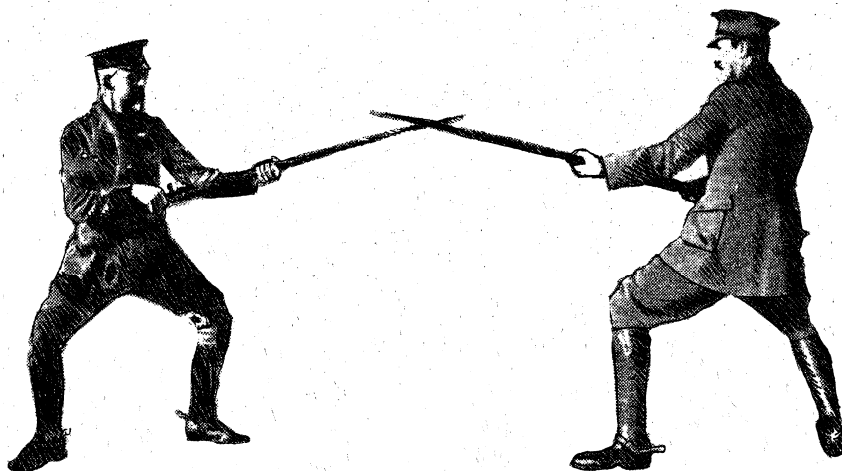


# Leopold the Great

by Graham Noble  
part 2

In 1914 Leopold McLaglen was in the international city of Shanghai. At that time contests of boxing, wrestling and jujitsu/judo were frequently held at such venues as the Town Hall. Occasionally there were mixed-styles matches too, such as wrestling versus jujitsu. The *North China Herald* of May 9th 1914, in an article about the previous night's bouts at the town ball, reported that wrestler Ben Farmer "Again issued a challenge to Captain McLaglen, stating that the conditions which he had previously made still held good." Farmer was an American serviceman who a month later would win a contest for "the lightweight wrestling championship of the Orient." He issued his challenge to Leopold McLaglen immediately after beating a Japanese, Watanabe, in a wrestling versus jujitsu contest, and McLaglen's apparent reluctance to accept the much smaller Farmer as an opponent is maybe some indication of his real level of skill.

For all his boasting about a long run of contest victories, Leopold McLaglen would try and avoid genuine matches whenever he could. When he



From '*Bayonet Fighting for War*'  
McLaglen is on the right.

was in St. Louis in America for a series of appearances at the Standard Theatre, he needed partners, and a couple of well known local sports contacted him: Lloyd Carter, a good middleweight wrestler, and Eddie Randall, boxing instructor at the St. Louis Athletic Club. Carter actually called on McLaglen with the intention of arranging a free-style-wrestling match with him, but Leopold simply ignored this request. He did, however talk Carter into taking part in a 15-minute jujitsu exhibition match.

When they got on stage McLaglen applied a few common wrestling holds, and Carter broke them easily, though McLaglen whispered that he was allowing him to do so, and throughout the match Carter was led to be-

lieve that the two men should co-operate in giving a good show. McLaglen instructed Carter to "give me an arm", so that he could show a locking technique, and then he let Carter break out of it. The match carried on like this close to the 15-minute time limit when once more McLaglen said, "Give me an arm," and Carter found himself locked in position and in danger of having his arm broken as McLaglen applied pressure. He was forced to submit, but he knew he'd been conned. The same thing happened to Eddie Randall, and The Seattle Times, in which this story appeared, described Leopold McLaglen, (who for some reason they also referred to as 'Lord Puttyknife') as a "Globetrotter and confidence

man, who "is still bunking the public." As a rather useless piece of additional information the newspaper noted that "McLachlan (*sic*) used to be chief engineer of a heavy roller propelled by hand at the Vancouver Baseball Park in the days of Jawn McCloskey". I have no idea what they were talking about.

McLaglen would make full use of his "reputation" as a World champion to try and put off possible opponents. When Eddie Randall went to see him in St. Louis, McLaglen put his finger on Randall's collarbone and said, "I could easily break that bone young man. Jiu jitsu teaches me how to do these things. I don't mind having you as a partner in an exhibition bout, but if you insist on it, I'll put you out into the audience with my feet, just to convince you that I can do it." Leopold McLaglen's wife was with him on this occasion and she chipped in too. "Oh Leopold!" she exclaimed, "Don't do that. It makes me dreadfully ill when I see you abuse anybody! You are so strong and powerful. You must be considerate, Leopold dear. Remember that man you threw in Kansas City is still in the hospital and you are paying his bills. The poor fellow's back is broken. I'll go away from you for good if you repeat the performance here. Mr. Randall will go with you if you promise not to hurt him, won't you, Mr. Randall?"

According to Leopold McLaglen, he had won the World Jiu-jitsu Championship

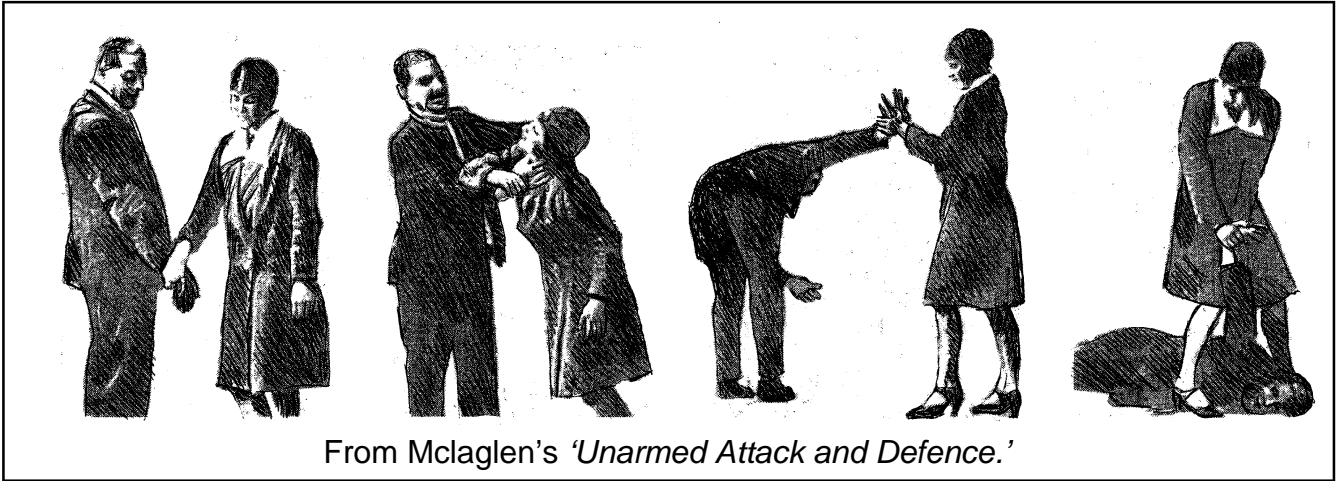
in 1907 by defeating Professor T.H. Kanada. In a run of forty victories in major contests he had defeated among others, "*the celebrated Japanese jiu jitsu champions*" M.Tani and T. Hirai at San Francisco, Professor Fukamuchi (Los Angeles), Watanalu, Rondo, Yamagata (Minneapolis), Saku, Shimeru (Toledo), Kande, Captain Tanaka and Lee Bly. He broke the arm of Professor Yamagata, "one of the best men in Japan, who was engaged by President Roosevelt to teach the American police jiu jitsu." and another opponent, the 350 pound de Raymond, had his shoulder blade broken. In Calcutta, in 1913, he defeated both Professor Yamauchi and Professor Toda, the contest being conducted "on two carpets worth £500 each." McLaglen told a reporter from The North China Herald that "both Johnson and Gotch' had declined his challenge. Since Jack Johnson was the world heavyweight boxing champion and Frank Gotch the world wrestling champion that sounded impressive. Here was a man prepared to meet anyone, or rather, a man who wanted to give that impression.

What do the record books say about this? Well, there are no record books, and it would be a difficult and tedious task to try and prove, or disprove, all of McLaglen's claims, even supposing someone could be bothered to do it. To become a World Champion you not only need

talent, and a long period of intensive training but the experience which can only be gained by years of competition, at progressively higher levels. There is no evidence that McLaglen ever had that track record. He was certainly big - the descriptions of his height range from 6 foot 3 to 6 foot 7, but he lacked the temperament and fighting spirit of a top competitor. By way of comparison, it was not until the early 1960s that Anton Geesink sent shock waves through the Judo world by beating the Japanese champions and breaking their strangle hold on the sport. Leopold McLaglen was no Geesink and to suggest that he defeated all the top Japanese experts over eighty years ago is ridiculous.

None of the names of the leading wrestlers or jujutsu/judo men were included in McLaglen's list of defeated opponents, and over time I came to the conclusion that his various victories never happened. In fact, I was being a little unfair because a so-called "Jiu jitsu World championship" match really did take place with a T.H. Kanada. I owe this information to Joseph Svinth, a terrific researcher, who also sent me the newspaper clippings on the event.

The contest took place in Vancouver in October 1907. The Daily Province of September 11th 1907 gave a preview of the bout, with the subtitle "Kanada and McLaglen confident of victory. Prin-



From McLaglen's *'Unarmed Attack and Defence.'*

cipals are not to receive a penny if contest has semblance of having been fixed." Professional wrestling had its share of prearranged matches in those days; in fact, it was probably the norm, but it seems curious that the newspaper chose to mention this possibility in its write up. There must have been rumours of a fix going the rounds.

McLaglen told reporters that he had been training for a month and was in great condition. But when he gave his first public work out a few days later the paper reported that, "He was puffing as if he would have been at home on a drying table in a sanatorium for the down and out. He was unfit to go on the mat with a 10 year old"

The "title match" took place on October 4th 1907 and The Daily Province reported that "for two hours the spectators saw nothing but Kanada crouching on the mat with McLaglen on top of him and there was little, if any, jiu jitsu to the performance. It was one of the biggest frosts ever perpetrated on the British Columbia sporting public.

"In the first place instead of grasping each other in the regulation jiu jitsu style and using footwork which is so important as part of the art, McLaglen and the Jap fell to the mat, it was amusing to see the way the white man worked. For nearly an hour he tried to get an arm lock on Kanada, who was all the time crouched on the mat like a bit of rubber. McLaglen sweated and strained and heaved and pushed and pulled but there was nothing doing. In the course of this the Jap's face was rubbed on the canvas and his features presented a gory appearance.

"The crowd growing tired of this began to coach McLaglen from the bleachers, and so the white man changed his tactics and began trying for a leg lock. He managed to grab one of Kanada's feet and doubled the leg back, but it did not worry the Jap in the least and it was apparent to everyone that McLaglen's knowledge of the game could be covered with a pin head, for he had innumerable chances which he did not see, or, when he did, took

about a century to try for them. After half an hour of futile legwork, McLaglen switched on to the Catch-as-Catch-can and got a half nelson on the Jap. But as this did not distress him he changed it to a double nelson but did not know enough to clench his hands in the way which would inflict most punishment on his opponent. Finding this no good, the big fellow went in for pile-driving and dragged Kanada round the ring, pounding his head on the canvas and so the weary exhibition went on."

At this point things livened up a bit when Kanada's manager climbed in the ring and "under jiu jitsu rules," demanded a three-minute rest period. McLaglen's corner disagreed with this, and as an argument broke out Referee Lynch brought the men to their feet and temporarily stopped the action. As the argument descended to a shambles he announced to the large crowd that he was declaring the match a no contest and was going to retire from the ring.

As Lynch finished saying these words, McLaglen,

“who was sitting in his corner with his seconds working on him, got to his feet, stalked over to the Jap, caught him by the neck, and kicked his chair from the platform and started in again.” Once again the two men were dragged apart as McLaglen’s manager began to shout that the referee was refusing to listen to him. Leopold McLaglen himself joined in the hullabaloo and declared that he was ready to fight on.

“I know I can rely on you.” he said to the crowd, “to see that I get fair play When I left my corner and kicked that chair off the platform I did so because the referee called time. I do not wish to leave this platform until either Kanada or myself is declared the winner.”

Terrific cheers greeted this speech and the band struck up Auld Lang Syne in recognition of McLaglen’s Scottish blood.

Things were going nowhere. “The next speaker at this impromptu debate,” was Chairman Armstrong of the Special Features Committee, who referred to the match agreement that stated that if either man was unprepared to go on, his opponent would be declared the winner. Since Kanada’s manager would not let him continue, Armstrong declared McLaglen to be the winner.

What authority had he to make that declaration and overrule the referee? Possibly very little; but the decision seemed to be generally accepted, and the event

drawn to a close. And that was how Leopold McLaglen won his world title.

The newspaper report accepted that McLaglen had had the better of “the rough and tumble - it refused to call the match a jujutsu contest but took the view that “He does not know anything of the game to justify him going on the mat.” And incidentally that does not say a much for his opponent, Kanada, who before the match was described as “knowing the game from A to Z.” It was a shabby and farcical victory, but it allowed Leopold McLaglen to make the claims of World Championship status that were so important to him. In his 1942 book *Unarmed Attack and Defence for Commandos, Home Guards and Civilians*, those claims were still being made, and in fact McLaglen was described as still undefeated, thirty five years after winning his world title match.

No doubt Major (as he then was styled) McLaglen hoped to make a little money from *Unarmed Attack and Defence*, but I also think that he wanted to do his bit for the British Empire, which was then fighting for its life. It was the last of his books, of which there were eight in all. *Bayonet Fighting for War* and *The Infantry Pocket Book* came first in 1916, and then there were the Jiu-jitsu books: *Jiu-jitsu - A Manual of the Science* (1918); *Jiu-jitsu for Girls* (1922); *Police Jiu-jitsu* (1922); *Katsu: The Leopold McLaglen System of*

*Resuscitation* (Published in Sydney in 1939); and *Unarmed Attack and Defence*.

Looking through these books must give a good idea of what McLaglen taught, and it is apparent that his technique was rather different from that shown in the works of say Uyenishi, Tani, and Miyake. Those books showed more or less a turn-of-the-century Judo. Some of the Japanese who came to the West had actually trained at the Kodokan, the Mecca of Japanese Judo, but even where they had not, they had been heavily involved in randori and competition. And by that time a general body of judo-like technique had arisen. Tani and Miyake’s book for example (*The Game of Ju-jitsu*, 1906) treated the art as a competitive sport (“A game”) where victory was gained by throws, locks and hold-downs, which are easily recognizable by modern judoka.

Leopold McLaglen’s book includes a few judo type techniques such as the stomach throw and the “Japanese Strangle-hold”, but his system wasn’t really judo based. Rather it concentrated on locks and throws on the wrist and arm, techniques somewhat analogous to Aikido, although it wasn’t Aikido, and it lacked the flow of that art. Interestingly, McLaglen’s 1942 book did include a few nice action shots of “opponents” flying through the air which anticipated similar photographs in aikido books two or three

decades later.

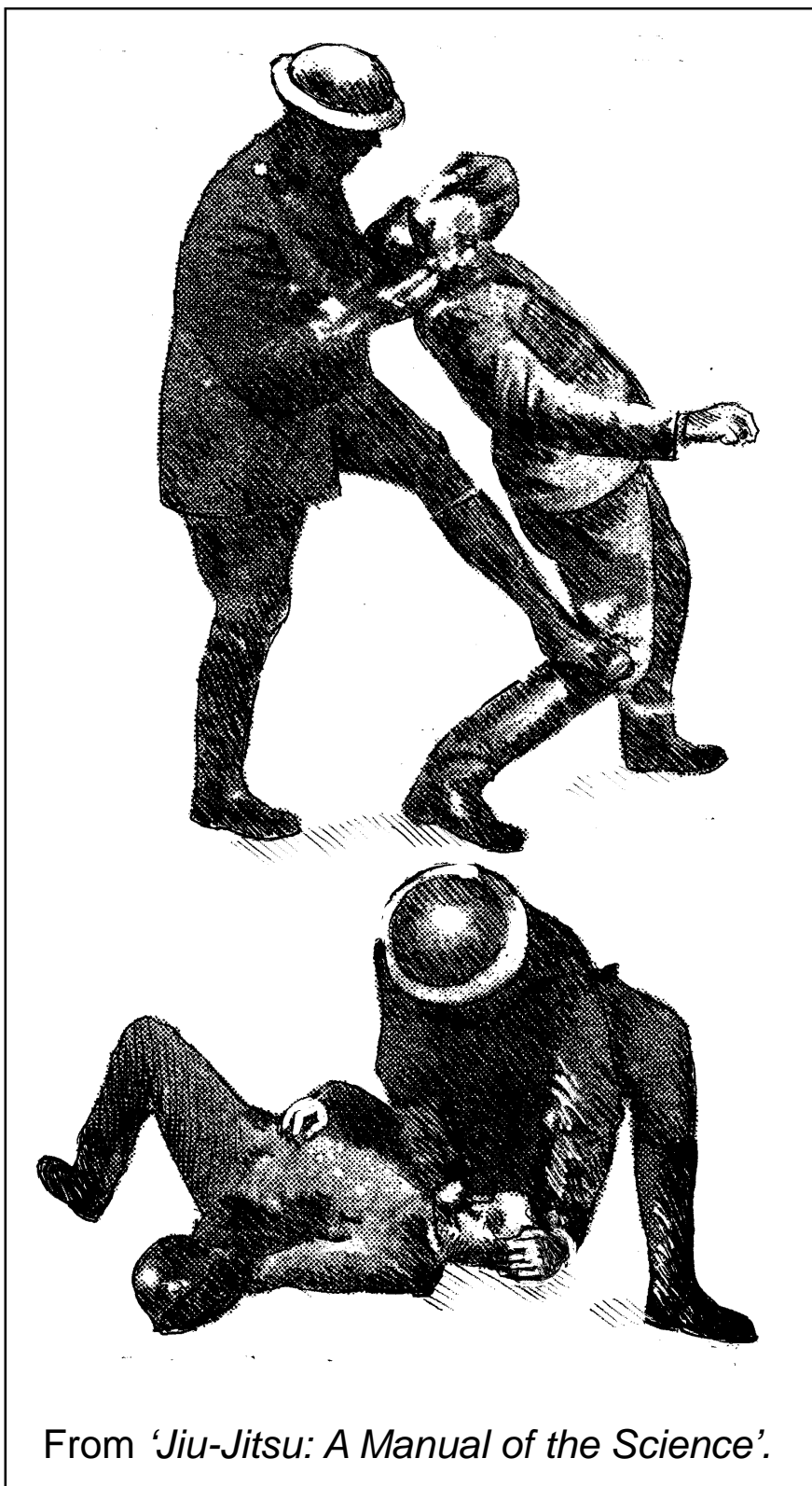
Whether such techniques work very well against aggressive street attackers is questionable, but they have often been regarded as particularly suitable for self-defence, and this is where Leopold McLaglen directed his teaching efforts. His system was described as "adapted to modern necessities, "and he taught techniques not only for civilian use, but also for the police and the military. In each case he did adapt his methods to the needs of his students. One interesting point is that he was a strong advocate of jujitsu for women.

Since the techniques did not demand great physical strength, he thought they were particularly suitable for women, who would then be "on equality with man."

McLaglen's first book, *Jiu-jitsu - A Manual of the Science*, was published during the Great War and besides the normal self-defence methods and techniques for jiu jitsu contests in a 24 foot ring, it contained quite a large section on close quarters combat for the services.

Jujitsu techniques were used here, not so much to gain a submission, as to break a limb, and the knee to the groin was also used frequently. In the defences shown against the bayonet, the weapon was often taken from the attacker and then used back against him.

The aggression was toned down a few notches for police instruction where the



From '*Jiu-Jitsu: A Manual of the Science*'.

emphasis was on restraining and come-along holds, along with a few defences against knife and club attacks. McLaglen included police techniques in almost all his

books and in 1922 Police Review Publishing Company put out his *Police Jiu-jitsu*, a pocket book of 83 pages, and really quite a charming little work.

Police techniques were a Leopold McLaglen speciality and a large part of his career was spent travelling around the British Empire teaching its police forces. "It's safe to say" he wrote in *Police Jiu-jitsu*, "that I hold the world's record in training police forces through out the Empire, but on the continent, also." His books contained testimonials from Singapore, Rangoon, Colombo, Durban, Penang, Shanghai, Hong Kong, Nairobi, Beverley Hills, Nottingham and Southend-on-sea. McLaglen was also proud of the races; he taught, which included "Sikhs, Ghurkas, Burmese, Japanese, and also native police of Africa"

In Shanghai, in 1914, he gave a lecture to officers of the Volunteer Corps in which he outlined the history of Jiu-jitsu and referred to the 'jealously guarded death blows, a blow on the spine, one on the head and two on the neck.' He explained that Europeans were "Usually only taught the rudiments of these blows, and of the sleep producing holds." He gave a demonstration of technique, showing how to defend against a knife attack and how to bring down and restrain an attacker "The sleep-producing hold was also demonstrated, the 'subject' being sent into an apparently sound, natural sleep within 10 seconds, and restored again to complete consciousness in an equally short space of time." McLaglen told the audience that his

system could be learned in a course of eight one-hour lessons.

In the early 1920s P.C. Leonard Crewe was on duty at Ealing police station when a tall, well-built man walked in and introduced himself as Captain McLaglen, the Jiu-jitsu Champion of the World. He explained to Crewe that Jiu-jitsu was most useful for police work and he was prepared to give a course of lessons at a cost of ten shillings per head. The course would consist of six lessons of one hour each, and he would need a minimum of 40 pupils.

P.C. Crewe was rather indifferent to this proposal, and McLaglen left, but he must have tried other avenues because a few days later Crewe found he was required to attend the jiu-jitsu classes that were due to start on the first of the month. He went along with little real enthusiasm, and yet when took his jacket off and began practising the moves, "armlocks, and locks useful to police against violent prisoners," he became fascinated. He wanted to learn more and after the course ended, he and a fellow officer began to practice with a student of McLaglen, "to retain the little we had learned in the six lessons.'

McLaglen called in himself one day to watch their practice. "He praised our prowess and quickness," wrote Crewe, "and awarded us three pretty ribbons of different shades, which, he in-

formed us, were the first, second and third degrees of Jiu-jitsu. I can assure you that I was a very proud man and, in my own opinion a forthcoming champion. (Since I have learned differently)."

Leonard Crewe continued to practice, and he and some of his fellow police officers began to work out different ways of applying the jiu-jitsu techniques, using the experience of officers arresting difficult prisoners. He found this valuable training, and then when he was looking for a partner to practice with, he met a Mr. Davey, who happened to be a practitioner of Judo. Shortly thereafter Crewe began to practice mainstream Judo, and he recalled his first practice session with Yukio Tani at the Budokwai "It was the best lesson I have had" he wrote, "My three ribbons dropped into insignificance, as did my opinion of my own prowess, which, up to that point, had been very high."

And so Leopold McLaglen's teaching fell away as it usually did. Most of his instruction was carried out on those short courses, and without a permanent school or organisation, there was little to sustain his system. All that remains now are his books, which themselves are becoming increasingly rare.

One day in 1948, Tromp van Diggelen was sitting in his Cape Town office when he heard a voice exclaiming, "Where's my old wrestling partner?" It was Leopold McLaglen, who he had not

seen for thirty-five years, since the Robbie Roberts incident as a matter of fact.

To van Diggellen, McLaglen seemed a shadow of his old self, an invalid. He had a companion, his doctor apparently who accompanied him everywhere. Part of McLaglen's tongue was gone and he told van Diggellen that during the war he had been captured and tortured by the Japanese - or maybe that was just another one of his tall stories. The two men talked amicably about the old days and then went fishing on Tromp's yacht a few times before McLaglen travelled on to Nairobi, where he died not long afterwards.

Tromp van Diggelen was well aware of McLaglen's real abilities, and he hadn't forgotten that fiasco at the Standard Theatre, but time lent detachment, and those last few days spent fishing together had been pleasant. When he came to write his autobiography, van Diggelen looked back on McLaglen with something like affection as "a good trouper". In reading about Leopold McLaglen I too became, hardly a fan, but someone who was intrigued by the ups and downs of his strange career. When he presented himself, as a philosopher of human life, as in 'The Creed of Captain Leopold McLaglen' the effect was pure schmaltz: "Do not keep the alabaster boxes of your love and tenderness sealed up until your friends are dead, Fill their lives with sweetness. Speak

approving, cheering words while their ears can hear them... If my friends have alabaster boxes laid away full of fragrant perfumes of sympathy and affection, which they intend to break over my dead body, I would rather they bring them out in my weary and troubled hours and open them that I may be refreshed and cheered by them while I need them... etc."

Leopold McLaglen may have acquired a reasonable knowledge of jujitsu, but he lacked the temperament and natural sense of combat necessary for true expertise. He had an interest in the art but for him it was often a means of demonstrating the phenomenon that was "Leopold the Mighty". No, he was not a genuine World Champion nor even a genuine expert, but no one could ever accuse him of being dull.

*I couldn't have written this article without old newspaper clippings and other material provided by Joseph Svinth and the late Dicky Bowen, and without access to John Sparkes' book collection.*

*I thank them all*

Graham Noble is an internationally renowned martial arts researcher and writer

## TAKE HEALTH ADVICE WITH A PINCH OF SALT

Everything seems to be bad for you these days, but there is also plenty of scientific evidence to the contrary.

Eggs seldom contain salmonella, even if some chickens do.

Cholesterol in the diet does not cause fatty deposits in your arteries.

There is probably little difference between the effect of saturated and unsaturated fats.

In those with normal kidney function, salt does not cause high blood pressure.

Those with a body-mass index of between 25 and 32 live as long or longer than those with a lower BMI.

And avoiding the sun causes vitamin D deficiency; a sun-tan is nature's natural sun block, although sunburn is to be avoided.

*EXTRACTED from "Global Warming & Other Bollocks: The Truth About All Those Science Scare Stories" by Professor Stanley Feldman and Professor Vincent Marks, published by Metro. 0845 155 0720*