

## Direct Voice Develops

### **Hannen Swaffer's Home Circle.**

By Maurice Barbanell

My first contact with Hannen Swaffer's home circle was in 1932, when I attended as a visitor on the same night that Frank Decker, the American physical medium, was invited to attend. That was a big night for me, because White Shadow asked me to join the circle, and for all of us, because it was Decker's visit that paved the way to our own development of the direct voice. Some psychic gifts seem, to some extent, "infectious". There must, of course, be the psychic power latent, but sometimes a fillip is given to its development by contact with a medium possessing the same gift. Dennis Bradley "caught" the direct voice from Valiantine; we "caught" it from Decker.

We had both the direct voice and materialization phenomena that night, Decker's mediumship, of course, being responsible. We were sitting quietly in the darkness when suddenly Decker's guide, White Eagle, gave his "war cry". It was so loud and sudden we all nearly jumped out of our skins and the wires of the piano vibrated. Later, Patsy, another of Decker's guides, shouted out, "Good night." I felt a materialized hand laid upon mine and, at the same time, Decker said he saw clairvoyantly the word "Test". He wondered what it meant. White Shadow explained that White Eagle intended the materialized hand to be a test for "the man who writes for the paper". He could not speak, as he was not controlling the medium, so he had caused the word to be seen clairvoyantly.

At this sitting, Decker told us that we had latent the power for developing direct voice mediumship. We asked White Shadow about it and he agreed and encouraged us to try to develop it. With his permission, we started sitting with trumpets on the floor in the centre of the circle. Within eight months, we heard the direct voice independently of the trumpet. Then, six weeks after Decker visited us again, the trumpet was used and longer talks in the direct voice were possible.

When I joined the circle, we had two good trance mediums, used by White Shadow and Silver Birch. Gradually, as the physical phenomena developed, Silver Birch took the place of White Shadow as the teacher, while the other medium was used more and more for direct voice. Both spirits, though they claimed to be simple "savages" - later communications have convinced us that they are really highly evolved spirits, using the astral bodies of the Indians as "mediums" - were most eloquent. Their language would put any earthly orator to shame. But, as White Shadow's medium could be used better as the "focal point" of the direct voice, Silver Birch became the teacher.

It was explained to us that all the sitters and their guides had been carefully chosen by the spirit people. For over two years they had been working for a

perfect circle, one in which all the sitters and all the guides would blend in harmony. At last they were satisfied they had got it. Each sitter brought some necessary power for the phenomena; each guide and spirit helper had some special task. Gradually the sitters would develop their mediumistic gifts. Each had some special work in front of him. The guides took us into their confidence, told us what they had to do and encouraged us to question them about their work. Their descriptions were supplemented by those who could see the spirits at work. We began to learn psychic laws and cooperation reached a fine point.

For weeks before we heard the direct voice we saw the trumpet moved in graceful motions in all directions. The guides told us the voice was nearly ready. "We have had rehearsals," they said. "We can make the voices all right, but we cannot make them heard in your world." On that first night, we heard just a few words. The guide spoke from the floor, from near the ceiling, from positions all over the circle, but mostly from the floor. He said it was easier to speak from there. The voice did not come through the trumpet, though this was moved with perfect control. Each sitter was gently touched by the trumpet, in the order we asked, and one of us felt a materialized hand.

The guides had never used the vocal cords of the medium, even in trance. They said there was healing power in her voice and if they used her cords that property might be impaired. They used vocal cords of their own construction. When Anny Ahlers, the actress, controlled the medium a few weeks after her death, she complained that it was very difficult because White Shadow would not let her use the medium's vocal cords.

The materialization phenomena grew as the direct voice developed. The father of White Shadow's medium was able to materialize his hands sufficiently to make, for evidence, the loud clicking noise peculiar to his habit during earth life, and strum on the wall in his accustomed manner. The favourite dog of one of the sitters was sometimes materialized and we heard its tail wagging against the leg of a chair. A pet cat scratched at the carpet and a bird which the medium had taken into shelter when she found it injured used to materialize and fly about the room. Often ornaments were moved from a high mantelshelf and were found after the sitting in the middle of the circle. 'We often felt materialized hands.

One of the guides must have been huge - he told us that on the earth he was over seven feet tall, which was corroborated by the medium's clairvoyant vision - for I would sometimes feel both my ankles grasped in one large hand. We heard the heavy tread of the guides going about the room and one of them, for our amusement, repeated a dance he used on earth, chanting while he did it an Indian tune which was always played for that particular dance.

At one sitting I shook hands with my "dead" sister, who passed on at the age of seven about twelve years before. I had been told that she acted as my guide, and I had had various messages from her, but this was the first occasion on which she had spoken directly to me. She controlled White

Shadow's medium in trance and spoke so quietly we could hardly hear what she said. She asked me to stretch out my hand towards the medium and she grasped it with her own - one she had manufactured out of ectoplasm.

She told us that trance control was very difficult as White Shadow would not allow the vocal cords to be used. Usually, cords were made of ectoplasm for the spirits' use, but in her case, she told us, a different system had been specially arranged. By some method of using compressed air - we would not have understood, she said, even if she were able to explain it exhaustively - she was able to make her voice heard without using any vocal cords.

At this sitting, one of the guides explained to us that the circle was formed as much for the "dead" as for the living. Many in the spirit world, it was said, are held back by their desire to communicate with their friends on this side of the veil. Until they are able to do this, their advance is impeded. We were also told something of the difficulties experienced by the guides. Before any new phenomenon was introduced, consideration had to be given to the mental reactions of the sitters, for on that depended to a large extent the psychic power that was available.

Frank Decker sat with us again in 1933 - about nine months after his first visit - and a few weeks later our own trumpet was used for the direct voice. When Decker was there, one of the guides was speaking to us through a trance medium and we were surprised suddenly to hear Patsy, Decker's newspaper-boy guide, announce himself in the direct voice. Later on, Patsy sang two songs, White Eagle, another of Decker's guides, spoke to us and White Shadow had a talk with his medium. This was the first time she had heard White Shadow speak, as always before she was in trance when he manifested. We saw wonderful control of the trumpet at this sitting, Patsy taking it all round the circle at lightning speed. The whizzing trumpet came so near to us that we felt a distinct breeze as it went by, but no one was touched by it.

Then, a few weeks later, after Decker had gone back to America and we had no outside help, we experienced our first voice through our own trumpet. It had taken three years of constant sittings to reach this stage and that voice gave us all a thrill. Only one word was spoken. The spirit merely announced her name - it was Lottie, Hannen Swaffer's "dead" sister-in-law - but it showed that our own direct voice phenomena had started. At the next sitting, a guide said two or three words to his medium. The next time there were seven voices, and so it went on, gradually improving until we were able to hold long, sustained conversations directly with those living in another world, hearing their own voices speaking to us and giving us evidence of their continued existence.

At first the voices were weak, though each was distinctive, and the "personality" spread even to the movements of the trumpet. In many cases, we were able to tell who was about to speak by the way in which the trumpet was moved. One guide always traced in the air the letter "S", the initial of his name. Another always made peculiar movements which suggested the name

by which he was known. One spirit, the father of White Shadow's medium, always tapped the trumpet with his fingers before speaking, recalling an earthly habit as a means of identification. Each of the regular communicators had a special way of introducing himself before the voice was heard.

In the early stages of the direct-voice phenomena, White Shadow's medium was in trance. The communicating spirits seemed to get additional power from her for, after leaving the floor, the trumpet would always move towards her before a voice was heard. Later, she was sometimes able to hear the voices while she remained out of trance.

Within the first month of hearing our first voice, we had talks with four of the guides of the circle, the father and sister of White Shadow's medium, the mother, father and brother of the medium's husband, Hannen Swaffer's sister-in-law, my sister, Hall Caine, Gilbert Parker and Lord Northcliffe, Swaffer's former "Chief" in the newspaper world.

**A.W. Austen**

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