

Biography of John S. King (1843-1921)

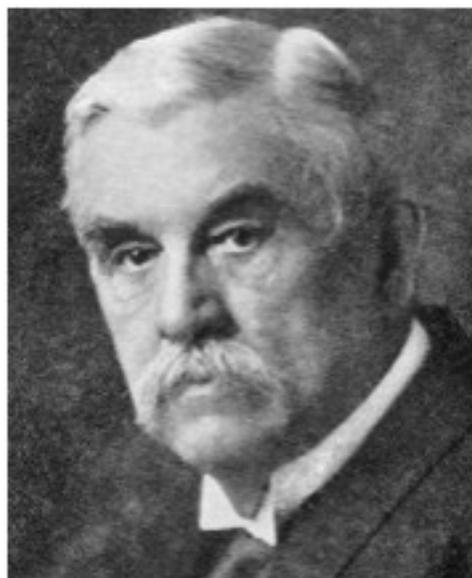
Founder of the Canadian Society for Psychological Research, Dr. John Sumpter King (April 26, 1843 to February 14, 1921), a Toronto physician, detailed his psychical research in a 1920 book, *Dawn of the Awakened Mind*, describing much in the way of veridical physical mediumship.

A graduate of Victoria College, King qualified as a doctor in 1876 and served as surgeon at the Andrew Mercer Reformatory for Females and the Industrial Refuge for Girls for 35 years. He also served as medical director for the Home Life Association. In 1908, he founded the Canadian SPR, which was merged into the American SPR in 1916.

Reared in the Presbyterian Church, King struggled to accept some of its teachings. "The earnest orthodoxal expositions of heaven and hell; and the familiar pulpit references to man as a body, soul, and spirit destined either for eternal happiness or eternal misery, with deviations at the starting point in earth life not discernible by human judges while interesting, fell far short of being to me at least, perfectly lucid and satisfactory," he wrote.¹

While visiting Washington, D.C. during 1894, King was invited by Dr. B. L. W. Theodor Hansmann, a former medical adviser to President Abraham Lincoln, to attend a séance with Mary A. Keeler, the wife of Dr. William M. Keeler. Although he had dabbled in psychical matters before then, this sitting motivated him to further investigate. King was permitted to inspect the two rooms which were used for the séance. "I then resumed my own seat and became witness to a variety of forms as they entered the larger room, from the smaller one, which was designated "the

cabinet," and heard the voices of what appeared to be men, women, and children, as they advanced into the room and up to individual sitters in the circle," he recorded. "As the room was rather dimly lighted, and as the circle was a large one, and I at the greatest distance from the medium, and as I could not distinguish their features plainly, nor identify their individuality, from where I viewed them, to me it was not conclusively convincing of anything, but it, however, determined my future course should a similar opportunity present itself."²



Later that year, he had four sittings with Effie Moss, a materialization medium, in London, Ontario. After inspecting the cabinet and room and ruling out any kind of trap door or secret entry passage, King took the seat second from the cabinet.

A lamp burning on the western wall of the room permitted adequate light to detect movement within the circle of a dozen men and women

and three children. "A few apparently human forms appeared, one at a time at the opening of the curtains, and were presently recognized by one or another of the sitters, as purporting to be that of near relatives or friends; and would engage in conversation in some instances in a whisper, in others audible to all present," King observed. "'Some of these advance either alone, or by the hand of some one from the circle, out in the room and up to individual sitters, myself among the number.'"³

One of the forms was that of a young girl who came out to talk with the three children sitting in the group. King was permitted to examine the girl from the cabinet, feeling her hair and her head. "This apparition, materialized form, or actual human girl, whichever she was, claimed to be the spirit of an Indian girl. She next permitted me to feel her feet, which were encased in a pair of moccasins; and while I was observing her stature, features, eyes, and mouth, she chatted pleasantly, and gave all present an evidence of her agility, by running and jumping upon the floor, finishing by asking me if I thought the medium could make herself up like a little Indian girl, with small hands and feet like those I felt. I had to admit my disbelief in the possibility of the large and heavy medium diminishing her size and weight in that manner, or to such a degree. The form disappeared by way of the cabinet."⁴

When another child emerged from the cabinet, the medium also emerged and stood side by side with the materialized form. After this child disappeared in the cabinet, a man known to other sitters as a former editor of a London, Ontario newspaper appeared and claimed fraternal brotherhood with King, designating King's status in the fraternity. King was invited to enter the cabinet with him. "...and to my astonishment he did certainly prove himself a brother."⁵ I may add that while this testing and proving was in process in the cabinet with curtains closed, I could see the medium seated on the chair, her eyes closed, and

apparently in a deep trance state as was her usual condition during a séance. The form, which proved itself to be a brother, was surrounded by a certain degree of illumination, which made the cabinet as well as the form of the medium distinctly visible to me."⁶

As King grasped his hand, the form melted away, dissolving as white or grayish smoke or vapor into the carpet. Then a deceased minister, known to some of the sitters, appeared and addressed those present in the manner familiar to those who had listened to his pulpit utterances. The minister admitted that had he known when alive in the flesh what he now knew, he would have been more effective as a preacher. King was allowed to shake hands with him and talk with him briefly before he disappeared into the cabinet.

A former actress then materialized and sang for the group. King also held her hand and saw her features distinctly before she disappeared into the cabinet. Then King witnessed an actual materialization. "I noticed a light upon the carpet, phosphorescent in appearance, about the size of a 25-cent piece or English shilling, which soon became more extensive, and apparently rose as a vapor from which evolved curling flame-like white and purple light, until suddenly it took on tangible form, and developed what all the sitters agreed upon as being beyond doubt a beautiful young woman, clad in draperies of creamy white, bearing supported or suspended above her head a purple ball of light, which, however, seemed physically separate from any connection with the head; and which illumined the entire room and simultaneously the air was impregnated with odor of a most delicate and agreeable perfume, resembling nothing I had ever inhaled."⁷

King went on to explain that this materialization differed from the others in that they had a substantial, every-day, solid, life-like physical body and raiment, while this materialization appeared angelic. "She took my hand as if for salu-

tation, held it firmly as if for support, for perhaps half a minute, and apparently until fully materialized, and explained that she had the power to appropriate material from the medium, and from my own and other sitters' composition, to form a body to occupy, and by aid of other spirits likewise formed the vestures, and draperies worn, of thought creation from particles of matter in textures in the room, and also from the air."⁸ She, too, dissolved into mist or white smoke and seemingly was absorbed into the carpet before King's eyes.

King was then called to the cabinet. "I beheld the form and features, the perfect physical resemblance, and physiognomy of my own mother, who passed out of the physical life, as the result of an accident in my own and her own home, some nine years previously," he related. "So natural, so human and life-like was the apparition that it formed a perfect duplicate of my mother – as perfect a view as her mirrored reflection in life, while it possessed tangibility, solidity, weight, moved the eyes as if looking into mine, grasped my hand as really as ever it was grasped, and used the mouth to speak and I heard her breathe."⁹ King's mother spoke in her characteristic manner and told him that his father was there with her but was still too weak from having recently passed out of the body to manifest himself. King was reasonably certain that no one there knew that his father had died about two months earlier. King also noted a brown spot on the white of the globe of the left eye and a cluster of silvery hair hanging over the left temple to the left ear, both characteristic of his mother.

King concluded that there could be no stronger evidential support of the spiritual hypothesis than what he had just witnessed.

King had his first sitting with Etta Wriedt, referred to by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle as the best direct-voice medium in the world, 44 days after the death of his wife, May, during 1911. He was immediately greeted by the voice of Dr. Sharp,

Mrs. Wriedt's primary spirit control. "He pointed out that I could not do much for the departed spirit, but that it could do much for me; that my worrying and fretting, or sorrowing, would only tend to hinder or delay her progress or advancement," King recorded. "He also advised me to take care of myself, told me that Hypatia, my spirit guide, was with her (May) and would speak with me."¹⁰

A deceased physician communicated briefly and then King's nephew, Jesse, spoke, offering some very evidential information while also telling King that it might be too early for "Auntie May" to speak clearly or distinctly. Jesse was followed by Hypatia, who said that she had brought May. "Johnnie! Oh Johnnie! My dear Johnnie! It is I. It's May! It's your 'Babe!' I am not dead, I am alive. I told you I would come if I could, and I am here."¹¹ King pointed out that the names "Johnnie" and "Babe" were their own private pet names and known to no one else.

May mentioned that she could not have succeeded in communicating without the help of Hypatia and Jesse. She spoke with King for some 15 minutes about personal matters, including some jewelry and personal belonging of hers that King had put in a safety deposit box. King noted that he had placed the items in the safety deposit box two days earlier and considered this strong evidence. There was specific reference to one item and to specific relatives and friends. May asked that her thanks be given to one particular friend for assisting in preparing her body for burial, another very evidential item which King was certain the medium could not have known. "She talked as naturally about these things as she ever conversed with me in her home life, and she was always known as a shrewd business woman," King wrote.¹² Before ending the conversation, May told her husband that she would materialize for him in Toledo.

The following day, King again sat with Mrs. Wriedt, and May communicated again. As a

test, King asked his wife to tell Mrs. Wriedt what she gave him for Christmas last. The voice coming through the trumpet said, "I had a grip made for the Doctor's instruments, and had his initials, J.S.K., printed in gold letters on the outside; and a Christmas card with printed greetings and written on by myself, which card I placed on the inside of the grip. He found it on the chair at breakfast time." King recorded that this was "absolutely correct."¹³ King also heard from his old-time friend, MacRoberts at that sitting.

King then left Mrs. Wriedt's home in Detroit, Michigan and went to Toledo, Ohio that same day to sit with the medium Joseph "Ben" Jonson later in the evening. He closely inspected the room, the materializing cabinet, the furniture and the single window in the second-floor room, taking every precaution to rule out fraud. There was a circle of six, including King, Jonson, Jonson's wife, and three others at that first Toledo sitting. After two of the other sitters had fully-materialized visitors come from the cabinet, May emerged, caressed her husband, said a few words and then dematerialized in front of him. "As I stood there looking at her she got shorter and shorter in stature, and while still looking me in the face, she went down and down, in sight of all sitters, till she disappeared in the floor," King recorded. "Her voice in this, her first materialization, was not as strong as when speaking through the trumpet at Mrs Wriedt's."¹⁴

King's deceased brother, who had died at age 18 months, then materialized as an adult as did King's daughter who had died at birth 20 years earlier. Although King did not recognize either, he was able to ask them questions and confirm that they were who they said they were. The brother told King that he had been present along with many other relatives when May entered the spirit world. Still another materialized spirit for King was a man who had worked with King some years before and had died about three years earlier.

For his third sitting with Jonson, King had a stenographer accompany him to record the communication and happenings. There were 19 separate manifestations that night. May King was the eleventh to materialize. The stenographer recorded: "Beautiful and strong, and so convincingly natural as to overcome a strong man's self-control, Dr King's wife stood materially before him, speaking the following comforting words: 'Don't cry, dear Johnnie. My dear, this life is beautiful on our side...(more discussion about what to do with her jewelry)...Oh, Johnnie dear, I feel my strength going....'"¹⁵

King later recorded that his wife appeared normal in size and voice on the third materialization, having noted that she had appeared shorter than her normal height in the first one. Her form, feature, voice, and mannerisms, he stressed, were all those he had become familiar with over his 25-year marriage to May.

"The majority of the forms I saw in the three séances in November materialized inside the cabinet, and returning towards the cabinet, disappeared as they got to the opening of the curtains, but without entering the cabinet," King explained. "A few materialized outside of the cabinet, and several were materialized inside the cabinet, while Jonson sat at one end of the semi-circle of people part of the time, and another part of the time he walked along in front of the line of sitters, drawing magnetism from them to build the forms inside the cabinet, so Grey Feather, his Indian spirit guide, explained through Jonson's vocal organs; and lastly a part of the time was spent on the inside of the cabinet."¹⁶

One of the 19 spirit manifestations was Dr. Sharp, Etta Wriedt's spirit control, who had told King in his sitting with Wriedt that he would materialize in Toledo. "I am prepared to admit that many phenomena are so strange, and incomprehensible, that they seem unbelievable until they have been appreciated or experienced by physical senses," King offered, mentioning a materialized

spirit of one of the other sitters at Jonson's séance walking about the room and then picking up his seven-year-old granddaughter, kissing her, putting her back on the floor, "then melted, so to speak, down into the floor, and disappeared from view, several feet from the cabinet entrance."¹⁷

King further observed that higher developed intelligences appear to have the power of producing much more light, or else require less darkness to exhibit themselves in materialized form and perfect detail. Also, music facilitated the appearance of the forms.

Two days later, King returned for two more sittings with Mrs. Wriedt, the first with a group and the second a private sitting. Again, May communicated and spoke in detail about private matters. King was then in for a surprise, as his first wife, Martha, who had died 37 years earlier, spoke, as did the daughter who died at birth.

In concluding his report on this series of séances with Wriedt and Jonson, King, who had studied hypnotism, ruled that out as a possibility and then asked if there is any trickster clever enough to duplicate the natural voice, facial expressions, and mannerisms of close friends and family relatives while also obtaining intimate personal knowledge. He felt certain he had not been deceived.

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¹ King, John S., *Dawn of the Awakened Mind*, The James A. McCann Co., 1920, p. 2

² _____ p. 8

³ _____ p. 14

⁴ _____ p. 16

⁵ Apparently via a secret handshake or some such sign.

⁶ King, pp. 16-17.

⁷ _____ p. 18

⁸ _____ pp. 18-19

⁹ _____ p. 20

¹⁰ _____ p. 81

¹¹ _____ p. 83

¹² _____ p. 85

¹³ _____ p. 88

¹⁴ _____ p. 94

¹⁵ _____ p. 108

¹⁶ _____ p. 99

¹⁷ _____ p. 98