

THE THINGS THAT ARE CÆSAR'S.

Professor W. G. Sumner has an article in the last number of the *North American Review* entitled "State Interference," that curiously illustrates the inability of many learned men to draw natural, and, even obvious, conclusions, from the facts that they have laboriously gathered. In this instance Professor Sumner opens with a brief sketch of the growth of the tyranny of an all-powerful and intermeddling state in the Roman empire, which gives a really graphic picture of the worse than ordinary slavery inflicted on a people through the operation of any form of state socialism. This is followed by a sketch of the attempt in the middle ages to solve the labor problem for the skilled trades by guilds sometimes possessed of civil power and sometimes protected and sanctioned by the sovereign. The result in Rome was first to crush out all individualism, then all liberty, and finally the political life of the people. The guild system finally became a restraint on the necessary growth of the artisan class and a fetter on individual enterprise and industry.

Thus, looking back over history, Professor Sumner says—

“that the interest of the individual and the social interest have been at war with each other, while, again, the interests of the individual in and through the society of which he is a member are inseparable from those of the society. Such are the two aspects of the relation of the unit and the whole which go to make the life of the race. The individual has an interest to develop all the personal elements there are in him. He wants to live himself out. He does not want to be planed down to a type or pattern. It is the interest of society that all the original powers it contains shall be brought out to their full value. But the social movement is coercive and uniformitarian. Organization and discipline are essential to effective common action, and they crush out individual enterprise and personal vanity. There is only one kind of co-operation which escapes this evil, and that is co-operation which is voluntary and automatic under common impulses and natural laws.”

Pessimistic, indeed, must be the political philosophy of a man who can thus clearly describe this apparently hopeless conflict between two beneficent powers and not seek the cause of the inevitable misunderstanding that lies at the root of every such quarrel. Such a conflict is as unnecessary as it is unnatural. **Give back to society that which naturally belongs to it — that is, the land that it inherits and the values created by social growth and improvement — and the conflict is at an end.** Then men will cease to monopolize that which they cannot use, and pay into the common treasury the value of any advantage that the land they do possess and use shall have over that which is practically free to all. Then the

interests of society as a whole will be amply guarded, and the interest that the individual has through such society will be assured to him without any attempt at an impossible division.

The individual, on the other hand, will be free to apply himself to natural resources for the satisfaction of his own needs and the needs of those who serve his other wants, and the ever-increasing desires of civilized man will be the sufficient stimulus to a more effective and cheerful industry than could be expected from the subjects of Roman imperialism, or its modern successor, state socialism. On the other hand, the regulation attempted by the old time guild and the modern trade union would cease to be desired where all men were free to employ themselves and unrestricted freedom of exchange made general over-production impossible. The individual could then live out his life, free from the maddening fear of want, but sure that whatever be produced that was useful or pleasing to his fellows would find a ready market. On the other hand, this freedom from the slavery of poverty would pave the way for that "co-operation which is voluntary and automatic, under common impulses and natural laws," which Professor Sumner truly says is the only desirable co-operation. **The senseless war between society and the individuals composing it is a war concerning property, and its continuance is due to the failure to recognize, mark and permanently establish the boundary line between the property of all and the property of each. Yet the "image and superscription" that marks the distinction between the two species of property is as clear as that by which Christ marked the difference between things that were Cæsar's and things that were God's.**

In other matters Professor Sumner sees clearly enough that we have imported European blunders. "When the United States," he says, "put upon their necks the yoke of a navigation and colonial system which they had just revolted against, they showed how little possible it is, after all, for men to see above the current notions of their time, even when geographical and economic circumstances favor their emancipation." "We have," he continues, "been borrowing old world fashions and traditions all through our history, instead of standing firmly by the political and social philosophy of which we are the standard bearers." We have indeed; and the most absurd and inconsistent of all our imitative acts was to blindly copy and apply to a vast continent the system of land tenure imposed by a robber baron on a small island, a system which had been made even worse by a parliament of landlords who selfishly exempted ownership in the soil from all obligation of service to the state. If Professor Sumner were, under favoring geographical and economic circumstances, to rise above the current notions of his time, he would see this truth, and instead of recommending a stupid and irrational resistance to the manifest tendency toward unwise and galling state interference, he would lend his assistance in so guiding this blind tendency that it would spend

its force in giving to society that which naturally belongs to it, in restoring to the state those powers that properly belong to it as society's instrument and agent, and in strictly limiting the state to the exercise of those necessary powers without curtailing individual liberty and growth.