

PROFICIENCY IN ENGLISH

(An address delivered before the High School pupils of Tache School, Norwood by Trustee W. J. Wilson, on the occasion of presenting a medal for proficiency in English)

Haven't you at sometime been in a workshop?

Haven't you seen the mechanic there preparing to build something—say a table?

Have you noticed what he had?

Do you remember—the wood, the rule, the nails, the hammer, the saw, possibly a plane and a chisel?

These were but the raw material and the tools for making what was yet but in his thoughts, his mind's eye—his table to be. What does he do? He takes a piece of wood, carefully measures it with his rule, marks it with his pencil, cuts it with his saw, dresses it with his plane, and fits and nails it into place. Piece by piece the table grows until it is finished and that which was an unreal thing in his mind's eye becomes a reality.

Did it ever appeal to you that we are each and all mechanics? We do not all make tables, we do not all use such tools, but each day we have things in our thoughts, in our mind's eye, which we build and give to the world.

What is our workshop? Our brain.

What are our materials? Our thoughts.

What are our tools? Words.

Simple words—made up of simple letters, and only 26 of these to arrange.

The mechanic first decides on what he is going to make—then chooses his material—his lumber. We must first know what it is we are going to produce—have a definite idea. We must choose our lumber—our lumber is our thoughts on that subject. Now we must collect our tools—our rule, saw, plane and hammer. What are these? Words.

Someone has said that language is the tool of thought, rather language is a collection of tools.

It is not necessary that this table shall be very elaborate, showing turned legs

and fancy carving, a simple, substantial table will likely serve the purpose equally well and possibly better. Our speech needs not be fancy—that is, intricate sentences and unusual words—in fact you will find that the charm and force of our greatest speakers and writers lies in their simplicity, proving clear, definite thoughts. Their language is never loose, inaccurate and ungrammatical. The true mechanic loves his tools, prides himself on the care and attention given to his well-kept tools, keeps them clean, sharp and bright and true. Let us be as careful of our tools—our words. Don't let us dull our tools by such careless speech as readin', writin', and walkin.' let us remember that these words end in "ing" and pronounce them clearly with a definite "ing" at the end, or again in this land that boasts so many hours of sunlight daily, surely it is not necessary for us to jumble five or six words into one as "tehcominout 'tnite."

Have I made it clear that language—English—is a subject of first importance, not only as an item of study within the four walls of the school or during the early years of life, but something to which care can be given with profit throughout our whole life. Therefore I trust that in presenting this medal it will be an incentive not alone to the winner but to all of us to take advantage of the wonders of English literature which are so easily within our reach. In the words of that great educator, the late Prof. Goldwin Smith, each of us wastes more time on street cars, going to and from our daily work than would give us a rich acquaintance with the classics of our English language. Let us make it our aim to be intimately acquainted with our language, its meaning, its construction, its expression, that we may experience the full joy and privilege of clear thinking.