

San Francisco Examiner
September 15, 1889

As We See Ourselves

There appears to be no reason to doubt that Mr. Edison's latest and most remarkable invention, the theoscope, has a great future before it. An instrument which enables us to see another as he sees himself must accomplish great good by promoting clear understandings between man and man, and subjecting estimates of personal character to the chance of revision. As matters now stand, and have stood from time immemorial, our opinion of even a man whom we have known from infancy is formed by a series of what are known to journalism as "Star Chamber proceedings," in which the man himself is not heard with that fullness and frankness which is desirable. It is hardly fair, either, to convict or to acquit him--nay, even to honor or reward him--upon indirect testimony, introduced by him for another purpose. True justice obviously requires that A in making up his mind about B should in some way if possible avail himself of the advantage of looking into a mind already made up--a mind enriched and instructed by longer and nearer observation of the subject upon which light is sought; in short, B's mind. If Mr. Edison's astonishing invention makes this as practicable as (if practicable) it is imperative, he has indeed brought "joy to the afflicted" in a way to make the proprietor of a patent medicine grow green with envy.

That Mr. Edison should call his marvelous and delicate appliance a theoscope appears at first thought a reasonless and wanton exercise of the right of nomenclature; but on reflection the name seems singularly appropriate. "Theoscope," we venture, not to inform the reader but to remind him, is from the Greek words *theos*, a god, and *skopein*, to view. The theoscope is therefore an instrument with which to look at gods. When one man sees another as the other sees himself the image, naturally, is one of supernatural dignity and importance--one worthy of divine honors, even if 'tis not in mortals to command them. One hardly knows which to admire the more, the ingenuity which invented the theoscope or the inspiration which named it.

Most readers are more or less disposed to agree with Burns that the gift to see ourselves as others see us would from many a blunder free us and foolish notion; but few, probably, have reflected on the considerable advantage of seeing others as they see themselves. It seems certain (for example) that it would notably mitigate the acerbities of debate if each of the two disputants could behold in the other, not an obstinate, pig-headed malefactor endeavoring by unfair means to establish an idiotic proposition, but a high-hearted philanthropic, benevolent and infallible, tenderly concerned for an erring opponent's reclamation and intellectual prosperity. The general use of the theoscope in newspaper offices can hardly fail profoundly to modify and mollify discussions in range and heat. When the editor of the *Cow County Opinionator* has written down the editor of *Hog's Back Allegationist* as "a loathsome contemporary whose moral depravity is only exceeded by his social degradation, and whose skill in horse stealing has been thought worthy of record in the books of a court which his ill-gotten gold was unable to corrupt," it may occur to him to ring up his enemy and inveigle him before the other end of the instrument. The

god-like image of a blameless man and generous rival which will then confront him he may know in his soul to be a very counterfeit presentment, but the moral effect of looking at a noble work of the imagination is to soften the heart and elevate the sentiments; he will probably find something in his written censure which he would willingly let stand for the precious example of its incomparable style.

If the theoscope may be expected to work so desirable moral changes in the man at the receiving instrument, what may we not hope as to its influence on the person before the transmitter? To be seen at last as one really is (according to his own belief) must necessarily be supremely gratifying to all who have known and bewailed the opacity of the glass through which they have hitherto been seen darkly. No longer doomed to chafe under the disability that forbids expression, our whole natures must expand to something nearly as great and good as that other self which we can send over the wire by merely touching a button. When Mr. Keppler, the famous cartoonist, had the justice to offset his weekly caricatures by representing his favorite victims once as they would have represented themselves, he doubtless did something toward discrediting his own conceptions from the other end.