



DAVE'S DAIRY

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Governments love to be popular!

Since the drought has been so serious in New South Wales and Queensland, the television stations, in particular, have been showing heart-rending pictures of animals bogged in the mud and on the point of death.

And the drought has had a very serious effect on Australian economy.

For this and other reasons, the public interest has been awakened, and according to Clarkson, some very eloquent speeches have been made in Parliament on the subject.

Clarkson says that Opposition speakers are always agreed that droughts are caused by the Government, and that the Government should do something about it.

They are not quite clear what ought to be done, but are certain that it ought to be done with rapidity, imagination, and vision.

Supporters of the Government, on the other hand, do not blame the Government (though no doubt they would if they were in opposition), but most of them urge the Government to do something soon.

Clarkson says that all Governments love, above all, to be popular, so the poor old Government would like to help prevent and cure droughts, if it could, but it doesn't know how to start.

And in Parliament, in particular, and in the country generally, the more eloquent speakers do not feel it necessary to descend to mundane details like spelling out what ought to be done, but prefer to make statesman-like utterances on a much higher plane.

What should the Government do to prevent and cure droughts?

Clarkson says, leaving out the question of cloud seeding, which he has been lecturing about lately, that there is not a great deal that the Government can wisely do; and a great many things which it is usually urged to do would be either dangerous or disastrous as drought measures.

For instance, the Government is usually urged to construct dams as a drought measure.

The theory is that the stored water would be available for growing badly needed fodder, which would be fed to the starving stock.

And it is interesting to find that this is exactly the argument that was originally used to justify the Murrumbidgee irrigation scheme in 1906, the inquiry into which was held while the disastrous drought of 1895-1902 was fresh in everyone's mind.

But, in actual fact, the stored water was not used to irrigate fodder crops for drought purposes.

It would have been too expensive to store water and not use it, and the evaporation would have led to a lot of it being wasted if it was not used until there was a drought.

So it was used to grow rice or garden or vegetable crops, or to carry more stock.

And because more stock was carried, there would be more stock to feed through a drought if the river dried up, as some did in New South Wales this year.

Clarkson also says that besides conserving water, the Government is always being urged to conserve fodder.

This is to be held in large depots strategically spaced throughout Australia, and would be available for emergency, so the lives of our stock would be saved, our export of primary industries would not fail as they have this year, so our economy would be kept on a more even keel.

I thought myself that this was a pretty sound argument, but I had trouble with Clarkson.

He was all for fodder conservation, particularly by me (and this he has been all his life).

He is all for farmers conserving fodder, but not the Government.

He remarked rather sourly that Governments aren't much good at that kind of thing, and asked me to remember what happened to the hay that was stored by the Government in 1944-45.

It is not because Governments do not intend to properly care for the conserved fodder.

They do.

They mean to.

But usually the weevils or mice get most of it in the years it has to remain there, waiting for the drought to come.

And even if the Government could store it well, it would be a costly process both in capital and maintenance costs.

This would mean that the fodder, when it was sold, would either have to be sold at a loss, with the taxpayer making up the difference, or very high prices would have to be paid by the drought-stricken farmer, in which case it might very well be cheaper to let his stock die anyway.

And Clarkson says (but he doesn't want this to be made public) that if the Government does anything which takes away the incentive for the farmer to conserve his own fodder on his own farm, then it will do more harm than good.

I wonder where Clarkson is now?

He seems to have got out of Indonesia without causing another revolution, or getting murdered.

I suppose I will be getting long letters from him soon which he will want to squeeze into the Diary.

Why should I, that's what I want to know?

Just because he is a kind of relative!