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Should Workers Think?

BY "PROGRESS"

SEVERAL Clarion references having from time to time been made to the subject of university-grade working class education, the above title suggests itself. What the answer shall be depends mainly on how the respondent gets a living; for, in our Capitalist society, or in any master and subject class society in which it does not pay the tyrants and exploiters to have the underlings any wiser than the former adjudge to be healthful for their continued dominance, thought is a crime to be discouraged or rigorously suppressed. "Yond' Cassins has a lean and hungry look;" says Julius Caesar in the play, "He thinks too much: such men are dangerous."

Now, it is Logic which may be roughly defined as the science and art of reasoning; and the operations of reasoning are the highest developments of consciousness of which latter function, Psychology is the science. It is significant of our decaying and corrupt society that in these days lawyers, business men, clergymen and professional lecturers and teachers are specializing [illegible] with the higher development [illegible] and the methods of treating the latter are all based on teaching just enough about the subject to enable one to work someone or other by monkeying with their internal machinery of consciousness. Even in our schools it would seem that instruction in truly practical reasoning is carefully avoided. Certainly the scholars are encouraged to debate with one another—too often on very silly subjects—but none having any logical knowledge, such debates amount to little more than glorified rag-chewing matches. As Jevons says, school children are exercised in algebra, geometry (or trigonometry) problems they will never employ in after life; and yet through total ignorance of logic—one of the simplest of the exact sciences—they know nothing of those elementary principles and forms of reasoning which enter into the thoughts of every hour.

However, logic cannot save one from foolishness, for it is a tool, a weapon or exercise to be employed by those willing and courageous enough to use it efficiently and even then—"to err is human!" Practically all those professors whom Marx and Engels ridiculed, were acquainted with logic; and as Burns says about naturally dull-witted students, they enter colleges like stirks and come out asses; and that philosophers after mauling much Greek and Latin in some "logic jargon" fight, are at last compelled to turn to common-sense and appeal to that which ordinary women and weavers see and feel. The truth is that there is hardly more necessity to teach us how to think than there is to teach how to see or digest food. Hence, in England, the study of logic at one time fell into a contempt and disuse from which it was only revived around 1827 by Archbishop Whately's book on the subject. Indeed, according to Prof. Minto, the true founder of logic—Aristotle, who died in exile accused of unpatriotism and atheism—had no serious intentions in perfecting it, his only purpose being to write rules for the practice of a kind of game of argument that had been in high fashion in Greece for more than a century and was much indulged in by Socrates, before those rules were devised. The professor says that to this day the modern Athenians still take a singular delight in peaceful duelling with wits, with a calmness impossible to any other nation.

In later times the frivolous origin of logic was fully exhibited and maintained by the monkish schoolmen who had not only ample opportunity and leisure to erect those beautiful edifices so much admired by Wm. Morris but also amused themselves therein by disputations on such trivial subjects as: can a prostitue again become a virgin through the divine omnipotence; and, does the mouse that eats the consecrated host, eat the body of the Lord?

Logic is useful for two main purposes: the first, by deduction (meaning leading down) being to ensure consistency and agreement in our statements: the second purpose, as induction (leading in) is a means of getting and proving scientific truths. Down the ages the rule for thinkers developed as follows: in Aristotle's time it was, bring your thoughts into harmony with one another: in the middle ages, be extremely careful, if you don't want your tongue cut out and yourself afterwards burned at the stake, to bring your thoughts into harmony with religious authority and dogma: in modern times the demand is to bring your thinking into agreement with facts—so long as you don't tread on Capitalist corns. What Aristotle prided himself on, as his chief invention in the argument game, was what is called the Syllogism. This is a form into which all sound reasoning must be capable of being shown, and it is necessary (this is not written for, but by leave of, experts!) to put those workers "wise" to it, who don't know the nature of the beast.

As Locke points out, our knowledge is gained through three factors: first, by experience; then, by some or all of our five senses acting on what we experience; thirdly, by the mind putting together and summing up what the other two factors have provided it with. These steps involve simple apprehension; then by joining together the facts we get a judgment about them; lastly, by comparing two judgments (or "propositions") together to see if they agree or do not agree with one another, and stating the result in a third proposition or judgment called the conclusion, we complete the act known as reasoning.

Let us take an example. In youthful days, we experience certain small copper coins, and also a certain smaller coin of white metal. We then get to apprehend that each one of these copper coins is called a cent; and that each one of the white metal coins is called a dime. Next we join these ideas ("terms" or ends) together and get this: ten copper cents is the amount of one dime. Next having painfully gathered together, one after another, ten whole copper coins, we then pronounce them to be really, truly and actually the full ten cents in number. We therefore argue that these—our ten copper coins—is the amount of one dime. That is the end of one argument; and as it will be used to build up another, it is called a "pro (for)—syllogism". We next apprehend that a dime is the entrance price to a movie matinee show. We join this judgment to another judgment that the copper coins we possess is the full amount of one dime. We then reach the end of our second argument (which, as it is built upon the first, is called an "epi-syllogism") that—we are at perfect liberty to enjoy the movie matinee!

Now this kind of deductive argument—the syllogism—may be exhibited by letters of the alphabet, and the logic that deals with it is called Formal Logic, because the conclusions follow from the mere form that the ideas appear in. For example, lump the idea together and call "ten copper cents" Y; do the same with the idea "the amount of one dime" and call it X; next call the idea "these our ten copper coins" Z; and you may finally show the first argument above by the following form, the joining word "is" being called the "copula"

Y is X
Z is Y
therefore
Z is X

The soundness of the argument being based on the geometrical truth that if two things are each equal to the same third thing, then the two are equal to each other. In the above Z is equal to Y, and X is also equal to Y, and so Z and X are equal to each other; just as a carpenter might take a piece of pine plank to a fixed measure and find it was 4 feet long, and then carry a bit of spruce plank to the same measure and find the spruce also was 4 feet long. He would then know that the pine and the spruce planks are equal in length to each other.

Once you can be persuaded to admit that the first two statements of a syllogism are true, then you are also bound to admit that the third statement is true; because the third must follow from the other two. Each of the first two statements is called a "premiss" (or premise) and the third is called the conclusion. Now suppose we make the letter Y stand for "all birds," the X for "fly" and the Z for elephants and imagine that by some slick psychology business trick I can get you to admit that an elephant is a bird. Then you would have to admit that Z is X, that is, that all elephants fly; All elephants are birds; therefore, all elephants fly. Silly, you say? Sure! But the above is a purposely exaggerated example. Yet, in forms much more difficulty to detect, it is a common trick played hundreds of times upon the workers by labor fakirs, capitalists, and their K.C.'s and politicians, and by Preternatural Bible stupifiers, etc., etc.; so get wise to it! It might be mentioned that Aritotle's system of syllogism may be in all legitimately tortured into nineteen different forms—go to it!

Now though J. S. Mill to start with had a high opinion of the formal syllogism, in his later master work on logic, he relegates it to a very inferior position indeed, because he did not consider it a scientific instrument. However, as all spoken and literary thought and argument is based upon the syllogism, it would be foolish to underrate its value, because it brings out many a startling truth undreamed of by readers or hearer. For instance, in the days of the belief in the Divine Right of Kings, the simple proposition sounds harmless that all human beings are animals; and it might even be allowable to say that King John, Henry or George, as the case might be, is a human being. But Lord help you if you made the public grasp the valid conclusion flowing from your premises that King John, Henry or George is an animal, for that would have shot the Divine Right idea all to pieces.

Here's another case. Robert Burns, while he was wallowing in the luxury of a seventy pound sterling a year job in the excise, wrote a song in

(Continued on page 8)