



IT HAS come! The age of mechanical progress has reached Taranaki. Don't think that we were completely out-of-date before this. Even during the war we had horse sleds for the easy conveyance of anything capable of withstanding the shock of being bounced two feet into the air. We had Taranaki gates that possessed the advantage of being made of anything at all except an old gate. We had windmills that went really fast when disconnected from the pump, and could still be turned by hand when connected.

Our latest innovation has shadowed all these simple inventions, lessened the work of the farmer, and provided amusement and instruction for hundreds. I refer to the mechanical boxthorn cutter in our village. Perhaps you don't know much about boxthorn. If you don't you are not a native of these parts. Boxthorns start as delicate little plants about eighteen inches high, which are carefully spaced out along a raised bank to



Boxthorns start as delicate little plants.

form a new hedge. The farmer is very proud of them at this stage and really believes them to be tender little shrubs needing protection. He digs a deep trench along each side of the row and puts two strands of barbed wire neatly staked outside each trench. The finished work reminds me of newspaper pictures of portions of the Maginot Line in the early days of the war. The only difference being that the hedge is impregnable, as any ex-homeguardsman will tell you.

Having completed his hedge the farmer goes home to tea and the following morning, in place of his neat effort, he finds an enormous hedge, fifteen feet high and thirty feet wide at the base, covered with millions

of ferocious thorns, and completely engulfing the trenches and barbed wire and probably a few sheep and cows. In the old days he was obliged to return home for a carthorse, hooks and chains, a slasher, two assistants and some sticking plaster and iodine. Then followed an endless war on the hedge. The chains would be hung round the horse's collar, the hooks would be attached to a great lump of hedge, and number one assistant would then grasp the horse's bridle each side of its head, lean back and endeavour to pull the head off, at the same time shouting "gerrupyoldcow". The horse, in a praiseworthy attempt to avoid having its



Fifteen feet high and thirty feet wide.

neck dislocated, would start forward and the boxthorn would commence to heel over ominously.

At this stage several things might happen. It might be that the chain would simply break. In this case the horse would stumble forward on to number one assistant, knocking him flat on his back and treading heavily on his stomach. Number two, who was standing at the rear with the slasher, waiting to take a swipe at the boxthorn, would probably escape with a mere flesh wound from the loose end of the chain and the farmer would be unscathed. In the event of the hooks pulling out, number one would suffer the usual fate again, but number two would be hooked by the leg and flung into the cowyard, while the boxthorn would fly back and imprison the farmer in the heart of his hedge from whence he would have to be excavated with the slasher, pierced to the bone by thorns in every part of his anatomy. When the cutting of a hedge had been accomplished by this means it would be time to go to the other end and start again.

Our mechanical hedgecutter has put an end to all this misery and suffering. The worst you have to fear now is sudden painless death—or decapitation. The propelling force of the machine owes its existence to the genius of Mr Henry Ford, who produced an engine that will run under the most adverse circumstances. Ever since the days when it pulled the school bus, and the kids used to ram corks up the exhaust pipe, it has had a hard life. The chassis of the cutter was apparently once a steel girder bridge that the Railways Department found rather big for their purpose. It is roughly oblong in shape and has a wheel at each corner which is roughly circular. On these solid foundations the super-

structure has been erected. It was once no doubt the captain's bridge on some ocean liner. It contains the wheelhouse and a very few turns of the wheel quickly take effect on the steering, although no one knows what the effect will be until too late. Above the navigator's bridge, at right angles to the presumed direction of travel, is a heavy steel shaft extended out on the right-hand side as you go forward, or the left-hand side as you go backwards, as you may unexpectedly do if you lean on that big lever off the hay sweep which sticks up by the driver's seat, which also came off the hay sweep.

At the end of the steel shaft mentioned above is the chief working part, the crux of the whole invention, as you might say. This is a steel model of the four-bladed propeller on an early vintage Handley-Page, with the edges sharpened to form cutting knives. The shaft is rotated by a belt driven from the engine, and as the blades are securely fixed (at times) to the shaft, they perforce have to rotate at great speed.

You see the idea? Don't waste time—come for a trip with us. It is early morning. George fills the radiator with petrol, and puts water in the tank. Fred quickly discovers the mistake. Fortunately Arthur happens to have a two-gallon jar which just fits under the draw-off taps, and the error is rectified by lunchtime. George fits the cranking handle and gives her a smart pull over compression. The compression doesn't happen to be there this morning and the handle and George fly off the ratchet together. It doesn't take long for two experts to get the boxthorns out of George, and soon he is swinging her again. She fires—backwards. This time they are thrown the opposite way and there is no pain-

ful encounter with the hedge. One more swing and she springs to life, vibrant pulsing life. No, you are wrong. There are not two bridges, two shafts, and one hundred and fifty-four blades. That is just the vibrant life. George says it is due to a bit of slack in a big-end. He says she just wants taking down and taking up. Fred mounts the bridge, stands heavily on a large pedal and pulls the big lever back. The vibrations increase, there is a noise of many grindstones grinding diamonds and we are off. So is George, who was sitting on the back axle, applying iodine to the last wound. Fred grabs the wheel and gives it six sharp turns, we veer towards the hedge, the blades flashing bright in the evening sunlight (bit late getting her going today) and—the mechanical cutter is in action.

Boxthorn is rent and torn and flies hundreds of feet into the air. Half a mile away on the nearest road a motorist gets four simultaneous punctures and stands at a gateway shaking his fists and raving. Old tins whizz out of the hedge in all directions, chewed up barbed wire sings by like shrapnel, an enormous cascade of water bursts out of the hedge as a long-forgotten stand-pipe is cut off at the roots. There is a shuddering thud and millions of blue sparks as we misjudge our distance and cut off the power pole to the cowsheds. The heifers in the home paddock have gone mad and knocked the garden fence down, grandfather has crept into the fowlhouse and is yelling something about the Tarawera eruption and the Pink and White Terraces, but mechanical progress must go on—nothing can stop it. We can't because the accelerator pedal has dropped off and the ignition key has jammed.