



*Excerpt*

# Revolutionaries of the Soul

*Reflections on Magicians, Philosophers, and Occultists*

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By Gary Lachman

## **Taken from Chapter 2: Dion Fortune, Psychic Warrior**

On Sunday mornings during the height of the Battle of Britain, several people could be found huddled together in 3 Queensborough Terrace, Bayswater, engaged in an activity most Londoners wouldn't have recognized as part of the war effort.

Imagining themselves part of the “group soul of the race,” these otherwise respectable citizens visualized “angelic Presences, red-robed and armed, patrolling the length and breadth of our land.” Further meditations had them patrolling mine fields off the coast of Norway and performing astral commando raids on high-ranking Nazis. This magical effort against Hitler and Co. continued throughout the war, and although its effect on the dark forces of National Socialism may be doubted, the earnestness of those participating was unquestionable. The fact that during the Blitz not one but two German bombs fell of the headquarters of the Fraternity of Light – the group behind this spiritual resistance movement – might suggest that the Führer recognized the threat and tried to eradicate it. The further fact that those engaged in these etheric expeditions spoke of astral dogfights and mystical punch-ups might also suggest that there was more behind them than just patriotic wishful thinking.

The leader of this occult National Guard was at any rate very familiar with magical battles. In fact, it was through one such row itself that she first became involved in the occult. Having learned early on how to defend herself from psychic attack, and having devoted many years to mastering the mystic arts, by the time Hitler made a bid to annex Britain, she no doubt felt capable of defending not only herself, but her nation. The name of this remarkable character was Dion Fortune, and she was one of the most brilliant figures of twentieth century esotericism.

This, however, was not her name at birth, or at least not her one. The individual who took the name “Dion Fortune” at her second, magical birth was christened Violet Mary Firth, and was born in Llandudno, North Wales, on December 6 1890. As is true of many esoteric figures, little is known of Violet’s early years; as one writer remarks, she “obscured the details of her life and the true nature of her personality behind a cloak of glamour and illusion,” something that could be said of other occult figures, like Madame Blavatsky and Aleister Crowley.<sup>1</sup> Her father came from the prosperous steelmaking Firth family of Sheffield. Arthur Firth didn’t follow this line, becoming a solicitor, although by the time of Violet’s birth, he was running the Craigside Hydropathic Establishment in Llandudno, having already run similar spa-hotel in Bath, an apt career, perhaps, for the father of someone for whom the sea would be a central symbol of mystery, magic and power.

Violet’s mother, Sarah, was a Christian Scientist, and in her early years Violet, too, felt the impact of Mary Bary Eddy’s ideas. But there were other, stranger experiences that presaged Violet’s life to come. At the age of four, she began to have

visions of a past life in Atlantis. She saw, she said, “pictures that formed themselves unbidden in the mind in that interval between the putting out of the nursery light and the oncoming of sleep” – what we would call hypnagogic hallucinations.<sup>ii</sup> She speaks of a “sandy foreshore” and a level plain, with great mountains rising sharply in the distance, of a river and strange trees that it wasn’t safe to go near, of dangerous beasts in the river and equally dangerous people, of grassy vegetation, and indigo sky and a copper-colored sun. Were these images of an actual past life, or psychic postcards from Jungian collective unconscious? Or were they the kind of fantasies an imaginative and lonely little girl might entertain herself with? Whatever the source of these strange visions, they stayed with Violet throughout her life, and led her to believe that her true home wasn’t in a sleepy seaside resort, but in some lost world that she could return to only through her imagination. In later years, although she claimed that she wasn’t “naturally psychic”, Fortune would channel a remarkable work of occult metaphysics, *The Cosmic Doctrine*, which was “received” in 1923 but not published until 1949, after her death.<sup>iii</sup> This was her attempt at doing what Madame Blavatsky had done in *The Secret Doctrine*: reveal the hidden structure of the cosmos. Although *The Cosmic Doctrine* remains a difficult work and is generally read by serious devotees only, it suggests that the visions of some other life that haunted the young Violet were not mere pre-school make believe, but an early expression of her strange ability to enter and make herself home in other worlds.

But although the young Violet had visions of prehistoric Atlantis, and at fourteen was writing poems about the sea, her real introduction to the mystic path

came in her early twenties and in a drearily mundane context. When Violet turned twenty, her parents decided to enroll her in a residential college. The Studely Horticultural and Agricultural College is said to have offered places to “young ladies with slight emotional problems.” From the little we know about Violet’s teens, we get the impression of an imaginative, withdrawn, somewhat snobbish – “I have a constitutional repulsion for ‘crushes’,” she wrote “and give them scant politeness” – highly intelligent and creative woman who, like many others, had to find place for herself in the world. Violet would find her path at Studley’s, but not in the way she, or anyone else, might have imagined.

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<sup>i</sup> Janine Chapman *Quest for Dion Fortune* (York Beach, MA: Samuel Weiser, 1993) p. xvii.

<sup>ii</sup> Quoted in Alan Richardson *Priestess: The Life and Magic of Dion Fortune* (Wellingborough: Aquarian Press, 1987).

<sup>iii</sup> Dion Fortune *Psychic Self-Defense* (**online**) p. 69.