

Constructive Thinking

MARY GRACE FRENCH

The student of today is not allowed to think for himself. Instead he is told what to think and criticised if he does not do so. As a result he goes through grade school, high school, and even college without using his mind to its fullest capacity. Classes are usually too large for much individual attention, and time is often considered too important a factor. To take advantage of every minute, the teacher does not let each person express his views but deals out facts that the student must accept.

In a social science course, for example, he is told that our government is based on the theory of social contract. The teacher may define the term and then move on to something else instead of asking questions which will arouse the student's curiosity and induce him to go back and see just how long ago the theory was accepted, and why the American people were so convinced of its practical use.

In literature it is often the same. A student is given the assignment of reading a certain book. He skims through it, getting the characters and plot well in mind, but does not connect the experiences of the characters with anything that is happening today. He does not try to analyse their thoughts and actions and relate them to universal problems.

Science, above all other subjects, should develop the student's reasoning power. To understand fully the complexities of the human mechanism, for instance, it is necessary to start with the lowest form of animal life and work up to man, noting carefully the changes which take place and why they do take place. I must admit that this is attempted,

but not enough time is taken in doing it so that the student can thoroughly understand it. The laboratory should be a place where the student can study first hand specimens which illustrate the application of nature's laws. If a question comes to his mind concerning the formation in a certain organism he should note by actual observation its development and structure. Instead, the instructor usually quotes from a book stating why it is formed and the student accepts the fact whether he really understands it or not.

This state of things has been creeping up on the American for many years. In our desire to know a little of everything we have not let our minds concentrate on one problem and think it out completely. From the time we started in grade school we have had our thought dictated to us and our studies planned for us. The average person's thoughts are those of generations before him.

Can anything be done about this situation? Certainly, if the school and student will cooperate. There should be fewer people enrolled in each class so that the teacher can give each student the help he may need in constructing his own ideas. More time should be spent acquainting the student with the basic principles of everyday living and application of those principles. Last, but most important, the student must be made to believe that he is capable of thinking and reasoning for himself, and that he can contribute to his own understanding of the subject by using these powers. The essential need of the student of today is to think for himself.