

## **Ectoplasm - Part 2**

### **Absurd, But True.**



***above: not all ectoplasm flows from the mouth***

Sceptical scientists insisted that ectoplasm was nothing more than cheesecloth or some other substance cleverly packed in the body and regurgitated at an opportune moment. They gave examples of this "rumination hypothesis," showing how some people are able to use the stomach as a hiding place and later bring it back up.

However, as Dr. Albert Von Schrenck Notzing, a German forensic psychiatrist, pointed out to the doubters, more than half of the 180 observations of ectoplasm by him did not involve ectoplasm flowing from the mouth. It sometimes came from the nose, from the ears, from the vagina, and quite often just from the pores of the skin. In the case of medium called Eva C. (Marthe Beraud), Schrenck Notzing often observed it oozing from the pores near her shoulder.

Schrenck Notzing was so careful in his study of Eva C. that he had her completely strip before many of the sittings and then subject herself to a gynaecological exam. She was then given special attire, consisting of knitted tights and an apron tunic closed down the back. Before each sitting, the tunic was sewed up at the back, the wrists, and the junction of the tights with the dress. There was, von Schrenck Notzing said, absolutely no opportunity for her to smuggle any kind of foreign substance or object into the room. On several occasions, Eva C. volunteered

to sit in the nude and did so to satisfy various sceptical scientists who observed the phenomenon with Schrenck Notzing.

"Not one of the observers during these four years has ever found on the medium's body, or in the séance costume, anything which could have been used for the fraudulent production of the phenomena," Schrenck Notzing wrote, adding that the various rooms in different houses had no secret passages or trap doors, as skeptics claimed, and were regularly examined, both before and after every sitting by him and visiting savants. Moreover, the room was locked by him so that there was no possibility of another person entering.

As Schrenck Notzing pointed out, even if the ruminant hypothesis were true, the phenomena did not end with ectoplasm flowing from an orifice of the medium. That was only the first stage. Various objects, including fingers, hands, heads, and occasionally complete body materializations took shape from the ectoplasm. It was one thing to advance the ruminant hypothesis, quite another to explain how these various objects formed from the alleged regurgitated material.

To this, the sceptics claimed that Eva C. and other mediums had cleverly arranged wires in the room to transport in various objects, but Schrenck Notzing said that this was impossibility as he had the opportunity to examine the room before the medium entered and again at the end of the sitting. Moreover, Eva C. did not have access to the room beforehand.

Dr. Gustave Geley, a professor of medicine at the University of Lyons and a Laureate of the French Medical Faculty, observed Eva C. in his own laboratory twice a week over a three-month period during 1917-18. "It is needless to say that the usual precautions were rigorously observed during the séances in my laboratory," Geley wrote. "On coming into the room where the séances were held, and to which I alone had previous access, the medium was completely undressed in my presence and dressed in a tight garment, sewn up the back and at the wrists; the hair and the cavity of the mouth were examined by me and my collaborators before and after the séances. Eva was walked backwards to the wicker chair in the dark cabinet; her hands were always held in full sight outside the curtains, and the room was always quite well lit the whole time. I do not merely say, '**There was no trickery,**' I say '**There was no possibility of trickery.**'"

Geley described the process: "With Eva, the mode of operation necessary to obtain materializations is very simple. The medium, after having been seated in the dark cabinet, is put into the hypnotic state, slightly, but enough to involve forgetfulness of the normal personality. This dark cabinet has no other purpose than to protect the sleeping medium from disturbing influences, and especially from the action of light. It is thus possible to keep the séance room sufficiently well lit for perfect observations.

"The phenomena appear (when they do appear) after a variable interval, sometimes very brief, sometimes an hour or more. They always begin by painful sensations in the medium; she sighs and moans from time to time much like a woman in childbirth. These moans reach their height just when the manifestation begins, they lessen or cease when the forms are complete."

Of the ectoplasm, Geley wrote: "The substance exudes specially from the natural orifices and the extremities, from the top of the head, from the nipples, and the ends of the fingers...the most easily observed from the mouth...The substance has variable aspects; sometimes, and most characteristically, it appears as a plastic paste, a true protoplasmic mass; sometimes as a number of fine threads; sometimes as strings of different thickness in narrow and rigid lines; sometimes as a wide band; sometimes as a fine tissue of ill-defined and irregular shape...In fine, the substance is essentially amorphous, or rather, polymorphous."

Of the quantity, Geley said this is also very variable, sometimes very little and at other times covering the medium completely, like a cloak. It most frequently appeared white, but occasionally black or gray.

"Sometimes it is slowly evolved, rises and falls, and moves over the medium's shoulders, her breast, or her lap with a crawling, reptilian movement; sometimes its motion is abrupt and rapid, it appears and disappears like a flash. It is extremely sensitive, and its sensitiveness is closely connected with that of the hyper-anesthetised medium, and touch reacts painfully on the latter...The substance is sensitive to light rays; a light, especially if sudden and unexpected, produces a painful start in the medium. However, in some case the substance can stand even full light. The magnesium flashlight (flash camera) causes a violent start in the medium...It shrinks from all contact and is always ready to avoid them and to be reabsorbed.

Several other scientists collaborated with Geley in his study of Eva C. "We saw, touched, and photographed representations of heads and faces formed from the original substance," Geley wrote. "These were formed under our eyes, the curtains being half-drawn. Sometimes they proceeded from a cord of solid substance issuing from the medium, sometimes they were progressively developed in a fog of vaporous substance condensed in front of her, or at her side."

Schrenck Notzing also reported that when he tried to capture some ectoplasm it evaporated and seemed to be reabsorbed by the medium. However, there was some residue left behind, which Schrenck Notzing had chemically analyzed. "As regards the structure of the teleplasm (ectoplasm), we only know this," Schrenck Notzing wrote. "That within it, or about it, we find conglomerates of bodies resembling epithelium, real plat epithelium with nuclei, veil-like filmy structures, coherent lamellar bodies without structure, as a well as fat globules and mucus." Whether or not this residue represented the true nature of the ectoplasm or was just that part associated with Eva's own body Schrenck Notzing had no way of knowing. One thing for sure, he commented, the substance did not consist of India rubber, which many sceptics had suggested it was.

As reported in Part I of this series on ectoplasm, Dr. Charles Richet, a Nobel Prize winning scientist, also attested to the genuineness of the phenomena produced by Eva C.

Interestingly, Richet, Schrenck Notzing, and Geley all resisted the spiritualistic hypothesis, the idea that the phenomena were being produced by spirits. All saw it as a possibility and indications are that Geley came around to see it as the most

likely explanation. Indications also are that Richet and Schrenck Notzing may have privately accepted the idea that spirits were producing the phenomena, but publicly they would not admit to it. They were hard-core scientists and there was no room for spirits in their belief system. They simply wrote it off as something that was beyond science at the time.

Yet, in spite of the fact that these three distinguished scientists witnessed it over and over again and attested to the non-fraudulent nature of Eva's mediumship, modern references on Eva all suggest that fraud was involved, that the three scientists were duped by a master magician.

One debunking theory holds that Eva had a hollow tooth and therefore was able to smuggle things into the séance rooms in her tooth. Whether or not she actually had a hollow tooth is unclear from the modern sources.

Another debunking theory had to do with Juliette Bisson, an influential artist who had become interested in hypnotism, telepathy, and clairvoyance because her physician father was interested in the subjects as she was growing up. She collaborated with Schrenck Notzing in studying Eva and at some point allowed Eva, who was later married, to live with her and her husband in their Paris home. It was Mme. Bisson who did the gynaecological exams and then put Eva into the trance state. One debunking theory that has been handed down and accepted in modern references is that the two women had a lesbian relationship and therefore Bisson was a confederate in the sham.

Since Eva was strictly an amateur and apparently was not paid for her sittings, it is never made clear by those advancing this theory what the two women had to gain from the regular sittings - more than 180 by Schrenck Notzing over a four-year period, some lasting over two hours and quite a few in which they sat for an hour before anything developed, and still others in which nothing at all happened. What was the point of it all? There was no reality TV in those days.

The facts that Mme. Bisson was well-to-do and that Eva C. preferred not to use her real name also seem to be in conflict with such a theory.

After Geley's death in a 1924 plane crash, it was reported that a study of his notes supposedly indicated that Geley found objects hidden in Eva's hair in a most suspicious way, even though he made no mention of these in his reports. Geley's notes were never produced to confirm such a claim.

Perhaps more than anything, the debunkers pointed to some of the "ridiculous" manifestations produced from the ectoplasm, several of which looked like they had come from a local magazine. Such manifestations will be the subject of Part III of this series

Schrenck Notzing mentioned that one of the scientists he invited to a sitting was in awe of what he saw and fully agreed with him that fraud was not possible under the strictly controlled conditions. However, a week or so later, this same scientist stated that he had changed his mind because what he had witnessed was not possible and therefore it had to be a trick beyond his comprehension. Schrenck

Notzing further observed that every scientist who was introduced to the subject matter seemed to discount all research that had gone on before them. "It is unfortunate," he wrote, "that learned men, who see the phenomena for the first time, commit the error of supposing that their entry into the arena marks the beginning of the proper investigation of mediumistic phenomena. They disregard the copious literature and the many strictly scientific reports of their colleagues, such as the numerous unrefuted results obtained by eminent investigators with the medium Eusapia Palladino..."

Schrenck Notzing also observed that the cynical press was quick to accept unsubstantiated debunking reports and sensationalize them, thereby defaming innocent people. These sensationalized reports then became "fact" as far as the public is concerned and later became part of standard reference books, muddying up the waters so that people don't know what to believe.

If Eva C. had been the only person producing ectoplasm and related phenomena, then there might be justification for being sceptical, but the fact is that the phenomena were observed by many distinguished men and women and their reports were consistent with those of Drs. Schrenck Notzing, Geley, and Richet.

This ectoplasmic formation at the expense of the physiological organism of the medium is now beyond all dispute," said Richet, who won the Noble Prize for his research on anaphylaxis, the sensitivity of the body to alien protein substances. "It is prodigiously strange, prodigiously unusual, and it would seem so unlikely as to be incredible; but we must give in to the facts...Yes, it is absurd; but no matter - it is true."