

PATIENCE WORTH, THE NEWEST LITERARY MARVEL

Is She Spirit or Mortal?—Her Output Through Ouija Board Amazes Writers and Puzzles the Scientists—All the Centuries Her Field.

Admirers Give Dinners in Her Honor, Yet None Is Able to Answer Simple Query, Who Is She?—Her Remarkable Quips of Conversation.



Mrs. John H. Curran, amanuensis for Patience Worth.

realm beyond the world to the two ladies. Then one day the pointer on the board in response to questions as to who wished to speak spelled out Pa-t—Pa-t, and the ladies inquired if it was an Irishman who had something to say, when the reply came in the negative. A little later the pointer on the board spelled out the name Patience Worth. From that time till now the intelligence calling itself Patience Worth has continued to pour forth a stream of the most remarkable quality of literature that has ever come over the ouija board.

WHAT THE OUIJA BOARD IS.

The ouija board is a board about two and one-half feet by one foot. The letters of the alphabet are painted upon it in two concentric semi-circles, and the numerals from one to zero appear on a straight line beneath; in the upper left hand corner appears the word "nay," and in the upper right hand corner the word "yea." The messages are spelled out by means of a small triangular shaped pointer resting upon three legs, shod with felt to prevent rasping or scratching the board. At this board sits Mrs. Curran with anybody who may be interested enough to sit with her. The sitters rest their fingers upon the triangular pointer and then it moves about among the letters—spelling out words with a marvellous rapidity.

The operations are conducted in a parlor fully lighted. Mrs. Curran is not blindfolded. Anybody present is at full liberty to make any investigations the situation may suggest or to ask any questions. It makes no difference at what time Mrs. Curran and her vis-a-vis sit down to the board; the pointer begins to flash about and messages are received from Patience Worth. These messages are taken down by Mr. John Howard Curran and preserved in a record which now extends to nearly 500,000 words.

Some of the most distinguished men and women of intellect in the city of St. Louis have sat around and at the board and have questioned Patience Worth on every question under and over the sun. Among these investigators have been ex-Governor Charles P. Johnson, a distinguished criminal lawyer; Professor George E. Payne, professor of psychology in the St. Louis Teachers' College; Casper S. Yost, managing editor of "The Globe-Democrat"; many eminent medical and legal gentlemen, professors at Washington University and indeed people of all kinds and distinction that may be found in a community the size of St. Louis. All are agreed that the communications they have seen transcribed from that board constitute a body of literature absolutely unparalleled in the history of such manifestations.

The intelligence which is always in readiness to respond to Mrs. Curran wastes no time in answering frivolous inquiries. No one has had from her any prophecy of the future. She has found no lost articles and reunited no estranged lovers. Often, though, she says things to inquirers which have pertinency only to things known to the inquirers but unknown to others around the table. She has been put through such a quiz as no one has been subjected to in this country in the last decade of investigational "grills" and "probes." She has been examined upon all the subtleties of philosophy, upon the mysteries of chemistry and physics, upon almost every possible conception of life beyond the grave, and she has given responses to those questions which are thoroughly consistent each with all the others. Perhaps 300 people in the last two years have sat with Mrs. Curran and have put questions to the ouija board. Every one of these conversations has been recorded. I have read the complete record, and the astounding thing about it is the impression one gathers from it of a thoroughly complete, consistent, fully rounded personality.

This personality is a most attractive one. Patience Worth has wit and humor, acute observation, keen analysis of character and a vein of beautiful, tender, spiritual poetry. To sit and talk with her is something like it must have been to sit and talk with Shelley. She is a mistress of subtleties and uncannily wise in the evasion of traps set to catch her. So far as the record shows she has never once contradicted herself. On the contrary, replying time and again to the same question in various forms, she repeats her answer in almost exactly the same words.

In addition to the delightful interchange of conversational quip and jest, the personality expressing itself through the ouija board will very often in response to a request spell out, without the slightest hesitation, poetry and

The language is like no written language with which any student of English literature is familiar. It is Patience's own. The locutions are peculiar to herself. It is very figurative, sometimes symbolic. The parable is a favorite form of expression with her. Her style is a continuous stream of metaphors and similes. None of her figures is far-fetched. For her the visible world vividly exists, and all her illustrations are drawn from nature with a very poignant simplicity.

When we come to the "Sorry Tale" we get away from this so-called early English style and we fall into a measure which has a graver and grander sweep and a more sonorous rhythm. For purposes of convenience one may call it a Biblical style, but one should not be held too strictly to that description or definition.

So far as any one has yet discovered there is nothing like this story, at least in English literature. There is no evidence of its derivativeness from the New Testament apocrypha. The old morality plays have been searched for some clue to the origin of the story, but they have yielded nothing. "A Sorry Tale" is an intensely personal expression of the personality called Patience Worth, as it reveals itself both in particularities and in generalities through her other recorded utterances. This is the marvel of all her work. To one well versed in literature the reading of it reveals echoes of many things; but no one has yet been able, surely, to lay a finger upon any plagiarism of any one particular writer.

PATIENCE IS A POET.

Last February Mr. Casper Yost published in "The Globe-Democrat," on four successive Sundays, a number of poems, parables, prayers and a short story or two as coming from Patience Worth. These examples of her work and many others Mr. Yost has shaped into a book to be published shortly after the holidays by Henry Holt & Co., of New York.

The poetry is not rhyming poetry, but it is richly rhythmical. For a comparison to it we must turn to such writers as Walt Whitman, Edward Carpenter or some of our contemporary writers of free verse. But the likeness is far from close. There is no imitation in Patience Worth's literary output. It is much simpler than either Whitman or Carpenter, not at all complicated by modern forms of thought or expression. It remains always what we call archaic, always highly figurative, often apparently obscure, but easily clarified by taking a little thought. It is always full of pictures, and no matter how gross the subject matter in which she works there is thrown over it an indescribable but not the less definite spiritual glamour or over-soul. I don't know that I can better describe the peculiar quality of this verse than by saying

sponded with a verse in Scottish dialect. She has used Scotticisms once or twice. And this is all we know positively about her thus far. She says she will tell more later.

Mrs. Curran, who has the lovable and pungent and sprightly Patience for a familiar, does not say that Patience is the spirit of a woman long dead. Neither does she say that Patience is not a name taken by her own subconsciousness or personality. All Mrs. Curran will say is that she has the sense of being in touch with the personality of a very bright, charming and lovable being; that this personality, in her communications over the ouija board, has never said or written anything but that contributes to the comfort and happiness, spiritually, of all who have seen the message.

A GOSPEL OF KINDNESS.

"All I know," says Mrs. Curran, "is that Patience comes to me as instrumentality to 'unpack a pack' of Him." Her gospel is of loving kindness, universal and individual."

I asked Mrs. Curran how the messages come to her. She told me that she has a peculiar feeling as of a pressure upon her mind—upon her mind as distinct from her brain. She says that the communications come in a combination of vision and hearing. She sees things as pictured and catches them as a sort of unheard sound, which comes with a peculiar beat or rhythm. Sometimes she has the vision before the pointer spells out the words on the lettered lines. She does not know exactly how to explain her method of reception of the message, but it is in a sense independent of the ouija board. The ouija board seems to be simply the easiest means of transcribing what she receives in a combination of visualization and audition.

Of course, the Spiritists insist that Patience is a discarnate spirit. Of course, Roman Catholics and some others maintain that she may be a spirit, but if so she is a spirit not at peace and abroad to no good end. Others insist that Patience gives off what she gets from the individuals around the board when she is communicating, and then there are the psychologists, who hold to the theory that everything that Patience Worth gives off has been taken into Mrs. Curran's subconsciousness in some way.

Mrs. Curran is a very charming woman of about thirty. She was born in Mound City, Ill., has lived in St. Louis and Chicago and in the Ozark region of Southeastern Missouri. She has had a high school education and has studied music and taught it. She is a woman of intelligence, but not apparently of super-intelligence. She would not be classed as a "highbrow." She has none of the stigmata of so many psychics. She is spontaneous, blithe, girlishly-matronly. She has read the ordinary literature that a woman in middle class life would ordinarily read—the standard novels, some of the standard poets, some of the latter-day "best sellers"—but she has no particular knowledge of any literature that is archaic in character.

She has not been a great reader of the Bible, and she knows nothing much more than the name of Chaucer or Langland. She never heard of Chaucer or Beowulf until their names were brought out in questionings for the origin of the Patience Worth writings. Neither her father nor her mother was or is literary in any distinctive sense; certainly, neither of them ever specialized in early English. Every line of investigation which promised to lead to something that would account for Patience Worth by evidence of an unconscious acquisition of the kind of language used by Patience Worth has led to nothing. So far as known, Mrs. Curran has never been placed anywhere where she could have absorbed the language of Patience Worth or anything remotely resembling it.

About three weeks ago Mrs. Curran, at the instance of some friends, went to Boston to visit Professor Morton Prince. The visit amounted to nothing. Mrs. Curran sat with Professor Prince at the ouija board and Patience disported herself in perfect character there as elsewhere. She laughed at Professor Prince when he tried to trap her, saying that he was trying to measure a smoke that would drift awither under his hand.

When Professor Prince wanted to hypnotize Mrs. Curran and sidetrack her consciousness, according to his theory, so that he might get into her subconsciousness as the abiding place of a personality of hers calling itself Patience Worth, Mrs. Curran refused to submit. She said that she did not want to surrender her will to that of another person, being unassured that such another person might not suggest to her subconsciousness personality explanations which would destroy Patience Worth. She feared that in some way submission to hypnosis might put a stop to the message of beauty and love that she has been receiving, and so the visit to Professor Prince ended.

The mystery remains. And Patience gossips and smiles and sings and weaves away at her "Sorry Tale."

POEMS BY PATIENCE WORTH

War.

Ah, thinkest thou to trick?
I fain would peep beneath the visor.
A god of war, indeed! Thou liest!
A masquerading fiend,
The harlot of the universe—
War, whose lips, becrimsoned in her lover's blood,
Smile only to his death-damped eyes!
I challenge thee to throw thy coat of mail.
Ah, God! Look thou beneath!
Behold, those arms outstretched!
That raiment over-spangled with a leaden rain!
O Lover, trust her not!
She biddeth thee in siren song
And clothe thee in a silken rag her treachery
To mock thee and to wreak
Her vengeance at thy heart's
Cast up the visor's skirt!
Thou'lt see the snaky strands.
A god of war, indeed! I brand ye as a lie!

Leta's Prayer.

Vast blue above, wherein the angels hide!
And moon, His lamp o' love! And, cloud-fleece
white,
Art thou the wool to swaddle Him?
And doth
His mother bide upon a star-beam
That leadeth her to thee? I bless Thy name,
And pray Thee keep my sire to watch full well
His flock; and put a song in every coming day:
My Tina's coo, and mother's song at eve.
Good night, sweet night! I know He watcheth thee
and me!

parables and short stories and epigrams—all with a peculiar personal quality, thoroughly consistent with everything in the records and evidently the expression of a personality thoroughly at one with itself in all its multifarious manifestations. There are in manuscript two complete works of literary art; a third one is in process of communication. The first is a play in six acts, called "Red Wing." It is a drama located somewhere in England, or perhaps in Scotland, about 300 years ago, or maybe earlier. It is a complete play, the characters clearly differentiated, intensely individualized and thoroughly consistent in every changing situation of the drama. The setting of the scenes reveals a wonderful clearness of visualization. The description of the settings is as minute as the like feature in the work of George Bernard Shaw, although not so profuse. The characters come and go without conflict and the story works out logically and consecutively to a beautiful conclusion.

CORRECT LOCAL COLOR.

In addition to this play there has been taken down a novel entitled "Telka." While the play runs to about sixty thousand words, "Telka" stretches out to about eighty thousand. "Telka" is a story of life in England about two hundred years ago, and it is thoroughly correct in all its local color. The characters have a reality which is hard to describe, because the author does not describe them; they describe themselves thoroughly in their expression and in their action.

Particularly colorful and racy of the soil are the descriptions of the domestic life of the lower classes. Many of the scenes of "Telka" are set in the kitchen or in the barnyard, and the realism of them is strikingly honest without descent into any of the disgusting details to which so many of our modern realists resort for their strong effects. "Telka" is a beautiful story, and it moves with a remarkable swiftness through scenes of humor and passion and pity to an ending which has in it

some of the high quality that we find, let us say, in the work of Thomas Hardy.

To pass from the reading of "Red Wing" and "Telka" to another work now being received is as much of a leap as, for example, that which we must make between "David Copperfield" and "The Tale of Two Cities." Indeed, it is a much longer leap, for this third tale—which Mrs. Curran calls "Panda," but which Patience Worth calls "A Sorry Tale"—deals with incidents in Bethlehem and Jerusalem under the reign of Tiberius at the time of the birth of Christ. So far, about eighty thousand words of this tale have been taken down. It has been communicated in sections, in sittings at the home of Mrs. Curran and in various friends' houses in St. Louis, in the city of Washington and in Boston.

No matter when or where Mrs. Curran sits at the board with another person, after the usual conversational pleasantries and a few special inquiries and answers on subjects in which the inquirers think they have posers for Patience, there comes a pause and then some such sentence as this: "Bake thou the loaf" or "Set thou awake," and then straightaway, without any hesitation whatever, the story reels off in sections ranging in length from three hundred to three thousand words. This story is told in a language which simulates somewhat remotely the language of the Bible.

SHORT WORDS USED.

The language in "Red Wing" and in "Telka" has no Biblical flavor whatever. In those productions the speech may be loosely called "early English." Seldom do we find a word of more than two syllables. The language is of no particular past time. It is made up of the simplest root words that have been used as far back as the time of "Piers Plowman" and earlier, but it has no Latinisms or Normanisms. Many words archaic, obsolete, or lingering in particular provincial localities appear. As they appeared they were looked up by students of philology, and never once has a word been found used wrongly.

that it carries with it an atmosphere of "other-where-ness."

The touch of Patience's individuality is eerie, but not spooky. While her "note" is religious it is so in a large sense. Her faith is too large for dogma or doctrine. Broadly she proclaims a spiritual democracy attainable elsewhere from present conditions, as the butterfly evolves from the chrysalis. Her description of the realm from which she speaks is not materialistic. It is difficult to condense all she says, but one gathers that where she is there is life untrammelled and unconditioned. There is boundless knowledge and there is a union with the divine without the annihilation of the individual.

SHE WAS A PURITAN.

So far as we have been able to learn Patience Worth says she lived somewhere upon the eastern shore of this country. She was a Puritan. She has expressed hatred for the Indians. She has intimated that she helped build stockades against them, that she has chewed sheepskin to make wads for muskets. Once she was asked if she had been captured and killed by the Indians. Her reply gave her interlocutors a flash of horror. It was: "Nay, worse."

She describes herself here as not tall but short; eyes brown; she wore a cap with a crown and with ribbons on it; in her face there were lines caused by sorrow and not by laughter. She says that a tree rises out of her grave and that one man now living, of her blood but not of her name, knows all about her.

None of the investigators has been able to locate the date of Patience. She described herself once as a "russet," meaning a Round-head. She has given contemptuous and scornful descriptions of Cavaliers. The name of Worth is quite common in records in Massachusetts and in Virginia. I asked her once to give me some song she had sung at home or in the chapel or meeting house, and she re-

Who is Patience Worth?
No living person has seen her or heard her voice, and no living person ever will; but in St. Louis dinners are being given in her honor, scientists are discussing her and artistic circles are giving her enthusiastic welcome, some admirers even going so far as to say that here is the greatest literary genius ever manifested in that city.

This is not so strange in view of the fact that Patience Worth has dictated to a St. Louis woman about 500,000 words of literature which is as remarkable for its quality as its form, the latter being that of centuries long past. Through the humble medium of a ouija board, hitherto regarded as a toy, she has given to the world a novel, a play, many poems and countless discourses on religion, philosophy, art and other matters. Furthermore, through the ouija board she will converse at any time with any one and upon any subject, never being at a loss for comment or reply.

In her demonstrations of the literary gift she ranges through the centuries, apparently knowing no limits as to time and space. She lived in America in Colonial times, she tells inquirers, but a novel she is now dictating concerns the time of Christ, and the most exacting observer has failed to find any historical inaccuracy in her depiction of that age and its people. She transmits poems in Scotch dialect as easily as in any other medium, although her unique "conversational" language remains constant.

Patience Worth speaks to the world, from what she calls a "wall-less country," through Mrs. John H. Curran. It appears that she began communicating with mortals without any preparation or solicitation on the part of Mrs. Curran, who was using the ouija board purely for amusement when Patience began to "talk" to her.

"The personality calling itself Patience Worth" has amazed nearly every one who has seen revelations of it. Scientists are puzzled by it and cautious editors have not only discussed it at length but have printed much of the literary output of this mysterious source. A book by Patience Worth soon will be published by a New York company, and current periodicals of St. Louis are giving steady prominence to her work.

William Marion Reedy, distinguished literary critic and editor of "The Mirror," tells in the following article as much about Patience Worth as may be known at present. If any one is unlikely to be taken in by chicanery in such a connection it is Mr. Reedy. He has devoted many years of a brilliant life to fighting and exposing fraud in all forms. By religious inclination, by education and by reason of his natural mental endowment, he is as nearly proof against deliberate deception as any one who can come into contact with Patience Worth. He gives here facts, and nothing else, concerning the supposed communications from the spirit of a woman who passed centuries ago through the change we know as death.

By William Marion Reedy.

THE city of St. Louis appears to have at present a patron saint other than the canonized King of France. Her name is Patience Worth. Everybody here is talking about her. No one has ever seen her. On the evening of November 3 the Papyrus Club, an organization of local writers and artists, gave a dinner in her honor at which there were 250 guests. The menu was decorated with quotations from the words and works of Patience Worth, and local celebrities made speeches about her and her message. The fame of her has spread abroad even unto Boston, where Professor Morton Prince, an eminent psychologist, erstwhile of Harvard University, investigated her, with little satisfaction to himself and less to Patience herself.

Some say she is a spirit. Others that she is a figment of the subconsciousness of another lady. Literary folk are of the opinion that it doesn't matter who or what she is; her utterances are wise and tender and beautiful. Some hold that Patience Worth is the greatest literary genius St. Louis has yet produced, barring no one in the writing game in that metropolis.

Here is the story of Patience Worth! About two years ago Mrs. John Howard Curran, wife of the former Commissioner of Immigration for Missouri, and Mrs. C. Edwin Hutchings, a writer for local newspapers, started to amuse themselves with a ouija board while their husbands played pinochle. At first they obtained from the board nothing but a few sentences, sometimes coherent and often otherwise. Then these communications became more intelligible. At first it seemed as if there were two, or even three, intelligences endeavoring to impart information from some



Patience Worth's typewriter is a ouija board, a popular amusement device.



Under Mrs. Curran's touch it writes "spirit" literature and messages.