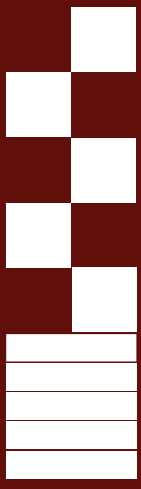
# Early Media Effects Theory & the Suggestion Doctrine

*Selected Readings, 1895–1935*

edited by
Patrick Parsons



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**edited by Patrick Parsons**



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CHAPTER SEVEN

# "A Sociological Definition of Suggestion" (1921), "Definition of Imitation" (1921), & "Attention, Interest, and Imitation" (1921)

## W. V. Bechterew, Charles Judd, & George Stout

*In* Introduction to Science of Sociology*, edited by Robert Park and Ernest Burgess. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, pp. 391–94, 408–20 [with elisions].*

### EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION

In 1921, Robert Park and Ernest Burgess published an anthology of over one thousand pages that aggregated scholarly articles from across the young field of sociology. With more than two hundred fifty individual entries, the *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* represented an exhaustive survey of topics from "Human Nature" to "Progress." It was to become a landmark work in the discipline. To graduate students (and faculty) in universities across the country, it was known as "the green bible."

Nested in that volume, between "Social Contacts" and "Social Forces," was a section on "Social Interaction" that included more than a half dozen entries on suggestion and imitation. Even more articles examined "social contagion," "the crowd," and "types of mass movements" in the section on "Collective Behavior." Foundational theorists from Darwin to Le Bon were included in the volume along with younger scholars who offered the latest in summary and evaluation of the relevant theories and topics.

Two samples from the anthology are presented here. They illustrate, first, the established place the theories had acquired in the scholarship of the period, not just in social psychology but in sociology as well. They also provide a descriptive snapshot of the then-current definitions, processes, and implications at issue. Finally, they show the ways in which imitation and suggestion had begun to conceptually separate themselves in the literature and start to mix with other theoretical camps.

Vladimir Bechterew (1857–1927) was a Russian psychologist and neurologist with academic and medical degrees from the Medical and Surgery Academy of St. Petersburg (1881), where he later taught and conducted research. He founded the Psychoneurological Institute at the Academy and made significant contributions in the field of neurology. Bechterew was an exponent of "objective psychology," or "reflexology," a forerunner of behaviorism. In 1905, he wrote a short book on *The Importance of Suggestion in Social Life*, which he drew from for his contribution to the Park and Burgess collection.

In the following entry, he offers first "A Sociological Definition of Suggestion" and then a description of "Social Suggestion and Mass or 'Corporate' Action." (In the original they are listed as separate entries in the anthology, combined here for convenience.) It is interesting, in part, as an example of a blending of the doctrine of suggestion with concepts and language drawn from Freudian psychology. Suggestion is divided into conditions of active versus passive perception, the distinction being the involvement of the ego. External impressions that enter the mind without the participation of the ego—as when we are distracted—"make their way into the sphere of personal consciousness" passively and without awareness of their origin. They sneak "so to speak—up the back steps" of consciousness and "directly into the inner rooms of the soul."

In reviewing social suggestion in the context of mass action, Bechterew considers the interaction between the powerful leader and "the multitudes," considered as crowds and publics. Offering historical examples of the use of

suggestive influence to marshal groups large and small to frequently problematic action (e.g., war), he declares it "the art of manipulating the masses." In the end, it is a potential social problem that "should be the object of the most attentive study for the historians and the sociologists."

Bechterew does not discuss imitation. That is reserved for separate treatments by Judd and by Stout. Charles Judd (1873–1946) spent his career in educational psychology. With a BA from the University of Connecticut (1894), he studied under Wilhelm Wundt at the University of Leipzig, earning his PhD in 1896. From 1909 to 1938 he was director of the Department of Education at the University of Chicago. George Stout (1869–1944) was a prominent English psychologist and philosopher. On the faculty at Oxford, he advanced a complex theory of psychology that he labeled "analytic psychology" (not to be confused with Carl Jung's analytical psychology).

Unlike Bechterew, who does not explicitly mention Le Bon or Tarde in his article, Judd draws directly from the earlier major statements of Tarde, Royce, and Baldwin. His short chapter highlights the role of imitation in providing long-term continuity, and therefore stability, to social practice, as well as introducing a source of social conflict when varying social practices and fashions collide.

Stout similarly notes the role of generational imitation in the maintenance of cultural practices and traditions. His focus, however, is more psychological, and he discusses the influence of personal interest and attention in the processes of imitation, especially as they affect learning.—*P.P.*

## "A Sociological Definition of Suggestion" (1921)

*Vladimir Bechterew*

The nature of suggestion manifestly consists not in any external peculiarities whatever. It is based upon the peculiar kind of relation of the person making the suggestion to the "ego" of the subject during the reception and realization of the suggestion.

Suggestion, is, in general, one of many means of influence of man on man that is exercised with or without intention on persons, who respond either consciously or unconsciously.

For a closer acquaintance with what we call "suggestion," it may be observed that our perceptive activities are divided into (*a*) active, and (*b*) passive.

*a*) *Active perception.*—In the first case the "ego" of the subject necessarily takes a part, and according to the trend of our thinking or to the environmental circumstances directs the attention to these or those external impressions. These, since they enter the mind through the participation of attention and will and through reflection and judgment, are assimilated and permanently incorporated in the personal consciousness or in our "ego." This type of perception leads to an enrichment of our personal consciousness and lies at the bottom of our points of view and convictions. The organization of more or less definite convictions is the product of the process of reflection instituted by active perception. These convictions, before they become the possession of our personal consciousness, may conceal themselves awhile in the so-called subconsciousness. They are capable of being aroused at any moment at the desire of the "ego" whenever certain experienced representations are reproduced.

*b*) *Passive perception.*—In contrast to active perception we perceive much from the environment in a passive manner without that participation of the "ego." This occurs when our attention is diverted in any particular direction or concentrated on a certain thought, and when its continuity for one or another reason is broken up, which, for instance, occurs in cases of so-called distraction. In these cases the object of the perception does not enter into the personal consciousness, but it makes its way into other spheres of our mind, which we call the general consciousness. The general consciousness is to a certain degree independent of the personal consciousness. For this reason everything that enters into the general consciousness cannot be introduced at will into the personal consciousness. Nevertheless products of the general consciousness make their way into the sphere of the personal consciousness, without awareness by it of their original derivation.

In passive perception, without any participation of attention, a whole series of varied impressions flow in upon us and press in past our "ego" directly to the general consciousness. These impressions are the sources of those influences from the outer world so unintelligible even to ourselves, which determine our emotional attitudes and those obscure motives and impulses which often possess us in certain situations.

The general consciousness, in this way, plays a permanent role in the spiritual life of the individual. Now and then an impression passively received in the train of an accidental chain of ideas makes its way into the sphere of the personal consciousness as a mental image, whose novelty astounds us. In specific cases this image or illusion takes the form of a peculiar voice, a

vision, or even a hallucination, whose origin undoubtedly lies in the general consciousness. When the personal consciousness is in abeyance, as in sleep or in profound hypnosis, the activity of the general consciousness comes into the foreground. The activity of the general consciousness is limited neither by our ways of viewing things nor by the conditions under which the personal consciousness operates. On this account, in a dream and in profound hypnosis acts appear feasible and possible which with our full personal consciousness we would not dare to contemplate.

This division of our mind into a personal and a general consciousness affords a basis for a clear understanding of the principles of suggestion. The personal consciousness, the so-called "ego," aided by the will and attention, largely controls the reception of external impressions, influences the trend of our ideas, and determines the execution of our voluntary behavior. Every impression that the personal consciousness transmits to the mind is usually subject to a definite criticism and remodeling which results in the development of our points of view and of our convictions.

This mode of influence from the outer world upon our mind is that of "logical conviction." As the final result of that inner reconstruction of impressions appears always the conviction: "This is true, that useful, inevitable, etc." We can say this inwardly when any reconstruction of the impressions has been affected in us through the activity of the personal consciousness. Many impressions get into our mind without our remarking them. In case of distraction, when our voluntary attention is in abeyance, the impression from without evades our personal consciousness and enters the mind without coming into contact with the "ego." Not through the front door, but—so to speak—up the back steps, it gets, in this case, directly into the inner rooms of the soul.

Suggestion may now be defined as the direct infection of one person by another of certain mental states. In other words, suggestion is the penetration or inoculation of a strange idea into the consciousness, without direct immediate participation of the "ego" of the subject. Moreover, the personal consciousness in general appears quite incapable of rejecting the suggestion, even when the "ego" detects its irrationality. Since the suggestion enters the mind without the active aid of the "ego," it remains outside the borders of the personal consciousness. All further effects of the suggestion, therefore, take place without the control of the "ego."

By the term suggestion we do not usually understand the effect upon the mind of the totality of external stimuli, but the influence of person

upon person which takes place through passive perception and is therefore independent of the activity of the personal consciousness. Suggestion is, moreover, to be distinguished from the other type of influences operating through mental processes of attention and the participation of the personal consciousness, which result in logical convictions and the development of definite points of view.

Lowenfeld emphasized a distinction between the actual process of "suggesting" and its result, which one simply calls "suggestion." It is self-evident that these are two different processes, which should not be mistaken for each other. A more adequate definition might be accepted, which embraces at once the characteristic manner of the "suggesting," and the result of its activity.

Therefore for suggestion it is not alone the process itself that is characteristic, or the kind of psychic influence, but also the result of this reaction. For that reason I do not understand under "suggesting" alone a definite sort and manner of influence upon man but at the same time the eventual result of it; and under "suggestion" not only a definite psychical result but to a certain degree also the manner in which this result was obtained.

An essential element of the concept of suggestion is, first of all, a pronounced directness of action. Whether a suggestion takes place through words or through attitudes, impressions, or acts, whether it is a case of a verbal or of a concrete suggestion, makes no difference here so long as its effect is never obtained through logical conviction. On the other hand, the suggestion is always immediately directed to the mind by evading the personal consciousness, or at least without previous recasting by the "ego" of the subject. This process represents a real infection of ideas, feelings, emotions, or other psychophysical states.

In the same manner there arise somewhat similar mental states known as auto-suggestion. These do not require an external influence for their appearance but originate immediately in the mind itself. Such is the case, for instance, when any sort of an image forces itself into the consciousness as something complete, whether it is in the form of an idea that suddenly emerges and dominates consciousness, or a vision, a premonition, or the like.

In all these cases psychic influences which have arisen without external stimulus have directly inoculated the mind, thereby evading the criticism of the "ego" or of personal consciousness.

"Suggesting" signifies, therefore, to inoculate the mind of a person more or less directly with ideas, feelings, emotions, and other psychical states, in order that no opportunity is left for criticism and consideration. Under

"suggestion," on the other hand, is to be understood that sort of direct inoculation of the mind of an individual with ideas, feelings, emotions, and other psychophysical states which evade his "ego," his personal self-consciousness, and his critical attitude.

Now and then, especially in the French writers, one will find besides "suggestion" the term "psychic contagion," under which, however, nothing further than involuntary imitation is to be understood (compare A. Vigouroux and P. Juquelier, *La contagion mentale*, Paris, 1905). If one takes up the conception of suggestion in a wider sense, and considers by it the possibility of involuntary suggestion in the way of example and imitation, one will find that the conceptions of suggestion and of psychic contagion depend upon each other most intimately, and to a great extent are not definitely to be distinguished from each other. In any case, it is to be maintained that a strict boundary between psychic contagion and suggestion does not always exist, a fact which Vigouroux and Juquelier in their paper have rightly emphasized. […]

### *3. Social Suggestion and Mass or "Corporate" Action*

In most cases the crowd naturally is under leaders, who, with an instinctive consciousness of the importance and strength of the crowd, seek to direct it much more through the power of suggestion than by sound conviction.

It is conceivable, therefore, that anyone who understands how to arrest the attention of the crowd, may always influence it to do great deeds, as history, indeed, sufficiently witnesses. One may recall from the history of Russia Minin, who with a slogan saved his native land from the gravest danger. His "Pawn your wife and child, and free your fatherland" necessarily acted as a powerful suggestion on the already intense crowd. […]

Of analogous importance are the factors of suggestions in wars, where the armies go to brilliant victories. Discipline and the sense of duty unite the troops into a single mighty giant's body. To develop its full strength, however, this body needs some inspiration through a suggested idea, which finds an active echo in the hearts of the soldiers. Maintenance of the warlike spirit in decisive moments is one of the most important problems for the ingenious general.

Even when the last ray of hope for victory seems to have disappeared, the call of an honored war chief, like a suggestive spark, may fire the hosts to self-sacrifice and heroism. A trumpet signal, a cry "hurrah," the melody of the national hymn, can here at the decisive moment have incalculable

effects. There is no need to recall the rôle of the "Marsellaise" in the days of the French Revolution. The agencies of suggestion in such cases make possible, provided that they are only able to remove the feeling of hopelessness, results which a moment before are neither to be anticipated nor expected. Where will and the sense of duty alone seem powerless, the mechanisms of suggestion may develop surprising effects.

Excited masses are, it is well known, capable of the most inhuman behavior, and indeed for the very reason that, instead of sound logic, automatism and impulsiveness have entered in as direct results of suggestion. The modern barbarities of the Americans in the shape of lynch law for criminals or those who are only under a suspicion of a crime redound to the shame of the land of freedom, but find their full explanation in that impulsiveness of the crowd which knows no mercy.

The multitude can, therefore, ever be led according to the content of the ideas suggested to it, as well to sublime and noble deeds as, on the other hand, to expressions of the lower and barbaric instincts. That is the art of manipulating the masses.

It is a mistake to regard popular assemblies who have adopted a certain uniform idea simply as a sum of single elements, as is now and then attempted. For one is dealing in such cases, not with accidental, but with actual psychical, processes of fusion, which reciprocal suggestion is to a high degree effective in establishing and maintaining. The aggressiveness of the single elements of the mass arrives in this at their high point at one and the same time, and with complete spiritual unanimity the mass can now act as *one man;* it moves, then, like one enormous social body, which unites in itself the thoughts and feelings of all by the very fact that there is a temper of mind common to all. Easily, however, as the crowd is to excite to the highest degrees of activity, as quickly—indeed, much more quickly—does it allow itself, as we have already seen, to be dispersed by a panic. Here too the panic rests entirely on suggestion, contra-suggestion, and the instinct of imitation, not on logic and conviction. Automatism, not intelligence, is the moving factor therein.

Other, but quite generally favorable, conditions for suggestions are universally at hand in the human society, whose individual members in contrast to the crowd are physically separated from each other but stand in a spiritual alliance to each other. Here obviously those preliminary conditions for the dissemination of psychical infections are lacking as they exist in the crowd, and the instruments of the voice, of mimicry, of gestures, which often fire

the passions with lightning rapidity, are not allowed to assert themselves. There exists much rather a certain spiritual cohesion on the ground perhaps of common impressions (theatrical representations), a similar direction of thoughts (articles in periodicals, etc.). These conditions are quite sufficient to prepare the foundation on which similar feelings propagate themselves from individual to individual by the method of suggestion and auto-suggestion, and similar decisions for many are matured.

Things occur here more slowly, more peacefully, without those passionate outbreaks to which the crowd is subjected; but this slow infection establishes itself all the more surely in the feelings, while the infection of the crowd often only continues for a time until the latter is broken up.

Moreover, such contagious examples in the public do not usually lead to such unexpected movements as they easily induce in the crowd. But here, too, the infection frequently acts in defiance of a man's sound intelligence; complete points of view are accepted upon trust and faith, without further discussion, and frequently immature resolutions are formed. On the boards representing the stage of the world there are ever moving idols, who after the first storm of admiration which they call out, sink back into oblivion. The fame of the people's leaders maintains itself in quite the same way by means of psychical infection through the similar national interest of a unified group. It has often happened that their brightness was extinguished with the first opposition which the masses saw setting its face against their wishes and ideals. What we, however, see in close popular masses recurs to a certain degree in every social milieu, in every larger society.

Between the single elements of such social spheres there occur uninterrupted psychical infections and contra-infections. Ever according to the nature of the material of the infection that has been received, the individual feels himself attracted to the sublime and the noble, or to the lower and bestial. Is, then, the intercourse between teacher and pupil, between friends, between lovers, uninfluenced by reciprocal suggestion? Suicide pacts and other mutual acts present a certain participation of interacting suggestion. Yet more. Hardly a single deed whatever occurs that stands out over the everyday, hardly a crime is committed, without the concurrence of third persons, direct or indirect, not unseldom bearing a likeness to the effects of suggestion.

We must here admit that Tarde was right when he said that it is less difficult to find crimes of the crowd than to discover crimes which were not such and which would indicate no sort of promotion or participation of the

environment. That is true to such a degree that one may ask whether there are any individual crimes at all, as the question is also conceivable whether there are any works of genius which do not have a collective character.

Many believe that crimes are always pondered. A closer insight into the behavior of criminals testifies, however, in many cases that even when there is a long period of indecision, a single encouraging word from the environment, an example with a suggestive effect, is quite sufficient to scatter all considerations and to bring the criminal intention to the deed. In organized societies, too, a mere nod from the chief may often lead with magic power to a crime.

The ideas, efforts, and behavior of the individual may by no means be looked on as something sharply distinct, individually peculiar, since from the form and manner of these ideas, efforts, and behavior, there shines forth ever, more or less, the influence of the milieu.

In close connection with this fact there stands also the so-called astringent effect of the milieu upon the individuals who are incapable of rising out of their environment, of stepping out of it. In society that bacillus for which one has found the name "suggestion" appears certainly as a leveling element, and, accordingly, whether the individual stands higher or lower than his environment, whether he becomes worse or better under its influence, he always loses or gains something from the contact with others. This is the basis of the great importance of suggestion as a factor in imposing a social uniformity upon individuals.

The power of suggestion and contra-suggestion, however, extends yet further. It enhances sentiments and aims and enkindles the activity of the masses to an unusual degree.

Many historical personages who knew how to embody in themselves the emotions and the desires of the masses—we may think of Jeanne d'Arc, Mahomet, Peter the Great, Napoleon I—were surrounded with a nimbus by the more or less blind belief of the people in their genius; this frequently acted with suggestive power upon the surrounding company which it carried away with a magic force to its leaders, and supported and aided the mission historically vested in the latter by means of their spiritual superiority. A nod from a beloved leader of any army is sufficient to enkindle anew the courage of the regiment and to lead them irresistibly into sure death.

Many, it is well known, are still inclined to deny the individual personality any influence upon the course of historic events. The individual is to them only an expression of the views of the mass, an embodiment of the epoch,

something, therefore, that cannot actively strike at the course of history; he is much rather himself heaved up out of the mass by historic events, which, unaffected by the individual, proceed in the courses they have themselves chosen.

We forget in such a theory the influences of the suggestive factors which, independently of endowments and of energy, appear as a mighty lever in the hands of the fortunately situated nature and of those created to be the rulers of the masses. That the individual reflects his environment and his time, that the events of world-history only take their course upon an appropriately prepared basis and under appropriately favorable circumstances, no one will deny. There rests, however, in the masters of speech and writing, in the demagogues and the favorites of the people, in the great generals and statesmen, an inner power which welds together the masses for battle for an ideal, sweeps them away to heroism, and fires them to do deeds which leave enduring impressions in the history of humanity.

I believe, therefore, that suggestion as an active agent should be the object of the most attentive study for the historians and the sociologists. Where this factor is not reckoned with, a whole series of historical and social phenomena is threatened with the danger of incomplete, insufficient, and perhaps even incorrect elucidation.

## "Definition of Imitation" (1921)

*Charles Judd*

The term "imitation" is used in ordinary language to designate any repetition of any act or thought which has been noted by an observer. Thus one imitates the facial expression of another, or his mode of speech. The term has been brought into prominence in scientific discussions through the work of Gabriel Tarde, who in his *Les lois de l'imitation* points out that imitation is a fundamental fact underlying all social development. The customs of society are imitated from generation to generation. The fashions of the day are imitated by large groups of people without any consciousness of the social solidarity which is derived from this common mode of behavior. There is developed through these various forms of imitation a body of experiences which is common to all of the members of a given social group. In complex society the various imitations which tend to set themselves up are frequently

found to be in conflict; thus the tendency toward elaborate fashions in dress is constantly limited by the counter-tendency toward simpler fashions. The conflict of tendencies leads to individual variations from the example offered at any given time, and, as a result, there are new examples to be followed. Complex social examples are thus products of conflict.

This general doctrine of Tarde has been elaborated by a number of recent writers. Royce calls attention to the fundamental importance of imitation as a means of social inheritance. The same doctrine is taken up by Baldwin in his *Mental Development in the Child and Race*, and in *Social and Ethical Interpretations*. With these later writers, imitation takes on a significance which is somewhat technical and broader than the significance which it has either with Tarde or in the ordinary use of the term. Baldwin uses the term to cover that case in which an individual repeats an act because he has himself gone through the act. In such a case one imitates himself and sets up what Baldwin terms a circular reaction. The principle of imitation is thus introduced into individual psychology as well as into general social psychology, and the relation between the individual's acts and his own imagery is brought under the same general principle as the individual's responses to his social environment. The term "imitation" in this broader sense is closely related to the processes of sympathy.

The term "social heredity" has very frequently been used in connection with all of the processes here under discussion. Society tends to perpetuate itself in the new individual in a fashion analogous to that in which the physical characteristics of the earlier generation tend to perpetuate themselves in the physical characteristics of the new generation. Since modes of behavior, such as acts of courtesy, cannot be transmitted through physical structure, they would tend to lapse if they were not maintained through imitation from generation to generation. Thus imitation gives uniformity to social practices and consequently is to be treated as a form of supplementary inheritance extending beyond physical inheritance and making effective the established forms of social practice.

# "Attention, Interest, and Imitation" (1921)

*George Stout*

Imitation is a process of very great importance for the development of mental life in both men and animals. In its more complex forms it presupposes trains of ideas; but in its essential features it is present and operative at the perceptual level. It is largely through imitation that the results of the experience of one generation are transmitted to the next, so as to form the basis for further development. Where trains of ideas play a relatively unimportant part, as in the case of animals, imitation may be said to be the sole form of social tradition. In the case of human beings, the thought of past generations is embodied in language, institutions, machinery, and the like. This distinctively human tradition presupposes trains of ideas in past generations, which so mold the environment of a new generation that in apprehending and adapting itself to this environment it must re-think the old trains of thought. Tradition of this kind is not found in animal life, because the animal mind does not proceed by way of trains of ideas. None the less, the more intelligent animals depend largely on tradition. This tradition consists essentially in imitation by the young of the actions of their parents, or of other members of the community in which they are born. The same directly imitative process, though it is very far from forming the whole of social tradition in human beings, forms a very important part of it.

*a*) *The imitative impulse.*—We must distinguish between ability to imitate and impulse to imitate. We may be already fully able to perform an action, and the sight of it as performed by another may merely prompt us to reproduce it. But the sight of an act performed by another may also have an educational influence; it may not only stimulate us to do what we are already able to do without its aid; it may also enable us to do what we could not do without having an example to follow. When the cough of one man sets another coughing, it is evident that imitation here consists only in the impulse to follow suit. The second man does not learn how to cough from the example of the first. He is simply prompted to do on this particular occasion what he is otherwise quite capable of doing. But if I am learning billiards and someone shows me by his own example how to make a particular stroke, the case is different. It is not his example which in the first instance prompts me to the action. He merely shows the way to do what I already desire to do.

We have then first to discuss the nature of the imitative impulse—the impulse to perform an action which arises from the perception of it as performed by another.

This impulse is an affair of attentive consciousness. The perception of an action prompts us to reproduce it when and so far as it excites interest or is at least intimately connected with what does excite interest. Further, the interest must be of such a nature that it is more fully gratified by partially or wholly repeating the interesting action. Thus imitation is a special development of attention. Attention is always striving after a more vivid, more definite, and more complete apprehension of its object. Imitation is a way in which this endeavor may gratify itself when the interest in the object is of a certain kind. It is obvious that we do not try to imitate all manner of actions, without distinction, merely because they take place under our eyes. What is familiar and commonplace or what for any other reason is unexciting or insipid fails to stir us to re-enact it. It is otherwise with what is strikingly novel or in any way impressive, so that our attention dwells on it with relish or fascination. It is, of course, not true that whatever act fixes attention prompts to imitation. This is only the case where imitation helps attention, where it is, in fact, a special development of attention. This is so when interest is directly concentrated on the activity itself for its own sake rather than for the sake of its possible consequences and the like ulterior motives. But it is not necessary that the act in itself should be interesting; in a most important class of cases the interest centers, not directly in the external act imitated, but in something else with which this act is so intimately connected as virtually to form a part of it. Thus there is a tendency to imitate not only interesting acts but also the acts of interesting persons. Men are apt to imitate the gestures and modes of speech of those who excite their admiration or affection or some other personal interest. Children imitate their parents or their leaders in the playground. Even the mannerisms and tricks of a great man are often unconsciously copied by those who regard him as a hero. In such instances the primary interest is in the whole personality of the model; but this is more vividly and distinctly brought before consciousness by reproducing his external peculiarities. Our result, then, is that interest in an action prompts to imitation in proportion to its intensity, provided the interest is of a kind which will be gratified or sustained by imitative activity.

*b*) *Learning by imitation.*—Let us now turn to the other side of the question. Let us consider the case in which the power of performing an action

is acquired in and by the process of imitation itself. Here there is a general rule which is obvious when once it is pointed out. It is part of the still more general rule that "to him that hath shall be given." Our power of imitating the activity of another is strictly proportioned to our pre-existing power of performing the same general kind of action independently. For instance, one devoid of musical faculty has practically no power of imitating the violin playing of Joachim. Imitation may develop and improve a power which already exists, but it cannot create it. Consider the child beginning for the first time to write in a copybook. He learns by imitation; but it is only because he has already some rudimentary ability to make such simple figures as pothooks that the imitative process can get a start. At the outset, his pothooks are very unlike the model set before him. Gradually he improves; increased power of independent production gives step by step increased power of imitation, until he approaches too closely the limits of his capacity in this direction to make any further progress of an appreciable kind.

But this is an incomplete account of the matter. The power of learning by imitation is part of the general power of learning by experience; it involves mental plasticity. An animal which starts life with congenital tendencies and aptitudes of a fixed and stereotyped kind, so that they admit of but little modification in the course of individual development, has correspondingly little power of learning by imitation.

At higher levels of mental development the imitative impulse is far less conspicuous because impulsive activity in general is checked and overruled by activity organized in a unified system. Civilized men imitate not so much because of immediate interest in the action imitated as with a view to the attainment of desirable results.