

THE RIGHT HON. W. M. HUGHES

(PRIME MINISTER OF AUSTRALIA)

ON LAND MONOPOLY

(In proposing the health of Mr. Hughes at a complimentary dinner in London on May 18th, Mr. Lloyd George, Minister of Munitions, said: "Some of the things he has done I dare not talk about in a mixed political assembly. I can assure you they would horrify every Tory present, and three-quarters of the Radicals present, I will say nothing about land taxes, but I assure you that, compared with what he has done, my poor efforts are the milk of human kindness. I mean to the landlords.")

In his recent "raging, tearing" campaign throughout the country in support of Protection, Mr. Hughes has consciously or unconsciously, as Mr. Lloyd George sees and has stated, kept in the background the policy of his Government in dealing with land monopoly and his own well-known views on the subject. We therefore make no apology for reproducing his own words on the question which originally appeared in the SYDNEY DAILY TELEGRAPH, and were reprinted in LAND VALUES, October, 1911.

In his series of articles, "The Case for Labour," published in the Sydney DAILY TELEGRAPH, the Acting Prime Minister (Mr. W. M. Hughes) deals in an interesting way with the recent litigation concerning the Federal Land Tax Act.

Mr. Hughes says:—The recent decision of the High Court in *Osborne v. Commonwealth* has completely settled all doubts as to the validity of the Federal Land Tax. The judgment was unanimous, and its terms such as to effectively discourage further attempts to upset the Act. It may be that some adventurous spirit will launch his barque upon the Constitutional ocean once more; but his voyage will be at best a mere island cruise. The Act is to stand. So much is certain.

OBJECTS OF FEDERAL LAND TAX

The object of the Act was twofold—to raise revenue and to induce large landholders to cut up their estates. The plaintiff sought to show, *inter alia*, that the Act was only colourably a taxing measure and that its object was really to break up great estates. But this argument, as was inevitable, received short shrift from the court. The principle upon which the interpretation of statutes rests is perfectly clear and of the widest possible application. The court in interpreting a statute is not concerned with the motives of the Legislature in passing it, save as these may be set forth or plainly deduced from the Act itself.

Looked at from any standpoint every citizen of the Commonwealth is entitled to be devoutly glad that our feet seem now set upon the right road. The prosperity and further development of the country depend almost entirely upon the increased area of land under cultivation, and the growth in the number of settlers engaged in cultivating it. And the national safety of Australia hangs upon the complete and speedy absorption of large numbers of suitable immigrants, who will cultivate our lands, rather than throng our already overcrowded cities, and upon the training of these and of every adult male citizen in that primary duty of citizenship, the defence of his country. That is to say, our national safety and progress rest upon access to and cultivation of the land; and by no other means can we either maintain our national existence or develop this great country.

THE DECLINE AND FALL OF ROME

The better to appreciate this great and vitally important truth, we may with advantage review a recent article in

the London SPECTATOR, in which those causes that led to the downfall of the Roman Empire, which the writer declares exist in the British Empire to-day, are dealt with. Let us briefly consider how far its conclusions are justified, and if so in what way, if any, we here in Australia, in common with the other portions of this mighty British Empire, may avoid the fate that overtook Rome. Summarised, the SPECTATOR attributes the downfall of Rome to:—

(1) A declining birth-rate and the dissolution of the marriage tie. (2) Overwhelming taxation, especially on land. (3) The introduction of a caste system through Government action. (4) The attempt of the State to act as universal providence. (5) The endowment of idleness. (6) The neglect of national defence by the refusal to train the population to arms, and by reliance solely on a professional army.

First, slavery was general. Practically nearly all the manual work in the rural districts at all events was done by slaves. By the first century B.C., says the SPECTATOR, much of Italy was occupied only by vast grazing farms tended by half-wild, half-starved, wholly dangerous slave herdsmen! It had not always been so; in the days when Rome was in her prime Italy was parcelled out into small holdings, owned, held, and cultivated by that sturdy yeomanry who, trained to arms as well as to industrial labour, fought her battles, produced her wealth, and spread her glory throughout the known world. But gradually these men, for various causes, were driven from their farms and drifted into the cities. As there was no room for free labour, they rapidly degenerated, and existed as practical paupers surrounded by social conditions of the most debasing and demoralising kind. The most frightful immorality was rampant. The inhuman butcheries of the arena marked the depths of their moral degradation. Infanticide was fearfully common. The population dwindled in numbers, and degenerated physically and morally. Rome went down because of the failure of her crop of men.

"Even when later free labour did obtain opportunities for employment in place of slaves, a rigid caste system confined and crippled it. Pestilence devastated the land, civil war raged and decimated the population. The country was ground down by taxation, especially on land, becoming more severe as time went on."

Here we pause for a moment to summarise the facts. Great estates swallowed up the small holdings; grazing took the place of agriculture; slaves displaced free men. The small farmers therefore were driven into the cities and as slave labour did all the work the dispossessed small holders became pauperised, degenerate, brutalised. Slavery and land monopoly accomplished this between them.

SLAVERY AND LAND MONOPOLY

Slavery and land monopoly! And out of these two came frightful immorality, infanticide, inhuman butcheries to make a Roman holiday, degeneration, and decay. A fine brood worthy of their dam and sire—transforming the descendants of the industrious yeomen who had fought for Rome into a race of pitiful and degenerate parasites unable either to do honest work or defend their own country. Not the lusty and virile barbarians that swept over Italy brought the mighty Roman Empire to the dust, but slavery and land monopoly!

Does this strike home to us? Are we standing on firm ground or living like fools in a palace built on quicksand? Slavery, it is true, no longer exists; but land monopoly throws out her evil spawn as of yore. If there is a declining birth-rate, if infanticide is too common, if the towns are overcrowded and the country deserted, if agriculture is neglected because grazing pays the great landholders best in these days, as in the evil days of Rome, if the people are unwilling or unfit to defend their country and leave this, the first and last duty of free men, to hirelings, what other cause than land monopoly is primarily to blame?

LAND TAXATION IN ROME

The attempt of the SPECTATOR to attribute some of the responsibility to heavy land taxation is ludicrously futile. In the first place the so-called Land Tax was not upon unimproved land values, not indeed upon the land at all, but upon the value of the annual product of the land! That is to say, it was a tax upon production. The man who produced the most wealth paid the most tax, the man who produced least wealth paid least taxation, although he might own half the countryside! The modern system of Land Value Taxation upon which the Federal Land Tax is based is the complete opposite of such a system. Not the value of the wealth produced, but the value of the land owned is the basis of taxation. The so-called Roman Land Tax was really a tax upon incomes derived from land!

The SPECTATOR, in its desire to attribute the downfall of Rome to Land Value Taxation in order to help its Tory friends—who viewed the Lloyd-George tax as the work of Satan—has over-reached itself. To prove this it is only necessary to point to a fact quoted in the article: That in the days of Valentinian III. there remained only the great land-owners and their slaves! The yeomen and middle classes had completely disappeared. It appears then, that the so-called land tax had so far from crushing the great land proprietors, destroyed all except them and their slaves! The extent to which this had been done may be inferred from the fact that while all beneath them were reduced to beggary, the incomes of the great landed nobles averaged £60,000, and were not seldom as high as £300,000 a year! As the SPECTATOR admits, it is obvious that these great landed nobles evaded their obligations as much as possible. And to the very rich many things have in all ages as in our own been possible.

LAND MONOPOLY THE PRIMARY CAUSE OF ROME'S DOWNFALL

Such was the condition of the Roman Empire in the days when wealth accumulated and men decayed. Great estates and slavery killed Rome. And these great estates dug their vampire bill the deeper into the vitals of the nation. Slavery decayed, but land monopoly flourished to the end; flourished at the expense of the strength, virtue, courage, and character of the Roman people. Rome went down owing to the failure of her crop of men. Great estates were responsible for the failure of the crop.

How far is this a picture of our own times and our own country? A mighty outcry has been raised against the Federal Land Tax, because it is aimed at discouraging great estates. Yet by this means alone can national dishonour be avoided and our existence as a nation secured.

The exact figures have not yet been compiled, but it is, I think, within the mark to say that less than 3,000 people own one-half of the entire alienated land of Australia; that is, one-half of the most valuable portion of our heritage! If we are not to follow hot-foot in the steps of Rome and fall an easy prey to the virile nations that hunger for our magnificent inheritance, we must get the people on the land, and we must train all citizens to defend their country. In that way and that way alone, lies industrial, social, physical, moral, and national safety. And the Federal Land Tax is making it possible for us to do these very things.

SHAKESPEARE SCRAPPED

(Reprinted from THE PUBLIC, Chicago.)

The tercentenary of Shakespeare's death is April 23rd, 1916. His birthplace is sacredly preserved, but his later dwelling-house in Chapel Street, Stratford, was vindictively scrapped. "And thereby hangs a tale."

In 1597 Shakespeare bought a Stratford house and lot known as the "New Place." He remodelled it and held it until his death.

After his death the house remained in his family's possession until about 1660, when it was sold to the Clopton family. About 1703 they rebuilt it, but retained so much of the original structure that the house and Shakespeare's mulberry tree remained a magnet for pilgrims.

In 1752 the Cloptons sold the Shakespeare house to Rev. Francis Gastrel. He had a disagreement with Stratford folk, whereupon he removed to Litchfield. Feeling that his assessment at Stratford was too high, he protested, but in vain. Petulantly declaring that the house should never be assessed again, he wrecked it, sold the materials, and shook the dust of Stratford from his feet.

This sacrilege would not have been committed but for the curious fact that Stratfordians of that day fined men who committed or maintained improvements in the town, repeating the fine yearly while the offence was in evidence. It was a misdemeanour, punishable by fine, to beautify the town, but not to uglify it. The clergyman avoided his fine for maintaining the Shakespeare house; he destroyed the priceless relic.—SAMUEL MILLIKEN.

We respectfully join in offering Harry and Crompton Llewelyn Davies and the members of their family sincerest sympathy in the death of their father, who passed away at his home in Hampstead, London, on the 18th May, aged 90. The TIMES in a lengthy obituary notice, said of him: The Rev. John Llewelyn Davies was translator of the "Republic" of Plato, and a Liberal Churchman of wide influence. . . . In him was exemplified the highest ideal of the teaching order in the Church of England.

In 1889, Mr. Davies left London for the Trinity living of Kirkby Lonsdale, which he held until eight years ago. The estimation in which he was held (said THE WESTMINSTER GAZETTE of May 19th) by those best qualified to judge was sufficiently shown by the letter addressed to him on his departure from London for Westmoreland "We call to mind your academical distinction, your early ministry at the East End, your labours of more than thirty years as Rector of Christ Church, Marylebone, and as a member of the Vestry and of the Board of Guardians of that parish, and also as Principal of Queen's College, and as one of the Founders and most constant friends of the Working Men's College. For your wise and unselfish devotion to measures of practical improvement; for the moderation, independence, and charity which you have shown throughout your career; for your maintenance of high ideals, and for your steadiness and judgment in pursuing them; for the influence of your personal character and example, and of your words and writings; for the manner in which you have combined a clear and firm assertion of Christian truth with a generous appreciation of all earnest thought and feeling; and for your habitual sympathy with rich and poor alike, we desire to record our grateful admiration. We should regret your removal less were it an incident in your promotion to some such high position in the Church as would correspond to your character, experience and power."

The "we" of this letter signified 700 names—seven English bishops and thirteen deans, and a multitude of public men of all parties, including such names as those of the late Lord Coleridge, the late Lord Tennyson, the late Lord Bowen, Mr. Childers, Mr. Mundella, Lord Avebury (then Sir John Lubbock), and Lord Courtney. . . .

In politics he was an Independent Liberal and Free Trader.