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Lesson No. 19, How to Convince

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EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

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NORTH AMERICAN INSTITUTE
CHICAGO

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EFFECTIVE PUBLIC SPEAKING

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HOW TO CONVINCE

In the Lesson on How to Make Ideas Clear, there were discussed those principles and methods which would be generally applicable to all kinds of statements but perhaps particularly to what is called "description" and "narration" and "exposition." The term, "exposition," may perhaps be more clear if we were to use the term, "explanation." Description is such setting forth in words of the characteristics of an object that the mental eye may see it. Exposition is really the description of an idea, principle, theory, or institution. Exposition or explanation has to do with things and ideas apart from their material aspects.

In this present study, there is to be taken up the question of the processes of convincing. It is a process of clearness, also; that of showing a proposition clearly, to be one of truth or one of falsity. The

general principles developed in the preceding pamphlet are applicable here; but at the same time, there are certain laws and principles governing our present topic which must be clearly grasped. The work before one is that of securing the acceptance by an individual or a group of individuals of some practical idea which we believe, and which perhaps they do not believe. Life is full of just such situations. Civilization, institutions and governments rise and fall as people reject or accept that which is fundamentally true. So all the time there are various ideas put before the people for their acceptance or rejection.

The question is, how shall an individual know when to accept and when to reject such an idea that is placed before him by his friends, or the press, or the pulpit, or the political leader; and secondly, how shall he proceed to lead others to accept certain beliefs which he himself has.

One must needs start out with a definite statement in the affirmative form of the point at issue: The protective tariff is a

wise policy for this country to follow, or the initiative and referendum should be made a part of our legislative system. The minimum wage law is demanded by the industrial situation. These statements of the principle, or the method of action, are what are called propositions. In all attempts to convince another of an idea, this idea must be clearly stated in what is known as the affirmative proposition.

Immediately after a statement of an affirmative proposition, some sort of question immediately springs up such as "why" or "how" and one must immediately satisfy these questions if the hearer is to accept and believe the proposition. The process whereby you satisfy the question is a process of establishing or proving a series of minor propositions. Until recently, a great many people were demanding that United States senators should be elected by popular vote. To win the approval of enough people to secure the change in our method of electing United States senators, it was necessary first to show why the senators should be elected

by the popular vote rather than by the legislative method; and second, to show that the popular method would not produce greater evils than the old method. Why elect senators by popular vote? It was said, first, to cure corruption; second, to secure greater honesty in the senators; third, to make the senator more responsive to the will of the people. These last three reasons, given for a new mode of election, are really propositions which have to be established thoroughly before there will be an acceptance of the main proposition, "That United States Senators Should Be Elected By Popular Vote." So, at the start, one must recognize that the process of convincing is one of establishing or proving the main proposition, by establishing or proving a series of minor propositions included within the main proposition.

It is exceedingly necessary that more men and women should train themselves thoroughly to the mastery of these principles which are called the principles of argumentation. Correct process of argu-

mentation leads to the power or to the ability to think logically; and logical thinking leads to reliable and trustworthy conclusions. Indeed where there are so many and different beliefs and contentions placed before the people, such as is the case at the present time, it must be evident that the ability to think reliably is not as widespread as it might be. There is a great conflict between many of the ideas presented for the consideration of the people; and therefore all the more need that the individual should train himself in logical thinking that he may be able to come to safe and sane conclusions himself and not be compelled to be led by others. Safety, in one's personal life, in his social relations, and in his political, and other relations, is dependent not upon opinion but upon solid conclusion. Action upon mere opinion frequently does and is very likely to lead to disaster. It is not action based upon opinion that is desired but action based upon sane reasoning. Opinions are formed in a great majority of instances without subjecting thinking to the test of

logical reasoning; and for that reason there is just as great a chance that the opinion is unreliable as that it is reliable; that it is unsafe as that it is safe. It will be agreed that one cannot, or frequently cannot, come to absolute certainty concerning propositions which he must face; but, on the other hand, it must surely be realized that greater certainty is possible when one acts upon logical reasoning than upon mere opinion.

The first step, therefore, in logical reasoning and in convincing others, is the forming of an affirmative proposition with a recognition of the sub-propositions which establish the main proposition. Having this main proposition, the next step is the definition of terms. One cannot be too careful in consulting all the sources at his command,—dictionaries, special books, expert authorities—in deciding just what the term may mean.

After one has carefully defined his terms, he is ready to ask next, just what the point at issue is, or to use the term in argumentation, he is ready to join the

issue; to decide that exact point upon which others disagree. For instance, those who are today supporting the initiative and referendum maintain that the established methods of legislation are faulty, that through those methods, the people cannot secure the legislation they desire, and, therefore, a new mode of legislation which will enable them to obtain the wished for legislation should be adopted. Now the question really at issue is the question whether under our present system, the people can secure the legislation they desire, whether the fact that at times they have not secured the legislation they wished, is due to faults in the system or due to the indifference and ignorance and even corruptness of the individual voter. If under the long-established system of legislation, desirable laws cannot be secured when the people are awake and zealous and fully participating in political affairs, then we are ready to consider changing our mode of legislation to some other that will permit the securing of needed legislation. It is not easy always

to decide just where the point at issue is and so one must give this question his most careful scrutiny before the decision upon this point is reached.

Having defined the terms and joined the issue, one is ready to ask himself what the various sub-propositions are which he must prove in order to establish the main proposition; to discover what the arguments for the main proposition are. Having made an enumeration of these, there ought to be put opposite them those contentions, or contrary views, which are held and maintained by those who disagree with the point to be maintained in the main proposition.

Some of the arguments against the proposition will be those denying the sub-propositions, sustaining the main contention; others will be definite propositions attacking the affirmative directly. The following illustrations will clearly point the method:

ANNEXATION WOULD BE THE BEST SOLUTION OF THE CUBAN QUESTION.

A. It would aid Cuba, for
   1. It would give Cuba a stable government.
   2. It would give Cuba our educational system.
   3. It would insure Cuba against internal warfare.
   4. It would give Cuba free trade with the United States.
   5. It would induce the investment of capital in Cuba.
   6. It would induce desirable immigration into Cuba.
   7. It would hold out the aim of ultimate statehood to Cuba.
   8. It would mean a social uplift to Cuba.

B. It would pay the United States, for
   1. It would greatly increase our trade with Cuba.
   2. It would stimulate our fundamental economic industries.

3. It would save the sugar consumers of the United States at least $108,000,000 annually.

C. No other plan has such an inclusive and satisfactory group of advantages, for

1. A protectorate would do little more than give Cuba a stable government through the constant presence of force.
2. Reciprocity and trade agreements could insure, at most, only Cuba's present trade, not the quintupled trade of a highly developed Cuba.

In testing any main or sub-proposition, or the argument upon which it rests, the test is applied at one or all of three points: testing the facts, testing the authority, or expert evidence, and testing the process of argument. It is readily seen that a conclusion based upon facts falls when it is proven that the facts are untrue. Conclusions based upon expert evidence, that is authority, fall if it is shown that the authority is giving hearsay evidence, or if

for any reason he is unfit to give evidence, or if it be shown, that, while the authority is capable of giving expert evidence, he is not informed of the present case, or that he is prejudiced. The fact, however, that an authority gives his evidence reluctantly, that he would rather give some other kind of evidence than that which he is compelled to give, is considered strong evidence. These tests will do much in establishing the reliability of evidence by authority or conclusions which we are asked to accept because men or women are quoted as authority. When one is examining his own conclusions as built upon facts which he supposes he knows, the same test may be applied. If one is basing his conclusions upon hearsay evidence, the truth or falsity of which he does not know, or if he is not capable or expert enough to understand the facts of a given situation, or if he is prejudiced, surely his conclusions are likely to be false.

Passing to the third mode of sustaining or supporting the proposition, it will be found that there are several processes of

reasoning whereby we reach conclusions. It must be remembered that in all of these processes, we are dealing with facts and that aside from the process of reasoning, if the facts at any time prove to be incorrect or untrue, then the conclusion fails, regardless of the correctness of the reasoning. Argumentative or reasoning processes to which attention is called are these: first, inductive reasoning; second, deductive reasoning; third, reasoning from cause to effect; fourth, from effect to cause; fifth, argument from analogy.

Inductive reasoning is often known as a process of generalization. The mode is one of examining a group of individuals within a given class; knowing what a few individuals of the class are like, we make assertions, or statements, or come to conclusions, concerning the whole class.

Suppose you ask yourself how we arrive at the fact that all men are mortal. How is one justified in saying that idleness is a cause of poverty? How does the child discover the truth that fire burns? Upon what facts does the assertion, "that the

best is the cheapest" rest? How do we come to the conclusion that such a brand of goods is high grade, that another is poor, that this make of automobile is dependable, and another cheap and inefficient? The sun has set in the west every day that we know of, so we say the sun will always set in the west. Every man in the past has died so we say that lot is in store for every man. The child suffers from the burn of the fire and he soon learns to be careful to avoid coming in contact with all fire. A man has been swindled in business dealings with men who have had hair of a certain color, and also of a certain peculiar curl. He now thinks that all men whose hair has this color and this particular curl are not to be trusted. Was he justified in coming to this conclusion?

The conclusions which have been given are those reached through a process of experience with a given number of individual units of a class; and what is learned of these units we conclude are characteristic of the whole class.

These illustrations show that the process involves making a conclusion concerning the whole class after examining a number of the members of the class; or asserting a principle or truth after examining a number of the particulars under that truth. There are four tests that need to be made before accepting any conclusion based upon generalization, or, in other words, based upon the inductive process. The first test:—have enough members of the class been examined to justify one in saying that what is true of the members examined is true of all of the members yet unexamined? If, for instance, a class has 500 units and an examination of only 50 out of the 500 has been made, one would wish to question whether he was justified in saying that what is true of the 50 is true of the 500. Second, in examining the members, it would have to be asked whether they are fair examples of the entire class,—that is, whether they are typical examples. If they are, the conclusion concerning all members is likely to be reliable. Third, it will have to be asked, whether

there are likely to be any exceptions in the class, or to the rule. It will at once be seen that if the conclusion about the whole class meets these three tests, one would be justified in accepting the conclusions. If one has examined a fairly large number of the class and those members are fair examples or fairly typical, if it is likely that there are practically no or few exceptions to be found, then the conclusion follows fairly justifiably.

Argument known as deductive argument reasons in the opposite manner from induction. Deduction reasons from the class to the members of the class, from the whole to the individual. Reduced to the simplest form, it appears in what is known as the syllogism. The typical form of the syllogism follows:

Major premise: All men are mortal.
Minor premise: Socrates is a man.
Therefore, Socrates is mortal.

Careful scrutiny of this syllogism will show that the major premise is an assertion which is an inductive conclusion. Second, that the minor premise is a unit

which falls entirely within the class, "all men," mentioned in major premise. If it is true that mortality is a characteristic of all men, and if it is true that Socrates is a man, it must follow inevitably that Socrates is mortal.

Two tests are to be applied to this type of argument. First, to see that the inductive conclusion which forms the major premise is beyond a doubt true. Second, to see that the unit in the minor premise is absolutely and entirely within the class mentioned in the major premise.

There are a number of other forms of the syllogism which time will not permit us to take up. Any first-class textbook on argumentation will show illustrations of the other forms.

Third, there may be considered the argument from cause to effect, and from effect to cause. It is probable that the second of the two we meet oftenest, so it will be taken up first. The desire is to determine the cause of an effect which is now under consideration. In proving our conclusion as to what is the cause of a given effect,

we find three tests possible: First, could any other cause, other than the one that has been decided upon, have produced the effect? Second, is the cause decided upon sufficient to have produced the effect? Third, granting that the cause decided upon is sufficient to produce the effect of itself, were there any other forces to prevent the operation of the assumed cause? In attempting to determine what the effect of a given cause may be, there are two tests: First, is the cause before us adequate to produce the effect in question? Second, granting that the cause is adequate, is there any other cause present sufficient in strength to prevent the assumed cause, or a known cause, from producing the effect?

Fourth and lastly, there is the argument from analogy. In this argument, a conclusion is drawn upon this basis: here is "A" which has certain characteristics and acts in a certain manner; here is "B" which seems to have the same characteristics as "A." We therefore assume that what is true of "A" will also be true of

in the thoughts and minds of people, is one that must be taken into account. As one attempts to develop an argument, he must see that he has divested himself of all prejudice before he can expect a tolerant hearing from those who are unprejudiced. On the other hand, when the reasoner has to meet prejudice, he has a real problem to solve. One cannot hope to secure the acceptance of his conclusions when his hearers are bound by prejudices. An effort must be made first to clear the way of those prejudices. If possible, common ground must be found upon which both the speaker and hearer may stand; and having found this common ground, skill and judgment must gradually lead from that to the prejudiced ground. If a speaker can show that his prejudiced audience already believes the same principle he is striving for in other matters and other relations, he will have done much to destroy prejudice and to prepare the way for acceptance of the mooted question.

In conclusion, brief attention must be given to fallacious arguments: arguments

that seem true, but are not. A fallacy is "an apparently genuine but really illogical argument." It is "any unsound mode of arguing which appears to demand our conviction, and to be decisive of the question at hand, when in fairness it is not."

Many fallacies spring from a lack of thorough-going definition. The use of undefined words having more than one meaning, the use of words or terms in their different meanings without discriminating among them, the use of terms or words as identical when they look alike, such as the words "democrat" or "democratic," the use of undefined words in a sense which does not belong to them, all represent types of fallacious reasoning.

Thorough care in definition will seldom fail in avoiding such fallacies.

Because of the lack of proper attention, or trained discrimination in observation, many fallacies appear in reasoning. The facts are unreliable because the observation is untrustworthy. The remedy is obvious.

One type of fallacies most common is

that called "begging the question." It is possible that more errors are made at this point than at any other. One cannot scrutinize his reasoning too carefully for this error.

One "begs the question" when he assumes as true anything which the nature of the argument makes it necessary for him to prove. It will be seen again, that this is largely a matter of testing facts. An argument was being made in favor of foot-ball, when the speaker said: "Shall we abolish this noble sport?" Examination shows at once that there is a "question-begging" word in the interrogation. The answer the speaker expects to his question, or that he implies, is, "no." If the game of foot-ball is noble, then assuredly it would be unwise to abolish it. But the question whether it is noble or not is just the question at issue: the speaker is under obligation to prove that this game is noble.

Analyze most carefully to see that at no point you state or assume as true that which you must prove.

EXERCISES.

These exercises are provided as a means of testing the student's knowledge of the subject and for training through actual practice. Exercises are not to be sent to the School.

1. At least once a week test the reasoning processes of a newspaper editorial. Take particular note of the number of times the writer "begs the question," that is, assumes as true that which he is under obligation to prove.

2. Make a list of those great ideas, policies or principles you do or do not believe in; make an outline of the reasoning by which you support these beliefs (as illustrated on pages 9 and 10), then apply the tests, furnished in this lesson, to your reasoning. In this process be absolutely honest with yourself.

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—Whipple.

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