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Elizabeth Drew's
Diary of Impeachment and Resignation
March 1 through August 9, 1974

From the New Yorker magazine,
October 7, 14, and 21 editions

A REPORTER IN WASHINGTON, D.C.

I-SPRING NOTES

THE events of the past several months were without precedent in our national life. At the heart of it all was the question of whether our Constitutional form of government would continue. This was a new question. President Nixon's resignation appeared to be the decisive event, but it was not. What was decisive was the action taken by the thirty-eight members of the Judiciary Committee of the House of Representatives. It was these men and women who, by what they did, compelled the President to give up his office, established what Presidential conduct was intolerable, and handed down the tablets for the future. The President's sudden departure from office and his successor's sudden attempt to "shut and seal this book" with a pardon simply added importance to what they did. The committee carried out the only process by which the President was called to account for the conduct of his Administration. It was a process that was not an easy one for political beings to face, and was one that many politicians—to the end, and successfully—sought to avoid. In the course of reaching their conclusions, the elected representatives on the Judiciary Committee conducted the most fateful deliberations about the meaning of the Constitution since the document was drafted at the Philadelphia convention in 1787.

The President's rapid exit from office was all that prevented an overwhelming vote of impeachment in the House, which would have been only the second impeachment of a President in American history, and what appeared to be an inevitable conviction in the Senate, which would have been the first. When Mr. Nixon resigned, it was in fashion to say that "the institutions" had performed, that "the system" had worked, but even then this was not really so clear. The ending of the Nixon Administration was not as certain, or the series of events that preceded it as impersonal, as history may make them seem. The "institutions" and the "system" are not self-implementing. They can work only if there are enough people who are sufficiently concerned and wise—as well as in a position—to make them work. There were such people—in the Congress, in the Special Prosecutor's office, in the courts, and in the citizenry. But while we learned that the forces that can make our system of government work are powerful, so are the countervailing

forces. There were several times during the year when there was reason to question which would prevail.

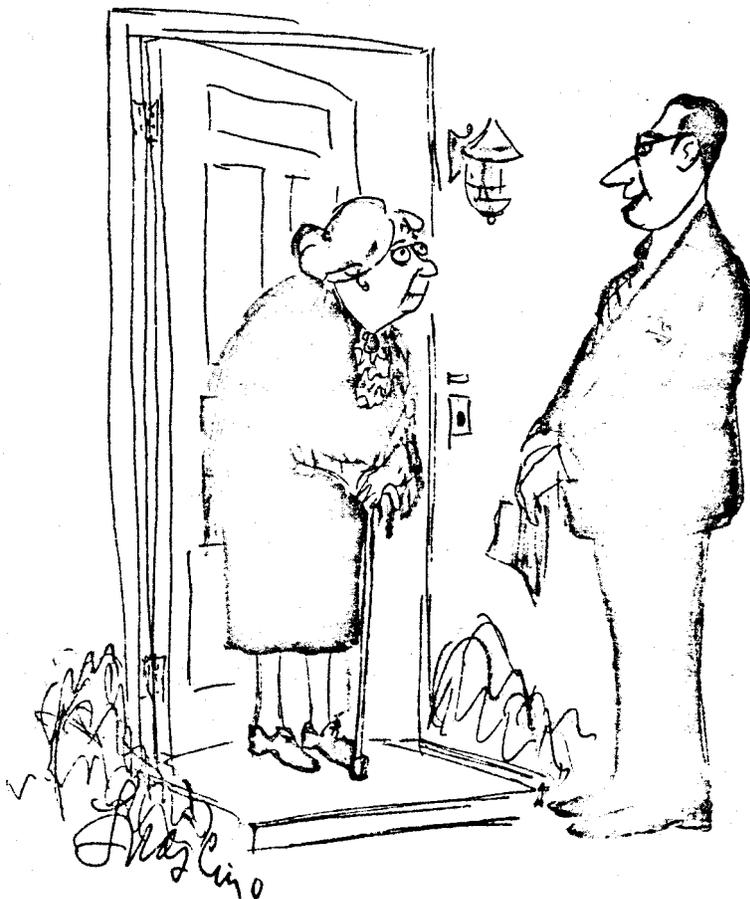
Living through this period here in Washington, one had an opportunity to watch and listen to the people who grappled with these great questions which were to define our nation's future. In following the events in Washington, there was a rare chance to observe the mixture of institutional and human behavior, of processes and personalities, of various motivations and ambitions which went into the decisions about what sort of country this was going to be. During this extraordinary time, I kept a journal. The following are some entries.

MARCH 1

IN cold print, and in stark language, the fifty-page indictment handed up by the Watergate grand jury today

charges that seven former associates of the President "and other persons to the Grand Jury known and unknown, unlawfully, willfully, and knowingly did combine, conspire, confederate, and agree together and with each other to commit offenses against the United States." The first count charges that the conspiracy began on or about June 17, 1972, the date of the break-in at the Watergate, and continued "up to and including the date of the filing of this indictment."

The major attention today is not so much on the details of the indictment as on a sealed report handed to Judge John Sirica by the grand-jury foreman, Vladimir Pregelj, and on a locked briefcase handed to Sirica by Richard Ben-Veniste, Assistant Special Prosecutor. Immediately, the speculation was that it contained information about President Nixon and was intended for



"Remember me, Miss Burns? Alvin Downs. You were my eighth-grade English teacher, and did I ever raise Cain in your class! I didn't turn out so badly, now, did I?"

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