

Biography of John C. Sloan (1869-1951)

John Campbell Sloan was a Scottish trance-voice and direct-voice medium, most remembered today because of the series of books published by J. Arthur Findlay, founder of the Glasgow Society for Psychical Research and The International Institute for Psychical Research. Findlay had numerous sittings with Sloan and credited him with converting him to a belief in spirit communication. "After twelve years' intimate experience of Mr. John C. Sloan, and having sat with most of the leading mediums in this country and America, I can say with conviction that he is the best Trance, Direct Voice, Clairvoyant, and Clairaudient medium with whom I have ever sat," Findlay wrote.¹

A resident of Glasgow most of his life, Sloan was employed as a seaman, warehouse packer, and small shopkeeper. He did not charge for his sittings, although he apparently accepted travel expenses and possibly honorariums. His spirit "control" was called White Feather, "Whitey" for short, said to have been an American Crow Indian. "All his life he has been aware that supernatural occurrences took place in his immediate surroundings," Findlay related. "In his youth, he was often disturbed by rappings and strange voices which he could not understand, and during the past thirty years these have developed into manifestations of a general and varied nature. His mediumship during these years has embraced trance, telekinesis, apports, direct voice, materialization, clairvoyance and clairaudience. These have varied in degree year by year, but his friends generally agree that fifteen years ago his mediumship was at its best."²

J. Malcolm Bird, an American magazine editor, described Sloan as "a short, stoop-shouldered Scot, of frail appearance. He is decidedly taciturn; when he speaks, one notices the Scotch bur. He is extremely shy, in manner, in speech, and even in bearing; his whole presence suggests

apology for his very existence. In every way he seems commonplace; he is certainly of little education – though he can write a decent letter – and I should judge his intelligence to be comfortably below the mean."³

Findlay first encountered Sloan during September 1918 after being invited to attend a séance with him. After hearing dozens of voices speaking to different people through Sloan's direct-voice mediumship, Findlay was mystified. Then, as he was wondering why no voices came for him, his father, Robert Downie Findlay, gave his name and spoke through the trumpet. The father told the son something that the son was certain no one else knew about or could have discovered. The father then mentioned his former business partner, David Kidston, by name and provided evidential details about the partnership. Kidston then began speaking and explained why he opposed taking on the son as an additional partner in the firm. "No spy system, however thorough it was, no fraud or impersonation by the medium or anyone else could be responsible for what I experienced," Findlay wrote. "I was up against something quite inexplicable."⁴

Another very evidential sitting took place in 1919 when Findlay took John, his brother, to Sloan's for a séance. A voice came through identifying himself as "Eric Saunders." The name rang no bell with John Findlay. Saunders told him that he had met him in the Army. Although John Findlay still could not place him, Saunders gave him the names of the duty station and their commanding officer, which were correct. By way of a test, John Findlay tried to cross him up by saying that they were using the Lewis guns at the time, but the spirit voice corrected him by telling him that they were using the Hotchkiss guns. Saunders then recalled a humorous incident in which the colonel made them all run around the parade field with their guns, an incident which John

Findlay clearly remembered. John Findlay asked Saunders what brought him to the séance and Saunders explained that Findlay had done him a kindness by obtaining special leave for him, something he had not forgotten. Findlay remembered obtaining special leave for someone under his command but still could not remember the name Eric Saunders. However, he contacted another member of the unit and verified that the man's name was indeed Eric Saunders.

Findlay further related that one day while in Edinburgh, he visited a friend, the Rev. John Lamond, D.D., and noticed an oil painting on the mantel piece. He was informed by Lamond that it was done by David Duguid, a trance painter who had died around the turn of the century. However, since his family frowned on such art, Lamond stored it in a tin box. Some years later, Lamond was at a direct-voice sitting in London when a voice spoke to him giving the name David Duguid. Duguid wondered why his painting had been put in storage and not displayed. That prompted Lamond to bring it out of storage and place it in his study for display. Some time later, Findlay accompanied Lamond's neighbor, a Mr. Robinson, to a sitting with Sloan. "He first of all got some remarkable evidence, and then a strong voice boomed out and addressed him by name," Findlay wrote. "Mr. Robinson, I am David Duguid; tell your friend Dr. Lamond, 18 Regent Terrace, Edinburgh, that I am much obliged to him for keeping his promise and placing my picture on his mantel piece."⁵ According to Findlay, Robinson had no knowledge of the painting and Sloan had no clue as to the identity of Robinson or the fact that he was a neighbor of Lamond.

Word of Sloan's ability reached London, where Hewatt McKenzie, founder of the British College of Psychic Science, arranged for Sloan to make frequent trips to London to give demonstrations. On February 22, Bird, associate editor of the *Scientific American*, sat with Sloan at the college in London and provided a detailed report of the sitting, including all the precautions to rule out

fraud. While highly skeptical of all mediumship, Bird was open-minded and accepted the existence of telepathy, leaning toward it as the explanation for all "spirit" messages, i.e., the medium's secondary personality (the "control") was reading the minds of the sitters.

"One rather expects, on going to such a gathering for the first time, to find much emotional tommyrot," Bird reported on his sitting with Sloan. "There was a notable absence of this at all my séances. There was no emotion, no atmosphere of mystery, no hocus-pocus of any description. There was music, presumably to get the medium into trance; and darkness, presumably to keep him there. The music and the darkness and the detached voices, however, do not seem to have any reaction upon the nerves of the sitters."

After Sloan entered trance, White Feather began speaking through Sloan's vocal cords and said that the energy was low and that the red light would have to be turned off. "White Feather had a rough time with his spirit communicators," Bird continued. "They kept crowding one another and usurping one another's places, like commuters at the sole telephone booth after a wreck. Frequently, Whitey called them down sharply, and apologized to us for their impatience...After Whitey had been struggling with the situation for some time, voices began to come from the trumpet..."⁶

One voice from the trumpet announced itself as that of Cornelius Morgan, a name that meant nothing to Bird or the other 10 sitters in the room. The voice came to Bird and said that about three weeks earlier Bird was walking across the Brooklyn Bridge with a lady and gentleman. Bird recalled the walk, the only time within a year that he had walked the Bridge, but said that it was with two gentlemen. However, the voice insisted that there was a woman. Bird did not consider the possibility that the second man may have had a female aura, but he was otherwise impressed with the accuracy of the message, especially since he had gone anonymously to the sitting.

"Cornelius" went on to identify Bird as a

writer and said that he had been writing something immediately before coming to the séance and that he had left it unfinished. Bird confirmed this as factual, as he had typing a list of French words on his portable typewriter in his hotel room, leaving it unfinished, when he left for the séance. However, Bird received nothing evidential from any deceased friends or relatives. Apparently, others in attendance did, but Bird did not know them and was in no position to gauge the evidentiality of them.

“He is retiring to a degree and modest in the extreme,” Findlay described Sloan. “He cares nothing for praise which so often comes at the end of such an evening. He always gives me the impression that he dislikes these séances and only holds them as a duty. I know that, if left to himself, he never would exercise his mediumistic faculties.”⁷



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¹ Findlay, Arthur, *On the Edge of the Etheric*, Rider & Co., London, 1932, p. 60

² Findlay, p. 54

³ Bird, J. Malcolm, *My Psychic Adventures*, Scientific American Publishing Co., New York, 1924, p. 41

⁴ Findlay, p. 96

⁵ Findlay, p. 97

⁶ Bird, p. 62

⁷ Findlay, p. 61