

Too Bad *Past* 12/22/66

The wounding public quarrel between William Manchester and Mrs. John F. Kennedy has saddened a great many people. Each of them was obviously most sincere in a stand for principles strongly held. It is to be hoped that the matter now is settled.

The whole contest arose from an initial mistake. Mrs. Kennedy should not have tried to impose upon a scholar restrictions inconsistent with his obligations as a writer; and no scholar should have accepted the limitations of this contractual arrangement. Nothing is to be gained by further controversy over the differing constructions put on the agreement and on the performance under it. Let us hope others will be warned against like arrangements.

Those who are the principals in great public acts of history need constantly to be reminded that "No amount of official restrictions can prevent histories of the past from being written. They can only secure that they are badly and inaccurately written."

Even the revised manuscript no doubt will provoke criticism. Many will think this detailed account should have waited a longer time. But as Herbert Feis has pointed out in the *Foreign Affairs Quarterly*, ". . . narrators do not wait as long as they formerly did to publish what they remember or choose to remember. The time span between experience and expression has been shrinking." As he observed, "historians should be glad of it." And indeed all of us should.

Perhaps there are some things that should not be divulged upon the very heels of happening. They must be very few. Perhaps there are some things that should not be disclosed at all. They surely are even fewer. If any such exist, the only course that the sources may safely pursue is to speak to no one of them.