BOOK OF THE WEEK.

"HAGAR."*

A book by Mary Johnston is always an event; but we are so accustomed to her wonderful descriptions of the American Civil War that "Hagar" (a modern story of the Woman's Movement in America), takes us by surprise. The book has the distinction, the charm, the sure touch of all Miss Johnston's work; and though Englishwomen who have passed through the academic stage of the movement and now live in a time of revolution, are taken back to the position in this country a quarter of a century ago, it holds one from cover to cover, and is one of the limited number of novels published in the last twelve months which should be acquired and kept.

The picture of the life of a Southern family is sketched for us with unerring touch.

Gilead Balm, where Hagar grew up to womanhood, is a delightful place, ruled in patriarchial fashion by Colonel Ashendyne, and "Old Miss," as the major part of Gilead Balm called his wife—who, subservient to the other sex, demands homage from her own. "She was a woman who never stood to talk; she always sat down, like a regent, and the standing was done by others; she was a large woman—tall rather than otherwise, of a distinct comeliness and authoritative—oh! authoritative, from her black lace cap on her still brown, smoothly-parted hair to her low-heeled list shoes black against her white stockings."

Then we have Aunt Serena, whose days were spent in novel reading, painting porcelain plaques and doing macramé and other useless work—a type of the useless woman hedged about by restrictions and the unwritten law that women must be supported by their male relatives—to whom they must render due homage and obedience; Uncle Bob, kindly and ineffective; and Maria, wife of the absent son (Medway Ashendyne),—her father-in-law was inclined to think "more's the pity"—but she was therefore Ashendyne, and housed at Gilead Balm. It was from her mother, to whom she was devoted, that Hagar received the impulses which made her break the toils which bound her; and though Maria did not possess the necessary force to free herself, as she told "Old Miss," "I am perfectly aware of how deplorable is the whole situation; if I were wiser and stronger and more heroic, I suppose I should break through it; I suppose I should go away with Hagar; I suppose I should learn to work; I suppose I should somehow keep us both; I suppose I might live again; I suppose —I might . . . even . . . get a divorce—"

Her mother-in-law towered. "The Bishop shall talk to you the first thing in the morning."

Wise Mrs. Green, Hagar's homely neighbour and friend, early diagnosed her outlook on life.

"I wonder now," she said, "if you're goin' to grow up a rebel? Look-a-here, honey, there ain't a mite of ease and comfort on that road."

"That's what the Yankees called us all," said Hagar. "Rebels."

"Ah! I don't mean 'rebel' that-er-way," said Mrs. Green. "There's lonelier and deeper ways of rebelling; you don't get killed with an army cheerin' you, and newspapers going into black, and a State full of people that were 'rebels' too, keeping your memory green—what happens, happens just to you, by yourself without any company and no wreaths of flowers and farewell speeches. They just open the door and put you out."

Later when Hagar confided to Mrs. Green, "I wish I could earn money," her friend told her. "It ain't so easy for women to make money. There's more ways they can't than they can. It's what they call 'sentiment' fights them—Sentiment don't mind their being industrious, but it draws the line at getting money for it. It says it ought to be a free gift. It don't grudge—at least it don't grudge much—a little egg and butter money, but anything more—Lord! . . . It's a funny world—for women."

Later in her life her grandfather expressed the same sentiment. "One world mistake lay in ever giving property unqualifiedly into a woman's hands, and another in ever encouraging occupations outside the household, and so breeding this independent attitude. . . . . I opposed the Married Women's Property Act in this State, but the people were infatuated and passed it. Married or single, the principle is the same. It is folly to give woman control of any considerable sum of money."

Of the influence of her friends Roger Michael, Rachel Bolt, and others on the development of Hagar's sweet, sane, and sunny nature we must leave the reader to discover. Rachel whose disastrous marriage at eighteen, and blind little son led her to say: "There's one Movement that I want to see, and that's the Movement to tell the young girl. If I were the world I would not *have* my dishonoured life as it gets it now. . . . And now let's talk about something else."

The usual pressure was put upon Hagar to marry the suitable suitor, but she successfully rejected all overtures and in the end promises herself to a fitting mate.

"She looked at him with eyes that smiled and yet were grave: 'You are aware that you are marrying a working woman who intends to continue to work.'

"'I'm aware.'

"Her candid eyes continued to meet his—'I wish a child. While it needs me and when it needs me, I shall be there.'

"His hand closed over hers—'Is it as though I did not know that?'

"She kissed him on the lips 'And you're aware that I shall work on through life for the fairer social order? And that, generally speaking, the Woman Movement has me for keeps?'

"'I'm aware—I'm going to help you.'"

P. G. Y.

* By Mary Johnston. Constable & Co., Ltd.

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