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## TRICKS AND WILES OF THE MODERN STRONG MAN.

By PROF. J. SZALAY.

[There is so much of trickery associated with the average strong man "show" that, in the true interests of genuine displays, I have decided to unmask a few of the more common tricks. The pity of the thing is that the genuinely honest performer stands no chance with *bona fide* feats against the more apparently wonderful feats of unscrupulous rivals. Quite recently, in Paris, I witnessed a disgustingly barefaced fraud, in which a certain strong man (!) brought down the applause of the house by pretending to lift with one arm a triplet bicycle and its three riders. I will illustrate and describe how this and one or two other seemingly marvellous feats are performed in the next number. The first article dealing with the subject is from the pen of Prof. Szalay, who has done so much to train and encourage amateur as well as professional strong men, and who certainly deserves the title of "Father of Amateur Weight-lifting." It may be remembered that some few years ago, when the strong man trickery was at its highest pitch, it was Prof. Szalay who bravely came forward in the interests of the public and honest performance. I can promise some very startling articles on the subject of stage trickery in future issues. I want to educate the readers of this magazine so that only honest performers will be able to secure applause and profit.—THE EDITOR.]

In accordance with my desire to educate the public mind in the interest of Physical Culture and to define the real strength from the fancy performances as seen on the stage, practised even by some of the most advertised and famed strong men, I dedicate this article to the perusal of all those interested, in the fervent hope that they will continue to assiduously practice and develop their body and mind, even if they cannot attain such marvellous strength as to all appearances such men seem to possess.

There is no doubt we cannot all become "The Strongest Man on Earth," as there is a limit to all attainments, but allow me to point out to you, and no one is better qualified to enlighten you on the subject, that those who constantly wish to impress it on your belief that they are the strongest and do the greatest feats, are more often the farthest from it. In all cases it is a matter of business to procure an engagement and draw a lucrative salary.

One man started to lift certain weights or do particular feats of strength, and immediately some one else followed and claimed to do one better. In course of time the weights grew from 150 lbs. one hand to 318 lbs. or 325 lbs. one hand, and if you give it only time you will find that others will come and claim perhaps more than that.

Yet no matter how strong a man is, and granted that he is trained to perfection and possesses the greatest amount of science or knack of weight-lifting, he cannot overcome the natural law of displacing or lifting a greater weight with a body of lesser weight unless artificial means like

a lever or the force of gravitation of falling bodies are used. Now, a man of about five or six feet in height cannot raise above his head with one hand more than his own bodily weight, and perhaps in the best case one-fifth more, which is the equivalent of the force of gravitation a man is able to apply considering his height and weight.

In the matter of lifting weights by sheer strength, the shorter the man the more power he will be able to apply, on account of being able to work closer to the centre of gravity than a man of equal weight and greater height, whose longer arms place him under disadvantage on account of the greater leverage his muscles are subjected to.

Now, having made this clear to the reader, I shall be able to describe the "faking" the professional, and even sometimes the amateur strong men, resort to in their endeavour to surpass others when their strength fails them to do so.

In the first instance, the size of the dumb-bells, barbells, or any other weights is no criterion to their actual poundage, as all these implements can be made perfectly hollow with astonishingly trifling weight. I can well remember some most remarkable cases, and if I tell you that I am speaking of the performances of some of the most famed strong men we have seen, you will hardly believe me, yet it is the truth.

One man at first sight astonished me when he stated from the stage that he turns a somersault over a chair with two 56 lbs. dumb-bells in his hands. Now, that was past my belief, and I went to inquire into the matter and found that

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equally similar bells could be made to weigh eight to ten lbs. each. The next biggest fraud in the barbell line was a so-called 1000 lbs. bell, which was wheeled on to the stage on its own carriage, and the audience challenged to stand over it and simply raise the bell an inch or two, which feat, of course, no one ever was able to do, except the performer himself.

Now, that very same bell had an accident some time afterwards. Some unfortunate attendant dropped it one afternoon by moving it without its carriage, and, lo and behold, the bubble burst, as it was made of the thinnest shell possible,



and could not stand coming in contact forcibly with the stage. Though the iron balls were about 30 inches in diameter, yet they did not weigh over 150 lbs. the lot. It was the carriage which had all the weight, and the bell was fastened to it by a secret lock, which only the performer could release by standing on the key.

On another occasion I observed a different method employed, which was just as daring as the one before, namely, the performer lifted a huge weight supposed to be 300 lbs. or over, raising it above his head and carrying it off the stage. Behind the scenes the weight was substituted for another of the same appearance but full



weight, and, of course, all and sundry were quite graciously invited to test the genuineness of it. To be quite correct, two men have done the same thing, but they have a little altered their methods of fraudulent performance. In both cases they used

hollow steel bars with the ends closed by a screw cap hardly visible to the casual observer, and the instant the performer went off the stage after performing his wonderful lift an attendant lowered a full charge of lead or shot into the hollow part of same and, if requested, the bar was allowed for inspection, but not before good care was taken of the filling.

The method of the imitator of this trick was much more simple. He had a box made with two compartments, and used two similar bars, one empty for his own use, and one very full, which was passed on to all those who came on to the stage to inspect the weights. But both, of course, walk off the stage after they do their so-called great lift. If anybody challenged them before or after, they made all sorts of excuses, or started bluffing to do it for £1000.

While speaking of dumb-bells or barbells, I must here state that hardly ever does any performer use bells of the weight they are represented to be. Neither can it be expected, as no man could work top weight every day. What I fight against is the outrageousness of some of the exaggerations. If a man works with 20 to 50 lbs. less on each represented weight, that is reasonable, but I am sorry to say in a good many cases the weight is hardly one-half of what it is represented to be.

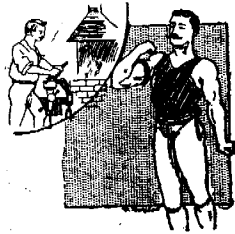
There are other "fakings" with the bells, such as using very big grips to prevent most people from being able to hold them on account of the weakness of fingers not accustomed to the grip, or using unequally balanced balls, so as to give very little chance for anyone not knowing the peculiarity of the bell to successfully lift the same as per challenge on first trial, but I take these fakings as being a more legitimate part of the business, just like those high-flowing challenges to give anybody £500 who successfully imitates a public performer, which is hardly ever possible, as everyone has a pet feat of his own, very difficult for anyone else to do at first sight, or unless time would be given to practice.

This giving away of £500 reminds me of a very interesting story, which is not generally known, though it marked the beginning of the great fame of a very well known strong man. It happened thus: Some years ago a very well-advertised "strongest man on earth" offered to give

away nightly that sum—which he probably never possessed—to anyone who would come on the stage and break his chains and lift his weights, knowing, of course, that it is nearly an impossibility for anyone barring himself to find the prepared link in the chain which is to be broken. The great success this man had for many months made others very jealous. One man in particular, who wished to become his partner in the business, not being able to gratify his desire, worked on the ruin of the other's reputation by importing a man to beat him. This very man, the hero of many tall tales, one memorable evening accepted the great challenge, and all those who were able to get into the hall, I am sure, will never forget that night. We may never see another like it. The whole of the excited audience at once favoured the younger and handsomer man, who eventually was adjudged winner, though I must say that, no matter how big a swindler and bouncer the other was, he has not yet been beaten on his own game fairly. No doubt our young man was by far the strongest and could lift heavier weights, but he certainly could not accomplish all the tricks the other set, and, after all, that was the challenge thrown out. The chains our hero broke were not those of the challenger. His astute manager prepared them for him, and had them ready in his pocket, and as soon as a certain chain bracelet had to be broken on the arm he objected to using the challenger's on account of difference in size of arms. Immediately his manager was to hand over his own, which were never inspected, but put on and hurriedly forced apart. Another one was used over the chest, naturally to the great disgust of the duped trickster. It was of no use for the man who offered the £500 to get into a great rage. The good old British Public decided against him, and secured the great fame of our hero to the detriment of the other.

Now all these performances of breaking chains, ropes of wire, nails, horse-shoes and coins or cards are more or less tricks prepared for the occasion. With this, I do not mean to say that anyone is able to do them. No, it requires a strong man trained for the purpose, but they are not such extraordinary feats as the public believes them to be. Take, for instance, the chains. Usually ordinary iron jack

chains are used for the purpose. Their S-formed links are most suitable for the preparation, as the ends of the links are not welded together; the chain is put into a vice with the jaws carefully protected so as to prevent the showing of any marks of preparation on the selected links, which are prized open and closed up several



times until the link is nearly broken. The closing up of the link is done by slight taps with a hammer, and, if skilfully done, the link should not show any marks of the break, except that the link will assume a slightly altered shape—that is to say, it is not quite as round as it was before preparation.

A chain so prepared will stand all the ordinary tests it is subjected to. A favourite test with the original performer was to have six men from the audience, and allow them to pull by a rope attached to the chain, which was fastened to a hook in the floor. A most ingenious and clever trick this is, which never failed to impress even the most sceptical, and it took me a long time to find out the manner of working it, especially as sometimes, if the performer wanted a sensational advertisement, he would invite a committee of pressmen, and show them that two horses could pull a heavy loaded cart attached to the chain, which he would afterwards break by the contraction of his biceps of right or left arm.

Yet, once you know, the trick is as simple as possible, by reason of the fact that when a chain is folded and placed over a strong hook, part of the link which is in contact with the hook bears no strain whatever, and that is the prepared part of the chain, the rest being genuine. All you have to do is to take care how you place the chain on the hook. Keep it there, and, of course, use only one prepared link in the chain you wish to break. Chains which are handed round for inspection must be a little stronger but not much, as

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there is very little chance of anyone finding the prepared link, and they never pull hard enough, recognising the hopelessness of their efforts, or if anyone does by some chance pull hard enough, the effort is mostly given to the wrong part of the chain.

Coins are similarly treated in the vice, except silver coins, which can be prepared by an immersion of several days in mercury (quicksilver) after coating them with wax on both sides and cleaning a small space in the middle corresponding on either side, which allows the uncovered part of the silver coin to be chemically destroyed and rendered possible to break by finger strength.

To perform with such prepared coins you must work with confederates to hand up the right ones on the demand from the stage, or they must be substituted afterwards, which is quite easy to work in several ways. One of them is to ask for the necessary coins, which will be quite eagerly given by more persons than you want. Choose your man or, preferably, a woman, take the coin or coins, and go to some other person to mark the same, on the way substituting the coin, which must

be handy in a secret pocket where your hand naturally would be held. As the other person does not know the coin, you are quite safe in handing him your own. Then take it up on the stage and astonish your audience.

There is another way of breaking coins which need not be prepared. That is by sewing in the thumb of both gloves



(which are used on the pretext to save the skin of your fingers) a specially prepared piece of narrow hard steel, about the length of your thumbs, with a slot on the end of such steel, and of sufficient depth to hold half the biggest coin intended to be broken. The leverage and strength so obtained will be enough to break any coin of the realm.