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A PLEA FOR THE QUEEN'S ENGLISH.

BY THE VERY REV. CHENEVIX TRENCH, D.D., DEAN OF WESTMINSTER.

I am going to say a few words on behalf of the "Queen's English." But I must begin by explaining what I mean by the term. It is one rather familiar and conventional, than strictly accurate. The Queen (God bless her!) is, of course, no more the proprietor of the English language than you or I. Nor does she, nor do the Lords and Commons in Parliament assembled, possess one particle of right to make or unmake a word in the language. But we use the phrase, the Queen's English, in another sense; one not without example in some similar phrases. We speak of the *Queen's highway*, not meaning that Her Majesty is *possessed* of that portion of road, but that it is a high road of the land, as distinguished from by-roads and private roads, open to all of common right, and the general property of our country. And so it is with the *Queen's English*. It is this land's great highway of thought and speech; and as the Sovereign in this realm is the person round whom all our common interests gather, the source of our civil duties and centre of our civil rights, so the *Queen's English* is not an unmeaning phrase, but one that may serve to teach us some profitable lessons with regard to our language, and its use and abuse.

I called our common English tongue the highway of thought and speech; and it may not be amiss to carry out this similitude further. The Queen's highway, now so broad and smooth, was once a mere track over an unenclosed country. It was levelled, hardened, widened, by very slow degrees. Now just so it is with our English language—our Queen's English.

There was a day when it was as rough as the primitive inhabitants. Centuries have laboured at levelling, hardening, widening it. And it is by processes of this kind in the course of centuries, that our English tongue has ever been adapted more and more to our continually increasing wants. It has never been found too rough, too unsubstantial, too limited, for the requirements of English thought. It has become for us, in our days, a level, firm, broad highway, over which all thought and all speech can travel smoothly and safely. And along this same Queen's highway ploughs ever the most busy crowd of foot-passengers—the talkers of the market, of society, of the family. Words, words, words, good and bad, loud and soft, long and short; millions in the hour, innumerable in the day, unimaginable in the year: what then in the life; what in the history of a nation; what in that of the world? And not one of these is ever forgotten. There is a book where they are all set down. What a history, it has well been said, is this earth's atmosphere, seeing that all words spoken, from Adam's first till now, are still vibrating on its sensitive and unresting medium. The language of a people is no trifle. The national mind is reflected in the national speech. If the way in which men express their thoughts is slipshod and mean, it will be very difficult for their thoughts themselves to escape being the same. If it is high-flown and bombastic, a character for national simplicity and truthfulness, we may be sure, cannot be long maintained. That nation must be (and it has ever been so in history not far from rapid decline, and from being degraded from its former glory. Every important feature in a people's language is reflected in its character and history.

In all our modern languages, some way is devised of getting rid of the "thou" in addressing persons in ordinary society. We in England have, indeed, done even more in this way than our neighbours. In France and in Germany, those intimate and dear are addressed with "thou" and "thee;" but in England we have banished these singular pronouns altogether from social life, and reserve them entirely for our addresses in prayer to Him who is the highest Personality. In common talk, the pronouns "I," "he," "she," are freely used. But when the form of the context throws these pronouns into unusual prominence, we shrink, I suppose, from making so much of ourselves or one another as the use of them in the nominative case would imply. Was there ever one of us who, when asked, "Who's there?" did not first, and most naturally, reply, "It's me." Now look at the sentence as it should stand grammatically