

## Book Reviews

GERARD L'E. TURNER, *The great age of the microscope: the Collection of the Royal Microscopical Society through 150 years*, Bristol and New York, Adam Hilger, 1989, 4to, pp. ix, 379, illus., £39.50.

This book by the Professor of the History of Scientific Instruments at Imperial College, himself a past President of the Royal Microscopical Society, covers in 379 pages the development of the light microscope since 1839, when the Society began. Six pages of Society history are followed by 10 describing the development of the European microscope manufacturing trade in the nineteenth century, and 8 pages introducing the reader to the catalogue. The remainder describe the 452 numbered items in the collection coupled with a bibliography and an index of names of inventors, makers, developers, manufacturers, and donors to the collection. Named devices are not listed so that a reader wishing to find a reference for example to the expanding dark-ground diaphragm stop but who has forgotten that it was Traviss's invention will just have to thumb through the pages. Likewise, to find the entry for the once-familiar dark-ground pointolite lamp, one must remember that it was manufactured by Ediswan.

Most of the items catalogued are illustrated by one, sometimes by two plates. Highly polished brass items are notably beautiful; and notoriously difficult to photograph in black and white. The plates are adequate but generally lack contrast. Colour plates of selected exhibits such as graced the pages of the September 1989 issue of the (free) magazine *Microscopy* would have made the catalogue a treasure, but without a sponsor, beyond price?

However, the book is intended to guide us through the actual collection and the descriptions of the items will be a source of delight and fascination to those who teach microscopy to undergraduates or who are just scientifically curious. The nostalgically chauvinistic will perhaps reflect upon the sets of plug and ring gauges for eyepieces and substages and on the standard taps and dies for RMS objective threads; now (almost) England's only remaining contribution to current microscope production.

K. McCarthy, University of Liverpool

COLIN WILSON, *Written in blood: a history of forensic detection*, Wellingborough, Northants, Equation, 1989, 8vo, pp. 512, illus., £14.95.

There are two ways to review a book like this. The reviewer can try to determine, first, how well the author has fulfilled his declared intentions, and second, how much the reader is likely to enjoy the book. Wilson invites critique on both counts as the blurb claims that this is "a serious contribution to the literature of scientific crime detection and an absorbing popular history of a subject that fascinates us all". On both counts, it is disappointing.

The book consists of a series of brief descriptions of cases from the early nineteenth century to the present day, especially of crimes committed in the United States and in Western Europe. The chapters deal with applications of particular techniques, for example fingerprints, serology, ballistics, and microscopy, or with topics—poisoning, the sexual criminal, manhunts, and "the soul of the criminal". However, the descriptions are brief, with little in the way of detailed analysis, and it is not clear if Wilson is giving us any new information as there are no notes to the text and the only references are to secondary sources. It is not encouraging to find, for example, that Wilson quotes R. H. Goddard's 1912 description of the "Kallikak" family without qualification. This was a family discovered by Goddard where an upstanding man married first a lowly, supposedly subnormal woman, and secondly a Quakeress of equal standing to himself. Goddard found that the descendants of the first union were all antisocial and/or defective, while those of the second marriage were all worthy citizens. There is clear evidence that this study was deeply flawed by Goddard's preconceptions and prejudices, if not actually fraudulent. Yet Wilson cites this study with approval as supporting the inheritance of criminal tendencies! Wilson does try to make some generalizations, and he is not modest about his achievements: "the essence of criminal psychology", he has discovered, is the temptation to "restore the sensation of free will by doing something absurd or violent or even criminal". This seems to be a rather sweeping and naive conclusion, disregarding as it does social factors.

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Murder is indeed a subject that fascinates us all, and the blurb promises a grisly panorama of case studies. In this, it is correct, but the result is dull, or rather dulling: I came to long for a respite from another set of names or another outrage. The book is inordinately long, and one can only be thankful that Wilson did not write the 10,000 pages that he feels the subject needs.

Jan A. Witkowski, Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory, New York

FRANK DANBY, *Dr Phillips: a Maida Vale idyll* (1887), with an introduction by Stephen Lock, London, Keynes Press, British Medical Association, 1989, 8vo, pp. xii, 285, illus., £45.00, abroad £49.00, incl. (air) postage from *BMJ* (Keynes Press), PO Box 295, London WC1H 9TE.

Few Victorian novels come as directly to the point as Frank Danby's story about Dr Benjamin Phillips, a Jewish doctor with a large and profitable practice in Maida Vale. "He made money, bought a carriage for his wife, and Mrs Cameron for himself." Fat, stupid, German Clothilde gets her carriage, her emblem of respectability. He gets blonde, blue-eyed Mary Cameron. From then on, it's downhill all the way ("his character retrograded"). Adultery is compounded by feuds, remorse, a great deal of cheerful bitching, and, eventually, murder.

First published in 1887, *Dr Phillips* has been reprinted—handsomely—by the Keynes Press because it is at once racy and a source of speculation about the career of Ernest Hart, editor of the *British Medical Journal* from 1866 to 1898 and supposedly the model for Phillips. Like Phillips, Hart was Jewish, and combined his editorial duties with a fashionable London practice. His first wife, Rosetta, died in mysterious circumstances. This, and other episodes, created plenty of scope for rumour. (Danby didn't have to invent *all* the cheerful bitching.)

"Danby" was the pseudonym of Julia Frankau, who specialized in sensational descriptions of Jewish or Bohemian life. Meeting her in 1911, Arnold Bennett found her "very chic"—and thoroughly ashamed of her novels. This one is notable chiefly for its portrayal of the medical profession. Phillips ends up as the prophet of a "new school" of surgeons whose "curiosity to unveil the mysteries of nature" has bred an "absolute disregard for human life". They sound like an interesting bunch.

David Trotter, University College London