

PIDGIN-ENGLISH SING-SONG.

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PIDGIN-ENGLISH SING-SONG

OR

SONGS AND STORIES

IN

THE CHINA-ENGLISH DIALECT.

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With a Vocabulary.

BY

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INTRODUCTION.

IDGIN-ENGLISH is that dialect of our language which is extensively used in the seaport towns of China as a means of communication between English or Americans and the natives. In its first and lowest form, as given in the vocabularies published for the use of servants, Pidgin is a very rude jargon, in which English words, strangely distorted, owing to the difficulty of representing their sounds in Chinese writing, are set forth according to the principles of Chinese grammar. It is, in fact, word-for-word translation, with very little attempt at inflection or conjugation, as such forms of grammar, as we understand them, do not exist in Chinese. The result of this is naturally that as the vocabulary is very limited, a Chinese learns Pidgin-English with no more difficulty than is presented by acquiring a few hundred words, the pronunciation and grammar of

which have been modified to suit those of his own language. In this it corresponds exactly with the *posh an' posh*, or corrupt Rommany dialect spoken by English gipsies, in which Hindi-Persian words follow the English structure.

It is owing to the ease with which Chinese learn this dialect, and the willingness of foreigners to meet them half way in it, that it has spread to such an incredible extent, thereby leading the way towards making English the language of the Pacific. And as Chinese learn a Latin tongue more easily than pure English, it is probable that had it not been for the Pidgin jargon, a corrupt Portuguese would have formed the popular medium of communication between foreigners and natives in China. The number of Portuguese words which now exist in Pidgin-English seem to prove this. As it is, our language in this rude form has spread, and is spreading to such a remarkable extent as to suggest several important problems. The coolie who speaks Pidgin has half his apprehension as to getting on in a foreign country removed, and the anticipated immigration of "millions of the Mongolian race" is beginning to cause serious reflection in America. Therefore Mr Simpson looks forward to a time when it will be necessary to issue the Scriptures in Pidgin, and Captain

Richard Burton gravely remarks in his "Ultima Thule," that "if English, as appears likely, is to become the cosmopolitan language of commerce, it will have to borrow from Chinese as much monosyllable, and as little inflection as possible. The Japanese," he adds, "have already commenced the systematic process of 'pidgeoning,' which for centuries has been used on the West African coast, in Jamaica, and in fact throughout tropical England, Hindostan alone excepted."

The word *pidgin*, if derived, as is generally supposed, from the English word *business*, indicates the difficulty with which Chinese master our pronunciation. It is also characteristic of the jargon, from the incredible variety of meanings which it assumes. As the term *wallah* in Hindu, and that of *engro* in Rommany, are applicable to any kind of active agent, so *pidgin* is with great ingenuity made expressive of every variety of calling, occupation, or affair. As *business* or commerce is the great bond of union between the Chinese and foreign residents, it is not remarkable that this should be the chief and ever-recurring word, and give its name to the language formed in its service.

Pidgin-English, "pure and simple," is found, according to a writer in the "Pall Mall Gazette,"