

**EVOLUTION AND RELIGION. PART I.
EIGHT SERMONS, DISCUSSING THE
BEARINGS OF THE
EVOLUTIONARY PHILOSOPHY ON THE
FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINES OF
EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY**

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Evolution and Religion. Part I. Eight Sermons, Discussing the Bearings of the Evolutionary Philosophy on the Fundamental Doctrines of Evangelical Christianity by Henry Ward Beecher

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HENRY WARD BEECHER

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EVOLUTION
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PART I.

EIGHT SERMONS,

DISCUSSING THE BEARINGS OF THE EVOLUTIONARY PHILOS-
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EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANITY.

BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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PREFACE.

THE universal physical fact of evolution, which a widely accepted philosophy of our day postulates as a theory of the Divine method of creation, is one which so naturally and simply fits many a puzzling lock, that it is gratefully seized by many who seem to themselves to have been shut out from hope and from the truth.

For myself, while finding no need of changing my idea of the Divine personality because of new light upon His mode of working, I have hailed the Evolutionary philosophy with joy. Some of the applications of its principles to the line of development I have to reject; others, though not proven—and in the present state of scientific knowledge perhaps not even provable—I accept as probable; but the underlying truth, as a Law of Nature (that is, a regular method of the divine action), I accept and use, and thank God for it!

Slowly, and through a whole fifty years, I have been under the influence, first obscurely, imperfectly, of the great doctrine of Evolution. In my earliest preaching I discerned that the kingdom of heaven is a leaven, not only in the individual soul, but in the world; the kingdom is as a grain of mustard-seed; I was accustomed to call my crude notion a *seminal theory* of the kingdom of God in this world. Later I began to feel that science had struck a larger view, and that this unfolding of seed and blade and ear in spiritual things was but one application of a great cosmic doctrine, which underlay God's methods in universal creation, and was notably to be seen in the whole development of human society and human thought.

That great truth—through patient accumulations of fact, and marvelous intuitions of reason, and luminous expositions of philosophic relation, by men trained in observation, in thinking, and in expression—has now become accepted throughout the scientific world. Certain parts of it yet are in dispute, but substantially it is the doctrine of the scientific world. And that it will furnish—nay, is already bringing—to the aid of religious truth as set forth in the life and teachings of Jesus Christ a new and powerful aid, fully in line with other marked developments of God's providence in this His world, I fervently believe.

The relations of this great truth to Evangelical Christianity, so as to show that the substantial points of executive doctrine are helped and not hindered by this new aspect in which we are called to view them, offer the field in which I hope to do some work during the closing period of my life.

During the past two years I have preached with specific application of this inspiring principle to various practical aspects of the Christian life; and those discourses have been put together for issue in book form. But, for a few Sundays, during the early summer of this year, I undertook to discuss the bearings of the Evolutionary philosophy on some of the fundamental doctrines of our religious faith,—the Divine Nature, the question of Human Sinfulness, the Inspiration of the Bible, the Divine Providence, and correlated subjects; that is to say, to show what light, in my judgment, falls on those great truths from this helpful view of God's methods. I could wish that my views might have been carefully written out before delivery; but I could not write them out. I could only hope for fairly accurate reports of what I might speak. I have taken the opportunity to revise these reports before putting them in a book. They appear in the following pages (Part I.); and will serve as an introduction of the *general principles* on which the discourses of *specific application* (Part II.) have been based; and not only so, but will show the main lines along which I believe the new course of the old ship will largely be laid.

It is a familiar thought that the unbelief of to-day is the faith of to-morrow: and yet to-day always condemns the premature to-morrow. The skepticism of honest men unfolds the truth, and becomes the conviction of the after-time. The theology that is rising upon the horizon will still rise. I cannot hope that it will be the perfect theology, but it will be a regenerated one, and I think far more powerful than the old; a theology of hope, and of love, which shall cast out fear. Nay more, it is to be a theology that will run nearer to the spirit and form of Christ's own teachings, he who found the tenderness of Divine Providence in the opening lilies of the field, and the mighty power of God's kingdom in the unfolding of germ and leaf and fruit.

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PERKSKILL, N. Y., September, 1885.

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