

SINCLAIR LEWIS ASSAILS THE CLAIMS OF SPIRITUALISTS

Trickery, Not Truth, Prevails at Lily Dale, He Writes



Sinclair Lewis.

I am a little taker of my life and I do not want anyone to remember me so I will not be remembered. I do not want anyone to remember me so I will not be remembered. I do not want anyone to remember me so I will not be remembered.

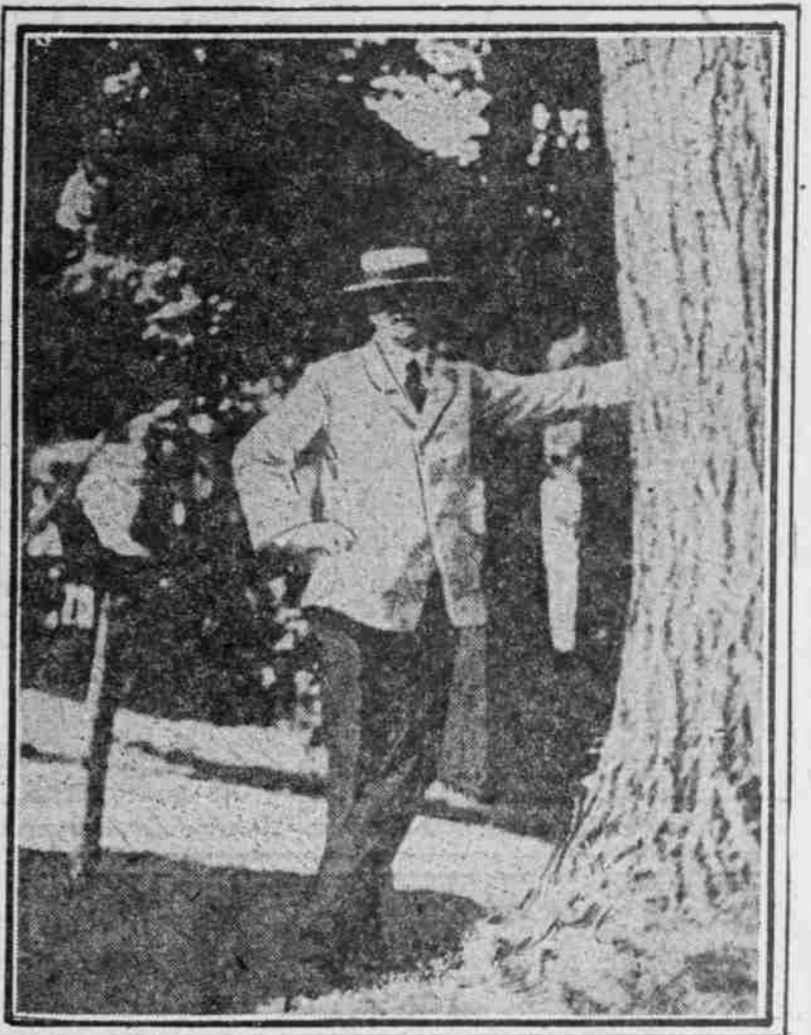
Arthur Upson

"Spirit Message" From Arthur Upson and, at Left, Facsimile of His Real Signature.

I have a life as real as your own. My spirit does not die. I am not lost. Alfred Henry Lewis

Alfred Henry Lewis

Facsimile of Alleged Spirit Message From Alfred Henry Lewis and, at Left, His Real Signature.



John Slater, posing by one of the big trees near the Lily Dale auditorium.

Alleged Spirit Message From "Herbert S. Wells" and at Left the Real Signature of H. G. Wells, the Well-known British Author. It Was H. G. Wells That Sinclair Lewis Had in Mind, Mr. Wells at This Writing Is Alive and Well. Not Knowing Him Personally, Mr. Lewis Thinks It Is Strange That Wells Should Address Him as "Harry."

Sinclair Lewis, young novelist and short-story writer, today takes a fling at the spiritualists. He does not directly assail the distinguished supporters of the belief in man's power to communicate with the dead—Lodge and Doyle—but he picks flaws in the methods in vogue at that strange of all colonies—the Lily Dale Spiritualist assembly in upper New York state.

Mr. Lewis spent considerable time there investigating séances, slate writing, spirit messages and similar phenomena. Only he doesn't call them phenomena. He has some big men against him, but what he says is as sincere as it is interesting. His conclusions make the title of the Spiritualist Series, which will close next week with a special article by Dr. James H. Hyslop, secretary of the American Society for Psychical Research.

BY SINCLAIR LEWIS.

William Shakespeare, Robert Louis Stevenson and Henry James assisted in the preparation of this article. No writer ever had more distinguished collaborators.

SLATER—John Slater himself—had, in return for three dollars in advance, given me ten minutes of his time, and an example of his inspiration as a spiritualist medium. "Are there any questions?" asked Slater, briskly and rather condescendingly.

"Please," I stammered, "does your guide tell if the spirits of William and Robert and Henry are near me and assisting me?"

"Yes, certainly," he said, "they are touching your sensorium?"

"Well, do they approve of the work I am doing just now?"

"Yes, they say it's all right. Just go ahead."

"But do they like the way I'm handling the work?" I insisted.

Slater was impatient. "Yes! Didn't I tell you that they were touching your sensorium? Why, there ain't once in a hundred times that I can see that condition. They tell me to go right ahead, and they will be with you." The Divine Guide, the Control, the same being an Uncas, had spoken the last words, through Mr. Slater's mouth, though, as I understand the system, it is Mr. Slater who gets the three dollars, not the guide.

I was modestly pleased, for William and Robert and Henry, those homely spirits whom Slater had definitely asserted to be my sponsors, were William Shakespeare, Robert Louis Stevenson and Henry James. Slater had not asked me for the rest of their names; apparently he had not needed the surnames to identify them.

And the work I was doing, the work which they were authorizing and aiding, was the investigation of Mr. John Slater and his fellow spirit exhibitors, spiritualist vaudeville managers and sideshow spellers of the Lily Dale Assembly.

The Lily Dale Assembly is a mixture of summer resort, spiritualistic campmeeting and Chautauqua. It has been held every summer now for 35

THEY ALWAYS CITE LODGE, BOYLE, HYSLOP ET AL, SAYS LEWIS.

"I want to establish some fundamental principles. I desire to prophesy. The spiritualists are going to answer my article by repeating their favorite incantation which is the names of Crookes, Lodge, Wallace, Stead, Hyslop and Conan Doyle. They are going to ignore what I actually do say; they are going to twist my meaning and assume that I have asserted that all psychic phenomena are necessarily deception. Of course, if I did say that it would be fair to contrast me, the novelist, with such master scientists as Crookes and Lodge. But it happens that I don't say anything of the kind. I do not deny the possibility of the existence of spirit-life nor of any other force or form of existence. I am not studying Lodge but I am protesting against the poor logic of saying—as the spiritualists constantly do—that because Lodge and Crookes were honest investigators, therefore any association of persons calling themselves spiritualists, psychics or occultists, must also be honest."

years in Chautauqua county, New York. It is the most important of the several summer campmeetings influenced by the National Spiritualist association.

Lily Dale lies upon a little rocky lake, 800 feet above the level of Lake Erie, and 13 miles south—about 40 miles from Buffalo. A creaking country bus takes you through an iron gateway, with a gatehouse and a ticket taker, like the entrance to a county fair. The admission is 30 cents. At first you seem to have come to a cheap summer resort, not unpleasant in its setting of trees and the sheen of the lake beyond. Then the big canvas-aided auditorium suggests a Chautauqua and the ubiquitous signs begin to amaze you.

Everywhere upon the houses are such notices as: "Message Medium," "Scientific Palmist," "Magnetic Healing," "Healing Circles," "Clairvoyant and Clairaudient," "Trance Medium," "Readings," "Psychic."

The Natural Beauties of Lily Dale. But three beautiful things there are at Lily Dale: the Forest Temple, the Inspiration Stump and the view of the lake and the sloping grainfields beyond it. The Forest Temple is merely a collection of wooden benches facing a roofed stage, but it is in a grove and above the benches the maple boughs meet. It is tranquil in late afternoon, when the leaves overhead are delicately translucent and there is a murmur of woodland peace. The covered stage, like a tiny wooden adaptation of an ancient Greek stage, is simple and white. True, some one has done his best to spoil it by adorning it with a mail order parlor organ, yet it has a dignity not borne out by the gilt messages which the minor mediums are constantly giving at the Forest Temple. A strange touch to the wooden benches is the tiny plate on the back of each, dedicating it to an "Arisen Loved One."

The Inspirational Stump, surrounded by a ring of blank benches, is among the big maples and pines of the Leocly woods. It is a natural church; a friendly and disarming gathering place.

Near the Forest Temple is the Fox cottage, shrine of spiritualism. It formerly stood at Hidesville, New York, and was removed to Lily Dale, as a sacred relic. In the Fox cottage in 1847, began a series of rappings, attributed by scoffers to charlatanism and by the faithful to the spirit of a murdered pedlar. It led to the spiritualistic epidemic which swept America and England, and produced so renowned a medium as Daniel Douglas Home—famous in his day. Now the astral signaling is reduced to a set of meek tappings which the custodian of the cottage, Miss Floy Cotwell, a queer school-mistress sort of young woman, produces at will. Her guide and rapper extraordinary is, she told me, one who was famous on the "earth-plane," but who now prefers to be known as Uncle Ike! Rappings have rather gone out of fashion—whether among earthly mediums or heavenly spirits, I do not know—but Miss Cotwell still cleaves to them.

The Fox cottage is further sanctified by such relics as the box of the murdered pedlar, an iron rod made by Mr. Fox, several spirit photographs—spirit photography is another art which, having been explained so many times, has somewhat gone out of vogue—and a picture of somewhat antique flowers which was, said Miss Cotwell, "done by an old lady blindfolded, in two hours, working with both hands."

write messages to spirit friends, and sit in an excited ring about the medium to get her replies. The prices for these circles vary. Slater's, the most popular, cost 50 cents; the minor mediums coax in just as many but not quite such articulate spirits for 25 cents. With all these wires at her service, any seeker ought to be able to get half a dozen communications from the same spirit in the same days. Only they are likely all to be the same communication more or less glibly expressed.

Spiritualists But Not Long-Haired Crookes.

I want to establish some fundamental principles. I desire to prophesy. The spiritualists are going to answer my article by repeating their favorite incantation which is the names of Crookes, Lodge, Wallace, Stead, Hyslop, and Conan Doyle. They are going to ignore what I actually do say; they are going to twist my meaning and assume that I have asserted that all psychic phenomena are necessarily deception. Of course, if I did say that it would be fair to contrast me, the novelist, with such master scientists as Crookes and Lodge. But it happens that I don't say anything of the kind. I do not deny the possibility of the existence of spirit-life nor of any other force or form of existence. I am not studying Lodge but I am protesting against the poor logic of saying—as the spiritualists constantly do—that because Lodge and Crookes were honest investigators, therefore any association of persons calling themselves spiritualists, psychics or occultists, must also be honest."

The more important investigations of a Crookes are the more important in that we shall have an honest means for the communication of his conclusions. It veritably after 500,000 years of human ignorance, we are guessing the riddle of the riddles, acquiring truth about the illimitable secret of after-life, then how drastically we should demand that all who actually dare to identify themselves with that truth shall be, beyond all ancient demands for the probity of priests, clean, scrupulous, intelligent. If I shall show that Lily Dale, approved by the presence of the high percentages of the spiritualistic organization, is not thus clean, scrupulous, intelligent, then I shall have made a severe indictment. And if I shall show that to this place come the average people asking for inspiration, then I shall have indicated a need for stern house-cleaning.

I was told by officials at Lily Dale that there are between nine and ten thousand attendants on the campmeeting each year; and this is only one of thirty camps. It is not a small movement. And, judging from the people at Lily Dale, it is not a movement of the long-haired, of cranks and sensationists. Not once at Lily Dale did I see the anemic gentlemen in robes and sandals, or the neurotic ladies in orange chiffon, who make many causes. These seekers of Lily Dale are the good, sound, solid people of the small towns and farms and suburbs and city uptown streets who do the world's work.

Scores of men and women I saw reminded me of the "pillars of the church" in the small towns I know. I can see them at Wednesday prayer-meetings, W. C. T. U.'s, at chicken supper or donation parties for the pastor. The older women—"Mothers in Zion" they used to be called—large, dignified, wrinkled; wearing

muslin or, on Sunday, the "best silk dress," with a big brown and white cameo at the throat, and a tiny frill. A few are like the small-town club-woman—alert, intensely respectful, wearing on their white blouses that eye-glass-hook which is a badge of Chautauqua culture. The older men are often bearded; the backs of their hands brown as strong cigars from 60 years of work in the fields; civil war veterans, many of them, wearing Indian gins. R. Burton and in one case, the blue coat with brass buttons.

Livers in the Past.

One thing that gives their flavor is the fact that they almost always ask for messages from dead relatives, not from friends or the lost great. A message from Uncle Charles, with no more content than "I am happy here, and Jimmie is with me, and sends love," is to them preferable to an attempt to gain the wisdom of Goethe or Erasmus.

They live in the past. No few of them are absolutely alone—parents, husband or wife, brothers, sisters, uncles, even children gone. R. Burton, a No. one could be flippant over the great tears, the broken voices, with which the old people greet the "messages." That was the only possible excuse for spiritualism that I discovered; that drugging of the forsaken old. But I believe that to be more than half evil, because it turns their attention from the need about them to a narcotic absorption in messages—any kind of messages, clever or clumsy.

It is so easy to deceive them! If a medium says, "I get a condition of your knowing some one named Frank," the devotee will helpfully suggest, "Maybe it's Fred," and be satisfied when the medium follows suit.

"Yes, of course! That's it—Fred. Now sit clearly. Well, Fred is here—wasn't Fred your brother on the material side?"

"No, my uncle."

"No, my uncle," my guide shows it to me clearly. Well, Uncle Fred is here and says to tell you he is helping, you and everything will be all right. The devotee started and delighted by the seeing powers of the medium, who slips in the questions so quickly and deftly that the slow-witted customer comes from the sense with what she has said and what the medium has said completely confused. Not only are the flock self-hypnotizing in their desire to greet the lost ones, but they are trusting because they themselves are honest.

They are exceptions to the rule that most of the Lily Dale devotees correspond to the crowd at a country fair. The most noticeable exceptions whom I saw were two army officers, in uniform; a captain of the regular infantry, and a doctor of medicine who was a lieutenant in the medical reserve corps.

the Charlie Chaplin, the William J. Bryan of Lily Dale. A few heretics complained that for three dollars for a private reading they had received only six to ten minutes of rapid-fire generalizations. But the stalwart-related anecdotes of his giving names, facts, and dates relative to persons of whom "he couldn't possibly have heard."

I went first to Slater's morning class in mediumship at Library hall, which is a two-story frame building resembling a village firemen's hall. The more shallow souls may skip from Forest temple to Inspirational stump, to receive messages; but the deep, the initiate, are supposed to imbibe esoteric doctrines at the classes at Library hall and even, occasionally, to look at the books on the second floor of the hall.

Enter the seer! Slater had come! He hustled down the aisle, a small, brisk man, with white hair, spectacles, a neat little collar and blue tie—very much like a veteran conductor whom I knew on the Great Northern railroad. But no conductor could rival that mingling stop, that patronizing utterance, nor the airy manner in which Slater, when he has answered a question, tears up the slip and lets the fragments flutter away.

The audience sat up to attention as Slater explained in speech. The master announced that he didn't want to be with us at all. We ought to be out in the sunshine. He wasn't going to give any test messages. (General air of disappointment through the room.) This was not a test circle. It was a class in the development of the powers of the soul. The classes formed a regular course. He, Mr. Slater, had just "finished with four ladies who had shown great power as mediums." He felt that this achievement was worth while, if nothing else that he did at Lily Dale was. He didn't have to stay at Lily Dale.

"I don't care anything about this place! They worship me out on the street," he exclaimed. (Applause and smiles.)

We were not to cross our legs and break the magnetic current. Mr. Slater, who he submitted, be in a trance, dead to the world. His guide would speak through him in regard to the unfolding of mediumship.

For two minutes we went into the silence—I don't know why the silence was plural unless each of us had a little silence all his own. Then the guide began to issue oracles via the vocal cords of Mr. John Slater. It seemed to me that John possessed spoke very much in the style of John unpossessed. But of course my observation was incorrect, for didn't Slater, by saying every so often, "I want to tell you through Mr. Slater."

I understood Mr. Slater to refer to his guide as "an Uncas." Uncas was a Mohegan chief born in 1388. Lily Dale guides have Indian names as frequently as do country clubs, and for the same reason—though what that reason is, I cannot imagine. A spirit of Thunder-Cloud and one or two of Sitting Bull are in residence at Lily Dale during the summer season, and I have no doubt that the two regular live Indians who sell baskets there are getting in training to be guides on the astral plane.

The Uncas was speaking! At last—now we were getting to it! Now for wisdom, delivered by a celestial being!

But I was baffled. What I heard did not make any great change in my life. It was the same goulash of metaphors and suggestions about optimism and concentration-on-the-inner-self which is served in all the rambling sermon-essays in the New Thought magazines.

to get into communion with the inner powers. We were to acquire vision and behold hidden beauty. We were to awaken and concentrate. The guide suddenly developed a peculiar accent of tone, and it was evident that he, she, or it had an important postscript to deliver. This was a tart rebuke to the amateur spiritualists who didn't attend Slater lectures. "There have been a lot of people around here the last few days who just sit and talk and look stupid, instead of taking advantage of the meetings and learning something. They are a lot of empty-headed seekers who never will get any further spiritually."

Mr. Slater awoke from the dead trance. He rubbed his eyes, and shook his head in a headachy way, to indicate the pangs of coming out from spirit control. This jerky passing of the hand across the eyes is a characteristic gesture at Lily Dale, where almost any one is likely to catch the spirit now and then. Even a skeptic reporter caught himself doing it whenever his eyes were tired.

A Burton Holmes in Spirit Land. Mr. Slater gave a peculiar look (without movies) on his experiences while he had been dispossessed by the guide. He had seen lights and colored thoughts; a perfect circle, a triangle, and an orange one, orange being the color of sickness and nervousness. When he had finished he delighted the audience by personal likely to come after all he would coax his guide to give answers to the written questions.

Everyone beamed, while Mr. Slater scribbled a slip of paper from the pile. It was an interesting performance. No, I don't know how all of it was done. I do know that myself and other quite unknown outsiders received no answers to their questions, while others who were known as regular patients of mediums had uncommonly full particulars about themselves. I know that Mr. Hereward Carrington in "The Psychological Phenomena of Spiritualism" not only tells how mediums get advance information about persons likely to come to them, but also quotes extracts from the secret book issued by the brotherhood of mediums for common information about charlatan customers.

I don't assert that Mr. Slater must have had advance information about all the persons to whom he gave the names of the steamer upon which they had crossed the Atlantic. But this I do assert: Even in my brief acquaintance with Slater manifestations and by limited knowledge of the lives of his devotees, I did twice know of his giving out publicly and with great triumph information which even I, the outsider, could myself have provided. At a later, larger seance, at the auditorium, Mr. Slater edified the audience and thrilled a business man whom I will call "Mr. Alexander" by shouting across that crowd of 1500 people:

Call for Mr. Alexander. "I have a message for Mr. Alexander, of Toronto. Is he here?" He was.

"Mr. Slater Louis is with me, and says to tell you that she is here, and helping you, always. . . . Do I know you?" "No, sir," testified Alexander.

Slater nodded at this tribute, and again, "Did I know you had a sister, Louise?" "No, sir."

"Could I possibly have known that before?" "No, sir."

"Not at all! Now I have another message for you, Mr. Alexander. The man you are thinking of—yes, right now—the Reverend Canon X. is here, too, and he says to call on him for aid whenever you need it."

Again Slater went through the "Did I know that—could I have known that?" formula which always impresses his audiences. But somehow I was not impressed. For I could have given precisely those same spirit messages, with the exact names and forms, to Alexander! On the evening before, at Pierre Keeler's materialization

(Continued on page 7.)