

The Long Goodbye

"JOHNNY, WE HARDLY KNEW YE"
by KENNETH P. O'DONNELL and
DAVID F. POWERS with JOE McCARTHY
434 pages. Little, Brown. \$8.95.

The hard-eyed reappraisers are all over the Camelot of John F. Kennedy these days, checking the towers with their plumb lines, chipping at the mortar between the stones, skeptically testing the house that Jack built for substance and integrity. And please don't talk to them about "style."

Devaluation is becoming the mode. In *The Best and the Brightest* David

air of a wake going into its second night. With earnest triviality O'Donnell remembers J.F.K. as "the only guy I ever knew who could shave while wearing his topcoat." Powers, who refers to himself as "John's other wife," reproduces evenings spent in the White House when Jackie and the kids were out of town. There were Audrey Hepburn movies and broiled chicken dinners warmed over on a hot plate. Later, perhaps, TV and a few beers, or maybe a couple of oldies on the stereo: *Body and Soul*, *Stardust*, *Stormy Weather*. Then around 11 o'clock the President would take himself off to bed and say: "Good night, pal, will you please put

sion that "Jack did like to have things done for him without hearing about the problems and difficulties involved." A touch of cruelty peeps through their obligatory record of Kennedy wit. A bit sadistically, he made Powers tell Irish jokes to Irishmen in Dublin. Once he ordered O'Donnell to lie over the phone while he watched.

"I hung up the telephone," O'Donnell recalls, "and saw Jack Kennedy smiling at me.

"That was pretty good," he said. 'A nice performance.'

When his brother was there, the President liked to call O'Donnell into his office and say: "Tell Bobby why you think that idea of his is terrible." O'Donnell knew Bobby (on Harvard's 1948 football team) before he knew Jack. Described as "incredibly naive," "actually as soft as a marshmallow," "not a simple man but many different simple men," Bobby clearly was O'Donnell's favorite Kennedy. Dave Powers knew one side of Jack Kennedy: the man off duty, on shore leave from Father, Harvard and public office. But nobody, the memoirists concede, really knew Jack Kennedy except Bobby, and what Bobby knew he kept to himself.

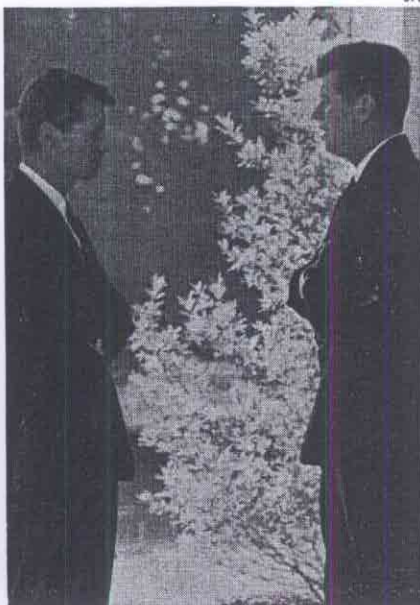
Hands hidden in his tailored pockets, J.F.K. seems to level from these pages his famously measuring, distancing glance, giving the title an ironic double twist. But for President watchers, there is an even more cutting irony. As the special Kennedy sense of infinite promise has lost its magic, inevitably the man who suffered most by comparison with Camelot is now benefiting. Out of the long grass adjoining Camelot a golf ball soars into the sun. Five years ago, who would have believed it? Ike Eisenhower is out of the rough and decently back on history's fairway.

■ Melvin Maddocks



J.F.K. WITH POWERS & O'DONNELL

More than loyal myth making set to Mother Macree.



BOBBY & JACK KENNEDY

Halberstam sees Camelot as an act of hubris created by overconfident young jerry-builders. In the current *Harper's*, the British journalist Henry Fairlie condemns Camelot as a sort of Washington, D.C., Disneyland that substituted the "politics of expectation" for the politics of performance. Just when the veneer is cracking and the gilt peeling, two members of Kennedy's "Irish Mafia," Kenneth O'Donnell and David Powers, have come along with their ghostwriter, Joe McCarthy, to add another bestselling chorus to the Camelot legend. As White House appointments secretary, O'Donnell was Camelot's gatekeeper (Jackie called him "the wolfhound"). Powers was court jester.*

Their memoir has the vague, elegiac

*A typical, alas, Powers bon mot: When the "three-decker Irishman" from Charlestown met the Deputy Premier of the Soviet Union, he asked, "Tell me, are you the real Mikoyan?"

out the light?" And old Dave would drive home to his wife and kiddies in McLean, Va.

It's all a little sad and, in its comfortable banality, revealing. That is what makes the book a valuable collection of footnotes, not the loyal myth making, set to *Mother Macree*. Nor the predictable chapters with titles like "How Lyndon Got on the Ticket" and "The Showdown with Khrushchev." Certainly not the all too facile celebration of J.F.K. as "insatiably curious," the "toughest" of the Kennedys, and compulsively competitive. These, in fact, are the very qualities, along with "style," that make Kennedy seem so cool, so tentative, so undefined in mind and heart, to today's Camelot revisitor.

It is, of course, the occasional slip in image by the two eulogizers that makes J.F.K. more interesting. For instance, there is their wry little confes-

Titan in Training

F.D.R.: THE BECKONING OF DESTINY,
1882 TO 1928
by KENNETH S. DAVIS
936 pages. Putnam. \$15.

The expectant father, James, middle-aged and anxious, was so grateful when things turned out well that he responded to the doctor's bill for \$82 with a payment of \$100. The Hudson River, Hyde Park, Democratic Roosevelts—as opposed to the Long Island Republican Roosevelts—were of course friends of that fellow New Yorker in the White House, Grover Cleveland. They sent a Dutch antique clock on the occasion of his marriage, and later, when their \$100 baby was five, James and Sara took him to the White House to meet the Chief Executive. Cleveland, having his troubles, said to Franklin: "Little man, I am making a strange wish for you. It is that you may never be President."

Within a few years, Franklin, of course, consciously set out to defy that admonition. One of the remote results