

The Quest

Sharon Sperry

“A PHILOSOPHER should, above all men, know truth,” argued the Child.

“But it can be seen from what Emerson says that even the philosophers can be wrong and, therefore, should not be regarded as all-knowing,” replied the Void.

“But how, then, is truth to be discovered about important matters?”

“What truth are you seeking?”

“Does Man desire to be deceived?”

“For such a question you are unprepared. You cannot expect to know the truth.”

“I have a mind. I can find it, if you direct me.”

“There is no other way for you to discover truth except through yourself.”

The Child cried out, for he felt the Void disappearing.

“But I don’t know! I don’t understand!”

The cry hung as an echo in the space about and mocked the Child, standing alone. Companionless, the Child stumbled in the midst of familiar objects, yet in darkness. Suddenly a mirror flashed out. The Child paused to look and saw a reflection. Part for part was reproduced faithfully, but he could see no answer. The parts were silent and unmoving. The image told nothing of falsehood or of truth. An hour, two hours passed and the Child neither gained nor forfeited, except to lose time. Being young, the Child soon wearied of the trial and, giving up the search, turned from the mirror to face the world. Life called and the capricious Child answered.

Naïvety slept on his shoulder until he met a man who awakened the specter. Naïvety flew away, and youth and wonder escaped with it, leaving the Child half grown, although more desperately alone than before. In an effort to end the solitude the Child sought men, but he found more than the end to grief. In men he saw the reflection he had pursued before. Revelation pierced his sight, and the Child saw part for his part, action for his action. He perceived some truth of himself. Remembering that self-discovery was an introduction to truth, the Child renewed the quest and sought the answer to his question in men.

He saw them crowded in huge mobs. They upheld kings and dictators and learned to blind themselves to truth on command. They overthrew the tyrant in home and government and exalted new terrors to enslave again. They mouthed goodness but practiced evil. By pretending to see evil as goodness, they lost the truth and goodness became evil. They ran in fear of their own creation, but, unwilling to run to truth, they glorified half-gods to stay their pounding hearts.

They sought only that which they desired, casting away that which was distasteful with no regard for truth. Occasionally, one of their number would break away to seek truth. Hysterically, the mob threatened and thundered against him, preserving even to death their half-gods of evil. Tortured and misunderstood, the One held out feebly, for his progress was halted by each attack. This the Child saw, and, seeing it, the Child knew at once a truth of himself.

In himself, the Child recognized the search for truth of the One and the fear born of ignorance of the mob. He realized the quest that spurred the One and felt the promised meaning it held for his discovery. He saw that, as did the mob, he, too, longed for protection, for hiding, for security that would keep away the horror he feared in the truth. And the fear was the greater of the two. For this reason he marveled that the One could face truth despite fear. Instantly, without the Void, the Child saw the way. It was to subordinate the fear, to dare the insecurity that lay waiting, and to reach for the truth unflinchingly. The Child saw that it was difficult and understood the inability of many to brave the struggle. However, the Child, with the aspiration of youth, determined to seek truth in spite of fear and the mob and called no more to the Void. The Void listened no more for a cry and sought not to help.

The Character of Failure

Claude Pierce, Jr.

WHEN a man encounters that upsetting experience called failure, he automatically enters it in the deficit column of his personality ledger. My deficit column is long, but its length has never worried me. I find that failure is a cleverly disguised blessing, and my appreciation of it has sharpened. Failure is a form of progress which may mean that I am progressing only from one defeat to the next. An example is the trial and error method, in which each failure can eliminate an error. Failures then become milestones on the path of progress, because each one marks the place where an attempt has been made to overcome a problem. Failure is my instructor, even though it may tell me what I can not do. It has also taught me lessons in patience, character, and stable personality. I must be patient in order to try again; patience develops character, and character is the cornerstone of personality. My failings have helped to build my character because I have developed the ability to take advantage of them. I believe this is my dominant characteristic, and therefore I must consider my failures as achievements. The true value of an achievement can be determined by comparing it with another, but how can I estimate the value of success unless I use failure as a yardstick?