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MAKING THE AMERICAN BODY

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Making the American Body

The Remarkable Saga of the Men and Women Whose Feats, Feuds, and Passions Shaped Fitness History

JONATHAN BLACK

UNIVERSITY OF NEBRASKA PRESS | LINCOLN AND LONDON

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Set in Minion by Laura Wellington.
Designed by Nathan Putens.

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For Adrian and Lucian

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Preface

Fitness today is an all-consuming habit. Untold millions troop to health clubs or run on paths and tracks or work out at home on equipment peddled on late-night infomercials. Yoga is experiencing an unprecedented boom. There are Pilates studios and boot camps and Zumba parties. There are fitness facilities in every hotel, in corporate centers and tennis clubs, in spas and on cruise ships. Exercise touches every aspect of our culture, from books and magazines to television shows and high-end clothing boutiques. How we arrived at this state of heightened awareness is a story whose contours mirror much that happened in twentieth-century America, but it is also, on another level, the tale of individuals. Virtually no other habit or business has been so propelled, and for so long, by such a remarkable cast of characters.

As diverse as they were, all shared a singular passion—to improve on the human body. Some happened on their mission by chance. Many latched on to exercise to overcome an early life that was blighted by illness, deprivation, or low self-esteem. Not surprisingly, few believed in moderation and fewer still in humility. Proud of their new physicality, they were big on self-promotion. The early icons with bodybuilder roots were the most likely exhibitionists, but shifting notions of fitness did little to alter their profile; almost all were crusaders with outsized egos and a flair for showmanship, and their occasional clashes made for enduring feuds and high comedy.

Singly and together, they shaped the habit of exercise in America, but their influence extended beyond the treadmill and yoga mat. They impacted advertising and figured large in the early use of television. They helped spawn the videotape industry. At a time when the demographics of the country were shifting, from rural to urban, they offered hubs for immigrants and a source of identity and confidence. In the daily shuttle

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between home and office, they introduced a new "third place," the health club, a source of friendship and social interaction. The promise they offered, of personal transformation, touched a common feature of the American dream—that anyone, with will and determined effort, could be a success and live a happier, more fulfilling life.

It can be said that their feats and stories fit no single narrative, that the very notion of a history of fitness weaves a misleading theme. The early "muscle heads" had little in common with the millions of converts to jogging; the addicts of Spinning would never deign to sit in the adjacent yoga studio. But this segmentation overlooks the progression that defines how Americans look at their bodies and how they employ them to further a sense of accomplishment and well-being, because most everything chronicled here was built on something that came before. The very notion of "fitness" appeared late in the game, but its provenance dates back to muscular Christianity and the nutritional zealots of the nineteenth century; it developed in the showmanship of Mr. Olympia contests and the drive to do better in sports; it fed off a national slump in self-confidence and the need to look good in the aerobics studio; it was a natural outgrowth of the coupling of exercise and health.

The end result of this history, it is fair to argue, has failed to fulfill its promise. The country is in the midst of an obesity epidemic, diabetes is on the rise, and so is the incidence of heart attack and stroke. One might conclude that the heroes of this book are partly to blame—for their salesmanship and commercialism, for their occasional grandiosity and excesses. To do so, however, would be to overlook how far they have brought us. Their flaws and limitations need not detract from the vision and vitality that inspired so many. What they accomplished should set a standard for our own ambitions—and what still needs to be done.

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Introduction | A Night to Remember

There was plenty of entertainment in New York City that warm night in October 1924. Up in Times Square, the Ziegfeld Follies were playing at the New Amsterdam, the marquee proclaiming, "A National Institution! Glorifying the American Girl!" Around the corner, Gloria Swanson was starring in the Broadway smash *The Impossible Mrs. Bellew*. Harold Lloyd was cracking them up in his latest five-reel comedy riot, *Grandma's Boy*. Marion Davis was in her "sixth capacity week" in *When Knighthood Was in Flower*.

But for fans of something different, for connoisseurs of male flesh and muscle, there was only one place to be that night—Madison Square Garden. This was the second Garden, the one designed by Stanford White, a huge, sprawling Moorish palace with a thirty-two-story minaret overlooking Madison Square at Twenty-Sixth Street. Atop the minaret an eighteen-foot bronze statue of a nude Diana had originally spun with the wind; deemed too erotic and possibly a danger to passersby below, it had been replaced with a much lighter, gilded hollow copy. The Garden's rooftop restaurant was the city's largest, as famous for its food as for the night when Henry K. Thaw shot White dead at his table because the architect had been having an affair with Thaw's wife, Evelyn Nesbit, much of it carried on in the apartment that White kept in the building, the site of the notorious red-velvet swing.

The Garden was the only place big enough to accommodate the likely crowds. Its main hall was enormous, the largest in the world, with seating capacity for eight thousand people and floor space for thousands more. In recent years, the Garden had played home to all manner of shows—rodeos and circuses and speed-walking races. It rarely made back its money, however, and entrepreneur Tex Rickard took over the arena to introduce the new sport of boxing. The night

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before, record-breaking numbers of fans witnessed a tough kid from Chicago, Charlie White, flatten the Canadian lightweight champ with a jackhammer left one minute into the second round.

There would be no fisticuffs tonight, but there would be plenty of macho display. Seventy-five men from around the world were here to show off their rippling abs and tree-trunk thighs. It was billed as "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" contest, and tickets were hard to come by.

The crowds had been lining up for hours. Policemen patrolled the lines brandishing night sticks. Brokers were waving tickets, yelling for more. Inside, in the basement dressing rooms, dozens of men methodically stripped off their clothes to begin their preshow ritual. Off came a shirt, the body turned sideways to the mirror, an arm cocked, the tight-roped bicep regarded with squinted satisfaction. Bodies hunched forward; shoulders leaped to life. A massive chest, a pulverizing clot of muscle, sprang into profile. Only the occasional grunt of confidence broke the tense silence.

Few noticed the dressing-room door crack open and the head of a man appear. The man was handsome, with a sharp aquiline nose, a high forehead, and piercing blue eyes. The narrow lips were fixed in their usual arrogant expression. He was dressed in a suit, though had he stripped off his clothes he would have appeared every bit as striking as the muscled Adonises in front of their mirrors. Short, a mere five-foot-two, he boasted an impressive physique, his powerful arms thickened by hundreds of morning push-ups, his stomach tightened by thousands of sit-ups. He lived by one credo, emblazoned under the banner of his best-selling magazine, *Physical Culture*: "Weakness Is a Crime. Don't Be a Criminal."

His name was Bernarr Macfadden.

He was, by most any account, the strangest man to leave his mark on the world of fitness—and one of the most influential. He educated the world about alternative medicine, proper nutrition, sex. He founded a utopian community and built luxury health sanatoriums. In years to come, he would create a hugely successful publishing empire with magazines such as *True Story* and *True Confessions*. He would persuade the nation's first lady to edit his magazine on babies and would declare himself a candidate for president.

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Tonight he was trading on the title that had made him famous: the self-appointed "Father of Physical Culture." It was an unlikely crown for the man who had grown up weak and sickly in the Ozarks. An orphan, he had transformed himself through fanatic devotion to exercise and had become America's greatest promoter of health foods and clean living. He abstained from smoking, alcohol, and drugs. He campaigned against prudery and believed sex prevented baldness. He slept on his bedroom floor and walked six miles to work, barefoot. He shaped his body as he shaped his life—with a disregard for moderation. He borrowed what suited him. The term *physical culture* had been popularized by the world's greatest bodybuilder and dated back to the nineteenth century, its provenance owed to a rediscovery of the body and a rebellion against Victorian restraint. In the twentieth century, it gathered a new momentum in the military, in schools, even in churches, fusing exercise with health and even spirituality.

Macfadden was quick to capitalize on the new "Body Worship," as it had come to be called. At the time of the Madison Square Garden event, the country was still recovering from the carnage of World War I, and many had turned to the human body as one means to establish control over a more limited canvas. The advent of photography had further propelled display of the sculpted male form, and Macfadden made the most of this new interest by running provocative pictures in *Physical Culture*, a strategy that worked both for and against him. Advertisements for an earlier show, his "Mammoth Physical Culture Show—a Carnival of Beauty and Brawn," had caught the eye of antivice zealot Anthony Comstock, who had him arrested for passing around photos of women in swimsuits. Macfadden got a suspended sentence but ran afoul of the law again by running an explicit series of photos on the dangers of syphilis in *Physical Culture*. Only a reprieve from President Taft saved him from a two-year prison term.

For tonight's extravaganza, he was determined to cloak the near-naked men in respectability and had recruited a blue-ribbon panel of judges, which included doctors, scientists, and nutritionists. If all went as planned, the event would garner the kind of publicity that Macfadden craved—for himself, naturally, but also for the doctrine of physical culture. Looking around him, he was appalled at the wretched condition of so many men. Weak, out of shape, they stumbled through their lives

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ignorant of the body's potential. He, Bernarr Macfadden, had been put on the planet to restore the glow of good health and the miracles of a powerful body.

From his position at the door, he surveyed the muscles that coiled and bulged under dressing-room lights. It was a beautiful sight, the body's benediction to his tireless work and obvious genius. He had only one reservation: tonight's event was a charade. All these men with their glorious oiled bodies were wasting their time. The winner who would soon walk off with the title of "World's Most Perfectly Developed Man" was a foregone conclusion. Quietly, he shut the door and went to find him in another dressing room.

The man had come to Macfadden's attention one year ago, when the publisher was promoting a photo contest, the "World's Most Beautiful Man," in the pages of his magazine. The picture the man sent had impressed Macfadden, but so had many of the photos that poured in through the mail. It was a difficult decision, and three months passed before he had replied to the contestant, suggesting he come by Macfadden's office in midtown Manhattan for a personal inspection.

The man had arrived in a business suit. He had a handsome square face, his eyes bright but calm. If he was nervous, he did not show it. Macfadden, ever attuned to physical auras, sensed a reserve of strength. The hair was obviously healthy, important to Macfadden, who sported a spongy black pompadour, evidence of his prophylactic cure for baldness. Even seated in a chair, legs casually crossed, the man emanated something special. There was the obvious bulge of his shoulders where they strained the suit jacket. His grip had been sure, confident—not the kind of crude, bone-crushing shake meant to impress. Macfadden was pleased to learn the man shared many of his values; he neither drank nor smoked. He spoke English well, not a trace of an accent, though he had apparently come from some tiny town in southern Italy. Most surprising was the man's description of how he had attained the body concealed beneath his clothes. If he was to be believed, the man had developed himself without use of barbells or dumbbells. There had been no machines.

This impressed Macfadden. He had invented an exercise machine himself, but did not believe in gadgetry. The body God had crafted provided all the tools needed—so long as the blood remained pure. He offered the man a glass of carrot juice. There arrived the moment of truth.

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"Alright," said Macfadden. "Let's have a look."

A few moments later the man stood before him, naked but for a pair of tight leopard underpants. Macfadden blinked in disbelief.

"You did this . . . without weights?"

"Yes, sir."

"But at a gym, yes?"

"No gym, sir. I developed myself at home."

The broad shoulders, muscled but not larded with flesh, tapered to a trim waist. The sculpted chest seemed almost unreal, as if expanded from within by a divine hand. The river of muscles from thigh to calf suggested thousands of squats, the kind Macfadden performed every morning.

"Could you . . ."

Obligingly, the man turned to profile and flexed his arm. Macfadden had never seen such biceps. The forearms . . . the tensed muscles that seemed to vibrate up and down his back . . . the casual strength that emanated from this man like . . . like a Greek god.

Macfadden told him to put his clothes back on. He only half-listened as the man described what had drawn him to bodybuilding . . . a childhood not unlike his own, growing up weak and spindly and bullied. His determination to change all that, the revelation he had at the Brooklyn Museum in front of a famous statue, his time at the sideshows at Coney Island, where he'd first heard of the Prussian strongman Eugen Sandow.

He went to his desk and took a checkbook out of a drawer. He wrote in the amount without hesitation, glancing up only once to make certain this marbled vision, this man he had only dreamed of, was not a mirage.

"Here's a thousand dollars," he said. "It's the prize. You win."

"Thank you, sir."

"And the name. I need to fill in the name. Again, it's . . ."

"Angelo Siciliano."

"I thought it was something different."

"That's the name I was born with. Now it's Charles Atlas."

Charles Atlas, he thought. It was a heavy burden to lift the weight of the world. But Bernarr Macfadden had a feeling, and he was never wrong.

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CHAPTER 1

The Shape of History

All credit to the Greeks; muscular Christianity; pioneers on the Continent—and at Harvard; the zealots of nutrition

The ideal of the perfect body, no surprise, goes back to ancient Greece, as does the start of what we now call fitness. There is evidence that the Egyptians were big on acrobatics and related training as far back as 2100 BCE, and not long after the Chinese introduced Cong Fu, a means of promoting health through breathing and fluid body movements. But it is to Greece that we owe our image of the sculpted male form—largely because those forms survive in marble. It is to Greece that we owe the word *gymnasium*—from the Greek *gymnos*, meaning "naked," which was how the Greeks exercised.

The Greek gymnasium was about more than exercise. It promoted the ties between athletics, education, and health, and the great public gymnasiums of Athens were the favored open-air lecture halls of philosophers. When not absorbing the wisdom of Plato and Aristotle, Greeks came to indulge their love of sport and athletic contests, which culminated in the Olympics. Footraces of all types and lengths were a major Olympics attraction, though never the marathon. That race owes its provenance to Pheidippides, the Greek messenger who ran from Athens to Sparta to beg for help fighting the Persians, who had landed at Marathon, then ran back to Athens to proclaim victory—whereupon he collapsed and died.

Herodotus, it needs noting, was a reliable battlefield chronicler and makes no mention of Pheidippides, stressing instead the intervention

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of the god Pan. Quite possibly the Athenians chose to minimize their reliance on Sparta, whose citizens were deemed narrow-minded and boorish, interested in fitness only as it served their military. At age seven, Spartan males were whisked away to tough training schools and a lifetime of soldiering.

It was not just sport that powered the Athenian passion for exercise. Hippocrates was a big believer in proper nutrition and physical activity. "Walking is man's best medicine," he said. Millennia ahead of his time, he declared: "If we could give every individual the right amount of nourishment and exercise, not too little and not too much, we would have the safest way to health." Plato had much the same advice. "Lack of activity destroys the good condition of every human being, while movement and methodical physical exercise save and preserve it."

With the collapse of Greek civilization, the ideal of the body beautiful and the attendant need for exercise went into serious hibernation. The Roman motto of "a healthy mind in a healthy body"—*mens sana in corpore sano*—was espoused mostly in the service of warlike goals and the need to truck heavy weapons into brutal battle. The long sweep of the Middle Ages, however interesting for its religiosity, architecture, and feudal hierarchies, paid scant heed to developing the body. The challenges of survival in the face of famine, plagues, and a minor ice age were distraction enough. It was not until the Renaissance that attention returned to the naked human form, in large part thanks to the study of anatomy by Leonardo da Vinci and Michelangelo. Even then, the casual grace of a *David*, say, or the tensile muscularity of a *Moses* or *Medici*, was largely an abstract ideal to be admired—never an actual prototype for the common man. For that, one needs to leapfrog another few centuries, over the age of exploration and the Enlightenment, over the costumed indulgences of the French Empire, and on into the nineteenth century, when fascination with Greece again blossomed.

So-called Greek Revivalism started as an interest in architecture but boomed in 1807 with the display of the Elgin Marbles in London. As more Greek sculptural treasures were plundered, public fascination with Greece turned to classical education and its focus on physical training and athletic competition, and it was not long before schools were offering "Greek gymnastics." Heading up the most influential of these schools in Germany, Johann GutsMuths penned what is arguably

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the first bible of fitness, a seven-hundred-page tome entitled *Gymnastics for Youth; or, A Practical Guide to Healthful and Amusing Exercise for the Use of Schools*. With chapter titles such as "We Are Weak Because It Does Not Occur to Us to Be Strong," GutsMuths rooted his ideal in "the Greeks [who] were eminent for beauty and symmetry of form. Not only were they all exercised but those more especially which most required exercise. . . . Thus they grew to their natural proportions; thus the muscles welled up to a beautiful and manly firmness." To achieve that perfection, he detailed a lot of information about running, leaping, wrestling, and lifting.

The gospel was spread by another German, Friedrich Ludwig Jahn, a gymnastics instructor and rabid nationalist. Mortified by Napoleon's defeat of Prussia in 1806, as were most Germans, he campaigned for renewed strength and freedom, going so far as to live in a cave and sport a bearskin on the streets of Berlin. He eventually started a militaristic school that linked exercise and sport to German history and launched what was arguably the world's first gymnastic club, the Turn (often called Turnverein). Most remarkably, he filled it with equipment he invented that still defines the sport: the pommel horse, parallel and horizontal bars, and vaulting blocks, as well as dumbbells and Indian clubs. His fanatic anti-Semitism and hatred of the French, unfortunately, did not sit well with the more liberal German Confederation of Metternich, and the Turnvereins were soon closed and the apparatus dismantled. Jahn himself was imprisoned and barred from teaching or gymnastic work after his release in 1825. A more liberal atmosphere in the 1840s revived the Turnvereins, and by 1860 there were more than 150 around the globe.

France had its own celebrity entrepreneur, a man named Hippolyte Triat who opened a Paris gymnasium that presaged, both as a workout space and as a business, the upscale health clubs of the twentieth century. His biography would have been fantastic enough: an orphan, he was kidnapped at age six by Gypsies and forced to wear a dress while performing in a wire-walking act as "Young Isela." Released finally, he joined a Spaniard who had formed a weightlifting troupe with his sons and then—more good fortune!—rescued a rich lady on a runaway horse and was rewarded with tuition to an elite Jesuit college. A convert now to theatrical spectacle as well as deep-pocket sponsors, he stunned Paris with a vast vaulted hall and filled it with every conceivable

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apparatus—and many new ones he invented. Well-heeled spectators were encouraged to watch from side galleries as instructors led bare-chested men in synchronized routines to the beat of drums. All of high society made a pilgrimage to Triat's gymnasium, as did much of the royal court of the Second Empire, including the emperor, to whom Triat personally tended. The less privileged could buy shares and redeem them for memberships or to pay for private lessons. Triat's enterprise had a few problems—its expenses, the complexity of routines, Triat's radical politics that led him to join the Paris Commune. In its bloody aftermath, his gym was confiscated and Triat briefly imprisoned at Versailles. He died a forgotten man in despair and poverty, the genius of his foresight shelved for a good 150 years until the advent of mirrored studios in American health clubs and the boom in personal training and group exercise.

America, mid-nineteenth century, had picked up the exercise habit, thanks largely to European models. In 1848, riding the wave of German immigrants, the first Turn opened in the United States in Cincinnati, and St. Louis quickly followed. Czech immigrants started their own versions of the Turnverein called Sokols. Two athletic clubs, the Olympic Club of San Francisco and the New York Athletic Club, opened in 1860 and 1868, respectively.

The social aspect was key. As the Industrial Revolution picked up steam, Americans increasingly crowded into cities. By 1850 more than 40 percent of the population had moved off the land and into urban environments. For people used to the simple rigor of field work and farms, cities could be intimidating places: impersonal, confusing, even dangerous. With the 1848 revolutions in Europe, waves of immigrants packed into slums. The gymnasium offered a home to new arrivals, a place to get to know their neighbors and at the same time learn ways to combat the health and moral hazards of the scary city. For many, gyms and athletic clubs took the place of a church, especially with the spread of what became known as "muscular Christianity."

The term derived from the works of the popular English novelist Thomas Hughes, whose young fictional hero, Tom Brown, was renowned for his active life and exploits. "[It is] a good thing to have strong and well exercised bodies," wrote Hughes in *Tom Brown at Oxford*. "The least of the muscular Christians has hold of the old chivalrous and Christian belief that a man's body is given to him to be trained and brought

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into subjection, and then used for the protection of the weak [and] the advancement of all righteous causes." (Curiously, it was another book in Hughes's series that inspired the first modern-day Olympic Games. In *Tom Brown at Rugby*, the smallish boy goes off to boarding school at Rugby, where he participates in athletics, helping him thrash the school bully. The climax of the novel is a game—cricket. A Frenchman and rabid Anglophile, Pierre Fredy, was so taken with the story that he made a pilgrimage to Rugby and then devoted his life—and fortune—to restoring the Games, declaring, "For me, sport is a religion with church, dogma, ritual." Ascending to the title of the Baron de Coubertin, he played a key role in persuading the Greeks to hold the first modern Olympics in 1896—and convinced them to make Athens only the first stop in a quadrennial global road show.)

The words *muscular Christianity* first appeared in an 1857 *Saturday Review* critique of the book *Two Years Ago* by another English novelist, Charles Kingsley. Though he initially balked at the term, Kingsley soon became its most fervent popularizer, writing, "Games conduce not merely to physical but to moral health." His insistence that morality was a function of muscularity as well as piety—the best Christian, said Kingsley, was a physically fit Christian—reflected a founding principle of the Young Men's Christian Association. The first YMCA chapter in the United States, modeled after a London club, was started by an American seaman and missionary, Captain Thomas Sullivan, to provide a "home away from home" for young sailors on leave. It opened in Boston in 1851 and promoted evangelical Christianity, stressing the linked importance of mind, body, and spirit—symbolized in the distinctive YMCA triangle. That emblem was designed by a YMCA training instructor, Luther Gulick, the most prominent devotee of muscular Christianity, who contended, "Bodily vigor is a moral agent."

Sport and physical training, went the belief, rechanneled the energy that steered young men to slack behavior and crime. There was added urgency when Frederick Jackson Turner formally announced the "death of the frontier" in 1893. A fast-civilizing West deprived people of a natural outlet for aggression, particularly the swelling urban populations. The growth of organized sports in college added steam to the so-called Athletic Revival, as did new sports. Both volleyball and basketball were invented in the 1890s, the latter at the YMCA training facility at

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Springfield College in Massachusetts. Calisthenics became popular, especially among women. The bicycle appeared in the late 1800s and soon became a craze. Though maligned by some for encouraging masturbation and sex, riding was hailed as a cure-all for everything from neurasthenia to consumption.

In the years following the Industrial Revolution, building a muscular body acquired a new appeal; as one social historian explained it, "Muscular posing's conflation with simply physical strength [was] a push against the prevailing experience of a machine age in which the body was in some ways less exalted as a productive resource." Any activity caught the public fancy. Among the more captivating trends was the habit of endurance walking, thanks largely to the exploits of Edward P. Weston. Tagged "Weston the Pedestrian," he turned his marathon hikes into crowd spectacles with the added interest of wagers and once walked from Portland, Maine, to Chicago to win a ten-thousand-dollar bet.

The body acquired a new reverence in the unlikely ivied halls at Harvard. There a slightly built fellow named George Windship entered medical school as the second smallest in his class of 1854. Presaging the legend of Charles Atlas, who had sand kicked in his face and swore revenge, Windship was humiliated when a classmate threw his books down a staircase. To right the wrong, and determined to avenge himself on the bully, he built himself into a rock-hard specimen by lifting weights and billed himself as the "Roxbury Hercules." He operated a large gymnasium in Boston where he also conducted his medical practice and sold apparatuses, including the "Windship Patent Graduating Dumb-Bell."

Windship's celebrity at Harvard would soon be eclipsed by an even more famous muscleman-turned-healer, Dudley Allen Sargent. A circus acrobat and weight lifter, Sargent earned an MD from Yale, teaching gymnastics when not dissecting cadavers, and went on to take over Harvard's famed Hemenway Gymnasium. There he conducted thousands of tests on the human body to perfect his training exercises, earning him the title "Grandfather of Fitness Testing." He included women in his training, one of the first to do so, and established his Sanatory Gymnasium in Cambridge, a private gym that catered to women at the Harvard Annex, which later became Radcliffe. He made the code of sportsmanship an integral part of college athletics and won the admiration of his elite students, among them Luther Gulick, as well as Theodore Roosevelt and

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Henry Cabot Lodge. His invention of exercise machines with weights and pulleys was the precursor of equipment that featured variable resistance.

Other equipment went through major changes in the nineteenth century. As far back as 1772, Benjamin Franklin had extolled the use of wooden dumbbells ("I have with the use of it quickened my pulse from sixty to one hundred beats a minute," he wrote in a letter), but Windship gets credit for inventing the first plate-loaded barbell, packing the globes with iron shot (some give the nod to Triat). Any number of other weighted devices—the kettlebell, the ring bell, even the Nautical Wheel (a converted ship's wheel)—found their way into gyms. So did Indian clubs, the feared weapon of Indian soldiers, adopted by the British when they colonized the country. A hugely popular 1866 book by the American S. D. Kehoe, *The Indian Club Exercises*, was used by the U.S. Army and early baseball teams. Kehoe claimed the clubs would steady the nerves of billiard players and promised, "All are adorned with Kehoe's Missives on Muscular Christianity." The clubs were great draws at churches, which organized "swing club" socials, largely for women.

Machines became popular. Many of the contraptions look surprisingly similar to equipment in today's home gyms or health clubs, albeit with more exotic names and a touch of Rube Goldberg; the "Spalding Semi-Circle Strength Developer" was a curved half-moon bench that looked more threatening than therapeutic. D. L. Dowd's "Health Exerciser—for Brain-Workers and Sedentary People," a confusion of weighted ropes and pulleys, was "indorsed by 20,000 physicians, lawyers, clergymen and editors." There were rowing machines, home equipment ("Dr. Barnett's Improved Parlor Gymnasium"—essentially a rubber cord with handles at each end, not unlike some products sold on twenty-first-century infomercials), even a treadmill, though it was intended for animals, allowing dogs to power butter churns.

The goal of all these devices was an improved body and state of mind. But for many, vigorous health was less a product of what one did with the body than the food one put into it—or how one put food into it. None here had a mightier impact than Horace Fletcher, the Great Masticator. Comic, perhaps, when viewed a hundred years hence, he was a pioneer in the emerging field of health science and an avatar of the positive thinking that came to grip America at the century's end. Endowed with a boisterous ego and boundless energy, he circled the

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globe four times; managed a New Orleans opera company; excelled as an athlete, weight lifter, painter, and marksman; and settled in a palace on the Grand Canal in Venice, determined to drop his body weight that was bloated by gourmandism. He accomplished the feat by chewing food hundreds of times until it was reduced to a tasteless paste.

The twin promise of weight loss and vigor—Fletcher biked two hundred miles on his fiftieth birthday—convinced tens of thousands to give chewing its due. The practice also had its loftier goals, wedding mankind's salvation to the salivary tract: "In his assertion that thorough mastication meant going back to nature," wrote historian Harvey Green, "he implicitly criticized a civilization he thought had somehow diverted men and women from the purity that was part of life in 'primal times.'" Among his more celebrated converts were both William and Henry James. "I Fletcherize, and that's my life," the novelist brother wrote to Fletcher. "I mean it makes my life possible, and it has enormously improved my work. You ought to have a handsome percentage on every volume I sell."

The verb *Fletcherize* was coined by cereal baron John Harvey Kellogg, another of the era's nutritional zealots. As a young physician and hygienist, Kellogg had taken over the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan, which was owned and operated by Seventh-Day Adventists. An avid vegetarian, he rooted the cause of disease in the intestinal tract and was devoted to his enema machine, delivering large infusions of water followed by yogurt. He advocated sexual abstinence and campaigned against masturbation, which he believed caused cancer and insanity. At the "San"—as it was known—his patients would range from presidents (William Howard Taft) to aviators (Amelia Earhart); he treated George Bernard Shaw, Henry Ford, and Thomas Edison. As many as fourteen hundred people were tended by an equal number of staff. Kellogg became best known, of course, for his invention of Corn Flakes, claiming that a rival breakfast pioneer, Charles W. Post, stole the formula from his safe in the Sanitarium office. Post, an inventor and engineer, had spent nine months at the "San," hoping to cure a variety of health problems. When nothing worked, he tried Christian Science, faith healing, and positive thinking—then went on to start his own health home, LaVita Inn, where he banned tea, coffee, and physicians. Three years later he created a cereal "coffee" made from bran, wheat, and molasses, which he called Postum. The following year, 1898, he came up with Grape Nuts.

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The cereal boom was merely one indication of an invigorated fit-minded America as the century drew to a close. The practice of athletics had mushroomed, especially team sports with the popularity of baseball and football. The strenuous outdoor life was given an added boost by Teddy Roosevelt. Modernity itself was on full display at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The Electricity Building showed the first motion pictures, while a giant Ferris wheel spun two thousand riders over the fairgrounds, though the triumph of technology was not the fair's only attraction. On the crowded midway and in a nearby nightclub, scaled-down human feats were just as likely to elicit gasps of astonishment. It was in the nightclub, the Trocadero, that America got its first glimpse of a man who would ignite a new worship of the muscled male body and all that it promised in the century to come.

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