



A MODEST FARMER

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My pearls of wisdom were dull beyond belief

After my defeat at the election, the next notable event was the declaration of the poll, at which I fondly hoped that large numbers of my previous supporters would give me a rousing and fond farewell.

So I prepared a powerful statement explaining why I was defeated and blaming it all on Eccles.

But only the winning candidate, the returning officer, and a few tired and indifferent onlookers who happened to be wandering by, made up the apathetic audience so it was rather an anti-climax.

I am beginning to realise that, in politics, one day you are a Black Orpington rooster and the next you are a feather duster.

The next sad thing I had to do was to clean out my office.

Over the years I have clung fiercely to anything I have ever said or done in the pathetic hope that eager historians who were clamouring to write my life story would have a large and deep well of wisdom and experience on which to draw.

But when I started to browse through my pearls of wisdom I was saddened to find that they were dull beyond belief.

I hoped that Mavis would like to keep my papers to pore over on winter evenings, but she made it clear that she would be far too busy watching TV, making up for the wasted years when she had been forced to listen to Parliament.

She was adamant that she didn't want any of my old rubbish for the mice to nest in.

And she had the same unkind comments to make about the bound Hansard volumes, all proudly embossed with my name.

"We just haven't got room for them, dear," she said plaintively.

"I know that they would look imposing and would make Mrs Jones jealous, but no one would ever look at them from inside. Offer them to Fred; he might want them for some queer reason."

But Fred said that the only use he could find for the volumes was to build them into an outhouse.

"And they would feel very much at home there," he said sourly.

So it was all very sad because I just couldn't bring myself to burn them or throw them out in the street.

Then one of my colleagues who had retired before me, told me to ring the Commonwealth archives which might be interested.

I did this rather diffidently and I was surprised to find that they seemed quite excited and they immediately sent a big truck around and a couple of strong men to cart all my papers away.

This pleased me immensely that my true value to posterity had at least been recognised.

But one of the workmen spoilt my pleasure by explaining that the archives seemed to be interested in almost anything, however trivial.

"Even this stuff," he said in a puzzled tone.

When I told Fred about this later, he said that they must have a winnowing machine which they used to find the few grains of wisdom in all that chaff.

The archives cherish the queerest things. They catalogue the more important documents so that they can be quickly retrieved if they are wanted by me while I am alive or by my family when I am dead.

But they want them so that historians in 50 years time can find out what problems occupied the time of members of Parliament in the 1970s.

And when they found I had been keeping a diary since I had been in Parliament, they became very interested and asked to see some of it.

I felt ashamed because it is really a mass of trivia, though I admit that there are some interesting passages, such as why I voted as I did at leadership contests and there are some rather frank comments about people.

I find it dull beyond belief, but not so the archives people, who said that they couldn't wait for me to die.

When I told Mavis about this she suggested that I should have demanded a State funeral as a reward.

It's funny how she always comes back to the State funeral. If I could get one, her cup of happiness would really run over.

There will be many other retired members who will be wondering what to do with their documents.

I can commend the archives as a willing and competent organisation.

I have been spoilt for so long by having a competent secretary who keeps everything in immaculate order, and I know that, without her, everything would get into the most awful mess.

So I was glad to hand the whole lot over. The archives will have the worry of sorting it out and caring for it.

I strongly urge all members to keep a diary. It is so easy to pick your portable dictaphone up and tell it what happened in that day's party meeting and so on.

It will seem pretty dull to you both now and later, but it will breathe life into the history of what will be written in 50 years' time. And it will give you a delayed opportunity to get even with a few sods!