

BROKEN BRIDGES

by "SUNDOWNER"

I WISH shepherds had nothing to do but stare at sheep; and that in a sensible society would be the case. If we had a better sense of values we would not think it important to have good gardens and tidy homes, to visit cities at intervals to buy books and call on the barber, to have a motor and seven suits of clothes, to spend more time getting and spending than standing and staring. Shepherding a few hundred years ago must have had its drawbacks: cold, wet, hunger, vermin and dirt. The days must have been long, the diversions few. But it is not on record that Spenser's shepherd grubbed gorse. If he planted potatoes he did it secretly. He never lay on his belly under a truck gouging out a hole for a jack. He cut no lawns and painted no sheds. He never had to sneak in a back door, wash, and shave, and dress to meet a visitor. He had gnats to fight but no white butterflies. He was "gentle"; lived with his sheep; had time to mark which did bite its hasty supper best.

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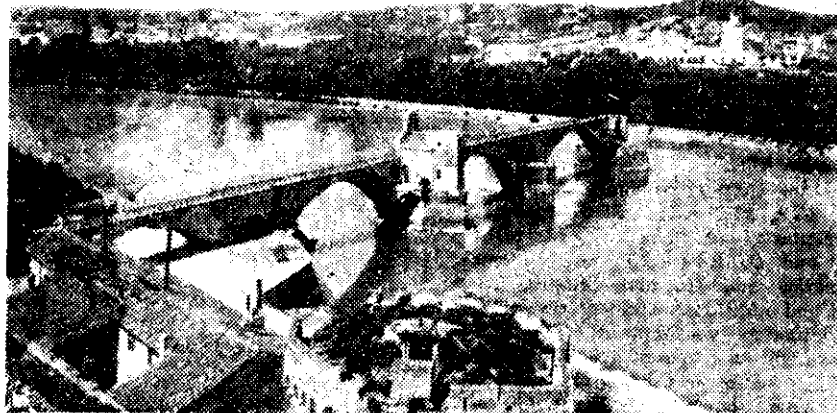
Today, I fear, no shepherd lives like that anywhere in the world. I thought

David Ben Gurion was going to do it when he turned his back on politics about 15 months ago and at 67 went to be a shepherd on the Negeb hills. But after he had rested there a few months—in a strategic corner of the country cynics said—and had his photograph taken carrying a lamb, he went back to Tel Aviv. I have just heard it announced over the air that he will be Minister of Defence. I will go back to the pine stump that I have been trying for three days to dig out (with the assistance of Will and Jim). But I hope I will never meet the man who started the legend that pines have no tap root.

[F we may believe the bridge engineers the most useful accomplishments in 30 or 40 years will be swimming and operating punts. New Zealand, they tell us, is 375,000 feet behind safety level in wooden bridges. Its annual rebuilding capacity is 10,000 feet. It will therefore take 37½ years

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to reach the safety line if no bridges in the meantime wear out.



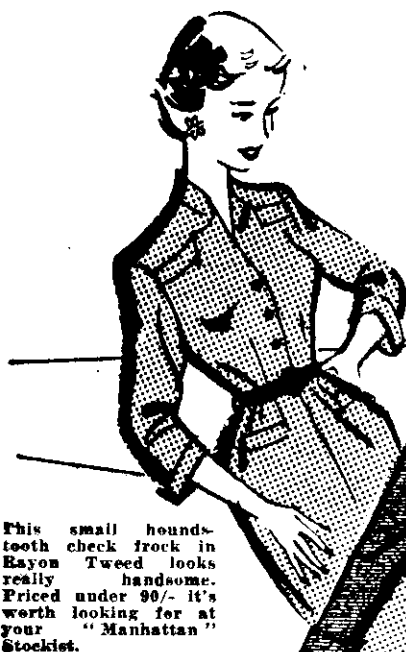
AVIGNON: "Bridge-building 600 years ago was a method of serving God"

Of course nobody does believe the engineers. We admire and mistrust them. We know that dramatics are one of the weapons they use to persuade the rest of us to put our hands in our pockets. Long before 1992½ they will be congratulating themselves and us on a miraculous escape from disaster. They will have found the method, the rest of us the men and the money, to replace 20,000 or 30,000 feet of bridges annually without disturbing the safety programmes

at railway crossings. But they will not be able to tickle our vanity then if they don't give us nightmares now.

In the meantime I have been re-reading the roads and bridges chapters in Jusserand's *Waytaring Life in the Middle Ages*. Bridge-building 600 years ago was a method of serving God. It was a charity like alms-giving. You gave your labour or your money or both to help those in distress on the roads and yourself on the way to Heaven. In the Vision of Piers

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