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EDITORIAL

THE STIMULUS OF SOCIETY.

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WITHOUT meaning to, Prof. Wm. H. Burnam, of Clark University, makes a valuable contribution to Socialist science by his article in the current *Science* on "The Stimulus of Society."

"Wherever men are together the individual is influenced by others without being aware of it," is the keynote of the Professor's article. What is known as "mob psychology," the tendency of an excited throng to act beyond the bonds which would constrain any of its members taken individually, is not what he has in mind. It is a far loftier theme—the increase in quality and quantity of work, which markedly follows upon the co-operative effort of large numbers of persons with a common aim.

Laboratory experiments are presented with the thrilling lucidity which marks all true science, wherein, merely due to the presence of another person in the room, "at once the work done was decidedly increased in comparison with that of other days, without the subject's making any voluntary effort to accomplish more." Laboratory methods carried into the school room revealed that children were identically affected, so that, to quote the Professor's summing up, "real class work is not a mere case of individuals working together and their performance the summation of the work of many individuals; but there is a sort of class spirit, so that in the full sense of the word one can speak of a group performance, which may be compared with an individual performance. The pupils are members of a community of workers. The individual working by himself is a different person."

Nor is this increase both in the amount and character of work performed in concert to be explained solely in terms of "ambition, rivalry, and the like." "This social stimulus," declares Prof. Burnam—and he fortifies his position with copious laboratory citations proving the same thing holds true with the lower animals as well—"goes much further back and is rooted in the reflexes of the sympathetic

nervous system that are correlated with emotion.”

What is all this but a restatement, upon a physical basis, of what Marx long ago postulated on the basis of economics: “Just as the offensive power of a squadron of cavalry, or the defensive power of a regiment of infantry, is essentially different from the sum of the offensive or defensive powers of the of the individual cavalry or infantry soldiers taken separately, so the sum total of the mechanical forces exerted by isolated workmen differs from the social force that is developed when many hands take part simultaneously in one and the same undivided operation. . . . Not only have we here an increase in the productive power of the individual, by means of co-operation, but the creation of a new power, the collective power of the masses”; and which Marx himself brilliantly summed up in the meaty sentence: “When the laborer co-operates collectively with others, he strips off the fetters of his individualism, and develops the capabilities of his species.”

This expansion of labor’s productivity, due to co-operation, which, in turn, is due to the advanced machine which demands co-operative attention, the idle class on our backs claims for itself, as the fruit of its “directing genius.” How false the claim is, Marx showed. Prof. Burnam’s paper backs up Marx with the light of an added half century’s scientific and physical investigation.

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