

## ON ERRATA RECEPTA, WRITTEN AND SPOKEN.

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*(Continued from Vol. X. p. 232.)*

## IV. VERNACULARISMS.

All that a man of one language can do, when foreign words and phrases fall upon his ear, is to extract from them such a meaning as he best can, according to the principles of his own solitary vernacular. The English sailor deduces strange meanings from the sayings of the Dutch and Chinese; and the Dutch and Chinese probably interpret, in a manner equally odd, the words of their eccentric British friend. The Chinese indeed, we know, have made out of our English tongue a dialect of their own, which is now even adopted by those who trade with them. At Hong-Kong and Canton grave British merchants, in conversation with Chinese, seem suddenly to fall into a premature second childhood, and to indulge in the infantile babble of the nursery.

In all ages a certain amount of intercourse, somewhat like this, must have been carried on between different races and tribes; and it can easily be seen how a complete misunderstanding on both sides may in some instances have arisen; and how singular blunders may have been transferred from one tongue to another, and at length incorporated in the languages of nations as vernacular expressions authorized by custom, however wrong in their first use.

Traces of such international misconceptions are observable in numerous common terms, but especially, as was to be anticipated, in the names of peoples and tribes, of countries, cities and particular localities, of kings and distinguished personages, as handed down to us by annalists and historians.

Sometimes names that have a real significance become, when vernacularized in another language, simply conventional; while, on the other hand, names that seem conventional, or the etymology of which is not perceived, assume a meaning quite foreign to their actual import. Sometimes, again, when a meaning cannot be forced into the whole name, a syllable of it is made to give out a vernacular sound;