

Romans, Teutons and Celts had been a single nation, speaking a common language. This fact, of prime importance for the history of our race, we find set forth clearly and intelligibly in Max Mueller's lectures, and I can well remember my glad surprise, when following the hint of my teacher, I began to read them. It seemed as if we had found a new standpoint from which to review human history. But while Max Mueller successfully popularized the results of other students' toil, his own work in comparative language study is of little importance beyond this, and he seems to have had little sympathy with the canons and methods that have prevailed in the comparative study of languages during the second half of our century. In 1862 Schleicher published his *Compendium of Comparative Grammar*, endeavoring, botanist as he was, to apply to language study methods properly belonging to natural science. In 1867 Leskien, the friend of Schleicher, formulated his conception of phonetic law in language, which has been of such importance in regulating our later language studies. But Max Mueller never showed any great sympathy with this tendency, and perhaps in this his influence may be more helpful in comparative philology than any direct contribution of his could have been. The idea of phonetic law marked a great advance in language study, and no one would now wish to go back to Curtius' theory of sporadic change. But it is still a question how far laws, parallel to the laws that govern inanimate nature, can be applied to the products of mind. And the tendency of language study, guided by such conceptions, or laws, as they are styled, has been to account for all the phenomena of language by phonetic change, unconscious, gradual and dependent on the vocal organs, and to deny to human intelligence what may seem to some its due share in the evolution of language. Against this Max Mueller raises his voice manfully, when in his tribute to Von Jhering he thus depicts the duty of a student of language: "He has always to try to discover in what is purely formal in language something that was in its origin full of life and meaning. He has to start with the conviction that there can be nothing in language that had not an intelligible purpose, that there is nothing that is now irregular that was not at first regular, nothing irrational that was not originally rational."

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