Proprieties and Vagaries

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Idols of the Twilight

“Spread Thy Close curtain, love-performing night,” says Juliet, in the full chorus of lovers, from the Provencal deploring the dawn to yesterday’s beau turning down the parlor light and to this evening’s boy friend looking for a dark place to park. And on the part of commentarists: “Wherefore, when we go about to make or plant a man, do we put out the candle?” says Mr. Shandy.

Wherefore indeed?

(That we are beginning not to do so is the better for our question. If we still put out the candle with the regularity of heretofore, there would be only theoretic interest in asking why. But if it is already a changing rule, then there is not only history served and theory but also the pleasure of wondering what is to come.)

Mr. Shandy, of course, did not ask the question
honestly, but rhetorically; it is an answer not a ques-
tion. "I know it will be said that in itself and simply
taken—like hunger or thirst or sleep—'tis an affair
neither good or bad—or shameful or otherwise.—Why
then did the delicacy of Diogenes and Plato so recalcit-
trate against it? and wherefore, when we go about to
make or plant a man, do we put out the candle?"

Several secondary reasons for the lover's love of the
dark are apparent. It is a measure of safety, from being
seen by those who would prevent, gossip, or revenge.
It is an initiatory palliative for frightened modesty. It is
a cover for imperfections of body or technique. And
both as symbol and warder it encourages the positive
value of intimacy: night is the time of privacy and sight
is a rover.

But obviously the basic reason is Mr. Shandy's: we
are well taught that in itself "it" is shameful. Whether
it be really so, as Mr. Shandy implies, and the cause of
"every evil and disorder in the world of what kind or
nature soever, from the first fall of Adam down to my
uncle Toby's (inclusive)," or whether it be indiffer-
ent, or whether it be good, or whether our holding it
evil be sufficient to make it so, are questions beyond;
that we are well taught it is shameful is the sufficient
reason. We may not altogether believe that it is alto-
gether bad; still we believe its badness is "that which
is to be believed."

The official doctrine (Platonic-Pauline-monastic)
then is: sensual desire and gratification are evil, espe-
cially in the play of two human bodies; virginity is “the better way”; marriage is permissible, and within marriage and for the sake of offspring man and woman may come together, but voluptuousness therein is a yielding to the lusts of the flesh which are evil, and voluptuousness apart from that marriage and apart from that purpose of offspring is sin and perversion.

The doctrine is within itself at least consistent, but its consistency had to give way in practice. The male half of humanity at any rate quickly agreed to leave virginity chiefly to women, to adore and demand it at once and make war on it, to pursue lechery while calling it bad but also good, as something properly frowned on by the church and just as properly required by masculine society. Now putting out the candle, which was strictly consistent with the official doctrine and a great help in fixing it and maintaining it, was also consistent with the masculine view and practice which was itself inconsistent with the official doctrine; and this business of putting out the candle helped greatly to fix and maintain the masculine tradition and of course to safeguard its performances. Thus men’s practice continues the atmosphere of that doctrine from which it is a partial and week-day revolt; and putting out the candle is the symbol by which all variations of conventional habit agree and the world, the flesh, and the church live together in sufficient amity throughout Christendom.

That which was chiefly accepted from the official theory by the covertly rebellious masculine practice was
the emphasis upon the act itself, the pushing away of its esthetic and personal accompaniments, developments, qualifications, or justifications. For it was the insistent primary hunger of the flesh which forced the breach in ascetic theory, and, this demand satisfied, practice itself would not necessarily push beyond—especially not as long as the candle was always put out. To be sure there was always more than this actually—a man likes some women better than others, partly on grounds general and esthetic, partly on grounds individual and personal. But on the whole it is the femaleness of the partner which is sufficient and the physical release of self which is final; and putting out the candle helps prevent elaboration of procedure and selectivity of object. Lack of light narrows the act by cutting off visual gratification and awareness of the partner’s consciousness the while, and by the same token it broadens the promiscuity of choice.

Not all candles have always been put out of course, but those that burned on have been exceptions. Versailles is said to have introduced the horror-raising fashion of uncurtained beds and nearby mirrors, and mirrors would have been scant use without candles; but the fashion scarcely went beyond the pagan circles of the court (and bagnios) and scarcely beyond the pagan period of the high Enlightenment. Though curtains in time went out for good it was for quite other reasons.

Masculine practice is at bottom simply the satisfaction of hunger, but hunger accompanied by human
consciousness quickly breeds itself a continuing appetite, and appetites are determined by all sorts of theories and theoretic implications of practices. Masculine practice has been kept pretty close to base by the pressure of the disapproving official theory and by the absence of light. Yet, even so it has had all manner of special trappings with the fashions of periods and has been consistently more continuous and more a source of “vulgar” humor than seems required by the rhythmical seriousness of mere physiology. If now, mainly because of the decay of the official doctrine of asceticism, we stop putting out the candle, practice may easily diverge and alter, invite new theories, and be further changed by the theories which prove fashionable and lasting—by different interpretations of sensuality, different accent­ings of the orgastic item, different ethical backgrounds, and different formulas of practice derived therefrom.

Prophecy braves the infinite of chance, and all we do here is suggest consideration of the chief possibilities which putting out the light has stood in the way of. There is first the development which putting out the candle has least directly stood in the way of and which, in part for that reason, has gone the farthest and reached the most stability: the this-worldly utilitarian develop­ment. This-worldliness has been the most persistent of our tendencies since the Renaissance, but it has come down, under the pressure of business and social success, from the heights of the romantic this-worldliness of the Renaissance, the violent rebel against medieval other-
worldliness, to a Main Street this-worldliness which makes its peace with the church on a basis of anti-sensualism, “service,” and respectability; an energetic gospel of ambition which leaves ambition small vista beyond money and position, a hedonism which frowns on pleasure, an intellectualism which fears the radicalism of intellect.

With regard to sex its push has properly been toward honesty and naturalism but also toward inadequacy and shallowness; to remove the taboo from sex as a natural fact, but not altogether a nice fact; to take its devilishness from it, but not give it any godliness; to regard it as negligible in importance, though not negligible in fact, to be got out of the way for business and service; to provide against its overemphasis by “sex instruction” or punish its power by social disapproval and cure it by “mental hygiene”; to leave it as a conjugal gesture and a party indulgence. In its conjugal aspect there is thus apt to be skimping and sentimentality, in its party aspect coarseness.

In this development, too, of course there is the separation of the masculine tradition; so that there is a junior as well as a senior doctrine of professed propriety, disagreeing not only with practice but with practiced ideals. Of late there has been a notable convergence of masculine and feminine, chiefly of the feminine toward the masculine, with mixed-company manners still a bit apart. And so the ancient official doctrine dominates the accent of Sundays and times of trouble, modern
this-worldliness presides over mixed-company conversation, together they regulate published discussion, the masculine tradition takes over the talk after a few drinks, and conduct goes its confused way.

The candle has continued to be put out; a social prudery taking the place of theological abhorrence. Indeed, it sometimes goes further: it is in the last hundred-and-fifty years we have the curious assurance that nakedness is primarily an offense against the respectable observer. If the development were to become complete, to be sure—complete along some of its twisted threads—the state of the candle might be indifferent, for the doing itself would tend to indifference.

So far as the put-out candle has stood in the way of this modern change in the ancient code of Christendom, it doubtless has been in part by safeguarding what was unfortunate in that code against the utilitarian cleaning up, but also it has been by safeguarding what is true in the old code against the utilitarian triviality—it has been by symbolizing the mysteriousness and significance of bodily communion. Platonism and Christianity have found their hold on the world and maintained their adequacy for the world largely because of their depth, which has provided for many strata of human experience. They have gone wrong in leaving no real content for their spiritual other-worldliness and in regarding sense as only the food of destruction. Yet, if sense served the devil the devil was real; and to fight sense and the devil was occupation enough for many a godly battler
whose sense was strong; content to leave it to God to fill up the vacuum when sense had been at length cast out. Through mysticism (about which the church was never comfortable but which it was wise enough never to rule out), through ritual, through relapses into sensuality (to which the reality of the devil gave a wonderful satisfactoriness and which could still be repented and forgiven), sense obtained positive outlet.

But today only jazz bands are “hot.” The bodily giving of oneself and taking of another is too central and potent an intoxication to be reduced, as today society is reducing it, to a pretty sentimentality, a passing amusement, or a vulgar joke. The Orphic elements in human experience are too real to be expunged from existence by an up-to-date rotarian metaphysic or cured by an up-to-date efficiency psychology; even when this is sought in the interest of individual frankness and social cleanliness.

And, without probing so far, sheer exuberance of sexual power, catholicity of sensual capacity, bravery of voluptuous imagination, are still gifts to human experience and possibility, are still power. Should utilitarianism contemn power? But though we worship and serve power in kilowatts and dollars, and though we speak sweetly of spiritual power, all we can think when we so speak is of rising inflections on the radio on a Sunday afternoon or over the finger bowls of a “service” luncheon. And so we regard sensual power as something the individual should (not be afraid of in the thankful
fear of God, but) be ashamed of, and which society should relegate, sublimate, and minimize for the sake of business regularity and an easy respectability.

But it is easy for rhetoric to tease itself into unfairness to Main Street and Chautauqua. The most obvious change derivable from not putting out the candle would be the straight reversion to animal directness. Let us get rid of restraints, pruderies, romantic involutions, artificial appetites, cultivated wishes and aversions and indifferences, theoretic prohibitions and justifications altogether, and take bodily desire as the simple occasional physiology which residually it is, accept it, gratify it promiscuously as the moment suggests and offers without any further implication, and pass on. Horrid as this may sound, it is not without much sincere goodness only too easy to see and only too easy to envy after the thought of the pain, excess, repression, deprivation, dissoluteness, humbuggery, vulgarity, barrenness, and dishonesty with which the world has been plagued in following even the noblest efforts at the idealization of sex. The dirt which is earth is not dirty—unless it has been shut under man’s pavements. We watch animals in their play almost haphazard with one another; we think what we have gained in richness, personality, and meaning; but also we envy them, for we can scarcely play at all, even with wife, husband, lover—indeed it is rather, if at all, with the chance licentiate we play a little and with the chosen beloved we put out the light and are shamefaced and serious, not with the seriousness of
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passion but with the seriousness of an ingrained respectability and a worldly prudence, the gift not only of the world but of twisted gods. Perhaps our gods would have been less cruel if they had been got in the light of a more sportive and sceptical hopefulness instead of between the dark sheets of anxious piety.

Yet reversion to the animal is a counsel of defeat and, after admitting its negative goodness, I doubt if such a program (aside from its very doubtful possibility psychologically and socially after our actual history) would be asked for by any but the most extreme pessimist. To give up hope of accomplishment and discovery is too great a price to pay for assurance of peace and honesty.

And there is in such a program a fundamental dishonesty, for it refuses to see what is the most important if not the most stubborn fact of our being, that we are conscious. Desire is not merely a physiologic uneasiness to be got rid of, it is an accompaniment, a spur, and a fulfillment to emotion; emotion an accompaniment, spur, and fulfillment to consciousness of one’s self, one’s otherness, one’s communion. It may be said that friendship, social feeling, love may all maintain themselves without muddying with sex; but, though it would be unsafe to say there is essentially necessary connection between love and the mutual giving of bodily pleasure, it is safe to say that by its essential character this is supremely and uniquely eligible for the role of expressing that. To rule them apart is to make an insane sacrifice or an insane denial. And if the two remain
relevant and love is to be anything more than a spasmodic gleam on the crests of gratification, then gratification must undertake a conscious responsibility more than simple physiology. The lighted candle must do more than show indifference to taboo; it must discover perspectives of discrimination.

The lighted candle at once suggests esthetic discrimination. Possibly the program may be found here—in the gratification of all the senses as an end sufficient, justifying itself and making its own requirements both of prodigality and of discipline. Gratification is already the end of the masculine tradition, but, by its focused purpose, especially by its exclusion of sight, it has tended to remain or always return to the very dregs of esthetic—what is added is social and prideful not sensuous. Let the candle stay lighted and the official ethic lose its hold, then men and women both may frankly seek the variety of delight, rediscover and admit the art of the Perfumed Garden, select both partner and technique according to esthetic fitness and the pleasure available, and not merely not put out the candle but multiply and vary its light, call in the sun, and use darkness itself not as a cover but as a novelty in illumination.

This is a most evident possibility, and in this direction an actual trend is most evident. Yet so opposite a development can only with utmost difficulty become complete, pure, or stable. In the supremacy of esthetic criteria in personal relations is much positive gain but
also loss and offense to obstinate beliefs and feelings. It is not that it would be of necessity the sheer debauchery which many would at once and only see in it, for in the esthetic of the art of love there would be the same possibility of refinement, elaboration, discovery, and perfecting as in all art, and in its personal conduct there would be the same exaction of restraint, bravery, and management as in all conduct. The conventional attitude toward it on the part of many may be taken as actually necessary; this attitude would push toward reaction and would constantly push the esthetic development itself toward extremes, defiance, a feeling either of its own naughtiness or self-righteousness—toward impurity.

Furthermore, the esthetic development would infringe deeply rooted ideas of the goodness of modesty apart from the goodness of asceticism. And although it would be selective as compared with the masculine tradition, its selectivity would certainly be numerically generous and temporally inconstant, thus directly flouting monogamy and the ideals of loyalty, and herein in conflict with our basic social pattern and of almost the same necessity with our basic economic pattern.

And, indeed, even when viewed as esthetically as a modern citizen can view it, the pretty picture of "paganism" laid out in modern setting either seems a wilful luxury available only for a few, or taken simply and pastorally and apart from practical difficulties still is apt to show itself arty, precious and fragile. I say
“available only for a few” not merely because of financial requirements but also because the very nature of the thing leads toward a sort of natural aristocracy, since, though almost everyone has some beauty of body, few there be can claim it without some charity of scrutiny. The arty fragility comes, perhaps, in part from the voices of its premature proclaimers but certainly resides in part in the stubborn feeling of most of us that so invasive a personal function requires a more inclusive government than the purely esthetic.

Must we revenge the exclusion of the esthetic by the exclusion of everything else? If not, can we merely welcome in the esthetic and be content? No; for the candle which welcomes home the esthetic prodigal hopelessly affronts the old moral government of the house, and if the prodigal is to remain at home the father will have to give up his aversion to fatted calves, and if he, too, is not to become a prodigal or leave his home to the prodigal some rescue of moral authority must be made. There is then this possibility; the ideals of modesty and chastity may survive the wreck of asceticism, find a positive basis and reward congenial with esthetic sensuality, and be encouraged not shamed by the now persistent candle. It would be foolish to say this will be; but it might be and the candle may help it to be.

If modesty be the regard for what is intimate rather than the suppression of what is shameful, if it be the reservation of what is prized for its best use and highest
enjoyment, if chastity be not mere continence but freedom from dissolute connections and wishes, if modesty and chastity connote the preservation of the flesh to the service of knowledge and love; then modesty and chastity need no help from asceticism and give it none.

Such interpretations of old ideals are not new even in the mollified usage and theory of Christendom when it is not on the high horse of official asceticism; at least the negative side is familiar. The positive, which not only permits but also calls for sensual warmth and enjoyment where modesty rightfully divulges itself, here is the balk. There is the respectable feeling that “passion” is illicit, an animal fact to be made the least of and “sublimated,” that true love should approach the “platonic” (pace Plato); once let in passion and there is no distinguishing. How may one tell between lustful temptation and loving desire? The test is not so difficult. Is one most of all interested in the other one’s consciousness rather than his own, and is he so not through what might be a psychological habit and luxurious refinement but through a real interest in the other person? Yes or no; love or lust.

This is, of course, a matter of infinite degrees; and people differ widely in the easiness and frequency of its occurrence. Moralists and sociologists may well debate. One man’s constant meat is another’s poison at a dose. But back of social confictions and personal variations the moral basis is unaffected, and it is a basis which can provide for that practical compromise the institution of
marriage, for the discipline of personal reticence and restraint and loyalty, and for the richness of esthetic enjoyment to which indeed it adds the taste of personal communion which once savored leaves sensual pleasure lacking it a dish unsauced—or a sauce without meat.

This is not merely a hope to salvage what may be hung on to in the wreck of old valuations. It is a prospect of better theory and practice which current changes may bring about. The official doctrine has allowed personal attachment but only as a sort of concession to the flesh and the world, not in itself harmful and of further value if it prefigures and leads on to heavenly love. The masculine tradition, on the other hand, likewise allows and talks of personal preferences; but these preferences are still selfish, limited, and largely insincere; for the prevailing social code makes exercise of preference narrow, the masculine lack of interest beyond simple performance makes it unimportant, and the habitual putting out of the candle leaves availability the real test and sufficient test. The more that masculine practice has been confined to its own backstairs game by church asceticism and its social-utilitarian caretaker, the less part has personal attachment played.

The pressure of fact and insight have been upon both church and laity, but only to the accomplishment of "venial sins," expected wild oats, holidays from business or for business. The other-worldly frown which came from Plato's dialectical sophism and Paul's tormenting taboo has continued strong to debase all extravagation
from the ethic of the cloister. What a historic irony that the disciple of Socrates, Plato, himself a seer of beauty, and the disciple of Jesus, Paul, himself a destroyer of law, should by their wisdom and their depth have established upon the world their wrongness against the rightness of the less wise and less deep Epicurus!

The theoretic doctrine of the rightfulness of sense and the coextension of gratification and love is itself no new one and has been preached especially in the last couple of generations. Unfortunately, it has figured chiefly as a doctrine of romanticism and has been in conflict with social and economic standards through its accent upon the unlawfulness of marriage and marital relations without love and upon the lawfulness of extra-marital relations with love. But these accented conclusions are unnecessary, for the doctrine properly is a fundamental ethical one of selection in personal relations, a selection upon which a further selection may be imposed with the imposition of further social schemes. Marriage and all the complication of rights involved and the resulting compromises required—all this is a question for further social casuistry.

The socially rebellious romanticism of the doctrine as preached has been chiefly because it has been involved with the romantic thesis of the fleetingness and involuntary factuality of love and in general with that widespread tendency of postromantic thought which makes all human behavior a matter of brutal and unquestionable pushes from the irrational and refuses to
give any but an illusory authority to the ancient ideal of foresight and reason. If love be the simple and only occasion for sensual intercourse, and if love be nothing but an irrational sickness which falls upon people and falls off again without their having anything to do about it, then marriage, whether as a deliberate undertaking or as the result of another irrational shove (but still a continuing institution), must be incommensurable with personal ethics, and the only issue is in a socially recognized free love. Our foremost dramatist, in a letter to his wife reminding her of a prenuptial agreement and announcing his intended divorce and remarriage, takes this theory as mutually granted if not self-evident to all intelligent people (intelligence as usual being called in to witness the truth of a theory which denies intelligence all other rights).

Now it is true that love can be so accepted, and it may be true that it would be well if society generally adapted its schedules to fit such acceptance; but the psychology which sees no further possibility is simply false. Love is a brutal possession; it is also in part brought on and determined by one's self, including his thoughts and intentions; it is in part subject to criticism and valuation, and in its continuance it is very largely dependent upon reason—upon what we do to it deliberately or not.

The marriage vow to love is not an absurdity as many now freely assert. We cannot assure continuance but we can do our best, and the vow is the more relevant
in that if anything is certain in the psychology of love it is that love will die which is not cared for. We may, of course, either for or against do the opposite of what we try to do, by mistaking the means; or we may accomplish either with great labor yet without being aware of making the effort. But the normal permanence of marriage, to which our economic system is adapted, is not a psychological impossibility or ethical anomaly—however the actuality may turn out.

Reason is not the creator of desire, still less its proper enemy; but reason may now rejoice in desire and now disapprove, and reason may recognize that not all that is permitted and is good in the simplicities of Arcadia is socially expedient. (Our reason has been contrarily taught to disapprove of desire as desire with the concession that not all the fleshlessness of abstract perfection can expediently be required in our material world.) Reason cannot manufacture love, dismiss it offhand, or make sure its stay; but reason and only reason can do all that can be done, and that is not little, for the constancy and integrity of love.

Any complex society will be a thing of many compromises; but there is no essential conflict between the traditional social-economic ideal of stability in personal relations, the traditional moral ideals of loyalty and faithfulness, and the primary ethical values of lusty personal desires and steadfast personal modesty.

I say primary ethical values because a metaphysics of ethics is not lacking if one wish for it. What we find
when the ethical question first arises is that we are separate conscious persons existing in a world together with other separate conscious persons. Having made the first choice in favor of consciousness, in favor of go-on rather than go-back, then we may recognize the two primary "virtues," that is the characteristic functions of what we find and choose, as desire, the forward and communicative energy, and modesty, the energy and reticence which maintains the personality which we have accepted. The one is the goodness of that bad lust, the other the goodness of that bad pride, which our negatively anxious fathers in the Middle Ages taught as the roots of all evil. Following close to these first two commandments to enjoy and to refrain, with the recognition of the equal reality of our fellows would come the third and fourth commandments, do good to others and mind your own business.

All other virtues are secondary and derivative, like mercy and industry; or formal and instrumental, like courage and honesty. These last may be said to be first of all, but we are not here concerned with them and need not disturb ourselves whether form is first or last.

Now, the put-out candle has never quenched lust, but it has belittled and falsified the communicative generosity and enfeebled the selective prerogative of desire; it has done nothing to expose the humorlessness of selfish pride, while it has done nothing to help the pride of chastity which saves itself for a richer possession and a richer expenditure. Then there may be hope that the
lighted candle may give light at once to the death of asceticism and to the discovery that modesty and chastity are more good, more beautiful, grave, free, and full of gifts than they were when regarded as flat denials. And the bottom of this is that consciousness, the enhancement of consciousness, is the ingredient of all goods, the touchstone of every better; and light, which is the universal symbol of knowledge, is in the doing of the body the condition of knowledge. When we learn that true privacy craves light and not darkness, we may learn that the intimate is not the indecent, and that innocence is not ignorance. I am even willing to repeat the great saying of Socrates, so often ridiculed, virtue is knowledge.

When I am told I should believe in the Virgin Birth—as a Christian and a man of faith—because it is a mystery, I like to reply that I can think of a greater mystery: birth by a father without a mother. I add that I have some textual warrant, for Matthew gives the genealogy of Jesus through Joseph and in the Gospel according to the Hebrews Jesus speaks of “my mother the Holy Spirit.” And if I am given time I further add that I do not object to the dogma as a mystery—being a man of faith and finding no impossibility in the belief—but do object to it morally.

The classical world, often called pagan, is supposed to have been unafflicted by our anti-sensualism; and it had many a “virgin birth.” Why seems it so particular in us? With the convenient humanness of the Greek
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gods (the Olympian variety) there was no great mystery in a god fathering a child by mortal woman. And by the same token there is no implied asceticism—quite the contrary: in these divine mixtures the poets have always found the theme of most impassioned ecstasy. It is indeed not fair to speak of these as virgin births. Virginity is scarcely typified in Semele or "wanton Arethusa's azured arms."

In the Christian dogma God is to be sure the father; but God has become "spiritual," God not Jove or Hermes. Thus the emphasis of the doctrine (first doubtless sprung like the others from the wish to glorify the hero's parentage) comes to be not so much on the godhead of the father as on the miracle of the conception and, instead of revering the joy of his making as a divinely magnified joy wherein the god himself gives warrant to the spiritual perspective of sense, we come to take his creation as the avoidance of reality and the denial of pleasure; so that if we are to find good it must be not by the pursuit, exploration, and perfecting of the goods we know but by escape from them.

The Virgin Birth is doubtless to blame that American cooking is poor, that American meals are unenjoyed except as accompaniment for a newspaper or a "deal," and that American digestions are bad. The Virgin Birth makes us dyspeptics and dyspepsia confirms our faith. To be sure indulgence can make us dyspeptics and ruin our faith in pleasure. Is it better to have a true faith falsely falsified or a false faith falsely confirmed?

"Wisdom is got only with experience," we are told.
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It should be added, “and then only when experience is got with wisdom.” (It is still true that he who “wisely” goes about to have experience loses his pain.) Further, experience is queer: we cannot have without missing. And he who misses may have more than he who has; may have the better experience for the getting of wisdom even in that which he misses, and may have the more experienced experience. If we have the possession of women we miss the lack of them, do we not? It is probable that Simon Stylites had a more unique and intense experience than Don Juan; and that the virgin can come closer to imagining the experience of the successful lover than the other way around.

All this has to do with natural desire, fulfilled and unfulfilled; not with the discovery of objective data. Byrd has that of arctic scenery, Einstein that of relativity theory, the lack of which was no pressing experience to King Alfred. But who speaks of experience and wisdom without reference to desire? He who achieves and enjoys the obvious fruits misses their poignant lack; and if he has certainly a broader more varied more positive and saner basis of acquaintance, he is much the less urged to the use of imagination and analysis; success dulls, the obvious shuts off pursuit of the possible, and if “still achievement lacks a gracious somewhat,” he lets it go at “disillusionment.” The wisdom of the failure must escape bland unawareness, bitterness, “sublimation,” apologetic asceticism and resignationism.
It is easy, for apparent success and apparent failure, to blame things instead of ourselves, to blame things instead of knowing them. All experience is positive, all difference in experience is qualitative. He who stays all night has not merely more of the same but a different experience from him who plays and runs. You have done both? Then you have done differently from him who has done but the one. And he who has never done either knows what neither of you has known.

Of course, I do not mean it is all a matter of indifference; only, in experience you cannot have all and you cannot have none. If you seek a basis of difference it must come in a judgment upon experience from without, not simply in a difference as experience among different experiences which are all homogeneous and all unique. And though success bears in its name its preferableness, in the service of wisdom it has no such prerogative. Nor am I moralizing the "sweet uses of adversity," but talking of simple knowledge.

Truly in one respect the experience of success (or of both success and failure) is best qualified to give advice, as to the technique of success; and it is this which is the most sought wisdom. Right enough it should be so. But it is wearisome that all things in the dialectic of love should be interpreted only as technique. At least, the aim of love is many or questionable: What success? "He is a fool to act so; he might know that is no way to win her." Is it not conceivable he should yet choose so? Must all things done toward the beloved be matters of
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engineering? At any rate the true lover is too much in love to make it so—unless he become "wise" which may be least wisdom. Even in that smart sense of "wise" it may be "the tigers of wrath are wiser than the horses of instruction."

"Women do not like so and so." Who is this Woman so assuredly known, and in what court is her liking? Worldly Wise is right if I also worldly wise play for a dim success in my one out of "the great majority of cases." Suppose I stake for more? But is it more? Here we need something other than technique: the office of wisdom, coming only by experience. What experience? Experience honestly got in the pursuit of wise ends other than experience, lighted by imagination, dissected by analysis, looked round about by reason. And whence all this wisdom? Whence but from experience?

A paradox and a dilemma? If a paradox no contradiction; and if a dilemma no impassable one; for some do better than others and we know it. Apparently at least one of our hands has hold of our own bootstrap; we need some sort of free grace—or call it luck. And for this there is faith.

"Faith is the belief in what we know is not so." With a little change the old joke becomes true compliment. Faith is the belief in what we know may not be so. And what is there of any general importance of which we do not know this? So far from being opposed to reason, faith, together with skepticism, is its chief need. Not now one, now the other, but both at once. Either with-

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out the other is not itself, is ignorant, presumptuous, lazy, and less than moral. The rationalist is one who is willing to take a chance on reason since no one has a choice except between better and worse reason; he is aware that the conclusion of either the fanatic or the scoffer may be true but that their assurance is certainly false.

Do I find the theory of relativity convincing? I will have some need of faith against its difficulties and against common sense. Do I find the classical mechanics still preferable? I will have some need of faith against its hiatus and against new fashion. The atheist will need faith to keep him from God's comfort in privation and terror. He who believes in God must cling to his faith through lazy calms and disillusioning failures. Put it in one case: Do I now love? And heart and head tell me my love is good? Yet it will take all my faith to continue to love against the dead weight of—not any new and better reason but—satiation or despair or time "which wars on all beautiful things."

The great need for faith and difficulty for faith is not, as has been supposed, in the mysteriousness of that which nevertheless we ought to believe, in defiance of reason. How are we to know apart from some reason for it what it is we ought to believe? The need and difficulty for faith lie in the push and pull of motives properly irrelevant as reasons but destructive of that good thing which some reason has bid faith hold to.

On the other hand, more or less of internal mystery
is no bar to faith and is a natural call to it. And so I repeat the mystery of the Virgin Birth does not offend me. It is indeed a feeble enough mystery (especially if the orthodox but uncanonical vincinitas in partu is left aside). Certainly it is not usual for a human body to be born of woman unknown by man. Yet, I should be more surprised if no such birth had ever occurred than if some had.

Reason is dependent externally and for its consequences upon faith; it is internally not possible without intuition, direct apprehension of simple fact and relational truth and value. But also it needs skepticism. We intuit what we intuit and otherwise we know nothing; the trouble is we have no pure intuition and no assured intuition as to just what part of our perception and acceptance and assertion is the gift of intuition. It may be said that intuition is never mistaken but that we may always be mistaken even though we are not mistaken in saying that some of our knowing is intuitive. So we need faith and have a right to faith in our faith; but faith is a gamble and can bet wrong. Faith is doubtless from the father of all light but our faiths—what we may waste our fine faith upon—are sometimes just proprieties. Or they may be the rebellion of vanity against propriety. Intuition and faith need to be checked on by more commonplace and suspicious underlings—like the "little dog at home" who will know the old woman who had her skirt cut off. But the little dog did
not know her, he barked at her: "Lawk a mussy on us, this is none of I." The helpful underlings, helpful because commonplace and suspicious, may be mistaken in differentiating their betters and impostors. But they often—normally, like the little dog—save us. There is no more proper cry than that of the father of the possessed boy: "Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief." But needful too is its other: "Lord, I doubt; help thou my belief." How many of our faiths are idols of the tribe, the cave, the market place, the theater, tenacity, propriety? "Their spirit," Zarathustra said, "is imprisoned in their good conscience."

In the Christian incarnation, I think, God took on the human liability to doubt, ability to doubt, need to doubt. "Know ye not I must be about my Father's business?" Did Jesus know it—the reality of the call, what the call was, his ability to give the answer in the world about him and ahead of him? He had his grounds and on them his faith; but he also knew he might be variously wrong or might variously fail. And this is so in degree with all those who try for anything beyond the ordinary. One assumes the extra risk that he be presumptuously wrong, mistaken in his credentials this way and that. But to avoid that risk is to risk being supremely wrong. Of those who try, and thereby fail of lesser things they could do, many are wrong; but I should say most of these are also right in having some decent ground for taking the braver risk. The social discountenancing or the friendly hesitancy to counte-
nance is like the parental love which prefers the safer road for the child.

I think luck as well as freedom must be counted in the salvation of man as well as in the fall; and not merely as of individuals but as of the cosmic drama. I believe that luck should be counted in the story of Jesus. God may have known He had a good bet but He had to wait for the finish. He may even have made the bet before. It not only must have been in the power of Jesus to fail, it may have been in the power of events to prevent his achievement. I say “must” of the necessary freedom for the goodness and the sacrifice; “may” of the continuing normal noninterference of God in the world in which Jesus achieved his goodness and his sacrifice. It seems to me essential to the true divinity of this man that he should be truly man not only in his body but also in his knowledge and his doubts and fears.