

LONDONER'S M S T Diary

GRAVELY and a little nervously, with small beads of sweat on his brow and a continual glass of water in his hand, Mr. William Manchester, author of the controversial *Death of a President*, faced a hot-tempered Press Conference at the Savoy Hotel this morning.

"People are appalled by the detail and frankness of it (the book," he said. "They say it was a dreadful thing to write—but what is the alternative? A resort to euphemisms?"

Manchester is a painstaking man with a slow, nasal speech delivery and a great impression of seriousness. What everyone was most insistently interested in, of course, was the litigation between his publishers and the Kennedy family, which blew up into the *Battle of the Book*.

He tried to explain the situation: "I don't think it is a hyperbole to describe the whole thing as tragic," he said.

What took place, he explained, was a confusion. When he had written the manuscript neither



WILLIAM MANCHESTER
Talking today.

Senator Robert Kennedy nor Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy could bring themselves to read it. "Bobby said it would just put him back two years."

But a certain representative of the Kennedy family wanted political cuts which would damage Bobby's career. This involved re-writing President Johnson's first Cabinet meeting.

"And I just couldn't do that," Manchester said with some agony. Mrs. Kennedy wanted some 27 personal cuts, of which Manchester accepted 17. He alleges that he is now on quite amiable and cordial terms with the Kennedy family.

"The book did not hurt the

Kennedys. The controversy did."

Manchester expects to get between 300,000 and 400,000 dollars (about £130,000) after legal fees and tax from the book, and estimated that between five and ten million dollars will go to the Kennedy Library.

If he had to do it all over again, would he still do it? This is a question he has never been able to answer to himself. "It was an agony," he says, with seeming sincerity.

"But you must remember that above all that man who was killed in ~~DEATH~~ was also my friend."

Stinging criticism

THE reviews that greeted Mr. Manchester's book here were anything but ecstatic. Apart from high praise from Mr. Cyril Connolly in the *Sunday Times*

(which serialised the book) critics have tended to use some stinging phrases.

"A classic example of the pornography of power" (Malcolm Muggeridge in *The Observer*). "Until the assassination itself—about a quarter of the way through—the book reads like a parody of *Time* written by Mr. Gorey ~~Wins~~" (Bernard Levin in the *Daily Mail*).

"It is a shame that Kennedy's memorial should have been left to a Presidential *Crawfie*" (Robert Pitman in the *Daily Express*).

"Mr. Manchester's style resembles that of one of the underwriters of old-fashioned advertisements" (Alan Hodge in the *Financial Times*). "A James Bond movie script on an historical theme" (Alistair Cooke in *The Guardian*).

The book is published here by Michael Joseph.