

**THE PROBABLE INFINITY  
OF NATURE AND LIFE:  
THREE ESSAYS**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649521661

The Probable Infinity of Nature and Life: Three Essays by William Emerson Ritter

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.  
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

[www.triestepublishing.com](http://www.triestepublishing.com)

**WILLIAM EMERSON RITTER**

**THE PROBABLE INFINITY  
OF NATURE AND LIFE:  
THREE ESSAYS**



BOOKS BY  
WILLIAM EMERSON RITTER

---

THE HIGHER USEFULNESS OF SCIENCE.  
THE PROBABLE INFINITY OF NATURE  
AND LIFE.

THE UNITY OF THE ORGANISM, OR THE  
ORGANISMAL CONCEPTION OF LIFE.  
*Illustrated.*

THE UNITY OF THE ORGANIC SPECIES,  
WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE HU-  
MAN SPECIES.

WAR, SCIENCE AND CIVILIZATION.

---

RICHARD G. RUDGE, PUBLISHER, BOSTON

THE PROBABLE INFINITY  
OF NATURE AND LIFE

THREE ESSAYS

BY

WILLIAM EMERSON RITTER

*Director of the Scripps Institution for  
Biological Research of the University  
of California, La Jolla,  
California*



BOSTON  
RICHARD G. BADGER  
THE CORNHAM PRESS

7277  
COPYRIGHT, 1918, BY RICHARD G. BADGER

All Rights Reserved

Jan. 30, 1920  
Harvard University  
Philos. Dept. Library  
Robinson

S 7700.76.30  
B



Made in the United States of America

The Gorham Press, Boston, U.S.A.

TO  
THE MEMORY OF  
JOSEPH LxCONTE

Who more than any other teacher helped me  
to look with the eye of Reason upon  
the Beauty, the Wonder, the  
Majesty, and the Mystery  
of Nature





## FOREWORD

THE essays constituting this booklet partake of the nature of ancient history in that all have been in manuscript several years. The oldest and longest, that on the question of the infinity of nature, was mostly written in 1912, but some of it still earlier. But the mere matter of dates does not show the full measure of the ancient history character of the ideas presented. Were I to treat the same topics systematically now, almost certainly a product considerably different from that actually presented would be the outcome. However, the basal conceptions would be the same; and history, even ancient history, has its intrinsic worths, one of these being that quite over and above all that is *said* in the record, there is the fact of the place which the record holds in the time-series into which all similar records necessarily fall. To illustrate, the various chroniclings and meditatings and generalizings on the life of a people produced by many writers and scattered through many years and centuries, constitute a history — a sort of super-history — of the writers. Indeed, to the student of evolution in the truly organic sense, this super-history may almost be said to be more important than the written record. The student of

man's efforts to interpret the organic world of which he is a part may well find more interest in the question of why and how Milton produced such a story as that of the Creation and Fall of Man than in anything actually contained in the story. From this standpoint the story may interest him as keenly, may mean as much to him, as does Darwin's attempt to account for man's origin.

It is almost as much on account of the super-history furnished by these essays as on account of what is said in them that I am now publishing them. They were not written with any definite purpose of publication. The ones on spontaneous generation and multiple causes were prepared as addresses for scientific societies. That on the infinity of nature was written mainly to enable me to see where my biological development was tending as touching other domains of knowledge. To state more specifically why I now publish the essays essentially as they were written, I find on approaching the completion of the *Unity of the Organism*, that I need the essays in print, partly as record and partly as super-record. What I am writing now in the larger work, I want to attach directly to what I wrote earlier about the "origin of life" and to do so without rewriting the old essay and incorporating it as a section in the later book.

The chief present significance, as I now see, of the essays as super-record, lies in the stage of development exhibited of the organismal hypothesis of consciousness in which the *Unity of the Organism* culminates. If any