



Left: An Ainu chief prepares his boat for fishing, which has a religious as well as an economic significance for these people

## Japan's Other Island (2)

# Dairy Farms—and Hairy Ainus

WE travelled to Ebitsu, about 12 miles from Sapporo, in a prefectural Government motor-car, the driver of which we soon had good cause to suspect was woefully short on reflexes; he totally disregarded bicycles, cars, and carts; giant pot-holes meant nothing, and bridges that shook when they took our weight were crossed with alarming speed. I sat there resenting the present and not caring to think too deeply of the immediate future, but we arrived safely and with nothing worse than shocked nerves. May I never again have anything to do with Japanese roads, drivers, traffic, and pedestrians.

Our visit was to see one of the largest dairy farms in Hokkaido. A property of 50 cho (about 125 acres) to a New Zealander may sound anything but large but it is an unusual area for Japan. The owner, who for 10 years had farmed in the United States, had been working this property for 20 years, and although his herd had every attention and was in the pink of condition his farming practices had long been outdated. His land was good and yet he milked only 25 cows. For the whole year his herd of Friesians were stall-fed and tended, living in large, airy barns from which they were never moved. Because of the higher prices for milk and butter they were milked in the winter. Except for minor cropping the whole farm was sown in timothy grass, red clover, and maize, which was cut and used for the ensilage with which he fed his animals through the year. We looked into the great red-brick silo towers (of typically

*This is the second of three articles written for "the Listener" by H.R.C., a New Zealander who recently visited the Japanese island of Hokkaido—and kept his eyes open.*

American pattern) and for a few minutes revelled in the wonderful rich malty smell of the contents.

### Solidly Built Houses

Typical of all buildings in Hokkaido, his house and barns were extremely steep roofed to carry off the winter snows, and, in contrast to the lightly-constructed dwellings with sliding walls of the rest of Japan, were solidly built. Instead of the charcoal pots which are inadequate even for the winters of southern Honshu, the houses of Hokkaido have open fireplaces and wood stoves, and for the first time since we had been in Japan we saw brick chimneys. Inside the house in a room which was not only European, but also had all the draughts of European rooms, the farmer's wife, typically meek and wearing a drab coloured kimono befitting her age, served us first with bowls of the interminable, lukewarm, and to us all-but-flavourless green tea (which is the preliminary to every conversation with a Japanese in his house or office) and later with most delicious ice-cream made from the farm cream.

Most dairy farms in Hokkaido average about 15 acres, with two or three cows—stall-fed all the year—perhaps a horse and a pig or two, about an acre in potatoes and beans, and the rest of the land in pasture to be cut for ensilage. Dairy stock is almost totally

Friesian, but Jersey herds run by the Imperial University have proved successful and more economical to feed, and efforts will be made to introduce them throughout the country when replacement stock is available. Since the war the number of cows in Hokkaido has decreased from 80,000 to 55,000 but as soon as possible herds will be built up. Average production per cow is about 6000 lb. of milk a year, and their average butterfat test is only a little lower than in New Zealand. All milk is sent to a co-operative dairy company for separating, and the cream and skim are returned to the farms for butter and pig-feed. For breeding there is either a co-operative association bull for each neighbourhood or a near-by artificial insemination centre—a service which is run by the State and which for many years has been most successful.

### They Knew a Lot About Us

In contrast with the United States occupation personnel, of whom most had either never heard of New Zealand or had only the vaguest idea of its whereabouts, the Japanese we met in Hokkaido were not only aware of our country (and not because of the presence of New Zealand troops) but were curiously (almost suspiciously?) well informed about its ways of life and most interested to learn more. A manager of one dairy company, who had a photograph of the Tauranga Co-operative Dairy Company in his office, had been to New Zealand and after a tour of three weeks had written a book about dairy practice in New Zealand. Several more had been here to buy stock or wool. Farmers, when they learnt where we came from, said the seed for their pastures had been imported from New Zealand ("very

good seed, too; and if only it was available now"); others showed us breeding animals which had been imported from the North Island.

The land area of Japan is not greatly different from that of New Zealand, but against the 40 per cent of New Zealand which is able to be cultivated or grazed only 12-15 per cent of the land of Japan is arable, for Japan is an exceedingly mountainous country. Their population is about 75 million; ours less than two million. Sometimes it embarrassed me when they asked the total of our population—and sometimes I suspected that they intended the question to be embarrassing. Always they found it incredible that there were more cattle than people in New Zealand and about 20 sheep to each person. Once, when I was browsing through the library of one of the leader-writers for the *Nippon Times*, I noticed in a handbook about New Zealand that the land area and the population had been heavily underlined and marked with a cross and some Japanese characters which, if I could have translated them, would probably have meant "we'll soon fix that"—figures that no doubt were the basis of a leader or two about 1942-43, when their troops were moving swiftly south.

### Hard Life for Farmers

In Japan more than 40 per cent of the total population earn their living directly from the land—from that 12 to 15 per cent of the country which is arable. In Honshu, where there are two (and in some areas even three) crops a year, the average farm is of 2¼ acres (with more than 60 per cent of less than one acre); in Hokkaido, with one crop a year (and that not too reliable) the average property is between six and 14 acres. Consider the intensity of cultivation needed with a farm of that area, and with soil comparable in fertility with New Zealand, for a peasant farmer to raise crops enough to pay his rent and taxes and to maintain himself and family with all the necessities of living.

The Tenant Farmers Act recently introduced by Katayama's Government directs that tenants be given the chance of buying land at strictly-controlled prices (an acre of land at a controlled price costs much the same as do four tins of condensed milk on the uncontrolled black market), thus giving the peasant farmer some chance of relieving his present dismal plight—where on an inadequate farm, racked by rent and taxes, he struggles on the edge of hunger and want, with no reserve of strength or money to offset a poor year. No wonder that he, and the 40 million or so like him, using farming methods and equipment as primitive as any in the world, and suffering from malnutrition and disease, have existed knowing little or nothing of their Government or leaders and neither caring about nor understanding what they did.

### The Tyranny of Rice

The area of land set by the Tenant Farmers Act is one cho (2½ acres) in Honshu and two cho in Hokkaido. Directly bound up with this frantic overcrowding of the land is the growing of the main crop—rice. When they can buy it and if they can afford it, the Japanese eat rice three times a day.