



## A MODEST FARMER

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### **Farmers cowed by tariffs fallout**

Well, the honeymoon is over now but it was nice while it lasted.

I have pointed out before that, though retirement from politics has meant blisters on my farming fingers and awful aches in my farmer's back, nevertheless I have escaped the attention of Eccles who made my parliamentary life so uncomfortable.

Mavis has also been more relaxed now that she has ceased worrying about my State funeral.

It has been wonderful for me not to feel Eccles' grip on my ear as he pointed out the straight and narrow path of economic rectitude.

I have plenty of other troubles such as running out of money and the drought — but at least I have been spared Eccles.

But last Saturday the local sergeant of police rang to say that there was a suspicious character in the town who was asking for me.

“What's he like?” I asked anxiously.

“He's a long skinny man with a mournful expression,” the sergeant said, “and he keeps tutting all the time when he is talking as if he were very disappointed about something.

“And he keeps looking anxiously over his shoulder as if he were fearful of being overtaken by some frightful fate.”

I asked: “Is he sallow as well as sad?” Said the sergeant: “Yes, and wrinkled too.”

So I knew then that Eccles had tracked me down at last, and it wouldn't be long before he came plodding up the track.

“Eccles is coming, dear,” I called out the Mavis. “You had better get something ready for him.”

Said Mavis: “Yes, I'll do that. I'll make up a bait. Where do we keep the strychnine.”

An hour later, Eccles loomed up. After greeting me in his usual unhappy way, he looked around him with a look of pity.

“This farming business does not appear to be very profitable, my dear fellow,” he said.

“It must be a nasty shock to you to have to live as a farmer instead of as a Member of Parliament. Are you sure that you can afford to give me a meal?”

I replied: “Yes, I know that Mavis is getting something ready for you. And things are not always as bad as this.

“It is this wretched drought that makes things look so bad — that and the way that costs increase so much faster than do the prices for our produce.

“If it wasn’t for this cost problem farming wouldn’t be so bad.”

Said Eccles: “Now that’s just what I came to see you about.”

He dived into his bulging briefcase and brought out a booklet entitled *Protection in Perspective*.

I could tell by the way he held it at arm’s length, between finger and thumb, and by the way his nose wrinkled that the document offended him.

“You must study this carefully,” he ordered. “It is an examination of our tariff system by the Australian Industries Development Association.

“You really must spend some time and effort on it.”

Said I bitterly: “Now look here, Eccles. I haven’t got time to study those kinds of things.

“It takes me all my time reading the farming papers to find out how much money I am losing because my costs are increasing so seriously. So would you please go away?”

So he went away but not before he had found out where Fred lives, and then he headed off in that direction. I have a suspicion that it was Fred who let Eccles know where I was lurking.

Fred seems determined that I do not have an easy retirement.

As Eccles disappeared down the track he called over his shoulder: “It appears to me that you need an economic adviser.”

Then I started to read the AIDA document. There was a lot of criticism of the Industries Assistance Commission, some of it mean and petty.

But the main complaint was direction at the people who tried to measure the weight of the tariff burden.

The authors felt that such measurements were open to so many qualifications that it was better not to measure them at all.

And as the measurements cannot be accurately made, there was really no need to worry much about the size of the tariff burden.

That reminds me of Fred’s comment a week or so ago that it didn’t follow that, because you couldn’t accurately measure the weight of a waggon wheel that was crushing your foot, there was really no need to worry about it.

But I wish I knew what Eccles is doing over at Fred’s place. I have an uneasy feeling that they may be cooking up work for me to do.

I know, of course, that it is my escalating costs that are beating me and I also know that a considerable portion of these costs is caused by the tariff.

But Fred doesn't seem to realise that I have retired.