

# "HOW AH WHIPPED MISTAH' JEFF"

## Jack Johnson Tells Kate Carew

## Lil' Artha's Own Story of That Great Event

ONCE more, if you please, let us contemplate Mr. Johnson. (Frithe pass on, pensive highbrow, this page is not for you.)

A more illustrious Mr. Johnson than when I discoursed with him three months ago, or by grace of knightly conquest he has become the world's incomparable sovereign, most formidable and august beater and bruiser of men.

Strange to relate, he did not seem puffed up. If anything, his manner was more grave and level-headed than before.

"Mr. Johnson," said I, "a great many people who are not at all interested in the technical part of your profession, have expressed some curiosity about the psychological side of it."

Mr. Johnson ducked his head, but did not lose confidence. "Yas'm," he purred smoothly, "the pay-to-pay—the psychologistic side of mah profession is surely a mighty interesting thing to every refined and educated person, ma'am."

"In your recent affair with Mr. Jeffries," I continued, "there appears to have been in addition to the exchange of blows, a constant ripple of polite conversation."

"Oh, yas'm," said Mr. Johnson. "I was conversing most pleasantly with Mr. Jeffries 'most all of the time we was in the ring."

"Was that your considerate way of making the time pass more agreeably?" I inquired.

"Not exactly, ma'am," said Mr. Johnson; "it was more to talk the other man's mind off his work, so as to catch him easier."

"Dear me! Doesn't this seem rather unkind?"

"Unkind?" repeated Mr. Johnson with a slight puzzled look. "I do assure you that I was most careful, ma'am, not to say one word to Mr. Jeffries that wasn't strictly gentlemanly."

"In the second round," said I, "you said to Mr. Jeffries: 'Don't you rough me.' Was that because he had been hurting you?"

"No ma'am, I was only kidding him. And I did get a luff out of him that time."

"An actual, spontaneous, merry laugh?"

"Well, no, it wasn't that kind," confessed Mr. Johnson. "It was more the kind of luff that would curdle the morning's milk."

And here a very small white gentleman spoke up. "Hart is his name," Mr. Sig Hart—and he seems to be Mr. Johnson's right hand man.

"Jack Johnson," he said enthusiastically, "is the greatest kiddier in the business."

He gave Mr. Johnson a look of such admiration as a toy spaniel might feel for an elephant which was not only large and ferocious, but also witty and entertaining.

"What was the neatest thing he said during the fight?" I inquired encouragingly.

"Oh, I don't know—he said so many," returned Mr. Hart, rumpling his back hair.

"What do you think, Mr. Johnson?" I inquired.

"As far as I can remember," replied Mr. Johnson, looking at the ceiling, "one of the best jollies I gave old Jeff was when he came into a clinch, and I said, 'Whatchoo wantin' hug me fo', Mr. Jeffries? You know puffykly well you don't love me.'"

"And that was a hot one you handed Corbett," exclaimed little Mr. Hart, "when you sang out to him. 'You'd better come right up here, Jim, and

help your man.' There were a whole lot of meanings to that Jack. It meant that Jeff needed help, and it meant that you could have taken on Corbett, too, and it meant that you had beaten Corbett at the kidding game. In fact, you fought two men at Reno."

"Is the conversational part of it considered so important?" I inquired.

"It certainly is, ma'am," said Mr. Johnson, musically, "which was why Mr. Jeffries had Mr. Corbett to do his kidding for him."

A proud and important negress entered with Mr. Johnson's breakfast, which consisted of chickens. "Yes, dears, this conversation took place in Darkest Africa. Mr. Johnson was chezul, as they say in France."

How many chickens? Well, there were two to begin with.

We had hoped—the professor, the patron of many sports and I—to find Mr. Johnson alone; but a champion like a monarch, is never alone, and there really was a certain atmosphere of royalty in the clean and well appointed little restaurant where Mr. Johnson, watched respectfully and solicitously by many courtiers, chiefly white, sat down to eat.

"Not a trace of self-consciousness," whispered the professor, "and eating under observation is a very severe test. The man is either a child or a master of deportment—I'm inclined to think the latter. Observe the extraordinary economy of effort."

Fully half a chicken had vanished irretrievably, and Mr. Johnson, with a lazy air, had seemed merely to wave his hands now and then. A few swift strokes with a carving knife had dismembered the bird as if by magic, and the whole of the breast had been absorbed in two leisurely mouthfuls.

The outlying parts were quickly following. Precision, speed, a graceful rhythm and a deceptive air of deliberation were the keynotes of this astonishing performance. An anaconda absorbing a rabbit couldn't make less fuss about it.

"Jack," said the patron of many sports, "some of the papers said that you looked nervous when you first entered the ring."

Mr. Johnson opened his eyes very wide, suspended for a moment the process of deglutition, and looked plaintively at Mr. Hart, as if to say: "What calamities must not the right suffer withal!"

"There's nothing to it," said Mr. Hart briskly. "He was kidding and cracking jokes every second."

"Weren't you, honestly, the least little bit nervous at first?" said I to Mr. Johnson.

"No, ma'am," said Mr. Johnson solemnly shaking his head. "I've never been nervous in all my life."

"I believe you," said the professor, slapping his knee.

"Why should I go and get nervous?" continued Mr. Johnson, stripping and devouring the meat from the last drumstick, "when I had just arrived at the very place I had always wanted to be, sitting plumb opposite to my friend, Mr. Jeffries, in a twenty-five foot ring?"

Picking up the carving fork, he deftly speared the second chicken off the dish, held it aloft and eyed it with a luxurious smile.

"What makes a man nervous," he proclaimed, "is not being satisfied. Ah'm never nervous, because Ah'm always satisfied."

He transferred the chicken to his plate and attacked it with a zest apparently sharpened by the discussion. The waitress reappeared with a third chicken, which she placed before him.

"The cook would like to know, Mr.

Johnson, whether you'll be wanting any more chicken," she said deferentially.

"No, I thank you," said Mr. Johnson ceremoniously, "that'll be about enough this mornin', Miss Lily."

And Miss Lily's polished black face was wreathed in smiles as she made her exit, treading on air.

"There's been a good deal of discussion, Mr. Johnson," said I, "about Mr. Jeffries's condition."

"Jeff was in grand condition," said Mr. Johnson quickly.

"But there seems to be an impression that something had gone wrong with his nervous system."

Mr. Johnson warmed up here, evidently unwilling to part with any of the honors of victory.

"His nerve was all right when he refused to shake hands," said the black man earnestly. "His nerve was all right when he tore the stars and stripes sash off his waist because he saw that I was wearing one like it."

When a fighting man's nerve is broke he wants the other fellow to have a friendly feeling for him. Mr. Jeffries was just the other way. He had a fighting edge on. If his nerve hadn't been all right he couldn't have lasted three rounds. He couldn't have taken the beating he did in the game way he did. No, ma'am, Ah take off mah hat to Mr. Jeffries—and his nerve was all right."

"You bet it was!" said Mr. Hart, as Mr. Johnson readdressed himself to what was left of the second chicken.

"Didn't you feel sorry for him?" I asked.

Mr. Johnson looked at me dubiously and picked a wishbone with some deliberation.

"Well," he said, cautiously, "in the thirteenth round I guess I kinder did begin to feel somewhat compunctious."

"Is that all?" I persisted. "Is it possible to batter a man on and on, as long as he is able to stand up—to see his eye swollen shut and his face covered with—ugh! do men do that sort of thing without a moment's real regret?"

"Mr. Jeffries had done it many a time," said Mr. Johnson philosophically.

"Isn't in the nature of woman to understand fighting," put in the professor oracularly.

"Ah guess you're right, doc," said Mr. Johnson, wiping his mouth.

"And didn't Mr. Jeffries hurt at all?" I inquired.

"Not in the least, ma'am, not in the least," said the big black man. "Ah assure you Ah was in just as good shape when Ah came out of the ring as you see me now. Not a mark on me—was there, Sig?"

"But," I insisted, "some of the papers said that you grunted once or twice when Mr. Jeffries struck you."

"Well, Ah may have grunted, but it was from the heat, not because Mr. Jeff hurt me. Ah didn't see anything coming mah way from him that could have caused me any pain."

"Say, Jack," asked the patron of many sports, "what about that left you gave him on the eye in the sixth round? I've been wondering if that didn't put old Jeff all to the bad for the rest of the fight. Was that something you calculated?"

"No, sir," said Mr. Johnson, "I never aim for such a small mark as a man's eye. I never take a target any smaller than his whole head and any one of his features is welcome to get it."

"I read with great interest," said the professor, "that in the first round you demonstrated your superior strength by lifting the other person off his feet."

"That's right, doc," said Mr. Johnson with a cheerful smile.

"Was that done with calculation?" "Sure it was," said Mr. Johnson.

"You had determined on it beforehand?"

"Yassir—because I knew that it would take the heart out of him."

"And could you judge whether it had the desired effect?"

"Mr. Johnson kinder wilted," said Mr. Johnson, "and his face went funny. Here—I'll show you how I done it, doc, and then you'll know how it feels."

He rose from the table and advanced toward the professor, who rose somewhat hesitantly.

"I sprang it on him," exclaimed Mr. Johnson, "in the first clinch, when he started in to roughing it some. Come on, doc."

"I'm a little doubtful as to the value of a literal demonstration," said the professor, hanging back. "Did—ah—hug him very hard?"

"No, I didn't hug him none," said Mr. Johnson. "I only took him like this—it won't hurt, doc."

And, placing his fingers under the professor's elbows, he lifted him into the air as lightly as if he—the professor, not Mr. Johnson—had been made of bannoo.

"Bless my soul!" ejaculated the professor, gazing into Mr. Johnson's black face.

"Not that you're anything like Mr. Jeffries' weight—about two-thirds of it, I should say," continued Mr. Johnson, depositing the professor on his feet.

"The sensation is remarkable," said the professor to me. "I never experienced a feeling of such utter helplessness, with the disquieting consciousness of being at the mercy of an overwhelming force. No wonder Jeffries' face went funny, as our interesting friend expresses it."

"I'm curious to know, Mr. Johnson," said I as Mr. Johnson went back to his chicken, "how you think you would have compared with John L. Sullivan, in that gentleman's prime?"

"Mah dear lady," said Mr. Johnson pityingly, "if you knew anything about the game as it's played you wouldn't ask any such questions as that. Mr. Sullivan was a great man in his time, and he is surely is now a very cultured and kindly old gentleman; but his style of fighting wouldn't go for a minute in these days."

"Do you mean," I inquired, "that you could beat Mr. Sullivan as he was at his very best?"

"Yas'm," said Mr. Johnson.

"As easily as you beat Mr. Jeffries?"

"I'm afraid it might be some easier," said Mr. Johnson with due deliberation.

"But the business of pummeling people," said I, "is so old and simple that—"

"Simple!" exclaimed the patron of many sports.

"Simple!" echoed Mr. Johnson and Mr. Sig Hart.

And the proceeded to explain to me what a very complex art modern pummeling is, and how assiduously the pummeler has to use his brains, and



"MOST PEOPLE LIKE THOSE SMALL FIDDLES," SAID MR. JOHNSON, APOLOGETICALLY, "BUT AH'VE TAKEN TO THIS KIND, DOC, BECAUSE THEY DON'T BREAK SO EASY."

If they hadn't talked together the professor and I might have learned a great deal about it, but as it was we looked at each other in helpless bewilderment.

There seemed to be something about "long-arm work" and "short arm work" and I did gather in a hazy fashion that the latter had been developed in recent years and was speedier and more baffling than the older methods.

"Jim Corbett invented a new style of boxing," said the patron of many sports, "but Jack Johnson has gone him one better. He has framed up entirely new ways of stopping blows. Instead of waiting to block them with his arms, he reaches out and catches them on the fly, as if they were baseballs."

"Is that clever?" I inquired.

"Clever? Why, it takes a speed of eye and brain and hand that is simply marvellous! And another trick he has developed is to stop a blow while it's on the way by prodding the front muscle of his opponent's shoulder with the tips of his fingers—Isn't that right, Jack?"

"Yup," grinned Mr. Johnson, through a mouthful of chicken. "That'll take all the steam out of the biggest wallop."

"You must have worked very hard at your profession," said I to Mr. Johnson.

"Yas'm," said Mr. Johnson, modestly, "I've worked hard at it ever since I was a child."

"You've been hungry and cold at it, too, haven't you, Jack?" said the patron of many sports.

"Lord, yes!" said Mr. Johnson. "I don't believe I ever got really enough to eat as a regular institution until after my fight with Burns. It certainly is wonderful the way my strength has been building up since then!"

And he heaved a sigh of happy repletion as he surveyed the devastated skeleton of the third chicken. I looked at Mr. Johnson, hero and idol of his race and wondered in what way civilization could have used his peculiar talents if there had been no such profession as prize fighting. Cool, crafty, patient, ambitious and immensely strong, courageous and quick he seems to have been especially molded for fighting in some individual form. His singularly flat head—

it slopes almost without an angle from the eyebrows back to the cone shaped crown—might have been built by design for the glancing off of blows. In action—I saw his sparring exhibition at Hammerstein's that afternoon—he has weirdly reptilian way of drawing down that flat head down between his prodigious shoulders, and anon protruding it and playing it swiftly from side to side like a huge turtle.

"Mr. Johnson," said I, "what do you think of the popular theory that in beating Mr. Jeffries you were demolishing the supremacy of the white race?"

"Why, I haven't got much patience



"WHAT MAKES A MAN NERVOUS IS NOT BEING SATISFIED; AH'M NEVER NERVOUS BECAUSE AH'M ALWAYS SATISFIED."



MR. JOHNSON SHOWING HOW HE LIFTED MR. JEFFRIES OFF HIS FEET EARLY IN THE FIGHT.