

EASY LESSONS ON REASONING

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Easy Lessons on Reasoning by Richard Whately

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RICHARD WHATELY

**EASY LESSONS
ON REASONING**

EASY LESSONS

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REASONING.

BY

RICHARD WHATELY, D.D.,
ARCHBISHOP OF DUBLIN.

THIRD AMERICAN

FROM

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PREFACE.

THE subject treated of in the following pages is one which has not usually been introduced into the course of elementary studies for young persons of all classes.

It is supposed by some that the difference between a better and a worse reasoner depends either wholly on *natural ability*, or on that combined with *practice*, or on each man's greater or less proficiency in the *subjects* he is treating of.

And others again consider a systematic study of the principles of Reasoning as suitable only to a few persons, of rare endowments, and of a peculiar turn of mind; and to those, only in an advanced stage of their education.

That this branch of study is requisite for all, and is attainable by all, and presents not, necessarily, any greater difficulties than the rudiments of Arithmetic, Geometry, and Grammar,—all this cannot be so well evinced in any other way as by *experiment*. If the perusal of these Lessons, or of the half of them, fail to satisfy on this point any tolerably attentive reader, it is not likely he would be convinced by any distinct argument to the same effect that could be offered.

The work has very little claim to novelty, except as to the simplicity and familiarity of its form. But without making any *discovery*, strictly so called, of any thing previously altogether unknown, it is possible — since 'discovery' is a *relative* word — to be, practically a discoverer, by bringing within the reach of thousands some important branch of knowledge of which they would otherwise have remained destitute all their lives.

And in regard to the present subject, a familiar introduction to the study is precisely what has hitherto been wanting. The existing treatises upon it may be compared to ships, well freighted, but which can only unladen at a few wharves, carefully constructed, in

advantageous situations. The want is, of small boats drawing very little water, which can carry ashore small parcels of the cargo on every part of the coast, and run up into every little creek.

Should the attempt to supply this deficiency prove as successful as there is reason, from the trial that has been already made in the (*Saturday Magazine*,) to hope, an addition by no means unimportant will have been made to the ordinary course of elementary education.

To frame, indeed, a system of rules that should equalize persons of all varieties of capacity, would be a project no less chimerical in this than in any other department of learning. But it would certainly be a great point gained, if all persons were taught to exercise the reasoning faculty as well as the natural capacity of each would permit; for there is good reason to suspect that, in this point, men fail quite as often from want of attention, and of systematic cultivation of their powers, as from natural deficiency. And it is at least worth trying the experiment whether *all* may not be, in some degree, trained in the right exercise of a faculty which all, in some degree, possess, and which all *must*, more or less, exercise, whether they exercise it well or ill.

It was at one time contemplated to subjoin an *Index* of the technical terms, with brief definitions of them, and references to the Lessons and Sections. But, on second thoughts, it has been judged best to omit this, and to recommend each student to draw up such an index for himself. It is for *students*, strictly so called, — that is, persons employed in acquiring an elementary knowledge of the subject — that the work is chiefly designed: and for these, no exercise could be devised more calculated to facilitate their study than that of carefully compiling an Index, and also expanding the Table of Contents, so as to give a brief summary of the matter of each Lesson. And this being the case, it would not be any real saving of labor to the learner to place before him such an Index and Table of Contents already drawn up.

It may be worth while to suggest to the Teacher to put before his pupils, *previously* to their reading each Lesson, some *questions* pertaining to the matter of it; requiring of them answers, oral or written, the best they can think of *without* consulting the book. Next, let them read the Lesson, having other questions, such as

may lead to any needful explanations, put before them as they proceed. And afterwards let them be examined, (introducing numerous *examples* framed by themselves, and by the teacher,) as to the portion they have learned, in order to judge how far they remember it.

Of these three kinds of questions, — which may be called, i. *Preliminary* questions; ii. questions of *instruction*; and iii. questions of *examination*, — the last alone are, by a considerable portion of Instructors, commonly employed. And the elementary books commonly known as ‘catechisms,’ or ‘books in question and answer,’ consist in reality of questions of this description.

But the second kind, — what is properly to be called *instructive* questioning, — is employed by all who deserve to be reckoned good teachers.

The third kind, — the *preliminary* questioning — is employed, (systematically and constantly) but by few. And at first sight it might be supposed by those who have not had experience of it, that it would be likely to increase the learner’s difficulties. But if any well-qualified Instructor will but carefully and judiciously try the experiment, (in teaching any kind of science,) he will be surprised to find to how great a degree this exercise of the student’s mind on the subject will contribute to his advancement. He will find that what has been taught in the mode above suggested will have been learnt in a shorter time, will have been far the more thoroughly understood, and will be fixed incomparably the better in the memory.

INTRODUCTION

TO THE AMERICAN EDITION.

THE author of this little work has not, so far as we know, avowed himself. From internal evidence, one would infer very decidedly that the work was prepared by Dr. Whately. It is marked on every page by that same strong good sense and solid learning which have rendered his works on Logic and Rhetoric so eminently valuable as text-books for students.

Many persons of high reputation for their attainments in those branches of learning to which they may have been devoted, have failed disgracefully, in the attempt to furnish a suitable text-book for the young student. Hence it is, that, although most departments of science and literature have been cultivated with constantly increasing success, still the number of really good text-books is exceedingly small.

The vanity of authorship has contributed much to this result. The writers of text-books for colleges and schools, have been too often tormented with the sorry ambition of saying something original, or something fine. They have been prone to forget that originality, as such, is not to be sought for in a work for learners. They have been impatient of the careful thought, and literary self-denial, requisite to enable a man to say just what is necessary, and no more. Often, too, mistaking prolixity for clearness, they have burdened and perplexed the minds of the unlearned, with a multitude of vague terms, suggesting many ideas partially, but without giving distinct and sharply-defined views of any.

The highest merits of a text-book are brevity, strict method in the arrangement, clearness and pertinency in the statement and illustration of what are the admitted principles of the subject treated upon. It is bare justice to say, that the elementary treatises of Dr. Whately are free from most of the defects, and comprise

most of the excellences above named. Whether he is the author of this work or not, it shows all the peculiar skill in arrangement, power of definite statement, and graphic illustration, which so strongly characterize his avowed works. To say the least, the freest use has been made of Whately's thoughts and language.

The work contains the main principles of the Logic of Whately, somewhat divested of their technical form, but not of their scientific accuracy. There are also a few pages showing the application of Logic to the purpose of conviction, which would more strictly come under the head of Rhetoric. Although the author evidently intended the work for the younger classes of learners, it contains the distinct outlines of a system of Logic, and whoever thoroughly masters this little work, and becomes able to apply its principles to the analysis of arguments, will be no contemptible logician. It is thought that this book will be admirably adapted to the wants of the advanced classes in our High Schools and Academies, as well as to the wants of those who wish for some acquaintance with the theory of reasoning, and have not the time or the resolution to go through any larger treatise on the subject. As a text-book for students in college, it is, doubtless, a more thorough work than that of Hedge, which holds its place in the list of text-books in some of our colleges.

However well adapted this work may be to the young and uninstructed, as a digest of the science and art of reasoning, it may become still more valuable to them, as a discipline for the mind. It cannot have escaped the notice of attentive observers, that the vast number of 'simplified' books, which have been prepared for the young, proposing to conduct them to learning by a royal road, have had an injurious influence. The practice of imparting knowledge in infinitesimal doses, diluted by leading questions and useless explanations, till it becomes tasteless, is very well, if the only object desired is to relieve the student from the labor of thinking. Though this object be attained, the process will have the effect to weaken the power of attention, to destroy the robustness and vigor of the mind, and to pall that eager curiosity which nature intended to sustain us under the protracted effort necessary to accomplish a difficult task. It cannot but have a salutary influence upon a young or undisciplined mind, to be