

Ectoplasm - Part 3

Thought and Imagery



above: ectoplasm beginning to form into a materialized spirit (Medium: Kathleen Goligher, photographer, Dr. William Crawford)

Vice-Admiral W. Osborne Moore, a retired British naval commander, began investigating mediums in 1904. One of the first he sat with was Cecil Husk, an English materialization medium. Like so many mediums of the day, Husk had been charged with fraud a number of years earlier. "Mr. Cecil Husk's séances have been the theme of many discussions amongst spiritists," Moore addressed the concerns. "I have sat with him over forty times, and have only once suspected fraud. On that occasion the conditions were bad, and I am by no means sure that my doubts were reasonable. Even supposing my first ideas were correct, there were good reasons for attributing the trick I thought I had witnessed to unconscious fraud." As Moore came to understand unconscious fraud, the medium, while in a trance state, will sometimes be prompted by spirits to move things when the power is low and the spirits cannot accomplish it on their own. Such unconscious fraud was interpreted by sceptical investigators to be outright fraud rather than unconscious attempts to achieve a result.

Moore also noted that many materializations with Husk as well as with other mediums did not look completely lifelike. Some looked like stage dummies while others had a parchment appearance. Some were just heads, others busts of the person. Many were only half or two-thirds normal human size. Moore came to understand that many of the unlikelike materializations were failed attempts by spirits to fully materialize.

These unlikelike manifestations, like partial materializations (hands only, arms, heads) were scoffed at by the sceptics and debunkers. "Did the charlatan think we would believe that something so ridiculous is the materialization of a spirit entity?" the smug debunker would ask. Indeed, were all the mediums who produced these strange unlife-like objects so stupid as to think they could fool people with them? It is easier for those with open minds to believe that they were, as Moore concluded, failed attempts at materialization.

As indicated in Part I of this series on ectoplasm, Dr. Charles Richet, a Nobel-Prize winning scientist, told of one sitting in which a communicating spirit said that he could not materialize because he could not remember what he looked like when alive. At a later sitting, this same spirit materialized in body but without a face.

Admiral Moore was present in England when William T. Stead, a social activist, began communicating through several mediums, including Etta Wriedt, after dying in the *Titanic* disaster. Stead explained that there were souls on his side who had the power of sensing people (mediums) who could be used for communication. One such soul helped him find mediums and showed him how to make his presence known. It was explained to him that he had to visualize himself among the people in the flesh and imagine that he was standing there in the flesh with a strong light thrown upon himself. "Hold the visualization very deliberately and in detail, and keep it fixed upon my mind, that at that moment I was there and they were conscious of it," Stead explained, adding that the people at one sitting were able to see only his face because he had seen himself as only a face. "I imagined the part they would recognize me by."

It was in the same way he was able to get a message through. He stood by the most sensitive person there, concentrated his mind on a short sentence, and repeated it with much emphasis and deliberation until he could hear part of it spoken by the person.

In her 1892 book, *There is No Death*, Florence Marryat, a popular writer of the Victorian era, told of a sitting with a medium in which an old family friend, John Powles, communicated but initially declined to materialize. Peter, the medium's spirit control, communicated that "he doesn't want to show himself because he's not a bit like what he used to be." However, when Marryat persuaded Powles to show himself, she saw only a face that didn't resemble her old friend in the slightest. She wrote that it was "hard, stiff, and unlikelike. Powles then told her that he would try to do better the next time.

For the next sitting, Marryat brought along a necktie that had belonged to Powles, keeping it in her pocket and telling no one about it. Soon after the séance began, Peter told Marryat to hand over the necktie and put it on Powles' neck. "The

face of John Powles appeared, very different from the time before, as he had his own features and complexion, but his hair and beard which were auburn during life, appeared phosphoric, as though made by living fire," Marryat wrote, adding that she then mounted a chair, put the tie around his neck and asked if she could kiss him. Powles shook his head, but Peter then told her to give him her hand. "I did so, and as he kissed it his moustaches burned me," Marryat wrote. "I cannot account for it. I can only relate the fact. After which he disappeared with the necktie, which I have never seen since, though we searched the little room for it thoroughly."

The *prima facie* most impressive evidence there could be of the survival of a deceased friend or relative would be to see and touch his materialized, recognizable bodily form, which then speaks in his or her characteristic manner," wrote C. J. Ducasse, a professor of philosophy at Brown University in his 1961 book, *A Critical Examination of the Belief in Life After Death*. "This is what appeared to occur in my presence on an occasion three or four years ago, when during some two hours and in very good red light throughout, some eighteen fully material forms - some male, some female, some tall, some short, and sometimes two together - came out of and returned to the curtained cabinet I had inspected beforehand, in which a medium sat, and to which I had found no avenue of surreptitious access."

Ducasse went on to explain that the material forms were recognized by other sitters and in some cases the deceased spoke and caressed the living. One of the forms called his name and Ducasse went up to her and asked who she was. "Mother," she replied. "She did not, however, speak, act, or in the least resemble my mother," Ducasse continued the story. "This was not a disappointment to me since I had gone there for purposes not of consolation but of observation." The friend who had taken Ducasse to the circle informed him that his mother had materialized on a number of occasions and that the form sometimes looked like her and sometimes it did not.

Whether it was his mother or not, Ducasse was fairly certain it was a materialized spirit. "I can say only that if the form I saw which said it was my mother and which patted me on the head, was a hallucination - a hallucination 'complete' in the sense just stated - then no difference remains between a complete hallucination on the one hand and, on the other, ordinary veridical perception of a physical object; for every further test of the physicality of the form seen and touched could then be alleged to itself hallucinatory and the allegation of complete hallucination then automatically becomes completely vacuous."

Ducasse also had an opportunity to see the ectoplasm in good red light, to touch it, and take ten flash photos of the substance as it emanated from the mouth of the medium. "Whether or not it was 'ectoplasm,' [it] did not behave, feel, or look like any other substance known to me could, I think, under the conditions that existed. It was coldish, about like steel. This made it seem moist, but it was dry and slightly rough like dough the surface of which had dried. Its consistency and weight were also dough-like. It was a string, of about pencil thickness, varying in length from six to twelve feet. On other photographs, not taken by me, of the same medium, it has veil-like and rope-like forms."

When we consider Richet's comments about the spirit who forgot what he looked like when alive in the flesh, as well as Stead's comments about having to visualize himself in order to show himself, and Marryat's comments about Powles' first attempt not looking anything like she remembered him and his telling her he would try again, Ducasse's comments about the spirit claiming to be his mother not looking like she did when alive makes some sense as it becomes clear to the open-minded person that the process of a spirit materializing all or part of the body is a very complex and difficult procedure.

Much more recently in his 2008 book *Life After Death: Some of the Best Evidence*, Dr. Jan W. Vandersande, a physicist, tells of his own observations of ectoplasm, while living in South Africa during the 1970s, with several mediums, including Kitty Gordon, under red light. "...Ectoplasm started pouring out of Kitty's nose and started to form a gauze-like sheet similar to that seen in photographs of the Johannesburg medium. One of the sitters was then told to pick up the end of the ectoplasm on the floor, hold it high (about 5-6 feet) and then pull it partly across the room (about 4-6 feet) while it was still attached to Kitty's nose. It was truly spectacular to see. The ectoplasm was slightly transparent. The person holding the ectoplasm was then told to drop the ectoplasm. It fell to the ground and disappeared (quite fast, within seconds) back into Kitty's nose. Besides the very clear sight of ectoplasm there was also a very noticeable smell; I would call it a smell very much like a perspiration smell. It was a truly amazing experience and I have absolutely no doubt that it was ectoplasm we had just seen."

The cover of Vandersande's book has a photo taken by Professor Jack Allen, one of Vandersande's colleagues who taught anatomy at the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg, of a materialized spirit, who had a very black beard, one that most people would say was a fake beard. However, if we can accept the projected-image explanation and Marryat's comment about Powles' beard appearing phosphoric, we can understand how this materializing spirit probably visualized himself with a very black beard rather than a gray one.

The projected-image explanation might also help us understand why materialized spirits are seen wearing clothes. If you were attempting to project an image of yourself to someone over the phone, it is unlikely you would project a picture of yourself in the nude.

And so it was also with the phenomenon called spirit photography. In order to project their images on to the photographic plates, the spirits said they had to remember what they looked like and then project that image. In one case, a spirit communicated that he had to visit his old home, view a portrait of himself on the mantel in order to remember what he looked like, and then return. In fact, a number of old spirit photographs turned out to resemble old portraits of the person, which led debunkers to assume that the photographer/medium somehow obtained an old photo of the person and transposed it to the photographic plate - a reasonable assumption for those who close their minds to the reality of the spirit world and are determined to find fraud without attempting to understand spiritual science.

An article in the January 1933 issue of *Psychic Science* told of an experiment conducted by T. Glen Hamilton, M.D., a Canadian psychical researcher, in which two

spirit communicators built an ectoplasmic ship. Coming through two mediums, the spirit communicators carried on a dialogue in which they pretended they were on a pirate ship and among a crew of ruffian pirates. It was stated that this play-acting was intended to recover past memories and better facilitate a thought-image of the ship. Hamilton remarked: "No matter how great we may conceive the unknown powers of the human organism to be, we cannot conceive of it giving rise to an objective mass showing purposive mechanistic construction, such as that disclosed in this ship-teleplasm (ectoplasm). We are forced to conclude that the supernormal personalities in this case (by some means yet unknown to us) so manipulated or otherwise influenced the primary materializing substance after it had left the body, or was otherwise brought into its objective state, as to cause it to represent the idea which they, the unseen directors, had in view, namely the idea of a sailing ship."

When we begin to understand how thought-imagery plays into materialization, things begin to make more sense. Still, however, the debunker wants to apply terrestrial science to celestial matters and continues to scoff.