

# Hermann Deutsch

*Fadiman Qualifies  
JFK Book Selection*

I HAVE NEVER been among Clifton Fadiman's more idolatrous admirers. Never having met him, I can assign no valid reason for this feeling on my part. Certainly, Westbrook Pegler's waspish reference to him as "the big bull butterfly of the literary teas" would not have prejudiced me against him. Mr. Pegler's truculence was made of no stainless metal, and one did well to disregard it.

He was very unlike his gifted father, the star of the Chicago Journal's staff of writers when Don Higgins and I broke into the exalted circle as Journal cubs in 1915. Arthur Pegler had the hauteur of a Sumner Wells, addressing the P-TA of a melting-pot ghetto. He would walk haughtily and unafraid into the Capone mob whose torpedoes were armed with tommy guns at the time, or into the board meeting of a newly defunct bank, without bothering to explain who he was, and bully the board members into revealing the dozen or so facts they were determined to withhold.



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I think it was by comparison with his confreres of the Information Please panel—chuckling John Kieran, the naturalist-sports writer; glum visaged Franklin P. Adams, the poker-playing poet-columnist; and that blithest of blithe spirits, the young Oscar Levant, musical prodigy, satirist, and turner of phrases, that Fadiman seemed less likeable.

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**NONETHELESS, I URGE YOU** to read Clifton Fadiman's report to members of the Book-of-the-Month Club on Manchester's chronograph of President Kennedy's assassination, considered as "literature." The man actually squirms in the phraseology of his effort to reconcile the book's obvious weaknesses with the fact that its name, like its author's, is on everyone's tongue, and that he is one of the quadrumvirs of the Book-of-the-Month Club's editorial board.

The prefatory announcement preceding Fadiman's re-

port informed the reader that "all members of the Board had been deeply impressed by (Manchester's book) and it was an immediate, unanimous choice." But Fadiman has the essential integrity to say of it that "it would be untrue to say that this is a work of literature, but true to say that it is a work of 'instant' scholarship, possible only in our quick-moving time . . . From now on anyone who writes or talks seriously about President Kennedy will have to study it."

There are, of course, those who do and will continue to regard the foofaraw attendant upon the controversy between the author and the Kennedy family, as an ill-conceived piece of tub-thumping to increase the sale of the book. I cannot share this view. If publicity was its real purpose, it may well have failed rather dismally to achieve its benefits.

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**BY NOW THERE IS—OR SO AT** least it seems to me—a general feeling of resentment against continuing this polemic; a feeling of "oh, for Pete's sake, I'm sick and tired of all this talk about who said what concerning whom." I read the Look installments; I even read the news accounts of what the deleted or objectionable passages were, and I still can't understand what all the shooting was about . . . I'm so sick of it all I shan't even buy the book. For my part, I've had it up to here.

Dist. Atty. Garrison's probe may have revived the fading ember into a brief semblance of leaping, living flame; but I doubt if even this can rekindle the fires of public interest. The Book-of-the-Month Club selection was made last summer, at the height of the controversy and the suit which Jacqueline and Robert Kennedy were filing—did actually file and then withdraw—to halt publication of the book as a volume or as a magazine serial. The element of uncertainty, of "whodunit" mystery is gone. Fadiman is eminently correct when he points out that most individuals agree with the conclusion of the Warren Commission's Report, that no one but Oswald fired the fatal shots, however many cabals and conspiracies may have talked about it before.