

**MIRACLES AND
MODERN
SPIRITUALISM**

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Miracles and Modern Spiritualism by Alfred Russel Wallace

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ALFRED RUSSEL WALLACE

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BY
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REVISED EDITION, WITH CHAPTERS ON
APPARITIONS AND PHANTASMS

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PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION

(1874)

THE Essays which form this volume were written at different times and for different purposes. The first in order (though not the earliest in date) was read before the Dialectical Society, with the intention of inducing sceptics to reconsider the fundamental question of the inherent credibility or incredibility of Miracles. The second was written in 1866 for the pages of a Secularist periodical, and a very limited number of copies printed, chiefly for private circulation. The third is the article which appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* of May and June 1874. All have been carefully revised, and considerable additions have been made of illustrative fact, argument, and personal experience, together with a few critical remarks on Dr. Carpenter's latest work.

As the second and third Essays were each intended to give a general view of the same subject, there is necessarily some repetition in the matters treated of, and the same authorities are in many cases quoted; but it is believed that no actual repetition of details will be found, care having been taken to introduce new facts and fresh illustrations, so that the one Essay will be found to supplement and support the other.

I must now say a few words on a somewhat personal matter.

I am well aware that my scientific friends are somewhat puzzled to account for what they consider to be my delusion, and believe that it has injuriously affected whatever power I may have once possessed of dealing with the philosophy of Natural History. One of them—Mr. Anton Dohrn—has expressed this plainly. I am informed that, in an article entitled “*Englische Kritiker und Anti-Kritiker des Darwinismus*,” published in 1861, he has put forth the opinion that Spiritualism and Natural Selection are incompatible, and that my divergence from the views of Mr. Darwin arises from my belief in Spiritualism. He also supposes that in accepting the spiritual doctrines I have been to some extent influenced by clerical and religious prejudice. As Mr. Dohrn’s views may be those of other scientific friends, I may perhaps be excused for entering into some personal details in reply.

From the age of fourteen I lived with an elder brother, of advanced liberal and philosophical opinions, and I soon lost (and have never since regained) all capacity of being affected in my judgments either by clerical influence or religious prejudice. Up to the time when I first became acquainted with the facts of Spiritualism, I was a confirmed philosophical sceptic, rejoicing in the works of Voltaire, Strauss, and Carl Vogt, and an ardent admirer (as I am still) of Herbert Spencer. I was so thorough and confirmed a materialist that I could not at that time find a place in my mind for the conception of spiritual existence, or for any other agencies in the universe than

matter and force. Facts, however, are stubborn things. My curiosity was at first excited by some slight but inexplicable phenomena occurring in a friend's family, and my desire for knowledge and love of truth forced me to continue the inquiry. The facts became more and more assured, more and more varied, more and more removed from anything that modern science taught or modern philosophy speculated on. The facts beat me. They compelled me to accept them *as facts* long before I could accept the spiritual explanation of them; there was at that time "no place in my fabric of thought into which it could be fitted." By slow degrees a place was made; but it was made, not by any preconceived or theoretical opinions, but by the continuous action of fact after fact, which could not be got rid of in any other way. So much for Mr. Anton Dohrn's theory of the causes which led me to accept Spiritualism. Let us now consider the statement as to its incompatibility with Natural Selection.

Having, as above indicated, been led, by a strict induction from facts, to a belief—1stly, In the existence of a number of preterhuman intelligences of various grades and, 2ndly, That some of these intelligences, although usually invisible and intangible to us, can and do act on matter, and do influence our minds,—I am surely following a strictly logical and scientific course in seeing how far this doctrine will enable us to account for some of those residual phenomena which Natural Selection alone will not explain. In the 10th chapter of my *Contributions to the Theory of Natural Selection* I have pointed out what I consider to be some of those residual phenomena; and

I have suggested that they may be due to the action of some of the various intelligences above referred to. This view was, however, put forward with hesitation, and I myself suggested difficulties in the way of its acceptance; but I maintained, and still maintain, that it is one which is logically tenable, and is in no way inconsistent with a thorough acceptance of the grand doctrine of Evolution, through Natural Selection, although implying (as indeed many of the chief supporters of that doctrine admit) that it is not the all-powerful, all-sufficient, and only cause of the development of organic forms.

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

ANOTHER edition of this little work being called for, I have carefully revised the text, inserted dates, and given a few additional facts either in the body of the work or in footnotes.

I have also added two chapters on Apparitions and Phantasms, which appeared in the *Boston Arena* in 1891, and which constitute my latest contribution to the philosophy of Spiritualism.

Having been more or less acquainted with psychical phenomena for half a century, it appears to my publisher that a few notes on the changes of opinion I have witnessed during that period may not be uninteresting to readers of my book.

It was about the year 1843 that I first became interested in psychical phenomena, owing to the violent discussion then going on as to the reality of the painless surgical operations performed on patients in the mesmeric trance by Dr. Elliotson and other English surgeons. The greatest surgical and physiological authorities of the day declared that the patients were either impostors or persons naturally insensible to pain; the operating surgeons were accused of bribing their patients; and Dr. Elliotson was described as "polluting the temple of science." The