

# Die-hards on Paper

by "SUNDOWNER"

**S**PASMODICALLY for 30 or 40 years I have been trying to rid New Zealand of esquires. But they die hard. Even in America, where they are supposed to have been extinct for a century and a half, they survive in dark official corners with the protection of the Constitution and the law. Here the more they multiply the tougher they grow. I am not sure

**JANUARY 18** whether the law still supports them or not, but custom coddles them and slobbers over them. We all know that they are less real than the barons and counts of revolutionary Europe, who were at least horn great, or knew how to pretend. But we accept them. Greatness is thrust on Bill! Smith the moment he owes the grocer money. I receive letters every week from people who want to sell me something—even a new religion—and on the envelope I am always an esquire. I am a snob, the butcher knows, as well as the land agent, and the politician, and the cadger. Call me Bill, and I will not even look round. Call me Mister Bill, and I may just admit that I hear. Call me Bill Esquire, and I am in your parlour at once.

Outside that parlour the esquire is of course nobody and nothing. He died in the Middle Ages, and now, like Lazarus, stinks. But we keep digging him up. He used to be an aspirant to knight-hood, but although many aspirants survive still, they are no longer *scutarii* (shield bearers). They don't carry anyone's shield or follow anyone into battle. The only risks they take are political kicks and cuffs. In the old world, from which the ancestors of most of us ran away, there are still a few legal esquires: the younger sons of peers, the eldest

sons of those younger sons, the eldest sons of knights and their eldest but not younger sons, created esquires (judges, for example, and I think justices of the peace), and a few others. But in New Zealand an esquire is nobody or anybody—a man you wish to flatter, a man whose pocket you see bulging, a man with a vote, a man you want to persuade to sing in your choir or play in your team or attend your bargain sale or give dignity to your wedding or your funeral. He is a poor fish, and a very dead fish, but not quite so poor as the cockabullies who play round him.

Yet I can't persuade my friends to help me. I send off a letter addressed carefully to Mr. Tom Jones, and the answer comes back to William Smith, Esq. If I take the hint, my campaign collapses. If I ignore it, my reputation goes. I am probably one of those oafs who on census papers call themselves retired, or even unemployed, instead of gentlemen.

**JANUARY 20** If there is a more embarrassing sight than a cow in love it must be two cows in love in the same paddock on the same day. This fortunately is not often seen in a herd of three, and when A.I. becomes universal and cheap, it will be a welcome sight. But to me at present it is a terrifying spectacle, since to end it I have to lead my cows for two miles along a public highway on which, if I don't meet the school bus, I will meet neighbours' wives walking to a bus or girl guides pushing perambulators to please God and the Queen.

And my cows have no delicacy at all. Instead of trotting discreetly by my side



CHINESE FARM-LABOURERS  
"No one will work here as they do there"

he is running free and every chain you move from the fence seems like half a mile. Though my cows are easy to catch and rope at home they have other ideas when 30 strange cows are milling about them and Scamp is adding to the confusion by running faithfully at my heels. I have no desire for the day when cows will milk without these embarrassing aids—as I am sure they will in 40 or 50 years—but hormones would be easier on my nerves than bulls, and safer, I suppose, for my old heart.

**WHEN** Dick and Rod—may their tribe increase—moved from the top of their father's high hedge to the top of mine I looked the other way. To cut it myself I was not able; to ask them to cut it I was ashamed. So I behaved like the monkey in the fable—I saw everything and said nothing.

they bellow like foghorns and make me trot to keep up with them as they drag me along. And it is worse on the way back, since they still bellow but now move like snails, stopping at every gate, and making a hotter and more bothered spectacle of me the harder I try to hurry them home.

The only sign of delicacy today was exhibited by the owner of the bull, who contrived to be away from home, and not a spectator of my knocking knees when I entered the paddock to say Enough. Even a yearling with a ring in his nose is a portentous presence when

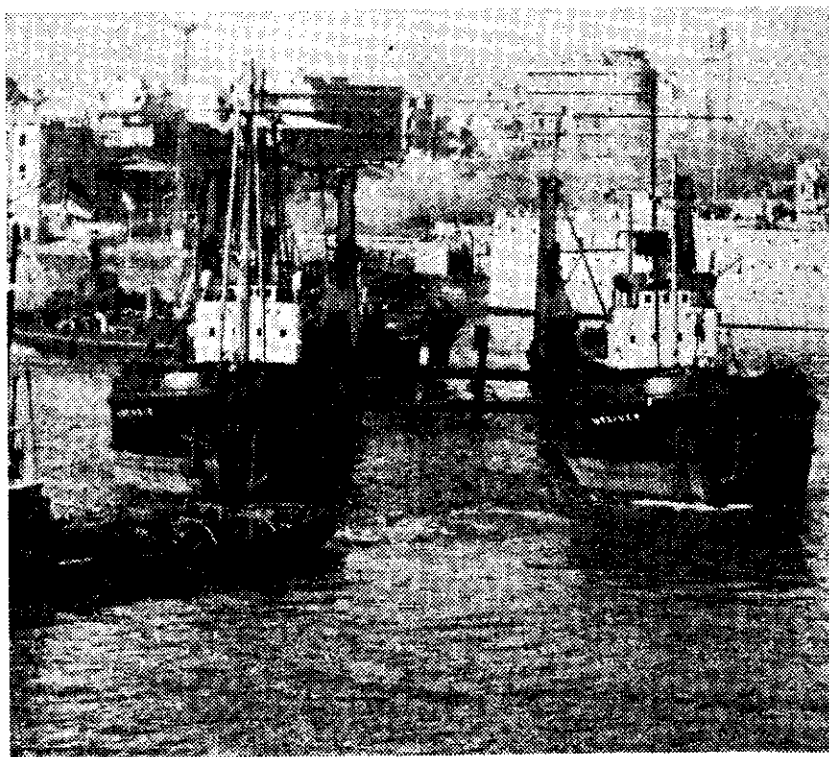
At first. Then I knew that I had to join in, helping when I could, if it was only morally. But

**JANUARY 21** when ten to fifteen feet of macrocarpa

have to be shortened to four feet, when the main trunks are four to five inches in diameter, and all the limbs have grown into and round one another in their 20-years effort to survive other assaults, the labours of 73 are neither here nor there on the jagged platform on which axe and saw have to be used. I was reduced to scavenging—chopping up and dragging away, piling up and burning, cartloads of excellent firewood that no one wanted or would collect. It was hot work and illegal work, since the thermometer stood at 84, and my hand had been forced before I had found time to get a permit; but above all it was disgraceful work, since no one should waste in summer what some shivering person would welcome in winter. It was the kind of destruction that anyone who has seen Japan or China must do with reluctance and shame. But Japan is nearly 6000 miles away, and the nearest point of China just as far. No one will work here as they do there, since no one has ever been as hungry here as millions always are there, or as poorly housed, or as miserably clothed. I hope no one ever will be; but that is the hope of a humbug if I do nothing to help it to materialise.

I happened in Japan to see a big pine tree cut down in the forest. The felling was slow and, I thought, inefficient. But when the trunk had been removed with all the big limbs, when there was nothing left but twigs and chips, women and children came three, four and five miles to carry these home in bags and bundles on their backs. I thought then that I would never again waste firewood. Yesterday I wasted some tons of it, and let the wind have the ashes.

(To be continued)



"THE SUEZ crisis . . . has focused attention on Britain's economy"

## THE ECONOMIC OUTLOOK

THE Suez crisis and its aftermath have focused attention on the state of Britain's economy and its effect on Commonwealth countries, so New Zealanders will be among those with a special interest in *Blueprint for Prosperity*, a series of six talks in the BBC General Overseas Service which are to be recorded by the NZBS for almost immediate rebroadcast. They are to be heard from YA and YZ stations at 9.15 p.m. on Thursdays, starting on February 21. In these talks Andrew Shonfield, Foreign Editor of the English *Financial Times*, will examine the main considerations influencing economic development and international trade at present.

Mr. Shonfield has travelled widely in recent years in Europe, the United States and the Middle East. Several months ago he toured India at the invitation of the Indian Government, in company with a group of economists, bankers and sociologists, and was able to study at first hand the industrial, agricultural and social developments in India's first and second five-year plans. His talks will range over many of the fundamental problems arising from the economic groupings into which world trade falls today.