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HOW TO BE A

CONTORTIONIST,

OR BENDING MADE EASY.

A PRACTICAL SELF INSTRUCTOR.

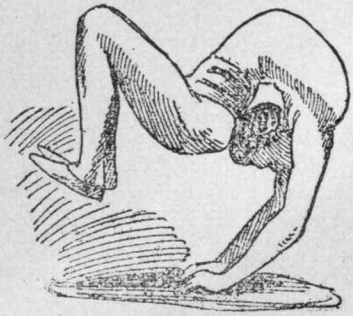

FIG. 1.

[MARINELLI SAYS THIS IS EASY.]

BY A WELL KNOWN PROFESSIONAL.

ILLUSTRATED.

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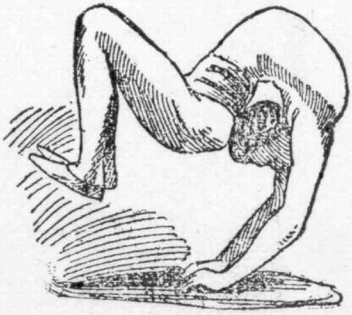

FIG. 1.

[MARINELLI SAYS THIS IS EASY.]

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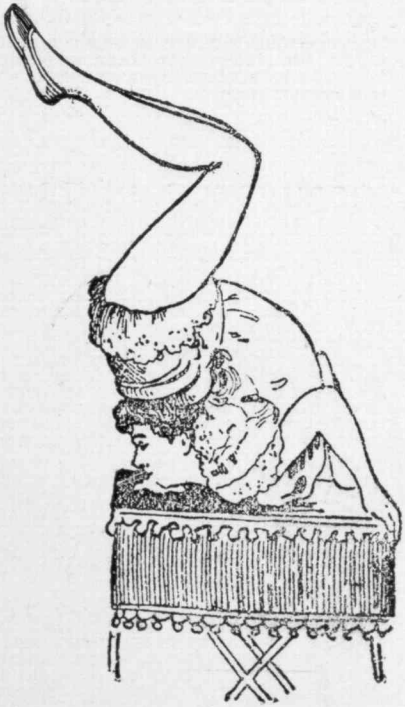

FIG. 2.

ENA BERTOLDI.

SAID TO BE THE CLOSEST BENDER IN THE WORLD.

INTRODUCTION.

Some people imagine erroneously that to be a contortionist one has to be "to the manner born," and I have been asked questions that prove that the outsider looks upon the contortionist as a regular wonder. Here are some of the questions that are put to me every time I perform:

"Have you any bones?"

"Do you ever eat?"

"Where do your meals go if you eat?"

These questions only show how little the general public knows about contortionism. Nature need not give you any particular qualities to become a contortionist. If you are an ordinary sized man—not weighing over one hundred and forty pounds—you have the qualities absolutely necessary. The rest will depend upon yourself, your patience and perseverance. Some will acquire proficiency in five or six months, while it will take others two years and more to master everything—some will master it easily, some with difficulty. As in every other branch of gymnastics, constant and persistent practice is absolutely necessary. If you are out of practice bending tires you and leaves a soreness and stiffness in all your limbs, but the gymnast who practices well and constantly need never know what these things mean.

Some persons think the contortionist is compelled to sleep in oiled blankets, so that his joints may be well greased, and there are others who actually believe him entirely boneless. Both opinions, of course, are wrong. Everybody is aware that the spine is not a stiff bone, but composed of pieces which are movable, and can be placed and replaced in almost any position. How little it is necessary to be an out-of-the-way person to become a contortionist is proved by the fact that there are very clever female artists in the profession. But as woman belongs to the weaker sex she is not able to bear the strain as well and as long as man, and therefore she has been obliged to remain in the background.

I should like to give one piece of advice to the beginner. Do not eat before the performance in order to keep yourself lithe and alert. I should not advise any one to begin bending after he is twenty years of age, as after that time your bones become stiff and settled. The best time to begin practicing contortion is at the age of fifteen. If one begins before that time there is some danger of injuring the back. It may not be strong enough to stand the strain, although any one of that age should be able to bend backward half way to the floor.

In tricks in contortionism there are three distinct ways of bending—first, forward bending, called posturing; second, side bending or twisting; third, back bending. My experience has been limited to two kinds of bending, forward and back. But I soon discovered that in order to become a finished performer I would have to confine myself to one kind only. I chose therefore the back bending, as it is the prettiest, hardest and most effective form of contortionism.

Wishing you success, commensurate with your efforts to acquire the Art, I am,

Yours truly,

C. E. S. THE AUTHOR.

HOW TO BE A CONTORTIONIST.

LESSON I.

An easy way to learn back bending is to get down upon your knees, fold your arms and bend slowly until you touch the floor. After that has been mastered you must try and draw your head under you until you reach your feet. This will serve to limber your back so as to enable you to accomplish the most important positions which require closer bending. It is a good idea to have a stout rope suspended from the ceiling. By holding on to this, while bending backward, it will save you from falling.

LESSON II.

FIG 3.—A LEG EXERCISE.

Fig. 3 shows about the easiest trick acquired, and can be learned in

a very few weeks. The easiest way to learn it is by lying on your stomach, take your right foot in your right hand and draw it up to touch your head. With a little practice you will find that in a short time you can do this with both feet. Then do the same thing standing up, as is shown in the figure.

LESSON III.

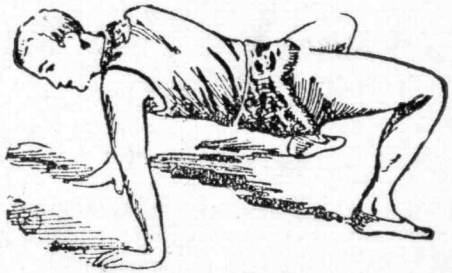

FIG. 4.—BODY TWISTING.

The next trick (Fig. 4), consists of bending down, touching the floor with the hands and then twisting the body around sideways. The trick is usually very effective and well received by the audience.

LESSON IV.

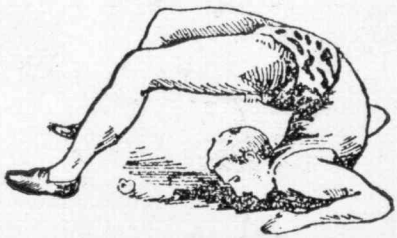

FIG. 5.—BACKWARD BALANCE.

Fig. 5 is the grand bend and consists of bending down and resting the chest upon the ground while your feet are on the ground, right in front of you.

LESSON V.

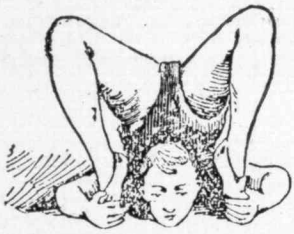

FIG. 6.—THE LETTER "O."

In Fig. 6 the letter "O" is shown. It is simply tieing one's self into a knot and is about the most difficult position in contortion. To do it well a great deal of practice is necessary. It is accomplished by placing the chest on the ground while taking hold of the feet with the hands.

LESSON VI.

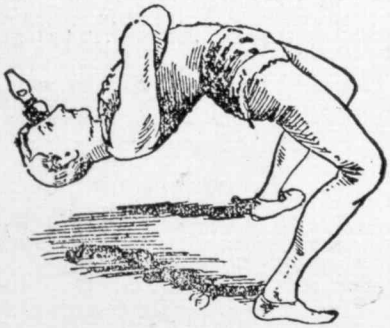

FIG. 7.—GROUND BALANCE.

Fig. 7 shows the performer balancing a lighted lamp upon his forehead, and then bending down slowly until he touches the floor. This trick requires a great amount of practice in order to get so steady that you can balance the lamp safely without risking an explosion. In practicing the trick it is best to use at first some article that rests se-

curely on the forehead and does not break if it should fall. Begin by spreading your legs two feet apart; then fold your arms and bend down slowly until you reach the floor. You will find, in rising again, that you need all your strength in order to come up slowly and keep your lamp well balanced. This is one of my best and most effective tricks. The lamp should be weighted with lead at the bottom to prevent its being top heavy.

LESSON VII.

There are a good many pretty tricks that can be done with chairs.

A simple one, only requiring a little confidence and strength, is to stand upon a chair and rest your calves agains the back of it. Have some strong man sit upon your feet, so as to keep from overbalancing yourself, then fold your arms and bend slowly until you reach the floor. You can add to the finish of the trick by picking up a handkerchief with your teeth. It will take all your strength to raise yourself from the floor.

LESSON VIII.

Another pretty bend is to take two chairs and place them about two feet apart. Put one foot in the centre of each one, then bend down backward very steadily until you reach the floor without using your hands in any way. Raise yourself again slowly until you stand erect upon the chairs in your first position. It requires steady nerves or else you lose your balance and possibly alight on your head. Rising up always requires your entire strength in all these tricks.

I have done this trick possibly five hundred times with all my clothes on, including collar, and have never missed it once, nor have I ever had an accident. It requires nothing but confidence in yourself.

To accomplish this trick you will have to begin by practising on the floor without the use of your hands. When you have mastered that part of it you can try two low chairs, and so on until you can use a regulation size chair. You will find it a very easy performance when once thoroughly studied, just the same as all branches of contortionism. You have to know how to do them, and practice steadily and patiently.

LESSON IX.

Forward bending or leg work is much easier for most people than back work. The secret of this act is to keep the hip and knee joints supple and lots of practice, as in the former act.

LIMBER LIZARD OIL.

HOW TO MAKE AND HOW TO USE IT.

First collect a pint bottle full of Angle Worms, wash them thoroughly, cork the bottle and hang in the sun for seven days. Add to this 1oz. Iguana Lizard Oil, 1oz. Arnica, 1oz. Alcohol. This is the best thing that has ever been discovered for limbering purposes. If you cannot get all the ingredients from your druggist you can get a good sized bottle, already prepared, for $2.00 from any dealer in showman's supplies, or from any of the professional contortionists. It is used by most contortionists for stiff joints, and is also an excellent remedy for sprains and bruises.

DIRECTIONS FOR USING.—Rub your back and joints with this freely upon retiring, and when you arise in the morning, after taking a sponge bath, give yourself another thorough rubbing down with the LIZARD OIL.

FOR SPRAINS AND BRUISES.—Apply same as any liniment. Rub the affected parts freely with LIMBER LIZARD OIL.

Jerome and Alexis, the Human Frog and the Lizard, feature of the Riley & Wood's Show, said in a recent letter to the author:

"By all means use LIMBER LIZARD OIL. It is the best thing we have ever tried for stiff joints. We believe it would make a stick limber."

CONCLUDING REMARKS.

You should have a smooth floor and carpet or pad to practice on. Your practicing room should only be moderately warm, but free from draughts. You also require a set of tights, pair of "trunks" and "pumps" to practice in. I will furnish you with a complete outfit for $5.00.

Do not forget to wear a supporter—in the showman's vernacular, a 'jock strap"—otherwise you are liable to rupture yourself.

Griffin, Charles Eldridge

Suffern, N.Y., c1896

The JOHN J. and HANNA M. McMANUS
and MORRIS N. and CHESLEY V. YOUNG
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1. A card may be drawn, shuffled in the pack, and cut the first time.
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3. The two colors of a pack divided by one cut.
4. The card discovered under a handkerchief.
5. Six persons draw a card each, shuffle them, and immediately after the performer at once produces them, pulling them rapidly out of the pack, one after the other.
6. The performer leaves the room; while he is absent a person draws a card. He returns, takes the pack in his hand, and immediately pulls the card from the pack drawn in his absence.
7. To cut a pack and name the number of cards in each pack.
8. A card drawn by the audience not seen by yourself, shuffled and placed with the pack upon the table, separates itself from the others.
9. To call any number of cards and draw them from the pack as called, etc., etc. While performing these tricks many others equally as good will naturally be suggested to the mind of the performer. We mail a full pack of Wizard's Cards (52 cards), Prof. Viller's Trick Cards, and a book with full and explicit instructions for performing all the tricks.

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