

THE DÉNÉ LANGUAGES.

Considered in Themselves and Incidentally in their Relations to Non-American Idioms.

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INTRODUCTION.

Among the allied sciences which concur in lending ancillary aid to Ethnology none can be compared to Philology. Anthropology's services are valuable, it is true; yet its investigations tend to the solution more of racial than of ethnic problems. Archæology can hardly be regarded as an infallible criterion of ethnological certitude, since we find among peoples confessedly heterogeneous implements and sometimes monuments of striking similarity. Mythology or Dæmonology can still less aspire to the first place in the ethnologist's esteem; for, not to speak of the universality of certain myths or beliefs, a people's legends and its very theology itself are liable to yield to the latent pressure exercised by foreign nations through migrations, captivity or commiscegenation. Sociology can lay claim to great importance indeed; still it cannot be assigned the first rank among Ethnology's satellites, since we find among such ethnically different peoples as the Jews and the Caffirs, observances the identity of which would lead to false conclusions were Sociology allowed supreme importance in the decision of ethnological questions.*

Such is not the case with philology. "Nothing is more characteristic of the intellectual existence of man than language," says Gallatin.† "It is found to be a more enduring monument of ancient affinities than the physical type, and there is no tribe, however situated, from which this proof of affiliation should not be obtained." This opinion is corroborated by a contemporaneous author, Horatio Hale, in a paper read some years

*The most striking instance adducible in confirmation of these and the following remarks is that of the Nabajoës of New Mexico and Arizona. Those aborigines who are geographically surrounded by heterogeneous tribes, and inhabit a country some 1,500 miles south of the most southern Dénés' hunting grounds differ in physical type, natural dispositions, manners and customs from our Indians. Their legends, myths and religious observances have no equivalents here, and yet their speech stamps them at once as an offshoot of the great Déné family.

†Am. Ant. Coll., Vol. II.