

A MODEST FARMER

The Australian Financial Review, 17 August 1979

Anniversary thought — and offer

Eccles is excited because this is the 500th Modest Farmer or Modest Member article. He takes the credit for the original idea and is proudly possessive when we turn out a good one.

But when a bad one comes along he quickly disclaims responsibility and gives me long lectures about my bad style or my primitive economic understanding.

I admit that I would have stopped writing the wretched things years ago if it had not been for Eccles' ceaseless prodding.

“You have to keep belting away at people,” he says, “Never let up. They may get a bit sick of hearing about tariffs but you have to keep their noses down on the grindstone as I had to keep yours.”

* * *



The Modest Farmer [above, with Mavis] found the following letter on his desk. It reads:

The Editor;

Dear Sir, Surely practically 500 defamations are reasons enough for at least a mild protest.

Loyal friends who are fully aware of my intrinsically low profile have undoubtedly been waiting for a long time for me to “blow my top.”

Even now I shall not do that. I shall just tear out that page and stamp on it as is my wont.

Mavis [Lorna Kelly] Burnside, South Australia.

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Mavis tried to whip herself into a state of tired enthusiasm about the 500th anniversary but she soon gave up.

It was not so bad being called “Mavis” everywhere she went when I was a MP, when she could greedily grasp at any straw that might make me a minister so that she could, at the end, have the pleasure of attending my State funeral which is a perk that ministers have.

“You must have something to look forward to dear,” she used to say, but now she has put this goal from her.

She seldom reads the column these days and when she does she usually mutters something like “I wish Eccles was dead” or some similar sentiment.

Fred received the news that this was the 500th issue with indifference.

He often tells me that I would be far more profitably employed if I stopped writing and spent more time hoeing thistles or chasing the old ewes with the shears or similar simple things.

Sometimes he is pleased with me but he hates me trying to be funny.

“Life is real, life is earnest,” is his constant lament.

He used to grimly warn me that life wasn’t meant to be easy but he had gone off that poignant phrase lately for some reason.

When I look back over the 500 articles I sometimes feel cross because everyone has not by now accepted the message that Eccles and I have been preaching for so long.

I never expected to convince the economic troglodytes, such as the textile people who live in a sad little world of their own.

But it is tragic to find that the business leaders who guide the destinies of big companies like BHP and ICI are still inward looking.

They still seem content to behave like the big fat foster-mothered beef bulls being prepared for the shows.

They still get down on their knees, and suck away greedily at the economy and ask for another tariff handout. (That metaphor seems to have got a bit mixed).

When we tackle them about this, they claim that our complaint that tariffs have to be paid by exporters is only economic theory anyway. They really seem to believe that there is indeed, such a thing as a free feed.

It is sad to think that such powerful people can be so economically ignorant.

But there are other times when I get quite cheerful, when it become obvious that the spread of economic education has made it clear to most that exporters do, indeed, have to pay the price for tariff protection in the end and that there are great advantages for industry expanding into exports instead of sitting around waiting for another tariff subsidy from exporters.

It is particularly gratifying that the Stan Kelly Memorial Lecture which was endowed to encourage the lowering of world trade barriers, is to be given on August 29 by Mr John Uhrig, the managing director of Simpson Pope, a recognised secondary industry leader.

He has demonstrated that the rest of the world should be regarded as an opportunity and a challenge and not as a threat to be met by cowering behind the tariff wall.

Whenever I get too sorry for myself I remember the verses by Arthur Clough:

*Say not, the struggle nought availeth,
The labour and the wounds are vain,
The enemy faints not, nor faileth,
And as things have been they remain.
For while the tired waves, vainly breaking,
Seem here no painful inch to gain,
Far back, through creeks and inlets making,
Comes silent, flooding in the main,
And not by eastern windows only,
When daylight comes, comes in the light,
In front, the sun climbs slow, how slowly,
But westward, look, the land is bright.*

I know that Fred will be embarrassed by me quoting poetry but it has comforted me when my spirit has flagged. Things are indeed gradually getting better all the time. We cannot continue being as silly as we used to be.

To celebrate the 500th issue, I have decided to post an autographed copy of my book, *One More Nail*, to the people who send \$9.95 to The Modest Farmer, GPO Box 568, Adelaide, 5001.

I have these uncontrollable fits of generosity once every 10 years.