

Part 4/10/73

Under the Big Red Wig

"One of the toughest problems we have in this life is in seeing the difference between the apparent and the real, and in basing our actions only on that which is real."

The foregoing bit of metaphysical wisdom comes from White House Assistant John Ehrlichman's letter of resignation to President Nixon, dated April 30 of this year. We have cited it before and have been meditating upon it almost without cease ever since, and we believe we are now prepared to offer a considered response. It is that while it has never been easy to distinguish between the apparent and the real (see Plato, Aristotle *et al.*), it doesn't make things a whole lot easier when people are running around in red wigs, using voice alteration devices, calling each other "Mr. Watson" when their names are something else, mailing letters to themselves, forging cables, doctoring records, hiding things in their closets and telling whoppers to grand juries. If you were a suspicious person, you could even get the idea that there were people around who didn't *want* you to be able to distinguish between the apparent and the real.

But that is hearsay. Disregard it. The point is that Mr. Ehrlichman—and this will not come as an overwhelming surprise—sought to connect the whole ancient philosophical dilemma to the misbehavior of the modern day press. Appearances, he explained, "can be affected by repeated rumor, unfounded charges or implications and whatever else the media carries." Now what is to follow *may* come as a surprise: we wish to associate ourselves (temporarily) with Mr. Ehrlichman's observations and also to apologize to our readers for some highly unfounded charges and implications we carried a little over a year ago. They had to do with a gala fund-raising effort called a "Salute to Ted Agnew," which was held in Baltimore in May of 1972. From our account of that

event you could easily have gotten the impression that the evening had been a smashing financial success and a tribute to Mr. Agnew's political strength. It wouldn't have been your fault if you did. The problem is that we were suckers for appearances. As the sage said, we confused them with reality.

The appearances in this case included one list of fat-cat Republican contributors who had purchased expensive tickets to the event. Only it turns out that they didn't. Instead, because sales weren't doing so well, the chairman of the Maryland Republican Party requested and got a \$50,000 cash loan from—who else?—the Committee for the Re-election of the President. This money was pumped into the gala and out again and back to the committee for Mr. Nixon's re-election. At one point it reposed under the Maryland party chairman's bed—a location off bounds to even the most diligent reporter unless he is armed with a search warrant and an imagination at least as baroque as those of the people who thought this thing up. We fear we have no reporter so singularly equipped. Nor had it occurred to us that "for public relations reasons"—as the chairman, Alexander Lankler, put it—the sponsors of the event would risk a brush with the law, falsifying reports to both state and federal election authorities.

"The big time came to Baltimore last night," we reported at the time, "and Baltimore paid for it." Forgive us: that statement turns out to have been unfounded as either a charge or an implication—two of Mr. Ehrlichman's pet grievances. Still, we're not so sure it doesn't qualify as a valid rumor, one a little ahead of its time. True, the Maryland party bigwigs who sponsored the event may not have paid for it at the time. But judging from the reaction to the news of what went on, it looks as if they're about to.