



DAVE'S DAIRY

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We had quite a good trip over to Canberra but there's not a great deal I can tell you about the trip. I sat in front with Clarkson most of the way and he gave me a running commentary about how he was going to handle Mr Menzies and he hoped that they would not put him on too many committees right away. Mary and Mrs Clarkson just sat in the back and chatted, and it sounded as if we were carting a hive of bees about with us.

Every time we stopped for petrol, Clarkson would take his hat out of its box and brush the dust off it. Every now and then Clarkson would cease talking and stare fixedly ahead, but his lips would be moving and I knew he was polishing up his speech. But I haven't heard it yet. When we were about 20 miles from Canberra I got Clarkson to stop and I went around the back and put on my heavy working boots. Clarkson and I had quite an argument about this, but I told him that I really appreciated him bringing me all this way up to Canberra and I was going to show that I appreciated this by being prepared to protect him if necessary. Because I've heard on the radio how these people behave I thought a pair of real heavy boots (with hob-nails) would be really suitable.

I also told him that I thought he ought to have brought his own, but he said that they still smelled of last year's silage. I told him that I didn't think that that would be noticeable in the atmosphere he was about to enter. Anyhow, we eventually arrived at the hotel and got changed and Clarkson appeared in his hat in all its glory. But he found that he was the only one wearing a bowler hat and it was a bitter disappointment to him, I could tell. He put it away in the box and wore his old one.

I won't go into all the details of the week, but just give you some of the highlights. The highlight of the first day was the reception. I could tell that Clarkson was rather disappointed to find that there seemed to be a lot of other important people there besides himself and really he didn't seem to loom very large. In fact, whenever we were standing together it was always me that people would look at, and I could see that Clarkson was quite hurt when a newspaper photographer came up to us both and asked if he could take my photo.

This gave me a nice, warm, important feeling but I've since realised that it may have been because I was still wearing my heavy boots. I was determined that I would not enjoy myself at the reception because I couldn't help thinking it was a bit extravagant. But the food was so good and there was so much to drink that I couldn't get very worked up about my decision. The dancing was rather hard work in my boots. Mary enjoyed herself tremendously, sitting down criticising the other women.

Clarkson went off to a party meeting on Wednesday morning and returned in a very thoughtful frame of mind. It seems he was not nominated to even one committee, and he also admitted to me in an unusually humble way, that there seemed to be an awful lot of people there with a great deal of brains and also the ability to express themselves even better than he does. I think he's had a very harrowing experience. And whenever I mentioned anything about his maiden speech he went quite green.

I spent quite a lot of time up in the gallery watching the House in session and it's much more interesting than I expected. Of course, there's still an awful lot of tripe talked and some speeches are terribly dull. These dull speakers must be very sad men really, because as soon as they start almost everyone gets up and walks out and they are left talking to the flies. Members have most revealing nicknames for their opponents and colleagues alike and I shall be very interested to hear what Clarkson will eventually be called.

The House is mostly pretty quiet; in fact many members sleep quite a bit. But every now and again some simple little thing will flare up into quite a row. The first time it happened I tightened up my boot laces, but it died down without any violence and everyone seemed quite good friends. In fact, I've since realised that they don't really mean half of what they say and I stopped wearing my boots.

Clarkson did his maiden speech on Thursday night. It's a tradition of the House that maiden speeches are heard in silence, without any interjections. This must have been a great relief for poor old Clarkson because by the time he got up to speak he was so nervous he could hardly open his mouth. I have never seen him like that before and it was rather interesting. But he eventually got through with it and I don't think the poor old coot did too badly, really. At least, you could see that he meant well.

One thing Clarkson says that everyone is very helpful to the new members, and there's a very warm friendliness about the place which surprised him. I think he is going to quite like the place once he gets over the shock of realising that he is not as important here as he is at home. One of the troubles about the place is that it's an easy place to get lost in; it's so big and has so many burrows. I found that I had to make chalk marks on the panelled walls and after that I was all right. Mary was always getting lost and kept going into the people's rooms by mistake.

This rather worried me because you know what she is like about speaking her mind about things that she thinks ought to be improved, and I couldn't help worrying about what she would say. I lost her once and eventually ran her down in the P.M.'s room and she was having her say in a very emphatic way. But he didn't seem to be getting angry; he just had his eyebrows raised in rather a quizzical manner. I had to almost drag her out.

I think I'll stay here for another week. It's quite interesting and I suppose Harold is managing alright at home.