

A Lusitania Victim Communicates

By Michael E. Tymn

On May 7, 1915, Hester Travers Smith, a prominent Dublin, Ireland author and wife of a respected physician, was sitting at the ouija board with Lennox Robinson, a world-renowned Irish playwright. Both were blindfolded as the Rev. Savell Hicks sat between them and copied the letters indicated by the board's "traveler."

"Pray for Hugh Lane," was the first message received. Following the prayer request, the traveler spelled out: "I am Hugh Lane, all is dark." At that point, however, Travers Smith and Robinson were still blindfolded and had no idea as to the message. In fact, they were conversing on other matters as their hands moved rapidly. After several minutes, Hicks told Travers Smith and Robinson that it was Sir Hugh Lane coming through and that he had communicated that he was aboard the *Lusitania* and had drowned.

On her way home that evening, Travers Smith had heard about the sinking of the passenger ship by a German torpedo, but she had not yet read the details, nor did she or the others know that Sir Hugh Lane was a passenger on the ship sailing from New York to England. In her 1919 book, *Voices from the Void*, Travers Smith states that she knew Lane and had heard that he had gone to New York, but it never occurred to her when she heard of the sinking that he was on board or that he was returning from New York so soon.

Although distressed by the message, they continued the sitting. Lane told them that there was panic, the life boats were lowered, and the women went first. He went on to say that he was the last to get in an overcrowded life boat, fell

over, and lost all memory until he "saw a light" at their sitting. To establish his identity, Lane gave Travers Smith an evidential message about the last time they had met and talked, although when Travers Smith asked him for his cabin number on the ship as proof that it was Lane communicating, the number given to her was later discovered to be incorrect. She reasoned, however, that he was in a confused state and that it is not unusual for people to forget their cabin numbers. (Nor is it unusual for boat passengers to remember where their cabin is located without memorizing the number.)



Hester Travers Smith

"I did not suffer. I was drowned and felt nothing," Lane further communicated that night. He also gave intimate messages for friends of his in Dublin.

Lane, 39 at the time of his death, was an art connoisseur and director of the National Gallery

of Ireland in Dublin. He was transporting lead containers with paintings of Monet, Rembrandt, Rubens, and Titian, which were insured for \$4 million and were to be displayed at the National Gallery. It was reported by survivors that Lane was seen on deck looking out to Ireland before going down to the dining saloon just before the torpedoes struck.

Lane continued to communicate at subsequent sittings. As plans were underway to erect a memorial gallery to him, he begged that Travers Smith let those behind the movement know that he did not want such a memorial. However, he was more concerned that a codicil to his will be honored. He had left his private collection of art to the National Gallery in London, but the codicil stated that they should go to the National Gallery in Dublin. Because he had not signed the codicil, the London gallery was reluctant to give them up. "Those pictures must be secured for Dublin," Lane communicated on January 22, 1918, going on to say that he could not rest until they were.

Sir William Barrett, professor of physics at the Royal College in Dublin, had the opportunity to observe and test the ouija board sittings at the home of Travers Smith. In his 1917 book, *On The Threshold of the Unseen*, Barrett explained that two members of the group would sit blindfolded at the board, their fingers lightly touching the board's "traveler," a triangular piece of wood which flies from letter to letter under the direction of a "control" (a spirit communicating directly or relaying messages from other spirits unable to directly communicate), while a third person would copy the messages letter by letter. At times the traveler moved so rapidly that it was necessary to record the messages in shorthand. Although Barrett had no doubt as to the honesty and integrity of Travers Smith and Robinson, he designed special eye patches for them to wear so that there could be no question as to them seeing where the traveler was pointing. On one occasion he turned the board around to see

if the results would be the same. They were. On another occasion, to satisfy a skeptical observer, who theorized that the blindfolded operators had memorized the position of the letters on the board, the letters were rearranged and a screen was put between the two operators who remained blindfolded. Still, coherent messages came.

When Barrett asked the controlling spirit if any friend of his could send a message, he heard from a deceased friend, who sent a message to the Dublin Grand Lodge of Freemasons, of which he (the friend) had been a high ranking member. Barrett was reasonably certain that neither of the board operators was aware of the friend's Masonic affiliation.

On another occasion, Barrett sat at the board, securely blindfolded. He reported that he was startled by the "extraordinary vigor, decision, and swiftness with which the indicator moved." The only message that came through was one that said Barrett was not suited for receiving. In other words, he did not have the mediumistic psychic power necessary to adequately receive messages.

Before one sitting, Travers Smith and Barrett discussed how evidential the messages from Lane were to them, although they could understand why the public doubted. After the sitting started, a man who said he had died in Sheffield communicated first. Then, Travers Smith recalled, Robinson's arm was seized and driven about so forcibly that the traveler fell off the table more than once. It was Lane, who was upset because of the doubts expressed relative to his communication.

W. B. Yeats, the famous poet, also reported contact with Lane, his close friend, through a medium in London. He said that the medium told him that a drowned man followed him into the room and then went on to describe a scene at the bottom of the sea.