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the guide stated that this "blidge" was one of the finest in the Northern Japanese Alps, but he gave no reason for his claim and certainly none was apparent. In front of us was the Imperial Hotel, built to European plan, looking as solid as the rock around, and, with great stone chimneys—a rare sight in Japan. This was the hotel where most of the overseas tourists stayed before the war in preference to the near-by Japanese inns, but now all the windows and doors were barred and shuttered, giving in the twilight of that strange setting a somewhat sinister air to the deserted building.

Getting into Hot Water

We walked through the trees and the mist rising from the cold ground beneath them to the Japanese inn, the Shimizuya, where we were to stay the night. It was freezingly cold; the evening air seemed to have flowed from the mountains to lie round us like a lake and we regretted that instead of sitting round fires in the great stone hearths of the Imperial Hotel we would have to be content with the meagre comfort of small charcoal warmers.

At the door of the Shimizuya we changed our shoes for the slippers provided for us and went to the room where we were to stay the night. Typically, it was as bare of furniture as it was, to us, of comfort; tatami (straw) mats covered the floor on which we would have both to sit and to sleep and there was nothing else but the wall-high scroll and the incense burner in front of it in the small recess at one end of the room. Shivering, I thought enviously of the comfort of hay in a barn.

Before the suki-yaki meal we were to have we went for a bath. The water came directly from a mineral spring and now our concern was not cold but heat. Again typically, the water in the tiled bath (which was the size of a room) was near boiling and to a European not accustomed to a temperature of more than 120 degrees Fahrenheit almost unbearable. Bath routine in Japan is much more complicated than in New Zealand. The bather first stands on the side of the bath and pours several wooden basins of water over himself. He then lowers himself gently into the water (which seems more suitable for boiling eggs than for bathing) and soaks for several minutes. Next he gets out and lathers himself thoroughly with soap which he carefully rinses off, using the wooden basin and more water. Preliminaries now ended he has his bath proper, again lowering himself into the water which reaches almost to his chin and staying there for perhaps 30 minutes.

Communal Bath-Houses

Few Japanese houses have baths installed, and the custom is to use the

communal bath-houses which are found in even the smallest villages. Here the bathers not only have their daily broil, which includes back scrubbing and perhaps some massage, but also keep abreast of the local gossip and exchange the latest scandal—for the bath-house is a social as well as a cleansing centre. They use the same small towel both to wash and to dry themselves, the theory being that the water is so hot that after half-an-hour or so the body temperature is high enough to evaporate the moisture left on the skin. But to a conservative New Zealander such lengths to avoid using a towel as well as a face-cloth seem extraordinary.

We organised a buckets-of-cold-water brigade to lower the temperature by at least 25 degrees; we refused a back scrubbing and made no mention of massage; we exchanged no gossip and indulged in no scandal; and we dried ourselves thoroughly with our bath-towels. It still seemed a pretty good bath.



"Waterfalls poured down hundreds of feet"

As soon as we were dry we changed into winter kimono that reached to the ground; they were padded to the thickness of an eiderdown and lined with loose silk that could be taken out and washed. For sitting round on those tatami mats they were ideal and they were warm enough even for that mountain temperature.

Strange Foods

We were to have a suki-yaki meal. Usually the overseas visitor is horrified at the sight of most Japanese food and nauseated with its taste. Soup made of seaweed and with the flavour you would imagine seaweed soup to have, raw fish, octopus which is eaten both raw and cooked and is as unpleasant either way, broiled eels and snakes which are no more attractive on a plate than they are in their native state, stewed frogs with eyes as large as saucers, that everlasting rice which to us is tasteless and gluey, and green tea which tastes more like a laxative than

a beverage, are only a few of the dishes which are delicacies with the Japanese and horrors to us. But suki-yaki is something even the most fastidious New Zealander may enjoy.

When we returned from the bath-house a table standing only a few inches from the floor had been moved into our room. At either end was a charcoal brazier and on the table itself were a large dish with our pork cut into thin slices, another with sliced onion and other vegetables, and china rice bowls set out with wrapped chopsticks in front of them. Two Japanese girls in gay kimono were kneeling ready to prepare the meal. Using chopsticks they put meat and vegetables into a dish, poured soya bean oil over the mixture, and freely covered it with sugar. Soon it was bubbling on the brazier and in a few minutes it was ready to serve.

We ate the suki-yaki (which although it is cooked for so short a time is remarkably tender) with chopsticks which with only a little practice are easy to use. After the meat and vegetables were finished we drank the remaining juice but without the customary sucking noises. As soon as one bowl was empty it was filled again from the main dish which was kept cooking and after about the third helping we had to protest emphatically against further replenishment. Next came the boiled rice which was made a little more palatable by the addition of suki-yaki juice and raw beaten egg. Even so one bowl was more than enough.

Throughout the meal we had sipped sake from the tiny china cups at the side of our bowls. Sake is not the fierce spirit so many of us imagined it to be when we first arrived in Japan, but a clear wine made from rice. It is served hot and is almost tasteless. To most New Zealanders the nicest thing about sake are the delicate china bottles holding it and the cups used to drink it.

After the meal we played ping-pong downstairs with some Japanese students

who were on a tramping tour. Instead of playing to the usual 21 points for each game, however, it was necessary to make ten points the limit, for we did not know the Japanese, nor they the English for numerals above that figure. Even then frequent finger counting was necessary. These students, aged about 18 or 19, were on vacation and were spending about six weeks in the alps. They were staying the nights in the wayside inns and occasionally breaking their journey for a day or two to climb one or other of the more noted mountains or volcanoes.

Mountaineering is Popular

In Japan mountaineering and tramping through the Japanese Alps is probably the most popular national sport and is to that country what Rugby is to New Zealand. For this there are several reasons. Ground for the tens of thousands of playing fields and parks that would be needed for team games cannot be spared in a country that already is so overcrowded. Moreover, peaks to climb and routes for tramping are so close to the cities and main centres that a train journey of an hour or two is usually sufficient to take the excursionist into mountain country. The Japanese, too, are much more sharply aware of beauty than we are, and this they find at first hand in the flowers and shrubs, the insects and birds, and the magnificent scenery of the hills and mountains.

That night we slept, still in our padded kimono, on the floor, our beds each made up of a thick Japanese mattress and three warm eiderdowns. Instead of the customary wooden pillows we used cushions. Outside a moon as round and as yellow as a cheese showed up the mountain scenery and threw into relief the smoke and steam rising from the misshapen Yake-dake and the soaring, forceful beauty of Yari-ga-take. Through the night came the hoarse croaking of frogs.

Another Lili Kraus Tour in March

THE New Zealand Broadcasting Service announces that arrangements have been made for Lili Kraus to make a second broadcasting concert tour of the Dominion, beginning early in March.

In her first concert tour last year, Lili Kraus won a high place in the regard of radio listeners and concert audiences alike by her artistry and charming personality. Although many listeners were then already acquainted with her work on gramophone records, enthusiasm mounted as her tour progressed and reports of her brilliant performances reached music lovers in other centres. When the time came for the final recital of her tour in Wellington, every seat in the Town Hall had been reserved by three o'clock in the afternoon of the day booking opened, after the booking office staff had worked at high pressure to deal with the long queues waiting for tickets. This was quoted by the booking office staff as a record. No other occasion could be recalled when a hall had been completely booked for a single artist's performance in so short a time.

In the forthcoming tour, concert-goers will have wider opportunities to hear Lili Kraus, as present plans pro-



LILI KRAUS

vide for several appearances in each of the main centres.

Lili Kraus will open her tour in Dunedin early in March, and will visit the other centres in turn.