



DAVE'S DAIRY

The Adelaide Stock and Station Journal, 22 April 1959

This has not been a very good week. The weather has been too hot and it begins to look as if a lot of the grass that came up with the Easter rains will die off. We only had an inch; those that had two inches will be all right. We really need rain this coming week to keep the grass alive and there's no sign of it at the moment. But the worst part of the week was that I had to burn my wheat stubble.

You will remember how I said in an earlier diary that the wheat stubble was so thick that I thought it would be better to burn it and sow the paddock with peas. Well, the time came when the stubble should be burnt, so on Wednesday I said at the dinner table that I thought we would do it in the afternoon. Mary immediately started to sniff, and then she started to tell Harold all the past history about how I always used to burn my stubble to sow barley or oats, and how the paddock started to erode and how Mr Herriot used to come along and talk to me. And that she hoped that it wasn't going to start all over again.

Harold sat pretty tight-lipped through all this and I could tell that he didn't approve of it, either. He got up from the table and went in to ring the Clarkson's, but Clarkson was away in _anberra (I'd made sure of this before I decided to do it) but I could hear him having a long conversation with Florence (that's Clarkson's daughter). Then we went all over it again, and I promised that I would never burn a wheat stubble to sow barley, and that it would be quite all right to burn it if you were going to sow peas, or even pasture. So we went out and burned it, and although it was a good burn I don't want to have another experience like it. Mary came along in the car, with the knapsack sprays in the boot and a handkerchief in her hand, sniffing all the time. Florence arrived halfway through and held Harold's hand. And just as the fire got going properly, they came up in a body and begged me to put it out! But it was too late then (thank goodness) and away it roared. And in the roaring I thought I could hear voices of protest coming from the centre of the fire, but whether it was the voice of conscience or Mr Herriot, I couldn't quite make out. Then when it was all over, everyone gathered together in the blackened centre of the paddock and passed judgment on me. I didn't go near them as I felt kind of unwanted, but I think there were four of them, Mary and Harold and Florence and I think there was another one, and I can't be certain, but it might have been Mr Herriot (in spirit).

Tea that night was not a happy meal. "Good burn!" I said brightly, but no one answered. Flo stayed to tea to comfort Harold and they sat holding hands, and Mary just stared out of the window and sniffed. I made several gallant attempts to make conversation, but there were no replies. So I went in and rang the bank manager who was very pleased to hear that it had been a really good bum. But when I came back into the kitchen the talking (which had started as soon as I left the room) suddenly stopped again, and everyone stared sorrowfully at their plates, so I went and sat in the grain room (that 's where I always go and sit when I feel I'm not wanted).

Clarkson came over on Saturday morning to tell me off for burning the stubble but when he was just getting eloquent I asked him "What about the Parliamentary salaries?" He pulled up dead in his tracks and started to get into his car, but I reached over and pinched the ignition

keys, so we sat down and had it out.

Clarkson said that there has been a great deal of argument in Canberra about it during the last week and they are still undecided about what's to be done. "Look here, Clarkson," I said, "I don't want to hear about what the others think, I want to know what you think, and I want to hear what you're going to do about it. Don't give me any of these politician's answers; just remember that you were a farmer before you were a Member of Parliament, and say straight out what you think." Clarkson stopped looking around for a way of escape at that, and settled back and really told me. It took hours, but when he had finished I really knew where he stood.

He admitted that, a year ago, he thought that Members of Parliament got well paid, but now he has changed his mind. And I don't think the old coot has changed his mind just because he sees his way clear to get his hands on some more money, since he admits he doesn't really need it. And he says that he could easily have made a good fellow of himself by opposing the increase, particularly as income tax will swallow most of the increase as far as he is concerned. And it wasn't a case of just standing by his mates (in Parliament), which he says he wouldn't have done if he thought that they hadn't earned it and didn't need it. But it was his opinion that members with no other income both earned and needed the money, and that many of them could certainly make far more than they made in Parliament in private life.

He admitted that there were many who weren't very able but there were well over half of them (on both sides of Parliament) with a good deal of ability and a great deal of character, and that it was a pity that I (and you too) always assumed that politicians were all both fools or rogues. And then he went on and on about the need for good young men and how we wouldn't get enough of them if we didn't pay them well. He said that there were some things in the Richardson Report with which he did not agree and which he would vote against but in general he agreed with it.

I think he was quite relieved to get it off his chest at last and he drove away looking more like a farmer and less like a Member of Parliament. And at least we know where he stands, although of course, we may not agree with him.

After he had gone I went inside and did a bit of practising in front of the mirror. I think people might soon be asking me to stand for Parliament against Clarkson.