Recent Fiction.*

A surprisingly good novel by Mr. Ernest Poole (a new writer, as far as we are informed), is entitled "The Harbor." It offers an epitome of American life at the present time, taking the harbor of New York as a symbol. Dante's famous description of the Sacred Poem might be taken as Mr. Poole's text. "The meaning of this work is not simple, but rather can be said to be of many significations, that is, of several meanings; for there is one meaning that is derived from the letter, and another that is derived from the things indicated by the letter. The first is called *literal*, but the second allegorical or mystical." The author himself puts the matter more bluntly when he makes his hero say, near the end of the book: "I have seen three harbors: my father's harbor which is now dead, Dillon's harbor of big companies which is very much alive, and Joe Kramer's harbor which is struggling to be born. It's an interesting age to live in. I should like to write the truth as I see it about each kind of harbor." Of the first two harbors we should say that Mr. Poole had written the truth; of the third, we are far from certain. The transition which has taken place, within a generation, from the age of competitive individual enterprise to the age of organized efficiency, is clearly set before us. The teller of the story, which is autobiographical in form, is the son of an old shipmaster and dock-owner, whose prime has seen the great age of American shipping, and who, in his declining years, has watched its disappearance from the seas, and felt what seem to be the foundations of life crumble beneath his feet. As the boy grows up, he comes under the spell of Dillon, an engineer whose daughter he marries, and who has a splendid vision of the city beautiful, based upon a glorified harbor and the most enlightened organization of its ancillary industries. To the boy, the harbor has seemed repellantly ugly, but to the young man, learning to know it intimately, and studying its various aspects under the enthusiastic guidance of his chief (and father-in-law) it grows to be a thing of awful beauty with amazing possibilities for the redemption of social life. But working all the time counter to Dillon's influence is the influence of Joe Kramer, a college friend, a modern of the moderns, who scorns their college teaching as "news from the graveyard," and develops into a wild-eyed socialist, bent only upon the upsetting of the comfortable order of society, and seeing in the harbor only a vast capitalistic engine for the crushing of human lives. There is nothing constructive about Kramer's ideals, but only a fierce conviction that anything would be better than the existing state of affairs, and an absolute inability to participate in Dillon's vision of social amelioration through enhanced efficiency and the application of directive intelligence to industrial affairs. The hero, whose part in the drama is that of a professional writer for newspapers and magazines, gradually finds doubts creeping into his mind, and becomes more and more swayed by sympathy with Kramer's materialistic aims and aspirations. To our mind there is no doubt as to the ascendancy and ultimate triumph of Dillon's ideals, because they mean the victory of intellectualism over emotionalism in human affairs, and it is something of a disappointment that the hero should come to waver between the two views. When we take leave of him, he is struggling with a confused sense that there is something big and unapprehended in the cause of which Kramer has been the protagonist, and for which, as the ringleader of a riot of striking dockers, he has very nearly forfeited his life to the law. The characterization in the novel is fine, although the two women (the hero's wife and sister) do not quite take hold of our sympathies as we wish they might; but the hero, his father, and the two men who most influence him, are genuine creations. In style and temper, this book reminds us strongly of the two novels of Mr. Albert Edwards, to say nothing of its being concerned with the same sort of subject-matter.

Turning from this vivid piece of modern realism to Mr. James Lane Allen's "The Sword of Youth," we are plunged into the very different atmosphere of sentimental romance, tinged with psychological subtlety, and

* The Harbor. By Ernest Poole. New York: The Macmillan Co.
The Sword of Youth. By James Lane Allen. New York: The Century Co.
The Man of Iron. By "Richard Dehan." New York: Frederick A. Stokes Co.

delighting in word-painting for its own sake. The story is of the slightest, but, considering the nature of some of Mr. Allen's recent performances, we may be glad that the book he now gives us has any story at all. Here is an episode of the Civil War, the story of a Kentucky boy who, on his seventeenth birthday, determines to join the Confederate cause for which his father and four brothers have already sacrificed their lives. To do this, he must forsake his sweetheart, and leave his mother to struggle alone with the difficulties of an impoverished farm. Two years then elapse, and the boy, now a veteran soldier, is with the Army of Northern Virginia, the forlorn last hope of the Confederacy, on the eve of the fall of Richmond and the end of all things. A letter gets through to him with the information that his mother is dying, and an appeal to come to her before it is too late. He at once deserts, and reaches his Kentucky home only to find that it *is* too late. Then he goes back to Lee's camp, makes his confession, and is pardoned. The end of the tale leaves him in the arms of his betrothed. This is all of the story; it is eked out to novelistic volume by what we should call padding were it not the writing of so artistic a stylist and suggestive an intelligence as those of Mr. Allen. A minor but irritating inaccuracy is the spelling "Clarke" for the name of the explorer; a more serious lapse is the implication that slavery no longer existed in Kentucky in the autumn of 1863. Of course, the Declaration had no application to the slave states that remained in the Union, and it was not until the adoption of the Thirteenth Amendment that the Kentucky slaves were legally emancipated.

Miss Clothilde Graves, who writes under the pen-name of "Richard Dehan," has added to "The Dop Doctor" and "Between Two Thieves," a third novel of similar dimensions. "The Man of Iron," with Bismarck for its central figure, treats of the Franco-Prussian War with the methods employed by "Between Two Thieves" for the Crimean War. The book has taken over two years to write (as well it might!), according to the preface, which thus magniloquently states this simple fact: "For the second time, since this book's beginning, the rose of June had flamed into splendid bloom. I drew breath, for my task approached its ending, and looked up from the yellowed newspaper records of a great War waged forty-four years ago." What she saw the world knows only too well. But, beholding it, she further says:

"I see no cause to blot a line that I have written. For the Germany of 1870 was not the Germany of 1914. The New Spirit of Teutonism had not shown itself in those dead days I have tried to testify. . . . Could the relentless exponent of the fierce gospel of blood and iron have foreseen the imminent, approaching disintegration of his colossal life-work, under the hands of his successors — could he have known what Dead Sea fruit of ashes and bitterness his fatal creed, grafted upon the oak of Germany, was fated to bring forth — he would have drunk ere death of the crimson lees of the Cup of Judgment; he would have seen in the shape of his pupil the grotesque, distorted image of himself."

Both this prophecy and this psychological judgment are probably true; and, although the author claims to have blotted no line of her story in the light of recent happenings, we may venture to assert that the last words of the heroine to the Iron Chancellor have been penned since the fatal first of August of last year.

"You are not a good man, Monseigneur . . . Hard, subtle, arrogant, cruel, and unscrupulous, God made you to be the Fate of France. One day she will lift up her face from the mire into which you have trodden it, and the star will be burning unquenched upon her forehead. We may both be dead before that day dawns. But rest assured that when your armies cross the Rhine they will not gain an easy victory! We shall be prepared and ready, Monseigneur, when the Germans come *again*!"

These words come at the very close, when the heroine, after having cherished the ambition to become a second Charlotte Corday, has heeded the scriptural injunction — "Vengeance is mine; I will repay" — and has been stirred by compassion to save Bismarck's life instead of destroying it, takes her leave of the sinister Man of Iron. The heroine is a French girl, noble and pure-souled, the daughter of a French officer slain on the battle-field, and of a wicked mother, who has trafficked in both personal and patriotic honor, and who has even sought to drag her own child into the maelstrom of corruption. The mother has just met a richly-merited fate, and the daughter is on the way to England with the young Irish journalist who has been her faithful lover from the time when he first saw her, and to whom she has given her heart in gladness. This Irishman, P. C. Breagh by name, is the hero of the story on its private and romantic side, and plays his part acceptably to the reader, if not much more than that. He is a free-lance war correspondent, driven into that calling by the accident of having been swindled out of his inheritance by a rascally trustee. To make smooth his future, we are given to understand that the inheritance is eventually to be recovered. On the historical side, the novel gives us vital characterizations of Bismarck and Moltke, of the pathetic Prince

Imperial and of his tinsel emperor-father concerning whom these burning words are written: "He had made France his mistress and his slave, and now her fetters were to be hacked apart by the merciless sword of the invader. Through losses, privations, and humiliations; through an ordeal of suffering unparalleled in the world's history, through an orgy of vice and an era of infidelity, through fresh oceans of blood shed from the veins of her bravest, she was to pass before she found herself and God again." This conception of the Terrible Year as a divine judgment upon a beloved but sinning nation is the keynote of the work, which is infused throughout (we need hardly say) by the deepest of religious feeling. Its war pictures are vivid transcripts of reality, its human figures have the stamp of life upon them, and its decorative features are the embodiment of minute and comprehensive knowledge. It is all overwrought, and this lack of restraint in both style and feeling is its chief defect. We think it somewhat less impressive than "Between Two Thieves," but we would not willingly have missed reading it.

WILLIAM MORTON PAYNE.