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AFRAID TO CREATE?

Life and Andrew Otway. By Neil Bell. This Our Exile. By David Burnham. (Peter Davies. 7s. 6d)

Books of the Day

T various times persons in positions of authority have announced that recently passed over our heads. If they of civilisation. One means that within finished, because all that it can say has lying about to excite the interest of Miss barians, just as there is in England, that already been said. Sir Edmund Gosse be some need to exhort them to moderation AND ANDREW OTWAY," that very disannounced once that he feared the writing in the use of it. But as it is, in a day when appointing successor to the admirable of poetry must be regarded as a dying the puny and not the excessive is our peril, "Precious Porcelain," in which the author industry, since it had expressed every emphasis on the importance of restraint writes with a sentiment he never justifies turn and twist of emotion, and must now be at a loss for material; and we hear if one is afraid of making a fool of oneself. every now and again that the novel like- except, perhaps, make a fool of oneself. wise must fall into desuetude. Macaulay's New Zealander (we might suppose, if we originally imported from America, is not believed this sort of thing) might some | nearly so mighty in America; and it is intime in the course of exploring the primi- teresting to note how American fiction gains ceiving or have received expensive Univertive depths of his mind, stumble on the in freedom by it. concept of the plot and the mythic figures of the hero and heroine, and be unable ING OF A DOOR," a novel about a family, to imagine to what creative purposes they can ever have been put.

these fears. The function of art is the factory. analysis of experience, and so long as there is one human being left alive there The Narcissist Circle exists material for an infinite number of works of art.

But one understands exactly what causes this fear that a form of art has died. It arises when we get artists who have the Eye," which was a novel about a boy the wealthy themselves. It is as if there mastered the technique of this form and practise it easily and frequently, while farm that when he grew up he went to the expiation. abstaining from the creative process, the inquisitive handling of experience which is such a wonderful childhood on a farm that Burnham's great gift that the people are the sole justification for any artistic activity. The spectacle of this empty and futile dissipation of energy is as depressing as any other spectacle involving the waste of "The Grandmothers," about a boy who their misery is real. human resources. We feel that things have loved his grandmothers so much that when gone dangerously wrong, that the mechanism which should have supported life has gone into reverse, that there seems no sense in continuing the use of it.

Mechanical Trick

ING DAY "comes to show how a talent that a less ego-centric handling of the material. or both, so that he should have something not conveyed to the reader. to express.

cisely because of his gift for handling words. can be grasped if one considers how hard it is to make a thorough musician out of any of those prodigies who can play anything by ear and put up a tolerable performance on any musical instrument.

more naughtily than in "A Threshing of fashion, it is a valid criticism of life. n the reader and recounts it gracefully. Then he tacks on to it a sentence of slightly gone before, which suggests that this material has a hidden significance, now Nelson: His Heroic Life made apparent to every subtle-minded reader, and that in keeping it back he has been exercising a masterly restraint. "A Threshing Day" is a quite common-

place story of a young farm girl who is drawn irresistibly towards seduction by the virility of a country blackguard; it represents an imaginative counter put into extensive circulation by Hardy and Lawrence. It is no new issue from Mr. Bates's mint. But he tags on to it the sentence, "No sooner had she begun to smile, however, than it seemed as if her heart would break."

Now, this does not in fact illuminate the Wilkinson opens his narrative in a fashion subject in the least, but it looks as if it did. It gives a masterpieceish air. But it is cautious over saying anything old. illegitimate. It is the literary equivalent of wardrobe out of which the historian must a wallop that owes its force to the horseshoe take the costume of the plain tale of these

Fear of Crudeness

in the boxing-glove.

By this device Mr. Bates pleases the people who, not knowing what literature is about, are anxious not to be wrong about literary matters, and who feel that something is being done adroitly, as indeed it is. But it is puzzling to consider how he can possibly please himself. It is in the deprive us utterly of the fabulous incidents highest degree unlikely that a person so vital and so sensitive as his prose proclaims him can really be cut off from life, can really have no experience to investigate. It is more likely that Mr. Bates, like ventured on creation he might find himself being crude, being experimental, being subject to criticism. It is to be deplored that he does not take the plunge, and yet one cannot blame him. There is evidently something in the critical atmosphere of today in England which would justify a fear that if he was led by a creative impulse to be crude and experimental, these faults would be held to cancel out any merits he might disclose at the same time.

be estimated by another book which is far hanging at the yard-arm of the frigate, more than a book of the month. It combelow the standard of its author's talents. 'Come,' said the demon woman, who had prises the best of the available informa-Miss Sylva Norman's "CAT WITHOUT had the power to expel every generous feel- tion; its transitions and explanations are SUBSTANCE" is a more honest attempt to ing from the breast of her infatuated sound; its general effect of the period is get a story going than " A Threshing Day." admirer, and substitute in their stead the free from the sentimental antiquarianism It sets out to represent the mood of a gene- worst of those vindictive passions which which is larded over many modern ration who can see in the order of events degrade human nature- Come, Bronté let accounts of our predecessors-sun, sea. something more ironical than accident, but us take the barge and have another look at men and women do not bear the labels can detect no other traces of a controlling Caraccioli.' The barge was manned and the "Antique" and "How Different!" The personality. They see, in fact, "the grin vindictive pair rowed round the frigate, and descriptive passages are unlaboured but without the cat," which was "the most satiated their eyes with the appalling copious, and the author's ironical notes, by

is a sufficient specimen. Miss Norman treats her theme through A particular theme of Mr. Wilkinson's, To the Battle of the Nile Mr. Wilkinson the story of Rosemary, the exquisitely but and an excellent one, is Nelson the artist supplies a background of Egyptian afterspiritually sterile woman who knows she is or peet-one who was not only an inventor noon and sunset, which suits well with his infecting her composer husband, Howard, of separate actions remarkable for design, rendering of the beauty of Nelson's "most with her own sterility, and contrives there- rhythm, and fulfilment, but who regarded perfect work of art "-and, moreover, he fore that he shall have as a companion and his whole course as a kind of Ode to Duty, adds a striking epilogue of the French inspiration the vital, sweet, and tawdry and who, possessing some sense that his time army afterwards, harrying the Mamelukes Leila. The remarked irony of fate sees to was short, planned his lifework passionately in the desert, busy without significance. it that this intention leads to the doom of for a great unity. Leila, the deep grief of Howard

ing any other mood than the stoical book is a natural panegyric, commanding has the gift of making decisive observaendurance of a grotesque destiny; that is the reader's response. the mood that is being worn this decade. To-day we are troubled by certain appre-She would be afraid of being thought to hensions, either awakened or fostered by be writing an ordinary novel, such as per- the experiences of the world in a war even sons who had never heard, say, of Virginia more extensive than the wars which Nelson lays parts logically and poetically separate made sea warfare beautiful "-for the first

A Threshing Day. By H. E. Bates.

(W. & G. Foyle Ltd. 7s. 6d.)

Cat Without Substance. By Sylva Norman (Peter Davies. 7s 6d.)

The Opening of a Door. By George Davis.

She is not Hugh Walpole. But, worst of all, she does not get going. Her story does not generate within herself the warmth that would unseal her deeper self, and make it reveal what the theme means to it—for by as dissociated from tradition, from the The Opening of a Door. By George Davis assuredly she would never have chosen that modes of human behaviour which have

This is the result, of course, of a school OUR EXILE." of criticism which lays undue emphasis on the importance of restraint, which is a made of the true American barbarism. That virtue not worth mentioning until one has term one uses advisedly. One does not something to restrain. It is not as if the mean that all America is barbaric, or that purple tides of a Romantic movement had Europe provides by contrast a standard some form of imaginative art is had, there might be more available material America there is a community of bar Norman and Mr. Bates, and there might one may learn from Mr. Neil Bell's "LIFE leads simply to the fear of making a fool of a fatuous and fraudulent company of oneself. And one cannot do anything promoter.

Here is Mr. George Davis's "THE OPEN-

which has a fundamental flaw and one or two blemishes, but which is so confidently There are, of course, no grounds for of its theme, that its net result is satis-

town and wrote a book about a boy who had For these people are miserable. It is Mr. when he grew up he went to the town and real-the weak and insolent Jackie, the wrote a book about . . . but the snake has weaker and more insolent Jimmie, the its tail in its mouth. He also composed weakest and most insolent Freddie; and he grew up he wrote a book about a boy Cannot Face Life who loved his grandmother so much that when he grew up he wrote a book about

give instead this sense of a dead end, be- Theodora, the beauty of the family, who cause it is in thrall to a mechanical trick. returns after extensive travels in Europe It was apparent when Mr. Bates made his as a governess in name only. The pages first appearance with "The Two Sisters" dealing with her are always mistaken, parthat here was a writer with such a natural ticularly one scene which suggests that the of achieving any successful sexual relationcommand over language that it was of the act of biting in the leg an Armenian clergyutmost importance for him to cultivate his man whom one is shortly to marry has a powers either of observation or speculation symbolic value for the author which he has

Mr. Davis writes exquisitely-more That this was likely to be difficult, pre exquisitely even than Mr. Bates; but he never writes for safety's sake. of the decay of the Macdougall family. nificance which may not be apparent to English readers. The American imaginaovercome; and though he can write as prairies, following the sun to the west, cona page, as all but a handful of his contem- The Macdougalls are rejects of the prairies. | ninepins.

o arouse a feeling of pleasure or familiarity | Davis's talent may not rise if it has the by the fear of committing himself.

Dynasts is crammed with spurious stuff-

with apocryphal anecdotes, catchpenny opinions; Mr. Wilkinson throws them aside

with vigorous reasons why. The Madame

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Not that our author does not appreciate

MELODRAMATIC VIEW

fabrication is not enough to save it.

12s 6d Net)

(Hamish Hamiston. 7s. 6d.) theme if it had not had some special signistood the empirical test of time, as the intolerable characters of his novel, "This

This is the most startling revelation yet

"This Our Exile" depicts the life of a family resident in a Chicago suburb, during and after the last illness of the father. This school of criticism, though it was There is a mother and three sons, and a great deal of money. All the boys are resity educations, and they all contemplate careers which involve expenditure rather than income. They and their friends have luxurious houses, unlimited servants, automobiles, speed-boats, saddle-horses, and itself, so calm and capable in its treatment swimming-pools. But they obstinately recall to the mind the idea of extreme

The spectacle of these people, gorged with luxury and without the slightest sense of duty to the community, is peculiarly revolt-Its fundamental flaw is that it belongs to ing; and it would seem as if the demand the narcissist school of American fiction, that wealth should be paid for by social which is headed by Mr. Glenway Westcott. responsibility was not a quid pro quo That able writer composed "The Apple of exacted by the community, but came from who had such a wonderful childhood on a were a sense of guilt that exhorted them to

They cannot face life, and, indeed, life is ... again the snake has its tail in its mouth. not (as Henry James suggested) there for "The Opening of the Door" tends to them to face; at least the channels along describe the same circle, being a book about which human beings have been apt to This kind of depressant effect is evoked a boy who disliked his old family so much approach it are not open. They try to not infrequently by English fiction to-day; that he takes steps to go to the town and master it by anti-romanticism. When their and that sometimes tragically, as in the writes a book about a boy who . . . one feels mother, a stupid but affectionate woman, case of Mr. H. E. Bates, whose "A THRESH- one is not getting on, that one would prefer loses the husband she has lived with for twenty-five years, she naturally enough might give an abounding sense of life can The chief blemish on the book is Aunt gives way to grief; and this is the precise point of the universe they select for their attack. These helpless and unmannerly children, incapable themselves of conducting their lives in regard to work, incapable ship, turn and bait her. Because she has not stopped grieving less than a year after her husband's death, in response to their ill-timed incivilities, they fall about in attitudes of despair, feeling that life is not worth living.

The curious thing is that Mr. Burnham much interested by his ideal convinces us, without seeming fully conscious of the fact, that the mother is grievwhich, by the way, has a satirie sig- ing not so much over the loss of her husband as over the nature of her children. Her husband was happy in the making of

This difficulty Mr. Bates has not yet tion loves to see itself as breasting the his wealth and could stand up to life. Her sons are invincibly unemployed, and, beautiful a sentence, and even as beautiful quering all by the vitality of pure being, making noises like Napoleon, go down like

poraries, his work suffers from an obvious They went, they dared, they are back, It is a superb picture of decadence; and paucity of material. To cover this deficiency huddled in a hideous flat in Chicago. Pure Mr. Burnham has achieved it in spite of all he has perfected a technical device which being, it seems, is not enough. Mr. Davis's sorts of difficulties, the chief of which is his he has used again and again, but never sense of irony there is not a mere following over-sympathy with his subjects' lack of values. He has been able to do this, cer-Day." He takes any incident that is likely There is no knowing to what heights Mr. tainly, because he has not been paralysed

Biography—The Letters of Coleridge

raphy of Sir Horace Smith-Dorrien played a dramatic part in the first se of the Great War. He gave his

rl Leslie Griggs. He draws his materia m the original letters exactly as they re written, and the work is carefully

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y Candid Recollections," and they I. I gather, appear soon with Nash and

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the world at large, but still—the family

There is a pleasing air of naturalness and a pronounced sense of fun about Mr. bular edition, at half-a-crown, of his book. Severn's novel, which, combined with his talent for characterisation, promise well for

Pickwickians would have fared under Not long ago the Duchess of Atholi gave us a little book which explained various public Mr. Thurston Macauley has compiled an questions, and incidentally had a tilt at Mr. hology of "The Festive Board," in a George Bernard Shaw. She has now done ime so entitled, which Methuen will book on "The Conscription of a People." J. M. meaning the Russian people.

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internal-combustion engine and the steam grandmother lost her keys one night turbine. They describe modern methods of the common, and was searching for the nower transmission and do not fail to notice when a benevolent old gentleman appeared that the "gas grid"-with gas transmitted "'I've lost the keys, sobbed gran at high pressure from a central station to mamma. What will mother say? places fifty or more miles away—is being must tell her to-night.' Not to-night.' sai developed as well as the "electric grid"

that receives wider publicity. No one can predict the precise direction which technical progress will take, and the authors do not try to do so. But their account of what has been done up to the had been up half the night searching present will be of distinct value and interest to many laymen and not a few experts.

to write an amusing book. He has live through one of the most interesting an varied half-centuries in history; his work has brought him into contact with score of figures that, even in perspective, sti loom large: and he has a charm, a humou nd a freshness of mind that make eve

He has, too, the painter's power for instance, his account of the discover

jueray, and in despair Lady Alexander at Ir. Robertson went to see a young actr med Evelyn Millard in "The Bla

"Miss Millard was very beautiful, ve

The authors explain clearly the true confidence, and on the night of the produc

the old gentleman-to postpone the unp sant was characteristic of him. 'To-morro will come quite soon enough." Early next morning she received a sma packet 'with Mr. S. T. C. Coleridge's co pliments.' The thrice-blessed old gentlema common with a lantern, and had at la achieved success."

Time Was. By W. Graham Robertson

(Hamish Hamilton, 15s.)

Reviewed by CAMPBELL DIXON Mr. Graham Robertson could hardly fa up a figure or a scene. Take

is loft a bore.

in an artificial juxtaposition, just to show time? but one has mislaid one's

Reviewed by EDMUND BLUNDEN Nelson. By Clennell Wilkinson. (Harrap, Thucydides-the mind receives it unwillingly, as being a truth by omission. There was beauty in the Battle of the Disclaiming any suggestion that he can Somme-but, like the duckboard tracks, it "say anything new about Nelson," Mr. only covered a small area of the mad country. We are beginning to be trained which assures us that at any rate he will be into a notion of the ugliness even of a The Nelson victory, and not only that, we find the equipment and paraphernalia of war are not so attractive to look at as they

an "Ode to Duty

In short, the materials in which the artist Nelson worked are largely such as the human race deplores, alike the idea of and found incorrect; the ingenuity of a war and the circumstances of its exhibition. They grow irrelevant and repulsive.

OUR INSPIRATION

the beauties of melodrama. He does not Mr. Wilkinson's generation-my ownwhich, as a chronicler, he is rejecting. will go on talking in the sincerest way for "Look on this picture, and on this," is a years to come of the Australians as trench way of his. Consider his summary of raiders, of the Germans as machine-Nelson's execution of Caraccioli in the Bay gunners, and this or that commander's of Naples. First he sets down the true brilliance; but we shall talk mainly among admirers, is afraid of being wrong. If he details (such as, that Caraccioli was "a ourselves. This is the disadvantage which sturdily built man of forty-seven "); then clings to the name even of Nelson. But, the "tale of terror," in which Caraccioli is for him, it is not an overwhelming dis-"a bent and grey-haired old man of advantage. His fascinating light will go seventy-four," and Nelson and Lady Hamil- on shining through the ruins of the old ton after dinner take a boat over to the style of heroism and hero-worship. Energy Minerva to " have another look at poor and intuition like his form an example of Caraccioli." Yet, perhaps, the legend human power which will remain long after might have been expressed more ardently. | the last shell is fired, an inspiration for a

race of artists in action. And Mr. Wilkinson's biography of Nelson "While the body of this brave man," (it is enriched, by the way, with un-The sterilising force of this criticism can observes a British melodramatist, "was familiar portraits) should be, on its merits, curious thing" that Alic in Wonderland spectacle." There is more besides, but this the way, add a spirit to the principal

matter, which in any case is well animated.

There are one or two passages on Nelson It might not be a vapid study to draw a which I could wish he had quoted, as It is neatly worked out, but wholly with- parallel between Nelson and Keats-not his almost keywords; there is Coleridge's letter out felicitous invention, either of episode or fine subordinate Capt. Keats, but John on the "wicked Lord Nelson article" in phrase. She piles up detail upon detail. Keats-in temper, human relations, concept the "Quarterly" of 1814, and his definias in the case of Jean, the young girl who tion of early death, and completion of tion that England owed the Nile, Copenis fumbling after a meaning in life without characteristic and illustrious scheme. In hagen, Trafalgar, and her naval spirit at ever finding the illuminating stroke; Jean narrating what Nelson did and contemplata its noblest to the same enthusiastic sensiing what he was. Mr. Wilkinson is always bilities which made Nelson adore Lady Miss Norman would be afraid of represent. candid and critical, but the whole of his Hamilton as he did. But Mr. Wilkinson tions for himself.

BOOKS RECEIVED FIFTY YEARS OF FIRE FIGHTING IN LONDON. By Jack While - (Hutchinson, 12s 6d.)

Woolf or E. M. Forster might write; there-knew. When Mr. Wilkinson remarks (for A MARRIAGE TO INDIA. By Frieda Hauswirth fore she cuts up her story into jigsaw and instance) that Nelson "for the first time THE WITNESS OF THE CHURCH. By the Rev. H. OUR CHURCH AND OTHER SERMONS. By the Bishop of Ely .- (Skethington, 7s 6d.)