

I've Been Thinking

BY CHARLES BATTELL LOOMIS.

MY dear young mother, will you pardon me if I address a few words to you on the subject of Theodore? I have noticed for some time how vigilant has been your care for the manly little fellow. You will not let him play with Tommy Perkins in the summer because Tommy says "Gosh!" You have forbidden him to associate in the slightest degree with Eddy Conway because Eddy smokes cigarettes, and you have threatened to have his father chastise him if he has anything to do with Aleck Saunders because Aleck swears like a trooper in Flanders.

You have done all these things in order that Theodore's language may be free from the tares that might otherwise choke it; but have you been careful in all things? Have you seen to it that the records of the talking machine that you bought for his delectation are up to your own high standard of grammar and culture? I trow not.

A phonograph need not be vulgar if its early associates are of the proper kind, but I notice that many of them are vulgar. One gets the impression that they have copied the speech of coarse and uncultivated men. Phonographs have absolutely no creative ability, but they are, within certain limitations, absolute mimics and they have the knack of picking up the phrases of men whom you would never think of admitting to your drawing room.

You were horrified the other day at the notion of letting dear Theodore go to one of the most respectable of continuous shows, but the new record that came to him that afternoon had mimicked word for word a monologue that never would have been allowed upon the boards of that theater. His little friends Aloysius and Van Sutphen and Saltonstall use an English remarkable for its purity of inflection and intonation, but that phonograph record has a diction unspeakably vulgar. It is not alone the thing it says, but the nasty way it says it, that makes it a poor companion for Theodore.

Pardon me, my dear young mother, but I can't help laughing at you just a little. You take Theodore to the symphony concerts that he may cultivate his musical taste, but I never hear him whistling any movement from Beethoven's, Schubert's or Schumann's symphonies. Yet that inexpressible street song that emerged from the phonograph last week was his in a half hour, both words and music—and vulgarly. I believe that Mrs. Perkins would have spanked Tommy if he had sung it in her presence, although she does tolerate his "Gosh!"

I really can't blame the talking machine. It has no conscience; it has no pride of ancestry to keep it in the right way. It has simply a waxlike receptive capacity and absolutely no sense of selection. If it heard good songs and refined speeches it would undoubtedly repeat them, but as its associates are for the most part vulgar it is small wonder that with its remarkable imitative faculty it should pick up many words, phrases, ideas, and leit motiven that are objectionable. The fault is not with the phonograph; it lies with you, and it is to me inexpressibly droll to see you shielding Theodore from those pestilent fellows, Tommy, Eddy and Aleck, while you admit to the intimacy of your house those records that successfully imitate the tough whine, the illiterate grammatical construction and the at times disgustingly vulgar witticisms of the cheaper stage.

I am not standing up for Tommy Perkins or Eddy Conway or Aleck Saunders, but Theodore might imitate some of their good points at the same time that he learned to say "Gosh!" or to smoke corn-silk cigarettes. It is also possible to break up a tendency to swear and one may reason a boy out of the habit of acting as a chimney while incinerating corn silk.

But the tough accent once acquired is almost ineradicable, and I cannot conceive of any good coming from Theodore's association with the uncanny voice which says: "Loidies an' gen't'mun, de udder day I wouldn't have went to de t'cater on'y I chanst to meet a young dame on der street," etc.

A man is known by the cylinders he keeps.

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"Mrs. Pinkham, of the Lydia E. Pinkham Medicine Company of Lynn, Mass., together with her son, Arthur W. Pinkham, and the younger members of her family, sailed for Naples on May 20th for a three months' tour throughout Europe and a much needed vacation."

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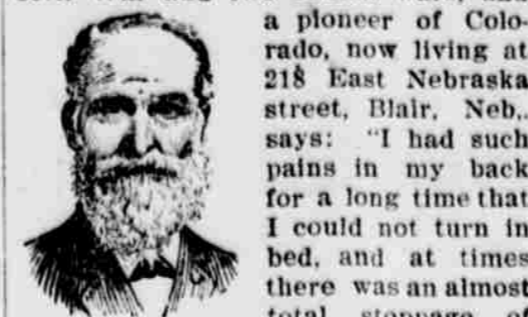
"My son Clyde was almost completely covered with eczema. Physicians treated him for nearly a year without helping him any. His head, face, and neck were covered with large scabs which he would rub until they fell off. Then blood and matter would run out and that would be worse. Friends coming to see him said that if he got well he would be disfigured for life. When it seemed as if he could possibly stand it no longer, I used some Cuticura Soap, Cuticura Ointment, and Cuticura Resolvent. That was the first night for nearly a year that he slept. In the morning there was a great change for the better. In about six weeks he was perfectly well. Our leading physician recommends Cuticura for eczema. Mrs. Algy Cockburn, Shiloh, O., June 11, 1907."

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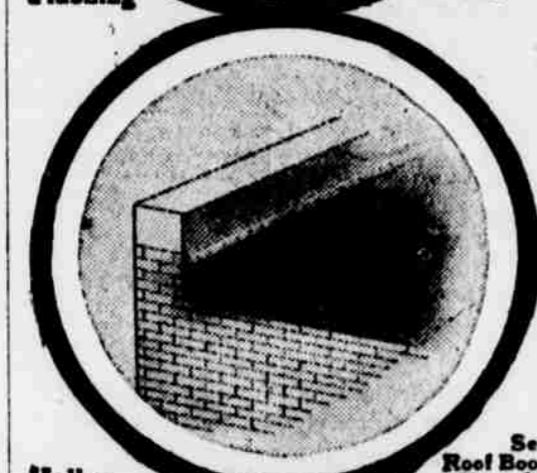
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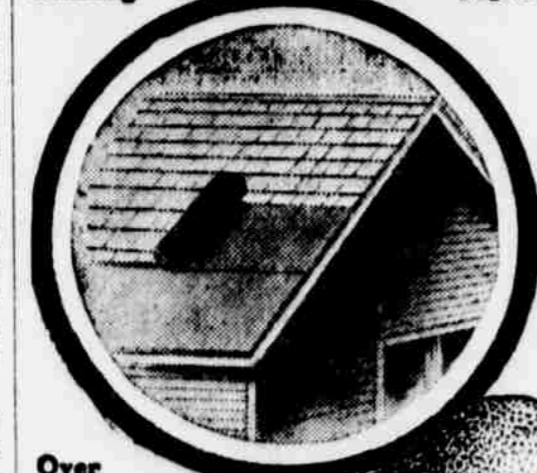
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