



JOHN GRIMEK BLUSHES AFTER BEING KISSED GOOD-BYE BY THE LEGENDARY FRENCH PHYSICAL CULTURIST. PROFESSOR EDMOND DESBONNET IN 1949.

Many years have passed since I first heard of Professor Edmond Desbonnet, founder and publisher of *La Culture Physique* magazine. His untiring efforts as a writer were prolific and he wrote many books on training and lifting. His books were filled with interesting biographic sketches about famous strongmen 'round the world. His efforts pioneered and popularized physical culture in France and had a marked influence on the rest of the world.

Although I'd corresponded with him for years, I still never found the opportunity to visit him on the several occasions I was in Europe. In 1938, for instance, we stopped in Paris on our way home from Vienna and I felt certain this occasion would fulfill my wishes, but the usual complications arose and I was forced to abandon the idea.

Ten years later, in 1948, when I was invited to London for the Mr. Universe contest, I saw that Professor Desbonnet was listed as one of the judges, and I felt certain I would finally meet him. Upon arriving in London, however, I was disappointed to learn that he had been forced to cancel his trip. I still entertained hopes of seeing him on that trip to Europe, so shortly after my victory in London I tried to get plane reservations to Paris. But it was an Olympic year, and I learned that all flights had been booked.



“MY VISIT TO DESBONNET”

BY JOHN C. GRIMEK

From: *Strength & Health*,
February 1950

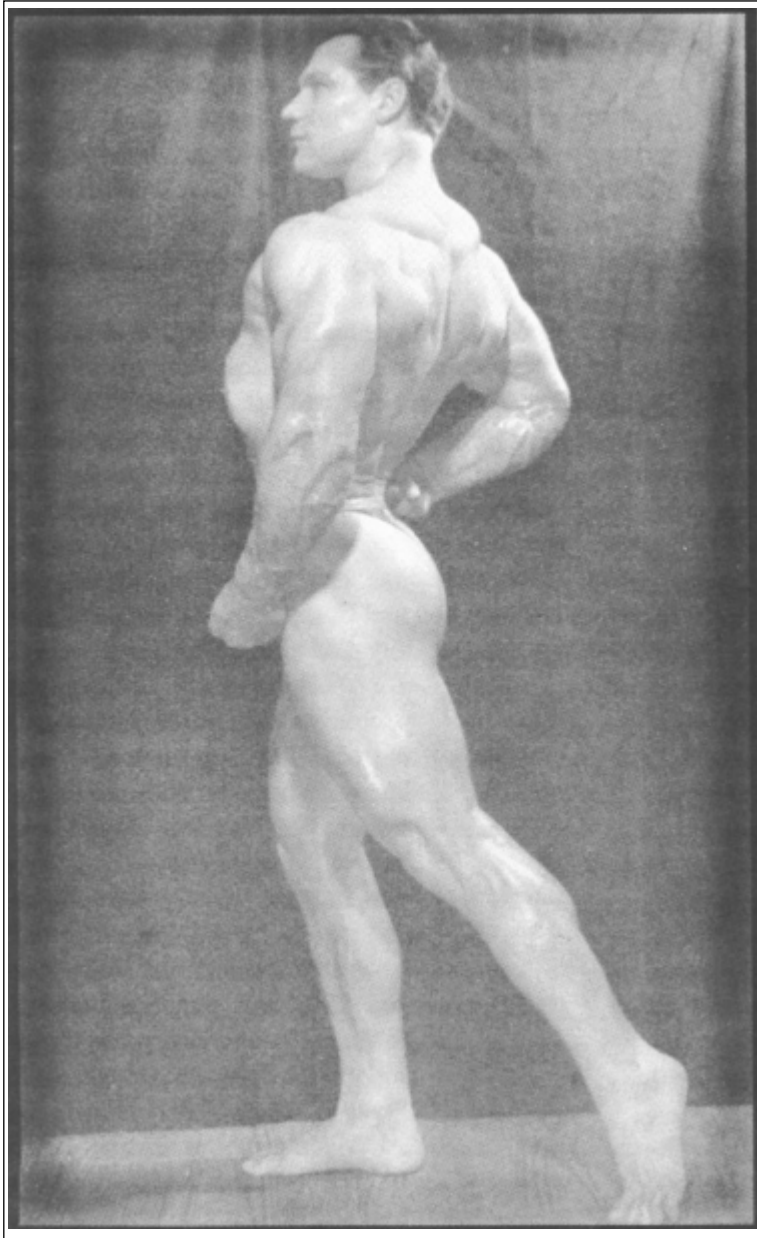
Once more my ambition to see him was stymied.

A year later, when I accepted the invitation to appear in London again, I made up my mind to see him. After completing all the shows arranged by the London organization, I arranged a flight to Paris for the coming weekend.

Once in Paris, I contacted a friend and, after a bit of adventure, we arrived at the Professor's villa, where we were warmly greeted. Desbonnet looked just as I pictured him, except even more alert and better than I expected. He admitted that he was in the middle eighties. He then introduced us to Madame Desbonnet, who, at 75, could easily pass for a woman in her fifties. It was amazing to see two people so unmarked by their years.

Professor Desbonnet doesn't speak English fluently, but my friend Paul Moor, who is quite a linguist, undertook to act as interpreter and did a very commendable job of translating. The professor showed me hundreds of wonderful and heretofore unpublished pictures, scores of medals, plaques, statues, and other trophies. I saw thousands of books and magazines, which occupy two huge rooms in a garage he remodeled just for that purpose. His home was filled with original paintings, etchings, and other prizes. Numerous cabinet files were crammed with

photos, original letters, and other manuscripts. The Professor told many interesting and original tales about strongmen he had known. He even produced coins, some made of early bronze metal, which the great Cyclops tore for him, and which cost the Professor several thousand francs because of a bet he wagered.



IN HIS PHOTO ALBUM, *MASCULINE PERFECTION*, GRIMEK ENTITLED THIS POSE "POWER PERSONIFIED"

We were so fascinated by all this that we lost all conception of time and to my amazement we spent hours there. I began apologizing for the long intrusion but he waved aside the issue by suggesting I remove my shirt and flex my arms for him. I knew I was obliged to do this after traveling such a long distance, so began disrobing.

Under such circumstances I'm always subjected to an eruption of "gooseflesh" and, as I slipped off my shirt, the gooseflesh was larger than my muscles. After I flexed an arm, the Professor's eyes opened wider and he attempted to finger-span the girth. Failing to do this he brought out a tape and passed it around the arm. It measured over 49 centimeters, larger than any arm he'd ever measured with the exception of the arm of Apollon, the ponderous French giant. Desbonnet also inspected my torso, back, loins and legs. I told him it had been weeks since I'd done any kind of training, but that I could stay in good condition with a minimum of physical activity. His compliments appeared to be sincere. When the "gooseflesh" came out larger than before, we laughed. We then drank a champagne toast; one to his enduring health, the other for my safe trip back to the States.

Before departing Desbonnet presented me with a heavy bronze medal of unique design as a token of my visit, and as we neared the door he said something which I didn't understand. Paul, our interpreter, quickly explained that I was to be the recipient of a traditional French farewell: a kiss on each cheek. Our interpreter now quickly turned into a cameraman and photographed me, blushing, after the experience. Before we finally departed, the professor's hardy handshake reassured me of his sincere friendship.

The sun was wending its way behind the hills and night shadows had begun to lengthen as we left the villa to retrace our path back to the Gay City. I felt my time had been well spent, and its indelible imprint is etched deeply in my memory . . . a mission finally completed.