

Reflections in the Mirror

THE events of the last few months form a very important part of our country's history. In the years of the Ayub regime one had come to believe that the turmoil which had troubled our nation in its infancy was giving place to a kind of stability. But all of a sudden this stability seemed just an illusion. All of a sudden it seemed as if a volcano was about to erupt, as if forces of unimaginable powers were about to be unleashed to exterminate in their relentless advance all that lay in the way. Suddenly one was afraid, terribly afraid, even more afraid than one had been when the enemy planes had darkened our skies. Then one had felt alone, one had felt secure in the strength of one's faith, in the knowledge that the nation was not divided against oneself. Then one had felt sure that God was on one's side, but now one felt dreadfully alone - alone with one's doubts and fears - alone because one no longer knew what one was up against, no longer knew quite clearly what cause to uphold, what person or party to trust. One could only turn to God in one's moment of despair but even God seemed far away in the din of one's confusions.

There were endless processions. In the beginning one was happy that there was mass awakening in the country, that our people were becoming conscious of their rights. One watched the processions with a kind of pride, one read the placards and lent ear to the slogans with interest. This, one felt, was the beginning of a new era - an era of greater and more intelligent

participation in daily affairs by our people. Then as the days went by, voices grew more and more angry, more and more filled with hatred. There were stones and bricks flying around in the air. What had taken years to build was destroyed in moments. Lives were lost and human bodies carried through the streets. One felt angry and helpless. Things were so terribly wrong yet one did not know quite whom to blame. It was easy at times to find scapegoats but one could not really shake off one's secret belief that no one man or party or factor was wholly responsible for what had happened. In some measure we were all responsible for our nation's collapse. While some fought for the removal of genuine grievances, others joined in merely to gather the loot. While some strove so that the rottenness and corruption which saps our nation's strength be rooted out, others made a loud noise merely because they thought it possible that when everything was in the melting-pot they might have the good luck to mount the wave which could lead them to personal glory. Those were strange times of honesty and dishonesty, of sincerity and hypocrisy. Only the critical eye of history will be able to determine what the truth was.

Ostensibly all the battles fought in the stormy months were in the name of justice and equality. But people forgot that justice and democracy are complex concepts and that an angry mob at the height of its frenzy is very likely to interpret them in a way which could lead to very dangerous practical

consequences. A nation when it becomes conscious of its rights must correspondingly become conscious of its duties. To seek to raise wages without increasing efficiency or output, or to lower the educational standard because one cannot be bothered to work hard, is neither justice nor democracy in the ideal sense of these words. It is very doubtful whether the students who protested for so many months for the granting of what they owed themselves, their parents, their country. They left their classes and their books to demonstrate against the injustices done to them. One wonders how many students there were who ever thought - through all the hundreds of precious hours which were wasted - of the injustice they did themselves by the gross neglect of their work. Similarly one wonders if the workers who left their factories thought of the colossal damage being done to the nation's economy. The point of this is not whether those who demonstrated - students, labourers, and others - were right or wrong in their demands, the point is that even if they were right, partially or wholly, they had a duty to think of things other than self-interest. Enlightened self-interest associated with the national interest. When a person or a group is determined to promote its own interest at the cost of the nation's interest then the result is bound to be a spectacular catastrophe.

There are no Utopias in the world and our poor, struggling country is very far from being an imitation of one. True it is, and obvious, that innumerable people in our country suffer needless hardship, that there are grievances which it is the imperative duty of a good government to redress. But just as it is dangerous to take the law into one's own hand no matter how great the provocation, it is unwise to make mobs the substitute for legislative bodies. What is wrong must be set right but it must be seen that while setting things right no greater wrongs are committed than the ones which

originally needed redress.

For years our people have clamoured for democracy, yet when democracy was in sight they let themselves go in a fashion which all but wrecked our country. They let themselves be exploited by one idea after another, by one leader after another. Instead of being independent evaluators of what was presented to them they became victims of vituperative bitterness and mass-hysteria. If democracy has been denied to us it is only because we have proved, quite conclusively, in the last few months, that we are not worthy of it.

The imposition of Martial Law is welcome for a number of reasons, but chiefly because it has brought most people back to their senses. They have become aware, perhaps more clearly than ever before, that unless they are able to think clearly and act in an enlightened manner, their dreams of a better life will for ever elude them. Ten years ago the coming of Martial Law saved us from disintegration and disaster and now, once again, it has come to the rescue of a nation which had grown weary of its own confusions and longed to be delivered from the clutches of the insanity which had taken root in its bosom. While our compatriots in the Armed Forces set about putting new life in the paralysed limbs of our country, it is our duty now to devote ourselves to careful self-appraisal, to discover where and how we have failed ourselves and our nation. The Founder of our country had been profoundly wise in calling "Unity, Faith and Discipline" the pillars of our solidarity and progress. For years the spirit of his words has not been truly incorporated in the lives of the people, but if now, having learnt from our trials and errors, we seek to build this spirit into the fabric of our life, the next time we are called upon to make the choice of how we want to order our life and country, we shall not be found wanting in judgment.

"Reflections in the Mirror," (Reflections on the Contemporary Scene), in *The Pakistan Review*, Lahore, Pakistan, 1969.