

'A Consuming Passion for Power'

As in all true tragedy, we see in Mr. Nixon's ruination the ravages of a failing to which all men are prey. Mr. Nixon's sin, like all sin, was a failure of restraint. It was the immoderate craving for that which, desired moderately, is a noble goal.

It is a terrible curse to want anything as much as Mr. Nixon wanted power. He wanted it more than he wanted friends. Indeed, he wanted it with a consuming passion that left no room for friendship.

And when, in his final extremity, he looked around for friends to grabble to his soul with hoops of steel, there were no friends **there**.

But, then, friends could not have helped, once Mr. Nixon was weighed down with scandal. Once the deeds were done, he was done, because the American system works.

A heart weighed down with the weight of woe to the weakest hope will cling, and for two years Mr. Nixon clung to the wicked hope that the rule of law could not reach up to him. His final hope was that the task of breaking a President to the saddle of law would tax the American people's composure to the breaking point.

The dashing of all such hopes is the happy issue of our Watergate affliction.

Mr. Nixon is not as bad as—caught in the tangled web he could not stop weaving—he came to appear. And no

one else is as good as they may now be tempted to feel.

It would be wrong for people—journalists, politicians, judges—to preen themselves on their performances during this protracted sorrow. No one did more than his duty, as a professional and a citizen, and many people did less.

In the end Congress was driven to the brink of doing its duty to protect the Constitution. Many journalists did what they are paid to do, reporting things that had been improperly concealed. And the judiciary construed and administered the law.

But no one deserves a garland for doing his duty.

Although the Nixon White House ran amuck as no other has done, and its abuses were uniquely lurid and sinister, there is a sense in which the kind of work we have been doing is work without end.

As our megagovernment grows, its potential for evil grows. Keeping the government reasonably tame and free from active venom is a task comparable to painting the Golden Gate Bridge. It is endless: You just get to one end and then you have to go back and start again from the beginning.

But surely, now, we can and must relax a little.

Oscar Wilde's aphoristic criticism of socialism—"It would take too many evenings"—meant that it is uncivilized

to allow politics to become a dominating preoccupation. Watergate has taken too many evenings.

Now there are books to be read, children to be played with, and other humane and civilizing pursuits that have been neglected because the task of getting the government back on the leash demanded a hideously large slice of the republic's energies.

Life under these conditions has not encouraged the softer emotions, but one would have to be dead to all human feelings not to feel deep regret for the suffering endured by Mr. Nixon's brave family. I am thinking especially of Julie Eisenhower.

Filial devotion is always moving, as is courage, and plain spunk. Ms. Eisenhower's brave combativeness on behalf of her father provided the nation with something valuable, an example of strong and noble character.

Her ordeal, like the republic's, is over and this year autumn, the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, will be spring, the season of rebirth and renewal. Mr. Nixon, by resigning, has struck the Watergate fetters from Uncle Sam's wrists. And President Ford, like a healing zephyr, arrives, his decency and goodwill settling like a balm on our lacerated feelings.

Now, at last, there is a stillness. The angry drumbeat of contention dies away—and silence, like a poultice, comes to heal the blows of sound."