

Book Reviews

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.

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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.

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