

## THE GIANTS OF JAPAN.

BY FRANK G. CARPENTER.

I 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

pavilion about twenty feet square, supported by four posts as large around as telegraph poles.

This pavilion 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 runs around it, enclosing a circle of twelve feet in diameter, which is floored with black earth. This is

### THE FAMED WRESTLING RING OF 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 pavilion, 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 centre of the ring stands the umpire, wearing the old

caption of a band of blue silk four inches wide, which runs round 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 the 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 coloured 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 5 000 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 pavilion trembles as though a cyclone were passing it. Now the two giants walk to opposite sides of the ring. They bow to the umpire and judge, and then squat down on their heels and look at each other. They come to the centre 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 glare again. The umpire watches them closely. He waits until they breathe together, and then gives the signal. As he does so, they crouch like tigers and spring into each other's arms. Each tries to grab the belt of the other. They wrap their arms round one another, and you almost hear their ribs crack. The bunches of fat have become mountains of muscle, and both arms and legs look like iron. Their biceps stand out. Their calves quiver. Their panches shrink in. Now the giant of the west has reached over the straining back of him of the east, and has grasped the band of blue silk which runs round his waist. He lifts that 200 pounds as though it were nothing, and he throws him with a jerk over the rice bags. How the people yell! Some of them tear off their clothes and throw them into the ring, which they will redeem with presents of money at the end of the day. They call out the name of the victor, and some of them hug each other in their delight at the success of their man.

### THERE IS NO SIGN OF BOOK-MAKERS,

though I am not sure but that some betting goes on. The defeated gathers himself up and walks away with bowed head. The victor goes on one side of the ring and squats down on his heels while the umpire holds up his hands and proclaims him successful. The prize is awarded and the apron of silk embroidered with gold is shown to the people. The victor receives it, and with his seconds behind him he marches away. Then another couple enter the ring, and the same sort of struggle goes on. Some matches last no more than a minute, and some are so evenly pitted that they strain for a quarter of an hour before one is victorious. The snakes of the Laocoon never gripped their victims more tightly, and ribs are often broken, and men have been killed in these terrible struggles. Some wrestlers throw their opponents from one side of the ring to the other. Now and then one strikes a post and his skull is cracked open. There is no striking or hitting, and the rules are as rigid as those of our prize-fighters. There are forty-eight different falls, and the umpires stop the matches at a single mismovement, and they now and then call a halt in order that their belts might be more tightly tied.



Photo. by Mr. S. R. Card.

### THE GIANT TROUT

(Caught in the Waingongoro River, Taranaki, New Zealand).—See Our Illustrations.

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 tall. These wrestlers weigh from 200 to 300 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 armpit 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 curling it up on the top of the head in a queue like a doorknocker. 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 bunches of muscle.

I saw famous matches in both Tokio and Osaka, and I spent one day at a wrestling match in the Japanese capital, in which 120 of the greatest wrestlers of Japan struggled together. The wrestling began at ten in the morning and lasted until five 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 network of bamboo poles so that it covers about 10,000 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 centre of the crowd there is a little

brocade costume of the days of the Daimios. He has a black lacquer fan in his hand and he looks like a clump. 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.

But

### LET US 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 ex-



R. H. Waldron, photo. Auckland.

A GROUP OF CABBAGE TREES, KINGSLAND AUCKLAND, N.Z.