



Eileen Garrett, the greatest medium and “psychic” of this century, strove to understand her gifts, and allowed scientists to scrutinize them in countless experiments. She could see ghosts and talk to spirits, but always maintained a respectful doubt about her powers.

EILEEN GARRETT: THE SKEPTICAL MEDIUM

by Louis Khourey

Eileen Garrett knew that the British dirigible R-101 was going to crash on her 1930 maiden voyage and she warned the Director of Civil Aviation. He ignored her warning and died with forty-five others when the giant airship went down in northern France, far from its destinations in Egypt and India. In 1930 the psychic Irishwoman was well known in English spiritualist circles as a trance medium with whom researchers like Sir Arthur Conan Doyle conducted investigations to establish contact with the spirits of the "dead." She was not a modern Cassandra, attempting to achieve notoriety by predicting disasters, but this experience of precognition was too clear for her to keep to herself. Four years earlier she remembered seeing a silver zeppelin floating over London's Hyde Park at a time when none were known to be in operation; then in 1928 she had a more disturbing vision of the same vessel, partly obscured by clouds and upset by winds. Still, she chose to believe that she was witnessing an actual event and was surprised to find no account of it in the papers. Finally, in 1929 the ship appeared a third time, burning and smoking, and she became convinced that she had learned of a coming tragedy.

The R-101 episode was Eileen Garrett's most famous and significant experience of precognition, and it enhanced her reputation as a woman with strange, yet reliable, powers. She was also clairvoyant, able to see things happening beyond her physical presence. She was made dramatically aware of this ability in 1916, one month after she had married a young officer before his return to the war in France. While leaving a restaurant one evening, she suddenly became oblivious of her physical surroundings and experienced the death of her husband in a terrible explosion. A week later she was informed that he was missing and presumed dead.

In 1933 Eileen Garrett was working with the California branch of the American Society for Psychical Research and made a tourist's visit to Hollywood where she was watching Cecil B. De Mille shoot a movie. She saw a small, elderly woman at De Mille's shoulder, making suggestions and criticizing his direction; De Mille seemed to ignore the woman completely. A few moments later, the same little woman appeared behind the large and striking Eileen Garrett and asked her if she could help in conveying her advice about De Mille's work. The medium knew that this woman was from another "sphere," but decided to refrain from approaching the imperious De Mille. Back in California two years later, Eileen decided to contact the great director with her message, and obtained an appointment. She was encouraged by a friend's remark that De Mille was deeply interested in the philosophy of survival after death and in psychical research.

De Mille received her grudgingly at his studio, but she was encouraged to present her message by the "presence" of the little woman. She began to speak about the faults in his work, and as she spoke took on the gestures and intonations of the "spirit." De Mille was visibly moved and recognized the words of his dead mother. As to De Mille's inquiries about Eileen's purpose, she responded: "I am not a woman with a mission though you might not suspect it. I take my work very seriously. I have some reputation as a sensitive, and I am happy that what I have done has been of some use."

The most famous "psychic" of the twentieth century was raised by her Irish Protestant uncle and aunt when her Irish mother and Basque father both committed suicide shortly after her birth in 1893. The pressures of religious and ethnic contrast became unbearable for her parents, but may have created in Eileen Jeannette Lyttle the unconventional and sensitive mind that gave her the determination to cultivate her unusual abilities rather than to suppress them, as many encouraged her to do. She grew up amidst the firm belief in fairies that is part of life in the Irish countryside, but was considered different even by those people who accept the supernatural as natural. She learned to project her awareness into familiar places, and also to withdraw that awareness into herself for protection. Until she reached the age of thirteen she had three young friends that she called "The Children" whose forms consisted entirely of light. Needless to say, her aunt did not accept the reality of these playmates and often struck young Jeannie for the "lies" she told about them.

Despite the fact that she had always been sensitive to feelings and visions that others did not experience Eileen had no real understanding of her abilities, and as she matured and entered into marriage and London society she began to doubt her sanity. Her first marriage was marked by tragedy when her two young sons died. She had another child, a daughter, before a divorce. After the brief marriage to the young soldier, she married James William Garrett. She could not live the quiet home life that he desired and sought an outlet for her social idealism within the Fabian Society where she met some of the outstanding thinkers of her time like Clement Attlee, H.G. Wells and George Bernard Shaw.

But instead of leading her into politics, the Fabian Society introduced her to a man who could listen sympathetically to her stories of strange experiences and explain that she was not the victim of an uncontrolled imagination but was in contact with a universal consciousness. The seventy-year old man was Edward Carpenter, a friend of Walt Whitman, and one of those rare individuals who had actually been described in Richard M. Bucke's book as one who had experienced "cosmic consciousness." He recommended that Eileen study the works of Madame Blavatsky, Rudolf Steiner, Emerson, Spinoza, Frazer's *Golden Bough* and the Hindu scriptures; he also advised that she not become addicted to any one cult or religion.

Carpenter gave Eileen the theoretical understanding that she needed to accept her past experiences and the grounding to continue her investigations. Those investigations took a new and remarkable turn one afternoon when she was sitting with a group of ladies who were seeking answers from the dead through table-tilting. Eileen was told that she had gone to sleep and spoke of seeing the dead relatives of the ladies present; they were impressed and referred her to a Swiss theosophist in London named Huhnli. She went to sleep in Huhnli's presence and, while asleep, an entity or "control personality" named Uvani spoke to Huhnli through her. Huhnli later explained to Eileen that while she was in "trance," a sleeplike state, she became the vehicle for the personality of another. Uvani, who claimed to be a Persian from an earlier century, announced to Huhnli that he intended to work through Eileen to help establish proof of life after death.

Eileen was repelled at first by the idea of a foreign personality invading her mind, and her husband urged her to see a psychiatrist. She was finally convinced by her spiritualist friends,

however, that she was a genuine trance medium and that she had nothing to fear, but should investigate her abilities. Eileen had no real interest in spiritualism herself; she found it banal and thought most spiritualists to be credulous. But they were her friends, and sources of support and encouragement for her desire to understand what was happening to her. And again, she was directed to a man who could help her: this was Hewat McKenzie, with whom she worked for five years until his death in 1929.

Every Friday night McKenzie trained both Eileen and her control, Uvani. He instructed Eileen to purify her body and mind by moderating her indulgence in sex, food and alcohol, and by living a simple life; this was necessary to maintain a clear and receptive subconscious mind. He would entrance Eileen by hypnotic suggestion and talk to Uvani, leading him into deeper and different areas of the medium's mind. This training enabled Eileen in later years to produce profound ideas while in trance, rather than the trivial meanderings heard from most spirit "controls." McKenzie advised Eileen against the development of physical mediumship-causing movement of physical objects or their materialization because it could adversely affect the more valuable gift of mental mediumship. Most importantly, McKenzie taught her to maintain objectivity about her own powers, as well as towards the people who would come to her for help.

Hewat McKenzie's primary interest in training Eileen Garrett was in making her a reliable vehicle to establish proof of survival after death, the spiritualist thesis. Eileen never really accepted this central tenet of spiritualism, but she cooperated nonetheless in the experiments of the spiritualists. Nor did she accept the belief of many who spoke with her controls that they were really separate, discarnate entities. Rather, she believed them to be different aspects of her deeper self, a view held by Dr. Ira Progoff, the Jungian analyst who worked with her in 1957. She wrote in her autobiography, *Many Voices*: "I definitely believe the entities are formed from spiritual and emotional needs of the person involved...The older conception of these personalities as evidence of schizophrenia would not seem to be true in my case, though there are many who still feel that this may be an answer. On the other hand, those who have known me intimately through the years know that I have continued to meet life on its many levels and that the psychic structure which may have begun very early has learned to deal with symbol and fantasy, thus giving me an appreciation of the meaning of life within and without; yet I have never lost sight of the spiritual goal toward which my whole nature strives."

Eileen Garrett's ability to "meet life" cannot be doubted. Although periodically beset by a variety of serious illnesses, she worked actively in writing, publishing, education and research until her death in 1970. She established Creative Age Press, which published general titles as well as books on psychic research, and in 1941 she founded *Tomorrow* magazine, which combined literary excellence with an open-minded approach to spiritual and psychic subjects. Her enduring achievement has been her founding and leadership of the Parapsychology Foundation in order to further "knowledge of human responses to psychologically recognized stimuli transmitted by human beings other than sight, hearing, touch, taste and smell" in the areas commonly known as "parapsychology, electro biology and extrasensory perception." It continues her work today as a leading institution in the field, a significant source of funding in an inadequately funded area of research. As one of the outstanding mediums and clairvoyants of this century, Eileen Garrett encountered not only scientific researchers like J.B. Rhine and Ira Progoff, but she also met some of the most famous names in modern esotericism. Despite the

accusations of charlatanism directed at him, she considered G.I. Gurdjieff to be a great man who was "definitely aware at all times," and she admired his students, Orage and Ouspensky. She viewed Rudolf Steiner as a deep student of the miraculous and the occult, and as a guide to the development of spiritual perception and truth. Aleister Crowley, "the wickedest man in the world," she thought to be less wicked than he liked people to believe, and also less a master of the black arts than he claimed to be; he was, rather, "an excellent poet and an able scholar." Many of those interested in psychic phenomena, and especially those who are "gifted" with psychic powers, tend to develop a dogmatic conviction that they have found the real meaning and purpose of life in their particular infatuation. Eileen Garrett's talent was supported by a remarkable character that always strove to integrate her discoveries of the unseen world into a commonsense view of life. She wrote: "I am often asked if my psychic experiences 'disturb' my everyday life. On the contrary, they enrich it. I need to understand my own motivations and continually observe what can be the cause of the fantasies and visions that make me forever curious about everything...One simultaneously lives a separate existence, aware of a tenuous level of experience as one rubs shoulders with one's fellows, while underneath there is the pattern that plays unconsciously and perpetually, a web many-colored and delicate, but filled with the awareness of what is happening to each and all below the surface...I am aware of an intermediary field which contains us one and all, to hold our 'signature' so that we, as emotional beings, continue to add our stamp of personality to this unsuspected world within space. Perhaps one day this area within space and time will reveal itself to the scientific mind."

One psychic manifestation that she experienced consistently throughout her life, and which she did not doubt, was the existence around every living thing of an aura or "surround" which changes colors as the creature breathes. She came to realize that it protects the body's action and absorbs the shocks of the external world. A being that is well and happy will have a surround that is brighter in color than one that is ill or predisposed to weakness.

This knowledge, in turn, led Eileen to a study of breath control as affecting her various psychic states. The proper awareness and control enriched her sensitivity and she discovered that a different tempo was suited to clairaudience, clairvoyance, telepathy and precognition. Breath was her channel of communication between the self and the external ocean of life. She stated that her energy came from the conscious use of breath, which helped her to bring a concept into her field of attention and perception.

Her psychic experiences informed Eileen Garrett that there was much more to life than was apparent to most people. This she knew, but the answer to what lay beyond the door of death was not revealed to her and she did not presume to preach on that subject. Instead, she wisely asked the only question that could provide a real answer: "In later years I have had to face up to the thought of parting with the body on many occasions, awaiting what then looked like the inevitable change. I have had to ask myself: What am I? It has been claimed that I am many people-all suspect!...Am I really one individual or many, and what will happen at my departure to the control personalities who have become so intertwined with me? They claim to be 'individualized,' and so do I, and yet I do not feel this to be true. I am unified and drawn into the thoughts and actions of others to a degree not even I can understand...I am a mass of motivations, not independent, not separate, not distinct. I feel a certain sadness that I have not arrived at any

answer that would throw light on survival for others; but since I have less knowledge of what is myself than most, I do not even know what might survive."

Eileen Garrett possessed the strength and determination of a pioneer; the country that she explored was her own mind. She avoided the extremes of shunning her unusual gifts as aberrations, and of accepting them as self-evident proof of life after death and communication with the dead. As a young woman who had not yet learned to control her psychic manifestations she was not without self-doubt and could have accepted the verdict of those who considered her to be mentally ill, had she not had the support of those who recognized her potential. Indeed, psychiatry could easily categorize Eileen Garrett as a deviant type, with no regard for the wealth of information about the human mind that she produced as she developed and refined her powers. Dr. Jan Ehrenwald, a psychiatrist and psychic researcher, diagnosed her according to conventional standards in his book *Telepathy and Medical Psychology*. She suffered, according to textbook medicine, from depersonalization and loss of feeling of reality associated from autoscopic hallucinations; she had systematized delusions and was, in sum, a victim of schizophrenia or paraphrenic psychosis.

Eileen Garrett's life and accomplishments are a direct challenge to psychiatric labeling and mechanical definitions of insanity. Perhaps the difference between the well-balanced psychic and the pathetic schizophrenic is not so much in the character of their visions as it is in their ability to control and understand them. In that case, the help and guidance that she received from Edward Carpenter and, especially, from Hewat McKenzie made the difference for Eileen between a life of confused possession that she could have suffered, and the life of directed action that she lived. She came to develop the conviction that the psychic experiences of people like herself were pointing the way to a truer understanding of human nature.

She wrote: "Did man but comprehend the potential range of his powers, he would be capable of reaching beyond time to a state where past, present and future are one, and beyond conscious mind to an area where the subconscious, the conscious and the superconscious are united. When man comes to recognize such experience as his birthright, he will indeed be able to live with himself at the same time in those states outside of time, which are as yet little known or understood by him." Her hypothesis was that she was able to produce information when in trance that she would have no normal means of knowing, due to the ability of the subconscious to contact the superconscious and receive from it an entire universe of information and knowledge denied the conscious mind. Her control, Uvani, was an entity who interpreted the images that she thus received; or, she felt, the control personality might simply be a dramatic device employed by her own subconscious.

She believed that more study of the phenomenon of mediumship was needed; true to Edward Carpenter's advice, she became addicted to no cult and did not try to start one of her own. Rather, she encouraged research, and would have been just as willing to accept proof of the unreality of the phenomena that she produced as proof of their reality. The intense subjectivity of her psychic experiences never impaired her intellectual objectivity. Her life itself was a prevision of what people might become if they learn to develop a sensitivity to interior experience and to generate the energy and determination needed to understand the mind.

The Parapsychology Foundation was established in 1951 as a non-profit organization to encourage scientific research and study of the laws and principles which underlie paranormal human behavior, based upon Eileen Garrett's awareness that psychical research was ignored by a large part of the academic community and that aid for parapsychological research would not be available from most universities or foundations. The Foundation supports scientists doing such research and has helped to take psychical research out of the field of the unreal and the eccentric. It observes objectively the varying research methods and studies of parapsychology, and offers assistance to scientists and universities engaged in the interdisciplinary approach to a better understanding of telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition, psycho kinesis and other paranormal phenomena. A research library is maintained at the Foundation offices in New York. The Foundation sponsors yearly, international conferences in the United States and Europe and publishes a record of their proceedings, as well as a series of Parapsychological Monographs and Parapsychology Review, its official journal. For more information write: Parapsychology Foundation, Inc., 29 West 57th Street, New York, N.Y. 10019.

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