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THE GIFT OF HEALING

Mother and son

A small boy and a young woman, warmly wrapped against the bitter cold of an icy, West Yorkshire winter afternoon, stood patiently waiting at the bus stop in the small village of Oulton. It had been snowing on and off during the previous few days and along the path and on the road before them dirty grey sludge lay piled and furrowed, dark, thick and ugly, adding



Figure 12.1 William Henry Lilley (1914–1972)

a chill emphasis to the bleakness of the day. Snow had little chance of remaining pristine in the grimy environs of industrial Leeds where the surrounding countryside was pocked and scarred with the pitheads and slagheaps of collieries and the air heavy with the emission of coal fumes and dust. Although early afternoon, the heavy ceiling of cloud made it seem much later. The mother and son were alone, and, as if warned by some premonition of delay, no one joined them while they waited. It was 1924, and the bus service probably more vulnerable to the effects of heavy snowfall and bad weather than today. As time passed, and the expected transport failed to appear, the mother grew anxious. She had timed the bus-trip to get them to the neighbouring village of Kippax shortly before the start of the Spiritualist séance she wished to attend. As a gifted psychic medium, Sarah Ellen Lilley, known to all as Sally, had made the trip many times before, for she was one of the central figures in the sittings that were held regularly in a cosy room above the village pub. She knew that any further loss of time would result in them arriving too late.

The sharp wind freshened, adding to the redness of their cheeks, and bringing with it an increasing flurry of snowflakes that clung to the scarf she had bound over her curly black hair and tied under her chin, and speckled with white the dark, plaid flat-cap the lad wore; a small replica of his father, who, before light, had set out that morning for his shift at the local mine. Suddenly, stirred by some inner prompting, possibly the silent influence of her Chinese guide, Li Chu, Sally decided to tarry at the bus stop no longer, but to set off on foot towards Kippax with her son, William Henry junior, in tow. It was not a conscious decision, because had she applied her serious consideration to the situation, given the prevailing weather, a ten year old beside her, ice, sludge, mud and snow underfoot, the distance to be covered and the lateness of the hour, it was not possible for them to reach their destination in time. At first she stuck to the main road hoping that the bus would still come, but before long, the area being well known to her from childhood, she turned off and by lane, stile and path sought to at least reduce the walking distance. Written into the memory of the child, and related many years later, apart from the snow and the nipping air, was how he had marvelled at the spirit-like vapour rising from the surface of the river Ayre. Unheeding, the mother pressed on, unwittingly moved by predestination as natural as a wave seeking the shore. Awareness of their surroundings, the ground beneath their feet, the damp chill and their efforts faded away. They spoke not a word and as if cocooned and cradled by some unseen influence seemed transported in silence through space and time. When their perceptions returned, they were already in the High Street approaching the pub.

Upstairs, the ladies of the circle were still arriving, shedding their scarves, gloves and protective outer garments in the séance room warmed by a cheery fire dancing in the ancient hearth. Sally and her, young 'Billy' had miraculously arrived with time to spare. This was the first time that William had ever attended a séance. He was no stranger to the other-worldliness of his mother. More gentle and sensitive than either of his two older brothers or his miner father, he was closer to his mother and did not find it strange that she was able to see and converse with spirit beings or that people visited their home for advice, for spirit healing and to have their palms or tea leaves read. After all, psychic powers were a tradition in his mother's family. His grandfather, Joseph Palfreyman, had been a clairvoyant psychic, like his father before him, and augmented his miner's pay packet by practising herbalism. Joseph was quite a character in the village, known for his talking jackdaw that accompanied him to the local pub of an evening, eagerly supped beer from a hollow in the wooden counter, and, clinging to his shoulder on their walk home afterwards, was more unsteady on its feet than its master.

On that fated Wednesday afternoon, William accompanied her only because Sally had been unable to find anyone to look after him on his return from school. The ladies present all made a great fuss of the young boy and spoilt him with tea and biscuits, but soon it was time for the more serious matter of the séance to begin. These sittings were held every month at the same venue and were always attended by the same sitters. Admission to the circle was carefully controlled and could only be achieved after all the members were in accord that the person seeking to join possessed qualities which would enable them to conform with the spiritual aspirations of the group; for the introduction of a discordant note would disturb the essential harmony of the circle. Invariably, prospective new members would be introduced by one or other of the established sitters and were, therefore, well known to them. However, the final decision of whether they should be admitted lay with the spirit inspirers, for whom Li Chu was the spokesman.

The common bond that initially drew these ladies together in their desire to lift the veil of death was often the loss of someone close through illness or tragedy. In 1924, due to the Great War of 1914–1918, after which in many British villages it seemed as if an entire generation of young men had been wiped out, it was more often than not the loss of a father, brother or son in action. Sally Lilley, who was born in 1888, and on that afternoon in Kippax was thirty-six years of age, had manifested psychic awareness from an early age, being conscious, both clairvoyantly (psychic vision) and clairaudiently (psychic hearing), of spirit children, who were her playmates

and confidantes. In the Palfreyman household, this was regarded as perfectly normal, natural and healthy. Against a relaxed Methodist Christian background, the family believed implicitly in the intimate interaction of the world of spirit and the world of everyday life. They understood, in their simple and relatively uneducated way, that those who had 'passed on', their nearest and dearest, were not removed to some remote nebulous Heaven or Hell, but resided in a spirit 'afterlife,' which interpenetrated the material world, and given the right circumstances, or need, could manifest to the sensitive beholder and communicate with them.

Sarah Ellen Lilley

Joseph soon perceived that his daughter's psychic senses were far greater than his own, and although she never attended a 'development circle' to advance her abilities, his interest and encouragement fostered their unfolding. It was he who predicted that she would one day bear a son destined to perform great healing works. Shortly after she passed puberty, her personal 'guide' or inspirer, Li Chu, a Chinese gentleman versed in philosophy and healing, first made himself known to her and remained with her throughout her long life. She died in 1980, at the age of ninety-two. She was short in stature, no taller than four foot eleven inches, and after producing her three sons lost her narrow waist and developed the solid frame of a strong, active, Yorkshire miner's wife; more muscular than obese. She had an ample bosom, which was a great comfort to me as a child, particularly during the time my mother and I stayed with her in Woodlesford, when we were evacuated 'up-North' during the World War 11 rocket blitz of London. I still remember snuggling up to her on cold, dismal winter days, and feeling so safe. She had black, curly hair, which later became 'pepper and salt', but never completely white, and warm, twinkling brown eyes. For me she was like a gypsy fortune-teller, and when I grew to know her well in later years, possessed an insight into people and events typical of the proverbial wise, old woman, or crone. Indeed, she was affectionately known as the village witch; the sometime midwife; a lass to be consulted when there was family distress or illness; who could see and converse with spirits; contact and receive messages and advice from wise beings and departed loved ones; read your palm, your cards and your tea leaves; see into the future; 'lay on hands'; and give good counsel. Sarah Ellen Lilley was, to say the least, well known and respected in the mining community.

I was always impressed by the strength of her forearms, developed, apart from hard domestic work, through the hours of massage she would give

those who sought her help for their various aches and pains, especially for their 'lumbago', or lower backache. Even when she was seventy-two, I know she was not past shovelling her miner-widow's coal allowance into her coal-bunker unaided. She was, besides, an excellent baker, and I have watched her for hours kneading dough with all the expertise she could apply to kneading an ailing back. Her hands were small and powerful and yet, when administering treatment, gentle and tender. Whenever she applied them to a painful spot, her palms would redden and become wonderfully warm, their contact bringing comfort and relief. Those hands wrought magic, they painlessly removed my loose teeth when I was terrified to have anyone else come near me, and much to my delight deftly and mysteriously conjured pennies and half-pennies from my nose or ears as a reward for my bravery. In her teens she entered 'service' in a grand home outside Leeds and it was there, 'downstairs', that she learnt the craft of good baking. During the Great War, she, like many women, volunteered to work in the gunpowder mills. Many years later, she told me about how many of the young women she knew during that time had become seriously ill from working with the toxic powder, suffering severe headaches and developing a yellow discolouration of the skin, and of others who had been killed or maimed by explosions.

The séance

In the centre of the séance room was a low table around which the required number of chairs had been arranged in a circle. Here, the ladies took their seats, all the while chatting and catching up on family doings and village gossip. The atmosphere was friendly and relaxed, all helped by the warmth and glow from the fire. William was given a comfortable chair to one side of the circle and told to be a good boy, to mind his 'Ps and Qs', and sit quietly while his Mummy and the good ladies said prayers, sang a few hymns and talked with the friendly spirits. The main purpose of these spiritualist sittings held above the village pub was to extend healing to people known to the sitters or to those whose names had been given to the circle by villagers who knew of the meetings and believed in spiritual healing; to make contact with deceased loved ones and the personal guides of the sitters; and to receive guidance in dealing with the demands and difficulties of life. Often unsought advice would come through for relatives or friends, or unexpected contact would be made with spirits wishing to use the circle to make contact with individuals quite unknown to any of the sitters. Although there were other 'sensitives' in the circle, of varying psychic ability, it was Sally and her guide Li Chu, who presided over affairs.

With William an intrigued observer, the séance began. Although not regarded by the sitters as a formal religious gathering, but rather as a coming together in spirit, the séance was conducted from a Protestant Christian perspective with due reverence and respect for the powers that were being invoked and a solemnity appropriate to the seriousness of the occasion and its high objectives. First the ladies joined hands, creating the circle, bonding the sitters and focussing the spiritual energy necessary for spirit communication and the transmission of healing. After a prayer of invocation delivered by Sally, the ladies discussed and identified the people to whom healing should be extended, one of whom was a member of the circle. When this had been done to everyone's satisfaction, the ladies once again joined hands, and, by way of totally surrendering themselves to the wishes of Divinity, sang their favourite hymn, *Lead, Kindly Light*, which commences thus:

Lead, Kindly Light, amidst th'encircling gloom,
 Lead Thou me on!
 The night is dark, and I am far from home,
 Lead Thou me on!
 Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see
 The distant scene; one step enough for me.

The words of the hymn capture the need for the incarnated soul to transcend the pride and pleasures of the ego-self, to trust implicitly, hearken to and follow unquestioningly, as a child, the guiding light of spirit, which constantly prompts and cues us through the uncertain gloom of unfolding life events. They express the need to live trustingly in the blessedness of the moment, and to know that at the end of our earthly journey, those we have loved and lost await us in the peace of the spirit world.

White Hawk

On that bitter, Yorkshire afternoon, in a room above a village pub, drawn by the earnest sincerity of a small band of village housewives, the universal light of which they sang focussed upon a young boy and in touching him blessed him with the gift of healing. Hardly had they closed with: "To rest forever after earthly strife in the calm light of everlasting life", than William, with eyes closed, as if in sleep, rose to his feet and with a noble and imperious gesture of his arm threw across his shoulder an unseen robe or cloak, much as a senator of old might have done before addressing his distinguished peers. Then, much to the amazement of all those present, in a voice lower in pitch than his own, the boy boldly spoke to them in an

unknown language. This was not the unintelligible gibberish of a person 'speaking in tongues', but clearly articulated and structured speech, delivered in measured tones and with remarkable authority, especially when heard issuing from the lips of so young a person. His entire being, small as it then was, emanated maturity, confidence and composure; all shared in his bearing, which was erect and imposing. Although his eyes remained closed, his audience knew he was surveying them as his hidden glance encompassed the room. He continued to speak for what seemed later to have been some time, but considering the circumstances was probably quite brief. Since they could not understand what he imparted, the sitters could only conclude that the inspiring spirit who had taken possession of the lad was actually communicating with 'others' who were present, but unseen. Only at the end of this discourse did he speak a few words of heavily-accented English, informing the circle that he was White Hawk, the appointed 'gate-keeper', or spirit protector of the young medium, and that this visitation was the beginning of important healing work that William was destined to perform. With a final injunction that Sally should assist the development of her son's mediumship, followed by a few words in his own language, which, judging by the intonation and stance that accompanied them, was a short prayer or blessing bestowed upon the group, their visitor resumed his seat and seemed to enter into a state of deep meditation. As White Hawk's animating influence withdrew, the boy's features and posture slackened, his breathing deepened, and he appeared to be peacefully sleeping. The circle remained silent and still, fully understanding the momentous nature of what had transpired and sensitive that the transition from the 'next world' to this should be gentle and undisturbed. After drawing a deep breath followed by an audible sigh, William opened his eyes with surprise and embarrassment to find all eyes upon him. He thought he had in some way disgraced himself by falling asleep. When questioned, he had no recollection of what had taken place during his 'absence'.

Much as Hamlet, after the appearance of his father's ghost on the battlements, enjoined Horatio and the watch to hold what they had seen and heard secret, so my grandmother cautioned her fellow-sitters to share that afternoon's revelation with no one. William was scarcely out of his boyhood, much work lay ahead to confirm and develop the remarkable mediumship that had been displayed and Sally had no desire for her youngest son to become a curiosity. A few weeks later, she returned to Kippax accompanied by a very reluctant and apprehensive William. On this occasion, all the energy of the circle was concentrated upon assisting his entrancement. Not surprisingly, although his mother had been at pains to

explain to him that a kind spirit wished to use him in sleep as a channel for communicating knowledge from the beyond; that he was very special to have been chosen for this role; and that he would come to no harm; the youngster was so frightened and overwhelmed by what was expected of him that he could scarcely bear to close his eyes, let alone fall sleep. This second afternoon sitting proved a great disappointment to all, but not to Sally. She realised that the first séance had been successful expressly because William had been completely relaxed and unaware of what was about to happen. It was only stage fright that stood in the way of further progress. By the time of the third séance, Sally's explanations and reassurances had prevailed, and, despite an initial anxiety, William again slipped easily into trance and was controlled by the same presiding spirit. During these first trance experiences, spread at intervals over the following months, very little communication took place. On the spirit side, however, there was considerable activity as spirit scientists devoted the time to preparing the young instrument psychologically and physiologically for the arduous trance-work that lay ahead and perfecting the process of entrancement to a point of seamlessness.

The Great Ramesôye

During the fourth successful séance, this had developed to such a degree that after the initial overshadowing by White Hawk, without the trance state being in any sense interrupted or disturbed, the sitters became aware that the North American Indian had departed and that they were in the presence of someone else – a personage, whom they would later learn, came from a far higher sphere. This illustrious being, speaking through the ten-year old medium without trace of a Yorkshire accent, made his presence known, announcing himself, after blessing the sitters, as the Ramesôye, an Egyptian doctor who had resided in the spirit world for the past 2000 years. He spoke English and expressed himself with immense dignity, strength and compassion, employing a turn of phrase that was both poetic and of another age. He graciously thanked the circle for their critical contribution to the development of the young medium, who was destined to become a great psychic healer and physician and told them that William's initial preparation for the important work that lay ahead was now complete. Before taking leave of them, he spoke directly to Sally advising her that her son's further development should be continued at home and no longer through attending the Kippax circle. The energy of the group was no longer required for what still remained to be achieved

and the familiar, relaxed home environment would prove ideal and more practical for this purpose.

In accordance with the Ramesôye's advice, regular sittings for William were commenced in the Lilley home in Oulton with the help of a few close friends, and in particular a devoted fellow Spiritualist, Mrs Westmoreland. I never heard this lady referred to by any other more familiar name, even though she was such an important and diligent participant in the final stages of my father's mediumistic development.

At that time, it was the custom, born of financial necessity, for young boys from the mining communities to leave school at the age of thirteen, sadly often younger still, and descend, like their fathers and grandfathers before them, into the stygian depths of the coal mines, exposing their young lungs under effort to the ruinous effects of coal dust and their tender bodies to the dangers intrinsic to working underground. By the time my father reached that age, both his older brothers, Tom and Jesse, were already down the mines pushing or pulling heavily laden trams or bogies along rail tracks, filled with the coal that their elders had hewn from the coalface. At this juncture, a vital decision had to be made about William's future. Despite the disapproval of the rest of the family, Sally, supported by Mrs Westmoreland, was adamant that "our young Billy" was not for the mines. She won the day, and during his teens Billy worked as a store assistant, thus providing his essential contribution to the family finances, earning money that he could never call his own. It was a difficult time for him because his brothers and his erstwhile school friends thought him soft, a 'sissy' and a 'mummy's boy.' Years later he would speak to me of the pain he endured during that period of his life, being a young boy in such a tight-knit community, estranged from both family and fellows through ever widening differences in behaviour and interests, which set him apart and isolated him. This isolation was intensified by the unique changes that were being wrought within him, which brought a precocious seriousness and depth to his disposition during years that are usually the most carefree and light-hearted. It would not be long, however, before two important people would enter his life and he would never feel alone again. The first was a deceased Hindu doctor and the second was my mother.

Psychic development

After the Ramesôye's appearance and advice, the intensity of the training increased, made possible because the sittings could be conducted at home, even nightly if need be, and could last as long as was required. Longer and

the identity or the essence of a person, even though in its configuration of feature, form and function it might bear witness to the nature and disposition of its inhabitant. He possessed the precious knowledge that there is no such thing as death, that each night as we enter sleep we 'pass-on' or 'die' to the physical world. We enter a finer world, more real and immediate than that of earth, in which we are not in a state of suspended animation, but find ourselves in our natural milieu and according to our spiritual unfoldment are interactive with this environment and with those we meet. He soon learnt that for the beleaguered soul, the sleep state, in which the soul to a variable degree, dependent on its level of enlightenment, remains awake and aware, provides not only respite from the struggles and sufferings of physical life, but also the care, advice, encouragement and love of spirit beings who are intimately involved in our affairs. No one is ever isolated, forsaken or alone – no one is ever forgotten. And, every morning after sleep, just as we 'died' the previous evening, we are 'born' into a new day. Indeed, if we are able to live powerfully, with utter focus, in the moment, in 'the Now,' no matter what has transpired over the years since our emergence from our mother's womb, even the most heinous crimes, each morning constitutes the first day of our lives, a fresh beginning in which we have the potential to rise from the ashes of the past as resplendent as the mythical phoenix.

With most of us the return into the body, which involves a descent from a state of high frequency to a grosser vibratory level, distorts or erases the memory of what has been experienced during the sleep state, but the effect is to some degree unconsciously retained and glimpses of happenings and meetings may be recalled. Advice given and insights imparted unconsciously modify our behaviour and decision-making, and may even convey a sense of anticipatory foreknowledge and preparedness for oncoming events. Attunement to these possibilities, and an urgent desire to penetrate the mist between the objective world and the Reality concealed behind it, will always be rewarded by an expansion of consciousness, which brings a closer proximity to the spiritual dimension. Old wisdom informs us that if we should knock, the door will be opened, and if we should ask, the question will be answered. Caught up in the swirl of life events, very few of us ever knock or ask, and if we should, our gesture is often too perfunctory and short-lived to achieve response.

Lejan Tari Singh

The young medium was now ready to commence his education in the art of healing and hence the time had come for him to make acquaintance

with his guiding spirit. The one entrusted by the higher spiritual masters with the task of leading William forward into the mysteries that lay before him, to inspire him and to tutor him, and to be his constant companion through his extraordinary life's journey was Lejan Tari Singh, a Hindu medical doctor, a Brahman, who had trained in both Calcutta and London and who 'passed on' in 1914, the year of William's birth. In those early years, my father saw his spirit mentor just as clearly as we, whose faculties are limited to the earth plane, can see those about us. He heard his voice, however, not in his head, as we who hear with our physical ears would expect, but in his solar plexus – in the pit of his stomach (which we will later learn relates to the energy vortex of the third chakra). He described the doctor as short of stature and dark-skinned, with handsome features, thick black hair and strongly marked eyebrows. His most salient feature was the beauty and intensity of his eyes, which though penetrating were softened by their warmth, tenderness and understanding.

A bond was established between teacher and disciple, which over the years, as William reached manhood and re-attained his spiritual maturity, would deepen to one of twin souls motivated by the same drive to spread the message of the eternal, imperishable nature of the human spirit; the spiritual significance of this physical life; the understanding and mastery of the subtle forces which pervade and order the creation; and the art of spiritual and natural healing. But this was yet to come; at first it was a relationship of pupil and master. There was so much for William to learn. He was a young, village lad, son of unsophisticated mining stock, spoke with a broad Yorkshire accent, had received only limited schooling and was untutored in the niceties of refined, social behaviour. Given this starting material and the elevated goal, even the most erudite and ambitious Pygmalion might have been daunted by the transformative task that lay ahead. But, a human being is not just the product of inherited characteristics, circumstances and conditioning. There is an endowment that is transcendent to outer appearances and qualities, derived from previous life experiences, achievements and accomplishments, a level of spiritual and intellectual development, which antedates birth into this life and will express itself despite the hindrances of racial, familial and genetic legacy. Working in concert with Dr Letari, as Lejan Tari Singh became affectionately known, were a team of doctors and skilled experts, each of whom had a particular role to play in William's education, development and healing work.

Just as it took five years to perfect trance mediumship – the ability to leave the body at any time, quickly, effectively, without fuss or theatricality – so was another five-year term needed to make him an equally successful diagnostician.¹

Medical education

From the very outset of William's training, Dr Letari concentrated on educating him in every branch of medical science, other than surgery and obstetrics, and imparting all the diagnostic and clinical skills necessary for him to be able to examine patients, interpret symptoms and signs and practise medicine in his own right, independent of his psychic gifts. In Britain, this was quite unique in the annals of what was generally referred to as 'divine healing', 'spiritual healing' or 'faith healing.' Invariably, the healer had little or no medical knowledge and was a sensitive, but largely passive instrument or channel for the healing power, which was transmitted from a higher source through the medium to the patient, by the 'laying on of hands.' In William's case, in addition to full trance mediumship and the use of hand passes specific to the demands of each case, nature's remedies always supported the spiritual therapy. Initially, these were herbal, therefore, William needed to become familiar with the herbs of the field.

Herbal lore

To this end, Dr Letari took William into the Yorkshire countryside and there, especially among the abundance of the hedgerows, he focused his pupil's eye on the common herbs which were to be found growing there. He learnt to identify plants that had long been part of European herbal folklore, used since early times in the healing of the sick, such as dandelion, chamomile, daisy and stinging nettle. William would see a blue light playing upon the herb in question and hear in his solar plexus the voice of Dr Letari giving him both its common and scientific name, pointing out its distinguishing characteristics and telling him of its uses. What started out as a game, filled with all the excitement and suspense of a nature trail, became by repetition the serious acquisition of herbal lore.

Both the inner and outer worlds of Billy Lilley were expanding at a remarkable rate. It was not by chance that this child, born in an obscure Yorkshire village, should have been given this special role. He was chosen before his birth and came replete, like Mozart, with all the potential; all that was required was tutorship. No coercion, persuasion or incentive was required of this willing and enthusiastic healer in training; he embraced the experience with all the vigour and determination at his disposal.

The next stage of his tuition lay in gathering and preparing the herbs he would require. Apart from the hands-on experience this afforded him, it was a necessity, for he did not have money to buy herbs from the local

specific pattern repeated many times, touching the skin with the lightness of a feather, each pass concluded by the throwing off gesture. Finally the treatment ended with a number of head to toe movements executed as before. The psychic healing had taken all of fifteen minutes. William then pronounced some words in a foreign tongue, resumed his seat and lapsed into a sleep from which he soon awoke with a deep sigh.

During the night that followed, the patient became very restless, developed a fever and a heavy sweat and the parents feared the worst, but by daybreak he was more aware of his surroundings, seemed less swollen and was definitely passing more urine. That evening further treatment was given, and this was repeated the following evening. By the third day it was clearly apparent that he had turned a corner and was emerging from his critical state. Although he was very weak, his face was far less swollen, he was urinating more and his urine contained less protein, he had become very thirsty and his thoughts were clear. Within three weeks his kidney function had improved markedly and his symptoms had cleared. He went on to make a complete and permanent recovery.

We do not know how the physicians reacted when faced by this unexpected turnabout in their patient's moribund condition, but if it was anything like that of modern-day professionals, their conclusion would have been that his recovery was due to an inexplicable, spontaneous remission and definitely not due to the ministrations of a village lad. In science caution is essential, but un-inquisitive scepticism and prejudice so often contracts our vision and renders us blind to marvels. This was not so in the mining villages around Leeds. Word spread like wildfire. There was a young lad in Oulton who possessed healing power. Within days a 38 year-old woman came to him suffering from chronic oedema, generally known as dropsy. She had been receiving medical attention for the past two years. In an attempt to rid her of the excess fluid, her doctors had treated first her kidneys and then her thyroid with little success. At intervals during the following two months she received spiritual healing through the mediumship of William and by the end of that time her cure was complete. Again the word went forth and the flow of patients continued to increase. His successes multiplied and word of him spread, at first locally then further afield. Patients usually came to him at his home in Oulton, but often he would visit those who were too sick or infirm to make the journey. He did not charge for his services and this added to the pressure he was placed under. Over time, the cases he saw covered the entire spectrum of human suffering from the superficial and often psychosomatic to the most severe and destructive. Treatment was tailored to the demands of the case, sometimes mostly herbal, sometimes both herbal and spiritual healing and oft

times in the more serious cases almost entirely through the 'laying on of hands.' And all the time William's knowledge was growing. From the very beginning, he was never just an attuned instrument used by others; with every patient he was informed by the voice in the pit of his stomach as to the cause of the disease, its characteristic presentation and its cure. Just as in the identification of herbs, the blue light was his pointer, highlighting enlarged tonsils with their infected follicles, pinpointing the ulcer on a cornea and drawing his attention to the thickened, rolled edges of a skin cancer – the spiritual light always attended by the voice, which explained to him the significance of what the light focused on.

My mother

In 1930, when William was sixteen, he met Nancy Overton, a very attractive girl of the same age with blonde hair, blue eyes and a slim, athletic figure, who lived in the neighbouring village of Methley. She came from a similar background to William being the daughter of a miner, but her parents, Cyril and his wife May, were better educated and rather more refined than the Lilleys. It was she who taught Bill, as she always called him, to stand up when a lady entered the room, to open doors for her and how to lay a table. Her Yorkshire accent was far gentler than his, and she soon set about changing his vowel sounds and getting him to stop dropping his 'aitches'. However, of greater concern to her, coming from a strict Methodist upbringing, were the stories that she had heard about him being a Spiritualist, talking to spirits, going into trance and healing people by touching them. It sounded like hocus-pocus or black magic to her, and smacked of the Devil. But her heart was smitten, and in giving him a chance, while she sought to change his ways, she was inevitably and constantly exposed to the gratitude and testimony of the many villagers and others he had helped. She began to realise that "her Bill" was a truly unusual young man with remarkable gifts. Despite his local reputation, he remained diffident and unassuming. Nothing in his temperament or behaviour made her doubt his kindness, his sincerity and his determination to heal the sick. She was touched by the stories he told her of his experiences and his vision of life after death, a perspective that far outreached the limited, superstitious, doctrinal beliefs of the church and the dire picture it painted of original sin and the fiery torments of Hell. The weight of evidence she was exposed to transformed her thinking; the process quickened by her love for him and the fact that his entire nature was so perfectly in accord with the path he was walking.



Figure 12.2 Nancy – my Mother – at 16 years old

Eventually, came the evening when for the first time she made acquaintance with the beautiful spirit who inspired William, Dr Letari. Before her eyes, she witnessed the transformation of the youth she now knew so well into another being with different facial expressions, different posture, different gestures, who spoke with a gentle Indian accent, utterly devoid of Yorkshire overtones and who above all addressed her with the wisdom and words of a sage. She knew she was in the presence of a superior being who radiated power, composure and empathy. It was a meeting she would always cherish. By then, she and Bill were deeply committed to one another. “The Doctor,” as we most often referred to him in later years,

welcomed her as a daughter and gave her insights into the very unusual and special life that lay ahead for William and herself. He emphasised the important supportive role she was destined to fill – a role crucial to William's success. At this sitting, the first of innumerable private and family sittings conducted during my father's life, he gave her the spiritual name that she was known by in the world of spirit; a name she carried from life to life. He never addressed her by any other.

A team

Their courtship years coincided with the Great Depression of the early 1930's, which particularly hit the north of England where the heavy industries such as coal mining, steel and textiles were situated. Times were extremely difficult and unemployment soared. Money was tight and I recall my father telling me how he would often only have sufficient money to buy a single Woodbine cigarette at a time. However, both he and my mother were fortunate enough to be employed. Nancy worked as a seamstress during the day at Joseph May and Sons, the clothiers and tailors on Holbeck Lane in Leeds and William worked night shifts, 5.30 p.m. to 5.30 a.m., at the Yorkshire Copper Works on Pontefract Road, at last earning a modest but independent income. This difference in their working hours, which made the short periods they could be together even more precious, did provide one practical advantage. When he emerged from the factory in the morning, in winter before first light and often in the cold and dreary wet, though weary from the physical exertion of drawing and turning heavy copper and brass tubes throughout the night hours, William would make off into the countryside to collect the herbs he needed. These he would leave with Nancy, to whom he had taught the process of cutting, cleaning and curing herbs. In the evening, on her return from the textile factory, she would attend to this work assisted by her mother, who by now was fully committed to the young man who was obviously going to be her daughter's partner through life.

Marriage

In 1936, the year of King George V's death and the abdication of King Edward VIII, Cyril Overton, my maternal grandfather died of a heart attack while lying on his sofa in the lounge to which he had retired to ease a bout of "indigestion", which had halted him in his tracks while gardening. He

The first press report

There was an onward driving force in the affairs of my father that never tarried. News of his healing work had thus far spread only by word of mouth, through the testimony of those whom he had helped. In May 1938, a wider audience was suddenly made aware of William's gift when *The Greater World*, a Spiritualist newspaper, founded to promulgate evidence of 'survival after death' and 'spirit return', featured him in a leading article. William, who was now 24, had been invited to attend the second anniversary service of the Castleford Spiritualist Church by a close friend and staunch Spiritualist, Mr W Brown, who lead a development circle at Normanton, which William had first attended some three years before. Brown had subsequently interested himself in William's work and had been a source of both spiritual and material support to him. During the service, Mrs H Ward, a seasoned clairvoyant and president of the congregation, noticed from the platform that the 'psychic aura' surrounding the young man in the audience was remarkably strong. After the meeting, Brown introduced William to Mrs Ward, explaining that the young man wished to become a member. She welcomed him with open arms.

During the next healing circle, held every Friday night under the guidance of Mrs Ward, Dr Letari 'came through' and after giving a prayer in Hindustani, which brought in a "wonderful influx of spiritual power", proceeded to make diagnoses and give treatment to patients who were present. This proved a revelation to Mrs Ward. As she expressed it:

... by means of their X-ray vision, the seat of the patient's trouble is immediately located.²

At such sittings, diagnoses of cancer and tuberculosis were made and subsequently corroborated medically. Mrs Ward was enthused by what she had witnessed, and when Mr JB Nilan, a *Greater World* missionary, took services at the Castleford Church, she seized the opportunity to introduce him to the young medium she had taken under her wing. This led to an interview with William that resulted in the full-page article that later appeared in the periodical. When asked how his healing work had begun, William told of the two cases already described and in addition spoke of a case of diverticulitis which proved intractable to orthodox therapy, but responded well to herbal therapy over a period of six months. He also gave an example of spiritual diagnosis made by Dr Letari. The man in question was in the terminal stages of an undetermined disease. His son approached William for help. William visited him and in trance diagnosed cancer of the prostate with secondaries to the lumbo-sacral area of the spine. The patient's disease

Diagnostic ability tested

This article had far reaching consequences. Within months it transported William from village life to the nearby city of Leeds and made it possible for him to resign from the Copper Works and devote the rest of his life to diagnosing and healing. A Leeds businessman, who had been a committed Spiritualist for 35 years, read the story and knew from his previous experience with psychic phenomena that, if accurate, the report revealed a level of mediumship that was both extraordinary and rare, and deserved investigation. He approached a number of friends who shared his interest in the paranormal and they decided to approach the young medium with the purpose of putting his gifts to the test. Many years later, when my father related these early experiences to me, which he did many times, as I never tired of questioning him and always wanted him to tell the story again, he told me how anxious he was when he received the invitation to demonstrate his mediumship. Would he be able to go into trance, would Dr Letari be able to come through, would his guides be able to diagnose to the satisfaction of his examiners? No matter the experience, no matter the previous success, no matter the trust – at such times of trial how natural it was for him to be only twenty-four years of age, a young man untried in the ways of the world, unsophisticated and daunted at the prospect of exposing himself and his precious gift to the scrutiny of influential business men. In the event, he and his inspirers passed the test with flying colours. The group had gathered together a number of articles belonging to individuals suffering from a diversity of ailments, none of whom were present.

The ability, then made apparent, to diagnose distant patients merely from an article supplied, made a tremendous impression.³

Arthur Richards

The businessman, a metal merchant, recognised the imperative need to foster William's remarkable gift and make it available to a wider public. For this, substantial sponsorship, expertise and assistance would be required. Through his work and his membership of the Freemasons, he was acquainted with a certain Arthur Charles Richards, or ACR, as he was known to business colleagues, the 42 year old chairman and managing director of a prosperous concern manufacturing piston rings in Hunslet, Leeds. This was an industry of prime importance in 1938, when the storm clouds of imminent conflict hung over Europe. Apart from his wealth and business acumen, Richards was not a natural choice for what the businessman had

in mind. He was essentially a pragmatic, successful and materialistic man of the industrial world, and in his rise to fortune had never given thought to the existence of dimensions other than the physical, or perturbed himself with questions about the ultimate reason for life and the possibility of continued existence after death. Nonetheless, as it turned out, the businessman could not have chosen a better person with whom to share the excitement resulting from his recent experience of William's mediumship and his urgent desire to find a means of promoting him. Having reached the top in his profession and with the infrastructure and personnel in place for the continued success and smooth running of his affairs even in his absence, Arthur Richards had been searching in vain for a new challenge or philanthropic interest. Despite Richards' initial scepticism, the intensity of his friend's enthusiasm awakened his curiosity, and he immediately expressed a desire to meet Lilley.³ In doing so, he was about to profoundly change his own life and that of William.

Medical proof

Characteristic of the man, Richards was not satisfied to simply accept the testimony of others, he needed to put the medium to the test himself lest he become involved in something that might prove spurious and an embarrassment. He concluded that the best way to proceed was to involve the medical profession in testing Lilley's diagnostic abilities.

With Lilley's approval, he invited two well-known Leeds doctors to meet the medium, bringing with them complete diagnoses of three of their patients. These were contained in sealed envelopes and were seen neither by the medium nor his guide. The sole source of help available to the medium were three articles, one belonging to each patient – a bandage, a penknife and a comb.³

What followed astounded Richards and confirmed what he had been told by his friend. William was a psychic prodigy. The clinical diagnoses of the absent patients corresponded accurately with those of the doctors, but in addition Dr Letari provided in each case more detail regarding the true causation of the pathology and supplied symptoms that the patients were experiencing, which had not been noted in the case details, and explained their significance. In evaluating the cases, he laid stress upon the importance of both the emotional and physical symptoms in recognising and understanding the unique nature of the patient's condition rather than limiting the diagnosis to the common symptoms of a clinical condition or a Latin name. He spoke strongly against the common medical practice of assigning patients to specific disease categories and tailoring treatment

according to diagnostic criteria instead of considering those symptoms and signs, which delineate the patient's unique individuality in order to determine the correct therapy.

In diagnosing one of the patients, Dr Letari, the spirit doctor, was in adamant disagreement with his living colleague. After holding the bandage that the doctor had provided, he diagnosed the presence of a serious growth with complications and added the following symptoms: pressure to the head; visual weakness; nervous debility; gastric acidity; and pain extending from the centre of the abdomen below the stomach to the spine. Asked where the growth was located, the spirit doctor answered that it was a malignant growth seated in the liver with a secondary growth in the lung. The doctor, limited by the diagnostic procedures available to him in the 1930s, told Dr Letari that X-ray had revealed a growth in the chest, but not in the liver, though he conceded that X-ray would not necessarily detect a liver tumour. Dr Letari insisted that the lung was not the primary seat of the condition and that although the lungs were certainly not healthy, the prime cause lay in the liver with secondary invasion of the chest. He added that if the doctor should "follow the advice of my mediator the condition of the growth will be eased, if not cured. I will show you the power of the spirit." The doctor replied, saying he would "think about it."⁴

Dr Letari then spoke for a while on the topic of cancer. Although speaking in 1938, his observations remain pertinent today. He warned that orthodox medical science cannot cure cancer. It may suppress and control, but cannot cure. He stressed that cancer is the end result of previous changes in the state of health, either emotionally or physically, and often both. Even constipation and chronic inflammation could be forerunners of malignancy. These warning symptoms and signs must be recognised by 'material doctors' at their onset and treated curatively and not by suppression, if cancer is to be prevented. The process of healing is then relatively easy. Unfortunately, most material doctors fail to detect and heal the pre-cancerous phase and by the time malignancy is discovered it is already too late.

At this point, the doctor who had submitted the case for diagnosis reiterated his conviction that the patient had carcinoma of the bronchus, but admitted that no method of curing such a case was known. Dr Letari disagreed with him on both counts. He reiterated that the seat of the trouble was the liver and went on to say that he would like to meet the patient and administer spiritual healing because the material world was unable to understand the process necessary to effect a cure. In order to resolve either malignancy or advanced tuberculosis the combination of spiritual and material healing was essential. Orthodox medicine was not

curative medicine, because it lacked the essential spiritual element. With Paracelsian-like insight he stated: "There must be an understanding between God and yourself."⁵ He concluded by saying he would welcome the opportunity to prove what the doctors of the Spirit could do. "In this case I can help. Will you consider the suggestion?" The earth doctor repeated his earlier promise to think it over. But Dr Letari's offer was not taken up. Within a few weeks, the patient 'died.' Post mortem upheld the spirit doctor's verdict that the cause of the problem was in the liver.⁵

Prior to considering the patient suffering from cancer, Dr Letari had already dealt with the other two cases, which were less serious – the first, an abscess to the neck and the second, a psychological case presenting with emotional problems. He emphasised that clinical diagnosis is always of secondary importance to the consideration of the past history and complete symptomatic picture of any patient. Without giving a name to the illness of either, since disease is essentially nameless, names only pertaining to the consequences of disease, he enumerated the symptoms experienced by each patient and highlighted the significance of a severe accident that the 'penknife' case had experienced some years before, and the presence of gynaecological problems, including a retroverted uterus, and sciatica due to spinal trouble in the emotionally labile 'comb' case. In both instances, these detailed pictures so accurately described the patients known to them that the doctors were left with no other conclusion but that, by some mysterious means, the young medium sat before them, in an apparently entranced state, was able at a distance to miraculously fathom a patient's state of health through focussing on an object which had been in their possession. They were deeply impressed. As an afterthought, and somewhat irrelevant after all that had been revealed, one of the doctors asked about a condition that had not been mentioned – the carbuncle on the back of the neck of the 'penknife' case. Dr Letari smiled and replied that it was superficial, not serious, and connected to the deeper symptoms he had given.

The doctors had nothing more to say. The experience had taken them into unknown territory outside their comfort zone and far beyond their medical understanding. They needed time to reflect on what they had witnessed. Whether this would make any difference to their future lives or their philosophy we will never know, but one would like to think that such revelations would someday have born fruit for their patients and themselves.

However, before the sitting was concluded, Richards had a last test for William. This time on behalf of a friend he had known for many years and whose condition was well known to him. He had brought with him one of

placed in isolation; therefore the healing had to be transmitted from afar by what is known as 'absent healing.' Holding the handkerchiefs while sensing their energy pattern, the guide stated that death was very close, but he would nevertheless do all in his power to help.

The following day, after a harrowing night during which the patient hovered on the brink of death, she had visibly rallied and the following evening, when a relapse was feared, instead of deteriorating, her condition held. Over the following days, her health slowly but steadily improved, and by the end of the week a blood test showed no trace of tuberculosis. Her improvement was so contrary to expectation that the doctors began to question whether she had ever had meningitis. They were perplexed. Soon afterwards, she was discharged from hospital with total absence of any residual consequences from her severe illness.

The House of the Ramasôye

Richard's life would never be the same; he had changed within the space of weeks from a pragmatic agnostic into a committed Spiritualist. He embraced the healing and teaching mission of the Ramasôye with all the vigour and drive that had brought him business success. To this end, he brought to bear not only his considerable financial means and those of certain business associates, but also his own personal participation in the work and the use of premises at his factory in Hunslet. Arthur Keith Desmond, who chronicled the early years of my father's healing work, dramatically described the scenario that had suddenly been created almost within the blink of an eyelid.

Facilities were provided whereby in future Lilley could devote the whole of his time to healing. He gave up his work at the copper mills. Part of Richards's contribution was the provision of a healing centre. It was to be accommodated in his own premises at Hunslet. Piston rings would continue to be made on one floor; health would be restored on another. Strange amalgum, but it 'worked.' They said he was mad. They shook their heads. To mix business and religion (Spiritualism) was to court disaster – for the business. So they averred. But Richards looked neither to the right hand nor the left. He went straight ahead with his plans. And that was the beginning of The House of the Ramesôye.⁷

References

- 1 Desmond AK. *The Gift of Healing – The Story of Lilley the Healer*. London: Spiritualist Press; 1943. p12.