Recent Fiction.*

"Katya" is a novel translated from the Danish of Herr Franz de Jessen by Mr. W. J. Alexander Worster. Both author and translator are unknown to us by name, but the latter has done his work in so masterly a way that he leaves us quite unconscious of any struggle in the effort to express the thought and style of his original in a foreign medium, while the former has produced one of the biggest pieces of fiction that has come to us from a continental source for many years. It is a revelation of power and beauty comparable with that given us by "War and Peace," by the great trilogy of Sienkiewicz, by "Jörn Uhl," and by "Jean-Christophe." The best work now being done in English seems trifling, sophisticated, and insincere, when set by the side of this masterpiece of psychological insight and dramatic power. Perhaps the most astonishing thing about it is that it is the work of a Dane, or, indeed, of anyone but a Russian, so evidently does it challenge comparison with the work of Dostoieffsky, Tolstoy, and Tourguénieff, and so unquestionably does it exhibit the qualities that have made the great Russians the masters of them that write fiction in our modern age. Had it been signed with one of their names, we should have been unable to dispute, from any internal evidence, the authenticity of the ascription. Dr. Brandes has recently said of the author that he "seems to know exactly not only the details of daily life on an estate in the Ukraine and the manner in which Russian diplomats pass their days in the capitals of Europe as well as at isolated posts in small Turkish and Servian towns; he also knows how young and older people of both sexes in those parts think and feel." This judgment gives some idea of the substance of the work. It opens on the estate of Priluka, the ancestral home of the Prilinskis; and, however far afield the action may take us, Priluka, the home, always lies in the background of our vision. Prince Prilinski, and his wife, their three children, the young men and women who are the intimates of the household, and the servants who are its faithful retainers, constitute a group of people who are characterized, one and all, with unfailing sympathy and minute fidelity, and individually realized as are few such groups anywhere in the field of fictive art. From this company emerges the central figure of Katya, the younger daughter of the house, whose vivid personality dominates the narrative, and shapes the destinies of the men who come within the sphere of her influence. For some inexplicable reason, the American publishers call her "the Becky Sharp of Russia," which is a comparison so amazingly inept that we do not see how it could have suggested itself to any intelligent mind. In common with Thackeray's hateful creation, Katya has ambition, it is true, but otherwise she is a creature of air and fire, lovable in her most wayward aspects, and the men who proudly bear her chains are richly rewarded for their glad servitude. Our own comparison would be with Mary Stuart rather than with Becky Sharp, but here also with a difference; the severest indictment that may be brought against her is that she is over-avid of admiration, that sordid considerations have some share in her marriage, that she is a little less than the perfect mother to her children, and that she is a little reckless of consequences at critical moments. We have an impression that the author would have us view her more harshly than we can find it in our heart to do, and that the sadness and futility of her late years are to be taken somewhat as a judgment upon her for her hardness, her selfishness, and her vacillation of spirit. But if

* Katya. A Romance of Russia. By Franz de Jessen. Boston: John W. Luce & Co.

Children of the Sea. By H. DeVere Stacpoole. New York: Duffield & Co.

Carmen and Mr. Dryasdust. By Humfrey Jordan. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

The Fortunate Youth. By William J. Locke. New York: John Lane Co.

Rung Ho! By Talbot Mundy. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons.

The Rocks of Valpre. By Ethel M. Dell. New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons.

Diane of the Green Van. By Leona Dalrymple. Chicago: Reilly & Britton Co.

The Light of Western Stars. A Romance. By Zane Grey. New York: Harper & Brothers.

Darkness and Dawn. By George Allan England. Boston: Small, Maynard & Co.

this be his wish, we can only say that his heroine has escaped from the control of her creator, and that she still holds our allegiance, as she held that of the Englishman who gave her the full measure of his devotion, and of the naval officer who entered the path of destruction when he thought that she was lost to him. She remains imaged to us, despite her faults, as a splendid creature to whom our deepest sympathies go out, and who is the sport of malign fate rather than the destroyer of men's souls. Only a few words may be spared for a suggestion of the plot. Prince Prilinski has gone into extensive building operations in a suburban quarter on the water front of Odessa, with the aid of capital borrowed from General Karatayef, a man whose great wealth is of dubious origin. The Prince becomes overloaded with debt, and is in danger of losing all his means, when the General, ambitious for his only son Niki, offers to relieve the situation on the condition of an alliance between Niki and Katya. The condition is accepted, and Priluki is saved. Now Katya is really in love with Niki, and makes him a faithful wife throughout his long career in the diplomatic service. After that career is ended by a Turkish bullet in an uprising at Stradova, where he is the Russian consul, she yields to the solicitations of Farringham, the English lover who has given her a doglike devotion for many years, and pledges herself to him. But she is not sure of herself, and puts him off from month to month. Meanwhile, Petya Orloff is in the distance, an officer in the Russian navy. Katya has been the lodestar of his life, and in his youth she had given him just enough encouragement to keep the spark of hope alive in his breast. Lost to him once when she married Niki, he now finds her seemingly lost to him again when she pledges herself to Farringham. This impels him to a desperate course. It is the time of the war with Japan. The Russian defeats have given the forces of disorder their opportunity, and the revolutionary uprising in South Russia breaks out. In the scenes of carnage that follow, a child of the people, who has for years been Orloff's mistress, is killed in the street. He is distracted by her death, and with the surplus of emotion over logic that marks the Russian temperament, offers himself to the revolutionary party as a leader. In the roadstead of Odessa lies the battleship of which he is second officer, and Orloff heads a mutiny by which he obtains command of the vessel. Placing it at the service of the revolution, he is ordered to shell the very quarter of Odessa which the Karatayef-Prilinski enterprise had built, and which has become a nest of conspirators. Their cause is already lost, and only this heroic measure will save their papers from seizure and their leaders from arrest. The work of destruction is accomplished, and then Orloff, accepting full responsibility, surrenders himself, is tried, and, despite the frantic efforts of Katya in his behalf, is sentenced and executed. Katya has now lost the truest of her lovers, and Farringham has gone out of her life, having learned of her feelings for Orloff. The bombardment of Odessa has bereft her of most of her fortune, and she ends by accepting an offer of marriage from a neighboring landowner, a commonplace person who had also been one of her admirers in the careless days of youth. The movement of the novel, at first deliberately measured, receives rapid acceleration when we come to the tragedy of Stradova, and the scenes of the mutiny are flashed upon the screen in swift and bewildering succession. We know of few things in fiction as stirring and tense as are these later chapters. And from beginning to end, we are given the sense of knowing in their habit as they lived the figures that people these pages. They become intimate acquaintances, and arouse both interest and sympathy in the deepest degree. Slow as is the development of the plot before the stage of its whirlwind finish, there is nothing that we would call superfluous, and the sure instinct of the artist makes every touch effective. The name of Franz de Jessen must now be added to the list of the greatest living novelists. It is indeed a new star that has swum into our ken.

The exotic fictions of Mr. Stacpoole are multiplying rapidly, and exhibit a growing power which is making this writer a man to be reckoned with. His "Children of the Sea" is a grim and vivid story of Iceland, with a prologue on the Japanese coast, where are sown the seeds of the tragedy that later ripens under the Arctic circle. A sailorman named Ericsson on shore-leave runs foul of a company of Japanese merrymakers, and becomes captivated by the provocative witchery of a girl of the party. Then the scene shifts to Iceland, whither he returns, and where he sets out to establish a fishing business in rivalry with the local monopolist. He wins the love of Schwalla, a beautiful girl whose parents are forcing her into a marriage with this octopus of the fisheries, and then he makes the appalling discovery that his Japanese escapade has infected him with leprosy. Like a wounded animal, he crawls off to a cave which he may use as a hiding-place in which to meet his miserable fate alone, but Schwalla tracks him to his lair, and the two put out in a boat together that the sea may swallow them up. This tense and colorful history is told with

sharp verbal economy, and with a strong sense of the values of the rugged sea-girt landscape of the island of fire. It exhibits an intimate knowledge of the life and the psychology of the Iceland fisher-folk, and is deeply impressive in its directness and simple strength. Something of the spirit of the saga-writers has got possession of the author and controlled his pen. In its reduction of sentiment to a minimum, and in its clear-visioned presentation of the bare facts of life, it comes near to being a masterpiece. Mr. Conrad could hardly have told the story to better effect, although he would have told it with much more of indirection, and with a profusion of the analysis in which Mr. Stacpoole is so conspicuously lacking.

"Carmen and Mr. Dryasdust" is not at all the story we should have expected from the author of "The Joyous Wayfarer," although we can understand its having been written by the author of "Patchwork Comedy." Mr. Jordan seems to be well on the way toward matching Mr. Snaith in the matter of versatility and the command of various manners. Mr. Dryasdust is a Cambridge don, of the dons donnish, a typical specimen. Why he should have married Carmen, or she him, is a good deal of a mystery, for Carmen is a young woman of Spanish ancestry, and her advent into Cambridge society considerably flutters the dovecotes of dondom. To begin with, she cannot take college society seriously, and its gossiping and petty intrigue seem to her only a parody of real existence. Further, she knows exactly what she wants, and exactly how to get it, which means that her husband is as wax in her hands. She loves him, and just because of that she seeks to get him out of the academic rut and to widen his horizon. This she accomplishes, but so deftly that he hardly realizes the compulsion of the silken web of constraint that she spins around him; it is true that he makes an apparent struggle from time to time, but he knows that he will have to yield, and does it gracefully enough after just enough protest to appease his self-respect. And when he finds himself in the end a denizen of the strange extra-university world, he recognizes the fact that all has worked out for the best, and that Carmen has been his good angel. He has become undesiccated while there is yet time for him to become a man, and to appreciate the fact that life is something more than an affair restricted within cloisters and quadrangles. It is a very human story and a highly entertaining one, albeit its course is placid and the depths of emotion are nowise sounded.

Mr. Locke's story of "The Fortunate Youth" begins in a London slum. At this early stage of his career, the youth has picturesque powers of speech which may be illustrated by this choice specimen of repartee: "You could no' knock hell out of a bug." A little later, we find him conversing after the following fashion: "You may find happiness and peace of soul under the stars." During the interval that has elapsed, he has run away from home, lived on the road with a vagrant peddler, found his way to London, and became an actor in a humble way. The reform of his speech is the result of several factors: the root of the matter is in him; he has extraordinary powers of imitation and adaptation; he cherishes the delusion that he is a lost child of noble parentage. In addition, he is extraordinarily handsome, and things come his way so fast that we are breathless as we follow his fortunes. It all seems to be a fairy tale as we go on to read of his being picked up by a county family and adopted into the household, of his becoming secretary to an M. P. and later a candidate himself for political honors, of his brilliant social career, and of his success in winning the love of a princess. Toward the end, the dream of his life is rudely shattered by the discovery that his long-lost father is a fried-fish magnate and ex-convict, not the noble Italian whom he had confidently expected sometime to discover. But while this is a setback, it does not really matter in the end, for the princess becomes reconciled to the situation, and her hero wins the election, incidentally inheriting a fortune when his father dies. The narrative has but slight relation to reality, but it appeals to the romantic instinct that has little use for reality or even verisimilitude, and it is written with the sprightly and whimsical touch that always makes Mr. Locke's work interesting. And it has strong characters,— Paul himself, Barney Bill, who saves him from the slum, the Winwoods, who make a man of him, and Silas Finn, the religious zealot who turns out to be Paul's father. These make engaging company for the hours spent in reading the story.

The Indian Mutiny is a subject of apparently inexhaustible interest for the novelist. The latest in the long line of good stories based upon this theme is Mr. Talbot Mundy's "Rung Ho!" which takes us up to the very edge of the outbreak, but has nothing to do with the hackneyed horrors of Delhi and Lucknow and Cawnpore. The hero is Ralph Cunningham, who comes into the Indian military service backed by the prestige of his father and grandfather, long imbedded in the heroic legend of the country. Mahommed Gunga, a wise and wily chieftain who had followed and loved the father, takes the son under his protecting care, discovers by various tests that

he is really the sort of man his father's son should be, and contrives to put him into the position of leadership for which he is fitted. The Mutiny has not yet been declared, but its imminence is apparent to the informed, and the episode which is the climax of the present narrative and of which Ralph is the hero is one that serves to strengthen the British resistance to the coming storm. Romantically, it is concerned with the rescue of Rosemary MacLean, daughter of a Scotch missionary in Rajputana, from a perilous situation in which her life is placed by the wooing of a treacherous native prince. The hero and the heroine are predestined for one another, but no sentimentality is wasted upon their romance. When the time comes, they simply accept the situation as a matter of course. In fact, there seems to be no waste or surplusage anywhere in the story, which is told in singularly forthright fashion, and is for that reason, as well as for its insight into native character, extraordinarily effective. Mr. Kipling could hardly have done it better, and Mrs. Steel could not have done it in less than three times the space.

When Christine Wyndham is a little girl of seventeen, in charge of a governess on the seashore of France, she makes a playmate of a young French officer, and is implicated with him in an innocent escapade which has serious consequences. They are caught in a cave by the tide, and forced to remain overnight. The resulting scandal is such that Christine is bundled post-haste back to England. When she grows up, she marries an Englishman who is almost painfully good, but the memory of her childish attachment does not fade from her heart. Meanwhile, the Frenchman has been made the victim of a treacherous plot which results in his being convicted of treason, and sentenced to a term of imprisonment. When set free, he takes refuge in England, and suffers the direst poverty, until he is rescued by Christine's husband, and taken into the family as his private secretary. Christine, all this time, has made the mistake of concealing from her husband the romantic episode of her childhood; and when he learns of it from other sources, an estrangement results, which ends in her taking flight. She cannot restrain her love for the Frenchman, but their mutually avowed passion is without sinful consequences. In the course of time, the plot which had led to his degradation is exposed, and he is shown to have been a second Dreyfus, just as he is at the point of death from heart failure. His vindication is complete, but only death can unravel the knot of his personal fate, and so he is conveniently disposed of, leaving the way open for a reconciliation between Christine and her husband. "The Rocks of Valpré" is a deft old-fashioned novel, with much variety of interest and some effective character drawing. It comes dangerously near shipwreck on the rock of sentimentality, but never becomes quite mawkish. Miss Ethel M. Dell, who wrote that strong novel, "The Way of an Eagle," is the author.

Heralded by much advertisement, and with all the notoriety attendant upon the winning of a substantial money prize, "Diane of the Green Van" makes a clamorous appeal for our attention. It is the work of Miss Leona Dalrymple, a young woman hitherto unknown to fame, and now disclosed as a writer of tricksy charm and astonishing fertility of invention. We frankly confess that the plot baffles us. It would require the analytical skill of a Poe or a Sherlock Holmes to exhibit the complication in diagrammatic form. New intricacies and unexpected relations are developed in every chapter, until at the end we are utterly bewildered, and can make no confident guess at the writer's intentions. All that we are sure of is that here is a charming heroine, impelled by the *wanderlust* to roam gypsy-fashion from Connecticut to Florida in the green van of the title, attended on her way by a train of devoted lovers — and desperate villains. The secret of her love for the open appears to be that she is of Seminole descent, and the varied machinations of which she is the victim are accounted for by some sort of connection with the royal line of an obscure European kingdom called Houdania. Whether she really is thus connected, or whether her Indian strain is authentic, we have been unable to discover with certainty. When the ancient document concealed in the old wooden candle-stick is found to have been a mystification, the solid ground slips from under our feet, and we are left helpless. However, the gypsy pilgrimage is vividly described, and the faithful suitor who guards the heroine is rewarded for his devotion. Of this much, but of little more, we are certain. The book offers the very delirium of romance, set forth in a manner of which a feeling for nature and a smart slangy type of conversation are the chief ingredients.

"The Light of Western Stars," by Mr. Zane Grey, is a stirring romance of the southwestern desert, the scene being laid in New Mexico, close to the Mexican border. This enables the author to work the Mexican revolution into his plot, and raids in both directions are among the incidents. A young woman of wealth and social distinction is the heroine. Becoming weary of the round of gaiety which has been her normal existence,

and fairly loathing its emptiness, she cuts loose from it all, and sets out to visit her brother, who is a rancher in New Mexico. Her adventures begin the moment she steps off the train at the frontier station, for her brother, who has not known of her coming, is not on hand to meet her, and she falls into the hands of a drunken cowboy, who insists that she shall marry him forthwith. A Spanish padre is produced, who mumbles words that she does not understand, and the distracted girl says "Si" without knowing to what the vocable commits her. It is not until near the close of the story that she learns herself to have been the wife of the cowboy all the time. Meanwhile, the desert fascinates her, and she casts in her lot with it, purchasing a ranch, and thus becoming the employer of many other adoring cowboys. Her unknown husband, not daring to reveal the secret, protects her from many perils, and worships her from afar. His love works in him a regeneration that makes him worthy of her, for he has been a gentleman, and is only temporarily fallen from that estate. After many melodramatic happenings, the truth comes out, but not before she is ready to be reconciled to the revelation and its consequences. The situation is not unlike that of "The Great Divide." It is all stagy and conventional stuff, but good of its kind, skilfully managed, and effective. Now and then, the writer seems to be planning effects for us which do not quite come off and leave us rather disappointed, as in the case of the elaborate preparations made for fooling and thrilling the lady's visitors from the east, and in the case of the Mexican bandit who seeks to abduct the heroine. But there is no lack of excitement in the narrative, which has also a considerable admixture of romantic glamour and poetic charm. It "reads" from beginning to end and mingles a good deal of humor with its melodramatic plot.

A blend of Jules Verne, Sir Rider Haggard, and Mr. H. G. Wells is offered us by Mr. George Allan England in "Darkness and Dawn." Allan Stern and Beatrice Kendrick, a civil engineer and his stenographer, wake up one morning on the fortieth floor of a skyscraper to behold a world in ruins, and come gradually to realize that they have been in a state of suspended animation for a thousand years or more. A cataclysm has swept mankind from the earth, and these two alone survive of the human race, unless we style human the debased and bestial creatures whom they afterwards encounter in their adventures. New York has become a jungle and the lair of wild beasts, and nearly everything of organic nature has rotted away, leaving only objects of stone and metal unchanged. Precession has made a notable change in the direction of the earth's axis, and increased speed of rotation has shortened the day by an hour or more. A new satellite has been formed by ejection from the earth, and revolves about its parent as a *dark* attendant, although no attempt is made to explain why it does not receive illumination from the sun, which shines as usual. This object seems to have been torn from the earth in the region of the Great Lakes, presumably taking Chicago with it, and in its place there is a huge abyss, inhabited by a race of degenerate descendants of civilized man. These discoveries are made by the enterprising couple in the course of their explorations, which are extensive, being made with the aid of an airship fortunately unearthed, and put into commission by the engineer's skill. Strange to say, they find abundant stores of alcohol in the cities, although the gasoline has all evaporated, and this provides them with fuel for motive power. In fact, they find most of the things they really need for carrying on life, and learn to make those that they do not find, aided by a copy of the "Encyclopædia Britannica" printed upon nickel leaves, and thus preserved from decay. When they discover the men of the abyss, they attempt to civilize them, and take them forth into the world of sunlight by means of the aeroplane, hoping to rear a new race of men upon this debased foundation. Allan proves a most resourceful person, and Beatrice a sturdy helpmate in the series of fantastic perils to which they are exposed, and from which they always escape after reaching a point at which there seems to be no possible way out. They are predestined to be lovers, and the chinks of the weird narrative are filled in and thickly plastered over with sentiment. We should say that for those who like this sort of thing the tale will provide just the sort of thing that they like.

WILLIAM MORTON PAYNE.