

A Western Volapük*

THIS LITTLE VOLUME is one in which Prof. Schuchardt of the University of Grätz would revel, as himself the foremost European collector of mixed idioms, international jargons, and 'Pidgin' languages of every sort. The Chinook Jargon of Oregon is a practical Volapük of incalculable worth to the traders of the Northwest Territories, Western British America, and it may be even Alaska. This jargon—peculiar to this region—is a natural growth, not an artificial jumble, like Volapük: it grew up out of the necessities of the traders of Oregon and Washington territories in their intercourse with fifteen or twenty different Indian tribes all of whom spoke different and mutually unintelligible dialects, harsh, unpronounceable, changeable as the chameleon. It is a true international speech used by Americans, English, French-Canadians and Indians (Nootkas and Chinooks), and composed principally of words from their languages. Puget's Sound is the Northwestern Mediterranean Sea where this *Lingua Franca* is spoken, in a land beautiful with islands and volcanoes like the Mediterranean, full of a dusky population like the Malay Archipelago where a similar jargon is spoken, and abounding in European and Asiatic (Russian) types in daily and perpetual contact with the aboriginal.

The distinguished Canadian ethnologist Horatio Hale undertook, as far back as 1841, to reduce this jargon to writing and reproduce it as the linguistic and ethnological portion of the researches made by the U. S. Exploring Expedition of that year. He found twelve distinct Indian languages there to grapple with, each as distinct from the other as English is from Hebrew; and the problem of intercourse with the tribes would have been insoluble had not the explorers been assisted in their work by the 'Trade Language' or Chinook 'lingo' that had already slowly risen out

* A Manual of the Oregon Trade Language, or Chinook Jargon. By Horatio Hale
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of the *débris* of numerous tongues that were intelligible. Missionaries, Hudson's Bay people, and early settlers had coöperated with the Indians from the beginning of the last century in the construction of this idiom, which is now what Italian is to the Mediterranean and Chippeway was among the Eastern tribes of the United States. Among these Indians the Chinooks were particularly quick in catching strange sounds, and to them is due the lion's share, on the Indian side, in the evolution of the jargon. Lewis and Clark found the language in crude use in 1804, and later on, the Astor expeditions celebrated by Washington Irving gave the permanent artistic shaping to it. The Chinook dialect underlies the whole as its skeleton, upon which has been built a superstructure of numerals, pronouns, adverbs, prepositions, and verbs derived from the English, French, Canadian *voyageurs*, an occasional word from other aboriginal tribes, and a series of singular and expressive onomatopœias imitative of sounds, actions, and the like, such as *siktik* for watch, *tumtum*, the heart, *liplip*, from the sound of boiling water, and *tin-tin*, for the tintinabulation of a bell. Mr. Hale found some 250 words in use, in 1841; in 1863 these had increased to nearly 500, one half of them being Chinook, 94 French, 67 English; the Flathead Indians furnishing 39, the Nootka 24, and miscellaneous sources about 40. Some of the terms are very queer: thus *Boston* stands for American, *Kinchotsh* (King George's men) for English, and *Pasaiuks* for French, the last word being a supposed representative of *Français*!

The Indians cannot pronounce an *f*, an *r*, or a nasal French *u*; nor a *d*, *g*, *v*, or *z*; the English *j* is changed to *ch* or *tsh*, and so on. The result is a language of odd phonetic characteristics, no grammatical inflections, no plural, no tenses, and but one true preposition, *Kopa*, used a good deal like the Louisiana Creole *apè*, for all sorts of relations, —to, for, at, in, etc. Tones, looks, and gestures fill up, as in spoken Chinese, the interstices of conversation, which revolves in the monotonous but sufficient grooves of 500 words.

Mr. Hale's history of the formation of this speech is interesting in the extreme, and is accompanied by an abundant lexicon, songs, hymns, a sermon, and translations from the Bible. The two words of this dialect which the reviewer remembers most frequently to have heard in his Northwestern travels were *pollatch* (give!) and *muckamuck* (food).