

**GRIMM'S LAW: A STUDY, OR HINTS
TOWARDS AN EXPLANATION OF THE
SO-CALLED "LAUTVERSCHIEBUNG"
TO WHICH ARE ADDED SOME REMARKS
ON THE PRIMITIVE INDO-EUROPEAN K
AND SEVERAL APPENDICES**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649597697

Grimm's Law: A Study, or Hints Towards an Explanation of the So-Called "Lautverschiebung" to Which Are Added Some Remarks on the Primitive Indo-European K and Several Appendices by T. Le Marchant Douse

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Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

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T. LE MARCHANT DOUSE

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BY
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LONDON:
TRÜBNER & COMPANY, LUDGATE HILL.
STRASSBURG: KARL I. TRUBNER.
1876.

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PRINTED BY TAYLOR AND FRANCIS,
AND LION COURT, FLEET STREET.

PREFACE

THE subject of this little Treatise came unavoidably in my way almost on the threshold of a somewhat more extensive investigation upon which I had proposed to myself to enter. Among other preliminary inquiries, it was necessary for my immediate purpose to see whether certain groups of I-E. roots, the members of each of which seem to offer the marks of a close relationship to one another, could, with any approach to certainty, be severally traced to a single parent form; and this inquiry, as it advanced, became at length inextricably involved with another arising out of a very obvious fact, namely, that the varieties of form exhibited by *all* the members of a group within *one* of the great dialects correlated by Grimm's Law are identical with the varieties of *one* member of a group as exhibited by *all* the great dialects so correlated. Looking about for the various explanations of this fact, I found it scarcely possible not to surmise that all those varieties of form, whether collected in one dialect or dispersed among several, must have originated by phonetic variation in the same way and at the same time, and that their distribution in each and among all of the aforesaid dialects must have

been due to the relationship that subsisted among those dialects in primeval times. The pursuit of these and such-like conjectures led me farther and farther astray from the line of inquiry originally marked out; and being (like most people who have thought on the matter) quite dissatisfied with the current hypotheses of Grimm's Law, I resolved at last to detach this subordinate subject altogether, and see what conclusions respecting it were attainable by a rigid application, to the facts before me, of linguistic principles that were either already demonstrated, or that appeared to me demonstrable.

I did this the more willingly because the limited time at my disposal for any studies of the kind seemed more likely to suffice for a monograph upon a single and definite problem than for an investigation into larger questions. It soon became manifest, however, that to elaborate all the points of interest that offered themselves at almost every step of even my more limited way would tax the powers of an inquirer who could devote his whole time to the work. Hence, although I have found myself able to consider a few of the more important of such points in separate Appendices, yet as regards many others I have been compelled to rest content with mere hints or bare statements, in the hope of resuming the study of them at a future time.

But neither inevitable shortcomings of this kind, nor some other defects both in form and in matter, of which I am sufficiently conscious, will very greatly grieve me, if I shall only have succeeded in clearly

working out the principal features of the theory hereinafter propounded. Looked at in the most general and comprehensive way, the characteristic of this theory will be seen to lie in its treatment of Grimm's Law as a compound, instead of a simple, phonetic problem, combining in itself (not of any natural necessity, but through a unique conjuncture of linguistic conditions) two distinct problems; of which one involves the *origin* or *generation*, and the other the *distribution* or *arrangement*, of the sounds composing the several Mute-systems covered by the Law. It will be found, I hope and believe, that this method of treatment, whatever else it may do or leave undone, will avoid the most glaring objections to the prevalent hypotheses on the subject. For, on the one hand, by the origin assigned to the weaker Mutes, the evolution of the German Mute-systems, instead of appearing to invalidate the almost universal Principle of Debilitation (or of "Least Effort," § 6), is actually accounted for by that principle; while, on the other hand, in favour of the process to which the symmetrical arrangement of the Mutes in the related systems is attributed it becomes possible to produce *some* evidence, at any rate, from similar phonetic processes actually observable.

What is here attempted, therefore (to borrow an illustration from a sister science), closely resembles, in a small way, what has been achieved in Astronomy on a grand scale; for as it was only when the orbital motions of the planets were no longer regarded as simple and uncompounded, but were treated each as

the resultant of two rectilinear motions, that both they themselves came to be properly understood, and that the planetary masses were shown to be as obedient as all other matter to the universal sway of attraction; so, in the present case, I have ventured to think that Grimm's Law, by the analysis here proposed, will become susceptible, as a whole, of a satisfactory explanation, and will, in particular, be reduced to subjection under the Principle of Least Effort,—as, indeed, it ought to be. For this Principle is, in Phonology, exactly what Gravitation is in the system of the Universe; and no case of sound-change can with perfect safety be represented as in direct opposition to it, unless counteracting agencies can be actually detected at work. Finding nowhere the slightest ground for thinking that any such agencies ever contributed to the phenomena of Grimm's Law,—finding everywhere, in fact, good grounds for thinking the reverse,—I have deemed it of prime importance to reconcile the Law with the aforesaid Principle; and to effect this reconciliation is the first, and, while really the more important, not perhaps the more difficult, of the two problems which go to make up the compound one.

But the most striking and interesting, although at the same time the most perplexing, aspect of Grimm's Law lies in that distribution of its implicated sounds which will here furnish the subsidiary component problem. It is this that differentiates it from other cases of sound-change; and by this it stands unique. There are not wanting, indeed, other and simpler cases of symmetrical distribution (§§ 18, 39); but they are