

THE CHINOOK JARGON.

BY MYRON EELLS.

No one person is competent to write a dictionary of the Chinook jargon, because it is so constantly changing and is used very differently at the same time in different localities. Words that are very common at one place are sometimes obsolete a hundred and fifty miles from that place, and words that have been adopted into the language from the English in one place are unknown to neighboring Indians.

In order to write a complete dictionary of the jargon, one should learn to speak it thoroughly in one place, then go to all the other places where it is spoken differently, and spend enough time at each place to note the differences. This would necessitate a residence in northern California, southern Oregon, the Willamette valley, eastern Oregon, northern Idaho, north-eastern and middle Washington, Puget sound, several localities in British Columbia both east and west of the Cascade mountains, and several places in Alaska.

Origin and History.

The following account, taken from Hale's "Oregon Trade Language," is probably as good a history of the jargon as there is, to within a few years:

The British and American trading ships first appeared on the north-west coast during the closing years of the last century. The great number of languages spoken by the native tribes proved to be a serious hindrance to their business. Had it chanced that any one of these languages was of easy acquisition and very generally diffused, like the Chippeway among the eastern tribes, the Malay in the Indian Archipelago, and the Italian in the Mediterranean, it would, no doubt, have been adopted as the medium of communication between the whites and the natives. Unfortunately, all these languages—the Nootka, Nisqually, Chinook, Chihailish, and others—were alike harsh in pronunciation, complex in structure, and each spoken over a very limited space. The foreigners, therefore, took