

## The Champion Jumper of the World.

BY OSWALD NORTH.

**I**N many ways it is distinctly advantageous to be a successful professional jumper, but the business has its drawbacks. Foremost among these is the joker who seizes upon the obvious. Mr. John Higgins, the wonderful man whose feats are depicted in these pages, at one time kept an account of the witty fellows who assured him he was "born to rise in the world"; but he soon gave up in despair, so great was the number of these would-be wits.

The curious thing about Mr. Higgins is that he is considerably below medium stature, being but 5ft. 3¾in. in height. He is not yet twenty-six years of age, and comes from Blackburn—a district famous for the number and variety of athletes it has produced. Higgins's various feats are truly remarkable, whether considered merely as jumps, or as dramatic spectacles, ingeniously contrived and brilliantly executed. The photographs reproduced here were specially taken by our own artist on the stage of the Pavilion Theatre, in Piccadilly Circus.

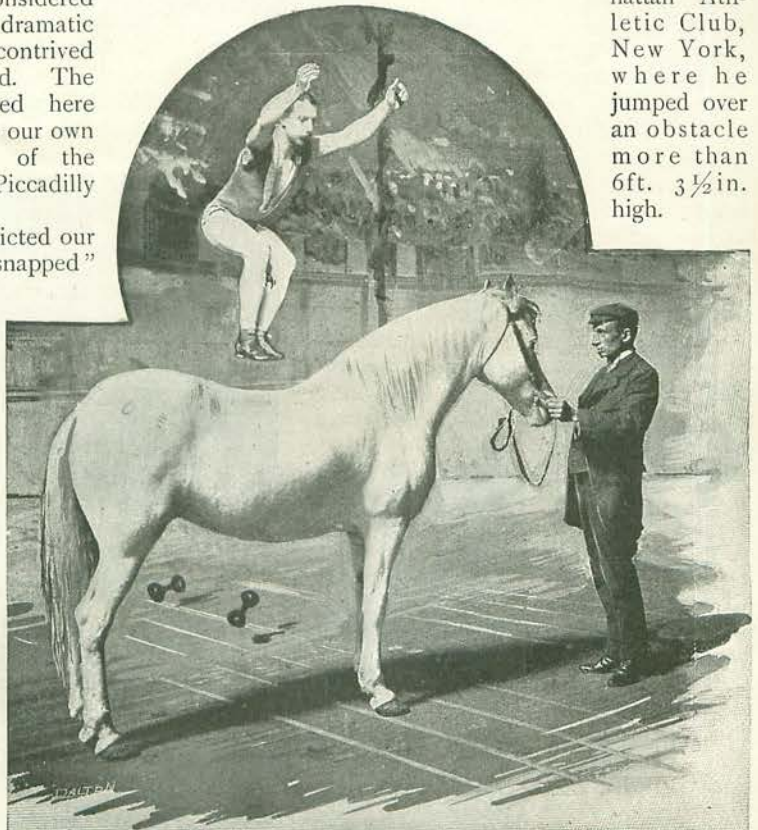
In the first feat depicted our artist has successfully "snapped" Higgins in the very act of leaping over a horse sixteen hands high. It will be noticed that the athlete has several inches to spare. "There are horses *and* horses," remarked Mr. Higgins to the writer. "Some are so quiet that I really believe they would stand there without any attendant at their head. Others, however, are a real source of danger to me. Perhaps just as I am 'taking off,' the brute will rear high into the air; something like this

once laid me up for weeks in Los Angeles, California."

As a rule, Mr. Higgins tests his horse nightly. He takes a run, but does not jump, merely bringing his feet down sharply close up to the animal, and dropping his dumbbells precisely as he does in flight. In this way he sees how the horse takes it, and acts accordingly.

But this is a magnificent jump, as will be evident to anyone who realizes the great height and broad back of a sixteen-hand horse. And yet Higgins asks no consideration for his own lack of inches. He announces himself ready to meet all comers who challenge his right to the proud title of Champion Jumper of the World. One of his longest jumps, by the way, was performed at his native place in 1895; it measured 14ft. 11½in. One of his highest was done at the Man-

hattan Athletic Club, New York, where he jumped over an obstacle more than 6ft. 3½in. high.



JUMPING OVER A HORSE SIXTEEN HANDS HIGH.



The next feat which Mr. Higgins is seen performing is one of a number of very extraordinary trick jumps. Clutching his dumb-bells as usual, the wonderful little man gives a few kangaroo-like leaps, and then rises into the air and alights right in the middle of a case of eggs! And yet not an egg is cracked, although the athlete is seen to linger in their midst for a moment and then rise gracefully over the back of the chair. We asked him how this was done. He said he couldn't tell; it was partly an effort of will. When he alighted for that fraction of a second on the eggs, he did not, of course, exercise a single ounce of his weight, but completed the jump by certain strenuous movements of his shoulders and the upper part of his body generally.

Often people in the audience have doubted that the eggs were real eggs. But such persons are always courteously invited on to the stage, not merely to examine the eggs *after* the jump, but before, and during its accomplishment. Beyond all doubt, the thing is genuine—a really graceful and beautiful feat, calling for extraordinary agility and suppleness, and extremely careful judgment.

Jumping, as is more or less generally known, is one of the favourite recreations of our North Country youth. Many of the factory lads make small wagers of a shilling or so, and decide them at jumping contests held after hours in the country lanes. When a recognised champion arises, he is backed for comparatively large sums against the amateur champion of a neighbouring district, the stakes being contributed by a



INTO A CASE OF EGGS WITHOUT BREAKING ANY.

weekly levy paid to a regularly constituted treasurer. The winner of several of these higher events, sooner or later, attracts the notice of sporting men, and the next stage is professionalism. One grieves to say that local publicans also get hold of likely lads and arrange a series of contests with the view of encouraging, not the spirit of healthy emulation or even the spirit of athleticism, but merely the consumption of other spirits—and beer.

A really tremendous jump is seen in the accompanying photograph. It is over eleven ordinary cane-bottomed chairs. In pointing out to me the difficulty of this jump, Mr. Higgins remarked that he had to rise about five feet and "travel" fourteen. The characteristic which is most forcibly borne in upon the spectator is the astonishing cleanness of action and lack of apparent effort that distinguish these feats. Higgins does *not* believe



OVER ELEVEN CHAIRS.



in overtaking himself. His various jumps are well within his power, and he always has some inches to spare—a fact which shows that he could accomplish still more difficult feats if he chose.

I have before me Higgins's athletic record ; it is virtually one long list of victories. After "little things" innumerable came the crushing defeat of Temple Jones. This gentleman, a kind of knight of the athletic world, bore on his crest the proud title of champion hopper of the world. Now, it must be a grand thing to be a champion hopper, and therefore one sympathizes with Mr. Temple Jones, who was one night forced to hop into comparative obscurity, ten inches behind the rising star.

Next, Mr. Higgins had the temerity to challenge the redoubtable Joe Darby, himself the greatest jumper of his day. Joe was a bit staggered, for he was mindful of his own immense reputation, hardly won and long held. Moreover, he had heard ominous rumours about the new athlete. However, he was pushed into a corner, and a match was arranged, to be brought off on the Moorfield Ground, Failsworth (!), on July 22nd, 1893. Here is the newspaper report about the match, which, by the way, was for £100 and the Championship of the World :—

"The most important jumping match of late years was brought to a satisfactory conclusion on Saturday afternoon, the contestants being Joe Darby, of Dudley, and John Higgins, of Blackburn. Both men had undergone a special preparation for the match, which turned out very much one-sided. Higgins won in his first jump by 2ft.  $\frac{1}{2}$ in., and could easily have made it much more. The jump was a hop, two strides, and jump, and Higgins broke the world's record by 17in. This record had

stood twenty-two years. Higgins thus fairly proved himself to be a long way in front of all other athletes at all-round jumping, and he is fairly entitled to the title of Champion Jumper of the World."

The next illustration shows another remarkably effective trick jump in the very act of being accomplished. Higgins is seen jumping over the back of a chair placed on a table, into a tub of water and out again without touching the bottom. That he does

actually touch the surface of the water is evidenced by the splash. It will be noticed that merely to jump over the back of the chair is an extraordinary feat ; and yet to this must be added the astonishing trick—performed in mid-air, be it remembered—of alighting on the water and then springing out again, without touching the bottom of the tub. No wonder this surprising jump should make a "splash," in more senses than one. Higgins has been all his life beating existing records and creating new ones. The first record that he made was at St. Helens, against John Larkin. This was "stand, hop-stride, cross-stride, and jump"; and Higgins covered 17yds. 10in.; then came two hops and jump, 38ft.; four hops and jump, 59ft.; two back jumps, 20ft. 7  $\frac{1}{2}$ in.; three standing jumps, 42ft. 2in.; and so on.



INTO A TUB OF WATER AND OUT AGAIN WITHOUT TOUCHING THE BOTTOM.

A very curious trick jump is seen in the reproduction next given. The subject is Mr. Frank Munro, of 104, Waterloo Road, Mr. Higgins's manager and agent, who, of course, does not usually "oblige" in this respect. The assistant, arrayed in a silk hat (and, of course, other things; only the silk hat is a *sine qua non*), takes up his position firmly near a table. It would never do for him to wobble about erratically. Well, a lighted candle in a candle-stick is placed carefully on his hat, and, this done, the jumper



retires some distance to take measurements with his eye.

The reproduction of the photo. fully explains this remarkable performance. It is, indeed, a tremendous jump from the other side of the table right up on to the candle with both feet together. The flame is extinguished with a quick movement of the foot from the ankle, and then the athlete sails gracefully down on to the stage.

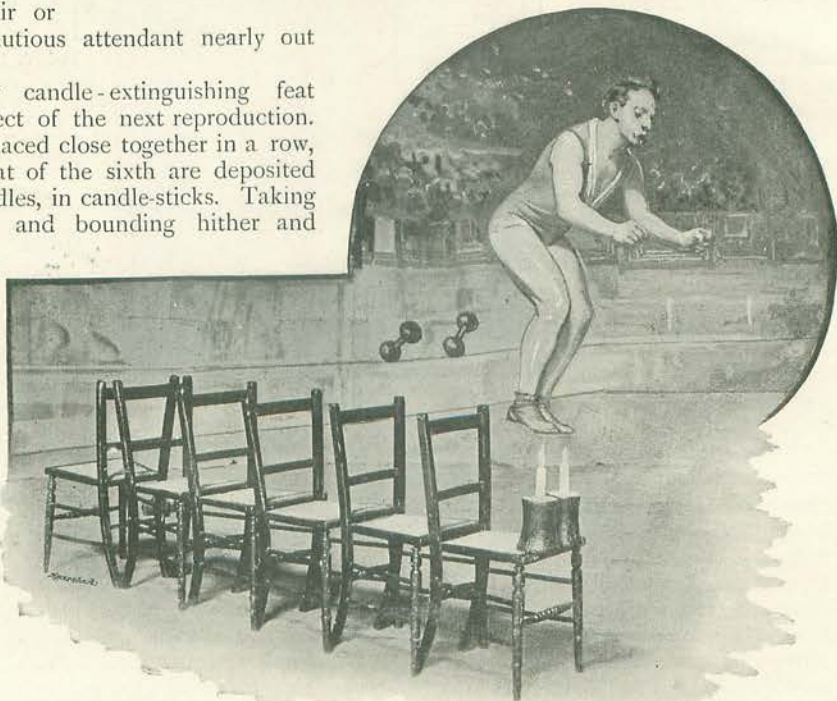
In the photo. one dumb-bell dropped by Higgins in his flight is just about to drop on to the table. And these missiles certainly do fall around with alarming promiscuity. The stage at the Pavilion was fairly corrugated with deep dents from them, and they often disabled a chair or scared an incautious attendant nearly out of his wits.

Yet another candle-extinguishing feat forms the subject of the next reproduction. Six chairs are placed close together in a row, and on the seat of the sixth are deposited *two lighted candles*, in candle-sticks. Taking his dumb-bells and bounding hither and thither like a veritable Spring-Heeled Jack (he does this to keep himself in form), Higgins stands well away from the chair most remote from the candles, and takes in the situation with his keen eye. He next gives a few more skittish frolics, and then one, two, and up



EXTINGUISHING A CANDLE ON A MAN'S HAT.

over the chairs with indescribable *élan*. He passes through the air with curious slowness, and actually alights gingerly on the lighted candles, which he carefully extinguishes, one with each foot. Having successfully accomplished this, the jumper seems to rise *off the tips of the candles* and alights gracefully on the ground, bowing to his admiring audience. Of course, the whole of the jump takes only two or three seconds, but it calls for marvellous nicety of judgment and delicacy of movement. Now and then it happens that Higgins only extinguishes one candle. In such cases he always performs the feat over again.

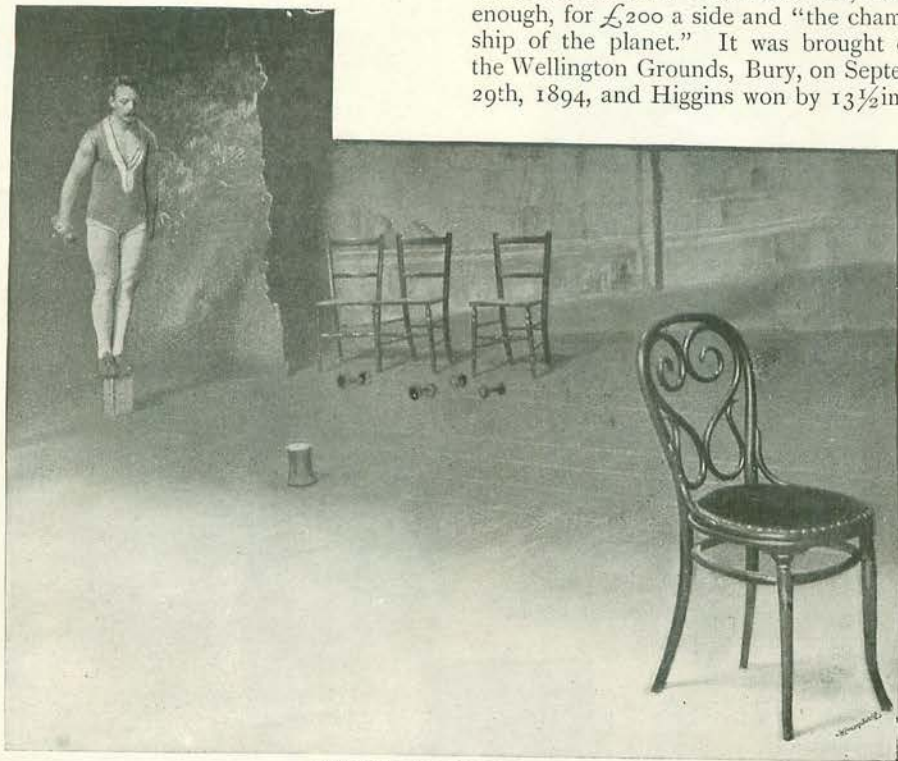


ANOTHER CANDLE-EXTINGUISHING FEAT.



Quite as difficult is the next extraordinary jump, which, however, is invariably performed with the same ease of movement and certainty of judgment which characterize all the feats attempted by Mr. Higgins. This wonderful man stands bold upright on an ordinary fire-brick, dumb-bells in hand, as we see him in the photo. Very well. After a few swings of his muscular arms, he rises lightly and alights for a moment with both feet together on a small stand, which is placed about eight feet away. Almost instantly he

States. Every individual who has made a great name in the entertainment world, here, does this. And Higgins's rivals even brought over a renowned American jumper who was to wrest the jumping crown—if there *is* a jumping crown—from the Englishman. The latter was challenged to try "three rises"—or hop, two strides, hop, two strides, and jump. His engagement list was full, however, and Higgins declined. The American sent letters to the sporting papers complaining about Higgins, and at last the latter met his trans-Atlantic rival. The match was, modestly enough, for £200 a side and "the championship of the planet." It was brought off at the Wellington Grounds, Bury, on September 29th, 1894, and Higgins won by 13½ in.



TWO LONG AND DELICATE JUMPS.

risers again and takes another immense bound over a chair that stands rather more than another ten feet distant.

Obviously a useful accomplishment in cross-country races. Higgins has often taken part in these sports, clearing hedges and ditches and gates before which the boldest steeplechasers would shrink. And Mr. Higgins was once compelled to negotiate a six-foot paling at very short notice. As a matter of fact, an infuriated bull was the cause of this—and so ugly did that bull look, that Higgins declares to this day that he owes his life to his powers as a jumper.

Of course, Higgins went to the United

Next we find the plucky little North Countryman carrying the war into his opponents' country. In other words, Higgins went off to the States again, travelled over 25,000 miles there, and defeated every athlete he met.

Mr. Higgins is next seen in the very act of ringing a bell in his flight—one of those bells you push down sharply. It is placed on a chair, which stands on a table, so that the mere jump, to say nothing about the bell-ringing, is worthy of notice. Of course, doubting Thomases have their say about this remarkably clever feat—"it is an electric bell, rung from the wings at the proper



moment," and so on. Nothing but a close examination of the bell *in situ* will convince such people. A curious thing is that Higgins never practises. He considers his evening's work before the public

a specialist was evidenced by the betting, which was three to one *against* Higgins for the cross, and ten to one *on* him for the match. Higgins, however, won the cross by  $1\frac{1}{2}$  in. and the jumps by *nine feet*!

In the photograph here reproduced we see Mr. Higgins taking a flying backward jump over a table and two chairs. The jumper stands several feet away from the chair, to which, of course, his back is turned. Swinging the dumb-bells, he throws his arms out behind him, and bounds backward to gain momentum. Resting for a second or so, he takes another terrific backward leap, and travels clean over the table and the other chair, having so calculated the distance and effort required as to be within, perhaps, a couple of inches of touching the seat of the farther chair as he descends.

This backward jump always appeals to an audience. "A forward jump, high or long," they seem to argue, "is all very well, no matter how big; but a leap backwards over a serious obstacle is a very different thing. A man may lose his nerve, or make an error of



RINGING A BELL IN FLIGHT.

quite enough practice. Another remarkable thing is the way in which he has attained, after years of perseverance, his present position as champion all-round jumper. Fearlessly he has attacked professional and semi-professional men, who have made one particular kind of jump their speciality. For example, there was the match with Gregson, of Grimshaw Park, for £50 a side. The conditions were "stand, one cross, and four jumps." That Gregson was



A GREAT BACKWARD JUMP.





THE KANGAROO FEAT—OVER A RING OF CHAIRS.

judgment through not being able to see where he is going, and then there is a pretty bad fall before him—or rather behind him."

Even this wonderful "leap in the dark" is characterized by Higgins's neatness of style and ease of manner. He seems to rise from the stage with the elastic bound of an india-rubber ball, and he "travels" along in mid-air precisely as though he were gliding on an invisible wire. His legs are never sprawling apart, but always close together, and he smiles at all times as though he viewed his performance in the light of a mere pastime.

At Hull our champion jumper leaped over a horse 18 hands high; and at the Orpheum, San Francisco, he cleared two horses, each 17 hands. In November, 1895,

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he jumped over forty-five chairs in succession, placed in a ring, and each chair 10ft. from the other—a truly terrific feat of agility and endurance. The next photo. shows Mr. Higgins

clearing a ring of chairs—a much smaller ring, of course, than the one just mentioned, or it would not have been photographable. The chairs are placed 10ft. apart, and Higgins braces himself for a great effort. The band plays a very slow march, and to keep time with the music the jumper regulates his prodigious bounds, the effect being peculiar in a very remarkable degree.

What Mr. Higgins calls the "Human Obstacle Jump" is seen in the accompanying photo. We all know the Human Obstacle, but unfortunately we cannot all get clear of him with the ease and agility



THE "HUMAN OBSTACLE."





OVER THE "HUMAN WALL."

displayed by Higgins. This is how the jump is arranged:

Three gentlemen from the audience are invited upon the stage. Two take up positions about 5 ft. apart, and the third extends himself rigidly crosswise, his head resting on the shoulders of one supporter, and his legs on the other. To maintain this position is a little trying. Few gentlemen are bursting to attempt it. Still, there is always someone thirsting for the fearful joy of a few moments' publicity.

The Human Wall is seen being negotiated in the next photo. reproduced here. This explains itself. Half-a-dozen gentlemen from the audience are brought on the stage and placed in a row. When the components of the "wall" appear to be a nervous lot, Higgins leaps over their heads from behind, but ordinarily he takes the jump with his men facing him. In the photo. it will be seen that the poor man over whose head the athlete is poised for a moment is shrinking half-unconsciously, lest a worse evil befall him. In this particular instance

it may truly be said that "outsiders see most of the game." The men at each end know perfectly well that Higgins won't jump over *them*, so that they are really only ornamental adjuncts, and, as such, free to gaze at the jumper as much as they please.

This is a very effective feat. Sometimes it is varied by jumping over the wall endwise on, in which case it is extremely difficult to find a person willing to fill the onerous (and possibly dangerous) position occupied by the man at the end farthest from the jumper.

What may be called the athlete's most sensational jump is next shown. His victim for this occasion only was Mr. Frank Munro. As a rule, Higgins has to content himself with a paid underling as *corpus vile*,



ON TO A MAN'S FACE AND OFF AGAIN WITHOUT HURTING HIM.



unless there happens to be someone in the audience burning for distinction. A chair is placed on a table, and the assistant leans back with his elbows on the table and the back of his head resting on the seat of the chair.

When all is in readiness, and the audience suitably worked up, Higgins retires slowly to the other end of the stage. Here he dips his shoes into a preparation of lampblack and oil, so that "his mark" may be proof positive of successful accomplishment. Then giving the usual preliminary leaps, and carefully calculating distances with his eye, he bounds into the air, lingers for an infinitesimal period on his subject's face, and then descends to the stage on the other side. The ordeal past, the subject rises bashfully to take that share of the applause to which the big smuts on his nose and eyes entitle him.

The last illustration depicts Mr. Higgins's showiest feat—jumping over an ordinary brougham. There is a great fuss on the stage on the eve of this jump. Attendants run here and there. Some drag the brougham into its proper position, others spread an astonishing number of carpets, for the descent is very heavy.

Of course, Higgins does not leap off the ground clean over the carriage; no human being could do that. Observe the small table 2ft. 3in. high, which is placed close to the rear hind wheel. Taking as great a run as the stage will allow, Higgins springs lightly on to the table, pauses for a moment, and then rises with an extraordinary bound right

over—and across—the top of the brougham. One opines that the value of the carriage deteriorates nightly, mainly on account of those dumb-bells which are discarded in flight. Often they fall on the carriage and knock it about. Or one will fall on a lamp, and batter it somewhat. But it is a grand feat this jumping "over a full-



OVER A FULL-SIZED BROUGHAM.

sized brougham"—splendidly engineered so as to bring down the house the moment the "Human Kangaroo" alights on the carpets placed on the other side. Of course, a stumble or miscalculation may entail a broken limb. Such mishaps are among the "draw-backs" mentioned at the outset.