

Bulging Muscles

the early part of the eighteenth century. Early in the nineteenth century an effort to revive it was made, not very successfully. Toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, wrestling was going strong in America, and at the beginning of the twentieth century it became immensely popular in England, showmanship being exploited to give crowded houses the thrills the fans wanted.

It was at this time that the super-promoter, C. B. Cochran, took up wrestling, and he was chiefly responsible for the tremendous boom that followed. In Paris he saw for the first time a young Russian named Georges Hackenschmidt who was competing in a world wrestling championship, and when Hackenschmidt later went to London Cochran met him, became his agent, and secured for him a contract for a trial week at the Tivoli at £70 a week. The house record for receipts was broken that week, and the wrestler was given a further four weeks' engagement at £150 a week.

—Helped by Such Renowned
Matmen as Count Varga and
Whiskers Blake

WITH Hackenschmidt enjoying a nation-wide popularity wrestlers began to appear from other countries—the "Terrible Turk," or, to give him his right name, Antonio Pierri, came to England with a fellow-countryman, Madrali, who also became, known as the "Terrible Turk." After some negotiations Madrali and Hackenschmidt were matched at Olympia and the crowd was tremendous. When the gong sounded Hackenschmidt rushed at his opponent, picked him up and dashed him down. The match was over, for the not-so-terrible Turk lay on the mat with both arms broken!

It is about four years since the wrestling fever hit New Zealand, for the past 12 months wrestlers have been pouring into the Dominion, and, in the case of some, have received almost as much hero-worship as matinee idols. Auckland was the first place conquered, then Wellington—and finally the South Island. All-in wrestling made a bad start in Christchurch. When it was first gaining its feet in Auckland, and it was known that the famous Russian grappler Al Karasick was in the Dominion the public of Christchurch was informed that an open-air contest would be held at English Park Stadium between Karasick, "The Russian Lion," and a local man. The contest drew only a small crowd, and it turned out a farce, finishing in an early round when one of the contestants retired with an injured knee. For an exhibition by the great Al Karasick it was the poorest thing imaginable, and a local newspaper decided to probe the visitor's credentials. It



ran across a man who not only knew Karasick, but also knew that the Russian could not possibly have been in Christchurch that night! So the first "all-in" bout, although it was only a "take-in" bout, provided Christchurch with a sensation. The principals folded up their tents and faded away.

THIS season those responsible for importing the grapplers to New Zealand have brought to the Dominion men of a much better class than most of their predecessors, huge men with a much better appreciation of the art of showmanship. The old gesturing and grimacing and attitudinising of the earlier matches has been toned down, and spills provide the thrills. Theatricalism is inextricably bound up with wrestling that the imported professionals are providing for the public at present. Cochran's maxim that "The public wants a show" applies equally to the matches arranged in the Dominion as it did to the old music-hall stunts of 30 years ago.

Walker and Alley, by residing in New Zealand for some time, have done much to popularise wrestling in the Dominion. They were outstanding, but it appears that the associations are now promoting with men of their class, and for that reason the entertainment provided has improved considerably. As the wrestling is presented at present it is nothing more or less than entertainment. There appear to be no rules except a few prohibitions; nothing, for instance, to stop a man bumping and battering his opponent till he is groggy and easily pinned.