



ONE MORE NAIL

Chapter Three

Pre-Parliament Life

I was born in 1912 and there were four in the family, two girls and two boys. We all went to the little Merrindie school which was about three miles from home. Before my younger sister went to school the three of us used to ride on one quiet old mare. Then where there were four going to school we graduated to a spring cart. It was a one teacher school and I suppose all the high powered educationists of today would be very sorry for us, but I think that we were lucky. For one thing, we were always seeing interesting things on the journey, which is more than do most country kids of today as they travel in their big buses. And there is nothing quite so stimulating as a good one teacher school. You always have the opportunity to listen to the lessons being taught the class a year or more ahead of you. If the discipline is good, and it was with us, we learnt a lot and much of it painlessly.

Then in 1925 I went to Prince Alfred College as a boarder and had a typically Kelly undistinguished career. I didn't really settle down to study until my fifth and final year and, strangely enough, it was economics and economic history that seemed to whet my interest in learning. But that is all the economics I have formally studied and I have always been envious of people who have been able to study economics at a university. I played in the first cricket and football teams, but mine was mostly a dull and mediocre time at college.

I left school at the end of 1929, just when the depression was bearing down on us. I worked on the farm under a manager and work was indeed the operative word. Then I started to manage the place when I was 21. In 1936 I married Lorna Clare Hill who I met when her brother came to teach at Merrindie school. We have three sons, two of them farmers and one a vet.

We had an unusually Puritan upbringing. My parents were staunch Methodists with a very strong sense of duty. But we were fortunate in that the little Methodist church at Giles Corner also had a tradition of self education. So there was often a debate to prepare or an evening devoted to drama or public speaking, as well as frequent devotional sessions. This training stood us in good stead later on life, though unfortunately it never taught me to talk well on my feet, though somewhere along the line I learnt to think clearly.

We had little money when we were married and we have to wait till we won the All Australian lamb competition before we could afford to buy a radio set. We had a good Dorset Horn sheep stud and exhibiting these at Adelaide and Melbourne Shows gave me some outside interests. But I was not farming the country well, the rotations were too close, and we were not using enough fertilizer, and as a result soil started to wash away. I well remember my father saying to me on one of his visits home that it was about time I got off my tail and did something to stop these great gutters spoiling our best arable paddocks. He seemed to remember that someone somewhere in N.S.W. had published a little booklet, telling people how to construct contour banks which were supposed to guide the water off the land quietly instead of having it rush down the hillside, taking good soil with it. Then he disappeared to Melbourne again, leaving me with the job on my hands. That is one of the benefits of absentee ownership.

To make a long story short, I eventually located the booklet in the Bank of N.S.W. and, following its directions, we made up a level and then set out to lay out some contour banks [Note from *Economics.org.au* editor: I presume he is talking about Yeomans Keyline Plan, but I don't think that was published till 1954]. Lorna, who was then great with our first child, used to mark the place for the pegs to go. It was quite exciting wandering around behind the level, wondering where it would lead us. Then we ploughed the banks together with an old disc plough, and then we waited for the rain. There were a lot of teething troubles, but we made the banks work reasonably well. Then I got the Department of Agriculture people to come and see what we had done, and we soon had a soil conservation service going under excellent officers. And I ended up on the State Soil Conservation Committee which work I very much enjoyed until I went into Parliament.

Then I found myself on the Advisory Board of Agriculture. Its task was to advise the Minister for Agriculture and also to have the general oversight of the Agricultural Bureau which was an excellent farmer's extension service. I served two terms as Chairman on this body during the 17 years I was on the Advisory Board.

Then in 1951 I was awarded a Nuffield Fellowship to enable me to study farming in Britain. This was the first time farming fellowships had been awarded in Australia, though they had been made available to British farmers for some years. As the name indicates, they were financed by the Nuffield Foundation. Lorna and I had a most interesting seven months in Britain, learning a little about the systems of farming that were applicable to our arid area, but also learning a lot about life.

It is interesting that a few years ago the ex Nuffield farming fellows in Australia were told that the Nuffield Foundation felt that it could no longer finance the scheme and, if it was as good as they have been told, they we ought to be able to carry the scheme on ourselves. This has meant a considerable effort on the part of the ex Nuffield fellows, but we have been successful so far with the generous assistance of Qantas, farming firms and the banks. We send two scholars away each year, with the various States taking their turn. And it is with modest pride that I tell that the scholar who is now away representing South Australia is my son Kim who is the first son of a Nuffield man to win the award in Australia.

When I returned to Australia in September 1951 I found that there was a great deal of interest and curiosity about British farming, so I ended up giving lectures all round the State.

My avid interest in agriculture continued in formal and informal channels until I went into Parliament in 1958.