

# TRICKS AND WILES OF THE MODERN STRONG MAN.

By PROF. J. SZALAY.

Having described in the June number the tricks employed in breaking chains and coins, we now come to the cards, which trick has always been accepted as a genuine feat of strength, and no doubt such it was in the first instance, but competition has brought a fake into this most successful show piece as well as in all others.

I can well remember some years ago my introducing it mostly to some private or drawing-room performances, more for convenience sake than anything else, and always meeting a hearty reception and admiration. Well; at that time one pack of 52 cards, mostly found in every house, was sufficient to get a good applause. The thing took the public by storm, and soon everybody included it in his programme. Naturally professional jealousy soon made the one pack into two packs, and, lately, one man professes to tear three packs of cards of 52 in each pack. No doubt such is the case, but the manner of tearing the cards has considerably altered since its original introduction. In the first instance one used to take

the whole pack into the hand, and by one turn of the other hand the cards were torn into halves, or quarters by a repetition of the same move.



*How long does it take to do them things, Sir?*

Not so now; the altered method makes it possible to tear any number of cards, provided you are able to hold them firmly with

one hand against the knee as the other hand is employed in breaking them off in sections, consequently making it quite easy to do two, three, or four packs provided you get your card thin enough to be able to hold them; and, besides, when working with your own



cards you can greatly facilitate matters by a process of drying or baking your cards in an oven to draw out all the moisture and make the cards perfectly brittle. Of course the cards are always kept in their original packing with the government stamp on it. Some of the foreign made cards hardly need any preparation at all, as some of them can be had about the same strength as ordinary blotting paper.

If you see a strong man tearing cards just watch him closely, and you will find when two or three packs are to be broken that he will hold them firmly with one hand on the knee and cover the cards with the palm of the other hand. Now, with that hand he will break a section of say 40 to 50 cards three parts off; with a second move another lot of about the same number, also three parts; and, if three or four packs are to be performed on, he will have to make as many moves as necessary to accomplish his object. But for the last move he will grasp the lot, and with a determined looking face wrench them all asunder.

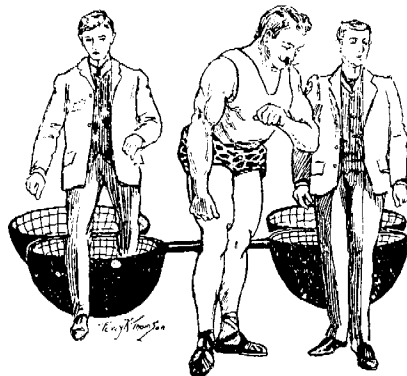
Before this method of tearing cards was known some performers had to divide two packs of 52 cards each into three parcels and do the trick in that manner, further deceiving the public by apparently letting them have all the pieces.

In my next description I will attempt to show that even if live stock is performed with, the public has mostly an exaggerated

idea of it, and those not in the know are very fond of arguing, and think they give convincing proof of, their champion's ability by quoting those lifts or feats of strength performed with human beings or with horses and elephants, as well as with carts or pianos.

Only the other day in the controversy raging in this magazine between the partizans of two strong men, I saw the same error committed. One man is given credit for having accomplished a one-handed lift of about 250lbs., and is supposed to do the trick twice every day in his performances by lifting a 90lbs. ball and a 12st. man sitting on it.

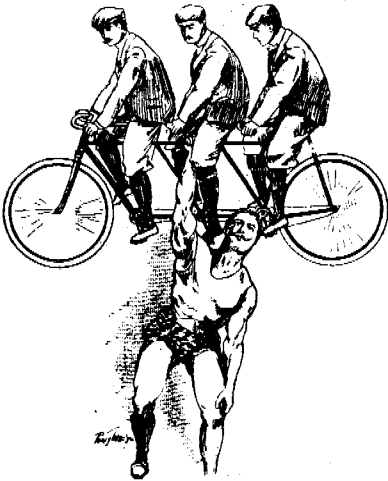
Now, this and similar lifts are not one-handed lifts at all, and cannot be reckoned in the same class as in ordinary dumbbell or barbell lifting, as the weight in the act of lifting does not rest on the hand only, but, according to the length of the iron handle and size of ball, it rests half-way up the arm, sometimes past the elbow, and, of course, the performer has not got half the work to do to straighten his arm. This again is one of those very clever tricks where in the first place one man started to lift a man sitting on his hand and pressing him above the head. His competitors found ways and means to improve on this lift, and in a way which makes less work, is easier, and looks more effective, by lifting not only a man but also a 90lbs. ball, which, by the way, as I told you before, may look to weigh 90lbs., but on the scales may weigh very considerably less.



As regards the men employed in the lifting they are put into padded clothes to make them appear average size men of about 12st., but I personally know two light weight boxers under 7st. each, and who have been lifted many times in the so-called surprise barbell, which is wickerwork made in the shape of

a huge hollow barbell covered with black cloth. This is usually body pressed above the head with one hand by the performer, and on the successful accomplishment of the feat the two men hidden in the balls step out of them to the great surprise of the audience. The next day some of the members of the audience will come and tell me they have positively seen a strong man lift about 350 lbs. at least with one hand, as they calculate the men must have been about 12st. each, and the barbell, they think, must have been over 100lbs. to stand such a strain.

Yet, as I have explained, the men weigh 7st. each, and the wickerwork and bar about 30lbs., or a combined total of about 225lbs., which, as you see, falls far short of the general estimation. Nevertheless, in my opinion, this is one of the finest of strong men's feats I have seen, and all credit is due to its originator for a most convincing show piece.

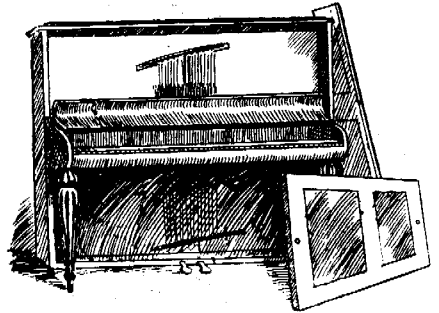


The lifting of two men of course soon found imitators in varied forms. The most popular amongst them is the raising of a tandem bicycle with its riders off a platform, or, as seen lately on the Continent, a triplet with three riders is held up. But holding a weight with outstretched arm is not lifting. You cannot compare this with the previous lift at all. Once the weight is there there is no difficulty as long as perfect balance is kept. But what I mostly object to with the imitators of this feat is that they do not even hold the weight with outstretched arm, but utilise one of the rider's legs, and who stands on the pedal with one foot, whilst the other is on the performer's back or shoulder to support.



Another has done a similar feat by carrying a very small pony across the stage, like a coal man would carry a sack on his back. Yet the posters show him holding an ordinary size horse above his head with outstretched arm, which is rather a tall order.

This pony, tandem, or triplet cycle carrying with its riders is very similar to the piano and player carrying business. The piano used is specially made for the purpose—as a rule with a very light frame having only about two octaves, sufficient to play the sem-



blance of a tune. A very light man or, preferably, a girl is seated on the fixed stool, and both are held on the back of the performer, who I am sure would not care to do the same thing every day with the piano of the average British householder.