

A book review by Aleister Crowley from the September 1917 edition of The International.

Jap Herron a novel written from the Quija Board, Mitchell Kennerley.

The Love Letters of St. John, Mitchell Kennerley.

Literary forgeries are sometimes interesting, but they have to be clever. It is possible that St. John corresponded with a courtesan, but we should be more satisfied as to the authenticity of such a correspondence if we had the manuscript. As the person responsible for the volume claims to have had letters that were given to an old priest in Tuscany long ago, we might at least have had a sample of the original. Instead, we obtain nothing but stuff which would hardly do for the sob column of the least sophisticated evening paper. The ideas attributed to St. John are so cheaply sentimental, and the attempt to imitate part of his style is so crude, that one simply cannot bother to attempt a serious analysis. There is nothing in the book but vague drivel. It is the most modern brainless tosh. The worst of all ancient authors never abandoned himself to such a debauch of futile footling. The whole thing is beneath contempt.

"Jap Herron" is prefaced by an elaborate introduction as to how the book was obtained. We have no wish to doubt that the spiritualists who did it are sincere. They may think that Mark Twain wrote this book; but if so, Mark Twain has simply forgotten how to write. It is hardly even a washed-out Mark Twain. There is not a line of humor or a phrase of wit in the entire production, of the kind that one could call characteristic.

There appears to be a kind of painstaking imitation of the style, such as might be within the powers of one of those playful elemental spirits who love to make fun of those who invoke them without proper magical precautions; but no one with the smallest sense of criticism could possibly imagine that Mark Twain wrote this book.

It limps a thousand miles behind the feeblest of his earthly efforts. I say this not by any means as a whole-hearted admirer of Mark Twain. I think he wrote a great deal of third-rate stuff, forced humor, false sentiment, at times sheer tosh. But this book is a revelation of how good that bad stuff was.

On the other hand, it may be argued that Mark Twain is now "regenerate." His new experiences may have modified his attitude to things terrestrial. The book, standing on its own feet, might be found interesting and genial; on the stilts of spiritualism it fails.