

Bill Slocum

**Book War's
Effect on LBJ**



NEW YORK—Some small thoughts, mildly relevant and mildly irreverent, about the Kennedy-Manchester war which I still think is several furlongs behind the Vietnam war in public concern. Or should be.

I get the feeling that when the book is published there will be nobody to buy it except Mrs. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Everybody else seems to know all about it, the more succulent passages have been printed (oh, man, have they been printed and printed) and gossiped all over the world.

★ ★ ★

I MUST CONFESS to being numbed every time I read that the book has never been read by Mrs. Kennedy, Bobby Kennedy and the President. That suggests inhuman restraint, two character gifts never noticeably present in either the Senator or the President.

In the beginning I could understand why Mrs. Kennedy and the Senator had passed on reading the manuscript to avoid reopening wounds that are not now, nor ever will be, fully healed. I am not familiar with Mr. Johnson's reading habits but I rather doubt he has time for unpublished manuscripts.

But when this thing became the story of the day all over the world it is hard to understand how Mrs. Kennedy, her brother-in-law, and the President could avoid saying, "Okay, I've heard all about the book from friends. But now let's see what it really is all about."

No matter what appears or does not appear in the book it has already hurt Mr. Johnson's public image. The quick readers and the non-readers already are convinced of unspeakable Johnson gaucheries on the funeral plane.

Whether they happened or not is secondary. Whether they are omitted from the book (if they ever were written) is now academic.

The Senator has not been seriously wounded by the gaudy incident. And, of course, Mrs. Kennedy carries the admiration of a world that can easily understand the emotional confusion of a widow.

★ ★ ★

IT IS HARD to believe that Mr. Johnson will not have to make some clear public statement no matter what appears in the book. He has been politically hurt by rumors, if nothing else. Silence — never a Johnson forte — will only add to the political wound.

The possibility is mighty remote that Mr. Johnson will see in all this publicity any degree of human error.

He is bound to think he has rather been had. And whether it was by accident or design, he jolly well has been had.