



# **Debating Evolution before Darwinism: An Exploration of Science and Religion in America, 1844-1859**

*Ryan C MacPherson*

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Fifteen years before Darwin's *Origin of Species* shook the world, a debate over evolution already raged in America's classrooms, churches, and scientific institutions. *Vestiges of Creation*, published anonymously by the Scottish journalist Robert Chambers in 1844, boldly marshaled recent scientific discoveries into a sweeping hypothesis of naturalistic development. Glowing gases had become planets. Nonliving material had become living organisms. Simple life forms had developed into the human species. Scientists on both sides of the Atlantic sharply objected to this "developmental hypothesis." So did most theologians. Little did they know, it was all a dress rehearsal for how the world soon would respond to Darwin. Dr. MacPherson's keen historical insight probes deeply into the private and professional lives of leading intellectuals at Princeton, Harvard, and Yale. Crafting a narrative energetic enough for lay readers, but supported with footnotes thorough enough for scholars, Dr. MacPherson reveals unexpected interactions between religion and science during this crucial era.

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