



A Psycho-History

John Barkham

IT WAS inevitable that there would be psycho-histories of Richard Nixon, the only President in American history to have resigned. It is a theme worthy of a Freud. Any such analysis would necessarily have to be done in book form — by remote control, as it were — if only because of Nixon's secretiveness.

Dr. David Abrahamsen is a noted New York psychiatrist who has written a dozen books. Though he tells us he never interviewed Nixon, his book "Nixon vs. Nixon," is based on interviews with members of the Nixon-Milhous families, with Nixon's friends and associates, and on a close study of Nixon's writings and tapes. Dr. Abrahamsen is concerned with the personal rather than the political Nixon. "My concern is not with *what* he wanted but *why* he wanted it."

★ ★ ★

TO MOST OF US, who saw Nixon only (though frequently) on television, his appearance was striking — that swift, humorless smile that flashed on and off as though at the press of a button while the eyes remained grim. Behind that cheerless expression lay the life of constant struggle outlined in these pages. Nixon's father was a hard, even brutal man, his mother severely repressed. (Nixon later called her a "saint" while remaining silent about his father.) "Lacking a strong male to identify with, his masculine identification was im-

paired." This, argues Dr. Abrahamsen, led to Nixon becoming "self-protective and withdrawn."

At this point some readers may object that the psychiatrist is reading too much into too little, noting that psychiatrists often disagree with one another over the same data. But an example cited by Freud in one of his books and quoted by Abrahamsen illustrates the type of deductive reasoning Abrahamsen undertakes in his book.

★ ★ ★

NIXON, declares Dr. Abrahamsen, was a man totally lacking in joy or spontaneity — a sad, depressed individual. His hard upbringing had led to a feeling of rejection, which in turn made him doubt both himself and the motivations of others. "Feeling neither loved nor likable, Nixon was unable to form a healthy relationship with anyone." This in time tore him apart. "It was Nixon against Nixon."

Abrahamsen is fair to Nixon. While recognizing his abrasive political campaigns, he admires his resilience in bouncing back from adversity to become President. "I admire his tenacity. I deplore his duplicity." Yet he is compelled to conclude that Nixon was a "psychopathic personality," which in Nixon's case he defines as being "generally impulsive, unreliable, prone to lie." (Farrar, Straus; \$10.95).