

**A SELECTION OF
ENGLISH
SYNONYMS**

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A Selection of English Synonyms by E. J. Whately & Richard Whately

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E. J. WHATELY & RICHARD WHATELY

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By E. Home Mitchell.

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Edited by Richard D. Woodcock.

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EDITOR'S PREFACE.

THIS little work has been carefully revised by me, throughout ; and though I am far from presuming to call it perfect, it is, I am confident, very much the best that has appeared on the subject.

Of the importance of that subject itself, very different opinions will probably be found to exist. Some advantage, indeed, all will acknowledge, in the cultivation of correctness and precision in our expressions. But the importance of this, and of all that relates to language, will be much less highly estimated by those who have adopted the metaphysical theory of *ideas*, and who consider the use of language to be merely the *conveying* our meaning to *others*, than by those who adhere to the opposite—the *nominalist*—view, (which I have set forth in the Introduction to the *Logic*, § 8,) and who accordingly regard words—or some kind of *signs* equivalent to words—as an indispensable instrument of thought, in all cases, where a process of *reasoning* takes place.

RICHARD DUBLIN.

PREFACE, BY THE AUTHOR.

IN offering a collection of synonyms to the public, a few words of explanation may be necessary.

It is scarcely needful to remind the reader that the word 'synonym' is, in fact, a misnomer, as applied to words of the description in question. Literally, it implies an exact coincidence of meaning in two or more words: in which case there would be no room for discussion; but it is generally applied to words which would be more correctly termed *pseudo-synonyms*—i. e., words having a shade of difference, yet with a sufficient resemblance of meaning to make them liable to be confounded together. And it is in the number and variety of these that (as the Abbé Girard well remarks) the richness of a language consists. To have two or more words with exactly the same sense, is no proof of copiousness, but simply an inconvenience. A house would not be called well furnished from its having a much larger number of chairs and tables of one kind than were needed,

but from its having a separate article for each distinct use. The more power we have of discriminating the nicer shades of meaning, the greater facility we possess of giving force and precision to our expressions. Our own language possesses great advantages in this respect; for being partly derived from the Teutonic, and partly from the Latin, we have a large number of duplicates from the two sources; which are, for the most part, though not universally, slightly varied in their meaning.

These slight variations of meaning add to the copiousness of the English language, by affording words of more and less familiarity, and of greater and less force. This may be easily understood, if we consider that the branch of the Teutonic, spoken in England during the Anglo-Saxon period, never became extinct, but that three-fourths of the English language at present consist of words altered or derived from that ancient dialect; that these words usually express the most familiar ideas, such as *man, house, land, &c.*; and that the French terms gradually introduced, being those of a more highly civilized people, were adapted to express the more refined ideas. This is true even of physical objects; thus, for instance, most of the names of the animals used for food are still Teutonic, such as *ox, sheep, swine, &c.*

The Anglo-Saxons, like the modern Germans, had no objection to say *ox-flesh*, *sheep-flesh*, *swine's-flesh*,—but the Norman conquerors introducing a more refined cookery, introduced with it French words for the flesh of the animal; hence we have *beef*, *mutton*, *pork*.*

We have entirely lost such compounds as *ox-flesh*, *sheep-flesh*, but we still retain *swine's-flesh*, with a peculiar modification of meaning, when we speak of it as one of the meats prohibited † by the Mosaic Law, in which case it is plain that it presents to the mind a gross idea, which *pork* does not.

In the case of such duplicates as have no assignable difference, it may happen, from the mere fact of the greater or less familiarity which one word presents to the mind, that although it be in most cases indifferent which we use, yet in some instances custom, founded on the facts above mentioned, makes a difference in their employment. (See the articles 'Liberty, Freedom,' 'Righteous, Just,' &c.)

It has not been the design of this work to notice *all* the synonyms in our language; which would, indeed, be an almost endless task; but merely (after excluding technical terms, and words which

* See the amusing remarks on this subject in the second chapter of Scott's *Ivanhoe*.

† Isai. lxx. 4; lxxvi. 17. 2 Mac. vi. 18.

do exactly coincide) to select a few of those groups of words which are in most frequent use, and are most liable to be confounded.

Many persons imagine that two words must either coincide precisely in their meaning, so as to be, in the primary and strict sense of the word, 'synonymous,' or else stand for two (more or less) distinct *things*. Indeed, it would often be regarded as almost a truism to assert this; but those who maintain such an opinion overlook the fact, that two words, without exactly coinciding in sense, may nevertheless relate to one and the same thing, regarded in *two different points of view*. An illustration of this is afforded in the relation which exists between the words 'inference' and 'proof.' Whoever justly infers, proves; and whoever proves infers: but the word 'inference' leads the mind from the premises which have been assumed, to the conclusion which follows from them: while the word 'proof' follows a reverse process, and leads the mind from the conclusion to the premises. We say, 'What do you infer *from* this?' and 'how do you *prove* that?*' Another illustration may be quoted in the synonyms 'expense' and 'cost'—

* See Whately's *Logic*, book IV. chap. iii. § 1, in which the above is illustrated by the difference between the road from London to York, and the road from York to London.