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BOOK NOTE

VERDICT FOR THE DOCTOR. By Winthrop and Frances Neilson. New York: Hastings House, 1958. Pp. 245. \$4.50.

In the infant days of this country there occurred in the city of Philadelphia, then the capitol, a yellow fever epidemic that swept through the city and set the scene for one of the most interesting defamation trials that has occurred in the history of American jurisprudence. Dr. Benjamin Rush, a practitioner of medicine, but perhaps more famous as a signer of the Declaration of Independence and an advocate of democracy, strongly recommended bloodletting and purges as a cure for the dread fever. This theory of treatment caused a schism in the local profession. Perhaps more for his outspoken political philosophy as a follower of Jeffersonian democracy than for his professional ability, Dr. Rush's professional character was delicately, but thoroughly, emasculated by the razor-sharp satire of William Cobbett, an English monarchist, who published the widely read and influential political periodical, *Porcupine's Gazette*. Forced from the medical profession into government service in the treasury department, and unable for the sake of family, profession and self to bear any more of "*Porcupine's quills*," he brought an action for libel against Cobbett, and recovered a verdict for \$5000. More important, he succeeded in placing some reasonable fetters on overzealous freedom of the press.

Written primarily for the layman, this book reads much like a historical novel, detailing the lives of the two men whose personalities came into such violent conflict in a troubled time. Two-thirds of the book sets the stage for the trial which occupies the final third of the volume. The trial portion of the book consists mainly of quotes from the arguments of counsel, illustrating the rhetorical effects achieved by the attorneys in arguing a case that loomed large in the public eye.

The authors—a husband and wife team, neither of whom appears to have a legal background—have successfully edited the record of the trial proceedings to catch the mood of this period. Their book is easily read and provides a background knowledge of the times and persons involved in the libel suit by Dr. Benjamin Rush against William Cobbett. In a wider sense it is a discussion of some of the elements that led to the development of reasonable freedom of the press as we know it today.