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Battle of the Book

NEARLY EVERYONE involved in the battle over William Manchester's book, "The Death of a President," is being hurt by the struggle.

There is much that is not yet clear to the public, including the exact nature of Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy's objections to the manuscript.

But at the heart of the controversy lies a situation which is far from unique in writing for publication. This is the agreement between Manchester and the Kennedy family, that in return for exclusive rights to the family's own recollections of the circumstances surrounding President Kennedy's death (as well as access to other persons and material which would be facilitated by the powerful influence of the family) the manuscript would have to be approved before publication.

Whether that approval was being wisely or unwisely exercised has nothing to do with the legal aspects of the matter. Whether it is in the interests of history that such approval be required is also not a matter for the courts to decide. The practice is com-

mon; it is well recognized within writing and publishing circles.

So far as the law is concerned, the chief, if not the only point, is whether the memorandum of agreement which Manchester signed was abrogated by the other party to it.

The agreement has been amended—by agreement—in respect to the date before which there could be no publication. It has yet to be established, however, whether there was any waiver of Mrs. Kennedy's right to be secured against what she considers an invasion of her privacy.

In the meanwhile, charges are being exchanged, extensive publishing commitments are being jeopardized, and public interest is being whetted over a number of issues that are, presumably, only incidental to the main subject of a great national and personal tragedy.

Surely, a matter whose implications for the nation are so important, and in which the feelings of so many individuals are still so deeply engaged, could have been handled with better judgment and less indelicacy.