeptical about the strength building effects of steroids. Stories of great improvement with steroids — like those touting soybean-based supplements and isometrics — were and still largely are anecdotal. (I remember

extolling the benefits eight hundred-meter record-holder Mal Whitfield received from weight training to Ken Doherty, the famous track coach. His response: “How do you know whether he excelled because of that training or in spite of it?”) Regarding steroids, however, after seeing their effects on sprinters and other track and field athletes, as well as on weightlifters, I am convinced that the drugs are effective — especially when administered to genetically gifted people.

The Iron Game has benefited greatly from Peter Karpovich’s interest and the scientific studies he conducted on the effects of weight training. He and his wife were among the founders of the American College of Sports Medicine in 1954 and having his name as co-author of *Weight Training in Athletics* made the book acceptable to physical educators (who used it as a textbook for many years) and coaches, and paved the way for the present belief that strength training is

essential for success in just about every sport.

One seldom hears the term “musclebound” any more and muscular heroes abound in popular motion pictures, no longer portrayed as clumsy oafs. For that much credit should go to Dr. Peter V. Karpovich, whose influence lives on more than two decades after his death.



DR. PETER V. KARPOVICH

THE ALL – INCLUSIVE BODY

**Excerpted from: Kenneth Dutton's *The Perfectible Body:
The Western Ideal of Physical Development.***

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ED NOTE: WE ARE DELIGHTED TO BE ABLE TO OFFER OUR READERS THIS EXCERPT FROM KENNETH DUTTON'S THOUGHT-PROVOKING ANALYSIS OF OUR WESTERN IDEALS OF PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT. SEE *IGH* 4(4) FOR DAVID CHAPMAN'S REVIEW OF *THE PERFECTIBLE BODY*.

The term “erotic numbness” used by Rudofsky to characterize our response to heroic art applies equally well (but for different reasons) to the effect produced by the bodybuilding display.¹ In both cases, this observation must obviously be confined to “typical” responses, since as we have already noted the possible range of human reactions to the sight of the body, whether in art or in real life, is determined by the psychological disposition of the individual at the viewing end of the transaction. Though the Laocoon, the Farnese Hercules or Michelangelo's David can in no meaningful sense of the term be considered erotic art, it is at least conceivable – and probably factually the case – that some people would find these statues irresistibly exciting in sexual terms. So too with the bodybuilding display: the phenomenon of “muscle eroticism” is well known to psychologists dealing in the area or psycho-sexual fantasy, and such a disposition makes the very sight of muscularity a powerful source of sexual arousal. In this area, any general propositions that one may advance will apply only within the bounds of what can be considered typical or “normal” human reaction.

With this caveat, it is possible to suggest that there is a curiously asexual quality discernible in the advanced muscularity of the bodybuilder's physique, and it could be argued that this is a central element in the symbolic language of the developed body. It is not so much that the body is here devoid of sexual connotations, as that it combines in a unique fashion elements of both male and female sexuality, or that by simultaneously affirming and denying male and female messages it manages to escape or even transcend the male-female duality and attain a symbolic completeness which comprehends them both. Implausible though such a theory may at first seem, it not only accounts for some of the particular conventions of bodybuilding display which defy explanation on other grounds, but also corresponds to a deep-seated aspiration towards sexual unification which has found expression in various forms since antiquity.

It should be noted that this is a somewhat different concept from that of unisexuality or the elimination of visible differences between the sexes, a tendency which has been found in certain ide-

alistic movements from the apocryphal writings of the First century AD., through medieval and Renaissance mysticism to modern incarnations as disparate as the rock musical *Hair* and Maoist China. It differs also, at least in mode of presentation, from the androgynous or sexually ambivalent characteristics and mannerisms adopted by a number of male pop performers from David Bowie in the 1970s to Michael Jackson and the artist formerly known as Prince in the 1980s and 90s. What is suggested by the bodybuilder's physique is not a diminution or denial of masculine qualities, so much as their explicit affirmation in a context which simultaneously suggests complementary messages associated with opposite qualities. There is a basic principle of selective perception involved here, one long recognized by traditional scholastic philosophy which neatly encapsulated it in the maxim *expressio unius rei est exclusio alterius*: the presence of a characteristic or quality implies the absence of an opposite quality (hardness implies the absence of softness and vice versa) and thus suggests incompleteness of being. Conversely, the reconciliation of opposing characteristics can lead to our apprehension of a sense of completeness or self-sufficiency. Kenneth Clark, for instance, has observed that “the disposition of areas in the torso is related to our most vivid experiences, so that abstract shapes, the square and the circle, seem to us male and female.”² In this context, “the old endeavor of magical mathematics to square the circle” is related to the ancient cosmology which saw the union of opposites as a restoration of primordial harmony and perfection.

The combination of male and female characteristics has been noted by a number of observers of the bodybuilding display. George Butler has vividly described one of his photographs of Arnold Schwarzenegger as follows:

He seems to float, suspending himself palms down on the rails of two back-to-back chairs... His upper body — trapezius flexed, deltoids rolled forward, abdomen vacuumed into a small shad-

ow — is an accumulation of striking details. The pectoral muscles beneath are large and sweeping. They glisten so shockingly in the air of the shabby room that the figure who bears them seems neither man nor woman. . . .³

Equally, Lisa Lyon had characterized the image projected by the female bodybuilder as “neither masculine nor feminine but feline.”⁴ Margaret Walters has commented that “for all his super-masculinity the bodybuilder’s exaggerated breast development, as well as his dedicated self-absorption, can make him look unexpectedly, surreally feminine.”⁵ Whilst the latter comment is part of Walters’ dismissal of bodybuilding, which she sees as “the most narcissistic and, in that sense, most feminine, of pastimes,”⁶ it is nonetheless possible to endorse her perceptive identification of the crucially suggestive elements of the bodybuilder’s physique without sharing her distaste for this form of bodily manifestation.

The three elements identified here are the basic shape or outline of the body (“super-masculinity”), the modeling of the body’s surface (“unexpectedly. . . feminine”), and an overall air of self-absorption (characterized as “narcissistic”). With regard to the last-named characteristic, it is no doubt possible to draw different conclusions as to the extent to which it is a universal trait of bodybuilding performance. For one thing, there are considerable individual differences between bodybuilders in the degree to which they seek to interact with their audience, and in any case the extent to which such interaction is possible differs in the “compulsory” and “free” posing of which competition is made up. The extreme concentration required by any high-level competitive sport is here directed towards the body itself, in maintaining the “pump” and flexion of the muscles. In this sense, the self-absorption of the bodybuilder may not differ greatly from that of the diver standing on the platform and mentally rehearsing the movement of his body in a high-dive.

If the term “self-absorption” accurately conveys the self-directed concentration of the posing display, a more revealing indication of its distinctive and perhaps unique character as a form of spectacle is the alternative term “self-containment.” The pose does not look beyond itself, it is meaningful only in terms of the body’s ability to suggest, by its inherent expressivity of mass and gesture, the exaltation of physical existence.

In this sense, the bodybuilding display can be compared to ballet, not to those scenes in which the performers advance the action by way of a superior and aesthetic mime related to the events of the plot, but to those in which the body expresses nothing beyond an inner mood. Even here the analogy falters, however, because what the bodybuilder seeks to express has about it nothing cerebral, no reflection of an interior life, but the evocative power of the body itself,

the ability of visible form to conjure up in the minds of those who understand its language deep-seated images and fantasies of perfection and completeness. There is little difference in principle between such a form of contemplation and the delight of the mathematician confronted by a “perfect” theoretical equation, the rapt wonderment of a musicologist studying a Bach fugue, or the intent admiration of an art-lover standing before an abstract sculpture by Brancusi. In each case, the intimation of formal perfection is real, though it can be appreciated only by those who have learned the language of the medium by which it is conveyed. In each case, as in the so-called classical ideal of art, form takes precedence over content; in one sense, indeed, the form is the content.

The posing display suggests self-containment. It is not “about” anything other than itself. The so-called “archer” pose, for example, mimics the bodily attitude of a person drawing a long-bow in a lunging position; its reference, however, is not in any sense to the sport of archery but purely to the muscular configuration and line of the body which can be displayed in that particular position. The “three-quarters twisting back pose” is precisely that of the antique Torso Belvedere and of one of the *ignudi* (sometimes known as ‘The Athlete’) from Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling. Once again there is no sense in which the pose “refers” to these artistic works, of which the bodybuilder (and no doubt most of his audience) are more likely unaware given their cultural background; it is rather that the bodybuilder, like the artist, has chosen that pose because it expresses a potentiality of the body. Handed down to the contemporary poser by his predecessors (the art-studio models), it reveals in Clark’s words “a compelling rhythmic force [which] drives every inflection of the human body before it.”⁷ Like its artistic forerunners, the pose indicates nothing beyond the power of human anatomy to transform itself into an instrument of expression.

Pursuing the terms of Margaret Walters’ analysis, we can discuss in closest detail her reference to the coexistence of “super-masculine” and “surreally feminine” characteristics in the bodybuilder’s physique. In its fundamental shape and outline, the latter is unmistakably, even aggressively, masculine, emitting super-normal stimuli of masculinity. The ideal bodybuilding physique, says Robert Kennedy,

should have wide shoulders, trim hips a small waist, arms with balanced development from the wrist to the shoulders, legs that flow aesthetically from the hips to the knees, and then into a full calf development. The lats should be wide, but not too much at the lower lats. The neck should be developed equally on all sides. Pectoral muscles should be built up in all aspects, especially the upper and outer

chest region. The glutes should be rounded but not overly heavy in appearance. The overall muscle separation and definition should be clearly visible when contracted or flexed.⁸

The broad shoulders, trim hips, wide latissimus dorsi, small buttocks and relatively thick neck are all super-normal masculine stimuli. All of them, it will be noted, are characteristics of body shape and are visible features of the body when seen in silhouette. The development of the pectoral muscles, on the other hand—what Walters refers to as the “exaggerated breast development” of the male bodybuilder — seems somehow to be of a different order, having more to do with the modeling of the skin surface and the tactile quality of body-texture than with the outline of the body. It is here that we enter into a world of body-imagery strangely different from that of masculine stimuli.

The tactile quality of the body’s surface is clearly an important component of the messages emitted by the bodybuilder’s physique. The skin as psychologists have recognized, has a vital role in erotic stimulation, related as it is to the considerable suggestive power of the sense of touch. Physical love-making is intensely reliant on touching and certain parts of the body (the so-called “erogenous zones”) are especially sensitive to erotic messages conveyed by stroking, kissing, fondling or other forms of skin-to-skin contact. The powerful imaginative force of tactile messages is so great that the mere sight of bare skin can act as an erotic stimulus, without the need for actual touching to take place. (The same applies, it should be noted, to tactile experiences involving non-human objects: fur, leather, silk and velvet as well as garments associated with another person, can all act as erotic agents and take on the pathological dimensions of fetishism). The erotic role of the skin itself is intimately associated with the polarized attitudes towards the display of nakedness which we saw above to be characteristic of Western society.

While skin is not of itself a purely female characteristic, as a mode of conveying bodily messages it belongs to a different order from that of super-masculine stimuli. The latter are all related to the outline of the body, and are observable even when the body is clothed, indeed, some male clothing (from padded shoulders to tight-fitting jeans) is designed to accentuate the super-masculine body-shape. Bare skin, however-endowed with all the erotic overtones mentioned above — is suggestive of the body-as-object rather than the body-as-agent, of the “sex that is looked at” rather than the “sex that looks.” To present the skin-surface as ‘object of the gaze’ is not a traditional male dominance-signal, but on the contrary a sign of submissiveness or seductiveness. Not for nothing did the erotic tradition in art, from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, typically depict a clothed male in the presence of a nude female — never the other way round.

That a man should bare his body for presentation to the objectifying or fantasizing gaze of others —whether women or (even more) other men—is so signal a departure from Western sexual convention that it would almost be unthinkable as a public spectacle but for the simultaneous display of super-masculine stimuli which obliterate or even deny any suggestion of female role-play and provide a sexual “neutral ground.” The legitimizing context of the posing display leaves the spectator’s mind, if not “erotically numb” at any rate erotically uncertain. Not so much transcending sexuality as rendering it illegible, the bodybuilder’s performance aims at a kind of sexual self-containment which sublimates desire.

The Transfigured Body

Over the years of its evolution, bodybuilding has adopted a set of conventions related to the grooming and attiring of the body for competition and public display. Designed to enhance the visible muscularity of the physique, these measures have an obvious cosmetic purpose and can readily be understood in terms which apply also to other types of public spectacle; the bodybuilder, like other performers, must appear in character. Like stage make-up and costume, these are part of the accepted practice of theatrical presentation and are aimed at the improvement of the performer’s appearance. At a deeper level, however, the conventions of presentation can be related to the implicit metaphorical language of the developed body, and can be read in symbolic terms as significant (if subliminal) elements of the message it transmits. Some of these practices have subsequently been transposed from the specific context of competitive bodybuilding into other, more general spheres (such as film and advertising) which make use of the expressive character of muscular development.

The shaving of body-hair is a case in point. Since the super-normal stimuli of masculinity are to be found in those characteristics by which male and female bodies are most sharply differentiated, one would expect that the presence of male body-hair would be an important component of the messages of the muscular body. Yet the reverse is the case. Competition bodybuilders shave all exposed parts of the body including the chest (where necessary), legs and armpits. The common and most obvious explanation of this practice is that body-hair tends to conceal muscular shape, so that the definition and striation of muscles are not visible. In this and a number of other aspects of body-presentation, however, the obvious practical explanation, while entirely valid so far as it goes, is only a part of the total picture. If its practical purpose were accepted as the complete explanation of the practice of body-shaving, there would be no reason why the underarm should be shaved, since it is not the site of a muscle-group. The practice of body-shaving, in both men and women, clearly has

an additional set of connotations connected with the heightened messages conveyed by hairless skin.

In this respect as in several others, the conventions of body-building have merely articulated in somewhat exaggerated form a set of widely held, if latent, cultural attitudes towards the body. Given the significance of facial and bodily hair as biological markers of masculinity, the male ideal images portrayed in Western media as ideal models are those of lithe, smooth-bodied youths. Only by reference to the symbolic language by which the body has been interpreted in the Western cultural tradition can we understand the conventions underlying this shift.

The shaving of the whole or parts of the body has been practiced in human societies since primitive times, sharpened stones having originally been used as a form of Neolithic razor. The practice has possessed various kinds of significance — religious, political, social or sexual — from one culture to another. In ancient Egypt, both men and women commonly shaved their heads and bodies, possibly as a matter of hygiene. In ancient Greece, the athletes who appeared naked in the gymnasium or arena were known to go so far as to shave (or pluck out) their pubic hair. In contemporary western society, certain parts of the body only (the face for men, the legs and underarm for women) are commonly shaved. The wearing of a beard is more frequent amongst certain male groups — academics and students, for instance — just as unshaven legs among women may be a social sign of feminism. The shaving of the head has often been required by authorities as a mark of submission: prisoners of war have had their heads shaved to humiliate them, and men and women who join religious orders have traditionally received the tonsure as a sign of humility and devotion.

Although the various messages involved in shaving are complex and disparate, it is possible to hazard some suggestions as to those connected with the modern bodybuilding display. The anthropologist Robert Brain has suggested that the shaving of body hair is associated with man's desire to make "cultural" human qualities prevail over "natural" beastly attributes, to distinguish us as human from brute creation around us: "A hairy body is an animal body. Wild men, like Esau the hunter, are hairy. Body hair is beastly and has to go in the interests of humanity."⁹ This distinction appears to have prevailed in fifth century Greece, where the civilized, "Apollonian" bodies of gods and athletes were hairless while those of more elemental "Dionysiac" figures were often misshapen and hairy. Other ancient cultures used a somewhat different symbolism: R.D. Guthrie notes, for instance, that in earlier and more authoritarian Western societies "full beards, woolly chests, and rancid odors reinforced the lines of authority by giving a rather awesome even fearsome visage."

Hairiness, says Guthrie, is associated with most of the more important components of status

— sex, age and size. It is easy to see why, in the locker room, a hairy body is nothing to be ashamed of. In a society that must emphasize co-operation and de-emphasize direct serious competition, excess hair may be too gross for most tastes, because it is a symbol for rough masculinity. If the best key to physical prowess among humans is the amount of body hair, the corollary is the more body hair, the greater the intimidation.¹⁰

In relation to facial hair, Guthrie's observation certainly accords with a number of social practices, from that of the heavily-beamed kings of Persia and the Pharaohs of Egypt (who wore false beards on ceremonial occasions to emphasize their power and authority) to that of the bike-gangs of today who often cultivate beards as part of the image of fearsomeness.

In the case of the bodybuilder's shaven body it is doubtful that the message has directly to do with co-operation as the opposite of intimidation. On the other hand, it could have a good deal to do with a slightly different antithesis proposed by Guthrie: that between the older male and the baby or new-born, baby skin being "our standard of inoffensive child-like beauty." He suggests a variant form of the behavior known as *neoteny* — the reversion to an earlier state of evolution or life-cycle — which he calls "social neoteny."¹¹ This is a particular means of reducing the messages of intimidation by reverting to a more childlike appearance. Nakedness, a hairless body and smooth skin texture are all forms of social neoteny, signaling a childlike non-threatening quality and thus denying messages of aggression. In the light of such suggestive (if not conclusive) evidence, it could be argued that the point of shaving the body is to contradict, and thus neutralize, the aggressive or intimidating message of the super-normal adult male body-shape: to demonstrate, in other words, that this is not a body to be feared on account of its dominance, but rather to be looked at or touched — a body that places itself in the submissive role of "object."

The distinction being made here has been closely paralleled in the film world by the distinction which Michael Malone has noted between the dark-haired and blond-haired male movie star. Here, says Malone,

the blond is the more spiritual, more "feminized," more childlike half. The male's blondness give him an iconographic chastity. He seems more vulnerable, more fragile. . . . He lacks the self-protective (because conventional) camouflage of dark virility, and so he is visually connected, probably on a subliminal

level, to the female sex role, with its cultural cognates — among them passive desirability.¹²

Malone contrasts the “wholesome boyishness” of the blond Hollywood pin-up (such as Tab Hunter and later Jan-Michael Vincent) with the dark, mustached, macho star (Clark Gable, Burt Reynolds), who is always the seducer, never the seduced.¹³ That many dark-haired film stars are hairy-chested and most blond stars smooth-chested may suggest a link with the messages of the hairless body, particularly as the removal of male body-hair was insisted upon by some film directors for actors who appeared with barer torsos. Some stars have even presented themselves in both guises: William Holden appeared with shaven chest in 1957 (*The Bridge on the River Kwai*) but with chest-hair in 1958 (*The Key*),¹⁴ and the naturally hairy John Travolta has also “shaved down” for the photographer. There has been only one hairy-chested Tarzan (Mike Henry), while Stallone and Schwarzenegger have very obviously been influenced by the bodybuilding convention and always appear with shaven bodies.

It is clear, then, that the hairless body conveys a particular message or set of messages, possibly related to the attenuation of hyper-masculinity by the enhancing of those submissive tactile qualities associated with the skin of the infant. So pervasive has the association become that body waxing and electrolysis for men is becoming increasingly common in some Western societies. The proprietor of a firm specializing in men’s skin care has reported a marked trend towards hair-free torsos and limbs:

... the increase in hair removal for men (she says) reflected a reversal of roles. While women had undergone treatment for years, men were following suit. Women’s aesthetic expectations of men were such that many gave their husbands or boyfriends gift cards for treatment. ‘A lot of the women tend to send the guys to have it done.’¹⁵

It would appear that the influence of bodybuilding on the presentation of the male body has extended, possibly by way of the film and television screen, into the wider world of social fashion, and that it has been affected at least to some extent by the increasing acceptance of the male body as an object of aesthetic or erotic contemplation.

In a number of its manifestations — from heroic art to the erotic pin-up — the history of muscular body-display has been that of the nude male body. On the other hand, the one part of the bodybuilder’s physique that is always kept covered is the genital region. Again, the most obvious explanation — social mores, the need for decency and a respectable sporting image, the avoidance of erotic overtones — is entirely correct but not entirely complete. It is well known for instance, that penile display is an important part of the

intimidation behavior of primates other than man, and it would follow that it, like hairiness, must be reduced to the minimum if the messages of sexual (or other) aggression are to be neutralized. We noted earlier the unusually small size of the penis in many nude sculptures of the Classical period, and more than one commentator has pointed to the apparent discrepancy between the bulging muscles of the bodybuilder and the apparent tininess of the male organ hidden beneath the posing trunks. Those who have seen professional bodybuilders naked will attest, not only to the unfoundedness of this assumption, but also to the remarkable adaptability of the male sexual organs and the compressive powers of Lycra. According to the interpretation proposed here, this is precisely the point of the exercise: once again it is to neutralize the aggressive sexual message of the male body, in this case by giving the genital region the inoffensive and undeveloped appearance of the baby or pre-pubertal youth. In contemporary bodybuilding practice, posing trunks are worn as brief as possible, as if to reinforce the neutralizing message.

In the ancient world the diminutive and almost childlike penises of Greek vase paintings (and to a lesser extent, the often disproportionately small sexual organs of the heroic statuary) contrasted markedly with the exaggerated phalluses seen on satyrs, in pornographic figures and in Dionysiac celebration. The latter tradition is still reflected in homosexual toilet graffiti, of which Delph writes: “if one compares the proportions of the penis and testes to the rest of the torso in these drawings, they assume enormous size. . . the larger the penis, the more virile the individual is thought to be, enhancing the amount of attention he receives.”¹⁶

At a more generally acceptable level of eroticism, it is a fact well attested by those “in the business” — though seldom publicly admitted — that the G-strings and posing trunks worn by male strippers are commonly padded so as to give the genital region an appearance of greater size. This practice, which is often the source of fascinated speculation by viewers (“What do they keep down there?” . . . asked one TV host, “their lunch?”), is a further illustration of the contrast between the conventions of erotic display and the more complex messages of bodybuilding. As distinct from the bodybuilder’s miniaturizing trunks, the “posing pouch” favored in the sexually provocative physique magazines of the 1960s tends to draw attention to the genital area, often revealing a few tufts of pubic hair. The subsequent banning of this form of dress in competition bodybuilding may have had less to do with what it actually revealed (modern posing trunks are practically just as abbreviated, and any visible pubic hair is shaved) than with the extent to which it accentuated the bulge of the genitals.

Over the last ten years or so, male posing trunks have tended to be cut higher at the rear, exposing at least the lower half of the buttocks. This practice has become more common since a number of leading bodybuilders, beginning with Richard Gaspari, have made a feature of their impressive gluteal striation (the visible separation of muscle-bands in the gluteus maximus or large muscle of the but-

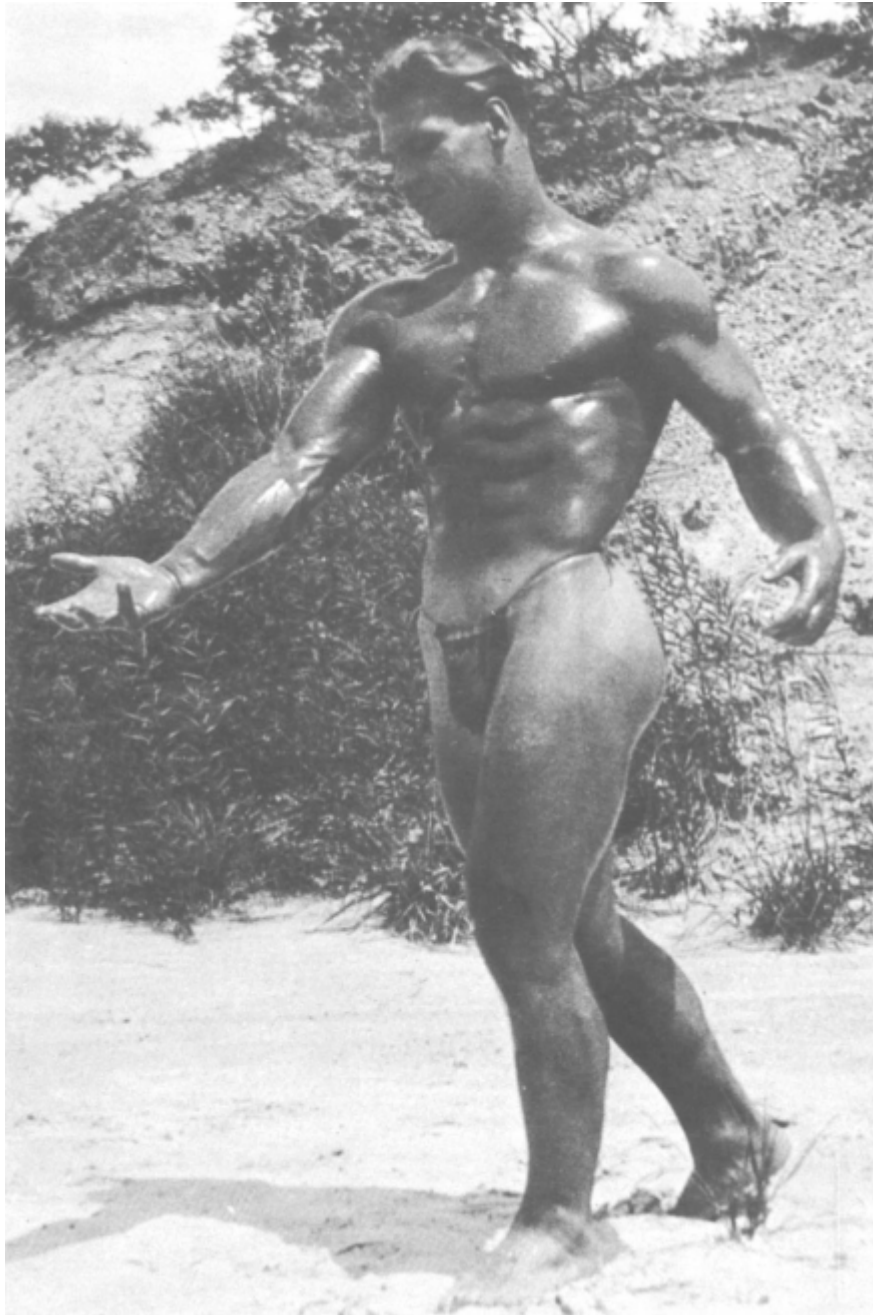
tocks). As in previous instances, however, there are perhaps more latent suggestions underlying the development in fashion. Unlike the male sexual organs, the buttocks are seen as non-intimidating, a symbol of passivity associated with infancy or childhood: a baby's bottom can be patted, smacked or even admired for its "dimples." Women's bodybuilding costume (like some women's beachwear) is often cut so as to leave some, if not all, of the buttocks exposed: the recent adoption of this fashion for men, as in the G-strings or "thongs" which are now worn on some beaches, can here be seen as a further shift in gender-roles which has rendered the male body an acceptable object of aesthetic or erotic curiosity.

The skin which the bodybuilder exposes to our gaze is hardly ever the 'natural' skin, but rather a skin-surface which has been subjected to processes designed to enhance the message of muscular development. In Sandow's generation, the practice was to cover the already pale skin with a coating of white powder, in order to stress its resemblance to marble statuary. By the 1930s, however, social customs had undergone considerable change as the leisured classes had both the time and the means to take summer holidays, usually in a sunny cli-

mate. This meant a complete reversal in fashion as compared with earlier generations in which tanned skin was the mark of the peasant or the outdoor laborer: the tan now became the badge of the upper classes, as the French Riviera and the beaches of Rio became the

favorite resorts of the wealthy. Pale skin was the sign of the lowly office or factory worker, whose long working day was spent entirely indoors. The association with leisure and exercise gave rise to the notion of the "healthy tan," which soon took over from the earlier pale skin as the new bodybuilding convention. By the time of the leading American bodybuilder of the 1940s, John Grimek, it had established itself completely and has since become almost mandatory.

Even in the present age, where the dangers of exposure to ultra-violet light are well publicized and the medical profession issues frequent warnings of the risk of melanoma or skin-cancer, there is no sign of a change in the convention of bodybuilding, and the tanned body is the universal norm. This being the case, it is probably fortunate from the medical point of view that those who do not tan easily have access to a wide range of chemical body dyes, tanning lotions,



THIS PHOTO, ONE OF A SERIES TAKEN OF JOHN GRIMEK IN THE 1930s, REVEALS THE DEEP TAN FOR WHICH HE WAS FAMOUS. MORE THAN ANY OTHER MAN, GRIMEK, NICKNAMED "THE GLOW," MADE TANNING AN ESSENTIAL PART OF BODYBUILDING.

vegetable-based “body-stains,” canthaxanthin (or Vitamin A) tablets and a host of other artificial means of producing the desired color. That the tan is “fake” is unimportant: it is essentially a form of stage make-up. The skin need not be tanned, but it must look tanned.

The metaphorical meaning of the convention is not far to seek, and is even clearer when seen in conjunction with the other chief mode of skin-preparation, the oiling of the body. Though much disputed as late as the 1960s the coating of the skin with a light layer of oil is now standard practice. If inexperienced bodybuilders tend to overdo the effect and present the glistening spectacle of a body which appears to be wrapped in cellophane more seasoned competitors seek the effect of a low sheen rather than a high gloss.

The tanned and oiled body replaces the symbolic associations of marble with those of polished bronze: the glint of light on the rounded muscle-surface contrasts with the deep color of the depressions, so that the musculature stands out in dramatic and highly tactile contrast, a dark and polished surface which emphasizes the rises and hollows of the muscles more vividly than can be achieved by the pale, matte texture of marble. The association is even more obvious in French, where the terms bronze and bronzage are used to refer to tanned skin. The rise to eminence of a number of black bodybuilders in recent years, though mainly attributable to their genetic endowment and often formidable muscularity, has no doubt been assisted by the fact that their deeply colored and naturally polished skin allows them to achieve the sought-after effect without resort to artificial means.

The visual effect in question is often described by bodybuilders themselves as “looking hard”, an optical impression which suggests the tactile firmness of the flexed muscle. At the level of metaphorical suggestion however, the aim is not simply to resemble the appearance of burnished bronze, but to convey what the bronze statue and the bronze-like body alike suggest to us. No art-form, not even sculpture, is more purely concerned than the bronze with the visible surface of things: it is in its surface, says Jennifer Montagu, that the supreme quality of bronze resides, its particular effect being chiefly dependent on “the interplay of its shapes and the movement of light and shade on its modeling.” The frequently-made bronze copies of marble statues seem to speak a different language from that of their originals, the translation of light-absorbing stone into light-reflecting metal concentrating all attention on the outward play of highlights and shadows. Its dark, gleaming surface is suggestive of impenetrability or even invulnerability, as Jean-Paul Sartre recognized when he made the bronze statue in his play *Huis Clos (In Camera)* the symbol of the inanimate world of fixed being as distinct from the human world of shifting inner consciousness.

Yet the body we see on the stage is not a statue, an attitude captured at a moment of time. We are in fact conscious of opposing and neutralizing messages: this medium of representation is not impenetrable metal, but living and resilient flesh. The body moves, it breathes, it is part of our human world of mutability and transience. The muscles flex and unflex, limbs are extended and retracted, the abdominals turn suddenly from a cavernous vacuum into a glistening washboard, the pectoral muscles are bounced up and down. The performer’s face is at one moment serene and smiling, at the next contorted with effort: the body is now a road-map of vascularity, an anatomical drawing, now a series of soft and rounded planes, as

sweeping as though drawn with a compass. At once aloof and intensely present, the body we see before us belongs to both the world of inanimate objects and the world of subjectivity and feeling, to the world of fixed being and the world of becoming.

It is obvious that this sophisticated array of self-canceling messages of affirmation and denial could never have been designed or introduced as a pre-planned system. Despite its relatively recent origin, bodybuilding (like most sports) has evolved over the years more by experimentation and the processes of trial and error than by deliberate design. As innovations were introduced, they would either be adopted because they seemed somehow “right” or would be abandoned. As with any internally consistent but outwardly hermetic code, the elements can be developed and elaborated only by those who speak and understand the symbolic language by which it operates. Had anyone set out in advance to devise a means whereby the human body could suggest, purely by its own visible configuration and presentation, a totality of physical being which by subsuming and reconciling opposing qualities both completes and somehow transcends them, one may well doubt that such an enterprise could ever have been successfully achieved. Only the accumulated and refined perceptions wrought by centuries of cultural tradition could have endowed the developed body with such imaginative potential.

Notes:

¹The reference is to Bernard Rudofsky’s statement that: “The erotic numbness that emanates from a perfectly proportioned body assured generations of city fathers that all the mythological statuary that clings to public fountains or dots a town’s parks, and all the caryatids and atlases carrying sham loads of palace porticos, are incapable of arousing sensuous pleasure.” From: *The Unfashionable Human Body* (New York Doubleday, 1971), 74.

²Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study of Ideal Art* (Hammondsworth: Pelican 1960), 25.

³George Butler, *Arnold Schwarzenegger: A Portrait* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990), 13.

⁴Lisa Lyon, *Lady* (London: Blond and Briggs, 1983), 12.

⁵Margaret Walters, *The Nude Male: A New Perspective* (New York: Paddington Press, 1978), 295.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Clark, *The Nude*, 199.

⁸Robert Kennedy, *Reps!* (New York: Sterling Books, 1985), 98-99.

⁹Robert Brain, *The Decorated Body* (London: Hutchinson, 1979), 146-147.

¹⁰R.D. Guthrie, *Body Hot Spots: The Anatomy of Human Social Organs and Behavior* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1976) 67.

¹¹Ibid., 159.

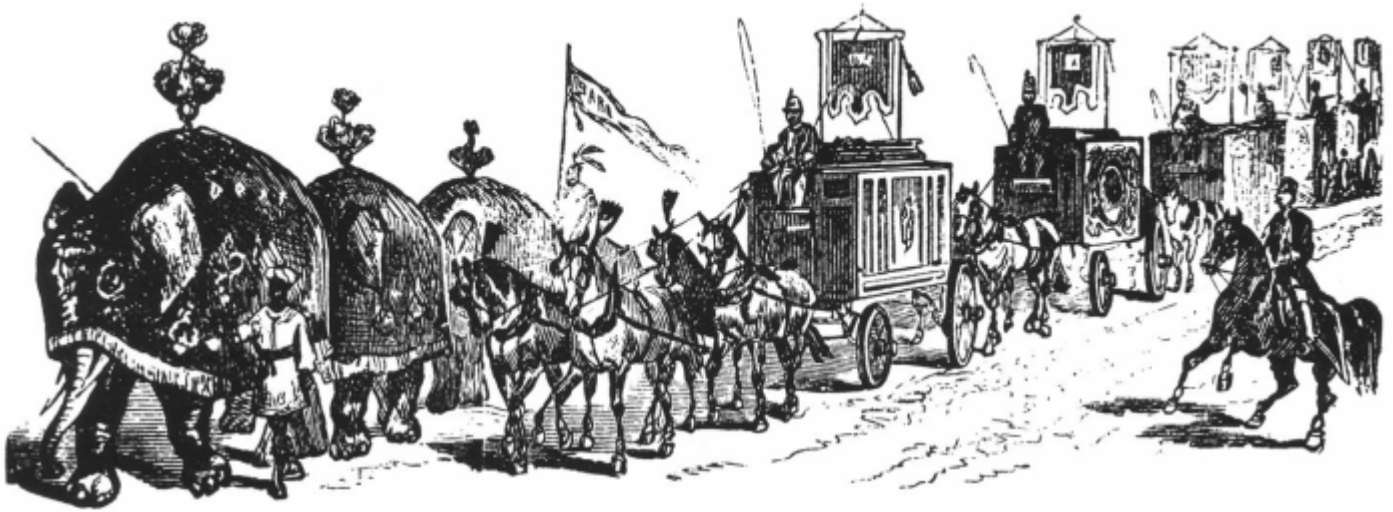
¹²Michael Malone, *Heroes of Eros: Male Sensuality in the Movies* (New York: Dutton, 1975), 73-75

¹³Ibid., 75-79.

¹⁴See Tony Crawley, *Screen Dreams: The Hollywood Pin-Up* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1982), 62 & 77.

¹⁵Suzanne Mostyn, “In trim for the hair-free alternative,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 10 October 1991.

¹⁶E. W. Delph, “The Silent Community Public Homosexual Encounters,” (Beverly Hills: Sage Sociological Observations, 1978), 8:71.



TOO MANY COOKES?

DAVID P. WEBSTER

While the extraordinary number of circus performers named Cooke may make research difficult, there should never be complaints of too many Cookes as this great old family of showmen played an extremely important part in popularizing circuses and were, with good reason, great supporters of strongmen. They, more than anybody else, set the scene for the Golden Age of Strength. Many think that strongman acts began with Samson and Sandow in late Victorian times but that is far from true; there were good, well-known strongmen one hundred years earlier and what's more, they were very versatile performers capable of feats which are beyond the capabilities of most strongmen today.

The Cookes were descended from a baronet, Sir Thomas Cooke, Bart., of Holkham Hall, Norfolk, a strongman who founded one of the very first travelling circuses and thus earned an enviable place in history. It was also one of the first families to take a complete circus abroad—but that is getting a little ahead of the story.

The exact date of the founding of this circus is difficult to pinpoint and it is likely to be earlier than generally stated. Certainly they toured in the early 1800s, but if Cooke's Circus was much enjoyed by Scotland's national poet, as has been claimed, then it must have been quite a lot earlier than was generally believed as Robert Burns lived from 1759-1796. This fits in with other accepted dates, e.g. Thomas Taplin Cooke, son of the founder, was born into the circus family in Warwick in 1782, so they were already on the road at that time.

Scotland became one of the Cooke's major locations, and it was because of their lasting reputation in this area and their unbroken links with strongmen that the author made a special study of this

circus dynasty. I found a great deal of interest in many of their original circus posters from the early 1800s and was lucky enough to purchase several Cooke circus posters at a church book sale in Edinburgh. It did not take me long to reach the conclusion that the Cooke family made a very significant contribution to the development of the circus. Even their very early posters featured strength and posing acts, which is not surprising considering that the founder and some of his descendants were just such performers.

Thomas Taplin Cooke was a professional strongman with his father's circus and in his act he supported on his chest a platform on which ten men mounted and were held solidly to great applause. This might merely have been bearing the weight while lying on the ground, a stunt of no great merit, but "being held solidly to great applause," as stated in the contemporary report suggests that it could be one of the earliest recorded examples of the Tomb of Hercules feat. He became well known in the Scottish fairground booths of the late eighteenth century and became even more like his father when he, too, became a noted proprietor. Like most of the Cookes, Thomas Taplin was an all-round athlete, a competent tightrope walker and talented equestrian. As he took over from his dad, and became thought of as the patriarch, the strongman's offspring intermarried into shows throughout the world. It was almost certainly the first major circus family in existence.

By going to Spain and Portugal, and appearing in Lisbon in 1816, Thomas Cooke's became one of the first overseas touring circuses. It was probably the second to do so, the earliest being Astley's, recognized as being the first circus-type entertainment as we know it today. After getting quite rich from this tour, the Cooke

AN 1831 POSTER ANNOUNCING A PERFORMANCE OF COOKE'S EQUESTRIAN CIRCUS AT THE HAYMARKET THEATER IN LONDON.

Alfred Cooke's Circus in June 1842 advertised "Unprecedented Evolutions, Athletic Displays and Herculean Achievements not to be equalled by Modern Gymnastics." In 1841, Astley's Circus was destroyed by fire for the third time and the manager of the

new Astley's of the 1850s was the before-mentioned William Cooke (1808-1886), second oldest son of Thomas Taplin Cooke and Mary Ann Cooke (nee Thorpe 1784-1868). William was atypical Cooke, a strongman like his father and grandfather before him, a superb equestrian and a most acrobatic clown. He was also equally at home on tightrope or slack wire. On the latter he is said to have revolved one hundred times "standing erect on the cord." That would be a clever trick! We suspect this was what was known as "short swings" as opposed to grand circles or long swings. One of William Cooke's incredible strongman feats was performed high above the ring. He hung upside down from a small platform and held suspended from his hands a grown horse. No doubt he was well strapped but it was nevertheless a spectacular presentation and the earliest performance I know of such a feat, although it was soon being copied by others.

On 22 February 1836 there was a benefit for Mr. William Cooke at Aberdeen in the northeast of Scotland and, of course, the beneficiary was well featured. The large woodcut on the poster for this special event shows a strongman of bulky proportions fighting with a lion. We speculate whether this was supposed to represent the star of the show. Posing was popular at that time and an "Italian Statues" act was one of the highlights. William and his brother James had put such an act together and a month earlier had presented an attractive series of tableaux —Two Marble Statues —and ten gladiatorial poses were described in the adverts.

With the passing of the years William Cooke became less energetic and more involved with animal training just as Zass, the Amazing Samson did almost one hundred years later. William was not only a third generation strongman but also a third generation circus proprietor, and clearly a very approachable individual. In *Circus Life and Celebrities*, Frost records how a circus entrepreneur in difficulties travelled to London on the night train and roused William Cooke very early in the morning. In spite of the unearthly hour, Cooke helped greatly, hiring him nine horses and at the same time arrangements were made for Thomas Cooke to be ringmaster and his son James to be a rider.

William Cooke leased Astley's from William Batty from 1853 until 1860. He gave up the lease at that time as Batty, a very rich man, wished to raise the rent or, alternatively, to sell the property. Cooke refused the terms offered and Astley's went into decline and never recovered. There have been contradictory views on the success of Cooke's tenancy. Thomas Frost, in 1875, wrote that all Batty's successors *with the exception of William Cooke* had signally failed. Cooke's presentation at Astley's of the Battle of Waterloo was undoubtedly a great box office hit and they always found indoor venues to be cost effective. However, William also diversified with travelling, tented circuses and some authorities believe these subsidized Astley's — though it could have been the opposite.

William Cooke retired in 1860 and his son, another William, took over the management until 2 April 1862 when the company and its assets were sold. The senior William died in Brixton, London on 6 May 1886, leaving five children by his first wife Mary Ann and two by his second wife, Sarah. Cooke's circuses remained prominent in Scotland until after the start of World War I. On several occasions I listened with great pleasure to personal descriptions by Allan

Jamieson, an old athletic friend who had attended and loved these shows. He knew well John Henry Cooke's Royal Circus at Bridge Street, Aberdeen, in the 1890s. John Henry, son of Alfred, was born in New York during the Cooke's tour in 1836. Apart from the family enterprises he was a popular star with Sangers and Henglers. The Henglers and Cookes worked in each others' circuses and the families intermarried. In Glasgow, where Hengler's Circus had a great following, John Henry Cooke was famous as a boxer and the Saxon Trio was another star attraction with Hengler's in Glasgow at the beginning of the century. Of course John Henry was also an equestrian of exceptional merit, indeed of world class, and in addition to nine American tours he travelled all over the globe with great success. He died on 22 August 1917.

Another benefactor to strongmen of that era was William Batty (1801-1868), a man of indomitable energy and enterprise, who toured widely from the 1820s until the 1840s. In 1841, showing great opportunism when Astley's was burned, Batty converted Lambeth Baths, London, into a circus and did good business. A year later at the Olympic Arena, as he called his new establishment, Batty booked a fine strength act which featured stunts similar to those of William Cooke and should not be overlooked in this review. The athlete, Walker, hung suspended by his feet and supported the weight of six men. He also held six cartwheels in the same way, although two of them were on his feet and the weight taken by slings. The performer is almost certainly H. Walker who was a wirewalker with Batty and also Cooke's around that time.

Lavator Lee (1817-1891) appeared in the same programme and on a special benefit night he threw twelve fifty-six pound weights over his head, vaulted over fourteen horses, threw a back somersault on the back of a horse going at full speed and turned twenty-one forward somersaults without the aid of a springboard. Most important, Lee did the Roman Chair exercise with an iron bar weighing one hundred pounds. In past literature, Felice Prades, known as Napoli (born in 1821), Professor Atilla (Louis Durlacher 1844-1924) and Sandow (Friedrich Muller, 1867-1925), have all been credited with the origination of the Roman Chair feat but, undoubtedly, Lavator did it much earlier than any of them. Lavator Lee was a good horseman, gymnast and balancer. He died at Battersea, London, on 18 March 1871 and was buried at Norwood Cemetery.

Evan Dewhurst, the clown at this show, got into strength stunts by walking on his hands carrying in his mouth two fifty-six pound weights. This was the same Mr. Dewhurst who appeared with Astley's and in 1840 with Cooke's Royal Circus in an act called "great Gymnastic Efforts." Dewhurst had a nice line of patter and was famous for his witty observations and curious speeches.

These are just a few examples of strongmen who were active in my own locality and throughout Britain long before the great names of strength we know today. Their lifestyles were shocking by today's standards — poor food, unsanitary conditions, no scientific training or barbells, unhygienic living quarters, with many lesser performers doubling as beastminders and sleeping alongside the animals. Yet their performances were outstanding and we welcome the opportunity to share this information and give credit where credit is due.



No doubt because so many months have passed since our last issue, we unfortunately have more than the usual number of deaths to report. The oldest of the fraternity to pass was Mike Mungioli of Jamaica, New York, who was born in 1908. Mungioli was the national weightlifting champion in 1937 and 1938, competing both years in the 126 pound class. An excellent "quick lifter" he created such national records as 152 in the right hand snatch and 194.5 in the two hand snatch.

A loss we felt very personally was the death of eighty-five year-old Sam Loprinzi of Portland, Oregon. Sam was the fifth of ten sons born to Charles Loprinzi, who came to the U.S. from Sicily before any of the boys were born and lived to see his strapping sons become ardent weight trainers. They were known as the "strongest family in the world," and in photos from leading popular magazines from the Thirties and Forties they look it. And Sam was the best of a good lot. So good, in fact, that he won the coveted "Most Muscular" title in the 1946 Mr. America contest. In later years he gained greater fame as the owner of one of the finest and best known gyms in the country, which is where we met him and his wonderful wife Helen almost twenty years ago. Then in his sixties, Sam looked like a healthy athlete of forty, and we told him we suspected he must be kin to Dorian Grey. So young and vigorous was Sam's appearance that our visit with him inspired us to write the (poorly titled) book, *Lift Your Way to Youthful Fitness*. After that experience, we became closer friends and when he sold the gym he gave us his beloved, bound set of *Strength & Health*. Not a week goes by that we don't use it and think of Sam, who was profiled by Al Thomas in the August 1991 issue of *IGH*.

Another departed giant is Stan Stanczyk, who died on July 3rd from a stroke at the age of seventy-two. One of history's greatest weightlifters, Flash Stanczyk had lived for many years in South Florida, where he operated a successful bowling alley. Noted for his blinding speed, Stanczyk won his first world title in 1946 in the 148 pound class, his second in 1947 as a 145 pounder, then topped it off in 1948 by winning a gold medal in the Olympics as a 181, making him the first man to win three consecutive world championships in three different weight classes. An incident occurred at the '48 Games which, according to those who knew Stan best, epitomized his character. What happened is that after he had snatched 292 pounds in the competition and received three white lights, he shocked everyone by refusing to take credit for the lift because he had felt his knee touch the platform. The lift would have been a new world record. He went on to win three more world championships, but his string was broken in 1952 when he "only" won the silver medal at the Helsinki Olympics. After his retirement as a competitor, he kept his hand in the game by coaching many young lifters in his area.

Dear *IGH*:

American history has it that Paul Revere's ride was to announce that "the British are coming." On October 5, 1996 in the Harbor Room of New York's prestigious Downtown Athletic Club he would have had to declare a warm welcome for Englishmen Malcolm Whyatt, Ian MacQueen, Scotsman Dave Webster and a couple of tables full of Brits and Scots who all lent an air of warm elegance to the fourteenth annual reunion of the Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen's Association. I could sense the presence in the room of the great Oscar Heidenstam looking on approvingly. And if that were not enough to make this year's event extra special, we were honoring a legendary titan of Olympic weightlifting — Norbert Schemansky — as well as another legend in the world of pre-steroid bodybuilding, George Paine.

These annual events serve to bring together those of us who were or who are still active in the Iron Game as well as those outstanding champions who inspired us to put forth our best efforts in an attempt to become the best we could be. Without fear of contradiction, it is safe to say that virtually every man who attends was originally inspired by the immortal John Grimek, either directly or indirectly. John C. Grimek was seated on the dais where a monarch belongs. Also seated on the dais were 1943 Mr. America Jules Bacon, the main man Vic Boff, Johnny Mandel, Rudy Sablo, and the honored guests. In attendance were so many great iron game personalities that it's impossible to mention them all. Among them were Russ Warner, Marvin Eder, huge Mark Henry, Jan and Terry Todd, Mike Greenstein who is the son of the Mighty Atom, 1946 Jr. Mr. America Val Pasqua, Joe Puleo, Bruce Wilhelm, Ike Berger, and Gary Cleveland. Try to imagine a mythical Iron Game event, rich in tradition, which would combine the Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen's Association for an evening with great Britain's Oscar Heidenstam Foundation. Well, this was it.

Vic Boff let me in on his intention to surprise Malcolm Whyatt by making him an unexpected honoree. Unaccustomed as I am to devious behavior, I nevertheless agreed to be an accomplice by taking the microphone and telling everyone about my United Kingdom adventures, my interaction with Oscar Heidenstam and what a great guy Malcolm Whyatt is. The mike was then turned over to Vic Boff who read the inscription on the plaque: "To Malcolm Whyatt guest of honor, founding secretary Oscar Heidenstam Foundation, Publisher *Health and Strength* Journal, with our deepest appreciation to you and the directors and trustees of the Oscar Heidenstam Foundation for your monumental work and accomplishments to promote and preserve the true ideals of physical culture and the Iron Game worldwide. With the revival of *Health and Strength* publication the connecting of the past with the present and future will be assured. With friendship and good will we confer the highest achievement award on this Saturday, October 5, 1996 from the members of the Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen's Association at our 14th annual reunion." There was a warm ovation for Malcolm and judging from the expression on his face it was obvious that he really meant it when he said "I had no idea. . . I'm at a loss for words."

Malcolm quickly recovered and remembered that he himself was there to make a presentation to Vic Boff. "Ladies and Gentlemen, it is an honor for me to be here this evening." Malcolm

then read the inscription on what he was about to bestow. "Presented to Vic Boff, President of the Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen Association U.S.A. by the Oscar Heidenstam Foundation England, in recognition of his superlative contributions to the international fellowship of physical culture, 5th October, 1996." There was another burst of warm applause and a cluster of photographers converged around the platform and did their stuff.

As I looked at the distinguished people seated on the dais and I greeted George Paine I felt very pleased that he was finally being honored. In the twinkling of an eye my memory wafted me back to 1951 when I was still a member of Boy's Division in the Bronx Union YMCA. I was a big kid already training in the weight room three days a week under the tutelage of Charlie Smith. Even though I was in the boy's division I trained with the men. There were lots of big, strong men training there. Some of them had huge arms and chests. One day a notice was posted about an upcoming physique contest for the Mr. YMCA title. Men from any of the New York City YMCA's could compete. The contest was to be held in the Bronx Union YMCA. All the big guys in the weight room were entered in the contest. When contest night came I was there to behold all the big guys waging war with their muscles. Well, that night there were several big strong guys entered but there was really only one man in the contest. He could have just stood there. He needn't have even posed. But he did pose. He also entered the subdivisions and won every one he entered with nobody else deserving to even be in the same contest with him. He actually refused to enter a couple of the subdivisions so that somebody else could win something. Otherwise it would have been a complete and absolute destruction of all competitors other than the obvious winner. In fact, it actually was total destruction tempered with admirable compassion by a man none of us had ever seen before. He was the most incredibly muscular man any of us had ever seen and his name was George Paine. That event, obviously, has remained indelibly ingrained in my memory. George Paine was to set the standard in muscularity for the next couple of decades.

My reflections only lasted a couple of seconds. Then we were back in the present and Dr. Al Thomas was called upon to make the presentation speech to George. Al told us, "I met George Paine in 1948. He was a man I greatly admired. He can talk about everything else in the world but he won't talk about himself, which is admirable." Al continued, "for sociological and historical reasons known to each one of us, the highest title in bodybuilding could not come to George Paine. The reasons for this had to do with sociological matters and matters of history but not with matters of physique. But the measure of the man, the measure of his character, the measure of his maturity, is that you do not waste energy, moral energy, that it would require to go back over these certain things of the past. That was then and this is now. And physique had nothing to do with the disappointment that was an aspect of then. He won America's most muscular man in 1953 and 1954, NABBA Mr. Universe class winner 1966, multiple class awards winner in 1951, 1965 and 1975. He could have gone on forever I would guess. Jr. Mr. America in 1951, he was the most muscular man in that contest. He was Mr. Eastern America in 1951, WBBG Mr. America 1973, WBBG over 40 Mr. America in 1977, Mr. Apollon, Mr. Gotham, Mr. North

America George told me that he won some of those titles two, three, or four times but that it's not important to remember all the dates because everybody knows about it. Amazing. George Paine should have been many things because of reasons beyond body. He was a hell of a man. He had big muscles and he had a big, muscular spirit." Al Thomas is a very passionate speaker and tremendous, long, enthusiastic applause came in response to what he said to us.

I have known George Paine for decades now and he has always been one of those almost larger than life figures. This was the first time I had ever seen him so obviously moved. This recognition was long overdue and I am grateful to have been present when justice was finally done. We live in an unjust world. It is most gratifying when finally a genuine attempt is made to help right some atrocious wrongs. George deserved to have won the coveted Mr. America title. We all knew why he was not permitted to. This evening was a laudable effort to make up for that long ago outrage. Jim Saunders' fabulous painting of George Paine doing the archer's pose, invented by him, was then presented along with his plaque from the association. George then said, "I am tonight a little bit stunned by my receiving this presentation. All throughout my bodybuilding career it has been my fondest wish to do the best I could, in the gym and on the stage. I've been doing bodybuilding for the past fifty years and this is the first time that I've been honored the way I have tonight. I certainly appreciate the committee and the Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen and Vic Boff for making this possible for me tonight. I thank everybody for coming and God Bless You." George's voice cracked once from the emotion of the occasion. He certainly deserved the thunderous standing ovation which he received. As the Mighty Stefan, our MC, then said, it appeared as though the majority of us were indeed misty-eyed at that point.

During virtually all of the decades of my own bodybuilding career, the name Norbert Schemansky was always prominent in the publications which covered weightlifting. I grew up just expecting to always see Schemansky there in *Strength & Health* along with Grimek and John Davis. Even though my interest was bodybuilding, Davis and Schemansky were also Iron Game heroes of mine and they were giants in the world of weights. I was, therefore, thrilled to now have the opportunity to meet the great Norbert Schemansky this evening. Arthur Dreschler spoke to us about the legend named Norbert Schemansky and it soon became obvious why the term legend is appropriately applied.

"I have the honor of presenting a distillation of one of the most extraordinary careers not just in the history of weightlifting but in the history of sport — the career of Norbert Schemansky. Norb's career spans three decades. He did it within the entire golden age of United States weightlifting from the early 1940s through the late 1960s. It was truly a unique career both in terms of the level of accomplishments and the longevity that it embodied. And, as if that was not enough, it was a career that includes one of the most amazing triumphs of the human spirit over adversity from his early teens forward. He's one of six athletes to win medals in four Olympic Games. He made the 1948 Olympics at twenty-four years of age and was able to remain on top when he was forty years old competing in the 1964 Olympic Games to win the bronze medal. He's listed in the *Guinness Book of World Records* as the 'most successful USA

Olympic weightlifter.' He's even been billed as the 'world's strongest man.'

"Norbert Schemansky was introduced to the sport of Weightlifting by his brother who was Jr. National heavyweight champion in 1940. By 1941 he had raised his clean and jerk to 235 pounds. In 1942, at age seventeen, he took fourth place in the national championships in weightlifting in the heavyweight class which in those days was anything above 181 3/4 pounds. Norb weighed 182. He drank some water to get up to that weight. From mid 1943 to the end of 1945 he served Uncle Sam in World War II and when he returned he began serious training in 1946. In 1947 he placed second in the National Championships. He made the American World Championship where he took second with 259, 286 and 353. He continued to improve during 1948 and took second again at the Nationals and won the silver medal at the Olympic Games, taking second to that great champion, John Davis. He continued to train hard through 1949. It paid off because he won the Nationals that year, the first of nine national championships that he won. Since they took only one lifter to the World Championships, they selected John Davis over Norb. Nineteen-fifty was a tough year for him. He took second in the Nationals. They only took one lifer in each weight class to the World Championships so Norb stayed home again. In 1951, they added the 198 pound class to weightlifting and so for the first time Norb was able to compete against men his own size. So he went to 198 pounds and won the National Championships. He made his first world record with a 295 pound snatch. It was the first of twenty-six world records that he made during his career. The next day he cleaned and jerked 370 to a world record and established himself as the premier 198 pounder in the world.

"He went on in November of that year to win the World Championships. He cleaned and jerked four hundred pounds later in the year to become the second man in history to make that weight. [Ed. Note: The third man, actually, Charles Rigulot having lifted the weight in the Twenties as a professional.] In 1952 he won the Olympic Games setting world records in the snatch, clean and jerk and total. A little later in the year he raised his clean and jerk record to 408 pounds to beat John Davis' world record. In January 1953, Norb raised his clean and jerk to 412.5 pounds and defeated John Davis. John had been undefeated since 1938. In 1953 he won the National Championships. But he began to have back problems and was unable to lift in the World Championships that year. However he came back strongly in 1954 and won the World Championship as a super-heavyweight. He had quite a record spree in 1954, making a 418 3/4 clean and jerk, a world record snatch of 330 and a world record total of 1074. Four days after that he lifted the Apollon Wheels, which had been lifted by only two other men prior to that [Ed note: Rigulot and Davis both lifted the Wheels, and Apollon himself is believed by many to have done so over one hundred years ago. Read David Chapman's translation of Professor Desbonnet's book chapter on Apollon and decide for yourself.] Norb lifted it quite easily. The Wheels weighed 166 kilos, about 366 pounds. Three days later he clean and jerked 424 pounds for another new world record.

"So, there he stood in 1954, truly the world's strongest man and at a relatively light bodyweight. He weighed about 230 pounds

at that time. The world was at his feet and it looked like Norbert Schemansky would dominate that weight class for years to come. Unfortunately, in 1955 he began to have really serious problems with his back. It became so crippling that he could not compete and in 1956, when everyone else was getting ready for the Olympic Games, he was having back surgery. By March 1957, however, he was back in shape and won the new 225 pound weight class at the Nationals. But his back began giving him trouble again and in November 1957 he had his second back surgery. Although the doctors advised him to retire from weightlifting, saying that he wouldn't be able to even walk properly let alone lift weights, he began to train again very carefully and in March 1958 he was back up to an 880 pound total. In 1959 he battled back to third place in the National Championships. He was now thirty-five years old. . . . By 1960 he took second place at the Nationals totaling 1075 which was a personal record and then went on to take third in the Olympics. In 1961 he made 380, 320 and 405 for an 1105 total. Then he made a 343 pound world record snatch. Here's Norb at thirty-seven years old following two back surgeries and he's once again a world record holder.

"In 1962, he made lifts of 390, 350 and 410 for an 1160 pound total. At the World Championships, his 1184 pound total beat Paul Anderson's total which had been set in 1956. . . . In February 1964 Norbert lifted 400, 355 and 445 for a 1200 pound total. He was the first American ever to do that although it was never officially recognized because he was an extra lifter. By now, Schemansky had a really Herculean physique at 265 pound bodyweight. On October 18, 1964 he became the oldest man in the history of weightlifting to win a medal at the Olympic Games. He was over forty. He had now won four Olympic medals and at that time no one had ever won four medals in an individual Olympic sport. He won the Senior Nationals in 1965, took third in 1966, and in 1968 suffered a knee injury which kept him from making the 1968 Olympic team. In his mid-fifties, he was still capable of doing a three hundred pound snatch and a four hundred pound clean and jerk. But age eventually takes its toll. Now his fellow lifters refer to him as the professor. If anybody knows the joy of victory and the agony of defeat, it's Norbert Schemansky."

There was tremendous applause as the legend stood up and was handed the microphone. Elegantly dressed and still charismatic, his statements were short and to the point. He simply said "I thank you very much. I'd like to thank Vic Boff. I'd like to thank all of you for attending and most of all I'd like to thank all of you for just remembering." What an impact he made.

Later, in the lobby of the Downtown Athletic Club, I extended my hand to Schemansky and complimented him on his statement of thanks earlier in the evening. I have shaken hands with Rocky Marciano and Sonny Liston among others. When Schemansky grabbed my hand, it disappeared in a hand so massive that I could sense the unlimited vise-like power. This was my last impression of the evening as I departed — in awe — of the Legend named Schemansky.

Ken "Leo" Rosa
The Bronx, New York

Ed Note: The 1997 Association of Oldtime Barbell and Strongmen Dinner is scheduled for Saturday, September 27th, at the Downtown Athletic Club, 19 West Street, New York City. For tickets and hotel information, contact Vic Boff at 4959 Viceroy Street, Suite 203, Cape Coral, Florida, 33904. Telephone: 941-549-8407.



Dear IGH:

It was with great pleasure that I saw the letter of Carl Linich on page twenty-two of the September 1996 edition of *Iron Game History* complete with a picture of Andy Jackson taken in 1995.

While in college, I had the good fortune to meet an experienced weightlifter who had attended Notre Dame – Daniel Cullinane. Dan had a very complete gym and seemed to many of us the most knowledgeable person around in weightlifting. It was he who introduced me to *Iron Man* magazine. He pointed out that I spent a lot of time lifting but managed to read virtually nothing about how to do it. Many times when we were working out (and Dan handled some very heavy poundages in his basement gym) he would often exclaim, “Don’t you read anything about what you’re doing?”

Dan had lifted with Father Lange at Notre Dame and he knew that I could use more weights. It was my dream to own an Olympic bar. One Saturday we drove from our respective homes in Bergen County to Springfield, New Jersey, and the home of Andy Jackson. I was amazed at the equipment in his basement and purchased two long dumbbell bars for some heavy dumbbell lifting. I particularly admired the “Jackson sets.”

Dan Cullinane knew that I was very taken with Mr. Jackson and his many stories about the Iron Game. Dan knew Andy Jackson and was able to tell me a few stories about him.

Because Dan owned three or four good Olympic sets, he offered to sell me his Jackson set. I was twenty-one years old at the time and jumped at the chance to buy it. I used that set in college, through law school, and have continued to use it to this day. The bar still has great “whip” for quick lifts (which I am no longer attempting). At age fifty-three, I regard the Jackson set as a family heirloom. My three sons have used it (two who did so as part of their running program for their respective schools, Cornell and Dartmouth). It is my hope that my sons will be able to pass on the Jackson set to any children that they may have.

Although I live and work in New Jersey, I do not have Mr. Jackson’s home address. Therefore, it is my hope that someone in your organization might be able to pass this letter on to him or, at least, to Carl Linich, so that Mr. Jackson will know that the Hammill family has gained a great deal from his traditions and the effort he put into the Iron Game, particularly the Jackson set which we still own and use.

James F. Hammill
Moorestown, NJ

Dear IGH:

Loved the Oscar Heidenstam dinner report and Minichiello’s meanderings. Many memories brought back . . . delightful.

Incidentally, Hackenschmidt did not invent the Hack lift (let alone the Hack machine). He performed it, though, and got his name tagged on to it because of this. Rather like Larry Scott’s name got attached to the preacher curl (which he did not invent) or Arnold’s name was used in the Arnold press (which he did not invent) or the entire series of bodybuilding techniques claimed as Weider principles . . . which he did not invent.

How do I know about Hackenschmidt? I asked him about it well over forty years ago and he denied it passionately. He had no interest in claiming the honor.

Bob Kennedy,
Muscle Mag International
Mississauga, Ontario



Dear IGH:

Enjoyed the September issue of *IGH*, especially the reminiscing by Tom Minichiello. I only met Tom one time, but it was an important occasion. He came with Ben Weider when they met with representatives of the AAU physique committee (Bob Crist, Ralph Countryman and me) in Chicago to discuss affiliation of the AAU with the IFBB. That particular meeting was a little strained because Bob Crist was not in favor, but it was short and the rest is history. So, it was enjoyable to read both excerpts from Minichiello’s book. He had an honored place in the history of physique competitors. I wish him the very best.

Wanted to also let you know that Ripped Enterprises is online at: <http://www.cbass.com>. Carol is the web mistress, and she worked long and hard on our site. It includes some of my best photos — age fifteen to fifty-five — training history, diet and exercise philosophy, frequently asked questions and, of course, information on our seven books. Carol adamantly denies it, but it’s a good piece of work. We plan to make frequent updates and improvements, so we’d welcome comments from all concerned.

Have been training hard —especially enjoying the power snatch and clean —have gained strength and size and I’m looking forward to having some photos taken on the eve of my sixtieth birthday. I’m also thinking about a new book about my recent progress and other developments. Keep up the great work.

Clarence Bass
Albuquerque, NM



APOLLON

From Edmond Desbonnet's *Les Rois de la Force* [*The Kings of Strength*]

Paris: Librairie Berger-Levrault, 1911

Translated and Introduced by
DAVID CHAPMAN

Ed Note: As readers of *IGH* know, David Chapman has undertaken the task of translating Edmond Desbonnet's *Les Rois de la Force* [*The Kings of Strength*], one of the classic texts on the history of the Iron Game. We are deeply grateful to David for sharing his labor of love with us, and with all of our readers.



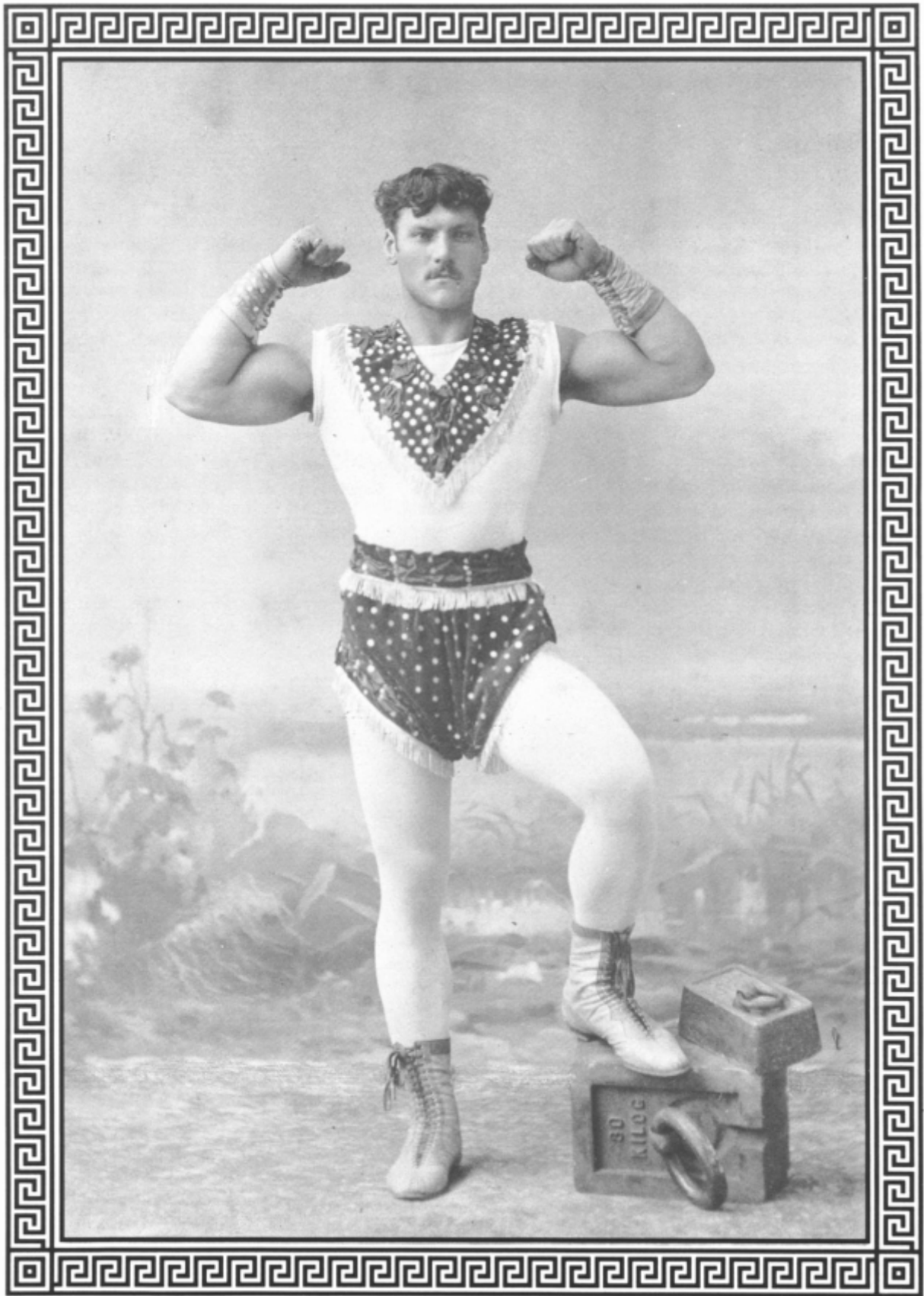
"Certain people," Edmond Desbonnet reflected in later life, "are born painters, poets, or musicians; others are warriors, brigands or orators. I was born a professor of physical culture."¹ If we are to believe his pronouncements, there was never any doubt in his mind that he would devote his life to the "regeneration of the French race" through the medium of physical exercise. Desbonnet had always been attracted to muscular strength and physical beauty, and thus it was only natural that he would later become one of Europe's most influential proponents of fitness and exercise. After investing and losing all of his and the greater part of his mother's considerable fortune in an attempt to establish schools of physical culture in the north of France, Desbonnet decided to take one last chance and go to Paris. There, he hoped to be successful in the gymnasium business. It was a risky enterprise, and he came close to failure, but gradually the young man was able to build a clientele and become successful. At the apogee of his physical culture empire, there were about two hundred Desbonnet Schools all over the Francophone world.

When it came to muscle building, Desbonnet's emphasis was always on moulding a slim, wiry physique, not a stocky, bulky body. Even so, the father of French physical culture was quick to admit that some men were far above the common herd when it came to strength and muscularity, and the regular rules of physical beauty did not apply to them. These were strongmen in every sense of the term, and they were the athletes that had fascinated Desbonnet since

his earliest childhood. As the accounts in *The Kings of Strength* attest, young Edmond had a nearly photographic memory when it came to these idols of strength that he had worshiped in his youth. It was not until he reached the ripe old age of twenty-one, however, that he was able to attend a performance that galvanized him as never before. It was then that he first witnessed Apollon.

Just as Desbonnet had been born a professor of physical culture, Louis Uni had been born a strongman. Tall, massively built and willing to show off his extraordinary muscular power, Uni had performed around France for a year or two by the time Desbonnet first saw him. During that time, he had acquired the stage name that he was to keep until the end of his life, "Apollon," the French word for the ancient god of culture and manly beauty. In 1889 Apollon came to Desbonnet's hometown of Lille in Northern France, and he amazed the young man in the audience with such unprecedented strength that Desbonnet was stunned to his core. Here was a man whose strength was far in excess of that of any of his contemporaries, and from that time onward Desbonnet made Apollon the subject of glorification in books and countless magazine articles.

Apollon needed all the help he could get since there were very few ways for strongmen to make a living in the early days. At the top of the ladder were those who performed in a music hall act where they displayed their strength and agility in a variety theater. At the bottom of the scale were the poor, street corner performers



AS THIS RARE CABINET CARD SHOWS, FEW PROFESSIONAL STRONGMEN HAVE BEEN SO BLESSED BY NATURE. AT SEVENTEEN YEARS OF AGE, LOUIS UNI – APOLLON – STOOD 6' 31/4" TALL AND WEIGHED 253 POUNDS.

PHOTO COURTESY: TODD-MCLEAN COLLECTION

who did their feats outdoors with a few miserable props and threadbare costumes. Somewhere in the middle were those who performed at the seasonal fairs that dotted the French calendar. These *fetes foraines* as they were called provided temporary employment to a number of strongmen who were able to find themselves a place in one of the *baragues* or carnival booths which dotted the site of the festival. These fairs are unlike anything in Anglo-American culture, and since Apollon performed in them it is useful to say a few words about them.

Although these fairs were similar to American carnivals, they had some striking differences, too. One of which was the booths where most of the entertainment took place. These gaudily decorated, temporary structures featured a porch-like walk in front, stairs that took the customers up to the door, and then down into the performance arena where a crude stage was set up. In order to seduce passersby into the booth, the performers regularly held “parades” when all the athletes (in the case of a strongman or wrestler’s booth) would line up and the barker would begin his patter. After the tout had finished his business, the audience would pay for their tickets and tile in to see the show. Taunts and good-natured banter between the audience and the performer were more or less expected in this type of entertainment, and (in the case of wrestlers) after members of the troupe fought one another, they would then dangle a tempting cash prize before the crowd and entertain challenges from the audience.²

Many other strongmen had made a decent living with their performances at the fairs, but Desbonnet points out that Uni was an utter failure in this line. Poor Apollon’s lack of business sense — or any other kind of sense for that matter — is one of the principal themes that run through Desbonnet’s account of his friend’s life. It is clear that the clever and quick-witted Edmond had little respect for his colleague’s laziness and mental torpor. Uni is constantly portrayed as a jovial but rather stupid man who used as little energy as he could get by with. A constant refrain that Desbonnet expresses over and over is “What might Apollon have achieved had he chosen to exert himself?” Despite the Professor’s obvious respect for the strongman, it sometimes appears that Desbonnet fell into the strongbody/weak-mind fallacy — then again perhaps Apollon was every bit as obtuse as he was presented.

The portrayal of Apollon as a henpecked giant is also a common literary convention. We are reminded of a host of other great men who were abused and dominated by beautiful, conniving women. Samson was unmanned by the wily Delilah, Socrates was abused by Xantippe, and Hercules was forced to wear women’s clothes and spin wool with the ladies at the court of Princess Omphale. Perhaps it is also significant that Apollon’s wife came from a family of circus entertainers; his spouse’s specialty was lion taming. Considering Desbonnet’s wide reading in the classics and his genius as a raconteur, we must wonder if he was absolutely faithful to the truth in

this instance. Unfortunately we shall probably never know for sure.

In 1911 when Desbonnet published his “history of all strongmen from ancient times to our own day,” Apollon was still in superb physical fettle and he continued to perform around Europe. But like so many others whose biographies were recounted in *The Kings of Strength*, Apollon was destined to come to a melancholy end. Somewhere along the way, Apollon had separated from his high-strung wife, but not before she had borne him a daughter. Because of his schedule of performances, he saw very little of his family, and eventually they became completely estranged. Then, in 1923 a sad announcement appeared in the magazine *La sante par les Sports*; it was an appeal for assistance, and read in part: “the famous strongman desires employment as a right-hand man [*un homme de confiance*]. Our champion has retired from the stage with an adequate fortune, unfortunately it was in Russian securities which are unproductive at the moment. Life is expensive, and Apollon would be happy to have guaranteed room and board in exchange for work which he would furnish. Apollon could serve as a handyman castle watchman forest warden, etc. Anything that he might oversee would be well guarded.”³ As bad luck would have it, Apollon had invested in Russian stocks and bonds at a time when the Communist revolution had rendered all such capitalistic holdings totally valueless.

Perhaps his appeal for employment yielded success, for about a year later it was announced that the once-great athlete would embark on a new and somewhat unexpected career as a movie star. Apollon had performed earlier as a strongman in the sentimental stage melodrama *La Loupiotte* [The Kid], but in 1924 the magazines announced that he would play the title role in a new film grandiloquently called *Episodes of Roman Life under Tiberius*. The obviously elderly strongman appeared in a series of publicity pictures with his co-star, the pretty French-Canadian actress Madge Kindall. Apollon appears in his brief Roman robe, displaying his thick, muscular legs as well as his much vaunted Roman physiognomy.⁴ It is unclear at this remove whether or not the movie was ever produced, but in 1926, the former strongman appeared in an even more prestigious production. He was cast in the role of “Triton” in a Rex Ingram photoplay entitled *Mare Nostrum*. This was an allegorical epic set during World War I involving sea battles and beautiful spies and enjoyed a moderate success in Europe and the U.S., but it was pulled from circulation in the late 1920s because of its anti-German content.⁵

These measures must not have had much impact on Apollon’s finances, for not long afterward another brief article appeared announcing the great man’s death on October 18, 1928.⁶ Although the news had been conveyed to the sporting world via *La Culture Physique* and the premier sports magazine of the time, *l’Auto*, Apollon’s funeral was very sparsely attended. Desbonnet reported that aside from the widow Uni, only a few faithful friends walked behind the coffin on its way to the cemetery.

Apollon had admitted himself into the hospital a short time earlier to have an operation on a throat abcess caused by excessive tobacco use and aggravated by inattention to earlier symptoms. He was sixty-seven years of age when he died. "Apollon," wrote Desbonnet, "who performed gloriously before millions of spectators came to die alone, without fanfare, without fortune, and virtually abandoned in a little provincial town. This is the sad and undeserved fate meted out to the greater part of professional strongmen. Sic transit gloria mundi . . ."⁷

Although Desbonnet was disappointed by the tiny crowd of mourners at the great man's funeral, he was determined to keep the strongman's memory evergreen. The writer's true feelings were best expressed when he bid his old friend adieu in the obituary he wrote for *La Culture Physique*. "Until we meet again, dear and greatly missed Apollon," he lamented. "We will sing your glory and the sadness of your unhappy fate. You may believe in us. Great and noble form, you have departed but you leave us with your memory intact."⁸ True to his word, Desbonnet dedicated himself thereafter to perpetuating the memory of his amiable, flawed, and extraordinarily powerful friend Louis Uni.

—David Chapman

Notes:

¹Edmond Desbonnet, "Chacun a sa tache ici-bas: L'homme sachant ce qu'il veut et voulant ce qu'il fait porte toujours bien sa destinee," *La Culture Physique* 42.576 (April 1938): 107.

²For more information on the traditional French fairs, see Charles Rearick, *Pleasures of the Belle Epoque: Entertainment and Festivity in Turn-of-the-century France* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985).

³"Qui Veut Employer Apollon," *La Sante par les Sports* 27.92 (June 1923): 168.

⁴Dupont-Servoise, "Apollon au Cinema," *La sante par les Sports* 28.106 (August 1924): 223-4.

⁵Leo Gaudreau, "Tid-bits of Strongmanism," *Muscle Power* 3:2 (July 1947): 33. Also see Ann Lloyd (ed.) *Movies of the Silent Years* (London: Orbis, 1984), 138-139. The athlete appeared in *Mare Nostrum* under the stage name "Apollon Uni." I have been unable to find any information about the earlier film, *Episodes de la vie romaine sous Tibere*.

⁶"Louis Uni dit Apollon n'est plus," *La Culture Physique* 32.463 (November 1928): 346.

⁷Edmond Desbonnet, "Apollon repose a Evreux," *La Culture Physique* 32.463 (December 1928): 382.

⁸"Louis Uni dit Apollon," 346.



APOLLON THE EMPEROR OF ATHLETES

BY PROFESSOR EDMOND DESBONNET

I lived in Lille in 1889, and one morning while crossing a street I came across a huge horse-drawn wagon piled high with weights, dumbbells, railroad wheels and grills of iron bars. The vehicle was festooned with gaudy flags and it displayed posters featuring an extraordinary athlete draped in an ancient Roman cloak with his right arm emerging from this antique robe. At the strongman's feet crouched a lion, the symbol of strength. This piece of printed matter announced the arrival of the famous Apollon who was coming to the Flemish capital for the very first time and would make his debut at the Théâtre des Variétés on the me Jean Roisin.¹ As you might well understand, I was at the theater that evening, bored with everything that came on the stage and anxiously awaiting the much anticipated turn that I had come to see.²

Finally, the orchestra struck up a triumphal march and the

curtain rose on scenery representing a stronghold with an entry door made of heavy iron bars turned toward the audience. When the curtain rose, the stage was plunged into a half-light, but then rapid footsteps which caused the floorboards of the stage to tremble announced the arrival of the athlete who played the role of an escaping prisoner. In the murky light we could barely distinguish Apollon's form which was wrapped in a large, dark cloak. He was bent over in order to elude the gaze of the sentinels who were pacing on the walkways of the castle.

Suddenly, the alarm was sounded. The prisoner was discovered, and he then had but one option: He must escape toward the audience, but the iron bars stood in front of him. He threw himself at the gate and shook the bars violently, but the iron refused to bend. The guards advanced in the dark, and we could hear their cries. The

prisoner's strength was truly unleashed in the face of this danger, and he grasped the bars in his fist shaking them vigorously. While forcing the bars, the man's arm was extended across the gate, and we saw that it was as big as an ordinary man's thigh. The only sound in the theater was a gasp of amazement at this sight.

The prisoner's cloak opened in a little in the effort and we discerned a leg which resembled the pillar of a temple. Grasping two bars in his hand, Apollon pulled them together using a tremendous grip strength. He then squeezed his head and upper body through the bars with still more effort, and eventually the bars yielded, and the prisoner was free.

Light then flooded the stage, and Apollon, this god of beauty and strength, tossed aside his cloak with a proud gesture thereby revealing himself to the audience in a silken costume which clung tightly to his muscular physique. The impression made by this handsome athlete who was elegant, strong, and endowed with a unique form, was unforgettable. The dramatic entrance through the bars was truly magnificent. Had the feat been performed by an athlete who did not possess Apollon's muscular bulk and the visage of a Roman gladiator, the whole thing would have been ridiculous and perhaps a little grotesque. This feat could only have been performed by Apollon.

While the stronghold set was removed, Apollon came to the edge of the stage and displayed his impeccable physique for the admiring crowd. One first noticed his beautifully shaped and highly expressive head with its long, naturally curly brown hair. Next, in quick succession, the spectators saw his white, evenly spaced teeth which gleamed as the giant smiled broadly; his small ears molded closely to his skull; his fine brown mustache; and his clear, gray magnetic eyes. I have never forgotten the strongman's nearly superhuman beauty after having the good fortune of seeing him for the first time, particularly since he was in the prime of life.

Finally, out came the weights and barbells, and Apollon prepared to deal with the masses of iron. To begin with, he did a series of arm extensions and rim lifts with twenty-kilo block weights, which in his hands seemed to be as light as wooden paving blocks. Next, he juggled a block weight of fifty kilos with the greatest ease, making the cast iron twist in the air once, then twice in front of him and next tossing it over his shoulder twice and catching it by the ring, finally stopping it in an arm extension. Apollon then climbed up on a fairly high table and bound a fifty-kilo weight to his right foot, then taking a twenty-kilo weight in each hand, he lifted his right leg and proceeded to lower his entire weight on his left leg until the leg with the fifty-kilo weight touched the floor. The great strongman then pulled himself up once more using the strength in his leg and thigh all the while performing a double arm extension with the two twenty-kilo weights until he brought the weights back to the table. It was extraordinary! This feat bore the name of "The Roman Table."

He continued by lifting his eighty-kilo block weight, snatching it easily and ending in an arm extension, pausing for a time with this mass stretched out horizontally. [Ed Note: Desbonnet's meaning is unclear. Although he could snatch by the ring an eighty-kilo block weight, neither he nor anyone else could hold 176 pounds at arm's length horizontally.]

From here, he passes to the feat called "The Bridge of Death." This consisted of juggling fifty-kilo weights gripped only by their narrow rims between Apollon's thumb and forefinger and held over the head of a man lying on the ground. Next, a piano was placed on the strongman's chest together with a pianist playing an entire tune. During this feat, the strongman's head and feet rested on two chairs which had been set a short distance apart and with his body extending across the void. The total weight of this load was around 350 kilos.

He then finished by lifting an immense pair of railroad wheels which had been connected by a bar of such thickness that very few strongmen were able to budge them off the ground. (These locomotive-car wheels weighed exactly 118 kilograms.)³

Only those who have actually seen Apollon perform his feats can appreciate the man's strength by seeing the almost casual way he handles even the greatest loads. Signs of effort are completely foreign to this great Hercules — everything is accomplished by great strength. Let us bow down before this man, this demigod. He is most certainly the King of Strength — he is most certainly the Emperor of Athletes.

One of Apollon's feats of strength which he executed regularly in his performances was done with the aid of two ropes attached to each of his impressive forearms. In this way, Apollon holds back two automobiles attempting to drive off in opposite directions. Nothing could be simpler!



APOLLON'S BIOGRAPHY

Louis Uni, known as Apollon, was born in Marsillargues (Hérault) on January 28, 1862. His ancestors were all tall and strong and had lived in the region. Tradition says that Louis Uni was a descendant of Marsillargues's founder, a gladiator named Unicus, meaning "Unique." This ancient Roman was remarkable for his beauty, his physique, and his vigor. The gladiator was fated to be thrown to the lions a few days distant on the occasion of a special Roman holiday, so he fled Rome one day at the head of a troupe of gladiators in order to escape from the games of the circus. Little desiring to try his strength against that of a lion or some other ferocious beast, Unicus, the unconquered gladiator, came to the seacoast, seized a

large fishing vessel, and fled across the Mediterranean. The men were pushed onward by a favorable wind, and eventually they reached the coast of Gaul where the boat beached itself near the mouth of the little River Vidourle. The fugitives continued their journey up this coastal river that runs through the provinces of Gard and Hérault until they arrived at a place which seemed propitious. Here they stopped, pitched their tents, and Marsillargues was founded. Unicus was the leader of this colony, and later his descendants called themselves simply Uni, and they (according to tradition) were the ancestors of the famous Louis Uni, better known as Apollon.

Regardless of whether this little story is true or not, it is indisputable that Louis Uni possesses the most typical appearance of a Roman gladiator that it is possible to imagine. Antiquity has never produced features of equal beauty.

Whether you are an antiquarian or simply curious, call to mind the statue of the Emperor Justinian — there you have a perfect representation of the athlete Apollon. In order to get a correct idea of the great man's physique, it is necessary to imagine some famous gladiator of the later Roman empire — one who might have become the darling of the patricians, the idol of the mob, and a rival in popularity to Caesar himself.

Today, Louis Uni is in his prime, and those who have seen him cannot forget him as he appears draped in his red Roman cloak leaving bare the arms of terrifying power that are as oak trees. Such men have personified strength for sixteen or eighteen centuries. He would have been noticed in the history of an era when Godefroy de Bouillon [1061?–1100] fought against the Saracen warriors and split the enemy from skull to saddle with one blow of his long sword.

Apollon's first appearances caused a sensation in his role of a gladiator as he burst the iron bars of his prison and the chains which encumbered him. Without any special training, he was able to accomplish such feats of strength easily — feats which other strongmen can only do after much hard work and many years of practice. Apollon is still the only one who can seize with just one hand four twenty kilo weights and swing lift or snatch them easily overhead without the slightest effort.

Truly, he is superb. This demigod is as impeccably built as the Farnese Hercules, and when he uses his gigantic strength as in the feats mentioned above, he brings all his muscles into play.

A strongman is remarkable when he measures forty centimeters in the arm and the calf; Apollon measures fifty-one centimeters [approximately 20"] in the arm and the leg. Next to this man who stands 1 meter 90 centimeters tall, other men appear miniscule and stunted. Apollon is incomparable in the one-handed snatch. He puts the weight into the air by the strength of one arm with little effect on the rest of his body, whereas a number of athletes bend their legs and even then can only get halfway through the lift before giving up.

On December 20, 1896 at my school of physical culture in

Lille, Apollon snatched a 160-pound barbell with his right hand. He then attached four weights which together added up to 176 pounds and repeated the same snatching feat. Afterwards, he swing lifted the weights twice in very rapid succession without returning the weights to the floor. All of these feats were done to perfection with only the arm coming into play. If Apollon wanted to "cheat," he would not lift four twenty-kilo weights, but at least five.

Apollon worked little in France since he was always able to find excellent engagements in foreign countries. Ah! If he had only been German, English or Russian, then French music hall managers would have been willing to pay dearly for his services. In England they would have erected a statue in his honor. But what can we do? The French are always French; they love the exotic, eager to celebrate the foreign and to ignore their fellow countrymen.

Here are Apollon's measurements taken in 1896: height 1 meter 90, chest (normal) 1 meter 29, chest (expanded) 1 meter 36, waist 1 meter, arm (flexed) 49 centimeters, forearm (relaxed) 42.5, forearm (flexed) 46, calf 50, weight 120 kilos.

Casts were made of Apollon's arm at different times in his career, and I have these in my collection. Here are Apollon's measurements taken at the height of his strength in 1900: Height 1 meter 90, chest (normal) 1 meter 28, chest (expanded) 1 meter 38, waist 1 meter 02, right arm (flexed) 51 cm., forearm (relaxed) 44.5 cm, forearm (flexed) 48.5 cm, calf 52 cm., weight 127 kilos.

Here, then, is Apollon's complete life story:

Apollon's grandfather measured 2 meters 02; his father was very strong, and he stood 1 meter 92 in height. People quote many prodigious feats of strength that Apollon's father was able to perform. He died seventy-five years of age from an accident. Apollon's mother was small but very strong. She died at eighty-five in 1906. Apollon has a sister who lives in Nîmes and who stands at 1 meter 84 in height. The strongman also had a brother who measured 1 meter 83, but he died of a fall from a horse when he was in the 11th Cuirassiers in Lyon; he was only twenty-two at the time of his death.

Due no doubt to the effects of atavism, the young Louis Uni thought of little but strength, the stage, the arena, the circus, and so forth. When he attained the age of fourteen, the lad escaped his parents' house and joined a traveling Italian circus at Lunel near Marsillargues. It was during a performance at the Caramagne Circus that the police nabbed the boy in the midst of his acrobatic turn and returned him to his father.

Finally with many misgivings, Louis's parents allowed him to leave home and work with Felix Bernard [1857-1900] and Pietro Dalmasso [1852 - ?] who wanted to make him into a wrestler.⁴ This, however, did not accord well with his tastes since he did not have a sufficiently combative temperament. He preferred working with weights.

Alas, the athlete's life is not always rosy, and the young Uni

came to know days when he went to bed with a grumbling belly, for he sometimes found himself working with a troupe which led a hand-to-mouth existence. When young Uni saw several famous strongmen snatch or swing lift three twenty-kilo weights, he responded by lifting four; if he had seen them lifting four, he would quite simply have lifted five. No one ever came along to spur him on to anything heavier.

Pietro had the young athlete snatch a seventy-seven-kilo barbell in the following fashion: he put the barbell in front of Apollon's feet at a distance of ten centimeters from Apollon's toes and had him do a one-handed snatch with the weight under the pretext of training him. The young Apollon lifted just as Pietro wanted and seemed to take no notice that the level of difficulty had been increased by about twenty percent.

Apollon worked with Victor Sosson from whom he won his seventy-seven-kilo dumbbell by snatching it overhead. He traveled also with the Ossud and Coradi circuses, and he even returned from Italy by foot since he did not have enough money to pay the train fare to Menton. Louis worked as well with Henri Péchon [1850-?] and August "the Butcher" [1849-?] In Toulouse an amateur, Mr. Valinot, made a cast of Apollon's arms, and these are casts which figure in my collection. Apollon was sixteen and a half at this time.

At Coursant he snatched a large axle of sev-

enty-eight kilos which because of its width few strongmen could have budged off the ground. Baby of Ariège [a wrestler active in the 1880-90s] was among the spectators. Apollon then went to Bordeaux to the Jeantien carnival arena where he had a very successful run; eventually all of Bordeaux came and applauded the young colossus. Several Catholic priests came to see him there and later invited him to dine with them. Husbands brought their pregnant

wives to see Apollon perform and then had the women touch young Uni's arm in the hopes that the sight of such a handsome man would lead to the favorable physical development of their progeny.

Lacaisse the wrestling impresario came to Bordeaux at this time to have a match with Pietro, but he took one look at Apollon and immediately saw how he could make a profit from him. He took Louis Uni to Paris where he made his debut at the Folies Bergère with his iron bar number. Apollon had a tremendous success there, and from the Folies, he went to the Hippodrome where he lifted four hoses while being suspended from a trapeze. He performed also at the Grand Orient on the Rue Cadet. He trained at the arena of the athlete Paris who was called "the boat man" where he lifted eighty-seven kilos which Sandow [1867-1925] was unable to press up. He performed also at the



APOLLON AT THE AGE OF SIXTEEN WITH WHAT IS BELIEVED TO BE THE SEVENTY-SEVEN KILO DUMBELL WHICH HE WON FROM VICTOR SASSON BY SNATCHING IT TO ARM'S LENGTH OVERHEAD.

PHOTO COURTESY: TODD-McLEAN COLLECTION

Cirque d'Hiver.

Since there were no shot-loading barbells (or only very few in that far off time), twenty-kilo block weights were usually used. One day, Lacaille, [amateur weightlifter, Count Georges] San Marin [active circa 1885], Bernard and Pietro wanted to find out just how strong Apollon really was. They filled up four hollow twenty-kilo weights with lead until they arrived at a weight of ninety kilos. They then took these to Joigneret's [1834-1896?] gymnasium on the rue des Tilleuls in Montmartre, and after letting Joigneret in on the trick, they took Apollon and bet a bottle of champagne that the strongman could not do a one-handed snatch of the four "twenty-kilo" weights on the first try. Apollon was convinced that his friends were playing a joke on him since they had seen him lift eighty kilos about fifty times at least, and he was reluctant to bet since he thought the men were making fun of him. When he was certain that they were serious, he made the bet and lifted the weights on the first attempt apparently without the slightest notice of the unexpected presence of the ten additional kilos.

Apollon next performed in London at the Aquarium with Felix Bernard Pietro, Limousin [1860-?] and Bazin "the Rifleman" [1841-1888]. The arrival of the young Uni in London was a great event since the English had never seen a colossus like Apollon.

One day Apollon moved into a splendid carnival booth at the annual fair called the "Fete de Neuilly, and he thereby created unpleasant competition for Marseilles's wrestlers who had their own stall at the fair.⁵ Here then is an extract from a newspaper relating to this sensational exhibition.

Wrestlers who are jealous of their calling and are poisoned by wrath, ready and willing to smash anyone, including those who get in their way, especially the public and the competitive athlete! None other than Marseilles's troupe and the troupe of Apollon, both of them professional strongmen, promise to fight it out in a Homeric battle. Great will be the enjoyment this year when Parisians of both genders who love sporting displays view the phenomenal attraction at this year's Fête de Neuilly.

Marseille or Apollon?

Marseille, or the archaic style wrestling, features its older, breathless, flabby, wrestlers with their drooping masses of flesh cinched into their tights. Even so, these men are known to the public, and applauded and supported by the generosity of the public out of the kindness of its heart.

Apollon, or the new style wrestling, features the great Apollon who is fresh from his debut this winter at the Folies Bergère and performances at the Grand Orient. Apollon and the wrestlers from the south of France: Boyer of Nîmes, Boyer of Marseille, Lagneau of Paris, and Robinet of Toulouse.

Apollon's fair booth was never empty during the entire Fete de Neuilly. The men who made up Apollon's troupe had such beautiful physiques that they completely overshadowed the ugly, obese wrestlers who comprised the Marseille group.

Fran here, Apollon went to Lille, Antwerp, Brussels (where he subdued several lions in the Pezon Menagerie), Louvain, and Liege where he beat Lhonneux, the strongest man in the city. At Wulff's establishment in Brussels he beat the German Karl Abs [1851-1898] who could not deadlift the fifty-pound weight by holding it by the rim (although Apollon did run-lift arm extensions with it), nor could he take an eighty-eight-kilo barbell to his shoulder with one hand (this was the same weight with which Apollon did a right-handed snatch every night).

Apollon next left with Paul Pons [1864-?] to tour across Europe, with Pans taking on all comers in wrestling and Apollon accepting all bets when it came to feats of strength. In 1889 during the Exposition [Universelle de Paris], Apollon became the champion of the Athletic Arena of the Quai Debilly where he was head and shoulders above the most famous strongmen in the country. From his very first arrival in the ring, Apollon was given tremendous ovation without even having to perform any feats in order to justify this enthusiasm. The mere sight of this demi-god was sufficient to satisfy the crowd, and despite the valor of wrestlers like Bernard, Pietro, Crest [1860-?], Fournier, and others, all eyes were on Apollon — on his masculine beauty in all its splendor.

What one always admired with Apollon was the simplicity of his attitudes. He never displayed eccentric or forced poses; the athlete never puffed out his chest while sucking in his belly in an attempt to make his already powerful physique look even more so. He never flexed his mighty biceps just to impress an audience; Apollon contented himself with just being himself, without boasting without flexing anything. He had only natural poses; his bearing was as majestic as that of an emperor but without any aristocratic arrogance. He was a magnet for the public's affection, and that was as it should be.

Apollon made a great deal of money with his engagements, and eventually on the advice of some poorly informed friends, the gentle giant got it into his head to become the director of a theater where he could perform every evening. He hoped that by doing this he could increase his bank account. He therefore took over the Cafe Fontaine, 6 rue Fontaine in Paris, renovated it, and shortly after, under the name of the "Concert Apollon," put on theatrical programs with athletic acts thrown in. He had quarrels with the entertainers and annoyances of every sort, and he finally had to abandon the theater after having lost a tidy sum of money.

The strongman then left for Tours, and there he directed another music hall, but he was no luckier with this venture and returned

to Paris in 1906 where he had to dust off his old act once more. My friend Albert Surier and I went to see him at the Étoile-Palace Theater where he was performing, and the following review appeared in the magazine Sports on October 4, 1906 under the byline of Albert Surier.⁶

APOLLON RETURNS TO THE STAGE

After an eclipse that has been all too long, Apollon, the king of strongmen, has returned to the stage. He is currently performing in an act that the gentle giant describes as "new" on the boards of a music hall near the Arc de Triomphe.

It is practically useless to recount the exploits and the measurements of this incomparable athlete. We all realize that virtually no one has attained the same dimensions as he. If Apollon had

wanted to train by the rational processes currently in use, he would have assuredly raised athletic records to a point where no one would have been able to touch them.

But Apollon has remained a strongman according to the old-time definition; he juggles with real twenty-kilo weights more easily than a carnival Hercules might with phony weights weighing in truth ten or twelve kilos.

Apollon begins his current act with his famous entrance from behind the iron gate, snapping bars and chains. Then he juggles with a fifty-kilo weight, grabs it using only his thumb and forefinger and then passes it above the face of a man lying on the ground as if he were carrying a lace fan. Next comes the "Roman Table," followed by lifting with one hand an enormous seventy-kilo weight until it is at arm's length overhead.

Apollon usually precedes his performance with a discourse that is always appreciated by those who are acquainted with the finer points of athletics. "Here is my weight," he declares. "It weighs 140 pounds, at least it does when it's at arm's length. If I ain't able to do it, I'll leave it where it's at." Do not look too closely at his grammar or his logic, for despite his shortcomings, the exploits of this amazing man are not exactly within the reach of most people.

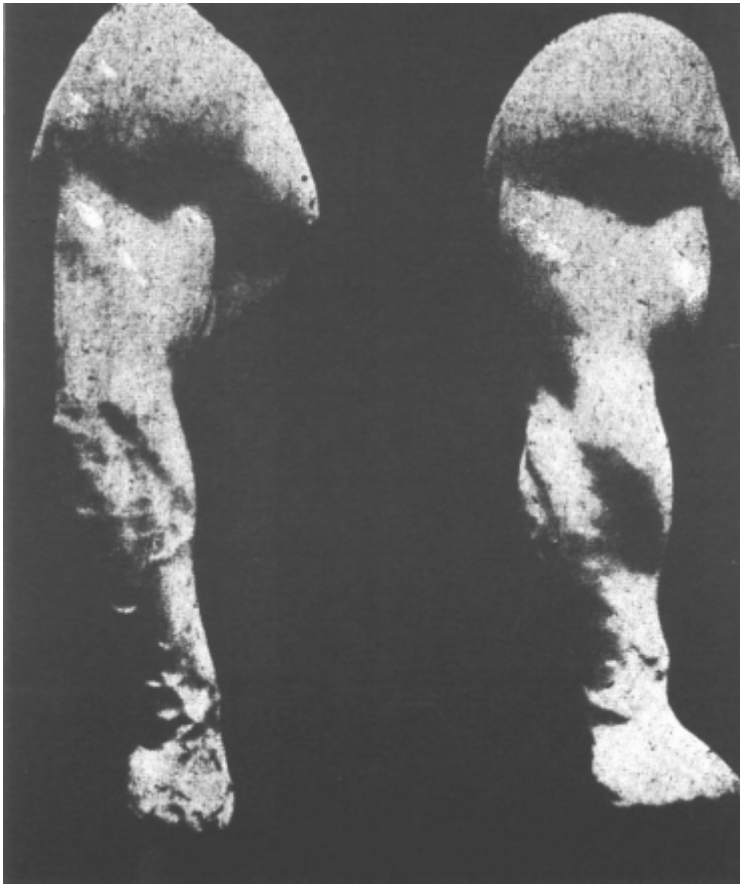
As a finale, Apollon extends himself across two chairs, his neck resting on one chair back and his feet on the other. In this position he supports a piano weighing 660 pounds while several bars of music are played on it.

Although he is a little dulled by the years, Apollon has retained his muscular power of long ago. Like the marble caryatids that support palatial porches, Apollon gives the impression of invincible strength.

Since I was one of Apollon's great admirers, I would like to have seen him quickly amass a big fortune on account of his strength and his physique. Because of this, I devised for him an athletic act where the artistic side would have played the greatest role. I am convinced that Apollon would have made a fortune if he had followed my advice and if he had adopted my special act consisting of artistic poses appropriate to his type of face and build, to his corpulence, to his deportment, and (because of his simplicity of mind) to his cerebral development.

Here, let us indulge in a brief parenthetical discussion prior to explaining the act that I imagined for Apollon.

What is more elegant, more beautiful, suiting more to display masculine beauty than the costume of a torador worn by a real bullfighter who is dark, small, well muscled, broad shouldered, agile, and vigorous? Clearly, there



PART OF LOUIS UNI'S FAME CAN BE TRACED TO HIS MASSIVE BONE STRUCTURE AND UNUSUALLY LARGE MUSCLES. HERE, FOR INSTANCE, A PLASTER CAST OF APOLLON'S ARM ON THE RIGHT IS CONTRASTED WITH THAT OF A PROFESSIONAL WRESTLER FROM THAT ERA NAMED WOLFF. WOLFF'S ARM MEASURED 16 3/8" WHILE APOLLON'S BICEPS MEASURED OVER TWENTY. EVEN MORE UNUSUAL, HOWEVER, WAS APOLLON'S ENORMOUS FOREARM.

are few masculine costumes which can rival this ideal apparel. Why do we consider it to be so splendid? It is because it is worn only by those who make their living in the bull ring, and because of the exercises they use to acquire speed, suppleness, and strength, they are all (or nearly all) well put together. Their form-fitting costumes simply would not look well on those who do not possess an excellent physique.

But suppose for an instant that this pretty costume were to be worn by a tall, thin blond man having "chicken legs" and long, thin arms and with his elbows poking through the cloth. If this man had never partaken of physical exercise, then you would immediately have a very bad opinion of the toreador's outfit. Those who have seen the giants of 1 meter 85 like Padoubny [1871-?] or Zaikine [c. 1908] attired as Cossacks, have quite rightly admired these two handsome specimens of the Slavic race. The costumes display the men's broad shoulders and narrow waists, and we all might regret that this attire is not worn in France. Imagine the same costume worn by a short, thin man with a hollow chest and utterly without muscles, and you will have a very unfavorable impression of this costume which at one time might have seemed so handsome.

It is equally true for the Cossack's uniform as it is for the toreador's costume: it is the man inside that matters. An athletic act must conform to that which it presents: to an energetic face, energetic gestures: to a feminine face, feminine gestures.

Apollon had the head of a Roman and the measurements and girth of a gladiator. This man needed to be placed in a set representing a Roman amphitheater: he should have been clothed in a gladiator costume, and given the gestures of an arena fighter who seeks the needs and joys appropriate to his primitive brain: combat, games, wine, orgies, and battle.

Here then is the act I imagined for Apollon together with descriptions of the sets.

The first set would represent the Gladiators' School at Pompeii: Vesuvius appears in the background as it belches out smoke and flames.

In the second scene: the courtyard of the school of gladiators with all the athletes' cells arranged around it and with different characters painted on the canvas background. The first scene: the cell of a gladiator; inside Apollon trains for his next combat. The different physique poses show us the gladiator's workout. This is "Unicus" (unique, the one and only) the handsomest and strongest of all the gladiators, the idol of the plebeians, the favorite of the Roman courtesans.

Apollon is scantily dressed, and he takes up two dumbbells, the cestus [type of boxing glove], a rapier, a shield, etc., and he shows the public the different methods of training for the professional gladiator's terrible art.

The second set shows the Roman Coliseum on a festival day —just such a day when the ancient Romans demanded with such

avidity for their *panem et circenses*. The circus is packed from top to bottom.⁷ At the back one can see Caesar's box in front of which stand the gladiators who are about to fight that day. They bow to the ruler before perhaps dying.

After a triumphal march, Unicus makes his entry dressed for combat. He displays his half-naked body, one arm covered by a protective sleeve decorated with chain mail the other arm naked and guarded by a shield, greaves of steel cover his lower legs and calves, a helmet with a lowered visor is on his head. Coming before the imperial box, Unicus pulls up the visor to his helmet, bows, raises his right hand holding his short gladiator's sword, and in a loud clear voice delivers the famous greeting, "Ave Caesar, morituri te salutant."

A revolving pedestal would permit the audience to see the gladiator's gestures and equipment completely.

Then, according to the needs of the program, Unicus would simulate a battle with a real or imaginary adversary.

After a series of blows, the gladiator is wounded: he collapses to the ground and presses a hand to his wound where his life's blood trickles away; his other hand is placed on the floor preventing him from falling horizontally. His desperate eyes seem to want to pierce the ground in order to dig the bed of his final slumber. His thoughts fly to his native land where his aged parents wait for him desperately, perhaps his doomed eyes also perceive the pleasures which awaited him had he been the victor.

Finally, he shows us the agony that radiates from him before his death. He succumbs at last in front of his fellow gladiator who shows no pity for the dying man's youth strength, or beauty. Then the gladiator slumps down stretching himself out to full length showing his great size to good effect. We see his monstrous forearms hanging inert, his enormous legs, and his pale head. His corpse seems to reproach the entire human race for having permitted this horrible crime — and all for the barbaric pleasure offered to bloody brutes. It is a useless sacrifice of a beautiful human body and a waste of precious life for a needful race.

The third set reveals a Roman brothel. The victorious gladiator comes to spend the money earned by his muscles in sensual pleasures. After countless drinks from the cup that cheers, the gladiator seeks to conquer the favors of the serving girl who has helped to induce his drunkenness. But Messalina, in her constant search for handsome men, keeps an eye on the victor because she desires him. Taking advantage of her victim's intoxicated state, Messalina manages to drag the man off his couch and then pretends to be one of the inmates of the house of pleasure.

The role of Messalina would be played by Apollon's wife since she possessed a distinctive figure and because she had a queenly bearing and would be able to infuse the role of Claudius' wife with great mastery.

Apollon would finish the act with some characteristic Roman

poses. For an encore, he would perform inside a special frame, the results of which would be not without success.

They would be:

- 1st Milo of Croton pulling apart his tree stump
- 2nd Farnese Hercules in repose
- 3rd Samson and Delilah
- 4th Samson destroying the temple of the Philistines
- 5th Nero experimenting with poisons on his slaves
- 6th Cain and Abel
- 7th Strength protecting Woman
- 8th Mars and Venus, etc. . . .

Never, I believe, could a strongman act have aroused artistic ideas like the one that might have been presented by Apollon. Let us not forget that Apollon had a head that was absolutely typical of the ancients, and he had the physique to go with it. This is something that one does not find easily, especially if one wants to represent a characteristic Roman since those specimens have become exceedingly rare because of the different hybrids which have drowned the primitive types.

In any case, Apollon did not understand at all that he could put on a similar act, despite his taste for everything that had to do with gladiators. The act could have been shown in Paris, London, Rome, Berlin, Naples, Saint Petersburg, then in the great cities of America and finally in Oceania where every attraction coming from Europe meets with an overwhelming success. The hearty colossus simply could not understand that he could make a fortune without his weights, dumbbells, or enormous loads — in fact, with nothing more than a few props and a painted backdrop. He constantly asked me if I could not include a few feats using four twenty-kilo block weights, his famous eighty-kilo rectangular weight, and his piano supported on his mid-section in the ancient Roman act. Needless to say, I never wanted to mix these acrobatic feats with my reconstruction of antiquity: that would have been sacrilege, and I did not want to commit such a blunder.

It only remains to cast an eye over several newspaper clippings from various cities where Apollon performed. These highly complimentary excerpts verify the interest that the entire press gave to Apollon. It is particularly important to remember that the press at this time was not very sympathetic to sport and that there was not a single magazine which was exclusively dedicated to sport as we have nowadays.

From Périgueux

He is most assuredly the best strongman in the world. Contrary to many others, he delivers more than he promises. A mere glimpse of this perfect example of strength and elegance will be enough to stimulate the curiosity of amateurs.

Apollon and Hercules, gods of strength, must have had the

same powerful appearance as this man. Those who defeated the terrible monsters of antiquity must have looked like him. At once strong and supple, his tense arms play with enormous weights as a child might toy with a ball. Apollon suspends himself with his head placed on the back of one chair and his ankles placed on the back of another, and on his chest is slung a piano. Then a gentleman perches himself at the instrument and plays it as if he were resting on a polished parlor. Apollon arises with a smite on his lips when he is relieved of this enormous weight.

The strength-loving public would certainly want to see this phenomenon who, like Hercules, can display himself by performing incomparable feats.

From Limoges

When Apollon appeared on the stage of the Alcazar or in a circus ring, the mere sight of him elicited hurrahs of enthusiasm from the astounded spectators.

From Castres

We should rather call this giant king of strength "Hercules." He has remained unbeaten until now, and perhaps he is invincible. The name of Diana's brother might actually be more appropriate because of the man's admirable and supremely elegant musculature.

Apollon was born in Arles — that ancient Roman city — and we wonder if he just might be the descendant of an ancient race and if drop or two of gladiator's blood might circulate in his veins. His vigorous physique evokes the era of Olympic wrestling and makes us think of wild beast tamers in the arena upon whom the decadent emperors deigned to smile.

From Mont-De-Marsan

Apollon, a superbly muscular young man of twenty-three years has earned the nickname "the strongest man of the nineteenth century." That he is truly worthy of this title surprises us not at all; after all, he possesses arms that are as large as the thighs of ordinary men.

From Algiers

In his feat called "The Bridge of Death:" Apollon juggles with a fifty-weight directly over the head of a man lying on the floor and catches the weight by pinching it with his fingertips just a few centimeters from the "patient's" face.

The muscular strength of this Hercules is equally spread throughout his body. For instance, the power of one of his hams is called into play when he climbs upon a table. He lifts up (in addition to the bulk of his own body) a fifty-kilo weight attached to one foot and carries with both outstretched arms a twenty-kilo weight

at the same time.

It is a feat that can only be described as "prodigious."

From Tunis

Apollon placed a piano on his chest and then had the orchestra director climb up, too. The poor man had doubtless never played on the abdomen of a god, and he pounded out a terrific din that passed as a tune. A wiseacre was heard to remark that the conductor was certainly weaker on the piano than Apollon was underneath it.

From Lyon

Apollon is certainly a worthy descendant of the well-known ancient gladiators whose names have been preserved in history. We were reminded of the king of strength by his entrance on the stage, his passage through the enormous bars, and his sweeping movements as he posed in his cloak.

From Lille

Apollon claims to be a real Parisian, and to prove it, he expresses how he feels in the midst of his exercises by saying, "Fai caou" [It's hot].⁸

From Havre

at the Alcazar Theater of Havre

. . . Crest, whose strength has not prevented gracefulness; Fournier from Lyon; and Andre who reminds us of Alfred. This Andre, the elegant Parisian model who has been applauded so heartily at the old Circus Ingouville, is a handsome young man with a beautiful form and aristocratic limbs. Andre is the last word in unclothed elegance. Then we come to Apollon who, because of his physique, calls to mind the ancient Farnese Hercules.

From Bordeaux

*And how might we praise you,
You who are both Hercules and Apollon?
You who have carried so long and far the fame
Of our dear France;
You who have burst your chains,
Oh, Champion of the universe
How might we celebrate your rebirth
If not in verse?
Your muscles are chiseled in perfect proportion
And our eyes are very pleasantly charmed
By the grace of your presence,
But the strength which God has given you
You flaunt so effortlessly.*

We hardly notice the swelling of steely muscles on your body. You betray no emotion on your face when you lift overhead an axle and two railroad wheels weighting 150 kilos. That is a real feat of strength!

From Liège

Apollon takes an iron bar as fat as a finger in his right hand and by giving it three sharp raps with his left hand, he bends it in two; from this action, as one might well understand, his blood is liable to gush out following this feat. Apollon finishes by hanging from a trapeze by his knees while lying and balancing a draught horse weighing 750 kilos.

From Saint-Étienne

Apollon is called "the god of music" because he smilingly supports a piano on his chest. People were allowed to come on the stage in order to lift and test the weights that Apollon uses.

From Paris

When, one wonders, are the French going to recover from their mania of believing that everything foreign is superior? Thus, at this time when wrestling is a very popular spectacle, why do we make such a big to-do over champions from Greece, Romania, Turkey, England, America, and who know where? Especially since our beautiful land of France has produced such brawny fellows as Apollon and others.

Go see them and you will come back convinced that the old Gauls might still compete fearlessly with the men of any other nation. Is that not correct, Apollon? Is that not correct?

From Grenoble

He is always superb with his musculature worthy of [Léon] Cladel's [1835-1892] famous painting Ompdrailles.

From Valence

As the start of his performance, he enacted the escape of a prisoner from the Bastille. In order to put his plan in action, he bent the huge iron bars of his cell.

From Montpellier

Do not confuse the real Apollon with the pygmies who masquerade under his name. They ate like the ass in the fable who covered itself with a lion's skin.

From Saint-Étienne

This Hercules (as he deserves to be called), this colossus arrives on stage amid the noise of a fusillade, and he then forces open the bars of a prison cell.

From the Newspaper *The People*

And after seeing Apollon, it seemed that he symbolized the great masses of people who although colossally strong and solid, allow themselves to be led by a few myrmidons, and thus are easily crushed. Just like Apollon who is not disturbed by a buzzing fly, the people remain too benevolent.

From Namur (1890)

What a man! What stature and what strength! He looked like one of those ancient heroes that we find in old prints. So must have looked the athletes and wrestlers of ancient Rome. Imagine a height of 1 meter 90 at least, arms measuring 53 centimeters around, legs to match in stature, and a chest that is not disproportional either. Apollon is indeed worthy of his name. He is a handsome man in every sense of that word—a veritable Hercules with all the grace of the god whose name he sports. Apollon can certainly be considered one of the strongest men in the entire world.

He was born in Arles, that most Roman of all cities, famous for being the home of pretty girls (and also of handsome boys if one is to judge by the specimen who is today among us). Had he worn a toga and tunic, he would have looked like a Roman emperor. His strength is superhuman. Next to Apollon, the strongest men are as children. Most certainly, Apollon deserves to be seen as a truly curious phenomenon.

**From Perpignan
Concert Parisien**

Apollon, the strongman-acrobat, ends tomorrow, Sunday. We have never seen a man of equal strength in Perpignan.

From Namur

Apollon is a handsome man in every sense of that term. He is admirably built; his physique is very harmonious; between his enormous arms and above his legs which are veritable columns, rests a well-situated torso that is nicely chiseled, sinewy, and strongly muscled. His biceps are models of nervous energy.

When he appears before the public in his flesh colored tights, partly concealed by the scarlet Roman cloak that glistens with golden threads, he calls to mind (as if to deceive us) those vigorous athletes and gladiators who long ago elicited the lust-filled glances of highborn Roman ladies on the Appian Way.

It is an extraordinary and remarkable thing when Apollon seizes a fifty-kilo weight by a mere pinch grip and holds it over the head of one of his wrestlers. He then throws down the weight with the ease of a player who tosses a card on the table.

From Toulouse

The spectacle which the valiant Apollon has given us is

so fine as to run no risk of turning to horror if, by a possible accident, the mass of iron which he uses were to crush the skull of his brave and ravishing assistant. The highlight of the evening was the feat in which Apollon places on himself a long iron device from the extremities of which hang two wooden boats equal in weight to a dozen men.

When everything is ready, assistants lift the two boat supports and Apollon thus supports on his chest an apparatus weighing almost one thousand kilos.

From Nantes (1897)

The modern gladiator, Apollon, experienced a crescendo of success every evening. He was applauded and called, and since this Hercules is gentle as a lamb and enjoys giving others pleasure, he took up his weights, his train wheels, and the Roman table and performed his feats a second time.

From London

**The International Wrestling Championship
at the Westminster Aquarium**

There is at this time a man stronger than all those we have seen in England. He is a Frenchman who is called Apollon. He has competed against Sandow, but I doubt that he would risk his recent victories on another stage since he was engaged exclusively by the directors of the Alhambra. Apollon is twenty-five years old, and his forearm is stronger than his biceps. He lifts a cluster of iron blocks weighing more than 189 pounds. I can attest to this fact. He lifts overhead an enormous 157-pound barbell in a single movement and juggles it with other weights which apparently possess a weight equal to that of an ordinary anvil. He offers £200 to anyone who can do the same.

Here are Apollon's measurements taken in the lodgings of the colossal Frenchman by Mr. Horne: height 1 meter 89.5mm, chest 1 m 30, arm 49 cm, forearm 0.4475m, thigh 70.5, calf 50, body-weight stripped 242 pounds.

From London

Apollon desires to deposit £200 for contests of weightlifting with Cyclops [pseudo. of Franz Bienkowski 1862-1922], Louis Cyr [1863-1912], Sandow, Sampson [1859-?], etc. Apollon lifts a 360-pound barbell and raises 1,400 pounds; The props which he brings for his athletic performances weigh five thousand pounds. He is the largest strongman that we have seen since Emile Voss [?-1910] and Carl Abs.

From London

Apollon throws a fifty-six-pound weight into the air, and he catches it in the palm of his right hand; next, he does the same

thing with a 160-pound weight, then taking it between his thumb and index finger, he throws it about six feet. A magnificent 188-pound barbell is then brought out which he easily lifts overhead, keeping it there for around twenty seconds, and laying it gently back down on the floor. Finally, four weights weighing two hundred pounds were lifted overhead with a single hand by means of a handkerchief passed through the rings.

Apollon is six feet three inches tall (1 meter 925) and weighs 274 pounds in his street clothes.

From London

Yesterday evening Apollon went to see Cyclops and Sampson's performance. He came up onto the stage just like an ordinary spectator in order to lift the weights of the two strongmen. Sampson spoke to him in French begging him not to take away a colleague's livelihood. Apollon then withdrew.

After the show, the three strongmen met once more at a pub frequented by music hall artists, and Cyclops displayed his famous arm. At the request of several fans, Apollon bared his own arm, and the frightful arm of Cyclops seemed to be that of a child in comparison. Never in the history of strongmen did anyone ever see an arm like that of Apollon.



Excerpt from *The Little Journal* for Monday, October 9, 1893
"Strong Men"

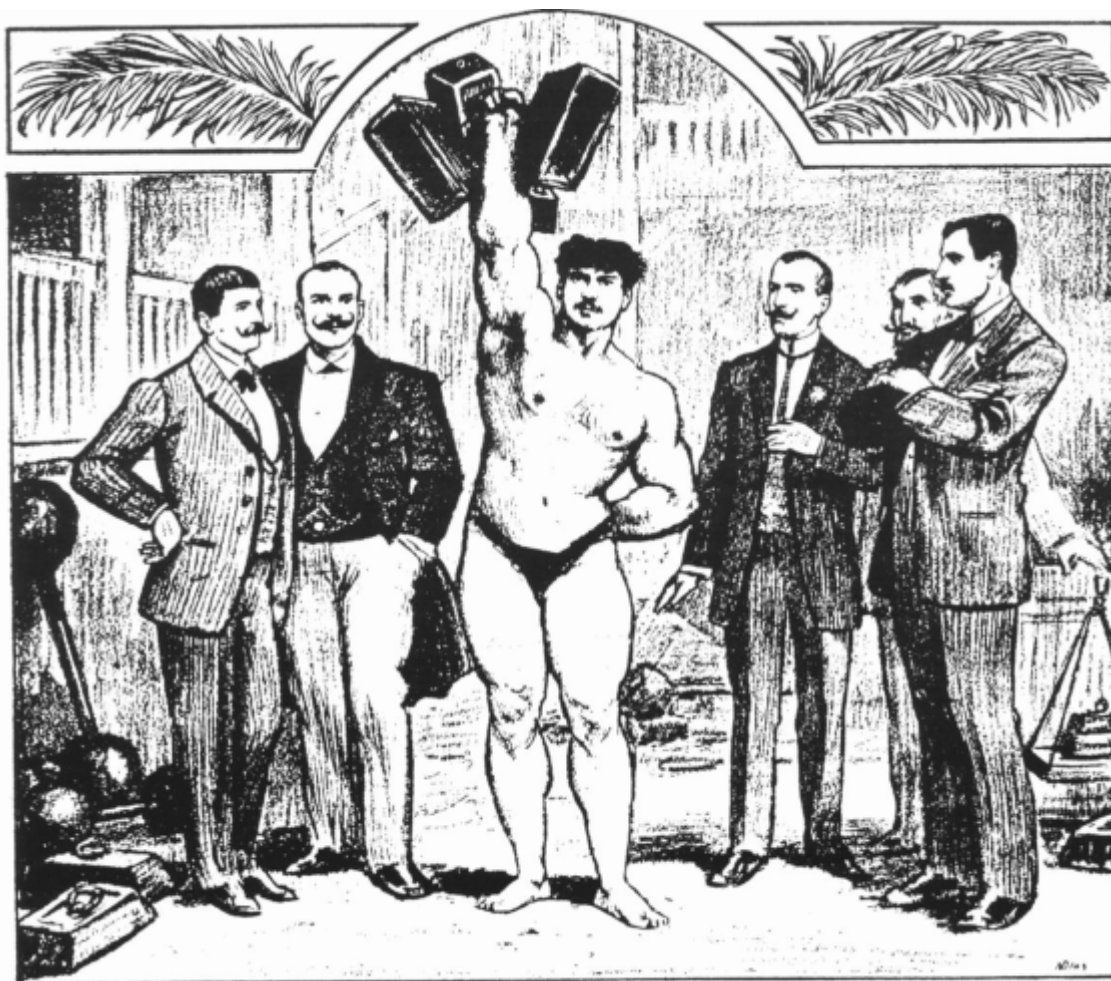
What is a strongman? If I were to ask you this question out of the blue, you might doubtless mull over my query with a bit of astonishment and tell me that a strongman is a strong man. But you are going to see that my question is not as simple as it might seem. You doubtless recall the porter who trudged more than a day with a two hundred pound sack on his shoulders. Obviously, this porter is a strong man; nevertheless, I would be prepared to wager that if this man were asked to lift a few dumbbells, he would easily be beaten by any athlete. It is naturally quite true that one must have muscles in order to carry such a weight on one's shoulders,

but it is more a matter of practice and balance. One must be otherwise muscled in order to handle the dumbbells. The truth is, as Mr. Strehly who is both one of the most distinguished university professors and an outstanding gymnast, has testified, when one establishes a comparison between the strength of two individuals, we often use comparisons that are extremely exaggerated.⁹

Strength is much like height: two or three centimeters make the difference between a medium and a tall build just as a third or a quarter more in the number of kilos marked on a dynamometer registers the difference between a strong man a very strong man. We have therefore considered that those readers who are interested in physical exercises might be happy to learn what is the maximum attained in a few feats by today's professional and amateur strongmen. We will inform these exercise fans in the surest way while taking advantage of our own background as well as that of Mr. Strehly. In addition, we will use the extremely precise information supplied to us by Mr. Joigneret, a citizen of France and the world, who has had the greatest experience in athletics.

Let us first say a few words about Mr. Joigneret (a person who is most certainly not an ordinary figure of a man). Mr. Joigneret is a former strongman and gymnast whose reputation is very great. It was he who first lifted a horse white suspended by his feet and who earned hearty ovations for his work in America. This man opened an establishment in Montmartre which he gave the unusual name of "The Gymnastic Cafe." This restaurant is divided into two parts; on one side there is a wood floor with several tables, and on the other there is an arena covered with sawdust for weightlifting and wrestling. There cannot be a single strongman in any corner of the globe who is not familiar with this cafe where everyone in the world of strength is ranked according to his merits.

Mr. Joigneret's barbells and dumbbells are very carefully weighed as soon as they arrive, and since the feats are performed in the presence of professionals who naturally have an interest in belittling his competitor's strength, one can easily see that trick-



A RARE ILLUSTRATION OF THE DAY COUNT GEORGES SAN MARIN BET APOLLON A BOTTLE OF CHAMPAGNE THAT HE COULD NOT SNATCH "EIGHTY" KILOS WITH ONE HAND. WITNESSING APOLLON'S SUCCESS WHAT WAS ACTUALLY NINETY KILOS ARE (L-R) FELIX BERNARD, CHARLES BATTÀ, APOLLON, SAN MARIN, GYM OWNER JOIGNEREY, AND PAUL PONS.

cry is not possible. The same goes for measuring the different parts of the body since these statistics are carefully taken and entered.

The big weights are lifted in four differing ways: the clean and jerk, the swing, the snatch, and the bent press. The clean and jerk consists of taking the barbell to the shoulder, then with a vigorous movement of the tower body, it is brought overhead. The maximum that has been done is 196 pounds; this fine feat of strength was performed by a model named Henri Pêchon. Several athletes have done 150, but thereafter we fall to 120 pounds representing the medium strength range for very fit people. The swing is performed by rocking the dumbbell between the legs as if it were the pendulum of a clock, then taking advantage of this oscilla-

tion, the lifter swings in a semicircle until he brings the weight overhead. The maximum in the swing is 150 pounds; it was accomplished by Pons, a giant of a man who is famous in the wrestling world. Among those who have done 135 pounds, we can list Louis de Lyon, Charles Poiré [1866-1939], and the amateur San Marin. Many have done 120 pounds. The snatch consists of grabbing the weight smartly from the ground and lifting it overhead perpendicularly along the body.

Several years ago a colossus arrived in Paris who could boast of neither technique nor a great deal of training, yet he lifted weights that no one else before him could lift. Apollon, for such was his name, snatched 176-

pounds in block weight and a 160-pound barbell. To give an idea of this man's dimensions, let us say that his biceps measure forty-seven centimeters and his forearm forty-two. An athlete name Limousin once managed to snatch 143 pounds. The average is 120 pounds.

The bent press is performed by putting the weight overhead while bending the body to the side opposite the same weight which one holds in one's hand Sandow the strongman lifted two hundred pounds in this way. Some claim that he attained the phenomenal total of 260 pounds, but I must admit I have never seen such a thing. Many athletes have bent pressed 150 pounds. The maximum for the two-handed barbell belongs to Apollon who did

284 pounds. We can list after him André with 252 pounds and San Marin with 240 pounds. The average is 180.

The arm extension is one of the most familiar of all strength exercises, but it is also the one which is the easiest to counterfeit. We have heard it said that Apollon had performed an arm extension of one hundred pounds. Obviously, in order to attain such a figure, he had to cheat, that is to say to rest the greater part of the weight on the forearms in such a way as to minimize the length of leverage. We can list several athletes who do very correct arm extensions with six pounds.

We cannot end without remarking that whatever may have been written on this question our strongmen have not grown weaker. On the contrary, they are stronger today than ever before. Thanks to gymnastics societies, the progress has been enormous for the last ten or fifteen years.

If while you were at school, you were a fan of gymnastics, you must remember certain feats which were performed only by your teacher or by professionals in the circus. Today these feats are performed very easily by a very great number of young people. The same is true of weightlifting. All the records that we have quoted here have only been accomplished in the last fifteen or so years.

—Thomas Grimm

As we can see, already at this time Apollon seemed clearly superior by far than all the athletes named in this article from *The Little Journal*, but Apollon's strength was never fully known. No one had ever pressed him to accomplish any feat of strength whatsoever. Therefore, we cannot evaluate fairly in terms of kilos the athletic feats which he performed nor can we compare him with today's athletes because at the time when Apollon was at his peak of strength there was no Weightlifting Federation that would officially register records, no closely monitored method to know if an exercise was correct or incorrect, neither judge nor dynamometer to assure the regularity of a classic exercise. In addition there was no decent, graduated and balanced equipment which might permit a barbell or other weight to be loaded little by little until it reached a lifter's maximum weight. It was necessary, by way of example, to be very strong in order to handle three twenty-kilo block weights in the snatch. Quite a few of today's athletes who now snatch 140 or 150 pounds do so because of good equipment and progressive training, but they could never snatch three twenty-kilo weights unless they had been faced to do so from the start. They simply would not have the strength to put the weights up all at once; they would become discouraged and would completely abandon their ineffectual attempts at the end of a month or two.

I speak from experience in this case, for I am among those in the latter category. I recall that at twenty-two years of age, after I had worked out since the age of fifteen, I struggled ineffectually with

a forty-kilo dumbbell. Had I never made the effort to have a light thirty-kilo barbell made expressly for me which I could press easily and which I was able to make gradually heavier in response to my improving physique, I would have continued to strain vainly to lift the forty-kilo bell. At the end of several months, despite my fervor for athletics, I would have been discouraged and would never have been able to lift nearly seventy kilos with one hand. Nor would I be able to lift sixty-five kilos at the Montmartre Athletic Society of Paris in front of the president, Eugene Robert, and seventy members of the club as I did at the age of nearly forty. Thanks to good equipment and progressive weight training, I had thus managed to increase my maximum from around forty kilos to sixty-five kilos, which is to say a gain of twenty-five kilos.

When at the age of eighteen, Apollon encountered four twenty-kilo weights, he lifted them with ridiculous ease. If we therefore admit that Apollon would have gained by knowledgeable training and good equipment as much as I had, since he had double my own strength (lifting double what I was able to lift), he would then have gained fifty kilos over his old maximum, that is 130 kilos. We can see from this that Apollon was born twenty years too early, or rather our training methods and our modern equipment had arrived twenty years too late.

There is another very important question which has never been examined and which conclusively demonstrates Apollon's extraordinary muscular strength. The great athlete had always worked with his muscles alone. Unlike many strongmen who supplement their muscular strength by an exaggerated expenditure of nerve impulses, Apollon never needed to tap his nervous energy. These people accomplish their feats with will power rather than with the muscles of their arms. For example, some very energetic athletes (and we commend them for their energy) only lift their maximum weight once from time to time, and when they choose not to do so, remain much below their own records. Example: an athlete of this type works without an audience to urge him on and will hardly lift sixty kilos in a one-arm press, but his maximum might be sixty-five or sixty-eight kilos. In nineteen attempts out of twenty he will not be able to reach his maximum, unless he makes a major call on his nervous system, a situation that would necessarily tire him by the expenditure of nervous impulses.

Apollon, on the contrary, lifted with his muscles, pressing his weights to the maximum every day. One could ask him to press or jerk seventy-two kilos at any time of the day: he would do it at once and without the slightest fatigue. This was proof either that he could lift a vastly heavier weight or else that he did not need to call upon his will in order to lift heavy weights; that is the evidence of real muscular power.

Take a hundred strongmen, learn their records, and then ask them to lift their maximum on the spot. There would be ninety-

nine who could not do it. One would not be warmed up, another would have a sore arm or a pain in the groin, a third would not feel like it, a fourth would be tired. In short, no one would say to you as Apollon used to say, "I will lift 176 pounds." They would bring him the weights, and before you know it the four weights would rise into the air. Unlike many strongmen who lift using too much flexibility, Apollon side-presses without even bending his legs so as to move his body underneath the weight. In these cases, it is not the weight which rises at arm's length, it is rather the body which bends in order to allow the arm to stretch out in mid-path.

Certain athletes of 1 meter 80, for example, fall back on their heels, their legs completely folded under their body. The weight rises only 1 meter 20, and the body bends to the side in order for the arm to extend. As soon as it is extended, the legs straighten up, the body becomes upright, and the weight is thus side pressed. [Ed Note: He means bent pressed.]

Apollon, on the other hand lifts the weight two meters high at least, takes it to the end of his arm without bending his legs or his body while letting his arm do the work. Ask yourself then, if Apollon had coordinated his movements and if he had bent his legs while arching his body excessively, what this strongman might have lifted if he wanted to.

Here are several feats of strength performed by Apollon in front of me and a number of amateurs:

One day in 1889 in Lille, Apollon competed against the strongman, Batta [pseudo. of Charles Estienne 1866-1939]. The judges who were charged with choosing the feats decided on the two-banded barbell. Apollon did not have one: what was he to do? He decided to visit a dealer in secondhand ironworks named Mr. Garde on the Boulevard des Écoles, and there he found two train-car wheels attached to an enormous axle which was much too thick even for the bands of Batta. All told it weighed exactly 118 kilos, and the strongman paid ten centimes per kilo for this contraption. Among all of Mr. Garde's employees, even those who were used to handling the heaviest loads, no one could pick up the 118-kilo makeshift barbell, including the great Edgard, one of the workers who wielded a sledge hammer; this huge man who measured one meter eighty-six in height had been hired specifically for his extraordinary strength. Apollon took the axle and tested it to see if it felt good in his hands. When he was satisfied, Apollon announced to the manager, "Take this to the Théâtre des Variétés. It'll do."

First off that evening Apollon lifted the train wheels as if he were merely raising his cane. In his match with Apollon, Batta could only get the famous axle to his shoulders, resting it lightly on his chest for a moment — this despite the man's legendary grip strength. Apollon, however, had lifted the device like a feather.

One day in 1892 Apollon came to Lille with the wrestler

Pons in order to do a series of athletic performances. He brought with him his equipment which consisted of a barbell which weighed ninety-six kilos empty and four hollow balls (two large and two small) arranged in the following fashion: a bar joining the two large balls passing through holes drilled in the center of the spheres. The enormous balls were hollow and could be filled with sand which Apollon could easily find in any town. That spared him the shipping costs since the barbell traveled empty.

When the two large balls were put in place, the bar stuck out thirty centimeters out from the balls on each side. On this extension were attached two other balls which when filled were twenty kilos each. In a special locker were two absolutely empty balls but similar to the smaller filled balls except that they weighed only three kilos each.

When the barbell was deposited in the midway of a circus or in a room of a theater or music hall, the two full bells were screwed to the larger balls which raised the weight of the four-bell bar by thirty-four kilos and brought the total to 130 kilos.

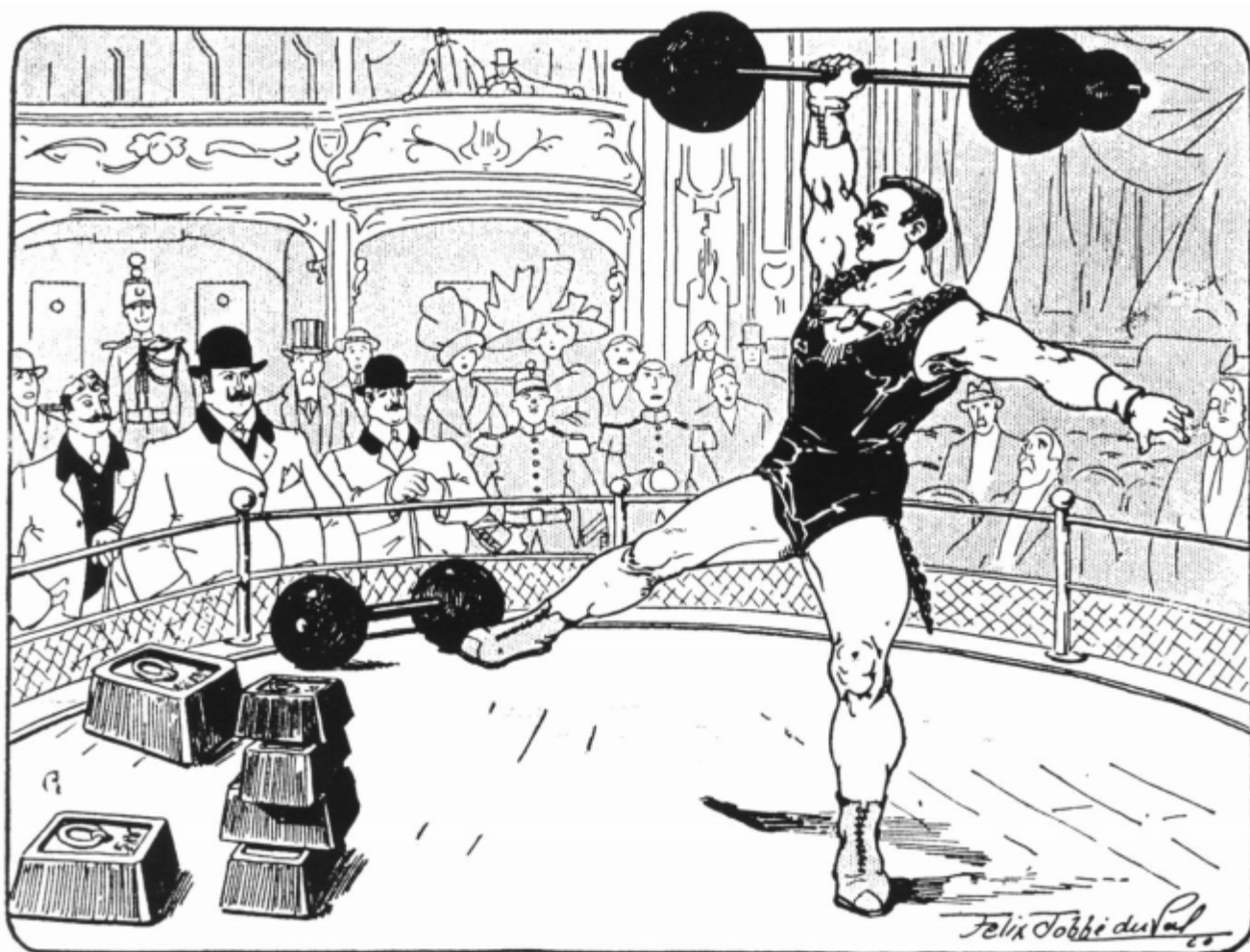
When the strongman had to use the weights on stage, he removed the filled balls and screwed in their place the two empty balls. In this way Apollon did not tire himself out and did not risk harming the stage floor with his barbell which (despite the empty bells) weighed 96 kilos. Even so, very few people could move the enormous weight from off the ground because of the thickness of the bar. I confess that I, too, was among those who could not lift it. I could not even pick up the barbell when it was empty.

The spectators who had tried to lift the barbell when it was fully laden were dumbstruck with admiration when they saw Apollon easily lift the barbell on the stage, and not a soul suspected the subterfuge. But one day the management of the Théâtre de Variétés wanted to let people living in the surrounding area of Lille see Apollon and a quartet of wrestlers without fear of missing the last train or streetcar. They therefore arranged a matinee for Sunday, December 18, 1892.

Here, taken from my archives, is the newspaper clipping from the time announcing this show:

At the request of a great number of customers, tomorrow, Sunday December 18, 1892 at three o'clock, there will be a huge athletic tournament between four amateurs from the cities of Lille and Roubaix. Wrestling with Messrs. Masson and Louis le Faouët. New feats of strength by Mr. Apollon: 150-kilo double barbell!

This was at the time of the Roubaix Fair, and the justifiably famous Rasso Trio, consisting of Nordmann Hertzog, and von Paar, was appearing at the Franco-Russian Circus at Roubaix.¹⁰ At exactly the same time, the Circus Lenka was at the Hippodrome in Lille, and Batta was engaged there as a strongman. But the Rassos, hav-



THIS DRAWING DEPICTS THE VISIT OF THE RASSO TRIO TO SEE APOLLON'S SHOW AT THE VARIEITES THEATER IN LILLE, FRANCE, IN 1892. NOTE THE "DOUBLE" BARBELL, THE BLOCK WEIGHTS, AND THE ELEGANTLY CLAD WRESTLERS WHO WERE NOT ABLE TO MATCH APOLLON'S 341 POUND SHOW-STOPPING LIFT.

ing learned of Apollon's presence in Lille, decided to profit from the show on Sunday afternoon in order to get acquainted with this colossus whom they had never seen, but they had heard much of from other artists. They arrived at around eleven o'clock at the Théâtre de Variétés precisely when Apollon along with Pons, Batta, and I were overseeing the ring setup for the four wrestling matches. Immediately, one of the athletes warned Apollon's wife of the presence of the Rassos and told her of the many feats of strength performed by these strongmen. When Mrs. Apollon saw the great Godefroy Nordmann who, thanks to a large overcoat with absurdly large epaulettes, seemed to be even bigger than Apollon himself, the woman was immediately struck with terror. She called to her husband saying, "You had better use your heaviest weights since the three Rassos are here to challenge you and to try to take over your engagement at the theater." When he heard this news, Apollon was furious, and he sent off in

search of twenty-five kilos' worth of sand. He sent a waiter at the music hall named Maës who was also a great fan of Apollon's strength and had him fill the huge balls of his barbell with this sand. He then had the sand moistened in order to make the barbell even heavier. After filling the balls with the twenty-five kilos of wet sand, he then filled the smaller, hollow balls, and then Apollon lifted the barbell in order to assure himself of its weight. Finding the device still too light for his taste, he said to Batty, "Put another twenty or so kilos of sand in the bar and then have the thing placed in the middle of the ring. As for me, I'm going to grab something to eat, then I'll put on my costume for the show."

Batta then replied, "Everything is fine, old chap. You can leave. I understand. Don't worry."

Apollon then left, and in the meantime Pons arrived and asked what Batta was up to. After hearing the explanation, Pons told



APOLLON, DRESSED AS A GLADIATOR, WITH HIS WIFE, JOSEPHINE, IN PARIS CIRCA 1892.

him, "Don't fool around with all that. We don't have time to refill that barbell. Look. Here's the key to the locker where we keep the weights. Go get the solid balls and screw them onto the bar in place of these here. Apollon is strong enough to lift it. At Joigneret's he lifted 142 kilos. Then, later when he misses his barbell, we'll have a good laugh at his expense." [Ed Note: the meaning is unclear. If Pons thought Apollo was strong enough to lift it, why would he "miss" the barbell?]

Batta was very happy to play a trick on his friend, Apollon, and he changed the empty balls for the solid ones, and convulsed with laughter when he thought of the look on Apollon's face when he picked up the barbell. The bar started out by weighing ninety kilos

empty; the sand added another twenty-five; the filled balls were another forty kilos, and that brought the total to 155 kilos. In order to test the weight, Batta attempted to lift the barbell and thanks to the strength of his hands he succeeded in budging this phenomenal weight a little. But Batta admitted that he "tried his damndest and that Apollon was in for a hot time" (those were his own expressions).

The show began around two o'clock. The theater seats had been removed from the floor, and the wrestlers and athletes had to perform in the middle of the audience. The weights were brought in, and these were close enough for the audience to touch. The wrestlers were Félix Bernard, Léon le Faouët; Paul Pons; three men from Lille and Pierre Cnude, Louis Moury, and Joseph le Brasseur (one of Batta's cousins); a phony wrestler who called himself Rabasson; and Desnoullez Adophe from Roubaix. The strongman was Apollon. Batta saw to the placement of the equipment, for Apollon was still in his dressing room where his wife showered him with encouragement and urged him to have the energy to prove to Rasso that he was in truth the strongest man in the world. Nobody needed to inspire Apollon. He was already sufficiently agitated. Batta and Pons had put him in high dudgeon by telling him that little Rasso was exceptionally strong when it came to lifting barbells. He had tried Apollon's weights, they reported, and it was only a matter of time before Rasso lifted them, and so on and so forth.

At last, Apollon came on stage, all the while staring fixedly at the three Rassos who were seated in the first row near the weights and barbells. Apollon came forward and

announced to the audience, "Gentlemen, I have been informed that there are certain strongmen who are desirous of touching my weights. I put them at their disposal, and I will offer a prize of one thousand francs to whoever can repeat a single one of my feats. I will begin by doing a one-handed snatch of eighty-five kilos with these here: one weight of twenty-five kilos and three others of twenty kilos each. All amateurs take note!"

Batta tied the four weights together, and Apollon snatched the eighty-five kilos on the first attempt. He lowered the weights between his arms without letting them touch the ground and then raised them two additional times into the air. The Rassos watched

but did not move.

Apollon did a rim lift with a twenty-five-kilo weight which he then extended until his arm was completely outstretched. Then he passed the weight back and forth between his right and left hand several times always holding it by the rim. Apollon juggled with a real fifty-kilo weight, throwing it behind his right shoulder and catching it in front at the height of his right shoulder, and then he extended his arm with a slight backward thrust of his body. The Rassos still watched but did not move.

Apollon brought a 143-kilo dumbbell with an enormous handle: he positioned it behind him with his heels touching the globes of the barbell and reached for the dumbbell behind him, snatching it overhead without moving his feet. It was unbelievable! Fantastic! All the weightlifting fans in the audience broke into unrestrained applause. The Rassos remained motionless. [Ed Note: Obviously, the 143 kilos is a misprint, as no one could do a one-hand swing with 315 pounds.]

Apollon brought in his eighty-kilo rectangular weight, snatched it aloft with one hand, juggled with it and then caught it with his outstretched arm — all this in the space of just three seconds and with only a slight wobble of his body. It was incredible. The Rassos came up to touch the weight and returned to their places while looking on in total amazement.

A barbell was placed on the stage and Batta announced that the device weighed 155 kilos. He said that Apollon offered a prize of one hundred francs to any man who could pick up the huge weight with two hands and raise it until the lifter was completely erect. [Ed Note: A deadlift.] Apollon then came onstage in front of the barbell, hefted it to find the exact middle, returned it to the floor, took two steps back, and at last approached the weight. On the very first attempt he brought the bar up to eye level and from there jerked it into the air without even resting it on his chest. After that, he found the balance point and neatly slid the barbell onto one hand, while doing so he lifted one leg at a right angle. Then he let the barbell fall from overhead and caught it in the bend of his arms and from there he gently set it back down.

Apollon had lifted a 342-pound barbell without for an instant realizing that it was filled any heavier than that which he had ordered. As for Batta, Pons, and me, we stared at one another dumbfounded. At that point we realized that Apollon's true strength would never be known.

The Rassos looked first at one another and then at the barbell on the stage. The strongest of the three came up to try [to deadlift] the weight. He succeeded with great difficulty in lifting it from the floor, but when he attempted to stand up, the barbell slipped out of his hands before he had even brought it to knee level. If we consider that his man was capable of lifting a 130-kilo barbell [overhead] we can judge the difference in strength between Apollon and him. It is only fair to add that the thickness of the bar handicapped Rasso

who did not have the necessary hand strength to grip a bar of that size.

When Apollon saw that Rasso could not lift the barbell, he said to Batta loudly and a bit patronizingly, "The little fellow isn't bad. What do you think, Batta? I really thought he was going to win the hundred francs." Happy as a king, Batta replied to Apollon, "He could very well win the prize, but first he'll have to eat his vegetables."

One week later the Rassos abandoned the name by which they had so much success and so many profitable engagements. They decided to perform under the name of "The Three Apollons" thereby giving indirect homage to the man who had galvanized them so thoroughly.

What a pity that similar performances could not be authenticated and that we cannot now certify the weight of the barbell that Apollon lifted. The barbell could not be weighed exactly, and no one dreamed that the day would come when codified weights and barbells would be important for the archives of an honest and dependable sport.

One day Apollon came to my physical culture school in Lille in order to give an exclusive performance for the students at the school. A big, globe barbell weighing 205 pounds was lying in the middle of the floor. This barbell was famous all over northern France because of its difficulty. The bar was able to turn loosely within the balls when anyone wanted to lift it, and consequently few were the athletes who were able to pick it up with one hand and take it as high as their knees. Cyclops and Noel the Gaul [pseudo. of Noël Rouveyrolis 1863-1939], to name but a few, had not been able to lift this barbell so much as a centimeter: and yet these two men were remarkably strong. Léon Sée and Vandenoche alone in all the north had lifted this barbell on the first attempt.

I said to Apollon that the ability to lift this barbell would qualify anyone as a real strongman. He smiled incredulously, thinking that I was trying to pull his leg. But after Apollon saw that I was serious, he lifted the barbell in his right hand, hefted it as if it were a walking stick and tossed it up 1 meter 20 centimeters into the air and caught it in his left hand once more. All the while he was watching me to make sure that I was not making fun of him. After he had returned the weight to the floor, he announced in his deep, masculine voice, "I believe that I can snatch this."

Immediately, we all protested, but Apollon took off his jacket, rolled up his sleeve revealing his huge forearm, and approached the barbell. On the very first attempt he snatched it to arm's length with such force that the weight went completely past his head. It landed three meters behind him, narrowly avoiding a collision with Mr. Paul Corman, an amateur who was standing behind Apollon just when the colossus first grabbed the barbell.

At another time, although still at school in Lille, I present-

ed him with a seventy-kilo barbell with a very thick bar. Not one of the strongest men could shoulder this barbell with one hand despite being able to press sixty-five kilos at this time in my life, I could not budge the weight from the ground.

Apollon took the barbell and lifted it automatically, not suspecting that it might escape from his fingers. When he saw that his hand was empty and that he had failed to snatch seventy kilos, he became furious. He attacked the bar once more, and this time he lifted it as if it were a feather; he lowered the bell into a horizontal position and held it there for three seconds. Evidently his arm was not sufficiently extended; his body was bent back sharply, and his arm was turned slightly to the outside. Still, if we consider the effort used to support a seventy-kilo bar with an outstretched arm, we remain confounded by the vigor, the articular ligaments, and the muscles of this man. Those who have not seen this feat cannot comprehend a similar effort. Unfortunately, we cannot evaluate the lift in kilos since the movement was not correct and cannot therefore be counted as true arm extension. [Ed Note: Clearly, Apollon's arm must have been greatly bent and he must have stopped the 154-pound barbell well before the level of his shoulder. Even so, if Desbonnet's recollection is at all accurate, it is an amazing feat.]

An amateur from the north of France named Florent Marchand was renowned for his strength. This man was present at the aforementioned performance (there were sixty or seventy spectators on that evening — and every one a lifter). Marchand could lift 112 kilos with two hands and snatch around seventy kilos with one hand, but when he had seen Apollon's exploit, he said, "We are all miserable little runts, and starting today I will never touch another weight or barbell." He kept his word and retired from the ring.

On another occasion Apollon was visiting Paris, "The Boat Man" [1850-1909], along with Sandow. Apollon was presented with four twenty-kilo block weights so that he might press them aloft, and we wanted to tie them together in order to make it easier for him to do the job.

"Do you want a handkerchief?" Paris asked Apollon, observing him approach the enormous handful of weights which had not been tied together.

"Whatever for?" the famous colossus replied calmly. "Do you think I have a snotty nose and that I need to wipe it?"

Then passing a finger in each of the four rings, he brought the four weights together in his prodigious grip, and using a single effort lifted the weights at arm's length in spite of the bruises made by the weights when they crushed his hand.

The feat caused a genuine astonishment among the spectators of this rare exploit, and Sandow was the first to congratulate Apollon. He might well have done so, for this feat of strength was quite simply unprecedented, and was something that certainly could

not have been done by anyone else.

Here is another strength feat performed by Apollon. The scene is set at my school in the Faubourg Poissonnière. At this time I had a student named Briançon who had a special barbell made for himself. The globes were mounted in the form of discs, and they looked like large versions of the candy wafers known as "pastilles" so that is why we gave the nickname of *Briançon Pastilles* to this weight. The bar was very flexible, and because of the shape of the "pastilles" was very easy to handle, so he had additionally arranged for it to be much heavier than an ordinary barbell. It weighed ninety-two kilos: forty-one kilos for each pastille and ten kilos for the bar itself. But there came a time when Briançon no longer wanted to practice with a huge weight, so he made a gift of his barbell to Victorius, and Briançon asked us to send it to him.

On precisely the same day that I was disassembling the device in order to send it off, Apollon stopped by to pay me a visit. He was accompanied by the secretary of the Weightlifting Club of France, Mr. Louis Chappellier; they had come to meet the strongman, Batta, who was at my establishment.

"What's that?" Apollon asked as he pointed to the barbell in question.

"That," I replied "is Briançon's pastille which I am sending to Victorius. Briançon just gave it to him as a gift."

"Oh," said Apollon simply, and he then changed the subject. During this time my servant continued to take the barbell apart and to pack it for sending. After taking off one of the pastilles, the boy needed to carry it to the other end of the room, and, I assure you, he had to do so with both hands and with much difficulty.

Apollon had seen the effort which the poor blighter had to expend, so when he saw that he was about to start back for the second trip with the second pastille, Apollon spoke. "Leave that there. Go on," he told him. "I'll carry that for you." Immediately seizing the pastille by the rim, he carried it thus in his outstretched arm. It was securely squeezed in his enormous grip until he had placed it at the other end of the room with no appreciable effort.

"Here!" he said to me in his funny southern accent, "Have a Pastille!"

If we remember that the pastille in question weighed forty-one kilos and that it was around twelve centimeters thick then we should be left awestruck after an exploit like this. I would certainly never have believed it if I had not seen it myself. But I did see it — with my own eyes — and it convinced me one further time that Apollon's strength was indeed limitless. In another type of lift, the athlete Batta (a man who possessed remarkable

grip strength himself) tried vainly to lift the pastille by the rim with both hands. He could not even succeed in lifting the pastille off the floor, and he therefore accorded Apollon an unbridled admiration particularly since he had personally witnessed the strongman lift the pastille. [Ed Note: It is extremely unlikely that Apollon (or anyone) could pinch grip a plate with one hand that a man like Batta could not pinch grip with two hands.]

Another day, Apollon came to 48 Faubourg Poissonnière, and there in a corner he spied a dumbbell with weights shaped like church bells. He asked me, "What's that thingamajig over there?"

I replied, "It's for deadlifting with two hands. You stand in front of the bell and grab hold of the bar which goes across. Right now it weighs live hundred pounds. John Grün [1868-1913] who is extremely strong recently lifted it off the ground very easily and has since lifted it several times."

Apollon came up to the bar, and lifted it playfully. He looked on the interior and saw the bar that went from one bell to the other. He then passed his enormous hand over the center fill hole, grasped the bar and pulled with one hand while steadying himself with the other on a stair rail that was within his reach.

Slowly, as if it were a heavy carriage which was starting up, the enormous mass trembled and then rose. It remained suspended by the single hand of this colossus who had easily lifted with one hand that which the strongest men could barely budge with two. Those spectators who were present were absolutely dumb struck; they were speechless on account of their extreme surprise. The dumbbell weighed exactly five hundred pounds.

At another time Apollon came to see me after my return from the English weightlifting competition. I had taken Maspoli to the English championship and there he had won an easy victory over the strongest English amateurs. I told him of the ups and downs of the trip, and I said to him, "In London I saw a man who possessed a terrific grip strength. His name's Paddely, and he is an Englishman who is an instructor at the Sandow school in London. He broke Batta's record of 121 kilos on the Régnier Dynamometer (authorized position); the Englishman took it to 132 kilos. It was marvelous: the record was beaten by 11 kilos."¹¹

While I was speaking, I showed Apollon the Régnier Dynamometer which was hung in my anthropometric chamber. I use this device in order to register the strength of my students at different periods of their training. With his hands in the pockets of his jacket, Apollon looked at the dynamometer with disinterest as if it were an object of little importance. He had never wanted to try "all three little gadgets" as he had called them. I would have liked to have him try it just to see what he could do, but this was not exactly an easy task. Even so, I had an idea and as will be seen from what follows,

it was a good one.

"Well," I said to Apollon, "Poor old Batta who had the record for so long can no longer take it back from Paddely, a young man in the full flower of his strength. So you see my dear Louis, since Batta cannot be in the running any longer it means that this is just another record which has been lost to the French. What is worse, it will never again return to France, for I do not know of a single man who can win back the record."

During this conversation, I stole a glance out of the corner of my eye at the hearty but uncharacteristically pensive Apollon. I followed the thoughts as they made their sluggish way through the brain of this colossus. He contemplated and looked constantly at the dynamometer. I felt him weakening, so I attacked.

"Batta," I said to Apollon, "told me the other day, 'There is only one who could most certainly break my record, and that is Apollon. But he won't want to try your apparatus since he is too afraid of doing poorly. In any case, a strength feat without weights simply doesn't interest him; to him it's just a *gadget*.'"

While listening to my words, Apollon took his hands out of his pockets and reached out his enormous right hand toward the apparatus. He asked me, "How do you work this gadget?"

I showed him once and then put the needle in place and gave the device to Apollon who put his two huge hands on the grips and gave it a simple squeeze without even moving the muscles of his face. The needle of the dynamometer made a jump and on the first attempt came to 153 kilos thus breaking the Englishman Paddely's record by twenty-one kilos. Apollon returned the contrivance to me and said while rubbing his hands and making a grimace, "You won't catch me out again with your gadgets. That hurt my hands. I won't try it anymore."

Despite repeated entreaties, Apollon refused to touch the dynamometer any more. I reckon that on that day he could have easily reached 170 to 180 kilos on the dial, for he had neither enough time to press nor had he applied sufficient effort

One day in Bordeaux in 1888 Apollon was working in a fair in Jantien's Arena. Across from his booth was another housing two men who were then at the peak of their strength: Andre Brandelli (nicknamed "Little Andre of Paris") and Victor Jadin. Mutual friends of the three strongmen discussed among themselves the relative strength of these champions and at last they bet that Jadin could do some strength feat which Apollon could not duplicate.

After learning of this, Jadin replied that he defied any athlete — Apollon included — to swing-lift his famous dumbbell with the turning plates which he called "Jadin's Roller." This roller weighed 130 pounds and Jadin himself could lift it only with great difficulty since the bar was very thick and it turned in the plates. The proposal was repeated to Apollon and he replied "Bring the apparatus to me,

and you will see what I can do.”

Someone went to get Jadin who arrived soon afterward followed by several other athletes, among whom were Felix Bernard, Eugene Robert, and Little Victor. They all trooped into Apollon's booth with the famous dumbbell and threw it at the strongman's feet defying him to lift it. Apollon said to Jadin, “Lift it first, and we will see what happens.”

Jadin pulled himself together, grasped his roller, and with a great deal of difficulty, swing-lifted the weight a single time and then let it fall back to the ground.

Apollon looked this little audience, and asked, “How many people are here?” Twelve spectators were counted in the group. “Fine,” he said, “I will make a lift for every person here.” He grabbed the dumbbell, swing-lifted it, and counted, “One.” It descended and then came up again. He counted “Two.” Thus it went until he had counted out twelve times without dropping the dumbbell. Apollon raised the bell once more and said “Isn't there anyone else to oblige?” While he was tilting, the serving girl from the cafe where the athletes ate arrived to tell them that lunch was ready. Apollon lowered the dumbbell and then lifted it again a thirteenth time announcing in a loud stentorian voice, “This one's for the waitress!”

André Brandelli who was an extraordinary athlete has recounted to us a prodigious feat of strength performed by Apollon at the Bordeaux fair in 1889. André, who was very proud of his strength, had a barbell weighing 252 pounds, and he was the only person at this time who was able to lift it. He took the bell with him to Bordeaux, and when he had a big show he lifted his famous 252-pound barbell in two stages. It was a feat the likes of which no one had ever seen before.

Apollon was annoyed by André's claims that he was the only one who could lift his barbell, so one day while André was training, Apollon took his revenge. He removed his jacket and vest and gave the barbell a tentative heft. Then Apollon marshaled all his energy, came up to the barbell, and snatched it overhead with both hands in one swift movement without even stopping at his shoulders as André did. You would find it impossible to picture André's stupefaction. That is why you should never mention Apollon in front of little André, for he would turn bright red with anger.

Another time at Neuilly, Apollon was performing in the Marseille fair booth in a troupe of athletes that included Max Sergy, the well-known master of ceremonies who was himself an excellent wrestler. In order not to tire out the gentle colossus, the director had supplied Apollon with three false weights that were marked “20 Kilos” but which actually weighed only ten kilos apiece. The wrestlers called the ten-kilos “bogus weights” [*poids tocs*] and the real one of twenty kilos they called “bona fide weights” [*poids chouat*].

Apollon had given another name to the false weights; he called them “saucepans” because they sounded hollow. Apollon had been presented to the public as the king of strength and the only one in the world who pressed four twenty-kilo weights at every performance.

Now it happened that one day Apollon was a little under the weather. He had passed the night drinking champagne surrounded by fans and strength enthusiasts who had encouraged him to tell about his various adventures while downing glass after glass of champagne. Not wanting to work that day, the strongman claimed to be indisposed so as not to have to go on stage. Instead he went off to get a little rest.

Max Sergy loved practical jokes, so he got together with the other men of the Marseille troupe, and they resolved to play a little trick on Apollon. Seeing Apollon seated at the dining table enjoying a hearty luncheon to recuperate, the athletes hid the counterfeit weights and replaced them with the real twenty-kilo weights. Max, himself, was asked by his employer to introduce Apollon to the public during the first show which was scheduled to take place at four o'clock. Around 3:30 the honest strongman arose from the table slightly flushed and with an abdomen that was bulged out from the substantial meal which he had just finished. Apollon was drowsy and a good deal more inclined to go to bed than to dress for the parade of athletes. Finally, Marseille insisted, and Apollon got into his costume but he grumbled all the while.

The barker finished his patter, the public entered the ring, and the feats of strength began. Max came forward and said “Ladies and gentlemen, we have the honor of presenting the king of strength, Apollon, the strongest man in the world. He will prove this title to you by lifting four twenty-kilo weights which have been tied together as if he were picking up a feather. We beg you to give your attention to this feat of strength which is the only one of its kind in the world. Take note of the ease with which Apollon does his work!”

During this speech, Apollon was in the process of digestion, breathing as heavily as an ox, and rubbing both hands on his belly which was swollen by the huge meal that he had just consumed. The four authentic twenty-kilo weights were tied together and put in the middle of the ring. Max shouted, “Attention!”

Apollon beamed his most gracious smile, crouched down, gathered together the weights and picked them up, but when he discovered that they were too heavy, put them back down and rose up completely flustered. He shot a glance to the right, then a glance to the left toward the stony-faced wrestlers. Then he walked back a few steps, breathed deeply a little, rubbed his belly with his hands, and returned to the weights. He crouched down once again, gathered up the weights, picked them up, and found them . . . even heavier. He shot a glance to the right, a glance to the left and saw the luminous smiles on the faces of his fellow athletes. Then he understood that he was the victim of a practical joke. He stared daggers at Max and

announced in his *basso profundo* voice these words which were incomprehensible to the public but very clear to the wrestlers: "Ladies and gentlemen, ordinarily I have three saucepans, but I see that I have friends who do not like them. Well, that makes four bona fides. Fortunately, Apollon is always ready!"

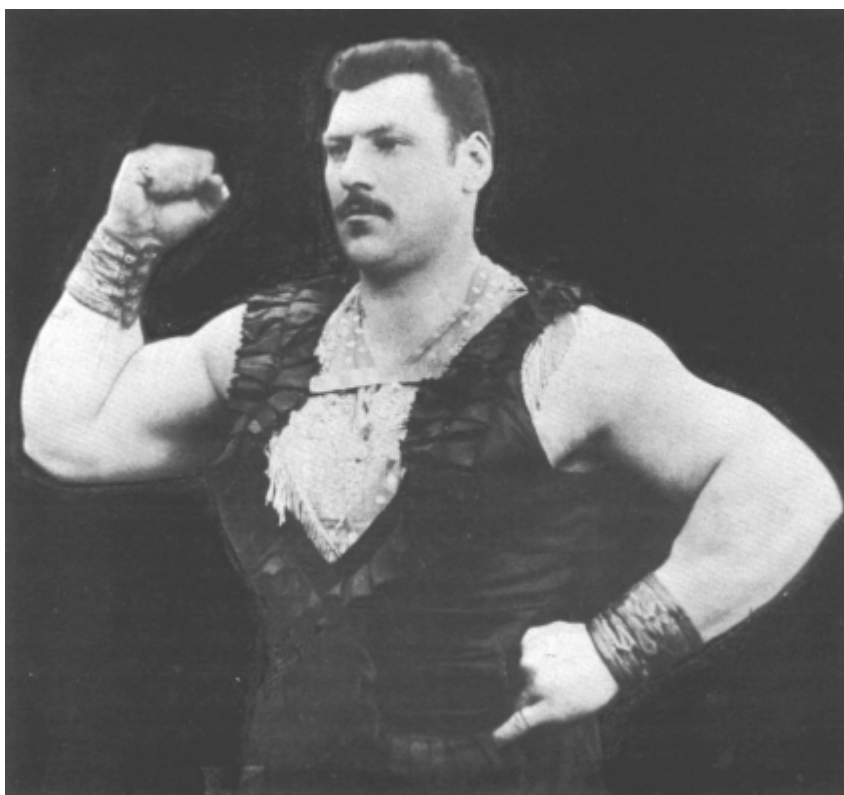
As soon as he had spoken these words, Apollon grasped the four weights and despite the discomfort that he felt from his luncheon, he lifted the quartet of weights as if they were feathers. Then, casting a look of triumph toward his friends, he marched around the ring with the enormous load at the end of his outstretched arm. The wrestlers were dumbstruck with admiration when they saw this feat of strength which was performed under the worst conditions, after a night passed without sleep and after a meal eaten with little prudence. Believing that he had to lift a mere fifty kilos, Apollon had taken no precautions and had gorged himself at lunch, and everyone knows that after a copious repast, it is nearly impossible to produce a serious effort.

Another time in Lille, Apollon experienced a misadventure with the iron bars which comprised part of his act. My friend, Léon Sée, has written about this incident in *La Culture Physique* in a curious article which you are about to read. It is titled:

Apollon's Prison Bars

Apollon's strength seemed to be nearly infinite. He performed the most stunning feats of strength; these include times when he pressed aloft four twenty-kilo weights tied together with a handkerchief in a single movement without even tensing his leg muscles or when he pushed the indicator on the Régnier Dynamometer to an extent which today sounds incredible. This strongman who called to mind an ancient Roman gladiator, this superman, this demigod of strength seemed to perform his feats almost effortlessly.

When San Marin put before him four weights, Apollon lifted them without even realizing that they were actually filled with more than eighty kilos of lead. What then was the extent of this superhuman strength? Unto what hitherto inaccessible heights might his strength be carried? Might he put up 120, 130 kilos? Would he one day do a two-handed jerk of four hundred pounds? No one knew because Apollon was, alas, as indolent as he was strong.



DRESSED FOR WORK, APOLLON SHOWS OFF HIS MASSIVE FOREARMS IN THE EARLY 1890s.

—PHOTO COURTESY THE TODD-MCLEAN COLLECTION

Nothing was more difficult than to make him lift the lightest barbell; neither the pleadings of his best friends nor promises of the most tempting rewards could make him perform a feat that would immortalize his name and show once and for all that he was an equal of Samson and Milo of Croton.

One person, however, exercised a great influence over this colossus: his wife. She was a small dark haired woman with an energetic face, and when she ordered sharply with her southern accent, "Come on, Apollon. Lift it!" her husband would slowly turn his big head with its tightly curled hair, give her a timid look, and the dumbbell which he had a moment before refused to lift because he "did not feel in top form" or because he had a "pain in his arm" would rise up. This would all be done with unforgettable ease—an ease that was discouraging to the other strongmen present and disconcerting to the experts who sought to know the limits of the giant's strength. But one evening Apollon took his strength to its full extent, and the modern Hercules performed a feat which almost certainly would have caused the mythic Hercules to hesitate. It was an impressive spectacle — fantastic even.

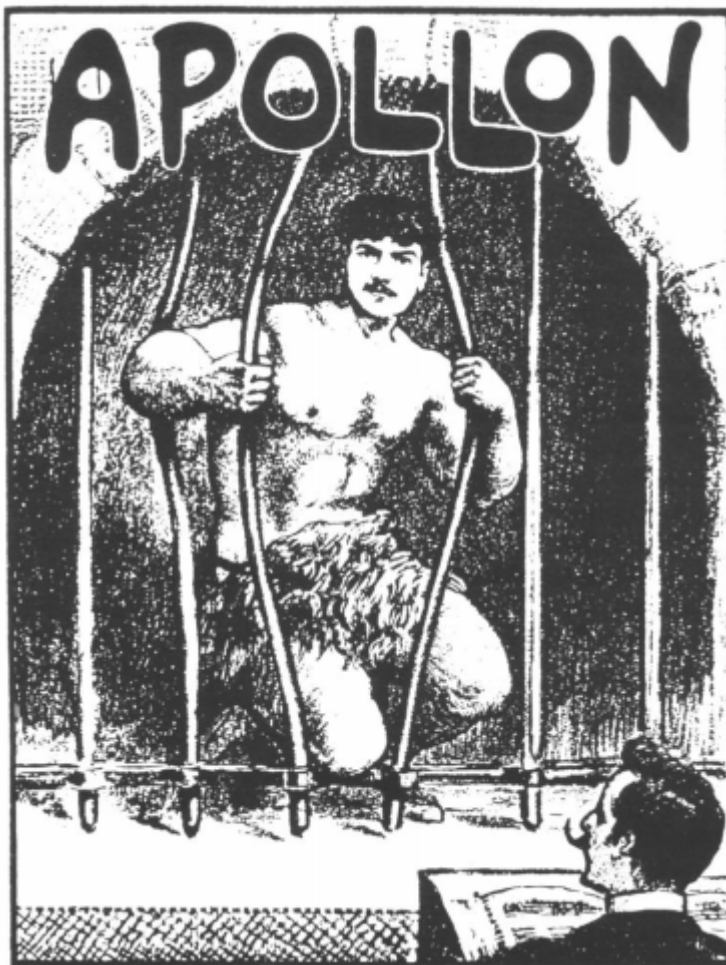
It was about nineteen years ago, and Apollon was performing in the music halls of Paris and the other major cities. His act consisted of unique and unforgettable feats of strength. The strongman was at that time twenty-five years old. His incomparable musculature and physique in all its enormity were completed by a superb head that conveyed energy and harmony; all went to create a unique being. Apollon was one of those phenomena of power that a capricious Nature produces perhaps once in ten centuries.

I have seen all the most renowned strongmen of the stage: Sandow with the superb physique; Batta, the Gentleman Athlete, who lifted a horse at arm's length; Cyclops, who bent and twisted coins. I have applauded Paris, the boat man, and I have admired John Grün, the breaker of horseshoes. But none of these acts were comparable

to that of Apollon. I do not know which artist of genius devised this thrilling scenario, but I am certain that no one could forget it after once seeing it.

When the curtain rises, the stage is in partial darkness. We can just make out on the stage enormous iron prison bars two meter high. All at once behind these bars we hear noises that break the suspenseful silence: several shouts and then footsteps of a fleeing man. Then, gunshots ring out over the heads of the audience, and the flash of those explosions briefly illuminate the inky darkness. A shadowy figure draped in a cloak runs across the stage behind the bars. This is the prisoner who seeks to escape from the fortress. This is Apollon.

The dark shape stops directly behind the iron gate, then two enormous hands seize it in an attempt to rattle the thick, metal bars. Suddenly, a huge, bare arm appears and passes between two of the bars. Is it really an arm? Is it not the leg of a giant? No, an enormous hand extends from the forty-four-centimeter fore-



THIS CONTEMPORARY DRAWING SHOWS APOLLON PERFORMING HIS "ESCAPING PRISONER" ACT AT THE FOLIES-BERGERE IN PARIS IN 1889.

arm, and it grasps the massive iron rods; this the arm of Apollon. Although the other arm is invisible, its hand grasps the adjacent bar, and using an irresistible pressure the two hands and the two bars slowly begin to move apart. In the gradually widening space a monstrous shoulder soon appears and pushes against one of the bowed rods. Both hands now seize the other bar. The monstrous arm, now clearly visible slowly extends, and through the yawning gap which he has just produced, the fugitive Hercules passes his entire body.

The powerful giant now appears on the other side of the bars and abruptly shrugs off his cloak just at the same moment that the spotlights flood him with their light, thus revealing his incredible physique in his silken tights. All of this action is so astounding, so terrific that several seconds pass before the breathless audience is able to explode with its seemingly endless applause.

Next, the strongman has his weights, barbells, and dumbbells brought out and completes his unforgettable entrance with several feats of strength. He juggles with a fifty-kilo weight and catches it with his outstretched arm; he performs a one-handed press with a short dumbbell weighing close to eighty kilos and then lifts an enormous 118-kilo barbell which even the strongest athletes can barely budge from the ground.

During the day Apollon's prison bars were displayed outside the theater or music hall like a ladder, and skeptical passers-by could come and exhaust themselves in vain attempts to bend the immovable bars.

It was in 1889, and Apollon had just arrived in Lille. He was to have his first performance that very evening at the Théâtre des Variétés in the rue Jean-Roisin [Desbonnet's note: today demolished]. His imposing equipment which included his dumbbells, his weights, and his enormous bars (still bent from his previous evening's performance) had been unloaded with great difficulty by

a large contingent of workmen. After having sent the first of these items to the theater, Apollon took the bars to a blacksmith whose address he had been given in order to refit the bars and to restore them to their original appearance. The smith was then to return the prop to the theater in the rue Jean-Roisin.

The blacksmith gladly accepted the job, and the strongman left with his mind at ease. Apollon thus contentedly lurched along the quiet, narrow streets of the Flemish capital as the sight of his oversized frame caused pedestrians to stare in amazement.

"How the devil could these bars have been damaged like this?" wondered the good Flemish worker aloud to his helper as his hammer gradually pounded the red-hot bars back into shape. "I wonder if I should perhaps temper them? That's it! I'll harden them until they are as strong as possible. There will no longer be any danger that they will bend again." So without realizing the terrible consequences of his deed, the blacksmith emptied several buckets of cold water on the heated bars, thus tempering them until they were nearly as hard as steel.

On that fateful evening I was with Desbonnet backstage at the theater, impatient to see the strongman once more in his extraordinary act. Apollon finished dressing, and during the intermission the prison bars were placed behind the lowered curtain, and there it was bolted solidly to the struts of the set. When Apollon declared that everything was ready, nearly all the stage lights were killed, and the curtain rose. The rifle shots were fired, and after the necessary running back and forth needed to set the scene, Apollon quickly fell to attacking the iron bars.

His powerful hands seized the two middle bars and the brawny muscles of this colossus produced their effort. But to his unspeakable surprise, nothing moved. Apollon pulled harder; he set his back into the task, but in vain. The bars refused to budge. Then without letting go, the strongman turned toward his wife who was standing in the wings. His anguished head was lowered, and with the unforgettable look of a wounded beast he said in a deep stage-whisper, "I don't know what's happening. I can't get through!"

Madame Apollon immediately suspected her husband of laziness; her severe, imperious little voice rose, and in her southern, country dialect she ordered, "You just hurry up and pull harder. Come on, go through the bars. Get a move on!"

Thus ordered, the strongman set himself once more to his task. Heedless of the performance, he threw the cloak which was constraining him off his shoulders, and pulled with all the strength of his enormous muscles. When he did so, the veins on his neck swelled to a terrific degree. The impact of his shaking caused the entire set to shudder, and in fact the whole building seemed to have been struck by a hurricane.

Little by little under the pressure of these prodigious, superhuman efforts, the bar began to bend. A profound silence reigned in the hall as the astonished spectators held their breath. The only sound was the "ugh!" which escaped from Apollon's enor-

mous chest every time he made a new effort. For the first time in his life Apollon was forced to exert himself the full extent of his strength; he had already pulled two of the bars toward one another; his powerful hands now seized both bars at the same time and inexorably closed the gap between them. When he let go, the bars were touching one another.

Despite severe bruising, Apollon could soon put his shoulder through. Then using his hand and back as if drawing a bow, he produced a final effort that was incredibly powerful. The half-broken bars widened, and through an opening that was just barely sufficient, the giant slowly and painfully slid his head, his torso, and finally his entire body through the bars.

Apollon had accomplished the most tremendous feat of strength of his entire career. He was panting and covered with sweat. His huge chest rose and fell like a blacksmith's bellows, and his gasps for breath could be heard clearly at the back of the theater. He then came forward toward the audience, staggering a little, his eyes bloodshot, his body worn out. He gave a weak flourish of his hand and said simply, "There. That's done."

When his weights and barbells were taken out to him he was notable to lift them. He was able to press an eighty-kilo weight no higher than his shoulder. He tried to juggle with his 160-pound weight, but on the first attempt he dumped it and it fell heavily, jarring the boards of the stage.

"I beg you to excuse me," he said winded and disoriented. "I don't know . . . what I . . . I don't feel well . . . I'm afraid . . . unable to do my feats. . . and to smash. . . the stage." He then waved to the audience and staggered offstage. No one in the theater said a word. The audience sat silent; they had the feeling that they had just witnessed something extraordinary.

In the wings, Apollon collapsed in a chair and lolled his head on to his chest. His forearms rested on his knees, and although they were normally of unusual thickness, now they were pumped up by the titanic effort which he had just accomplished. They must have measured at least forty-eight centimeters, and as they rested on the thighs of the devastated strongman, they seemed to have been deformed into something not quite human.

Apollon had always been a little paranoid, and forever after he remained convinced that on that day he had been the victim of a jealous rival's clever machinations.

Another day a robust young man named F. who had arms measuring forty-six centimeters, and calves of forty-seven centimeters, a chest of 1 meter 30, and weight of 115 kilos attended Apollon's show in a large northern city. He was very strong and superbly built. He was accompanied by a group of friends who were convinced that F. was the strongest man alive. Unfortunately, they made so much noise during the show that Apollon came toward them and asked them to be quiet. A few hotheads among them took this admonition rather badly since they believed that any behavior was permitted, trusting in the great strength of their friend, F. One thing

led to another, and despite the pleas of F., one of the hotheads came forward and said "Mr. Apollon, there is an amateur here who will undertake to do everything that you can do."

Apollon, who was about to begin working with his twenty-kilo weights, reddened and then paled when he saw himself challenged so discourteously. As his anger got the better of him he replied, "Really! Let this man come forward and we will have a good laugh."

F. stood his ground like a good fellow (he had, after all, said nothing in all this), but his friends pushed him to the middle of the arena so he could hardly refuse to participate, and upon my word, he made the best of a bad situation. Confident in his strength, F. resolved to do at least do a few nice arm extensions with Apollon. But the strongman was determined to teach the little smart aleck a lesson and not to cover him in easy glory gained from a measly twenty-kilo weight.

Apollon said, "Come on, then, sir. We'll see if you are strong."

F. came forward and said, "Mr. Apollon, with your permission, we will start with some arm extensions with twenty-kilo weights."

Apollon looked at him with a supercilious expression and answered, "An arm extension with a twenty-kilo weight? That's fine for children, sir. We, however, will start with four weights, and then we will begin to add a little more." He then had four weights tied together and announced, "I will start," as he lifted them overhead on the first attempt with a one-handed press. Then, after putting them back on the floor, he said, "Your turn sir."

After F. had seen the strongman lift the four weights as if they were feathers, he thought to himself, "These are hollow

weights. If they are easy for Apollon, they will be the same for me."

He approached the four weights, but when he attempted to lift them, he realized clearly that the weights were genuine. Troubled at having fallen into this hornet's nest where his reputation was in jeopardy, he marshaled all of his energy and pulled on the four weights in order to bring them to his shoulder with one hand. He was unable to do so, but he tried again and after several attempts succeeded in bringing the weights to his shoulder with one hand, thus showing that he actually was remarkably strong. But F. was bothered by the four weights which moved and fell back on his forearm thus hurting his hand and he was unable to get them higher than his shoulder.

Then Apollon grabbed the weights, and as the strongman pressed them up with his hands, he said these simple words to young F., "Go sir! Get off the stage. You're about as strong as my sister." Poor F. was forced to leave amid the laughter of the audience, and



IN 1926, APOLLON APPEARED AS "TRITON" IN THE MOTION PICTURE *MARE NOSTRUM* DIRECTED BY REX INGRAM. WITH APOLLON IN THIS PUBLICITY STILL IS KADA-ABD-EL-KADER, WHO PLAYED ULYSSES FERRAGUT IN THIS ALLEGORICAL FILM ABOUT THE SEA BATTLES OF WORLD WAR I.

—PHOTO COURTESY THE TODD-MCLEAN COLLECTION

A five hundred-page book would be insufficient to cite all the feats of strength accomplished by the colossus, Apollon.¹² What a pity that all his feats were not done under the control of official dynamometrists. Unfortunately, the Weightlifting Club of France still did not exist around 1889 at the time when Louis Uni was at the height of his strength and possessed the sacred fire which allowed him to accomplish so many feats of athletic prowess. How regrettable it is additionally that no one then considered making a full-body cast of this superman, this super athlete. The sight of this statue would inspire our sons and grandsons with admiration. I am filled with sadness when I think that nothing will remain of this marvel of strength and beauty when Apollon at last sleeps in the tomb and that only a few casts of his arm and leg will record the earthly presence of a demigod. While reading the account of the prodigious feats accomplished by this man and while looking at the different photographs in this work, our descendants will try in vain to reconstruct in their mind's eye the superb human edifice which was Apollon. Despite all their best efforts and their most vivid imaginings, the dream will forever remain a thousand times less than the reality. There has only been one Apollon; there will surely never come another.

Notes:

¹ Desbonnet's note: "Gone Today and replaced by the Northern Credit Bank."

² In a later article, Desbonnet admits that Apollon's appearance in Lille was not quite the surprise he implies in this chapter. At this time (1889), Desbonnet ran a school of physical culture, and an unnamed correspondent in Paris had sent him newspaper clippings describing Apollon's prowess. Desbonnet was immediately anxious to see this modern giant, and if possible, bring him to Lille to perform. He visited the manager of the Théâtre des Variétés who authorized the young man to go to Paris and seek out Apollon and engage him for the Lille music hall. Paris at this time was enjoying the Exposition Universelle, and Apollon had come to the city to entertain at this extravaganza. Unfortunately, by the time Desbonnet had arrived in the French capital, Apollon had departed for another engagement at Bordeaux, but he was able to negotiate with the strongman's manager, and he arranged for Apollon's appearance not only at the theater but also in his own gymnasium. Edmond Desbonnet, "L'apparence de l'athlète: La Grille d'Apollon," *La Culture Physique* 32.460 (August 1928): 241-2.

³ Probably no other piece of lifting equipment has fostered so many articles or so much speculation as Apollon's railroad axle. The best account is: Joe Roark, *Musclesearch* 20 (August/September 1988).

⁴ When I could, I have included the dates of prominent figures.

⁵ Marseille Aîné [the elder] was born about 1832 and died circa 1892. He was the head of a family of wrestlers who flourished in the first wave of the French athletic renaissance in the 1850's and 60's. Marseille also gathered around him a group of skilled but rather uncouth fighters who were able to hold their own in the rough and tumble world of fairs and vaudeville. Apollon's troupe consisted

of young, handsome, superbly muscular men, and the contrast between the two schools was dramatic, as the newspaper clearly indicates.

⁶ Surier became a well known writer on the subject of physical culture. He wrote two popular works, *Comment on devient beau et fort* [*How to Become Handsome and Strong*] (Paris: *La Culture Physique*, c. 1905) and *Forts par la culture physique* [*Strength through Physical Culture*] (Paris: *La Culture Physique*, c. 1915). His greatest contribution to the field, however, came as editor of the influential magazine *La Culture Physique* in February of 1904.

⁷ "Le cirque est plein du haut en bas," is a direct quote from the Toreador song in Bizet's famous opera Carmen.

⁸ This is a sly dig at Apollon's provincialism. By making an exclamation in the dialect of the *langue d'oc*, spoken in the wilds of south France, the writer is showing that Apollon is anything but a sophisticated Parisian.

⁹ Georges Strehly was author of *L'acrobatie et les acrobates* [*Acrobatics and Acrobats*] (Paris: Delagrave, 1903) and was a frequent contributor to the various Desbonnet publications.

¹⁰ The Rasso Trio formed and reformed many times over the years, but it nearly always consisted of extremely powerful men. Apollon and his feisty wife demonstrate the respect other strongmen had for the Rasso's strength and abilities. The men comprising the trio were especially talented when they encountered the French strongman. Godefroy Nordmann was extremely arrogant in demeanor, and looked down his nose at nearly everyone. By contrast, the other two members of the troupe, Heinrich Hertzog and Johann von Baar, were as generous and kind as their colleague was conceited and self-important. This version of the Rasso Trio flourished around 1890-95. For additional information, see David Webster *Sons of Samson: Volume 1 Profiles* (Irvine: author, 1993).

¹¹ "Paddely," was actually "James Pedley," and the year was 1902. The British light heavyweight had a well deserved reputation for great strength. Sandow himself is said to have remarked that Pedley was "the strongest Englishman that he had ever met." (Tromp can Digge-len, "My Strength Memoirs," *Muscle Power* 16.2 (August 1953): 66). This estimation of the man's power was echoed by such luminaries as George Hackenschmidt and W.A. Pullum. It was in the area of grip strength, however, that Pedley excelled. He was famous for the ability to lift a two hundred-pound dumbbell by the endnuts using only the tips of his thumbs and fingers. A full description of this as well as a comparative chart of his capabilities on the Régnier and Collins Dynamometers can be found in David Willoughby's *The Super Athletes* (South Brunswick: Barnes, 1970), 216-17, 233.

¹² Desbonnet, did, in fact, write a book about Apollon which appeared in the early 1920s: *Un demi-dieu de la Force: Apollon* (Paris: Librairie Athlétique, 1923). It was a slender, illustrated paperback originally produced as a premium for those subscribing to either of the Desbonnet magazines.

