

Good History and Biography

For the Kennedys, the Faucet Is Now 'Off'

Washington—No matter how agonizing it may be to the principals, there is no doubt that the Kennedy-Manchester wrangle is a rare treat to the general public. That is the way the general public is. Now that publication of the Look instalments has begun, it becomes even richer and rarer.



That is because Mrs. Kennedy cause of the opportunity provided with each instalment to compare the amended, or "bowdlerized," version with what might be called the unexpurgated version. This is made possible because of the preliminary distribution by the publisher and the author's agent of manuscript copies in connection with the disposal of secondary publication rights, which is normal publishing procedure.

Thus, hundreds of persons have seen the original, and an undisclosed number of copies are in circulation or kept in safes for reference. Human nature being what it is, even the most minor differences between the original and the published version will almost automatically be brought to the attention of a fascinated public.

Case in Point

This has happened already in the case of the first instalment, in which we are told that the late President personally chose Mrs. Kennedy's wardrobe for the Texas trip in order to show "these Texans what good taste really is."

But what the original is reported to have said is "these rich Texas broads."

By PHILIP WAGNER

Some will insist perhaps that the difference between "these Texans" and "these rich Texas broads" is trivial and historically unimportant. But to me the original text provides a good deal more biographical and historical insight than the neutral expression that has been substituted for it.

Certainly President Kennedy would never have referred to "these rich Texas broads" in a public address, either in Texas or elsewhere. But it does provide a good indication of Mr. Kennedy's attitude toward certain aspects of the Texan culture; and it rings true. There are ladies of taste and fashion in Texas and even more with taste but without the money to indulge in high fashion. But rich and cosmopolitan Easterners do tend to associate Texas wealth with ostentation verging on vulgarity and make slighting remarks about it.

The 'Right Word'?

Moreover, the phrase admirably illustrates the vividness of the Kennedy vocabulary. He had a gift for the *mot juste*. It is no wonder this brilliant if unflattering characterization of Texas womanhood stuck in Mrs. Kennedy's mind and came out again when she was trying to make a faithful reconstruction of the events leading up to the assassination.

No honest biographer-historian, hearing this striking phrase from the lips of the lady to whom it was addressed, and being told in detail how she complied with the presidential request, could let it pass. It tells a great deal about the relations between the late President and the First Lady, about the importance which they both quite properly placed on

her beauty, her good taste and her chic as practical political advantages (did she not charm both Khrushchev and President de Gaulle?) and about his generally supercilious attitude toward the trip which led him to his death.

The original version was good history and biography, I think, and Mrs. Kennedy's effort to suppress it, while understandable as hagiography, is not.

Real Victims

One begins to suspect that the real victims of this wrangle are not the late President, not the diligent and able historian Mr. Manchester, nor President Johnson (who may not be the most polished character in the world but who has behaved with dignity and restraint throughout) but the surviving Kennedys.

With all due respect to Mrs. Kennedy, she has not come out well. By her effort at suppression she has riveted public attention on those very passages she wished to suppress, and has disclosed a streak of willfulness and vindictiveness which had not previously been suspected by the public generally.

And as for the Brothers Kennedy, who are ever attentive to the slightest nuance of public relations, has anyone noticed how they have dropped out of the papers lately? A few routine skiing pictures of Bobby, and that's about it since mid-December.

The torrent of self-serving publicity which Bobby in particular had flooded the news media with for the past year was stopped abruptly. This sort of thing is not accidental. The faucet was turned off. They are waiting to measure the damage to the Kennedy mystique.