

THE ETHICAL IMPORT OF DARWINISM

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The ethical import of Darwinism by Jacob Gould Schurman

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BY

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To
JAMES MARTINEAU, D.D., LL.D.,
THE ETHICAL AND RELIGIOUS HELPER OF TWO GENERATIONS,
THIS STUDY OF EVOLUTIONARY MORALS
IS INSCRIBED
WITH THE GRATITUDE AND REVERENT AFFECTION
OF
AN OLD PUPIL



PREFACE.

THERE is a remark of Mrs. Carlyle's which has always seemed to me highly suggestive. When asked to explain her manifest antipathy to Bishop Colenso, whom Mr. Froude had got invited to one of her tea-parties, she confessed that it arose in part from the anomalous appearance presented by "a man arrived at the years of discretion wearing an absurd little black-silk apron," and in part from the incongruity between that ecclesiastical symbol and this particular bishop's "arithmetical confutation of the Bible;" for, proceeds the philosophical lady, generalizing the causes of her unfavorable impressions, "*it is the mixing up of things which is the Great Bad.*"

In what passes with us for the doctrine of evolution there is a mixture of science and speculation. Yet it is customary to serve it all up together, so that the hungry soul must needs take all or none. The result for many minds is apt to be indigestion or starvation. But this cruel di-

lemma might be escaped, if the fact and the fancy entering into current evolutionism were kept apart and dealt out separately. The mind's natural craving for knowledge could then be satisfied without detriment; for it is only when science is adulterated with nescience that it becomes unwholesome and poisonous.

The object of the present volume is to distinguish between science and speculation in the application of Darwinism to morals. The results of evolutionary science in the domain of matter and in the domain of life are everywhere taken for granted; the philosophical and, more especially, the ethical theories currently associated with them are subjected to the most searching scrutiny I have been able to make. As it has been pretended that the doctrine of evolution invests ethics with a new scientific character, I first examine the various methods of ethics and attempt to determine under what conditions alone ethics can become a science. (*This first chapter should be omitted by the general reader not interested in the logic of ethics.*) Whether Darwinian ethics is a piece of science or of speculation appears in the sequel. But before the question is decided we must know what is meant by Darwinism. Accordingly, the second chapter gives an exposi-

tion of the Darwinian theory, comparing and contrasting it with the more general doctrine of evolutionism, whose history and meaning are also briefly traced. Then follow chapters on the philosophical interpretation and the ethical bearings of Darwinism. The fifth chapter is devoted to an examination of the ethical speculations which Darwin grafted upon his biological science. These chapters confirming the conclusion reached in the first chapter, that a *scientific*, as opposed to a speculative, ethic can be constructed only by adopting the historical method, the last chapter has to show what light may be thrown upon ethical problems by tracing the actual development of moral ideals and institutions, of which, for obvious reasons, the domestic virtues are here taken as typical illustration.

The work is primarily the outcome of my own reflective needs. It has cleared up in my own mind the confusion between guesses and facts, which is "the Great Bad" in evolutionary ethics. I am not without hope that it may also prove clarifying to other minds. Not, of course, that I would presume to instruct trained philosophical experts; but I have in view the increasingly large number of intelligent men and women who, without making a special study of philosophy,