

Baron Albert Von Schrenck-Notzing (1862-1929)

Although Baron (Dr.) Albert von Schrenck-Notzing a German aristocrat, was educated as a neurologist, he married into a very wealthy family and was able to devote most of his time to psychical research rather than to medicine. His laboratory and library were in his palace home outside Munich. With his primary interest in physical mediumship, he studied the mediumship of Eusapia Paladino, Marthe Béraud ("Eva C."), Stanislaw P., Willy Schneider, Marie Silbert, Franek Kluski, and countless others over a period of nearly 40 years.

It is clear from his book, *Phenomena of Materialization*, first published in 1914, that Schrenck-Notzing was determined to defeat the spiritualistic hypothesis, which he felt was unscientific, and to provide an explanation acceptable to science. "If the results of our objective researches, in spite of ourselves, may yet be explained better by a spiritistic theory than in any other way, we must put this down to our lack of influence upon the quality of the phenomena, not to any bias in the experimenters," he explained his position. "Without wishing to prejudice this question, the author is of the opinion that, even though most of the spiritistic phenomena should turn out to be true, an animistic explanation is to be preferred, and that it does, on whole, suffice."¹

Although Schrenck-Notzing clearly came to accept the genuineness of various mediumistic phenomena, he was, according to his assistant, Dr. Gerda Walther, inclined "to attribute psychic occurrences to the workings of the subconscious mind," but "in rare cases he did not entirely exclude the spiritualistic theory."²

One of the cases prompting Schrenck-Notzing to lean in the direction of the spiritistic

theory involved, Alexandre Bisson, the deceased husband of Juliette Bisson, one of those collaborating with him in the investigation of Eva. C. While Eva was in the trance state, Alexandre Bisson began speaking through her in a deep voice, displaying the memory and character remembered by his wife, as well as stammering when in a state of excitement.



Although there were skeptics who claimed that Juliette Bisson, who had become Eva's guardian after Eva moved to Paris to be studied, was the trickster in the phenomena, Schrenck-Notzing and all the other scientists who worked with her concluded that her integrity was beyond question. "We must ask ourselves," Schrenck-Notzing wrote, 'Is it possible for a girl with Eva's lack of education and gifts to create a true psychic copy of the personality of the deceased, and even subconsciously to make his mentality and knowledge her own?' Even assuming an unusually highly-developed somnambule detective sense, such a psychological reconstruction would remain a remarkable and puzzling performance."³

On June 1, 1912, Schrenck-Notzing recorded a sitting with Eva in which a picture of Alexandre Bisson materialized. The sitting took place under red light illumination. As was routine, Eva was undressed completely and put in a tight black dress. She even underwent a gynecological

examination. After Eva went into a deep trance, "Berthe," Eva's spirit control, announced that there would be extraordinary phenomena that night. Schrenck-Notzing and Mme. Bisson then witnessed the teleplastic (later called ectoplasm) process, involving a white luminosity about 20 inches long. "To my astonishment, I seemed to recognize in the masculine face, shown with the well-known drapery of veiling but sketched as with black chalk on a flat surface, the features of Alexandre Bisson, the husband of my collaborator, who had died in January 1912," Schrenck-Notzing recorded. "Although I saw that she had immediately recognized her husband and showed deep emotion, I was not certain of my impression, and considered the possibility of a self-deception...I distinctly perceived a male bearded face, with a high forehead, which would not suffer the light, and disappeared behind the back of Eva's chair towards the back of the cabinet, without Eva having changed the position of her hands."⁴

Schrenck-Notzing got up from his seat, put his head deep into the cabinet while bending over Eva, and saw a male face looking straight at him. It remained for about six seconds and then revolved on its own axis flat on the wall, and then disappeared towards the floor.

Like nearly all of the materializations produced by Eva, this one appeared to be more like a two-dimensional drawing than a life-like person. Schrenck-Notzing concluded that it was a memory image of Mme. Bisson which was telepathically picked up by Eva and projected by some ideoplastic capacity unknown to science into the ectoplasm. (When Eva was studied some years later by Dr. Gustave Geley [see separate biography of Geley], these unlife-like materializations were judged by Geley to be incomplete materializations resulting from insufficient power on the part of Eva. Had there been sufficient power, Geley offered, the materialization would have continued to develop into a three-dimension life-like figure. However, Schrenck-Notzing does not appear to

have come to such a conclusion, although he summarized Geley's conclusions in a later edition of his 1914 book.)

Schrenck-Notzing observed similar phenomena with the 18-year-old Polish medium called Stanislava P. when he studied her in 1913. "It is certainly asking a great deal of common sense to believe that all these things, familiar in our daily life, owe their existence to a mediumistic creative process of a totally unknown nature," Schrenck-Notzing wrote of the materializations and of the attitude expressed by many other scientists, "that they are generated from an invisible substance derived from the medium's organism, and that, after a fugitive earthly existence, they again dissolve and are reabsorbed by that same organism. It is surely simpler and more natural to assume that these objects are somehow at the medium's disposal, and were smuggled in, in spite of our control, than that they are fugitive forms of transitory matter of psycho-physical emanation."⁵

But Schrenck-Notzing was certain there was no fraud of any kind. He even went so far as to conduct rectal examinations of the mediums and to completely rule out the rumination hypothesis advanced by skeptics. This hypothesis held that the medium hid the material in her stomach and then regurgitated it. Schrenck-Notzing pointed out that more than half of the materializations did not involve the medium's mouth. The ectoplasm would flow from her ears, the pores of her skin, or even from her vagina.

And even though Schrenck-Notzing went out of his way to disclaim spirit intervention, other scientists continued to attack and vilify him. The fact that many other reputable scientists, including Dr. Charles Richet (a Nobel laureate), sixteen savants, and six journalists, sat in on some of his experiments and validated them did not seem to mitigate the derision.

One witness, a Vienna physician referred to as Dr. Harter, wrote to Schrenck-Notzing: "Now I may tell you that at the first sitting I

laughed! But during the second sitting I was puzzled, and since that time the Saul is become a Paul. This second sitting with Stanislava has had the result of totally reversing my former conception of life. All nature and all life for me has assumed a new aspect ... Even today I thank the fate which by chance allowed me to see the little Polish girl, for I know today that I was an ignorant fool, and considered official science the beginning and end of wisdom. Now I am cured of that, although many scruples and doubts still as-

sail me. In my occupation with this subject I found that which one loses in the exact sciences, namely, a belief in the soul.”⁶

Schrenck-Notzing concluded his book by asking the old question raised by Kepler: “Is it possible that the whole visible world is but the outer shell of an invisible world of forces?”⁷

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¹ Schrenck Notzing, Baron von, *Phenomena of Materialization*, Wildhern Press, 2008, p. 155.

² Pleasants, Helene, *Biographical Dictionary of Parapsychology*, Helix Press, 1964, p. 287.

³ Schrenck Notzing, p. 156.

⁴ _____, pp. 164-165 .

⁵ _____, p. 261.

⁶ _____, p. 256.

⁷ _____, p. 284.