

J. F. K. Remembered

By HENRY BRANDON

ONE CAN'T HELP laughing, but there's an occasional tear, too. That's what usually happens when one leafs through a family album, and that's what happened to me and will probably happen to you if you turn the pages of *John Fitzgerald Kennedy . . . As We Remember Him* (a Columbia Records Legacy Collection L2L 1107, \$19.95). It is an enchanting voyage through Kennedy history. For 221 pages one completely forgets about the inevitable last ten. There are photographs full of nostalgia and others that seem to have been taken only yesterday. There are reproductions of his letters from early school days to the Presidential years, there are the marginal comments by his family and friends. There is John Hershey's story "Survival" about the horror of his PT boat adventure; there is Charles Bartlett's delightful account of how his first attempt to introduce Jack Kennedy

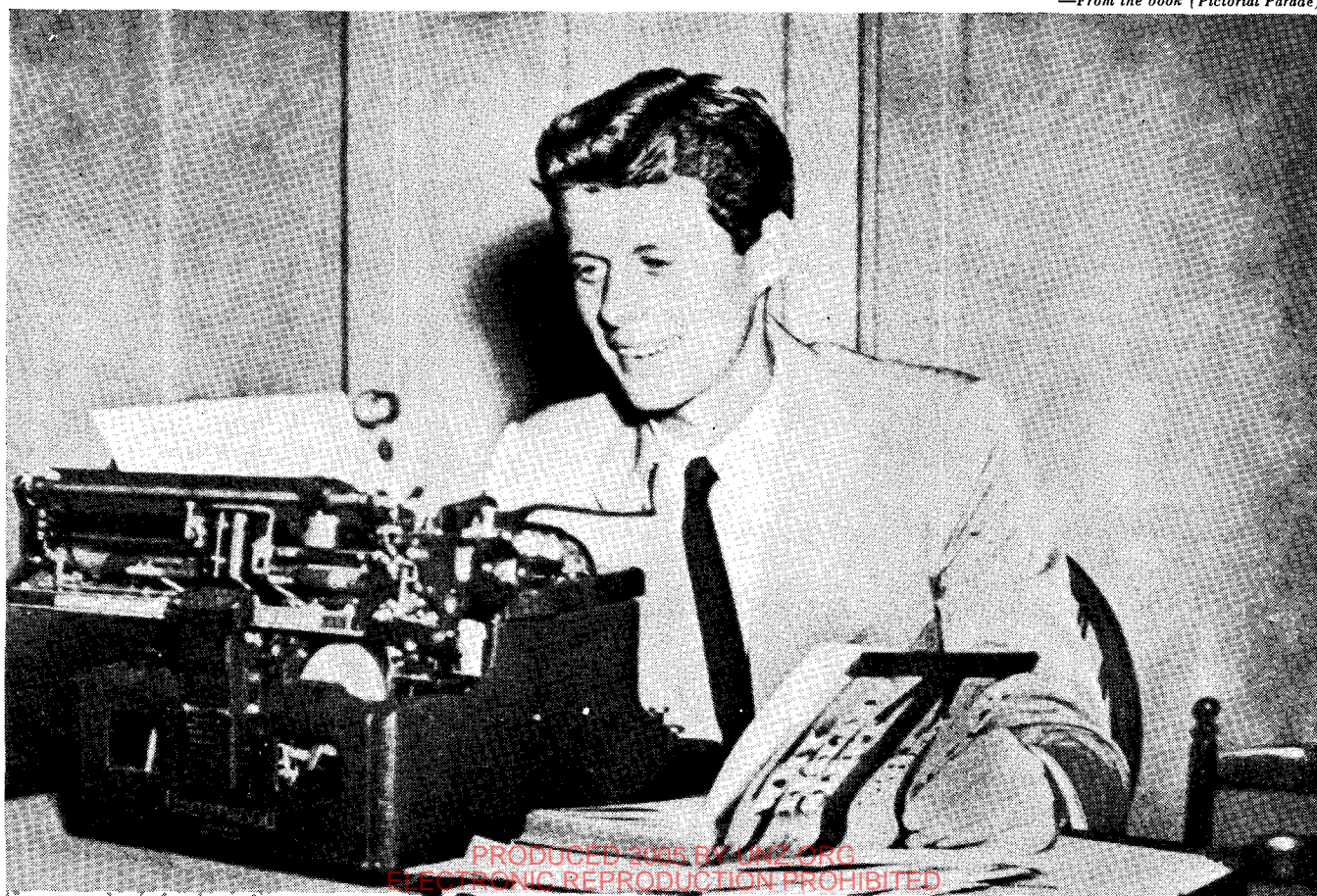
to Jacqueline Bouvier (at a wedding party they both happened to attend) failed because she was engrossed in a conversation with boxer Gene Tunney and thus missed Kennedy, who did not care to wait (this delayed their introduction by two years). There is papa Kennedy's remark to Kay Halle, a family friend, after his son Jack had refused to vote on a bill in Congress the way his father wanted him to: "Well, Kay, that's why I gave them each a million—so they could spit in my eye if they wished." And from Jacqueline Kennedy this poignant recollection: "In Shakespeare he preferred the histories. A favorite passage, which he knew by heart, was the St. Crispin's Day speech from *King Henry V*. He told me the words, 'We few, we happy few,' were what Britons said during World War II about the RAF. Sometimes I thought that line, and another—'shall think themselves accursed they were not here'—reminded me of all the people who be-

lieved in him and who came to Washington with him." And there are innumerable brilliant photographs, more telling than any words: the Inauguration Ball, with Kennedy bathed in light, enchanted and transfigured, and Jacqueline next to him, tense and overwhelmed by the life into which she had been plunged; or the strong, determined gaze of the President during the Cuban missile crisis.

Kennedy liked photographers and was very patient with them. He was never troubled about the angle or in what mood his picture was taken. But then he never took a bad photograph. Once I received from my editor a request to get myself photographed with Kennedy, the then campaigning Presidential candidate. I was embarrassed at having to ask him to pose with me (this sort of thing is so much easier with someone one hardly knows). But when I finally told him, he laughed and reassured me by saying: "But Henry, after all that's our daily bread!" Perhaps the photograph I treasure most, though, is one taken during the America's Cup yacht race off Newport. There were one or two handfuls of personal friends on his destroyer, making a gay, completely informal party. Then at one point, completely undisturbed by what went on around him (he might have been on an island in splendid isolation), he sat among his friends telling daughter Caro-

Graduation from Harvard and publication of a book.

—From the book (*Pictorial Parade*).



line and her little playmate a fairy tale about the fishes following the race, which he invented as he went along. I have never seen him more serene and happy.

He and Jacqueline were surely the most photogenic couple of their time. And it must have been quite a job selecting for this book from among so many marvelous pictures—a job made even more difficult because Kennedy's character, like history, as Goddard Lieberman says in his introduction, was at best "elusive." For all that, it succeeds in showing him at every important phase in his life and in almost every mood. And although Kennedy was of many dimensions, all difficult to capture, this superbly edited and collated pictorial memoir has caught more of them between its handsomely bound covers than one would have thought possible. The work imparts the intimacy of a cozy evening, one perhaps at the Kennedy house in Hyannis Port, with everyone sitting in front of the fireplace feeling *en famille* and talking about things past.

INCLUDED with the album are two phonograph records conceived in the manner of a spoken biography by members of his family and friends, which don't altogether do justice to the pictures and text. Listened to, they are uneven and, where the text is given, they often read better than they sound. The recordings come off best when characteristic incidents are recalled, but where these fall between recollection and tribute Kennedy, with his innate reticence and his preference for the understatement, would probably have frowned. Nor is the connecting commentary all that it might be, relying too heavily on pathos where a sprinkling of parenthetical phrases would have sufficed. But the records do nevertheless add one more dimension to the whole: the affectionate sound of Mrs. Rose Kennedy's voice that could only be a mother talking about her son; the sonorous recollections of some of his teachers that could not be mistaken for anybody else's; the beautifully modulated language of a tribute by Adlai Stevenson; Lord Harlech, representing England's great affection for the President, delving into the past when he first met Jack Kennedy in London and both were lighthearted and much younger.

Finally, in a thoughtfully written epilogue, James MacGregor Burns traces Kennedy's ascension from those early days to world leadership.

It is not only, as President Johnson says in the foreword, "a testament to the vitality of our political process and to the common hopes that transcend all boundaries and encourage the races of man." It is a testament to an unforgettable man and to an extraordinary family.

Through a Disc, Darkly

THE KENNEDY memorabilia industry, which has several times come perilously close to its *reductio ad nauseam*, continues unabated and unrepentant in *That Day with God* (RCA Victor VDM-105), a collection of thirty-one sermons, meditations, and observations delivered on the Sunday after the President's death. My quarrel is not with the unevenness of the material, which ranges from eloquently inspired to unbelievably banal; in a wounded nation, groping to express its baffled grief, even the most maudlin words perhaps deserved a hearing. Nor is it, certainly, with the fact that spiritual leaders of every place and persuasion were moved to speak out; there is a special poignancy in listening to the accents of New England, the South, the Midwest, Ireland, Britain, and the Vatican trying to express, as the Archbishop of Canterbury put it in his November 24 sermon in St. Paul's, "something universal in the human heart." My disappointment comes instead from the twice-removed quality of a recording that is not of Kennedy himself, nor even of the sounds of those days in Washington after the assassination, but of a faint reflection of what was happening. The sense of remoteness, from the sermons themselves to Henry Fonda's dignified introductory words to each

speaker, is nothing short of ghostlike.

The record's antiquarian quality arises, I suspect, more from the conception behind it than from the words on it. For there it, in its best moments, an almost poetic grief. Here are the Reverend Gabriel Bowe, of the Dominican Church of the Holy Cross in Sligo, Ireland, observing in his quiet brogue that "we seem to need occasions of great sorrow and tragedy to draw us together"; the Reverend Abraham K. Akaka of the Kawaiahao Church in Honolulu saying with moving simplicity, "He gave his life for you and me and our country"; and the Reverend William Sloane Coffin, Jr., of Yale, saying, "We academics expect the world to be rational; but who ever said it was?" Here also are Cardinal Cushing, Pope Paul VI, Norman Vincent Peale, Reinhold Niebuhr, and, the senior of them all, ninety-year-old Dr. Winfred E. Garrison of the University of Houston, delivering his second eulogy for an assassinated President. It was just sixty-two years earlier, in 1901, that he had given a similar address in memory of William McKinley, dead by an anarchist's hand.

But despite such moments the listener is likely to be left with some gloomy reservations about *That Day with God*. Nor, it seems to me, does the title help much.

—JAMES F. FIXX.

Kennedy on the Ould Sod

IN THE LATTER PART of June 1963, John Fitzgerald Kennedy spent a crowded four days in the windblown land of his ancestors, where he made speeches before the Irish Parliament and the huge crowds that flocked to his unique visit everywhere he went. Departing from Shannon Airport on June 29, the President quoted Irish poetry to say he would be "back in the spring." This happy plan was never to come about, for Kennedy was dead within five months and these were to be his last utterances on the soil of the Old World, the only words ever spoken on Irish soil by a U.S. President while in office.

Powertree Records, Inc., has just released a pressing entitled *President Kennedy in Ireland* (PLP 5007), produced in cooperation with Radio Eireann and preserving for posterity a souvenir in Kennedy's own voice of his last visit to Europe. We first hear him address the joint session of Dáil Eireann and Seanad Eireann, dropping here and there bits of Irish-American lore to the delight of partisan listeners. He presents a torn

battle flag from a famous Civil War Irish regiment and makes a good case for the potential of a small nation in a crowded, teetering world. Having been the first to endure the birth pangs of revolution and nationhood in the twentieth century, the Irish, says the American President, are in a particularly good position to guide the emerging nations of the latter twentieth century, as the great powers can never be.

The President is then heard on the second side in seven brief appearances in County Wexford, where his ancestors lived; County Cork; Dublin, where he received honorary degrees from the National University of Ireland and Trinity College; Galway and Limerick; and finally in his poignant departure from Shannon. One comes away from both sides of the recording with an expanded sense of the Kennedy facility with words, since not all of these speeches could have been prepared by an overworked staff in an adulatory four-day schedule that would have floored most travelers. Not a vital record but one of some historic interest.

—RICHARD L. TOBIN.