

CHAPTER XXIII.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGES AND SPECIES
COMPARED.

ARYAN HYPOTHESIS AND CONTROVERSY—THE RACES OF MANKIND CHANGE MORE SLOWLY THAN THEIR LANGUAGES—THEORY OF THE GRADUAL ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES—DIFFICULTY OF DEFINING WHAT IS MEANT BY A LANGUAGE AS DISTINCT FROM A DIALECT—GREAT NUMBER OF EXTINCT AND LIVING TONGUES—NO EUROPEAN LANGUAGE A THOUSAND YEARS OLD—GAPS BETWEEN LANGUAGES, HOW CAUSED—IMPERFECTION OF THE RECORD—CHANGES ALWAYS IN PROGRESS—STRUGGLE FOR EXISTENCE BETWEEN RIVAL TERMS AND DIALECTS—CAUSES OF SELECTION—EACH LANGUAGE FORMED SLOWLY IN A SINGLE GEOGRAPHICAL AREA—MAY DIE OUT GRADUALLY OR SUDDENLY—ONCE LOST CAN NEVER BE REVIVED—MODE OF ORIGIN OF LANGUAGES AND SPECIES A MYSTERY—SPECULATIONS AS TO THE NUMBER OF ORIGINAL LANGUAGES OR SPECIES UNPROFITABLE.

THE supposed existence, at a remote and unknown period, of a language conventionally called the Aryan, has of late years been a favourite subject of speculation among German philologists, and Professor Max Müller has given us lately the most improved version of this theory, and has set forth the various facts and arguments by which it may be defended, with his usual perspicuity and eloquence. He observes that if we knew nothing of the existence of Latin, —if all historical documents previous to the fifteenth century had been lost,—if tradition even was silent as to the former existence of a Roman empire, a mere comparison of the Italian, Spanish, Portuguese, French, Wallachian, and Rhætian dialects would enable us to say that at some time there must have been a language, from which these six modern dialects derive their origin in common. Without