



A Sigh of Relief Over the Nation

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THE METEOROLOGIST may be hard put to explain the soft summer breeze that has swept across the country in these past few days, but Washington knows the source: It is a national sigh of relief.

It is hard to imagine how Gerald Ford could have moved off to a better start. His swearing-in speech was superb, his address to Congress hit precisely the right note. With this changing of the watch, no one asks who's in command. Gerald Ford is in command.

And the word in Washington is "relief." The local weather bureau maintains an air quality index. Off and on this summer the index has wavered between hazardous and poor. Metaphorically speaking, the air quality has been poisonous: impeachment hearings, court proceedings, tempers rising, the political humidity soaring out of sight. The climactic moment of resignation followed hours of apprehensive waiting. Many persons had feared that Mr. Nixon would exit screaming, and that Mr. Ford would stumble as he came on stage.

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WHAT A RELIEF! Mr. Nixon went quietly, even pathetically, and Mr. Ford strode from the wings with a nice spring in his step. The smog lifts like a curtain going up. Now is the winter of our discontent made glorious by this sun of Michigan. How pleasant it is to draw an uncongested breath!

What has equipped Mr. Ford for this admirable start? He is peculiarly a man of the House. You have to look all the way back to McKinley to find a President with

anything approaching Mr. Ford's particular experience.

Mr. Ford served in the House for almost 13 terms, from early 1949 to his confirmation as vice president in December, 1973. The conventional political wisdom tends to low-rate the House. It is not nearly as exclusive as the Senate.

Yet the founding fathers knew what they were doing when they created a legislative body that would have to stay close to the people. There is something about the hurly-burly of the House that works upon the character of the men and women who serve there. They have less time for pomp and circumstance. They are often of the earth, earthy; and the rules of the chamber instill both a need for brevity and a spirit of compromise.

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MR. FORD'S quarter of a century in the House gave him no eminence in his party or in his country, but the years gave him something else—an ease of manner, a quality of speech, a mastery of the rough and tumble. Mr. Ford has been knocked flat from time to time, but he long ago learned to get up smiling.

Yes, he will make mistakes. He has problems aplenty. But the terrible tensions of the past two years have vanished with the lifting of the fog. The high pitched crescendos of the Nixon years yield to a softer movement. Carlyle once observed that the happiest hours of mankind are recorded on the blank pages of history. Mr. Ford will perform a tremendous service if he provides an exhausted people a few blank pages now.