

A Book of the Week.

CUT LAURELS.*

We have no hesitation in pronouncing "Cut Laurels" to be the most original novel of this season; and when we can say that of a woman's work it is always a joy to us. This season, in fact, seems to have belonged *par excellence* to our sex. Miss Sinclair's "Divine Fire," Mrs. Humphry Ward's "Marriage of William Ashe," Miss Robins' "Dark Lantern," and the book now before us, pretty well exhaust the list.

Miss Hamilton—her name now is, we understand, Mrs. Luck—is already known by one book of much more than average merit, "Macleod of the Camerons," which we reviewed with warm admiration some years ago in these pages. Her new book bears more or less upon the same theme—that is, we open the story with a woman journeying to meet again the husband from whom she has been parted for years.

Here, however, the likeness ends. The theme of "Cut Laurels" is a more poignant, more crucial, more problematic question; and the book is one which will provoke discussion wherever it is read. Was Katharine Hamilton right, or was she wrong, in the course she took? What should we ourselves have done in like circumstances? These are the points which will at once arise; and different women will have different answers.

Here, then, is the situation. Katharine was married at nineteen to Jack Hamilton, and went with him to Cairo, where he was in business. When they had been married only four months, he had an offer from his firm to go up country to negotiate a trade of some kind. This was in the days before Omdurman. He would be absent three months, and only half liked leaving his young, gay wife, with her lack of experience and her coming baby. But the chance was one not to be missed. He went and he did not return. His whole party were made prisoners by the Calpha. Katharine's father-in-law, who had not looked with too friendly an eye on Jack's improvident marriage, came over to Cairo and fetched the disconsolate little bride home to Ireland. There her little Phyllis was born. Then came the question of livelihood. How was money to be procured to give Jack a chance of escape?

Katharine bought a dressmaking business in Belfast, and made it pay. She sent out letters, she sent out money; and she hoped on and on. But nothing happened. News came, scanty and vague at first; then thick silence. Then Omdurman was taken. Slatin came home, and the others. But not Jack; and it was freely rumoured that he could have come home had he chosen; that there were reasons why he could not face his fellow countrymen—that he was a traitor, and had married a native woman.

Then at last, one day, when Katharine was thirty-eight, and Phyllis was grown up, came a telegram to say he was on his way home.

Katharine carried in her still the heart of a girl. She had always been made for joy. She let herself fly off on the wings of hope. Surely, surely, they yet had a future, Jack and she.

Phyllis and she both went to Cairo to meet him. By some mistake he did not get their letters, he did

not know that they were there. He arrived, old, grey, shrunken, miserable, hardly able to formulate his thoughts in the English tongue. And everybody in Cairo knew, before Katharine, that he had brought the native woman and his two little half-breed boys with him.

Here is our situation. How does the author deal with it? Let us say at once that she rises to the full height of the occasion. We may agree with her or we may not; but nobody can say she has treated it inadequately. Incidentally, the character of Phyllis is a masterpiece.

We congratulate the writer of this most convincing book. G. M. R.

Songs of Forgetting.—I.

"Quand on est mort c'est pour longtemps."

Grey spiders swinging from tree to tree,
Spin, spin

A silver shroud, dew-strung, for me;
A narrow shroud of grey to lay
Sorrow in.

Ring-doves high in the apple-bloom,
Strew, strew
A narrow bier for a narrow tomb;
Strew joy's purple pall all
With violets blue.

Deep in the earth, you blind brown mole,
Make, make

A narrow grave for a little soul
Where shadows across the grass pass—
It will not wake!

—UNA ARTEVELDE TAYLOR,
in the *Westminster Gazette*.

What to Read.

"The Proposed World's Tribute to Shakespeare: A Plea for the Erection of a Memorial Statue and National Theatre." By Walter Stephens.

"The Health of the Nation: What the Government May Do for it without an Act of Parliament: A Letter to the President of the Local Government Board. With a Preface by Sir John Gorst, M.P. By J. Theodore Dodd.

"Mrs. Darrell." By Foxcroft Davis. A Novel of the Social Life of Washington.

"The Country-House Party." By Dora Sigerson Shorter.

"Napoleon: The First Phase." Some chapters on the boyhood and youth of Napoleon I., 1769-1793. By Oscar Browning.

Coming Events.

July 1st.—Annual At Home at the West Ham and East London Hospital, at the Hospital, 3.30 to 6 p.m.

July 3rd.—The United States Ambassador and Mrs. Whitelaw Reid are entertained at luncheon by the Society of American Women in London.

July 5th.—Meeting Parliamentary Bills Committee, Society for State Registration of Nurses, 431, Oxford Street, W., 5 p.m.

July 17th.—Opening of the Marie-Celeste Maternity Wards at the London Hospital.

* By M. Hamilton. (Heinemann.)

[previous page](#)

[next page](#)