



An Investigation of the Laws of Thought: On which are founded the mathematical theories of logic and probabilities

George Boole

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By George Boole


The Laws of Thought, more precisely, An Investigation of the Laws of Thought on Which are Founded the Mathematical Theories of Logic and Probabilities, was an influential 19th century book by George Boole, the second of his two monographs on algebraic logic. It was published in 1854. Boole was Professor of Mathematics of then Queen's College, Cork in Ireland.

The following work is not a republication of a former treatise by the Author, entitled, "The Mathematical Analysis of Logic." Its earlier portion is indeed devoted to the same object, and it begins by establishing the same system of fundamental laws, but its methods are more general, and its range of applications far wider. It exhibits the results, matured by some years of study and reflection, of a principle of investigation relating to the intellectual operations, the previous exposition of which was written within a few weeks after its idea had been conceived.

That portion of this work which relates to Logic presupposes in its reader a knowledge of the most important terms of the science, as usually treated, and of its general object. On these points there is no better guide than Archbishop Whately's "Elements of Logic," or Mr. Thomson's "Outlines of the Laws of Thought." To the former of these treatises, the present revival of attention to this class of studies seems in a great measure due. Some acquaintance with the principles of Algebra is also requisite, but it is not necessary that this application should have been carried beyond the solution of simple equations. For the study of those chapters which relate to the theory of probabilities, a somewhat larger knowledge of Algebra is required, and especially of the doctrine of Elimination, and of the solution of Equations containing more than one unknown quantity.

Preliminary information upon the subject-matter will be found in the special treatises on Probabilities in "Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia," and the "Library of Useful Knowledge," the former of these by Professor De Morgan, the latter by Sir John Lubbock; and in an interesting series of Letters translated from the French of M. Quetelet. Other references will be given in the work. On a first perusal the reader may omit at his discretion, Chapters x., xiv., and xix., together with any of the applications which he may deem uninviting or irrelevant.

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