

East and West Converse

Linguistics

MAURICE PARMELEE, in *Oriental and Occidental Culture* (Century):

When I wanted my rickshaw coolie to hasten, I would say "you chop-chop go", and he would usually reply "can do" or "no can do". This is "Pidgin-English", which, like the "lingua franca" of the Levant, is used from Japan to India and in Oceania as a means of communication between the natives and foreigners. It is a jargon based upon English, with a picturesque intermixture of Chinese, Hindustani, Portuguese, French, etc. The word "pidgin" is said to have been derived as follows: business—busin—pishin—pidgin. This hybrid language evolved largely in Canton and along the Chinese coast during the early days of trade with the West.

"Chop-chop", from the Cantonese, in "chop-sticks" means to hasten eating. "Chow" in Cantonese means dinner or a feast, and in pidgin, food, while "chow-watta" is drinking water. "Chin-chin" is Chinese for "please" and becomes a greeting in pidgin. "Chin-chin joss" is to worship, "joss" coming from the Portuguese "dios".

"Compradore" for middleman between foreign and native merchants also came from Portuguese. "Savey" for to know came from French, and in Indo-China wine is "encore", indicating a frequent use of this beverage. Through employees of the East India Company came from Hindi "bund" (bund is an embankment or dike) for a boulevard fronting on water, "punka" for genuine, and "griffin" for a new arrival in the Orient or a young racing pony. Luncheon is always "tiffin" even for foreigners among themselves, and a message is a "chit".

The missionary is graphically described as "number-one-go-to-heaven-man", and in Oceania God becomes "big masta fella". To read is "look book". "What side" is where, "catchee" is to get, and "no plenty" is few. "What time" is when, "all time" is always, and "bimeby" is soon. The verb is conjugated as follows: "me go", I go; "bimeby me go", I will go; "me go finish", I went.

The letter "r" is little used by the Chinese and therefore becomes "l",

while the letter "d" is also difficult to pronounce. The butler announces dinner to his mistress as "chow-chow alle leady, missee". "Fly lice" for fried rice, and "slow-belly" for strawberry are at first somewhat distasteful. A table-boy (waiter) apologizes for a broken egg with "me velly solly he bust".

Pidgin-English, which has attained the dignity of a dictionary, has also its literature. The laudable maxim "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again" becomes "S'pose some ting you no can do, then do him till you could".

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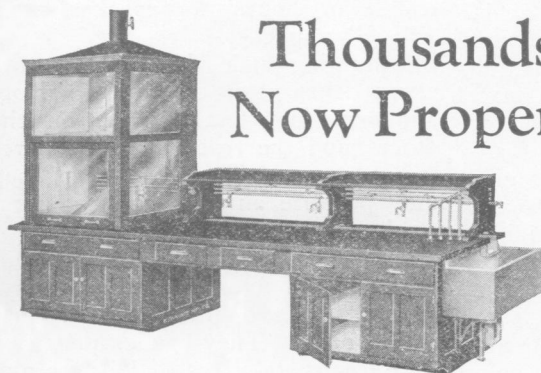
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