

old-fashioned word "beau." But even Margaret regards that as one of the unhappy vagaries of my age. "Fellow" is forbidden my house. And into limbo with it goes that gentle rising inflection which makes our beautiful and sacred word "friend" into a label for telephone calls, dance programs, and bonbons. As I say, Margaret regards me indulgently, and not me only. "John Anderson, my jo John," she thinks of as a peculiar error in capitalization. And to her, "My bonny, bonny marrow," suggests the Sunday roast.

Dean Briggs has precipitated a family crisis. The English language has failed us. But quite blandly unconcerned with all this, a young man in a gray suit is ringing my door-bell. After all, this is my house, and English is my mother tongue. I shall tell Maude that he is Margaret's latest "beau," and that they have been "going together" for a week.

AN OPINION OF OPINIONS

BY BRIAN HOOKER

ONCE upon a time, and somewhere in America, a certain young gentleman was laying down the law at considerable length upon a subject not wholly unrelated to international politics. Drawing a deep breath, he began his peroration:

"Now, in my opinion—"

At this point an older man laid down his morning paper and fixed the orator with a cold gray eye.

"Cuthbert," said he, unemotionally, "dry up! That isn't you: opinion. You haven't any opinions. You don't know what an opinion is. I'll tell you. An opinion is the result of making up your own mind after having informed yourself of certain facts. But you only read all that stuff somewhere. You don't remember where, nor who wrote it, nor whether it was his opinion or a lie, nor whether he knew what he was talking about. And you don't care. You think that understanding an idea which you see in print and putting the gist of it

into your own words is the same thing as thought. But it isn't. So you keep still and eat your breakfast."

It is further to be recorded that the young gentleman here known as Cuthbert, after some vain attempt to wither his tormentor with a pitying look, subsided and held his peace.

This episode is not related as an illustration of Christian charity. But it does suggest a common, though unfamiliar, truth. We are altogether too much in the habit of taking other people's opinions at their face value and miscalling them our own, opinions which, perhaps, were hardly even theirs, but which they themselves accepted at second hand with equal innocence. It is the more curious because we are most of us quite as skeptical as need be upon matters of fact. If we read that the Chinese have boiled an ambassador, or that a meteorite has lately fallen in Winsted, we do not at once accept these statements. We await further confirmation. But if we read some matter of opinion merely, as that, for instance, human beings can and ought to be bred like cattle, or that the League of Nations will bring about universal peace, or that prohibition is a good thing for the poor, we are likely to decide at once that we think so, too. Provided an opinion is easy to understand, and insults none of our existing prejudices, we generally accept it unproved. We have a healthy skepticism about alleged facts. But as for the truth interpreting those facts, we will swallow whole the first idea which is made plausible and plain. It is not even that our wish is father to the thought; it is making our minds an orphanage for thoughts which have no fathers. And we pride ourselves meanwhile upon our freedom from dogma and superstition.

The truth is that human nature has not greatly changed since what we are pleased to call the Age of Faith. Like our forebears, we accept the fashionable dogma and call it an escape from dogmatism. Only, the dogma must be fashionable. We will not take anybody's

word for it that miracles can happen. But we will take anybody's word for it that miracles do not happen. The point is not whether the evidence bears toward the one side or the other. We do not consider the evidence. We accept upon authority the current belief, and we do not even weigh or examine the authority. A few years ago we were all quite sure that there could be no more war; then we thought that we ourselves would never be drawn into the war; and now we think that we have won the war. Let us hope that this time, at least, we have guessed right. We do not believe in the divine right of kings, nor in the infallibility of priests, nor that a woman's place is in the home. We do believe in the divine right of democracy, and in the infallibility of science, and that a woman's place is in politics. There is much to be said for all of the above beliefs. But we do not trouble to inquire. All we demand is that a theory shall be plausible and up to date, as popular superstitions always are.

And the most pathetic detail of all is our quaint faith in the authority of mere print. Let a man tell us his opinion face to face and we shall not, perhaps, instinctively agree. If we know him, we make allowances; if not, we may even refer to our own information of the facts. But let us read that same opinion in a book or magazine, nay, even in the daily press or among the advertisements, and we shall have a strange, sweet feeling that it must be somehow true. We are so accustomed to learning all we know from the printed page that, in spite of all experience, we tend to reverence the sacred face of type. And especially when the author is unknown.

A PROTEST

[We are unaware of being touched in a vital spot by anything in the letter from Mr. Jones which we print below, and we imagine our contributors will be equally insensible of pain. If magazine contributors all look alike to Mr. Jones, as he says they do, it is

less their fault than his misfortune. For our part, we are happily able to discern some differences between them. From his allusions to Mr. Owen Wister, we suspect he has been influenced by Mr. Wister's paper on "Quack Novels and Democracy" of a few years ago, which was preceded and followed by a series of attacks on American contemporary writers, apparently for no other reason than that they were American and contemporary. There is a sort of critic whom nothing seems to infuriate so much as the contemporaneity of a contemporary. That is something that he never can forgive unless perhaps the contemporary is a foreigner. It may be that if our contributors were all dead or living very far away, Mr. Jones would be able to distinguish some merit in them. We doubt if they will consider his good opinion quite worthy of the sacrifice. As to that idiosyncrasy which, according to Mr. Jones some foreign critic accuses our writers of lacking, we cannot see the use of preaching about it. Set people on the search for singularity and they are apt to end up as cubists or futurists or something of the sort, apparently as much alike as when they started. We do not see any practical suggestion either in Mr. Jones's attack or in the body of criticism, on which we believe it was based.—EDITOR.]

TO THE EDITOR OF THE LION'S MOUTH:

MAY I ask why, after calling this department a Lion's Mouth you at once turn it into a literary cozy corner? Do not imagine that I did not allow for metaphorical exaggeration. I knew you had no intention of reviving that sinister Italian institution to serve the private passions and revenges of to-day, and I looked for no great violence on the part of contemporary writers. I did not expect that Mr. Owen Wister, for example, his face shrouded in his mantle, would deliver secret denunciations to your Lion's Mouth that should lead to the murder of Mr. Harold Bell Wright, much as Mr. Wister detests Mr. Wright's novels, or that the editor of *The New York Tribune* would, with your connivance, constrain the editor of *The New Republic* to starve in chains. Romantic as your title was, I was not romantic in my expectations, but realized fully the difference in the times, the dif-