

has is not only a dense state, but really an ugly, rather sordid, phenomenon. It is not the high quality that it was, to be content with your situation in life and to make the best of it. "Comfortable" people usually were content; and certainly they could, by an alchemy of their own, extract singular pleasure from the commonplaces of existence, and convey an equal sense of well-being to others. Their acquaintances prized them duly therefor. As the old grandfather remarks in "Milestones" to his blithe, gentle, placid wife who finds everything pleasant: "That's because you're pleasant. I've said it before. And I say it again." Such virtues have perceptibly depreciated of late years. No one desires to be the sort of creature who will always be found sitting at the fireside, or over the quiet tea-urn, when some one else needs a confidant. No one wishes to be soothing as an afternoon walk through gray November woods. No one wants the personality that blunts and smooths other people's nerves as if they had been wrapped up in cotton-wool. People should not like being wrapped in cotton-wool, it is said. The more their nerves are left in the raw the more likely they are to accomplish things. And confidences, in any case, are obsolete, weakening, time-wasting indulgences.

Behind this change of view-point is a changed ethical standard. This is a dynamic period, and it makes no distinction between going slowly and going slothfully. Shy people and contemplative casts of mind who get so much out of the inward moods are not regarded with the good-humored tolerance that practical souls formerly meted out to them. They arouse, rather, an irritated resentment, as if they were the victims of a malady they could cure if they chose. And perhaps they are, and perhaps they could cure it if they chose. When a movement is as universal as the present one for expanding the personality, for getting out of the individual shell, for struggling up to new planes and unsuspected experiences, it is safe to look on it as a mysterious sort of life-force, working to ends of its own. People who maintain that the gospel of forced energy is altogether abhorrent and tiresome have, for the time being at least, the burden of the proof on their side. They may say that forcing withers imagination and dries up the deeper movements of the mind at

their source. They may say that they never get the best out of themselves under mechanical pressure. But they must say it quietly—and wait for the tide to turn.

IT is a curious scheme which Mr. H. G. Wells unfolds, in the opening pages of "The Passionate Friends," for the better understanding of fathers by their sons. Why, he asks, should his father and grandfather have "left so much of the tale untold—to be lost and forgotten? Why must we all repeat things done, and come again very bitterly to wisdom our fathers have achieved before us? . . . Cannot we begin now to make a better use of the experiences of life so that our sons may not waste themselves so much; cannot we gather into books . . . the gist of these confused and multitudinous realities of the individual career?" And he prophesies a "new private literature" to be passed down from parent to child, in which fathers and mothers will tell their experiences "as one tells things to equals, without authority or reserves or discretions, so that, they being dead, their children may rediscover them as contemporaries and friends."

As Between
Fathers and Sons

This may seem at first glance an attractive and feasible plan, but does Mr. Wells or any one else really suppose that the son will profit by the father's experience? Even if the adventure were to repeat itself exactly, which is unlikely, can any one of us imagine that the son will not want to try its issues for himself? And does not the anxious father, after all, like him the better for his spirit? Fancy, for instance, the young man leaving the affair which engrosses him and hurrying home. "Father," he says, "my inclinations lead me to fall in love with the wrong woman. If I go on I shall find myself in a devil of a scrape—and I'm not sure that it won't be worth it. But just let me have a look at your private record and see whether you have put down anything which is likely to be of use. Or perhaps grandfather may have something to say about it." And picture the father unlocking the drawer and handing out the book.

In the matter of friendship and comradeship between father and son, it is well understood that it is the father's part to listen to the outpourings of youth, to advise a little,

to sympathize a great deal, to indulge sparingly in reminiscence and generously in anticipation. Doubtless the desire for self-expression may be as keen in the father as in the son, but it is a true instinct which leads him to indulge it more freely to his contemporaries than to his children. Not only does he fear to weary the youth, but he would dislike very much to shock him. For the traditional attitude of parent and child has roots which strike very deep; even deeper in the child's heart than in the parent's. The father does indeed like to be a person of consideration with his son, to be admired and respected by him, as well as to be a good comrade, but this feeling on his part is not a circumstance compared with the son's desire to look up to him.

No person on earth is so conservative as a child; the nursery tale must always be told in the same words. And with regard to our parents we are always children. We don't want to look at them with level eyes; we want to look up. A record of high thoughts and worthy deeds—yes, certainly we should like that, even though we might not read it very often; but to see most of them in their habit as they lived, when they were at our own time of life—their follies, their blunders, their stupidities, their vices, large and small, their narrowness and intolerance—no, thank you, we don't care for the view. True, it may be amusing to hear of trifling youthful follies, of the sort that one tells jestingly at family gatherings; that father made merry in his college days, that mother was a sad coquette; but it is only as trifles, in piquant contrast to the excellences of later life, that these things are entertaining. To be sure, if we were to come upon the private record only when we had ourselves grown old, we could regard it with some equanimity—but not in our youth! There is no other relation in life in which we so jealously demand adherence to type. Our parents may be handsome and witty, wise and good, or they may be modest and self-effacing, or plain, or a little slow-witted; if they stick to the parent type we can shut our eyes to a great deal else. If, as parents, they fail unobtrusively, it is disappointment; if they fail conspicuously, it is tragedy. And so, if the "private literature" of the family should unfold such a tale as that of the "passionate friends," I think that the "little son" for whom it was ostensibly written would rather

it had been burned unread. For our desire is that "father" shall love "mother" better than he loves any other woman, or, if that be tragically impossible, that he shall preserve a decent reticence with regard to his vagrant affections. Decidedly, his son would resent being taken into the confidence of his alien passion. No, I think Mr. Wells's plan will hardly do.

A "NATURAL HISTORY" made up of the conscientious exaggerations and conscienceless misstatements by travellers, and other romancers, ought to prove an interesting work, highly profitable as a book-agent offering. In the rural districts and at summer resorts solicitors should find it easy to write orders for it by the thousand; especially in telling their victims that it represents all the great men in literature, from Herodotus and Tartarin down to contemporary writers. One volume of this work I have already planned: the one entitled "America."

Unnatural
Natural History

Of course I do not mean to exclude foreign writers from this volume. That would be at once rash and ungenerous. There is, for example, John Josselyn. This gentleman paid us two long visits in the course of the seventeenth century, and published a little book in 1672, entitled: "New England's Rarities Discovered in Birds, Beasts, Fishes, & Plants of the Country; Together with the Physical and Chyrurgical Remedies Wherewith the Natives Constantly use to Cure their Distempers, Wounds, and Sores. Also a perfect Description of an Indian SQUA, in all her Bravery; with a Poem not improperly conferr'd upon her. Lastly A Chronological Table of the most remarkable Passages in that Country amongst the English." Do you know the work? It is well worth your study. The reader of our colonial literature finds there such refreshment as I imagine voyagers through the desert enjoy on arriving at a particularly herbaceous oasis. "Into the woods," writes Josselyn on one page, "and happening into a fine broad walk, I wandered till I chanced to spy a fruit—as I thought—like a pine-apple, plated with scales. It was as big as the crown of a woman's hat"—a bonnet of 1672, remember, not a toque of 1914; "I made bold to step into it with an intent to have gathered it.