



# History of Genetics - 2nd Edition: From Prehistoric Times to the Rediscovery of Mendel's Laws

*Hans Stubbe*

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This history traces the evolution of man's ideas concerning the generational continuities and changes of living organisms from the earliest times to the rediscovery of Mendel's fundamental laws, first brought to light in 1865 but neglected until the early 1900s. The dramatic story of the independent studies by Bateson (who coined the word "genetic"), De Vries, Correns, and Tschermak which finally led to public recognition of these laws is given in full detail.

Reviewing the first German edition of the book in *Isis*, Zirkle wrote that "The overall history of genetics falls easily and naturally into three periods. Recently, the first...has been covered excellently by Hans Stubbe."

Likewise, reviewing the second German edition (1965) for *Science*, the geneticist L. C. Dunn noted that "It is a sign of the widening interest in the origin of genetics that the first brief comprehensive account of its history before 1900 has already reached a second edition...."

"The first edition was an excellent and succinct account of the work of Mendel and of his predecessors beginning with the first domesticators of plants and animals. The first chapters were devoted to ideas about reproduction and heredity as found in the works of the Greek and Roman writers of antiquity and of scientists and observers of the Middle Ages. The beginning of a new era in the 18th century was noted in the controversy concerning performance and epigenesis and especially in the botanical discoveries of the late 17th century and the 18th century (by Camerarius, Linnaeus, and Kölreuter). Some 40 pages (now expanded to 60) were devoted to the plant breeders and theorists of evolution in the 19th century, including Mendel, and were followed by an excellent chapter on the origin of variations and the mutation theory.... The last chapters, about a fifth of the text, were devoted to the great cytological discoveries of the 19th century, to Weismann and the germ plasm theory, to the rediscoveries of Mendel's laws, and to the first conceptions of a chromosome theory of heredity.

"The second edition is an improvement and expansion of the first. Forty pages have been added to the text, including a 12-page facsimile of Mendel's letter of 3 July 1870 to Carl von Naegeli (the holograph has not been published previously) and 115 titles added to the already extensive bibliography. Proper attention has now been paid to Karl Pearson's contributions (1900 to 1909), to the theory of Mendelian equilibrium, and to Fisher's critique of Mendel's theory...."

"A valuable feature of the book is the brief biographical notices of most of the chief actors in the history of genetics up to and including the rediscoverers of 1900. Most of these notices are accompanied by portraits."

The present English translation is based on the second German edition, but it contains in turn a wealth of new material added by the author since the German publication.

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