

Chapter I

The beginning of my search.

Early in the first World War I received a telegram:

From H.M. War Office, 31st March, 1915.

Deeply regret to inform you Captain F.W. Townend R.E.
died 3.5 a.m. 29th March. Lord Kitchener expresses
his regrets. Secretary, War Office.

A few days later, I gazed, horror stricken, at a long paragraph in the Morning Post. It was headed "An Officer's Heroism", and read as follows:-

"A motor-ambulance driver, at the front, sends his mother a thrilling account of the fortitude and cheerfulness of an officer under the most distressing conditions. The writer says:- 'After dinner I commenced a letter, but was interrupted by a shell bursting in the vicinity and a man yelling for bandages. Of course I rushed to see if I could be of any use, and found that the shell had burst at the side of the road about forty yards away, right in the midst of a party of Indian engineers who were inspecting the telegraph wires. T.. and I grabbed stretchers from our car and, with some others, rushed for the Indians. I was late in starting and all the Indians were being attended to when I arrived on the scene. However I saw someone in the shell-hole where the men had been hit, and so had escaped notice. In it was a man, the white officer of the Indians, who appeared to have his legs half buried in the debris of the hole. He told us to attend to the others first; he was all right. And then, as we moved him, we saw that he was standing on the stumps of his legs. Both had been shot off at the knees. (I'm telling you this story because of the extraordinary courage the man showed -- such courage as I've never seen before and hardly imagined. It's worthwhile hearing the horror of it to realize we are officered by such men.)

'He was perfectly conscious and calm, and spoke as though he were a medical officer and someone else the victim. He looked at his legs as we moved him on to the stretcher and asked me quietly (he was not in the least

excited, and his handsome face showed no pain), to tie something tight round his legs to stop the bleeding. I did what I could with my handkerchief and another I requisitioned, and we took him to our billet. We had to move hurriedly, of course, as a second shell followed, and we wanted cover in case any more arrived.

'There were two R.A.M.C. men with us, and they attended to the subsequent first-aid. They discovered another horrible wound in his arm, and while they were dressing it he told them he thought he would give up football next year. We then took him to the nearest hospital. He was still conscious and perfectly collected, and laughed quietly and talked, apologising for the trouble he was causing, while on the way to the hospital. And I came back thinking of that tag in some book or other -- I have seen a man. The poor fellow died in hospital.'

The following day the Morning Post said they had learnt that this officer was Captain Francis Whitchurch Townend, R.E. Up to then I had been hoping against hope that perhaps there had been a mistake, and that the telegram I had had referred to a Townsend, or even another Townend; but now I knew for certain that it had been Frank, one of my seven brothers.

His death was a great grief to me. He had been so vividly alive. And my heart was wrenched by what he had said as he looked at his terrible injuries, for he had been a very fine all-round athlete. For years I was haunted by the thought of his death; but suddenly, in 1925, it seemed to be possible that, even though he was in another world, he was yet able to let me know he still lived. It so happened that my husband had to be away from me on military duties, and, as our boys were both at school, I was living in London alone. I had always hated being parted from my ^{three} ~~family~~, and somehow I found my mind dwelling on what it would mean to me if death separated us. I longed to know what did happen after death -- and that was the beginning of my search.

By an odd coincidence I found the house in which I was living was only a few doors away from the British College of Psychic Science, now no longer in existence. I went to many lectures there, and was present at a large

number of public demonstrations of mediumship, before arranging to have a few private sittings*. I had three of these at that time, all with trance-mediums*. The first I cannot clearly remember; but the second was with the well-known Kathleen Barkel. After she had gone into trance, I was startled when the control, White Hawk, asked with interest: "Who is Fanter? There is someone standing beside you who says he is known to you as Fanter." I did not answer this question; but Fanter was our special family name for Frank. Following that came many other details concerning him, all of which were correct; and soon after this I distinctly saw Frank one night in my room, standing at the foot of the bed, straight and strong, just as he had been before he was so hideously wounded. The third sitting was with Eileen Garrett, and was also most impressive; but that ended my initial attempts at psychic research, for my husband was given command of a battalion at Aldershot, and my time was fully taken up with other matters.

It was not until 1928 that I was able to start again, when I attended my first 'Direct Voice' seance* in London. Susannah Harris, an American of considerable repute, was the medium. There were about fourteen people present, sitting in a circle and all holding hands. The medium, a large woman, sat in a small wicker chair, which would most certainly have creaked had she tried to move in or from it. Moreover her hands were firmly held by the men sitting on either side of her. I remember them distinctly, for we had been fellow guests at dinner beforehand. One was a Harley Street doctor, and the other a stockbroker, and, like myself, they were eager for their first experience of Direct Voice phenomena.

The room was quite dark, and, with the curtains drawn on that very hot summer night, there was no breath of air to be felt. Very soon voices were heard, mostly coming (as it seemed to me) from towards the ceiling and from different parts of the room, speaking in both English and foreign languages. These voices were answered by one or other of the people in the circle; but at first I was not greatly impressed. Those conversations that I could

* see p. ...

understand seemed very trite; and I was wondering how it was that people knew when they themselves were being addressed, when, suddenly, I found myself in a swirl of cold wind, with two voices speaking from about the height of my knees, on which I could feel breathing.

The medium, who talked quite often herself, now said: "Someone here wants his sister. He says she has seven brothers." After a moment's pause, and as no one else answered, I murmured: "I have six brothers." Upon this one of the voices at my knee said insistently, and as though telephoning from very far away: "It's Frank. Frank. Can't you hear me? I am trying to make you hear. Frank." While he was actually speaking, the second voice (that of the medium's child control) kept on repeating: "I'm doing all I can to help him"; and very soon the man's voice came clearly: "You said you have only six brothers. Have you forgotten me?" And then he talked of things which only he and I could have known, all sorts of details and events, going back to our youth.

My husband ^{Harry,} died very suddenly in November of 1929, his death coming quite unexpectedly, for, although he had had a severe heart attack in the spring, we were confident that he was getting well. We were staying with a friend in Scotland when he died, one moment apparently all right and talking to me -- the next lying dead; and, as I sat beside him all through the night, feeling as though I had lived through countless years since it had happened, I thought: "If it is possible for anyone to return, you will come back to me."

Up to this time, the few experiences I had had of psychic matters had been deeply interesting in their results, sufficient to show ^{Harry} ~~my husband~~ and me that, even if what was given to me as evidence had, somehow, been taken from my own mind, there was, in all three of the mediums I had been to, some remarkable supernormal faculty. In each case there had been the clearest evidence of my brother, Frank. I did not talk about these sittings at all freely, and, apart from ^{Harry} ~~my husband~~, there were few people who knew anything about them. Two months before he died I arranged, with one of the

societies through which Eileen Garrett worked, to have three sittings with her after our return from a round of visits we were about to make. One day, when talking to ~~my husband~~ ^{Harry}, I suddenly said: "I would give worlds to know if what I have heard is true. Do you think you could come with me to Mrs. Garrett?" He answered: "yes, I'll go with you. I should like to see for myself what happens." Three days later he was dead, and when I went I was alone.

It was on November 26th, 1929, twelve days after ~~my husband's~~ ^{his} death, that I had the first of these sittings; and, on my arrival at the London Spiritualist Alliance, it was clear that no one had any idea of what had just taken place. The same applied to Eileen Garrett, and I realized that she had not the least recollection of the one previous time we had met. After all, that had been three years before, and since then hundreds of people must have been to her. She quickly went into trance, and I found that her control, Uvani, was speaking. Quietly and unemotionally he traced the events of the past eight months, giving me, for nearly two hours, the most detailed information from, and about, my husband; and I knew, in very truth, that he had kept his word of fifteen days' back, and that he was there with me.

From that time on I made an intensive study of psychic matters, experimenting with the finest mediums I could find; but (and this is an important point), I kept all my investigations secret. I told no one when or where I had an appointment; I never spoke either to the mediums or to anyone connected with them about myself or my affairs; and I very rarely gave any information to anybody at all, not even to my sons, with regard to what was told me. I kept complete records of all that took place, the evidence which poured through to me from ~~my husband~~ ^{Harry} being utterly amazing. There was little which had happened in our lives which was not mentioned; and, in refutation of the theory that all this must have been a matter of telepathy, much was spoken of which had not yet happened. To take only one example: several years before ~~my elder son~~ ^{my elder son} Ronald knew that he would be an explorer (he was working at the time for the Foreign Office), I was told that he would be

one, although I kept all mention of this to myself.

There may be some who will read this book who have only the haziest idea of what happens at a sitting. When appointments are arranged with mediums through the various Psychic Societies, the general procedure is always much the same. The mediums do not live on the premises, but attend at the allotted times. They go straight to the rooms in which they work, and they do not know with whom their appointments will be. The "sitter" comes in unannounced, and the name is not mentioned. Both sitter and medium sit quietly for a few minutes, and then the latter, if a trance medium, slips into unconsciousness. As a rule there is nothing strange or alarming about this trance. The medium is almost always quite normal and natural, and, to the sitter, it is just as if she, or he, were going to sleep. Suddenly she rouses and starts to talk, but with a voice and personality quite different to her own. The depth of trance varies considerably, some going into a very deep sleep, from which it takes a long time to awake when all is over, while others go off lightly and very rapidly, coming to again with the same ease. My own experiences have been almost wholly with trance mediums, and I have found in practically every case -- and they have been many -- that the mediums have never asked any questions, nor sought any information from me at any time.

I feel that the easiest way towards understanding communication between this world and the next is, first, to try and forget any orthodox ideas that one may have concerning it. Think of yourself, in the simplest case*, as having suddenly arrived in that other world to find yourself very much as you were when you died, physical body excepted. Your feelings are the same, your memory intact, and you may be yearning to return to someone you love. Presently you find that this can be done with the help of a

* Some people refuse to accept that they are dead for quite a long time, because the next world is so completely different to what they had confidently expected. They think they are sick; suffering from a lapse of memory -- all sorts of things -- until they finally realize what has happened.

human telephone, called a medium, and that messages can be given by you to an operator (or control), and transmitted by him or her through this medium. In other words, it is very much as it would be on earth if someone who had never used a telephone asked you to ring up a friend for him, telling you what he would like said. You could not send his message without the proper apparatus, in good working order, and that is just what a medium is. So there should be no sinister meaning in the term, which refers, in the psychic sense, to nothing more alarming than an instrument for communication between one person who has died and another who is still on earth.

In this chapter I am not going to speak in any detail of the results of my first two years' serious work, but will quickly pass on to the time when I myself developed psychically and became my own intermediary.

Uvani always spoke of my husband as 'your lord', and it was during my tenth visit to him that he quietly remarked: "Your lord says this: 'The next time I come I won't have an interpreter. I am coming to talk myself. I hate being explained away by a third person.'" Uvani then said, meditatively: "He has done many strange things in his life, but this will be one of the queerest. He never thought he would be pulling strings on the other side." I asked: "Uvani, will he be able to talk to me himself?", and he replied: "He says he will, Madame, and he is a man of great determination, great force of character. What he says he will do he will do."

This was five months after ~~my husband's~~ ^{Harry's} death, and was the beginning of one of the most wonderful periods of my life. During the next eighteen months, in all the sittings I had, Uvani came three times only, on each occasion staying not more than a few minutes, and it was ~~my husband~~ ^{Harry} alone who now spoke to me. That it was he in person I could not doubt. The way he talked, his expressions, the very words he used were his.

The first series of communications given through Uvani had been remarkable in their continuity, very accurate, and, to me, outstanding; but they were, in a sense, relayed, and now ~~my husband~~ ^{Harry} and I could talk directly to one another. In Eileen Garrett we had found a perfect instrument. Not only did ~~my husband~~ ^{he} evince the clearest memory of all we had done together; but

more and more was it clear that he knew all manner of things to do with the boys and me, in our daily lives; our sons being then both up at Cambridge. His care for us was just as it had been; but his understanding was far greater, and many things, which would have bothered him greatly once, now seemed trivial. It was what lay beneath, and not the outward appearance, that mattered. My big wish, in the earlier sittings, had been to keep any worries from him; but I soon found that, if ever I was troubled about anything, he knew of it already, without my telling him. If there were business affairs to be dealt with, he would speak of them without being asked; if there were an interview to be faced, which might have been difficult for me to deal with, he would know: and, as the weeks and months went by, I began to realize that now I seemed to know in myself what to do; that all fear was lifted from me; and that I was no longer in any doubt about how to manage, financially or otherwise.

During this period I went many times to seven other mediums -- Charles Glover Botham, Annie Brittain, Mrs. Clegg, Mrs. Mason, Estelle Roberts, Mrs. Dowden (the well-known medium for automatic writing)*, and Frances Campbell, who was a clairvoyante* -- and I received extremely fine evidence from all of them. None of these, however, could we use in the same easy way we could Eileen Garrett, and she was leaving, to live in America, in the autumn of 1931. The day she left we had our last talk through her for a very long time; and, while I was wondering how we should be able to speak again directly to one another, ^{Harry}~~my husband~~ said: "We'll have a try with the pencil." Accordingly, after Eileen Garrett left, I did try, on many occasions during the next three weeks, to see if involuntary writing would come; but it was not until November 12th that I had any success. That afternoon I sat down, as usual, with pencil and paper. I waited for twenty minutes or so while nothing happened; and then, slowly and feebly, my hand began to move. There was an attempt at a word, which I could not read; some small circles were made, the pencil going over the lines again and

* see p. ...

again; then my name written several times, quite legibly; and, finally, a short sentence from ^{Harry}~~my husband~~.

At this first success, each letter was made with the utmost difficulty, so that altogether I must have sat for about two hours, absorbed in what was taking place. The following day there was some improvement, and this continued for the first week, sentences being formed quite distinctly and with each word separate; but progress, on the whole, was slow, and, on November 20th, I paid a visit to Mrs. Dowden, feeling that perhaps her great power might, in some measure, communicate itself to me. I sat beside her, and occasionally she put her hand on mine. There was the same slow, careful forming of letters as before; but, while I was with her, only a little was written through me, to my great disappointment. However, some force had undoubtedly come to me from her, for that night at home there was a great improvement, almost a whole page of foolscap being filled with closely-packed writing.

After that I continued to work on my own, and a period of training began, which lasted until December 2nd; that is, for a fortnight. During this time hours were spent in laboriously shaping letters, like a child learning to write. Pot-hooks and hangers, straight lines and curves, all were practised and perfected until, little by little, they became easier to manage. Even after this training, though, some days were completely blank, without the least movement of the pencil; and at no time (after November 20th) were more than eight lines of foolscap filled until December 26th, when the writing became very tiny, as though to conserve energy, and considerably more was accomplished. On February 3rd, 1932, for instance, four hundred and sixty words were written in twenty-three and a half lines, an average of rather more than nineteen and a half words to the line. On February 14th, three months after I had started, once again a whole sheet of foolscap was written, and from that day on there was no more difficulty, the writing beginning at once and continuing with ease. I realized also that the effort needed was becoming less and less. The writing was still

very small, but it gradually became larger until, by February 29th, it was normal in size. It has remained so ever since. Besides my husband, Frank started to write through me at the end of December 1931; Uvani in June, 1932, and Abdul Latif in December of the same year. Apart from these four, it is only rarely that anyone else ever does or has done.

My training had been good. Great pains had been taken over the formation of words, and nothing slipshod was ever allowed. It was typical of ^{Harry's} ~~my husband's~~ efficiency and thoroughness. This applied to the actual writing. With the coming of Uvani, however, the procedure itself was re-organized, and this now became extremely methodical. At first it had been enough for me, when writing, merely to think of a question or comment in order to receive an answer; but, had I continued in this way, there would have been no record of the conversation which had led up to the introduction of any particular subject. Uvani insisted that what I said, or thought, myself should also be written down; and, from then on, the power working my hand would be abruptly suspended for me to put down my remarks, which I wrote in red pencil, to distinguish them from the involuntary writing. It soon became clear that it was Uvani who was the strictest control, for my husband, Frank and Abdul Latif were all more lenient, and would still sometimes answer if I only thought of what I wanted to say. Uvani would not write at all until I had first entered the hour, the day, the month and the year, saying it was most important that there should be no laxity in this, in order that complete records might be kept. Now and then I tried to see if I could persuade him to answer if I questioned him unnecessarily or did not conform to the system; but I found that the pencil would not move until I did as he expected me to do. The only exception to this rule was, and still is, when I was very tired; and then, at times, he would say: "I will not be obdurate. Do as you will.", or words to that effect.

When this writing of mine started, I took it for granted that it was

what is known as "automatic"; but I think I was wrong about this, for after a while I came to realize that there was nothing purely automatic about it. It is essential for me to give my whole mind to what I am doing, just as I would devote my entire attention to a person who was telling me something of compelling interest. And this is an apt simile, because, although the words written are in no way audible to me in the usual sense, I do seem almost to hear them with an inner consciousness, so that the writing appears to me to be controlled through my brain, and not directly through my hand. as is the case in most, if not all, truly automatic writing. In spite of what I have just said about the writing coming through my brain, my hand does seem to work of its own volition, without the conscious muscular effort needed for normal writing, and, when my communicator stops, this writing power is abruptly cut off. I do not mean to say that I cannot write when this happens -- of course I can -- but then it is with a totally different and much heavier feeling, and with myself consciously thinking of the words I write, instead of subconsciously hearing them. I find this a very difficult thing to explain, though, and I do hope I have not made matters more obscure by trying to make them clearer.

Ever since ^{Harry's} ~~my husband's~~ death I have had unbounded proof of his continued existence. It is from him that the most perfect evidence of survival and the finest cross-tests have come, and it is he who keeps me most constantly supplied with news of our sons. I know that essentially we have never been separated, and that our lives have gone on together; but everything concerning him touched me so deeply that I felt I could not lay bare any details of our story, his and mine. I do not think I should ever have written a book at all had it not been that Eileen Garrett herself published one ^{*} a few years after I began my search. In this she stressed her belief that Abdul Iatif and Uvani were merely aspects of her own personality, and that it was some deep-seated faculty in herself that enabled her to give information to those who went to her. It is not

* "My Life as a Search for the Meaning of Mediumship" (Rider).

surprising that she should have had this idea about her controls, for they came to her only when she was in trance and unconscious, leaving no after-impression on her mind when she came to.

After the publication of her book, Uvani and Abdul Latif did not cease to bring home to me the concern they felt for those people who had been to her for comfort, and whose faith must have been shattered when, after being filled with happiness in the belief that they had been in communication with those in the next life, they then found that she herself was sure that it was nothing but her own gleaning from their subconscious minds. Over and over again, referring to this, the two controls asked me, through my writing, to make public what I had been given, with the experiments and cross-tests they had carried out, as proof that they were indeed individuals, unconnected with Eileen Garrett apart from their use of her as an instrument. Here is an example of what was written on only one occasion:

"Having had your heart made whole, the aching wound healed, we are begging that, out of all compassion, you help us to heal others. It is what comes from our hearts to say. During these many years we have shown we do indeed live, that we are with you. Give us of your help to show others the same, to teach them that we are not figments of imagination. We are men who, having lived and suffered ourselves on earth, have returned to aid humanity as best we can; and that those who now doubt should know the truth is the constant prayer of Abdul Latif and Uvani."

It is for this reason that, in addition to recording the experiments by which Abdul Latif and Uvani gave me proof of their individualities, I am adding some of the evidence about my husband which Uvani gave me through Eileen Garrett. I am including the greater part of the first two sittings I had with her after his death.