JEFFRIES ON OSLERISM

SOME men are born to act, some men achieve acting and some men have acting thrust upon them. It was thrust upon Jim Jeffries. He says so.

The contention is made in a pleasant parlor of the Hotel Navarre, New York. Mrs. Jeffries, wife of the pugilist, who is having her nails manicured at a center table, nods understandingly when he looks toward her for sympathy and appreciation.

"I'm a man of action, not acting," says the champion pugilist, sententiously. "It's too much of a strain to speak that part; it all falls on me, the whole thing. I don't feel as if I was off the stage a minute of the time. I guess I'll get through the rest of the season because I promised."

He sinks into an attitude as suggestive of weariness as his stalwart frame will allow, while he says:

"Besides, me pipes are hoarse. It's me throat. You see now I can't hardly talk. Me pipes weren't ever intended for this business, and then the lines bother me. I never heard so many lines—lines all the time."

It does seem rather hard. Mr. Jeffries cannot find anybody to fight him, and he cannot fit himself into the exigencies of the stage career.

Mr. James Jeffries is not a person, however, whom one would venture to pity long. There is something rather convincing about his personality. As he stands, Mr. Jeffries is 6 feet 1½ inches and weighs 230 pounds. His head is rather small for the size of his body, and is well shaped, with certain evidences of his chosen profession—the straight lines from the back of the skull to the neck and the square, firm jaw. To offset these he has a good brow, with bumps over the lids, which are supposed to represent in the artistic head a tendency to music, but must have another meaning as well. He has large, intelligent brown eyes, and the firmness of his lower face, which in later life will settle into rather a bulldoglike determination, of which there are presentiments already, is relieved now by a quick smile which shows a rather amiable disposition, a sense of humor and good teeth.

Mr. Jeffries does not sport a supply of brilliants on his shirt front or on his fingers. His clothes are dark, well made, his trousers with a very fashionable crease. He wears a small black tie, immaculate linen, patent leather shoes and presents a general ensemble that does credit to his tailor. His hands speak for themselves.

His wife forms the not unusual contrast which marks many matrimonial selections; she is small, rather delicate and determined in appearance, a not uncommon combination, and explains that she has all the nerves in the establishment.

"Nerves!" and the big hands come out wing and wing. "I don't know what they are; hear the women talk about 'em, but Lord, no nerves for me!"

"Not even before you go into the ring?"

"I never felt a moment's excitement or uneasiness in my life. I'm always anxious to get in. I'm anxious now." He smiles rather reminiscently.

"And your training? Did you train much before you went into a fight or do you now to keep in trim?"

"Never did! Never had to! If I want to eat anything I eat it, and I did the same thing when I was getting ready to fight. I mean, of course, good, wholesome food, that I would eat anyway, no matter what I did. I never should eat pastry and sweets and all that truck, but I never went on a regular diet; that's all right when a man's making weight, but it's all bosh otherwise. If I want to drink a glass of wine I drink it. I did when I trained.

"I know sometimes the newspaper fellers would say to Delany, the trainer, 'Why, Jeffries is drinking wine with his dinner,' and the trainer used to say to 'em, 'Well, suppose you go over and call his attention to it and take it away from him.' But they never did! No, all those ideas of putting you on a strict diet are old fashioned; they don't go at all with the men nowadays; they eat what agrees with 'em."

"What do you think about this new Japanese form of wrestling? By the way, how do you pronounce it, Mr. Jeffries?"

"Oh, I don't know what they call it, 'jitsu,' or 'who hits you,' or something like that. It's absolutely no good. If it hadn't been for the Russian war we'd never have heard a word about it. Jenkins, the wrestler, could make a monkey out of any one of those Jap men. You see, a man's got to get hold of the other feller in that form of wrestling before he can do anything, get a good firm grip, and how is he going to get that grip unless the other man lets him?

"Then, all the Jap wrestlers wear those canvas jackets when they do their stunt. It's those canvas jackets that help the other men to get hold. If they didn't wear 'em, they couldn't get the right kind of a grasp. No, they're all buncs."

"Is that what they call the jackets, Mr. Jeffries?" asks the unversed interviewer. Mr. Jeffries stares.

"Buncs the name of the jacket? No, it's the name of the men. It's short for buncos—what we call 'em. Just buncs."

"Oh! Did you ever hit a man just as hard as you could?"

The big hands are like steel vises coated with a sprinkling of jet black hair, which matches the short cropped head covering and the heavy eyebrows. Half a blow from those hands would seem to be better than a whole one.

"That's rather a hard question to answer," says Mr. Jeffries, after thinking it over. "You see, in order to hit a man just as hard as I could I would have to have him in just the position where that knock would be most effective. Well, of course, in the ring I don't suppose I have ever had a man just where I could deliver such a blow. They haven't seemed anxious to let me, and I don't recollect that I have ever had just the opportunity."

"How do you classify the men you've fought with?"

"I should say that Sharkey was the toughest of the bunch. I mean by that that Sharkey has got the most endurance. You can pound away at him without making any impression at all. He don't seem to feel the blows that would knock another feller out completely. I suppose the hardest blows I've ever given I've landed at Sharkey.

"No, it is not a matter of training at all; it is a matter of nature. You can't make a man tough unless he's naturally so. Sharkey is so naturally; it's the way a fighter is built.

"Fitzsimmons is a great puncher. He can deliver the hardest blows of any of the lot—at least, I know he has hit me harder than any of the others.

"Then, again, Corbett is the cleverest one of the men I have met; clever in the way he gets away and comes back at you, in his dodges and sidesteppings and quick returns. Yes, Corbett is the clever feller.

"The longest fight? I should say the one with Sharkey at Coney Island. That was twenty-five rounds and lasted an hour and forty minutes.

"My shortest one lasted about thirty seconds. It was out west, somewhere. I forget the feller's name. I believe it was Finnegan. I walked across the ring and gave him a poke in the chin and it was all over. It hardly seemed worth while.

"Speaking of that reminds me of a story someone was telling me of a youngster that was new in New York and was taken to a fight at Coney Island. He was game to see it all right, for it was his first, and he paid $10 for a seat when he got there and got mixed up in the jam without squealing once.

"He and the friend that took him had seats sort of far back, and the young 'un wore lamps. Just as the fight began the lamps got dusty, and he took 'em off and leaned over to rub 'em hard with his handkerchief. When he'd fixed 'em to suit he looked at the ring again and the fight was all over. And $10 a seat!"

Again the mirthful smile chases itself across Mr. Jeffries' face.

"And your first fight?"

"The very first was with a feller by the name of Griffiths in Los Angeles when I was 17. He was 27. It lasted for fourteen rounds, but it was really a grudge more than anything else that sent me into the ring—just a personal affair between us—and we settled it that way."

"Isn't 17 rather young to begin?"

"Young? No, indeed. A man must begin to fight when he's in his teens if he's going to be any good. He can't wait too long."

"And at what age should a man stop?"

For the first time in the interview Mr. Jeffries really hesitated a little.

"That's another difficult question to answer right off. As a general thing I should say that after a man gets to be 30 he don't make good any more. He has matured by that time, and though it is quite true he can go into a fight and come out ahead, he'll probably never do as good work as he has done. There is only one safe rule for a man to follow, and that is to watch himself carefully. When he sees signs that he is not up to his everyday mark he wants to get out.

"Some men can tell one way and some another, but there is no doubt that however much a man may bluff he don't need to be told when his best days in the ring are done. No, indeed!

"I am 29, and I should not be at all surprised if I dropped out after 30. I have been fighting now for twelve years; that is long enough. I believe there is some talk with the boys about a coming contest with Marvin Hart of Louisville, but I don't know whether it will amount to anything; if it does, all right; if not"—he shrugs his shoulders—"well, I've had about enough. I'm not anxious to continue."

"You say you think a man should stop fighting at 30. Then do you believe in Dr. Osler's theory that a man is useless after 40?"

"I think," said Mr. Jeffries, "that Osler is an old loon; the man's crazy, that's all. Why, the most brainy men in the country are over 40, and the best brain work men ever do is after that age. I suppose a man that makes a speech like that, though, proves pretty well that he ain't any good himself; don't he? That's my way of thinking. When you talk about the ring, that's a different thing from mental work. Fighting is a matter of maturity and endurance, and when you begin to go down hill there, why, you can do nothing, because that is natural.

"And another thing; it is much better for a man to leave when he is the champion than to wait until he's thrown out. There's a good deal in knowing when to stop off."

The champion speaks of his recent trip through the south, and Mrs. Jeffries announces that she has traveled everywhere with him.

"He isn't able to take care of himself," she says. "I have to look out for him. Besides, I don't think it's a good idea to leave a husband too much to himself; he gets lonesome."

"There is just this about the south," says the party of the second part in his turn. "You get a come off all right; they're glad to see you, and all that, but they don't care such an awful lot about fighting. They're really not up to date. They're all right with their hospitality, but, nine chances to one, when you see a southern man you see a man that wants to fight with a gun. Give him a gun and he's the happy kid; or let him see somebody else fight with a gun and he's happier still. But just prizefighting—why he ain't waked up to its beauties yet.

"Now take the west; that's different. A western man loves every kind of a scrap, big and little, guns or fists, but he prefers fists. You see he's got his fists with him all the time, but he may have forgot his gun or lent it to another feller. The best place in the whole world is San Francisco. The only trouble there is that they're getting awful particular. They've had all the fighting they could stand for twenty years, and they are not satisfied with anything but the best. Even if they get the best men they don't want to be put off with any little fights or any onesided affairs. That makes it difficult to get a scrap there.

"New Yorkers are just crazy over it and they know a lot about it, too; not nearly as much as they do in San Francisco, but they make it up in enthusiasm.

"Some time the New York men will get the laws that prohibit fighting repealed. It's bound to come. I wouldn't be surprised if it came in a year or two. They made the laws to protect the people from a lot of promoters that got up some fake fights, but there is no reason why if a man loves that sort of thing he shouldn't be allowed to see it; it's a free country.

"I hope to settle in the west somewhere; it's the only place to live. A man can stretch out his arms and draw a good, long breath there. The east is too crowded and too noisy and nobody cares for anything else here, but what they can make. I like every inch of the west; I love the plains and the coast, and I think it's the finest climate in the world."

It has been rumored that the champion has made a fortune, enough to place him in the money class and point suspicion at him as a magnate of the prize ring trust. He laughs silently at the suggestion.

"I ain't come out of the ring with $40,000,000 yet, but I've got enough to buy bread and butter, and a little sugar on special occasions. I ain't worrying about that a little bit, any more than I'm worrying about the men I've got to fight. Worrying ain't in my line."

The color line is touched on, with delicate shading.

"Yes, I certainly draw the color line. None of it for me."

The lower jaw sets itself grimly and the interviewer, catching a profile view of it, sidesteps hastily to the question of medals. She had expected to see a wall covered with blue ribbons and copper, silver and gold disks, suitably inscribed with mottoes and sculptured resemblances of the champion.

"I ain't working for medals," says Mr. Jeffries. "That's all right for amateurs, but medals never bought any bread and butter yet. If a man wants a round thing with $5 of gold or silver coated over it and a verse, he's welcome to it. What I want is the money. Give me the dollars and I'll never take a man's medal away from him."

Then the conversation resolves itself into travelogues, bringing up sharp with another reference to Mr. Jeffries' ever present trouble which has cast over the natural lightheartedness of the champion a deep and almost tragic gloom.

"There I go, hoarsing up again and all the lines to speak again tonight. I don't believe there ever was a star who was so anxious to get off the boards as I am. But I'm going to stick it out. I said I would, and I will."

He helps the artist and interviewer into their jackets with a Chesterfieldian courtesy, and when he shakes hands he does it as gently as if he was stroking a sick kitten.

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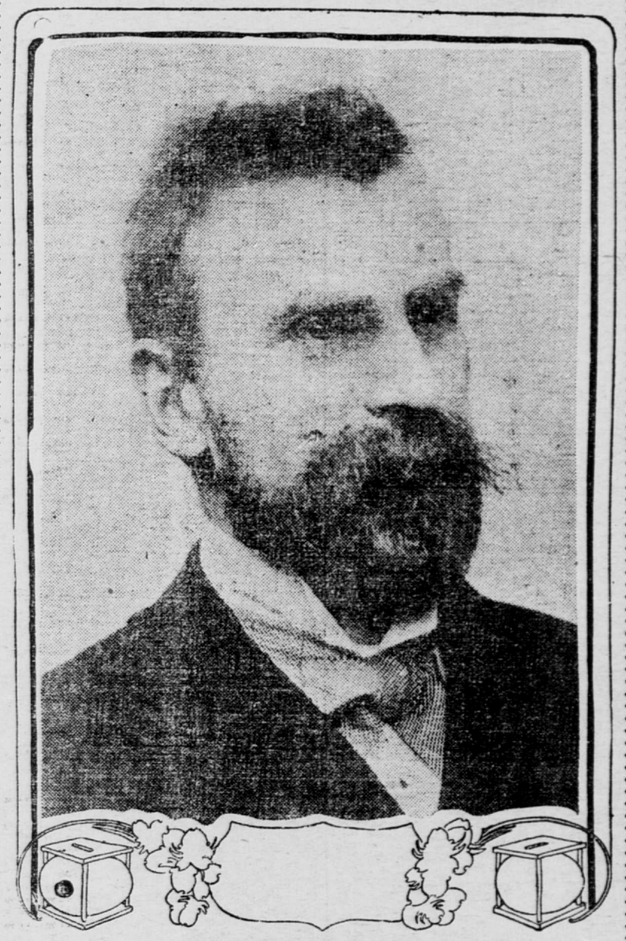

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THERE ARE HUNDREDS OF WAYS OF BREAKING YOUR NECK

ONE hundred ways of breaking your neck are recognized in the amusement profession—that is, 100 ways in which you may risk your neck to earn a living.

Adam Forepaugh, who, perhaps, was closer to his employes than any circus owner except P. T. Barnum, had a saying: "The nearer you come to breaking your neck the more money I'll pay you." The rule still holds good and the inventor of an "act" in which the performer risks his neck commands the biggest price in the amusement world.

Whenever the limit has seemed to have been reached some person appears with a feat more desperate, more dare devil than any before it. Things that thrilled great crowds of spectators five years ago and set them gasping with horror now appear like kindergarten amusements.

The public—which pays the salaries—loves to be horrified. Whether in France, Germany, England or America, the people who attend circuses are the same. The more daring the act, the more dangerous to the performer, the better the spectators like it.

And here is one strange feature. Circus men and vaudeville managers declare that not one-half of the people who pay to see daring acts ever see them. They avert their faces when the act starts and look back just as it is finished. They get their money's worth by the thrills of horror they feel while waiting to discover whether or not the man still lives or is a mangled mass.

Another peculiarity of the profession is that most of the riskiest acts are invented and performed by persons in other lines of business.

As a rule the higher a person goes, or the faster he goes, the more money he gets—or she gets—for many of the performers of heart stopping acts are women. Also, it pays better to go upside down.

The bicycle and the automobile have been the instruments of the inventors of the latest thrillers. Most of the recent inventions are simply applications of physical laws to mechanical contrivances, but to interest spectators it is necessary that some human being shall place himself or herself in the mechanism. An auto car looping the loop would not attract ten men to a place, but if a man or woman sits inside the car, the place will be crowded.

One of the most wonderful feats of equilibrium was the invention of two Englishmen. They stretched a wire between two high places—the higher the better—and one of them mounted a bicycle, from which was suspended a triangular framework with a bar and a double trapeze suspended from it. The bicycle rider rode out on to the wire while his comrade performed daring feats on the trapeze. The feat, which is unique and which looks more dangerous than almost any, is really almost as easy as rocking in a chair—always considering that the men do not lose their wits or nerve. The common trick of balancing two knives stuck into a cork on a pin point shows how easy the feat is to any one having nerve enough to try it. The act is terrifying to the beholder and especially spectacular, but really little risk to the trained "up aloft" man.

Little Danger in Rope Walking

The tight or slack rope performance is always new and a smaller proportion of performers at this line are killed than of bricklayers—yet the crowd stands gaping and admiring the nerve and daring of the man. The higher the performer can go the better the crowd likes it. Blondin's walk across Niagara is still talked about, but there are 100 circus performers in America alone who would walk across Niagara on a tight wire just to save the 5 cents on the drink of whisky on the Canadian side.

Last summer a wire walker attracted much attention by walking a tight wire 100 feet in the air between towers at Coney Island. These men, especially the slack wire performers, are extremely adept in balancing, but there is a man with Ringling's circus, whose act passes almost unnoticed, who, circus men say, does the most dangerous act in the world. He is a head balancer and works on an ordinary trapeze, balancing on his head on the bar while swinging to the greatest possible arc. His is one of the acts which is really extremely perilous, but does not look so.

High diving into shallow tubs of water is another thriller that wins. Men dive 100 feet from ladders into water 24 inches deep and escape uninjured, although the proportion of those hurt is greater than in almost any other act.

A good circus story in told of a prominent high diver who announced as a special attraction that he would dive from the Superior street viaduct at Cleveland, O., into the river. The viaduct is 128 feet above the water. A great crowd gathered to witness the performance. The diver kissed his hands, posed for his photograph, and made a beautiful dive.

The crowd applauded wildly when he reappeared in safety. Just at that moment two small boys, attired only in trousers and shirts, leaped upon the railing and plunged into the river, coming up like turtles and shaking the water from their hair as they started for the bank. They had been doing it all summer.

Shooting the Chutes on a Bicycle

A Chicago boy invented some of the most desperate bicycle feats on record. He started riding down the chutes. Then he invented an act which was unique. He built a sloping platform eighty feet high, cut off short forty feet from the ground, with a net at the bottom. He rode his bicycle down the inclined plane until it hit the net and then he plunged forward through space, diving into a shallow basin of water.

The balloon, parachute, and trapeze act is known to all county fair attendants. The feat is without especial peril—barring accidents, but the failure of a parachute in this country was The first performer in this country was a dare devil named Al Tolbert—an Indianian who trained Tod Sloane to ride racehorses. Tolbert did balloon ascension and parachute leaps, rode standing "Roman races," skeleton wagon races, did a tight rope performance, and entered his running horses in country fair races. A few years ago he proposed to a circus man that he send up two captive balloons, anchor them 1,000 to 1,500 feet above the earth with a wire between them, and he would do a stunt on the wire.

Nor at that time did he carry life insurance.

Human Cannon Ball's Slight Risk

Another act, which has for many years been a standard, is the one in which a woman is fired out of a cannon across the top of a great tent, either catching a trapeze or landing in a net. The charge of powder is, of course, fired after a huge spring has propelled the woman from the cannon. Barring mishaps she is as safe as if in bed—unless she happens to fall "twisted" into the net. If she does she dies.

The net diving of trapeze troupes within the last few years has become one of the features of a circus and it really is one of the most dangerous and spectacular of circus acts. To alight on the neck means death; to alight "flat" is an exhilarating experience. The tricks of turning just before striking the net make the act more spectacular.

The ordinary trapeze performers, working over nets, are in danger only when apparatus breaks or when their nerve or eye fails—and then they can save themselves in the nets.

One of the acts which is declared extremely perilous and which requires nerve, strength and a wonderful eye was invented by an Iowa doctor, an enthusiastic bicyclist. He worked the act up until now he rides down an incline of 50 degrees 100 feet, runs up a short incline, lifts his wheel, flies through space for 45 feet, and alights on another incline. The slightest flaw in the wheel, the slightest slip and he will be killed, yet he does the act twice a day all summer.

To loop the loop on a bicycle requires steady nerve and a quick eye, for the rider must throw himself and his wheel out of the loop on to another platform which slopes to the ground.

Looping the gap in an automobile is another risk invented by a Parisian woman. The mechanical devices required are ingenious. The auto first rushes down an incline of 50 degrees. Then it is caught by the upward turn of the track and leaps thirty feet through space, upside down, striking the half circular platform on the other side of the gap and rushing to the ground. The act requires no skill and is not particularly dangerous—unless the apparatus breaks—but it is sufficiently terrifying to the beholder and probably to the performer.

Another loop the loopist has gone his rivals one better. He places himself inside a wheel, with ams and legs acting as spokes, and rolls down the incline and around the loop on the inside. Performers are now doing a double loop, turning over twice inside a loop.

Yet another man willing to risk life to better his salary rides a bicycle around the inside of a huge wheel made of palings. The device looks like a big cask with the staves pulled apart. He rides around and around inside this on a bicycle with his wheel and body standing straight out from the side, held in place by his own terrific speed.

Shot From Car to Trapeze

The newest thing in neckbreaking is seen in Paris. Some frenzied performer invented a device which consists of a roller coaster that flies down a steep incline and up a short runway. There the car suddenly stops and the performer, carried on by the impetus of his body, shoots forty feet up into the air and catches a trapeze bar.

But despite all these new life periling feats circus men declare that the danger is not so great now as in the old days. The abolition of the old spring board and the double and triple somersaults over strings of camels and elephants and horses has lowered the circus death rate greatly. That act was a man killer—and the more so because everybody in the circus participated in it.

There are scores of other ways in which the neck may be broken, but these are some of the newest.

The performers themselves do not speak often of the risk. They are like the window washer who was working on the eighteenth story of a skyscraper, and looking into an office saw rows of clerks working over ledgers. He swung himself out on his rope, swung across to the next window, where his partner was working, and remarked:

"Look in there, Bill. Some people will do anything to make a living."