

**PLATO AND DARWIN:  
A PHILOSOPHIC  
DIALOGUE, PP. 1-70**

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**MARCEL HÉBERT**

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## Plato and Darwin

# Plato and Darwin

. A Philosophic Dialogue .

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TRANSLATED WITH AN INTRODUCTION

BY THE

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## INTRODUCTORY

‘WHAT more arbitrary or less justifiable, less applicable to reality . . . than the superficial device of an orthodoxy untrue to its first principles, which aims at a separation between ecclesiastical dogmas, classifying them, on the one hand as fundamental, and on the other as accessory or even superfluous? In the name of what authority is this distinction made? Who does not see,

with a little reflection, that the line of demarcation which is sought for runs, not between dogmas to divide one from another, but within each dogma, between the religious content which must be safeguarded and the symbolical expression which may vary indefinitely.'<sup>1</sup>

This passage may perhaps be looked upon as the last word of M. Sabatier on a subject to which he has devoted a lifetime. It is almost certain that many who are interested in the present work will have read the *Esquisse d'une Philosophie de la*

<sup>1</sup> *Esquisse d'une Philosophie de la Religion*, etc. (pp. 403-4), by Auguste Sabatier, Professor at the University of Paris, Dean of the Faculty of Protestant Theology (4th edition, Paris, Fischbacher, 1897).



*Religion*, which has, for some time, been before the British public in the form of an English translation. To those who have done so, the Abbé Hébert's pamphlet will appear as a striking commentary on many of M. Sabatier's criticisms of Catholic Theology.

The following dialogue first appeared in the *Annales de Philosophie Chrétienne* (May 1893), under the title:— 'Platon et Darwin—Dialogue Philosophique.' It thus precedes the *Esquisse* by some three or four years. If the present editor is right in his estimate of the above-quoted passage from that work, he is justified in concluding that M. Sabatier's main thesis was already

before the public when he wrote, and that the essay which contained it was from the hand of a Catholic priest.

Nevertheless, there is a profound difference, in scope and in fulfilment, between the productions of M. Hébert and those of the Dean of the Protestant Faculty. As a leading member of the *Reformed Church*, the author of the *Esquisse* was drawn into an attempt to set forth a complete system of progressive liberalism, which might serve as a basis for a future reorganisation of the Protestant faith. Thus it is that his wide comprehension of subjects is often balanced by thinness of treatment, and that a book, otherwise deeply interest-

ing, is somewhat vague in the impression it leaves on the reader.

M. Hébert belongs to a Church which, like the British Constitution, has its roots in immemorial antiquity, which does not rest on a written confession of faith, whose organic growth is coextensive with the secular evolution of humanity, and whose varied manifestations demand, for their systematisation, the lapse of centuries. It was possible for him to adopt the scientific method of concentrating on a small group of facts, and thus he has been able to arrive at a scientific conclusion.

Biblical Criticism, Comparative Religion, Ecclesiastical History, Theology,

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