

Washington

IN THE rare glimpses Americans have had of their President since his overwhelming re-election, Richard Nixon has likened himself to Disraeli, Churchill and de Gaulle, austere, magisterial, mysterious, majestic men all.

He has reflected on the vicissitudes of his life, the state of his health, mind, emotional and spiritual stability. He has explained why he, rather uniquely it seems from his own self-portrait, is able to remain cool and calm — two of his favorite words — under the stress of continuing crisis.

He has expressed his personal philosophy: He is an American Puritan, out of the Spartan mold. And he has offered his vision for the future. "I hope to do great things."

High Irony

These are all highly personal and unusual things for any public figure, much less a President, to say openly. There is also a high irony involving the President on the occasion of his second inaugural.

Richard Nixon, America's most familiar face and most enduring politician of the last quarter century, is today being severely criticized as one of the most isolated, remote, secretive, confounding and unpredictable Presidents in our history.

He is, perhaps, our most private — and yet, paradoxically, most personally revealing — President. After all his years at the center stage of American public life, Richard Nixon still retains the capacity to surprise and bewilder both friends and foes alike.

Those who have tried so long to explain him have written about Nixon the conservative, Nixon the liberal, Nixon the centrist, Nixon the pragmatist, Nixon the old and Nixon the new.

'It's Always the Battle That Sustains Nixon'

By Haynes Johnson

journalist, the President struck a recurring Nixon theme, and a key to his personality. He has, the President said, "a strong streak of individualism which probably was more than anything else rooted in my family background. Not only at home but in church and school we had drilled into us the idea that we should if at all possible take care of ourselves and not expect others to take care of us."

He also said, obviously approvingly, "but my mother and father were almost fierce in their adherence to what now is deprecatingly referred to as Puritan ethics."

With Richard Milhous Nixon, there is no need to in-

He is probably all these things, and more.

In one of the shrewdest of the many recent analyses, Stewart Alsop wrote: "There is something faintly comic about the endless indignation of the liberals as they endlessly rediscover that Mr. Nixon is not a liberal — except occasionally when it suits him."

The same point could be made about the conservatives who hailed him for his militant anti-Communism, his strong pledges never to intervene with the power of the Federal Government in the free enterprise system of wages and prices, his presumed determination to curb the power of the big labor unions, his supposed zealous loyalty to the Republican party and its candidates.

Perhaps strangest of all is the fact that Richard Nixon continues to surprise his fellow citizens. We have had presidents who valued their privacy before — Coolidge comes to mind — but none that has been so private and yet so consistently given to exploring the inner workings of his mind, emotions and motivations.

Great Introspection

His is an introspection that somehow seems to require the most extensive, even exhaustive, public expression.

For years and years, Richard Nixon has been trying to tell us about himself and we still have not understood him, or caught his message.

Two years ago, in a conversation with a British



dulge in amateur analysis or idle speculation. This most introspective President figuratively has scattered pieces of himself, his values and basic attitudes, over the American landscape for decades.

The Nixon self-portrait that emerges is of a driving, determined, calculating, tense and, yes, grimly assured man who has approached every task and obstacle with fierce

single-minded determination. If there is any evidence of humor or sheer joy and exuberance of life lived for itself, it has not come to the surface.

"It's important to live like a Spartan," he said in the most recent published interview with him, by Saul Pett of the Associated Press. "That's not to say I don't enjoy a good time. But the worst thing you can do in this job is to relax, to let up. One must have physical and mental discipline here."

Richard Nixon, quite obviously, always has had an extraordinary amount of self-discipline. It is, he tells us again and again, the hallmark of his success, the reason why he has been able to face and succeed in self-proclaimed personal crisis after personal crisis. His very words ring with a martial sound: It is the contest, the battle, the trial, the ultimate testing struggle that sustains him.

"I believe in the battle, whether it's the battle of a campaign or the battle of this office, which is a continuing battle," he said in that same interview. "It's always there wherever I go. I, perhaps, carry it more than others because that's my way."

Twelve years ago he expressed the same sentiments.

"When a man has been through even a minor crisis, he learns not to worry when his muscles tense up, his breathing comes faster, his nerves tingle, his stomach churns, his temper becomes short, his nights are sleep-

less," he wrote then. "He recognizes such symptoms as the natural and healthy signs that his system is keyed up for battle."

Recently, Stewart Alsop recalled that Nixon likes to use the phrase, "un homme serieux" in associating himself with de Gaulle. Both, in his apparent view, were "serious men," weighty men, destined men.

The image — and the lesson — of de Gaulle have run through Richard Nixon's writings and statements like an oft-repeated refrain. De Gaulle used the first person to characterize himself as the embodiment of France; Nixon now increasingly refers to himself and his country in the same first person singular context.

The American Character

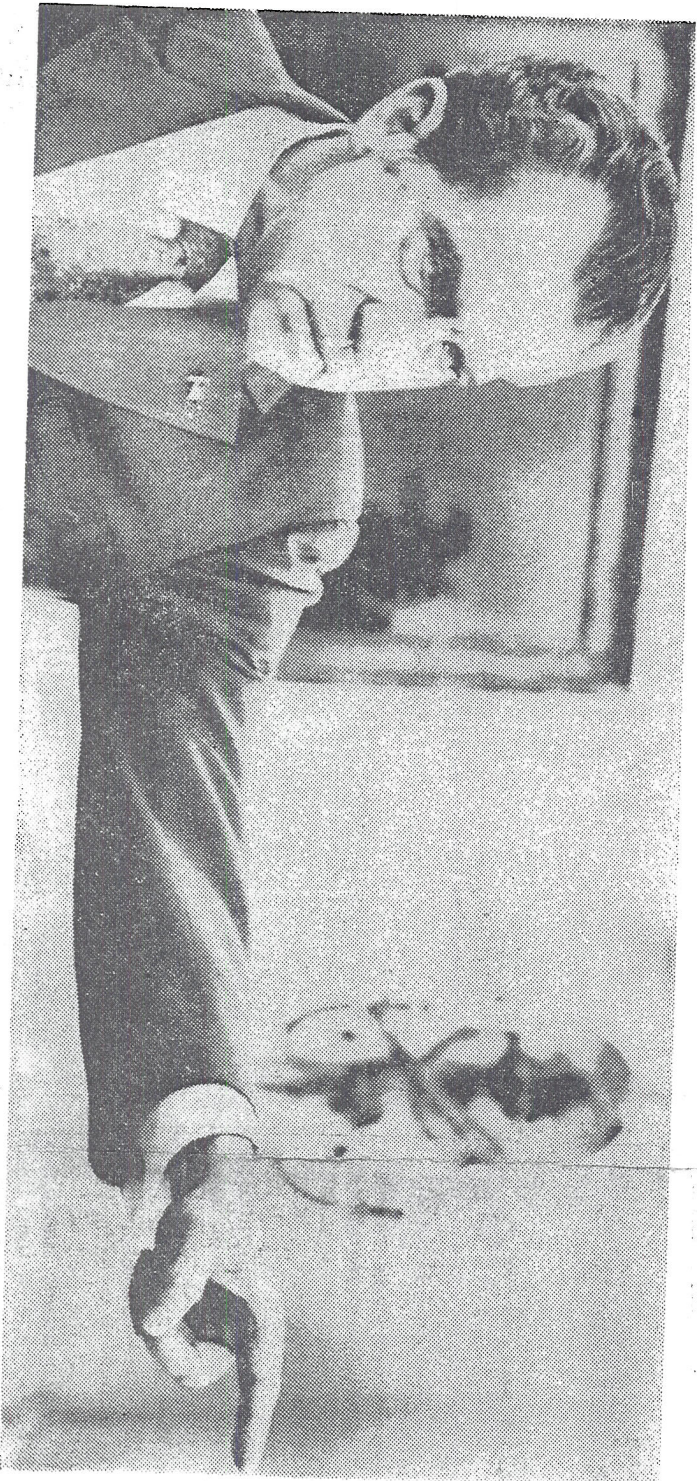
Akin to this is what seems to be a belief that he, mystically embodying the American character, knows best what is good — and what is bad—for the people. His celebrated interview with Garnett D. Horner of the Washington Star-News contained the memorable quote:

"The average American is just like the child in the family. You give him some responsibility and he is going to amount to something. He is going to do something. If, on the other hand, you make him completely dependent and pamper him and cater to him too much, you are going to make him soft, spoiled and eventually a very weak individual."

Richard Nixon does not intend to let that happen. He has the best view of the country's course. And he, in affirmation of his succeeding against all the odds, gives clear evidence that he alone will make the necessary judgments and decisions. He does not, it seems, wish to be diverted by the sounds of dissent.

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THE PRESIDENT GESTURES IN HIS WHITE HOUSE OFFICE

AP Wirephoto

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