

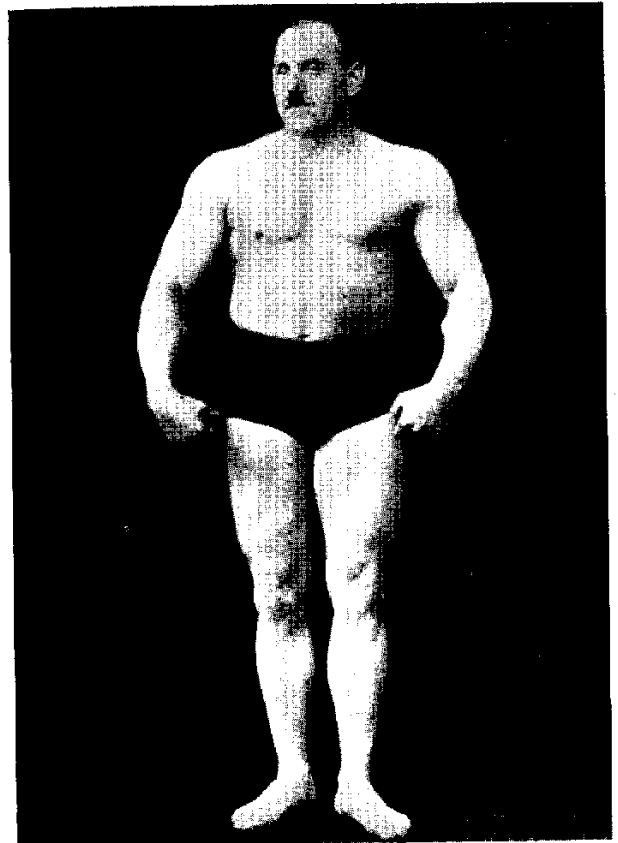
CHAPTER 2

His Early Life

HERMANN GÖRNER was born in Haenichen near Leipzig on 13th April, 1891. He was the youngest of three children and at birth showed nothing unusual to indicate the great power that was later to be his. In fact, he weighed so little that it was thought he would never amount to very much physically. However, by the time he was three years of age, young Hermann grew to normal size for a child of this age. His father was a big-boned giant, standing nearly 6 ft. 3 in. in height, but his mother was little over 5 ft. tall. His father wore on his small finger a ring which Hermann could wear with ease on his thumb and this was many years later, when Hermann was a full-grown man.

In spite of the pessimistic predictions at his birth, Hermann grew up into a fine, sturdy boy, showing excellent bone and muscular possibilities. At 10 years of age, he became interested in Weight Lifting. At the age of 14—his last term at school—he was able to swing to full stretch of the arm a kettleweight weighing $110\frac{1}{4}$ lb. (50 kilos). At this time he stood 5 ft. $6\frac{1}{8}$ in. (168 cms.) and weighed $185\frac{1}{4}$ lb. (84 kilos) or 13 stone $3\frac{1}{4}$ lb. As a matter of interest, George Hackenschmidt, the famous 'Russian Lion' was said to have been 4 ft. $7\frac{1}{2}$ in. in height and 122 lb. or 8 stone 10 lb. in weight at the same age, according to his book, 'The Way to Live'.

It is interesting to note that, contrary to popular



Görner at 36 years of age. A relaxed pose showing his symmetrical development. Photograph taken during his stay in England in 1928.

belief, Hermann's practice of Weight Lifting at the early age of 10 years did not have the effect of preventing his later growth to a height of 6 ft. 0½ in. (184 cms.). In this connection, also, it may be mentioned that another famous strong man, Louis Uni of France, better known as Apollon, started the practice of Weight Lifting at the age of 12 and reached the height of 6 ft. 3 in. at maturity (190 cms.).

It is worthy of note that all famous strong men have served an apprenticeship at outdoor sports in the course of which they have laid the foundation of their vigorous 'animal' strength, vitality and health. Hermann Görner is no exception to this. He practised all manner of health-giving outdoor sports—running, jumping, swimming, acrobatics, shot and weight putting in addition to boxing and wrestling.

It was apparent that as he grew and developed his musculature retained its sharp clearly defined lines. At 18 years of age he had attained measurements worthy of a full-grown strong man. His biceps, neck and calves were each 17 in. (Exactly 43 cms.) in circumference. His trade of Stove Fitter, however, gave Hermann little scope for his growing talents.

Famous sculptors, including Professor Klinger and Professor Moutier, were enraptured over his physique. He was engaged by them to pose for many of their works and, through this and other means, Hermann soon discovered that there were many ways of adding to his income whenever he felt like exhibiting his tremendous physique and great strength.

By the time he was 21 years old, Hermann had

won many honours in Weight Lifting including the following successes :—

- Championship of Middle Germany, 1911.
- Championship of Brandenburg Province, 1911.
- Championship of Northern Germany, 1911.
- Second in Championship of Europe, 1911.
- Second in Championship of Middle Germany, 1912.
- Winner of National Contest in Berlin, 1912.

During the years 1911-13, Hermann Görner was the leader of a Strong Man Trio. The Trio was first known as the 'Atlas Trio', later the title was changed to the 'Hermann Strongfort Trio', the members consisting of Hermann himself, his brother, Otto Görner and a friend, Otto Brauer. The Trio—all amateurs—put over an excellent act, featuring numbers in which they worked together intermixed with solo numbers. The act was opened with simultaneous juggling of kettleweights by the Trio, this being followed by juggling with a Globe barbell. Next the stage was taken by Hermann Görner as the featured performer. Taking a specially-constructed bar at either end of which one of his partners sat, he would jerk the whole overhead with two hands—the Jerk being made from behind the neck. This feat was then followed by Otto Brauer bent pressing with the right hand a kettleweight on which a man was seated, following up the Bent Press by taking up from the floor and pressing overhead a second kettleweight. The next feat was carried out by Otto Görner. He supported across his shoulders a barbell and five men. One of the men was seated on his shoulders and two men were suspended from each end of the bar. When the

whole load was in position, Otto then revolved rapidly several times on his own axis, finally returning the men and the barbell to the stage. The next number featured Hermann, this time supporting on his feet and hands in the pyramid position two barbells and eight men, the whole load being supported for several seconds. The concluding feature of the 'Hermann Strongfort Trio' was carried out by all three performers working together. The two Otto's laid on their backs and supported with their legs a stout plank, upon which eighteen or more men were placed, the men being lifted into position like babies by the redoubtable Hermann. As has been already said, this act was performed by the same trio for over two years, being performed in most of the principal cities of Middle Germany.

During 1922, Hermann again joined forces for a short time in a duo act with Otto Brauer. This time the act consisted of some ten different feats, performed singly and together, and including juggling with kettleweights and barbells, twirling a barbell around the body in the so-called 'Russian Mill' style. Hermann himself featured his famous challenge barbell with a shaft of $2\frac{3}{8}$ in. diameter and weight of $330\frac{3}{4}$ lb., which he cleaned and jerked overhead, then dropped to behind his neck, from which position it was again jerked overhead and finally dropped from arms length and caught in the crook of his arms, before replacing on the floor. The remaining features of the act included supporting a barbell and five men on the shoulders and whirling around, jerking overhead two men on a bar from behind the neck, supporting on a specially-built apparatus mounted on his head two men, who were



The Hermann Strongfort Trio, showing (from left to right) Otto Görner (Hermann's brother), Hermann Görner and Otto Brauer. Taken in Leipzig in 1911.

then twirled around as if on a roundabout. This latter feature of the act was performed by Otto Brauer. Hermann featured a number in which he danced a waltz around the stage, at the same time supporting on his right shoulder a barbell to which four men clung. Otto Brauer took the next feature of the act by lying on his back and supporting five men and two barbells, one of the men holding two kettleweights overhead—similar to the famous Roman Column. The final number of the act featured Hermann reclining on his back and supporting on his legs a revolving Merry-Go-Round on which eight men had a ride.

At the age of 22, Hermann lifted in the 1913 German Weight Lifting Championships at Kassel. In these Championships he was third in the Heavy-weight Class, behind Paul Trappen of Trier and Karl Mörke of Koeln (Cologne). This Championship was decided on 5 Lifts, namely, One Arm Snatch, One Arm Jerk, Two Hands Press, Two Hands Snatch and Two Hands Clean and Jerk. Görner lifted a total of 1,146 lb. (520 kilos) against Trappen's winning total of 1,217½ lb. (552½ kilos) and Mörke's 1,212 lb. (550 kilos) which gave him second place. Hermann's individual Lifts were:—

One Hand Snatch	- - -	170¾ lb. (77½ kilos).
One Hand Jerk	- - -	203¾ lb. (92½ kilos).
Two Hands Snatch	- - -	231¼ lb. (105 kilos).
Two Hands Press	- - -	220½ lb. (100 kilos).
Two Hands Clean and Jerk		319½ lb. (145 kilos).

In 1913 Hermann Görner also lifted in the World's Championships held in Breslau on 26th to 28th July of that year, but due to his having to work more than ten hours per day at this particular period

he was not able to find sufficient time to train properly, so could not reproduce his best form. He finished fourth, behind Josef Grafl of Vienna, who won with a total of 975 lb. on the four lifts of Right Hand Snatch, Left Hand Snatch, Two Hands Press and Two Hands Continental Jerk with Barbell. Berthold Tandler of Vienna was second and Jan Krausse of Riga, third.

Although it may now seem strange, in the light of what has happened, Hermann WANTED to be a boxer or wrestler, but these plans were shattered by the 1914/18 war and after serving four years 'Dienst bei der Fahne'—Service with the Colours—he returned home having sustained severe shrapnel wounds and being blind in both eyes. He later underwent a very delicate operation by a famous eye specialist and sight was restored to his left eye, but the other was totally destroyed. Notwithstanding this heavy setback his fighting heart was undaunted and he made plans for the future which he proceeded to put into immediate operation.

Hermann recommenced training as soon as he was reasonably fit and entered his name for the 1919 German Weight Lifting Championships which were held in that year in München (Munich) on 9th and 10th August. On this occasion, the famous Karl Mörke emerged the winner with Hermann Görner runner-up. The Lifts were the same five Lifts as in 1913 but due to the intervention of the war years and lack of training facilities, the totals registered were appreciably lower than in 1913. Mörke totalled 1,190 lb. (540 kilos) against Görner's 1,124 lb. (510 kilos) with the celebrated Josef Strassberger third with 1,107¼ lb. (502½ kilos). Up

to this time it is interesting to note that Hermann was still an amateur Weight Lifter.

In 1920 The World Championships were held in Vienna, the winner in the Heavyweight Class being Karl Mörke, beating Aigner and Alscher, both of Austria, into second and third places. Mörke's winning lifts were Right Hand Snatch 165½ lb. (75 kilos), Right Hand Jerk (two hands to shoulder) 220½ lb. (100 kilos), Two Hands Press 242½ lb. (110 kilos), Two Hands Continental Jerk 350 lb. (162½ kilos). In this year, 1920, a match was arranged between Karl Mörke and Hermann Görner. Hermann was out to avenge his defeat by Mörke in 1919 German Weight Lifting Championships.

The match was a battle between the 'long and the short of it'—as a note about the men's respective physiques will reveal. Hermann standing over six feet in height and Karl Mörke barely five feet, two-and-a-half inches, weighing 220 lb., and nearly as broad as he was tall!

The match duly took place on 4th April, 1920, in the Restaurant Hall of the Zoological Gardens, Leipzig, and was held on the following Lifts :—

- One Hand Snatch.
- One Hand Jerk.
- Two Hands Press.
- Two Hands Snatch.
- Two Hands Jerk.

The sixth Lift being a Lift selected by each man. This was in Hermann's case the Two Hands Dead Lift and, in Karl Mörke's case, the Deep Knee Bend. The result of this Match, refereed by Paul



Two-hands Jerk with live weights totalling 392 lb. Photograph taken in England in 1927.

Schröder, was a decisive win for Hermann Görner, as the following details will show :—

HERMANN GÖRNER	KARL MÖRKE
<i>Right-hand Snatch</i> 198½ lb. (90 kilos)	<i>Right-hand Snatch</i> 165½ lb. (75 kilos)
<i>Right-hand Jerk</i> 248 lb. (112½ kilos) (Clean)	<i>Right-hand Jerk</i> 220½ lb. (100 kilos) (Two hands to shoulder)
<i>Two-hands Press</i> 242½ lb. (110 kilos)	<i>Two-hands Press</i> 264½ lb. (120 kilos)
<i>Two-hands Snatch</i> 275½ lb. (125 kilos)	<i>Two-hands Snatch</i> 242½ lb. (110 kilos)
<i>Two-hands Jerk</i> 352½ lb. (160 kilos) (Clean)	<i>Two-hands Jerk</i> 341½ lb. (155 kilos) (Continental)
<hr/> <i>Totals</i> . . 1,316¾ lb. (597½ kilos)	<hr/> 1,234¼ lb. (560 kilos)
<i>Two-hands Dead Lift</i> 661 lb. (300 kilos)	<i>Deep Knee Bend</i> 528¾ lb. (240 kilos)
<hr/> <i>Grand Totals</i> 1,977¾ lb. (897½ kilos)	<hr/> 1,763 lb. (800 kilos)

It will thus be seen that Hermann decisively beat the World's Champion Heavyweight Weight Lifter and by his powerful lifting clearly demonstrated that he was not at his best form the previous year, when Mörke emerged the winner against Hermann in the Championships held in Munich.

Karl Mörke later went to America, where he resided for some years. He later returned to Germany and died there in 1947 as a result, it is said, of injuries sustained in a bombing raid during the closing stages of World War II.

CHAPTER 3

His Later Life and Travels

IN 1921 Hermann Görner became a professional Strong Man. Having become the 'World's Strongest Amateur Weight Lifter' in the Heavyweight Class, by his defeat of Karl Mörke, the World's Champion, Hermann turned to the ranks of Professional Strong Men and Strength Artistes, as a means of livelihood at which he could earn an income far in excess of that which would be his by following his former trade of stove fitter.

In 1922, on 27th May to be precise, Hermann was married in Berlin and with his wife set sail for South Africa on 29th June of that year. Until early 1924, Hermann and Elsie Görner travelled South Africa with the well-known Pagel's Circus, featuring a star act presenting artistically feats of strength of a magnitude never before seen even in that Continent famed for its men of strength.

Hermann's act included supporting on his shoulders one side of a bridge, whilst a fully laden motor-car was driven across. This breath-taking feat is fully described in Chapter 7. Other items in his act were :—

Carrying and walking with 4 men sustained by a bar carried on his right shoulder.

Juggling with kettleweights weighing 110½ lb. (50 kilos) each.

Lifting his stage barbell weighing 330¾ lb. (150 kilos) with a shaft of 2¾ in. diameter in the