

To My Friend

HERMANN GÖRNER

"THE STRONGEST MAN WHO EVER LIVED"

## FOREWORD

"The good old days" is a by-word. Most times the operative word is "old", and distance lends its enchantment, but when one turns to the professional weight lifting sphere one is also entitled to refer to the "good not-so-old days".

For the decade ending as recently as 1930 threw up many great Strong Men, perhaps not as eccentric in their hair-cuts nor skirted like Cyr, not as beautiful as Sandow, nor as bombastic as Sampson; unframed by gilt and plush, but displaying feats of strength sometimes even more laudable than those of their illustrious predecessors, if with simpler instruments and in a different manner.

Like their comrades of the 90's, they were a cosmopolitan crowd. The Russian Zass, the Pole Breitbart, the Frenchmen Cadine and Rigoulot, and the German Görner. . . . And the greatest of these, I think, was Görner.

Cast in a gigantic mould, one seldom used for Strong Men, almost that of the old time Austrian Türk and the French Uni, (Apollon) his over 6 ft. of height was underpinned by 17½ st. of smooth proportionate muscle.

Interest in the professional scene having been recreated by two matches in 1925 and 1926 for the title of World's Strongest Man, contested by the two Frenchmen and both won by Charles Rigoulot, I shall never forget the excitement caused by Tromp van Diggelen's publication of some articles about an 'unknown' (see later) who could lift nearly 800 lb. off the ground, wrestle with a baby elephant, take the weight of a laden motor-car upon his shoulders, and perform other feats of the super-human variety.

This, of course, was Görner, and he and his wife, almost as strong as he in supporting feats, duly arrived in England in 1927, and under the aegis of W. A. Pullum gave some proof of his immense strength by Dead Lifting before British Officials, in strict British styles, rulings and on appliances strange to him, over 650 lb. with two hands and 600 lb. with one, together with a number of other feats . . . and then seemed to fade out of the picture. I say 'seemed', and I called him an 'unknown' in the last paragraph, rather in the style of our headline about the Channel gale which Europeans use to illustrate our insularity: 'High Seas in English Channel. Shipping at a Standstill. Continent Isolated'.

Rigoulot, on the other hand, went on from strength to strength to make the 'impossible' grades of an over 250 lb. one hand Snatch, an over 300 lb. two hands ditto and an over 400 lb. Clean and Jerk. Unfortunately, the two, Görner and Rigoulot, never met. (Or did they? Wild horses will not drag from Görner some little stories about this). The stumbling block was that the German, not unnaturally, would have played his two or three trump cards, the Dead Lifts; spelling curtains for the Frenchman. That, of course, is conjecture at best. What Müller has written in this volume appears to me to be reality.

I have met both Hermann and his biographer, Edgar Müller, in their native land, where they both live in straitened circumstances as flüchtlinge (refugees), far from their homes. Despite the loss of his wife and his fortune, and his 16 months in a Concentration Camp including work in a mine, Hermann is still the genial figure, with an eye to a

joke, who endeared himself to British audiences in 1927. Apart from a small pension (he lost an eye in the first World War), he has practically nothing left except the clothes he stands up in, the bedding he sleeps in, some bills and hand-outs from Pagel's Circus with which he featured in South Africa many times, and an article I wrote about him in *Superman* about 15 years ago.

A word also about Edgar Müller, who is almost unknown to British readers. 'If Edgar says it is so, it is so', should be the slogan over the Müller portal. I pride myself on being a judge of precise, exact, factual people and I have never met such a walking encyclopaedia on continental Strong Men and their feats, as this man. Mention a feat and he can state the date, the time, who was present; almost the state of the weather and 'the colour of the engine driver's tie'.

He is a sheer 'fanatic' on weight lifting and weight training and can discourse for hours, days if necessary, both in his native German and in very good English, on the subject. Since 1943, when nearly the whole of his cuttings, records, photographs, books and charts were destroyed by fire, he has slowly built up a small but comprehensive indexed record of feats and personalities. It is not only from this that you get this story; its authenticity is copper-bottomed by his close friendship and co-operation with Herman Görner over 30 years; the whole cemented by his amazing memory.

To test some of his statements, I made a few enquiries myself about Görner's amazing two hands Dead Lift of nearly 800 lb. I pointed out to Edgar that whilst 'Brockhaus', the German equivalent of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, accepted this lift in

its 1922 edition as authentic, Theodor Siebert, the great German trainer of Weight Lifters and sometimes Stronger Men, gave the big man credit for only 300 kg. in a book he published in 1923. Quick as a flash, Edgar referred me to a German magazine of 1926 (which I had missed) in which Siebert acknowledges the greater feat.

There was another little matter, too, which illustrates his card-index recollection. In two American magazines in the 1940's, mention was made of a German, Paul Whur, alleged to have been the first man in the world to Clean and Jerk the double bodyweight. At least that was to me the inference from the date 1904. Astounding because the first previous recorded instances were at the Olympic Games of 1928. A little matter of 24 hours can sometimes make a difference in the weight lifting world . . . but 24 years!

So I duly consulted the oracle and his reply was that there was a *Joseph Wühr* round about that time, who was *Continental-Jerking* (a far different proposition) weights approaching the double bodyweight. (He gave me the figures from his records. Actually, one of the magazines in question changed its mind about the feat and eventually called it a Continental Jerk).

Just now, I couldn't care less whether or not Wühr lifted the double bodyweight overhead. What I am interested in is Accuracy, and I think the reading public is too. That is why I commend this book, hoping it will be the forerunner of many.

IRVING CLARK,

*Fully Qualified Referee of the  
British Amateur Weightlifters' Association,  
Formerly Honorary Legal Adviser to the  
B.A.W.L.A.*

## INTRODUCTION

### Introducing Edgar Müller

In presenting to the world of strength the first full and authentic life story of Hermann Görner, it is appropriate to introduce his biographer, Edgar Müller.

Writer, teacher, referee, statistician and historian, Edgar Müller is, without any doubt, the most knowledgeable authority on Weight Lifting, Strength Feats and Strong Men in Germany at the present time.

Born at Nossen, in Saxony, on 15th November, 1898, he served in the first World War and saw action in Belgium and France from 1917-1919, being discharged finally on account of war wounds.

He studied physical culture at the Institut für Leibesübungen der Universität, Leipzig (School of Physical Culture of Leipzig University). In business on his own account as a Fur Trader, he also established and managed one of the best known and most fully-equipped gymnasiums in Germany, situated in Leipzig. Due to air action, he lost his business and his home, together with much of his amazing collection of rare and unique books, cuttings, photographs and records of Weight Lifting, Strength Feats and Strong Men throughout the ages and from the world over.

In 1916 he won his first Junior Title in Weight Lifting and shortly after this found himself very impressed by the teachings and writings of Professor

Theodor Siebert, after whose methods he modelled his own system of training to be put into effect in his gymnasium later. He was Secretary and Referee for the Athletic Club Samson, when only 21 years of age. In 1920 he met Hermann Görner for the first time and throughout the years to the present day their friendship has continued unbroken. In 1929, Edgar Müller suffered a severe accident in falling down an ice-covered stairway and badly injured bones in his left hand, which hindered him considerably in his weight lifting career. Nevertheless, he was lifting officially as recently as 1944, when he won the Championship of Saxony at Chemnitz, at the age of 46. In 1930, he was elected Weight Lifting Instructor, Judge and Team Coach to three Leipzig Clubs—namely, 'The Atlas', 'Dala' and 'Arthur Saxon Weight Lifting Club', which duties he carried out over the period 1930-1937. During these years, he promoted and staged many Mr. Leipzig contests and Weight Lifting Meetings on the 'Olympic' and other Lifts.

In this same year (1930), he founded his own school in Leipzig, which catered for Weight Lifters, Body Builders and Strength Artistes. He was also the principal founder of the 'Hermann Görner Club', Leipzig. In 1936 at the Berlin Olympic Games, he reported the Weight Lifting events for a Leipzig newspaper and on this occasion Edgar Müller met many of the world's best known figures of strength, including our own Heavyweight Champion at that time—the late Ronald Walker of Wakefield. It is of great interest to British readers to note that Edgar Müller has the greatest admiration for the feats of strength and amazing lifts established by Ronald Walker, whose career Edgar

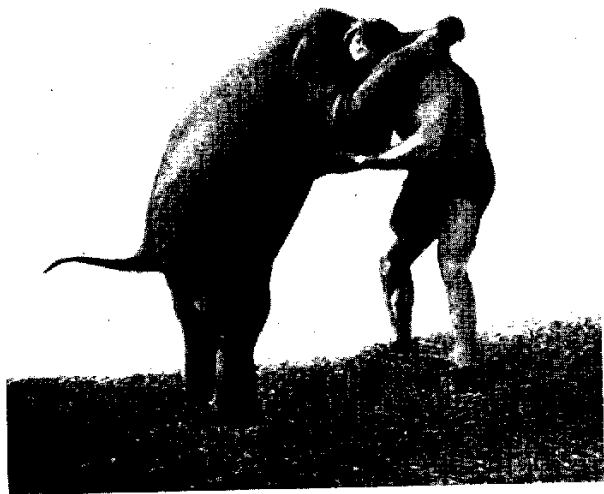
Müller always followed closely. It is Mr. Müller's considered opinion that Ronald Walker was the world's strongest man, at his weight, when in his lifting prime.

Edgar Müller has trained many of Saxony's champion lifters with his methods which he developed in conjunction with Hermann Görner.

In 1947, he left Leipzig (now in the Russian Zone) and came to reside in the British Zone, after closing down his gymnasium, which he had continued to operate. He has suffered severely through his experiences resulting from the aftermath of World War II, but his enthusiasm is still boundless. His ambition is to found an Anglo/German Weight Lifting Club in conjunction with Hermann Görner to be run on a cultural basis in the British Zone of Germany.

JOHN E. DAWF,

*Fully Qualified Referee of the  
British Amateur Weight Lifters Association.*



Wrestling with an Elephant. Part of his daily act with Pagel's Circus, South Africa. The elephant weighed 700 lb. at the commencement of the tour and had increased to 1500 lb. by the end of the tour, but was handled just as easily by the mighty Görner.

## GOERNER THE MIGHTY

BY EDGAR MÜLLER

### CHAPTER I

#### Introducing Hermann Görner

BEFORE I met Hermann Görner, I had so often read of his name in connection with extraordinary feats of physical power that the desire to meet him became an obsession with me.

My chance came in 1920 and the first glimpse I had of this towering superman gave me a feeling of overwhelming awe—I had seen other physical giants, including the Russian mastodon, Feodor Machnow, who stood 8 ft. 9½ in. and weighed about 34 stones; I have met Primo Carnera, when he came to Leipzig in 1929, but none gave me the thrill that I experienced as I gazed for the first time on our friend—the smiling, unfurried Hermann Görner with a figure truly Herculean yet not without an easy grace.

Görner's six feet of manhood is almost dwarfed by the extraordinary spread of shoulder he possesses. He is a man of huge symmetrical bulk without any vestige of adiposity. The huge masses of muscle on his arms, back and legs were to me something out of this world. Never had I seen such a figure—never had I been so impressed and to this day this impression has survived.

After the theatre had closed on his performances, he would discard his leotard and don his street

attire. You could not mistake him, even if one covered him with a shroud. He was still a magnificent figure walking leisurely along the street. Clothes, no matter how well tailored they might be, betrayed the startling evidence of thews rippling under protesting cloth. His neck was like that of a young bull and made his collar appear inadequate. Hands and wrists that gave every indication of a vice-like grip; a stride and manner that vibrated glorious strength in every step—here was the living incarnation of what we had been led to believe existed in the past, when they paid tribute to man's physical superiority in statues of bronze and marble.

On meeting Hermann for the first time, I was surprised to notice that his voice and manner of speaking was startlingly quiet. Modest and gentle, but the twinkle in his eye indicated he was not averse to a sense of good humour and as I became better acquainted with him, I discovered he was also very fond of what the British call 'leg pulling', but always without a hint of malice, being nothing less than sheer exuberance that is not unusual with men so gifted with abundant strength and bubbling health.

I was, however, to discover that my friend did not possess a one-track mind personality. Hermann could express himself delightfully on the piano and accordion. A game of chess or a game of billiards would often fill a spare hour in between performances.

A quiet man, a peace-loving man; honouring that which is right, detesting that which is wrong; a healthy abhorrence of regimentation and all that it might imply; deploring the causes that make men



Carrying four men on one shoulder—total weight over 1000 lb. Performed in South Africa as part of his circus act in his 1935 tour.

forget, so that in their militaristic amnesia they destroy with legal impunity what Nature created to be the most perfect physical machine in a world of moving things.

A respecter of his fellow men, gallant to the weaker sex and those not so blessed with physical qualifications ; a philosopher who had learned that the trials and stresses of life visit both the strong and the weak.

Elsie Görner, Hermann's wife, a lady of bearing, serious and of great understanding, bade her adieu to this world early in 1949. This sad blow to Hermann left him bereft of his staunchest champion. This shock coming after a period that had left the world wounded and trying to regain its balance after the human catastrophe, which had been shared by all, might have bowed lesser men than Görner, but he was of sterner mettle. Hermann Görner was not just strong in physical power—he had the mental qualifications which resist and repel attacks on the less obvious senses—a great body and a great mind were in harmony. Shocks might shake and temporarily flounder most of us but with time and understanding the strong survive even the most severe catastrophes.

Elsie Görner, during her life, which had been devoted to Hermann, had made a hobby of collecting and preserving anything literary referring to her husband — press reports, magazine cuttings, excerpts, articles, announcements, tributes coming from every corner of the world. She was justly proud of her world adulated man. When things were normal, his good wife had learned that, to keep Hermann in the pink of condition, he needed sufficient sleep, as much as  $4\frac{1}{2}$  lb. of minced meat

with eggs thrown in to help along. He has always been a moderate drinker and smoker.

To-day Hermann Görner lives alone in a tiny village not far from Hannover in Germany. His home is nothing more than a small room in which he eats, sleeps, cooks and philosophises. It contains a bed, a table, two chairs, a cupboard and a small stove for heating and cooking purposes. A far cry from the comfortable home he once had in Leipzig and vastly different also from the prosperous restaurant he once managed and lived in. In his present one-roomed 'home' Hermann often receives interviews with transient followers of the cult of strength. Here in this tiny home, the author has spent many a long hour talking, discussing and reviewing practically everything men do in similar circumstances, especially when a common bond exists between them.