

PRIVATE WEALTH.

Australasian
wealth.

THE first century of Australasian history closed on the 26th January, 1888. It is impossible to trace step by step the progress made during that period, as the data for the purpose are for the most part wanting. Sufficient material is, however, available, from which a comparative statement of the wealth of the colonies at different periods may be deduced. In the following figures the private wealth of the people has alone been considered, the value of the unsold lands of the State, as well as the value of public works, having been omitted. The subjoined table shows the private wealth of the whole of Australasia and the increase thereof at intervals of twenty-five years from the date when this territory was first colonized :—

January.	Australasia.	
	Amount of Private Wealth.	Increase during 25 years.
	£	£
1788	—	Country first colonized.
1813	1,000,000	1,000,000
1838	26,000,000	25,000,000
1863	181,000,000	155,000,000
1890	1,169,000,000	*988,000,000

* Increase for 27 years.

Marvellous
increase.

The progress exhibited in this table is marvellous, and as regards ratio quite unprecedented. Though Australasia has but the population of a province of one of the great European powers, in the wealth and earnings of its people it stands before most of the secondary States, and as regards wealth and income per head of population far before any other country. The following figures are designed to illustrate this truth. Those relating to the United

States of America are computed from data derived from the last census of that country; the other figures are given upon the authority of the Dictionary of Statistics.

The figures in regard to the wealth of Australasia do not include the value of State property, which in these colonies consists, besides unsold land, chiefly of railways, telegraphs, water and other works, more or less reproductive. If the value of public works were included, the wealth of Australasia would be at least 1,329 millions. Value of Public Works.

Country.	Private Wealth.	Wealth per head.	State Income per head.	Private Income per head.	Ratio of Public Debt to Private Wealth.
	Millions.	£	£	£	per cent.
Australasia (1890).....	1,169	309.0	7.8	*57.0	15.8
United Kingdom	9,400	246.1	2.3	33.7	7.7
France	8,598	221.6	3.1	27.8	14.7
Germany	6,437	132.5	3.8	22.2	6.8
Russia	5,089	55.4	1.0	11.5	14.8
Austria-Hungary.....	3,855	96.1	2.5	15.5	15.0
Italy	2,963	97.8	2.4	12.2	15.5
Spain	2,516	142.9	1.8	16.5	10.3
Portugal.....	408	82.7	1.8	12.1	27.5
Sweden and Norway	880	122.1	1.1	21.6	2.2
Denmark	404	192.4	1.4	32.5	2.8
Holland	980	213.0	2.3	22.6	9.1
Belgium	1,007	165.0	2.3	28.0	7.6
Switzerland	494	164.7	0.9	19.0	3.5
United States	12,824	205.2	1.5	39.0	1.7
Canada	980	196.0	1.6	26.0	6.1
Argentine Republic.....	509	164.2	4.8	24.0	21.6

* New South Wales only.

Land and the improvements thereon form the great bulk of Australasian wealth, for out of the 1,169 millions at which it is valued, about 821 millions, or 70 per cent., is represented by what is termed real estate. The valuation of lands and buildings presents no difficulty except in the case of Western Australia and New South Wales; as regards the first-mentioned colony the only data procurable are very meagre, but the area, situation, and use to which the lands are put are known, and from these data an approximation has been formed. Value of Land.

Land in New South Wales.

Only a very small part of New South Wales is under municipal government, and until the last Census was taken the valuation of lands outside the municipal area could only be a matter of speculation. The Census Act, however, was so framed that every holder of land was required to make a declaration of the value of his property, and from the return so obtained the present estimate was compiled. The value of lands, buildings, and other improvements thereon has been set down at £303,152,000; of this sum 141 millions represents property subject to municipal taxation, 117 millions country lands outside municipalities, and 45 millions the improvements thereon.

Land in Victoria.

In Victoria the valuation of municipalities is 214 millions; an inspection of the returns, however, will show that this is an under-estimate, as some of the municipalities, notably Melbourne City, have placed the capital value at only ten times the annual value, which is obviously too low a figure. Making a correction on this account the estimated valuation of property within municipalities may be set down at 233 millions; to this must be added the value of improvements on pastoral properties which are not reckoned in the municipal valuation. In New South Wales similar improvements, which originally cost 73 millions, were valued by the owners at 45 millions, equal to 11s. 3d. per head of sheep depastured. Reckoning every head of large stock as equal to ten sheep, for Victoria these improvements are taken to be worth 13s. 4d. per sheep, which fixes their value at 23 millions, making the total value of land and improvements in Victoria 256 millions.

Land in the other Colonies.

For South Australia and New Zealand the valuations adopted are those of the Local Taxation Offices, but slightly increased; for Western Australia the land has been valued at slightly over 5 millions, which sum is liable to correction should there be any evidence of a more exact valuation. For the other Colonies the municipal values have been accepted, with the addition for improvements not valued by the municipalities of 8s. per sheep for Queensland, and 12s. 6d. for Tasmania.

The plan adopted in valuing the other forms of wealth is given in the previous issue of this work, and as it is marked by no features of special interest need not be repeated on this occasion.

The valuation of each of the principal elements of wealth is as follows :—

Classification.	£
Land, Houses, and Permanent Improvements	821,280,000
Live Stock.....	120,205,000
Coin and Bullion	33,582,000
Merchandise	51,151,000
Household Furniture and Personal Property	62,874,000
Shipping owned in Colony.....	7,049,000
Mines and Mining Plant.....	38,033,000
Plant employed in Agricultural, Manufacturing, and other industries not elsewhere included...	35,260,000
Total	1,169,434,000

The distribution amongst the various provinces was as stated below :—

Colony.	Private Wealth.	Per Inhabitant.
	£	£
New South Wales	412,484,000	368
Victoria	344,224,000	304
Queensland	118,414,000	301
South Australia	99,141,000	310
Western Australia	10,619,000	218
Tasmania	34,360,000	236
New Zealand	150,192,000	240
Australasia	1,169,434,000	309

An estimate of the indebtedness of Australasia to persons residing abroad cannot be made with any degree of accuracy ; an estimate for New South Wales has, however, been made which shows that its indebtedness, with the annual interest or income therefrom at the close of the year 1891, was,—

	Amount.	Income.
To public creditors	46,472,000	1,826,000
Municipal creditors	1,128,800	50,800
private creditors and absentees	51,256,000	3,450,000
	98,856,800	5,326,800

Classification of items of wealth

Distribution of wealth amongst the various Colonies.

Money owned outside Australasia.

VALUE OF ESTATES OF DECEASED PERSONS.

If it be assumed—and such an assumption will not appear unreasonable to those who know Australasia well—that the private indebtedness per inhabitant of the seven Colonies is about equal to that of New South Wales, the estimated indebtedness of Australasia to persons residing outside its limits, and chiefly in Great Britain, is not less than £191,000,000 as compared with an estimated private wealth of £1,169,434,000, shown above. This, however, does not take into consideration the sum of £201,500,000 owing by the various Governments and Municipalities, which would make the total indebtedness £392,500,000.

Distribution of property.

If the number of those who leave property at death compared with the total number of deaths in any year, and the value of the estates of such persons, be taken as indicative of the distribution of wealth throughout the rest of the community, it would appear that 12·3 per cent. of the inhabitants of Australasia have property, which is a much wider distribution than obtains elsewhere. The distribution appears most general in South Australia and Victoria. The average value of estates is greatest in Victoria, and least in Tasmania, as the following table shows. The value of estates, however, is not a point upon which much stress can be placed. The occurrence at irregular intervals of the deaths of very wealthy persons tends to give undue importance to the colony affected; for in a population numerically small the average may possibly be affected by one such death. The returns for New Zealand are not available :—

Colony.	Per centage of persons dying who left property to total deaths.	Average Value of deceased Estates.
New South Wales	11·56	£ 2,864
Victoria	14·28	2,601
Queensland	7·77	1,634
South Australia	14·27	1,350
Western Australia.....	10·93
Tasmania	11·06	1,223
Average	12·31	2,395*

* Western Australia not included.

No attempt has been made in the foregoing pages to bring the estimates of private wealth to a date later than 1890, although it cannot be denied that very material changes have since taken place in the value of most descriptions of property. Allusion has been made in a previous chapter to the disastrous effects of the collapse of land companies and building societies, to which many thousands had entrusted their savings, and to the still more serious losses entailed by the suspension of payment on the part of many old-established banks. The experience of all the provinces shows that the selling value of property has seriously fallen, but it would be idle to alter the estimates of 1890 to the conditions of May, 1893, seeing that a few months will probably show a material improvement. The conditions of productive industry are very hopeful. The country has been favoured with an unusual succession of good seasons, and the prices of Australasian produce, though tending to lower rates than formerly, have not fallen so much as the prices of the goods for which they are exchanged. It is not likely, or even desirable, that the values of certain investments, notably land, will reach their former speculative values, at least, for many years, but there is ample evidence that, with the expansion of population, there will still be ample scope for the remunerative employment of capital.

Present financial depression.

Prospects of the future.