

MISCELLANEOUS.

Written for this Paper

THE JAPANESE GIANTS.

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SEE that the most famous wrestlers of Japan have offered their services to the emperor in the war with China. They have sent a delegation to him at Hiroshima, asking that they be sent to Korea and be given a place in the Japanese army. These men have done a great deal in the crude wars of the past, but it is doubtful whether they will be of much use in connection with Gatling guns and Winchester rifles. They form a curious class of the Japanese people, and they are like no other athletes on the face of the globe. They have entirely different methods of training from our prize fighters, and John Sullivan or Corbett would laugh at their corpulent frames. They would think them puffy and flabby, and would expect to see them go all to pieces at a blow. Still, I venture the Japanese giants could stand several rounds with either Sullivan or Corbett, and they could probably throw either of these muscular Americans in a wrestling bout. They seem to be of a race of their own. They are taller and heavier than the ordinary Japanese, and many of them are over six feet in height. The Japanese man is no taller than the average American girl. He has a long body and short legs. He is as straight as a stick, but he is stocky rather than tall. These wrestlers weigh from two to three hundred pounds, and they are mountains of fat and beef. They eat quantities of meat, while the other people of Japan live largely upon vegetables, rice and fish. They drink soup and beer by the gallon, and Professor Burton of the Imperial University, who has taken the best photographs of them, told me how two wrestlers whom he was entertaining one day in order to get their pictures each drank two dozen bottles of beer and great quantities of soda water, ginger ale and claret. These wrestlers have features much the same as the ordinary Japanese, though their heads are much larger, and more like cannon balls than anything else. They wrestle almost stark naked, and the only hair I could see on their bodies was under their armpits, and that which was put up in the old Japanese style on the tops of their heads. They shave their heads from the forehead to the crown, leaving that over the ears and at the back to grow long, and tying it up on the top of the head in a queue like a door-knocker. They are by no means fierce looking, and when I visited the wrestling matches I was taken among them and chatted with some of them through my interpreter. I felt

their muscles, and they were as hard as iron, and what I had supposed to be great lumps of fat I found to be bundles of muscle.

HOW A WRESTLING MATCH MADE AN EMPEROR.

These wrestlers date back almost to the beginning of Japanese history. The Daimios kept a corps of them about their persons, and when the princes traveled over the country they always had some of these men with them. They gave exhibitions at funeral and wedding processions, and they are mentioned in Japanese history as far back as twenty-four years before Christ. About five hundred years before Columbus and his band of Spanish pirates discovered America the throne of Japan was the prize of a wrestling match. The emperor had two sons. Whether they were twins or not I don't know, but they both aspired to the throne. Their father told them to each pick out a champion wrestler, and the one who backed the victor should be emperor. The boys agreed to this, and the successful backer succeeded his father. From that time to this wrestling has gone on all over Japan, and Japanese history is filled with the exploits of wrestlers. There are regular matches held every year in the big cities, and those in Tokio and Osaka last for weeks, and the champions of the eastern and western parts of the empire are pitted against each other. Not long ago wrestling became a great fad, and one of the cabinet ministers, I am told, entered the ring, while the noblest men of the empire were ready to meet all comers. In 1888 Count Kuroda, the prime minister, gave wrestling a great boom, and during the past year some of the most famous matches ever held in Japan have taken place.

A GREAT WRESTLING MATCH.

I saw famous matches in both Tokio and Osaka, and I spent one day at a wrestling match in Japanese capital, in which one hundred and twenty of the greatest wrestlers of Japan struggled together. The wrestling began at 10 in the morning and lasted until 5 in the afternoon, and there was not a minute during this time that wrestlers were not in the ring. But let me give you some idea of one of these Japanese prize fights. Imagine the biggest circus tent you have ever seen to be spread out upon a net-work of bamboo poles so that it covers about ten thousand people. These sit on the ground and in boxes or on platforms which are built up perhaps ten feet above the ground, and in the center of the crowd there is a little pavillion about twenty feet square, supported by four posts as large around as telegraph poles.

This pavillion is trimmed with red, and its posts are wrapped with red cloth, while about its top there is a curtain of blue. It has a raised foundation perhaps two feet high and a ring of rice bags run around its floor, inclosing a circle twelve feet in diameter, which is floored with black earth. This is the famed wrestling ring in Japan, and in such rings all these matches are fought. The giants struggle inside the rice bags, and if one can throw the other over

these or can fling him to the earth he is proclaimed the victor. At each corner of this pavillion, against one of the red posts, sits a sober, dark-faced, heavy-browed Japanese, dressed in a black kimono. He is raised upon cushions, and sits cross-legged, and he forms one of the four judges in case there is a dispute as to the decision of the umpire. In the center of the ring stands the umpire, wearing the old brocade costume of the days of the Daimios. He has a black lacquer fan in his hand, and he looks like a chump. He screeches out his voice as though he had the colic and was screaming with pain, but his shrill cries penetrate to every part of the circus, and he is a man of great importance and long training. The spectators squat on the ground back of the ring, and on these platforms. Each has a little tobacco box before him, with some coals of fire in it. All sit cross-legged, and nearly all smoke little metal pipes with bowls as big as a thimble.

ONE HUNDRED AND TWENTY NAKED GIANTS..

But let us take a look at the wrestlers. There are scores of them squatting about the ring, just outside of the rice bags. They are entirely naked, with the exception of a band of blue silk, four inches wide, which runs around their waists and between their legs and is tied in a knot at the back. This has a fringe about four inches long, which falls to their thighs, but further than this they have no more clothes than had Adam when he was gardening before he had eaten the apple. Here come two into the ring. They are the most famous wrestlers of the east and west, and the people receive them with clapping. What giants they are, and how queerly they act! At the corners there are buckets of water. They walk up to these and gulp down great swallows. They fill their mouths and squirt the fluid into the air so that it falls back in a spray over their cream-colored bodies. They take bits of paper and wipe themselves off, and then they look about on the audience and show off their muscles, while a yell goes up from five thousand throats. They pound their naked chests with their fists. They slap their brawny thighs. They lift their legs up as high as their shoulders, and they stamp their feet down on the well-packed earth so that the pavillion trembles as though a cyclone was passing through it. Look at that man's arm. It is as big around as Grover Cleveland's thigh, and the belt of the champion would loosely fit the waist of Wilson Shannon Bissell. He looks more like a man with the dropsy than a great athlete, and his body seems to be padded with great bunches of fat. He has a front like a saloon keeper and his face shines like a butcher's. He is the champion of the east, and the man from the west is almost as large. Now the two giants walk to opposite sides of the ring. They bow to the umpire and judges, and then squat down on their heels and look at each other. They come to the center of the ring. They bend over and rest their fists on the floor. They poke their great heads to the front, and their big almond eyes almost burst from their buttonhole sockets. How they glare at each other.

They are watching for the signal to close. Now they rest for a moment, picking up the dirt from the ring and rubbing it under their armpits and over their bodies. Then they kneel and