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THE TRIAL OF DR. ADAMS. By Sybille Bedford.
New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959.

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BOOK REVIEWS

THE TRIAL OF DR. ADAMS. By Sybille Bedford. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1959. Pp. 245. \$3.75.

Dr. John Bodkin Adams, a rotund, relatively unknown English physician was tried in 1957 for the murder of an elderly wealthy lady by administering large doses of opiates. This non-sanguinary alleged crime caught the fancy of the English people—if it had been committed in this country it would have probably created something less than a stir in the carmine-cloyed American public. The English fascination may have been caused by allegations that the Doctor had similarly dealt with other elderly and wealthy ladies who had remembered him in their wills. It required seventeen days of trial, the longest in English criminal history, to establish the innocence of the accused. In a short 245 page book, Miss Bedford has condensed the trial into one of the most readable accounts of an actual court proceeding that this reviewer has ever read. Questions and answers are given verbatim. Little pithy asides describe the attitude and demeanor of the accused, witnesses, counsel, court and even spectators. The jacket of the book describes these asides as “enormously subtle” indications of the author’s views. However, a casual reading will disclose that the author’s feelings in favor of the accused are more blatant than latent.

This book is much more than a recount of the trial of an unimportant physician; if this were its only purpose it would soon fade into oblivion. Its lasting value consists of its vivid demonstration of the painful solicitude of the English for the rights of the accused. In the words of Justice Devlin, “We pride ourselves, do we not, that a man who is convicted by a jury is undoubtedly guilty. The price of making sure that the innocent are not convicted must be that the guilty sometimes go free. It is to carry out that great principle that the common law has evolved these rules, the rules of evidence and proof, and it is upon those rules that our juries have been instructed for generations . . .”

The astonishing thing about this book is that a layman has so lucidly caught and portrayed man’s feeble attempts to establish truth and administer justice. “One is left with a sinking sense of the general hopelessness of rediscovering the past, the whole past, *the way it was*. But the ends of a court of law are relative, limited and temporal; the best must be made, here and now, of the best that can be got—fallibility is not a spectre but a calculable risk, and we plod on.”

In commenting upon the actions of the accused in remaining silent, the author stated, “Is it curiosity cheated? It is. Yet this curiosity, as we

call it, is it not one of man's oldest, deepest longings? the desire to hear the tale, to know the truth and meaning, the solution and the cause? . . . The machinery of law, such as we have evolved it, is perhaps a tribute to civilized restraint and melancholy realism; it is not always wholly to the taste of our instincts." In answer to this truism and to all those in this country who are so anxious to dispense with the Fifth Amendment are the stirring words of Justice Devlin, "I have made it quite clear that I am not criticizing that. I do not criticize it at all. I hope that the day will never come when that right is denied to any Englishman. It is not a refuge of technicality: the law of this matter reflects the natural thought of England. So great is our horror at the idea that a man might be questioned, forced to speak and perhaps to condemn himself out of his own mouth, that we afford to everyone suspected or accused of a crime, at every stage, and to the very end, the right to say: 'Ask me no questions, I shall answer none. Prove your case.'"

Miss Bedford has the unusual talent of being able to write photographic prose; with proselyting without preaching; with making Americans proud of being part of the English heritage of justice and at the same time, a little sad for having discarded so many of their meticulous trial procedures in the name of dispensing with pomp and formalism.

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FLORIDA REAL ESTATE TRANSACTIONS. By Ralph E. Boyer. Matthew Bender & Co., 1959. 1097 numbered pages, but with pagination reserved for expansion. \$30.00.

The law schools purport to teach the substantive law of real property and a lawyer is presumed to have been exposed to (though not necessarily affected by) the Rule Against Perpetuities and the Rule in Shelley's Case. However, neither an LL.B. degree nor a license to practice law is any indication that its holder has any familiarity with the practicalities of conveyancing. In "Florida Real Estate Transactions" Professor Boyer splendidly fills this gap in his scholarly treatise on the Florida law of real property. He begins with the sales contract and leads his reader through the sequence of events which culminates in the transfer of the ownership of a parcel of Florida real estate. In so doing he has provided the Bar not only with an outline of each step to be followed by counsel, but with ample excerpts from, and thoughtful analyses of, the forms usually employed in Florida real estate transactions with a comprehensive treatment of the statutory and case law as it applies to each step in the transaction and to each document which counsel must draft or review. The check list with which each section of the volume commences should prove beneficial