

prefer reading to gardening at the week-end this book will be thoroughly welcome.

Even by more exacting standards you can at least read the whole book and retain your self-respect. The English is matter-of-fact and colloquial, and although just enough is made of the sexual incidents to send thrills down respectable spines still there is no crude sensationalism. The view of Claudius as an unwilling dictator with democratic ideals in an age without them has some present-day relevance, and his exhibition of just that pattern of excellences and defects which would isolate him, and win the contempt of inferior contemporaries, is not grossly—though it is slightly—sentimental. The most interesting part of the book, the only part with any pressure behind it, is the end, in its presentation of Claudius' tired cynicism towards the kind of affairs his active years had been devoted to, and his realization that his efforts could have contributed nothing to the ideal he had held for Rome. It is only here for a few pages that the story has any of the interest that one might have hoped for on the strength of some of Mr. Graves' poetry.

Except for this it is just part of the movement which is re-discovering the value of taking pains, being intelligible, and avoiding intellectual and emotional inflation. Control is the essence of the movement, but most of its exponents lack any force that demands control. The result is the academic, with all its virtues and lifelessness.

D.W.H.

*EARLY VICTORIAN NOVELISTS*, by Lord David Cecil (*Constable*, 10/-).

Lord David Cecil admits in his prefatory note that this is a slight book, and asks that it be judged as such ; so we may assume that he did not mean to offer anything new on the Victorian novel. His essays merely tabulate the merits and faults of the authors concerned—with, of course, the merits predominating.

Both merits and faults are the obvious ones and, in most of the essays, the conclusions are unexceptional though, perhaps, scarcely worth repeating when they can be found in many other

works on the same subject. However, to have them altogether in one volume would be quite useful. Lord Cecil, if he was not attempting fresh discussion, should have been content to leave it at that. Instead, he tries to explain the author's characteristics in language that often sounds impressive but is inclined to lack meaning, he exaggerates various traits in order to make large claims for his authors, and he seems unable to make a statement without embroidering it with two or three lifeless metaphors, a gentle cadence, or a piece of more or less irrelevant descriptive writing. If we can disentangle Lord David Cecil's meaning from this clinging growth, the book turns out to be an enthusiastic and unassuming—though slightly patronizing—account of its subject that might quite well attract readers to the Victorian novel. As it is, many will be put off by the manner of presentation—criticism here is creation 'manqué,' and the trimmings are the manifestations of the thwarted impulse.

The introductory chapter ends with reminiscences of Sir Thomas Browne (?). 'For the achievements of the art of letters, the fall of a phrase, a man or a moment made vivid in a few scrawls of ink, can survive, fresh with all the glowing tints of youth, when towered temples and embattled cities have become no more than sunshine and silence and a chip of stone in the sand.' The perfect dying fall. And Charlotte Brontë is presented to us, as follows, ' . . . the gale rages under the elemental sky, while indoors, their faces rugged in the fierce firelight, austere figures of no clearly defined class or period declare eternal love and hate to one another in phrases of stilted eloquence and staggering candour.' These passages are not really intended to mean anything—merely to put the reader in a receptive frame of mind ; it would be a waste of time to inquire into the exact meaning of this sentence describing *Wuthering Heights*—'A pure clear morning light irradiates it ; a wind keen with the tang of virgin snow blows through its pages.' The mischief is that this is the sort of book that may be given to Higher School candidates to read, and their style will probably be modelled accordingly. They may even imitate its whimsicality, as when we are told that the difference between Mrs. Gaskell and her feminine literary contemporaries is summed up in the 'Mrs.' that she alone bears before her name in admirers' minds.

Lord David Cecil's conclusions, as I have said, do not, as a whole, call for much discussion, except for his exaggerated opinion of Thackeray, and the essay on George Eliot which shows that his standards of criticism have been to some extent the usual misleading ones of 'character' and 'pleasure.' George Eliot receives full recognition for her intellectual superiority, but Lord David Cecil, though realizing it to be her chief asset, seems to be repelled by it and finds her inferior to Dickens in 'creative imagination.' 'Lydgate is far more like a real man than Mr. Micawber, we know much more about him . . . But he is not so alive . . . [Her characters] never seem, as the greatest figures in fiction do, to have got free from their creators, and to be acting and speaking of their own volition.' The suspicion that this means only that Dickens is easier to read is confirmed on the last page where the comparison is with Mrs. Gaskell—'*Middlemarch* may never give us the same feeling of unalloyed pleasure as *Wives and Daughters* does, but it rouses far deeper emotions, sets the mind far more seriously astir.' The criterion of pleasure implied here is bound to be misleading in serious criticism.

FRANK CHAPMAN.

## THE CRITICISM OF BALLET

*BALLETOMANIA*, by Arnold L. Haskell (Gollancz, 18/-).

There is much to be said for regarding ballet, at the present time, as an art form of considerable importance. With the failure of the symbolist and expressionist movements, ballet remains the only popular alternative to the current drama of social realism. And interest in the modern ballet is, as most recent writings on the subject show, stimulated or at least supported by the frustrations imposed by the ordinary theatre. But apart from this accidental significance it seems to-day more obvious than ever before that the ballet possesses an intrinsic importance; through the medium of classical dancing it can offer satisfactions which, however they are to be explained, are unique.