

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.

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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.