

THREE CASES OF PREVIOUS LIVES RECALLED UNDER HYPNOSIS

By Amarasiri Weeraratne

For a long time it has been known that under deep hypnosis events in very early infancy, outside the normal range of memory to the conscious mind could be recovered in the deep trance state wherein the conscious mind recedes and the subconscious starts functioning. The method employed here is to induce a state of hypnosis, and then regress the subject to a particular point in childhood, infancy, or to a prenatal period wherein one wishes to unearth memories latent in the subconscious mind. In this state known as hyper-amnesia the subject becomes in effect the child or person he was and relives experiences that have long been buried in the subconscious mind. Memories of early infancy, and also cases of prenatal memories that is memories of previous lives have been brought to the surface in this way. There are numerous cases on record of persons who have remembered their previous lives in this manner, and several books have been published giving details of the cases. It has been found that in some cases obscure historical details known only to a few specialists in ancient history has been divulged by people with a very ordinary kind of education. When reliving former lives some have spoken in little known ancient dialects such as ancient Egyptian, ancient Norwegian etc. Certain phobias, loves, and skills of the subject to which no explanation can be given by probing sources in the present life have been found to have their origin in associations and practices of former lives. The best known case of memories of a previous life that has been tapped under hypnosis, and the details verified by independent investigations is the famous Bridey Murphy case of America (Please refer Voice of Buddhism June 1970 Vol. 7 No. 2). This took the western world by surprise, and drew a tremendous controversy between those who thought rebirth a possibility, and those who thought that such a thing was impossible.

In this article I propose to deal with two cases of Americans and one English who were able to recall their previous lives under hypnosis. The first is that of George Field, a 16 year old student of Hunsdale High School (Fate Magazine December 1966). The second case is that of Glenn Ford, a popular American film star, who has appeared in 128 films, and has won wide popularity. He recalled two previous lives under hypnotic regression, the details of which were published by Joseph Cassidy in the "Ceylon Observer" of 16.11.1969. The English case is that of Mrs. Naomi Henry, an Exeter housewife (The Case for Rebirth – by Francis Story).

The case of George Field, student, Hunsdale High School

George Field, a 16 year old student of Hunsdale High School, was under hypnotic regression able to recall and re-enact scenes from several previous existences. The most recent of these was a farmer in North Carolina from 1832 to 1863, during the time of the American Civil war. George recalled that then his name was Johnathan Powell, and lived in the town of Jefferson in Ashe County. During this recall he described a river named South Fork and mentioned that the neighbouring town was called Clifton. His father was a farmer who worked part time as a miner. When Johnathan was 17, his father died in a mine disaster. His mother too had died of an accident when he was three years old. He gave the names of his parents as well as that of his grandmother as Mary Powell. Johnathan was illiterate and took no interest in politics and political leaders of the times. He struggled to eke out a meagre living on his father's farm.

Now George Field had not travelled outside his state, and had no special interest in geography. Therefore his mention of the names of Jefferson, Clifton, and Ashe County seemed striking in that they were verifiable items. Mr. Loring C. Williams the hypnotist who conducted the session and published details in the Fate Magazine, did some preliminary checking up on the facts divulged. He felt encouraged to find that the above items were correct. Therefore he conducted further investigations regarding the verifiability of the facts divulged by George Field of his former life. Accordingly he arranged to take George Field to Jefferson, North Carolina, to see whether other details of this recall could be verified. When he reached Jefferson George said that he had a strong sense of certainty that the environment was familiar to him, and that he had been there before. He was again put under a hypnotic trance, and they began to tour the town, under hypnotic regression, reliving the life as Johnathan. Poor Johnathan was utterly perplexed and dismayed. Everything had changed during the last 100 years since his death. The little town he knew had increased many more times in size, and now the buildings he knew were not there. The houses were now longer and more numerous than those he had known. He was completely surprised to see macadamised roads. He wanted to know why the roads were so hard.

On making investigations at the County Court House they found that births and deaths had not been recorded there before 1912. A search was made through the old records of deeds. There they found a copy of a deed by which a land had been gifted to Mary Powell (Johnathan's grandmother) in the year 1803. This was a very significant discovery. Johnathan's grandmother would have been living then, and Powell was not a common name in the area. There was only one Powell in the area, but he was not able to trace his ancestry to the period concerned.

Mr. Williams obtained the services of a historian who knew the history of the old families in the area. The historian questioned Johnathan in his hypnotic trance of about 25 persons and events in the history of the town up to 1860. Some of the people were unknown to Johnathan, but he recognised 15 of them. He gave many details regarding them such as their financial position, the names of their children, the sites where their houses were situated. All of them were found correct. Johnathan had mentioned of a Minister named Brown while recalling incidents in his life. Verification showed that he was an itinerant preacher who came to Jefferson on horseback during his preaching circuits. The river he had referred to as South Fork was located, although it was not shown in the maps that had been consulted in the preliminary investigations. Johnathan had referred to Mr. Carter's store, and also to one Mrs. Abby. No records indicating the existence of the store were available. But records revealed that Carters were living there, and that a family named Abby had also been there. On this trip George Field who had not even heard of snuff used it expertly reliving his former life. He first blew it upwards into a cloud, and then he sniffed it. This was exactly how snuff had been used in the era in question.

Johnathan had said that he was shot to death by a group of Yankee soldiers because he refused to sell a bushel of potatoes at the price they offered, viz: 10 cents a bushel. As he protested against this method of extortion he was shot by one of the soldiers wearing grey uniforms. "Oh! They shot me. Those damn Yankee soldiers shot me". Reliving this pathetic scene Johnathan clutched his stomach. His face twisted in pain, and tears streamed down his cheeks. His breath came in convulsive sobs. Finally he ceased gasping, and a look of peace crossed his face. Johnathan was dead....

Johnathan had said that the soldiers wearing grey uniforms were not Southerners. This was confusing, and did not make sense. Records of the Civil War revealed that there were no Yankee soldiers in North Carolina, nor did they wear grey uniforms. However with the assistance of a local historian this problem was solved. The historian revealed that at that time there were groups of marauding bands - mostly from Kentucky, who used the war an excuse for raid and plunder. He pointed out that it was quite possible that they wore stolen grey uniforms.

Johnathan's life had been a humble one, - that of a poor illiterate farmer. It is understandable why little proof of his existence could be found. But it is important to remember that nothing that he said was disproved or found to be false. For example it was not possible to locate the mine where his father had died, but there had been plenty of mines in the locality. Many of them were worked by one or two men, and no records of them were available. Some very significant items were found to be true on verification.

The case of Glenn Ford, American film star

The second case is that of Glenn Ford, a popular American film star, now 53 years old. Under hypnotic regression he was able to relive and evoke memories of two previous lives, one as a Scotsman, and another as a Frenchman, somewhere in 1650. In the latter he was a roguish cavalry officer who was killed in a duel after making amorous advances to a nobleman's young wife. In the former he was a music teacher who preferred the horse-tables to the music class. In both of these he had one thing in common with his present life, a deep-seated love of horses.

Ford's hypnotic trips into the past lives were done under the supervision of a Los Angeles physician Dr. Maurice Benjamin. At first it was found that Ford would not go under hypnosis. But after several sessions Dr. Benjamin succeeded in breaking down Ford's subconscious resistance and induced the hypnotic trance state. From late 1966 to the end of 1967 Ford was repeatedly regressed under hypnosis to reveal not one but two past lives.

During the first previous life Ford was a music teacher named Charles Stewart, who was born in 1774 at Egin, Scotland, and died there of Tuberculosis in 1812. Talking in a thick Scottish dialect Charles Stewart spoke of teaching girls how to play the piano, when he would have preferred to have been in the stables with his beloved horses. When Glenn listened to the play back of the tape record later, he was not surprised by his Scottish accent, but he was amazed at this ability to play the piano under hypnosis. "I can't play the piano, not a single note" he said, quite amazed and perplexed. Yet under hypnosis when reliving the life of the music teacher he could play the difficult works of Beethoven and Mozart like an expert.

In the fourth hypnotic session at his home with his 23 years old son Peter as a witness details of Glenn's second previous life emerged. When hypnotised and regressed to his second past life Glenn suddenly exclaimed, "I smell horse". Although no one knew it at the time, later it was revealed by his mother that this was the same three-word phrase with which he had surprised his mother when he was only a toddler about 2 years old. His mother remarked that he had never seen a horse, much less could he have known what one smelt like, at that time. Then Glenn proceeded to give details of a life in Versailles, France, as a cavalry officer in the service of Louis XIV of France (1643 – 1715). When reliving incidents in this life he lapsed into fluent Parisian French spoken at that time. The strange fact is that in the waking state Glenn knows nothing of the French language except a few text-book phrases. He has never studied French in this life.

Glenn said his name at that time was Launvaux. It transpired that this young cavalry officer was something of a dare-devil rake, and that he met a violent and

untimely death, - an event which he lived under hypnosis writhing in agony. Launvaux did not like the aristocracy, but it was his fate to fall in love with a nobleman's young wife. When her husband learnt of it, he arranged for an expert swordsman to insult Launvaux and thus provoke a duel, knowing that this would kill Launvaux. Glenn said, "Where I was pierced by the sword strangely enough, I have a birth-mark that still hurts me at times. This is unexplainable." The discovery of his past lives has explained many things in Ford's own life that were to him an inexplicable mystery before. For instance his remark to his mother, "I smell horse, there are horses," at a time when as a toddler he had not seen a horse can only be explained in terms of his experiences in his former lives. Glenn did not ride a horse until he was 10, but as soon as he mounted the saddle he found himself a master at horsemanship. His experiences and skills acquired as a cavalry officer explains this ability. By the age of 11, Glenn was an accomplished polo player, although he had never taken lessons in this life. By the age of 14, he was such a remarkable horseman, that the famous horse-owner Will Rogers hired his services to care for his ponies.

The case of Naomi Henry – English housewife

The third case I wish to refer to is one from England. Here Mrs. Naomi Henry, a 32 year old housewife of Exeter recalled under hypnosis two of her previous existences. Mr. Henry Blythe, a professional hypnotherapist conducted the experiments under test conditions. Dr. William C. Minnifie, a medical practitioner too participated and testified as to the genuineness of the hypnotic trance. Several other witnesses took part and the proceedings were tape-recorded.

Mrs. Henry remembered two previous existences. In the first she recalled a life as Mary Cohan, a girl aged 17 years who lived at Cork in the year 1790. She related how she was married against her wishes to a man named Charles Gaul. She had two children, Pat, and Will by that marriage. Charles was a wife-beater; he ill-treated her, and finally caused her death in a beating which fractured her leg. While recalling these incidents she re-lived the agonising scenes in a most realistic fashion. She said that her marriage took place in St. John's church, in a village named Grenner. Several of the facts that she related were subsequently verified and found to be correct, but no village called "Grenner" could be traced. Later some records dating back to the 17th Century were found in the possession of a parish priest, and in there found the name of St. John's church in a village called Greenhalgh. It was found at the investigations made that this name was pronounced by the local people exactly as Mary Cohan gave it – "Greener".

Next she remembered a life in which she was a nurse in charge of a children's ward at Downham in 1902. Her name then was Clarice Hellier. After describing details of this life, she gave details of her last illness, death and her funeral, which she seemed to have witnessed in the spirit form. She was able to give the number of her grave as 207. The authenticity of this case has been established beyond reasonable doubt.

What psychologists and psychiatrists say

It would be interesting to know what the psychologists and psychiatrists have to say regarding this kind of evidence which supports the doctrine of rebirth. The majority of them are reluctant to accept that accounts given experiences re-lived through alleged prior lives are genuine. In such cases they tend to dismiss them as products of fancy, dramatization, and role-playing based on material gathered through normal sources in this life. They are prepared to grant that the subject's behaviour "WILL GIVE THE APPEARANCE OF REINCARNATION" (Hypnosis, Fact and Fiction, by F.L. Marcusse, Pelican book), but deny that a rebirth interpretation is valid.

Therefore the position is that nearly all the modern psychologists and psychiatrists are prepared to concede the fact that under age regression a hypnotised subject will give details of an alleged prior life, but would deny a "reincarnationist interpretation of the data." The main reasons for this seem to be scientific and religious difficulties involved in accepting an explanation in terms of rebirth, rather than a careful attempt on the part of these psychologists and psychiatrists to understand or explain the data themselves. Neither the scientific nor the religious objects are satisfactory or valid. There is now a growing realisation that the phenomena of consciousness cannot be explained away in terms of the biochemical laws known to science. The validity of E.S.P. (Extra Sensory Perception) requires that psychological explanations should not be contained within the narrow and limiting framework of mechanistic-materialistic assumptions. If memory can survive the dissolution of cerebral matter in this life, there is no need to assume that it cannot survive the destruction of the brain cells at death. That there is a non-physical aspect of the mind capable of existing and re-manifestation independent of the brain is now considered an open possibility. Therefore why should it not survive death, and re-manifest itself in other lives? The religious objections are even more unsatisfactory, and show the poverty and un-tenability of the religions that teach the one-life theory.

There have been a few psychiatrists who have accepted the rebirth explanation as valid. Dr. Alexander Canon refers to one thousand three hundred and eighty two reincarnation sittings to date in his book "The Power Within". His own reactions to these, and the final conclusion came to is summed up in the words:-

“For years the theory of reincarnation was a nightmare to me, and I did my best to disprove it, and even argued with my trance subjects to the effect that they were talking nonsense, yet as the years went by, and one subject after another told me the same story, inspite of different and varied conscious beliefs in effect until now. Well, over a thousand cases have been investigated, and I have now to admit that there is such a thing as reincarnation.”