

you select petty thinkers as your close friends, you'll gradually develop into a petty thinker yourself.

We're a poison-conscious nation—body poison, that is.

Every restaurateur is on guard against food poisoning. Just a couple of cases of it, and his patrons won't come near his place. We've got tons of laws to protect the public against hundreds of body poisons. We put—or should put—poisons on the top shelves so the kids can't reach them. We go to any extreme to avoid body poison. And it's good that we do.

But there's another type of poison perhaps a little more insidious—thought poison—commonly called "gossip." Thought poison differs from body poison in two ways. It affects the mind, not the body, and is more subtle. The person being poisoned usually doesn't know it.

Thought poison is subtle, but it accomplishes "big" things. It reduces the size of our thinking by forcing us to concentrate on petty, unimportant things. It warps and twists our thinking about people because it is based on a distortion of facts, and it creates a guilt feeling in us that shows through when we meet the person we've gossiped about. Thought poison is 0 percent *right* thinking: it is 100 percent *wrong* thinking.

And contrary to lots of opinion, women have no exclusive franchise on gossip. Every day many men, too, live in a partially poisoned environment. Every day thousands of gossip fests staged by men take place on such topics as "the boss's marital or financial problems"; "Bill's politicking to get ahead in business"; "the probability of John being transferred"; "the reasons for special favors being awarded Tom"; and "why they brought in that new man." Gossiping goes something like this: "Say, I just