

P R E F A C E.

TO a very great number of respectable and by no means uneducated persons, slang is simply a collective name for vulgar expressions, the most refined individual being the one who uses it least. To them it is all that which in speech is "tabu," or forbidden. Others regard it as the jargon of thieves, which has spread to costermongers and street-arabs, though in justice to the worthy people first mentioned it must be admitted that many of them are so fortified in their ignorance of what is beneath them, that they are unaware that thieves have a lingo of their own.

Others, again, believe that it is identical with the gypsy tongue or Romany, an opinion which, in spite of its easily demonstrated etymological absurdity, has held its ground for more than a century; whilst several writers, such as the author of the "Life of Bampfild (or Bampfylde) Moore Carew," have published so-called gypsy vocabularies, in which barely half-a-dozen words of corrupt Romany are to be found.

Many, not without good excuse, find it very difficult to distinguish between technical terms not as yet recognised by lexicographers, and those which are, to all intents and purpose, firmly established.

It is worthy of notice, let it be said *en passant*, that the two nations at the head of the intellectual movement, England and France, have the most extensive slang vocabulary, the two being about on a par in that respect.

Now, the dialect alluded to above was, centuries ago, almost the only slang—and there are men so much behind the times that it is