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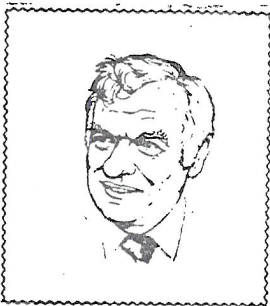
# Himself

## The Ghost

"The tube is everything."

Richard M. Nixon

WHEN THE late President made his Watergate confession on television (and gave himself absolution at the same time) I had every intention of writing a piece about it. That is, before the show. After all, I had followed his downfall as closely as any journalist in the country, and remain one of the few people who still believe Nixon knew about the Watergate break-in before it happened. When it comes to running a campaign there is no detail too small for the attention of this particular Master.



After watching the misbegotten soap opera, I decided to swear off the typewriter in this instance. I felt that writing anything about it would be compounding a felony. Likewise, it would be advertising the remaining installments of this bruising epic. Fortunately for Chronicle readers, my colleagues O'Flaherty and Hoppe did in the old Pharisee real good.

The thing you have reluctantly to admire about the Dick and Dave show is how unerringly it is aimed at the lowest common denominator, the cheapest possible taste. The tube was made for Nixon. Frost was made for Nixon. The splendid ratings the first show got reminds us that bear-baiting and witnessing public hangings used to be the chief spectator sports of our Anglo-Saxon ancestors.

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THAT FIRST SHOW (about which I can write in fair conscience now) was almost an encyclopedia of all that is meretricious in our culture. The most disgraceful episode in the history of the presidency, the worst scar suffered by the national psyche since the Civil War, was resurrected from a more or less decent burial on the terms of its protagonist, a pardoned criminal.

And all for 600 grand plus ten per cent for Nixon and 600 grand plus ten per cent for Frost!

If there is anything the American public has earned in the past few years, it is an absence of Richard Milhous Nixon from our lives. But he is the ghost which will not be exorcised. As long as he lives, in the house of our nation there will be heard nightly clanking of chains, and low fearsome shrieks from the belfry. All these bizarre sounds will, of course, be dutifully chronicled by Frost or his ilk, and paid for by the people who man the tube.

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HAD IT NOT been for Mr. Ford's strange pardon, there would have been no 600 grand for either Dick or Dave. Dick would have had to appear in a court of law, absolutely free and gratis, to have explained how he conspired to obstruct justice.

From that first broadcast, it was obvious that he had no such defense to offer. He was even outlawyered by a British non-lawyer, on what the obstruction statutes said. His defense is that he is all heart. A jury which could believe that could believe anything.

The media hype that accompanied that first show was almost as obscene as the show itself. A week before opening time Frost knew he had a dog on his hands. His syndicated pick-up network had large swatches of time on the 90-minute segment that had not been sold.

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TO SELL THEM, Dave began to exploit Dick the way Dick had been exploiting Dave. Knowing only too well the standards of the American press, especially the slick news weeklies, Dave leaked not only large segments of the Watergate show but saw to it that previously unpublished tapes implicating his star more deeply than ever in Watergate saw the light of day in *The Washington Post*, a newspaper which looks sleazier on Watergate as each day goes by.

Dave took the final show, the one that was to puddle us all up, and put it on first. Sure enough, the time slots were filled after the weekend media blitz before the first show.

As one Madison avenue charmer was quoted: "Hell, we'd run Attila the Hun if he had the ratings." There we are.