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Colloquial English Idioms

**БИБЛИОТЕЧКА
УЧИТЕЛЯ
ИНОСТРАННОГО
ЯЗЫКА**

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FOREWORD

The aim of this book is to supply *a* number of colloquial English idioms classified, explained and illustrated by examples drawn mainly from modern English and American authors. It will be noticed that the term "idiom" is used here in its broader sense, embracing both idioms proper and so-called "non-idiomatic" word groups. Only colloquial phrases are included in the book; a few idioms marked "slangy" are more for recognition than actual use. W. Ball's classification of colloquial idioms (see below), though greatly changed, is partially used in this book.

The definitions and explanations are taken mainly from the following sources:

1. The Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English, by *A. S. Hornby, E. V. Gatenby, H. Wakefield*,
2. A Concise Dictionary of English Slang, by *W. Freeman*.
- 3 A Practical Guide to Colloquial Idiom, by *W. J. Ball*.
4. English Idioms and How to Use Them, by *W McMordie*
5. English Idioms for Foreign Students, by *A. J. Worrall*.

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DIFFICULTIES AND TROUBLE

A general phrase for "(to be) in difficulties or trouble" is: **(to be) up against it** — (to be) confronted by formidable difficulties or trouble

"Well, old girl, "she murmured, "you're up against it this time, and no mistake." (*K. M.*)

You were a brick to me when I was up against it. (*J. G.*)

We are properly up against it here, Chris. We've paid out every stiver we've got. (*A. C.*)

(To be) in for it (trouble) is similarly used, meaning *(to be) involved in trouble*.

He grabbed the knob and pulled vigorously. It had closed. Heavens! He was in for it now, sure enough. (*Th. D.*)

Quickly I got in before Brown and said they might be in for another kind of trouble. (*C. S.*) If you break the school windows, you'll be in for trouble. (*A. H.*)

Having (getting into) trouble (difficulties) is colloquially expressed by these phrases:

(to be) in a jam — (to be) in a difficulty or in an awkward situation

Well, Dad, I'm in a bit of a jam again. (*J. M.*)

Connie was all right. She'd been in plenty of jams herself. She wouldn't turn up her nose. (*N. C.*) He was in a bit of a jam, that was all. (*N. C.*)

(to be) in a fix — in a difficulty (or dilemma)

Then she'd be in just the same old fix, only worse. (*H. W.*)

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His cart has stuck in the river, so that he is in a bad fix. (*W. M.*)

I should like to see the fix I'd be in in this house if I started laying down that law. (*L. A.*)

to be in (get into) a scrape — to be in (get into) trouble (difficulty)

She perceived she was in a scrape, and tried in vain to think of a way of escape. (*H. W.*) If he'd get into a scrape, or break his leg. (*J. G.*) I'll do anything you like to help you out of the scrape if you're in one. (*H. W.*)

(to be) in a hole — (to be) faced with what appears to be a disastrous difficulty, an insurmountable trouble

You'd think to judge from the speeches of the "leaders", that the world had never been in a hole before. The world's always in a hole, only in the old days people didn't make a song about it. (*J. G.*)

(to be) in the soup (cart) — (to be) in disastrously serious trouble

What if she declared her real faith in Court, and left them all in the soup! (*J. G.*)
"He's got himself properly in the soup, he has," he said thickly. (*N. C.*)
"No good crying before we're hurt," he said, "the pound's still high. We're good stayers."
"In the soup, I'm afraid." (*J. G.*)
"Now we're really in the cart," she said. (*A. Chr.*)

(to be) in hot water or to get into hot water — to have (get into) trouble, especially as the result of foolish behaviour

You'll get into hot water if you type the wrong addresses on the envelopes again. (*W. B.*) It often happens that a young wife is in hot water as long as her mother-in-law lives in the same house. (*W. M.*)

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The schoolmaster got into hot water with the Inspector for taking part in political meetings. (*W. M.*)

(to be, get into) in deep water — undergoing difficulty or misfortune

He looked and looked, and the longer the situation lasted the more difficult it became. The little shop-girl was getting into deep water. (*Th. D.*)

(to be) in a mess — (to be) in trouble

Uncle, you're so renowned for dropping your best pals when they're in a mess. (*J. G.*) ... — if ever the story breaks you're in a worse mess than ever, aren't you? (*C. S.*)

to catch it — to get into trouble; to receive censure or blame

The new boss is a terror. You'd better watch your step or you'll catch it. (*W. B.*)

The sharing of difficult or adverse circumstances is commented upon by the following phrase:

to be (all) in the same boat — to have the same dangers (difficulties) to face

The trouble is how to get on without reducing staff. Everyone is in the same boat. (*J. G.*) You're in the same boat. Don't you see this war is being lost? (*S. H.*)

Lewisham looked at mother for a moment. Then he glanced at Ethel. "We're all in the same boat," said Lewisham. (*H. W.*)

To leave a person in difficulties or trouble is to leave him (her) in the lurch.

One thing we have to thank Foch for, he never left us in the lurch. (*J. G.*)

Inviting trouble, that is acting or behaving in such a way as to bring trouble upon oneself may be colloquially put thus:

to look (ask) for trouble

Something in your eye says you're looking for trouble. That's the only kind of search that is bound to be a success you know. (*M. W.*) "Guess he is out looking for trouble," Roy said. "He may be looking for it right here," Jack said. (*J. Ald.*)

Well, to hell with it, he thought angrily, his life too complicated without looking for that kind of trouble all over again. (*M. W.*) "If you want to go out, I can't stop you," she said. "But it'll probably be your last. You and your chest on a day like this ..." "You and your chest," she said again. "It's just asking for trouble." (*N. C.*)

... I must say that you are asking for trouble ... (*J. Ald.*)

to ask for (it) — to take an action leading almost inevitably to an undesired result or trouble

You've been dismissed — but you did ask for it!
(*CD. E. S.*)

It's asking for it to put a wholly unexperienced player in the team. (*W. B.*)

to stick one's neck out — to adopt an attitude that invites trouble or unfavourable comment; to invite trouble unnecessarily

You won't stick your neck out if you don't need to? That's all I'm asking you, will you?
(*C. S.*)

However, if Willoughby wanted to stick his neck out — it was his neck. (*S. H.*)

And I'd like to be sure that I'm not the only one to stick out his neck. (*S. H.*)

Don't stick your neck out too far... (*D. A. S.*)

Seine colloquial phrases for trouble making are:

to stir up a hornets' nest (the nest of hornets) — to stir up host of enemies; cause a great outburst of angry feeling
To bring a hornets' nest about one's ears means the same thing.

... You don't seem to realize, Senator, that this has stirred up a hornets' nest. (*D. R.*) That suggestion of mine, it has indeed stirred up the nest of hornets. (*A. Chr.*)

to stir up trouble — to make trouble

Sounds innocent enough; but I can see through you. Get hold of the coloured folk round here and make them dissatisfied — put ideas in their heads — stir up trouble! (*D. R.*)

to raise (make, kick up) a dust (shindy) — to make a disturbance

You'd obviously got to raise the dust about Nightingale and give them an escape-route at one and the same damned time. (*C. S.*)
I don't want his lawyer to kick up a shindy about this. (*A. Chr.*)
They'll make a regular dust if they learn about it. (*C. D.*)

Warning of trouble to come may be expressed by these phrases in common use:

the fat is in the fire — what has been done will cause great trouble, excitement, anger, etc.

Well, the fat's in the fire. If you persist in your wilfulness, you'll have yourself to blame. (*J. G.*)
"Yes, " murmured Sir Lawrence watching her, "the fat is in the fire, as old Forsyte would have said." (*J. G.*)

trouble is brewing — trouble is about to come

Martin knew immediately the meaning of it. Trouble was brewing. The gang was his bodyguard. (*J. L.*)

you're for it — due for, or about to receive, punishment, etc.

Jones is late again, and this time he's for it. (*D. E. S.*)

A voice came right into the tower with us, it seemed to speak from the shadows by the trap — a hollow megaphone voice saying something in Vietnamese. "We're for it," I said. (*Gr. Gr.*)

A difficult task is colloquially speaking:

a large (tall) order — a task almost impossible to perform; a big thing to be asked to perform

"What you and I are going," he said expansively, "is to revolutionize this whole damn industry. That's a large order, and it may take us a long time but we'll pull it off." (*M. W.*) He says: "Well, Mr. Cauton, it looks a pretty tall order to me." (*P. Ch.*)

a hard nut to crack — a very difficult problem

The police cannot find any traces; the burglars have indeed given them a hard nut to crack. (*K. H.*)

A difficult or critical situation is also colloquially described by the adjectives **tricky** and **sticky**.

"Never mind," he consoled himself. "Nothing's so tricky when you've done it once." (*N. C.*) It was a tricky job, but Minerva pulled it off. (*L. A.*)

"It gets tricky here," Moose said as they entered the woods. (*J. Ald.*) I expect it'll be rather a sticky do. (*R. A.*)

A troublesome difficulty may be aptly expressed by a phrase from Hamlet: Aye, **there's the rub**.

But dreams! Ay, there was the rub. (*E. L.*)
Lammlein! Lammlein was involved, too. Here was the real rub. (*S. H.*)

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An unexpected difficulty (hindrance) is colloquially speaking
a snag or a hitch.

"If there's any snag, " said George, "I should expect
you to look on me as your banker." (*C. S.*) I take it
there won't be any hitch about that, Brown? (*C. S.*)

Some colloquial phrases to describe financial difficulties
are:

to be hard up — to be short of money

"She always talks about being hard up, " said Mrs.
Allerton with a tinge of spite. (*A. Chr.*) Oh, but we
may go to the theatre, you see, Mother, and I think I
ought to stand the tickets; he's always hard up, you
know. (*J. G.*)

(to be) in Queer street — (to be) extremely short of money;
in trouble; in debt

But if you ask me — the firm's not far off Queer
street. (*A. Chr.*)
A man must be in Queer street indeed to take a risk
like that. (*J. G.*)

(to be) on one's beam ends — to be without money, helpless
or in danger

"What has he to say for himself?"
"Nothing. One of his boots is split across the
toe." Soames stared at her.
"Ah!" he said, "of course! On his beam ends."
(*J. G.*)

to be (stony) broke — to be penniless

But we're less broke than we were. I could borrow a
dress from May Turner. (*M. W.*) He sobered up.
"Stony broke, " he said. (*G.*)

They can hardly (can't) make both ends meet also expresses
an acute financial embarrassment.

With the high rent for their flat they can hardly
make both ends meet on his small salary. (*K. H.*)

An end to troubles and difficulties may be put in this way:

it's all plain sailing now (difficulties are overcome)

plain sailing — freedom from difficulties, obstacles

The case was comparatively plain sailing. (*S. M.*)

After we engaged a guide everything was plain sailing. (*A. H.*)

If your wife had only shot Hammond once, the whole thing would be absolutely plain sailing. (*S. M.*)

He added in a tone unusually simple and direct: "This isn't altogether plain sailing, you know." (*C. S.*)

to blow over — to pass by; to be forgotten

"Don't worry, " said my mother, her face lined with care, defiant, protective, and loving. "Perhaps it will blow over." (*C. S.*)

To avoid trouble is **to keep out of it or steer clear of it.**

Keep out of mischief! (i. e. Don't get into mischief!) (*A. H.*)

Up till then he had always managed to steer clear of trouble. (*A. Chr.*)

Some proverbs dealing with trouble: **It**

never rains but it pours.

Misfortunes (troubles) never come singly. They mean: misfortunes do not come one by one but many come together.

One more proverbial expression on trouble is: **Pandora's box (of trouble)** — a source of troubles.

How do we know that we aren't opening a Pandora's box of trouble? (*A. Der.*) Well, let's not lift the lid of Pandora's box before we have to. (*D. R.*)

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FEAR AND COWARDICE

Colloquial phrases connected with the idea of fear include the following:

to get the wind up — to be frightened

Oh, the reason is clear. He lost his nerve. Got the wind up suddenly. (*A. Chr.*) Race suggested: "She may have recognized the stole as hers, got the wind up, and thrown the whole bag of tricks over on that account." (*A. Chr.*) "Shut up, Larkin, and don't get the wind up." (*R. A.*)

to put the wind up a person — to frighten him; to make him scared

I could put the wind up him by talking of that paper he had the copy wrapped in. (*V. L.*) That horror film is enough to put the wind up even the bravest man. (*W. B.*)

to have one's heart in one's mouth — to be in a state of tension or fear

Mary had her heart in her mouth when she heard the explosion in the workshop. (*K. H.*) My heart was in my mouth when I approached him. (*A. Chr.*)

to have one's heart in the boots — to be in a state of extreme depression and fear

Utter dejection or dismay may be also described thus: **his heart sank (sank into his boots).**

The driver had his heart in his boots when we lost our way in the desert and ran short of petrol. (*K. H.*)

His heart sank. He felt like turning away, a
beaten dog. (*A. C.*)
Mr. Squales' heart sank as he realized what it
was that he had done. (*N. C.*)
... when I returned home from dining at the
Inn; my heart sank. (*C. S.*)

A turn is colloquial for a nervous shock, hence:
to give a person a nasty (bad) turn — to shock or frighten
him

It gave him a nasty turn, but he put on a bold
front. (*S. M.*)
You gave us a bad turn, old thing. (*J. G.*)

to be scared stiff — to be terrified
to scare someone stiff — to terrify him
To be scared out of one's wits (senses) and to scare someone
out of one's wits (senses) are similarly used.

Organisation. Clever, such organisation. In a
group, you don't dare to admit that you're scared
stiff and that you want to go home. (*S. H.*)
"You don't seem worried," Pyle said.
"I'm scared stiff — but things are better than
they might be." (*Gr. Gr.*)
When the blow fell it is not strange that she was
scared out of her wits. (*S. M.*)

A person in a state of extreme fear is colloquially said to be in
a funk (blue funk); to funk (+ gerund) is to refuse to act
through cowardice; to fail to do something through fear; to
fear, to be afraid.

Each morning he climbed the stairs to the office in a
state of blue funk and all day he was like a cat on
hot bricks. (*M. E. M.*) You're in a funk. Pull yourself
together. It's all right I tell you. (*A. Chr.*) Before I
went to bed I found I was funking opening the front
door to look out. (*H. W.*) "Let's walk as far as the
park. I wanted to ask you about Jack Muskham." "I
funk telling him." (*J. G.*)

The coward is said **to have no guts (to do something); to have guts** is to possess courage.

It's all you can expect of a chap like that. He's got no guts. (*C. S.*)

Go on and do it, you lady's man. Show you've got guts. (*N. C.*)

to show the white feather — to exhibit cowardice

The young recruit had boasted of his bravery; but when the first bullets whizzed past his ears, he showed the white feather. (*K. H.*) It was reported ... he ... had certainly shown the white feather in his regiment. (*W. Th.*)

Other phrases in common use are:

to give one the creeps — to cause one to have sensation of fear and horror (or strong dislike)

The Square was too big for one woman to have all to herself. It was like taking a midnight walk on the moon. It gave Connie the creeps. (*N. C.*)

Let's get out of here. This place gives me the creeps. (*P. Ch.*)

The jitters is colloquial for a state of fear, excitement or other mental tension. Hence **to have (get) the jitters** — to be in (get into) a panic, frightened or nervous. Also: **to get (be) jittery (jumpy)**.

She laughed with a sort of shamed apology. "All right, darling. If you really have the jitters, we'll go to a movie." (*M. W.*) Many people get the jitters at examination time. (*W. B.*)

He'd got the jitters and didn't mind who knew it. (*N. C.*)

He was worried, wasn't he? Not that worried described it. He was excited. And jittery. (*N. C.*)

"Why, you're all of a tremble, Mr. Brown!" said Miss Spinks sympathetically. "What's getting you down? You're not usually jumpy like this." (*M. E. M.*) George was very jittery all last week. (*M. E. M.*)

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to give somebody the shivers — to cause a sensation of fear in him, to frighten him

You know, you think "my turn next" and it gives you the shivers. (*A. Chr.*) "You appeared so suddenly that it gave me the shivers," she said. (*A. Chr.*)

to get (have) cold feet — to be afraid, to lose courage

He ... urged me to go ahead not to faint or get cold feet. (*Th. D.*)

When one of the mountaineers saw the steep rock, he had cold feet, and went back to the refuge. (*K. H.*)

Some proverbs dealing with cowardice and fear: **Cowards die many times before their deaths.** (Cowards experience many times the fear of dying.) **He daren't say "Boo" to a goose.** (He is so timid and cowardly that he dare not frighten away a goose if it threatens him. The proverb is quoted to describe any very timid person.) **Faint heart never won a fair lady.** (A fair lady cannot be won in marriage unless the man shows courage.) The proverb comes out in favour of boldness in the pursuit of romance.

3

FIRMNESS AND CONTROL

The exercise of firmness and discipline is colloquially expressed by these phrases:

to put one's foot down — to be firm; to insist; firmly and without qualifications

This is one time I'm putting my foot down because it's more than your career — it's what we've got together. (*M. W.*)

"That's where I do put my foot down, " she said.
"We may have to live at the cottage ourselves
without Doris, because we've bought it. But I'm not
going to have Cynthia with us." (*N. C.*) When the
boy wanted to discontinue his studies to get
married, his father put his foot down. (*K. H.*)
Mildred said: "He's a most unbalanced young man
— and absolutely ungrateful for everything that's
been done for him — you ought to put your foot
down, Mother." (*A. Chr.*)

to pin a person down to ... (a promise, arrangement, date,
etc.) — to make him keep it; to refuse to let him take a
different course

I hope to pin her down to a definite undertaking
to sing at our charity concert. (*W. B.*)
"All I want to know is whether you'll go riding
with me again next Sunday?"
"I refuse to be pinned down like that. Really,
Derrick, you're the limit." (*L. A.*)

to lay down the law — to speak as one having authority and
knowledge, though not necessarily possessing either; to talk
authoritatively as if one were quite sure of being right

He could not bear ... hard-mouthed women who laid
down the law and knew more than you did. (*J. G.*)
Don't lay down the law to me! I shall say what I
think and nobody's going to stop me. (*W. B.*)

to keep a tight rein on — to be firm with; to allow little
freedom to; to control very carefully

He has to keep a tight rein on his passion for
collecting jade. (*W. B.*)

to make no bones about something — to act firmly without
hesitation

I tell you frankly I shall make no bones about doing
what I think is best. (*A. W.*) The squire made no
bones about the matter; he despised the captain. (*R.
S.*)

The workers made no bones about telling the employers that they would go on strike unless their wages were raised. (*K. H.*)

Phrases connected with the idea of control include the following:

in hand — under control

to take (have, keep) oneself in hand — to get control of oneself

She had her car well in hand when I saw her last. (*A. W.*)

These unruly children need to be taken in hand. (*A. H.*)

If he will take himself in hand, he ought to do well. (*J. M.*)

It's all my fault in a sense, but I have tried to keep myself in hand. (*J. G.*)

to pull oneself together — to recover one's normal self-control or balance

No, no, my dear: you must pull yourself together and be sensible. I am in no danger — not the least in the world. (*B. Sh.*)

She cleared her throat, pulled herself together and pertly addressed the man-servant. (*B. R.*)

Pennington suddenly pulled himself together. He was still a wreck of a man, but his fighting spirit had returned in a certain measure. (*A. Chr.*)

Keep your hair (shirt) on! means *Keep calm! Keep your temper!*

All right! Keep your hair on! There's no need to shout at me. (*A. W.*)

Jack Cofery was taken aback. "Keep your shirt on," he said. (*C. S.*)

He told the courier, "I got to say So Long to somebody. Keep your shirt on — I want to get away from here too!" (*S. H.*)

Absolute self-control is expressed in the following phrases:
not to turn a hair — to be quite calm and undisturbed; show no sign of being nervous, shocked or worried. Also: **without turning a hair**.

"Why should the Owens be upset?" "Wouldn't you turn a hair if you found that somebody of whom you have been making a friend turned out to be not what you liked them for, but a completely different person?" (*B. R.*) When the general received the news of his army defeat he did not turn a hair. (*A. W.*) "What do you think of her?" "Fascinating." "I'll tell her that, she won't turn a hair. The earth's most matter of fact young woman." (*J. G.*) When asked by the Detective-Inspector Smogg what he was doing between 8 and 11 p.m. on the night of the murder, he answered, without turning a hair, "What murder? This is news to me." (*W. B.*)

without batting an eyelid — without any signs of embarrassment, astonishment or other emotion **not to bat an eyelid** — not to show any sign of astonishment or other emotion

The innocent person is often acutely embarrassed when he is answering the judge's questions. But the guilty man will tell his lies without so much as batting an eyelid. (*W. B.*) "No, I'm not a guy who goes for dames, " I tell her without batting an eyelid. (*P. Ch.*)

The idea of losing control is contained in the phrases: **(to get, be) out of hand** — (to get, be) out of control, beyond control; undisciplined

The boys have quite got out of hand. (*A. H.*) Things are getting a little out of hand and I need someone. (*M. W.*)
"You are getting out of hand, " his wife said to him ... (*J. Ald.*)

to lose one's grip — to lose control of circumstances

The Prime Minister is losing his grip. He won't be able to command the country's confidence much longer. (*W. B.*)

He felt that he was losing his grip on audience. (*N. C.*)

to lose one's head — to lose one's presence of mind; to become irresponsible and incapable of coping with an emergency

When accused he lost his head completely and behaved like a fool. (*A. W.*)

"Don't ever lose your head like that again," said Haviland at last. (*M. W.*)

A great many servants might have lost their heads and let us down. (*B. R.*)

Losing one's self-control and getting angry may be described by these phrases in common use:

to lose one's temper — to lose one's self-control; to get angry

Well, she lost her temper and I didn't mine. (*J. G.*)
You have caused me to lose my temper: a thing • that has hardly ever happened to me before. (*B. Sh.*)

to fly off the handle; to fly out — suddenly take offence; to lose one's temper; to burst out suddenly into anger

"Don't you believe the old man's all right?" "Not for a minute. Nor will Julian. That's why I don't want him to fly off the handle." (*C. S.*) He flies off the handle at the least provocation. (*W. B.*)
He's a bit hot-tempered, a word and a blow, you know, flies off the handle. (*W. B.*)

4

IGNORANCE, INCOMPREHENSION AND MISUNDERSTANDING

"I don't know" is the simplest and the clearest form of admission of one's ignorance of something. But colloquial speech often prefers more emphatic statements, such as:

I haven't got		the slightest	idea (notion)
		the faintest	
		the	
		remotest	
		the foggiest	
		the vaguest	
		the least	

I haven't a notion (an idea, a clue). I have no idea (notion).

How much they could earn earnestly? I haven't the slightest idea. (*H. W.*) *Lady Plymdale*. Who is that well-dressed woman talking to Windermere?

Dumby. Haven't got the slightest idea. (*O. W.*) I've got an idea you're trying to tell me something but I haven't the faintest idea what it is. (*A. Chr.*)

What on earth you are serious about I haven't got the remotest idea. (*O. W.*) I haven't the vaguest idea where to start. (*M. W.*) "You did not know he was coming?" "I had not the least idea of it." "And have you no idea why he came?" (*A. Chr.*) I still hadn't the vaguest notion what I was going to do... (*J. P.*) I hadn't the faintest notion what all this was about. (*S. M.*)

I had no idea he was in Egypt... (*A. Chr.*) "What was his name?" "I haven't a notion." (*A. Chr.*)

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To be **(completely) in the dark (about something)** means the same thing.

"You and Miss Howard seem to know what you are talking about, " I observed coldly. "Perhaps you don't realize that I am still in the dark." (*A. Chr.*)
...there certainly were one or two points on which we were a little in the dark. (*B. Sh.*) Damn it all, man, two murders, and we're still in the dark. (*A. Chr.*)

I wouldn't know is also used to express ignorance of fact but implies / *cannot really be expected to know*,

"Did he go to see General The?"
"I wouldn't know." (*Gr. Gr.*)
"You don't know if Mr. Smith telephoned?"
"I wouldn't know, inspector." (*V. L.*)
"He was brilliant. What about his private life?"
Grant waited. "I wouldn't know." (*A. Der.*)

Ask **me another!** and **Search me!** admit complete ignorance but are a bit too colloquial for general use.

"Bill, " the Economic Attache said, "we want to know who Mick is." "Search me." (*Gr. Gr.*)
"How come no one is there looking after them?"
Roy asked.
"Search me, " Moose said. ... (*J. Ald.*)
Mrs. Jan Byl gripped Connie's arm. "What's that?" she asked. "Ask me another, " Connie answered. (*N. C.*)
"Are you one of them, Fleur?" "Ask me another." (*J. G.*) .

Other colloquial phrases expressing ignorance, especially ignorance of technique (not knowing how), are: **it's beyond me; it's got me beaten.**

The expression of her personality through the room, the conviction that she knew things which were beyond him, confounded him. (*A. C.*)

Have a look at this patent tin-opener, will you? It's got me beaten. I can't see how it works. (*W. B.*)

Ignorance of a particular subject is colloquially expressed thus:

It's (all) Greek (double Dutch) to me. — I can't understand it.

Tell him I don't know what he is talking about. It's double Dutch to me. (*A. Chr.*)
If only he could have understood the doctor's jargon, the medical niceties, ... but they were Greek to him — like a legal problem to a layman. (*J. G.*)

I'm out of my depth. (i.e. I can't understand the subject.)

Now I am quite out of my depth. I usually am •• when Lord Illingworth says anything. (*O. W.*) It's a funny thing, I'm afraid I got beyond my depth in it, but my intentions were good. (*J. L.*)

A fat lot you know! means *You don't know anything at all!*

His brogue! A fat lot you know about brogues! (*B. Sh.*)

I've lost my way (my bearings) admits ignorance of direction or locality.

"Where'll he come up?" asked Steevens. "I've lost my bearings." (*H. W.*) If you've lost your way, the lift is the third on the right. (*A. C.*)

I don't know my way around is similarly used. Colloquial phrases for not to know a person are: not to know him from Adam (not to know her from Eve)

A Mr. Withers — whom she did not know from Adam — having learned by some hook or crook

where she resided, bowed himself politely in.

(Th. D.)

"You are making some mistake, sir, " said he
eyeing the stranger as if he did not know him
from Adam. *(J. F.)*

"Do your people know the woman?" "Not from
Eve." *(V. L.)*

to be a complete stranger to one

I am sure they were complete strangers to one another.

(V. L.)

I can't place him (the name, face) means / *can't fully identify
him (it).*

The stranger's face was familiar to Lammlein, though
he couldn't place it. *(S. H.)* Jasha, Prince Bereskin —
somewhere Jates had heard his name, but he couldn't
quite place it. *(S. H.)*

Ignorance of future developments or of a person's intentions is
expressed by these phrases in common use: **one (you) never can
tell**

(you can't ever tell)

it is impossible to know

you never know there's no

knowing (telling)

But you can't ever tell what we're going to run into.

(M. W.)

Of course, there's a chance. One can't tell! *(S. L.)*

You never know what anybody's going to say and
do next. *(J. P.)*

"Let women into your plans, " pursued Soames,
"and you never know where it'll end." *(J. G.)* Why,
there's no knowing what you'll be able to do with it.
(C. S.)

What are you driving at? What are you up to? also express
ignorance of someone's intention.

What are you driving at? Are you crazy? *(A. Chr.)*

Goodness gracious! What are you up to? *(A. Chr.)*

He knows no better (He doesn't know any better) is a comment on ignorant behaviour. This is an excuse for a person who unwittingly does some wrong.

It was all my fault. These people don't know any better, but I do. (*A. C.*)

Brett. She's still young mama.

Bella. Young and no good.

Brett. She doesn't know any better. (*D. R.*)

Incomprehension and inability to understand use these phrases:

I don't (quite) get you (it).

I don't quite follow you.

I can't follow you (it).

I don't quite see (what you mean; why...).

I don't quite understand.

He hesitated: "I don't quite get you." (*C. S.*) The young man frowned. "I simply don't get it." (*A. Chr.*) I beg your pardon, I didn't quite get you. (*A. Chr.*) I'm afraid, Mr. Serrocold, that I don't quite follow you. (*A. Chr.*) They talked about various topics he didn't quite follow... (*R. A.*) I don't quite see what you mean. (*A. Chr.*) "I don't quite see why they tried to fix the blame on John," I remarked. (*A. Chr.*) I'm afraid I don't quite see what all this has to do with it. (*B. R.*) By the way, Mr. Anderson, I do not quite understand. (*B. Sh.*)

Other phrases similarly used include the following:

I can't make head or tail of it. — I can't understand it in the least.

Linnet thought she saw a telegram for her sticking up on the board. So she tore it open, couldn't make head or tail of it... (*A. Chr.*)

it beats me — I can't understand

:

"This thing beats me, " he whispered. "I don't see through it a bit." (*S. L.*)

"How you can stand that old fool beats me, " said Ferguson gloomily. (*A. Chr.*)

...it beats me what set you looking there.

(*A. Chr.*)

How he could be such a fool beats me! (*A. Chr.*)

I'm all at sea. — I'm unable to understand, in a state of ignorance about circumstances, situation, etc.

"Have you any theories?" he asked the sergeant. "I am all at sea, sir, " the other told him. (*A. Der.*)

I can't make it (him) out. — I can't understand it (him).

There's one thing I can't make out, why didn't he destroy it at once when he got hold of it? (*A. Chr.*)

I am sure I never can make out what you are talking about. (*O. W.*)

Complete misunderstanding (of a situation) is colloquially expressed thus:

to get it all wrong — to misunderstand it completely

"I know, " he rubbed his forehead. "I got things all wrong." (*A. Chr.*)

To get the wrong end of the stick has the same significance.

Her eyes flashed angrily. "You've got the wrong end of the stick, " she said. (*A. Chr.*)

Some proverbs dealing with ignorance are:

Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise. (As long as one remains in ignorance of certain unpleasant events he is likely to be happy — sometimes it is better not to know the unpleasant truth.)

A little knowledge is a dangerous thing.

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5

IRRITATION AND ANNOYANCE

Colloquial phrases for **to irritate**, **to annoy** include the following:

to get on one's nerves — to irritate, to annoy

Oh, dear, no. Ernest is invariably calm. That is one of the reasons he always gets on my nerves.

(O. W.)

Joanna amuses me, but I don't really like her, and to have her around much gets on my nerves.

(A. Chr.)

Don't let Peter get on your nerves, sweetheart.

I'd almost forgotten him. *(V. L.)*

to get under somebody's skin — to irritate

As a rule I was not touchy, but Howard had a *knack* of getting under my skin. *(C. S.)* The truth is, we all

get under his skin — particularly Gina, of course.

(A. Chr.) "I reckon that got under their skins," he said, rubbing his hands together. "That made them think." *(N. C.)*

to put someone's back up — to irritate, to antagonise

to get one's back up — to become irritated

She seemed perfectly self-possessed, but I had a notion that she was sizing me up. To tell you the truth it put my back up. *(S. M.)*

Oh, bother! There: don't be offended, old chap.

What's the use of putting your back up at every trifle? *(B. Sh.)*

They were rather reserved and you couldn't help seeing that they liked their own society better than other people's. I don't know if you've

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noticed it, but that always seems to put people's
back up. (*S. M.*)

"Whew!" said Simon. "You've put the old boy's
back up." (*A. Chr.*)

to rub (stroke) someone the wrong way — to irritate him

Whatever I say these days seems to rub him
up the wrong way. (*W. B.*)

His tactless questions rubbed her the wrong
way. (*K. H.*)

to get one's goat — to annoy, to exasperate

"You only say that, Daddy, to get my goat." "And
only because your goat is so easy to get." (*L. A.*)

What's wrong with England is Snobbishness. And if
there's anything that gets my goat it's a snob. (*S. M.*)

to give someone the pip — to annoy

Women drivers often give me the pip. (*A. W.*)

That gives me the pip. (*A. H.*)

His wish-wash gives me the pip. (*K. H.*)

to get (take) a rise out of someone — to annoy, to tease
him; to act in such a way that he gives a display of bad
temper, shows annoyance (or other weakness)

He said those unpleasant things to get a rise out of
you. (*A. H.*)

To be annoyed or vexed is colloquially speaking: **to be put
out (about something or with somebody)** — to be annoyed,
irritated

She missed it yesterday at lunch-time, sir, and told
me to look carefully for it. She was very much put
out about it. (*A. Chr.*)

"Do you mind telling me if they're much put out
with her?" "My people?" "Apparently not, " said
Ronnie... (*B. R.*)

An irritated person (or his nerves) may be said **to be on edge** (to be irritable; to be in a state of nervous tension).

"Strange things happen there."

"This is getting on my nerves," said the doctor...

Her nerves too were on edge. (*S. M.*)

"Take it easy, Larry, we're both a little on edge."

(*M. W.*)

to be (to get) sore (about something, at someone) — to be (to become) annoyed, vexed, hurt, aggrieved

"And you are not sore, any more?" he asked.

She turned and shook her head tenderly as if he were hopeless.

"No," she said, and it was her supreme understatement. "I'm not sore." (*M. W.*)

"What are you getting sore about?" White demanded. (*M. W.*)

"Don't get sore at me," he said. "It's not my fault." (*M. W.*)

to be fed up (with) — to be utterly bored with and tired of (This is rather slangy.)

He said in a grating tone: "I'm fed up" "What?" cried Tom. "I'm fed up with being talked about." (*C. S.*)

To be (get) sick and tired of — to be (become) annoyed, tired of, disgusted with. Also: **to be sick to death of; to be deadly sick of.**

"I'm sick and tired of going over stuff you know as well as I do," said Howard... (*C. S.*) It was interesting enough at first, while we were at the phonetics; but after that I got deadly sick of it. (*B. Sh.*)

Exasperation, annoyance and irritation may be expressed by these exclamations and phrases:

Annoyance:

Such a bore! What a bore! What a nuisance! Oh, bother!

How annoying! How vexing! How awful! Etc.

Exasperation:

(it's) enough to drive a man to drink; (it's) enough to try

the patience of a saint (of Job); enough to make a saint swear; (it's) enough to make you tear your hair.

What a nuisance their turning us out of the club at this time! (*O. W.*)

"It is such a bore putting on one's dress clothes," muttered Hallward. (*O. W.*)

"Listen: will you dine with me to-night?"

"Darling, I'm so sorry, but I simply can't. I've an appointment I simply must keep. Such a bore!"

"Such a bore, as you say!" (*R. A.*)

Oh, bother! There: don't be offended, old chap.

What's the use of putting your back up at every trifle? (*B. Sh.*)

Having his house constantly full of gossiping women is enough to drive a man to drink. (*W. B.*)

The remonstrances... I have received... have been enough to make a saint swear. (*Fr. M.*)

Irritation may be also expressed by using the phrase on earth after the interrogative word of a question: **Why on earth...? What on earth...? How on earth...? Where on earth...?** Etc.

What on earth's he doing out here?" Tim asked.

His mother laughed. "Darling, you sound quite excited." (*A. Chr.*)

What! Why on earth should you say that? (*B. R.*)

Why on earth didn't you say so before? (*W. B.*)

6

KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Thorough knowledge (understanding) of a thing (person) is expressed by these phrases in common use:

to know something (somebody) like the palm of one's hand

—
to know thoroughly

Everything that can be done is being done, you needn't worry about that. Martin knows the place like the palm of his hand. (*C. S.*)

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"You are what we call 'quick in the uptake',
Mr. Poirot".

"Ah, that, it leaps to the eye!" (*A. Chr.*) She was not at all shy, and she asked me to call her Sally before we'd known one another ten minutes, and she was quick in the uptake. (*S. M.*)

Some general phrases of understanding are:

to know what is what — to have proper knowledge of the world and of things in general

He isn't such a fool as they took him for. He knows what is what. (*N. C.*)

"And that won't wash!" said Trager. "He knows what is what." (*V. L.*)

Never you mind. It shows you know what is what. (*S. M.*)

to know the ropes — to be thoroughly familiar with the details of any occupation; to be worldly and sophisticated

"Did he find it easy?"

"I expect he knew the ropes." (*C. 5.*)

Mr. Bart said not to worry. And he's smart. He knows the ropes. (*N. C.*)

to know a thing or two — to have practical ability and common sense

You needn't have to worry about her. She'll be a help too. Not just a bleeding drag. She knows a thing or two already, not like Doris. (*N. C.*)

He wasn't born yesterday! — He is not a fool, he is a shrewd and knowing person.

The new Headmaster will stand no nonsense from anybody. He wasn't born yesterday, I can tell you. (*W. B.*)

to know on which side one's bread is buttered — to know where one's interests lie

Bosinney looked clever, but he had also — and it was one of his great attractions — an air as if he

did not quite know on which side his bread were buttered; he should be easy to deal in money matters. (*J. G.*)

Mary often stays with her old uncle and keeps house for him. He is very rich, and she knows on which side her bread is buttered. (*K. H.*)

to know better (than...) — to be wise enough not to...

My father would talk morality after dinner. I told him he was old enough to know better. But my experience is that as soon as people are old enough to know better, they don't know anything at all. (*O. W.*) She ought to know better than to ask him. (*A. Chr.*)

to get to know — to become acquainted

"Well, well, " he said, "we want to get to know our new friends, don't we, Mother?" (*N. C.*) He is all right when you get to know him. (*J. P.*) Compared to John, he was an astoundingly difficult person to get to know. (*A. Chr.*) Was there any way of getting to know where Hetty was? (*V. L.*)

Understanding is often colloquially expressed by these verbs: **to see**, especially in **I see** (I understand), to get and to catch (on).

"A man?" asked Esa.

"Man or woman it is the same."

"I see." (*J. P.*)

"I see what you mean, " said Mr. Satterthwaite.

(*A. Chr.*)

"Then tie my wrist up to my shoulder somehow, as hard as you can. Do you get that? Tie up both my arms."

"Yes, I get it." (*J. Ald.*)

"All right, " said Percy. "I get you." Mr. Basks, however, could see that he hadn't got him. (*N. C.*)

Do you catch my meaning? (*A. H.*)

An amusing phrase meaning a belated act of comprehension is:

The penny's dropped, (i. e. He's at last got my meaning.)

Two common sayings commenting on knowledge:

Knowledge is power. (The more a man knows, the greater power he has.)

Live and learn. (As long as you live there'll be new things to learn. This is usually said by someone who has just learned something which he did not know before.)

"But Mummy, I had no idea you were so immoral!"

"We live and learn" (*L. A.*)

MISTAKES AND FAILURES

The idea of making a mistake is present in the following phrases in common use:

to put one's foot in it — to commit a blunder

Sir George mopped his moist forehead. "I'm afraid I've put my foot in it." (*C. D.*)

That's why I haven't moved till now, sir. It is the sort of a case a man might well put his foot in. (*V. L.*)

Why did you ask Smith how his wife is when you know she's left him? You are always putting your foot in it. (*A. W.*)

I'm sorry if I put my foot in it, Miss Morris. (*B. R.*)

Wendy? Well, he had put his foot in it now, even if he didn't know it. (*V. L.*)

to drop a brick — to make a bad mistake, especially to make a stupid and indiscreet social mistake

I dropped a brick by inquiring after her husband, not knowing that she was divorced last year. (*K. H.*)

"Whatever happens, " Mickael thought, " I've got to keep my head shut, or I shall be dropping a brick."
(*J. G.*)

At dinner I lit a cigarette before the host had given permission. That was only the first of many bricks I dropped that evening. (*W. B.*)

Miscalculation uses the following phrases:

to bark up the wrong tree — to act under a mistake; to blame the wrong person or thing

But because I like you and respect your pluck I'll do you a good turn before we part. I don't want you to waste time barking up the wrong tree. (*St.*) (*Ch.*)

If you think your driver was responsible for the accident, you are barking up the wrong tree. (*K. H.*)

to back the wrong horse — to misplace one's trust

In voting for the Republicans you backed the wrong horse, since they lost thousands of votes
(*K. H.*)

His promises came to nothing. I'm afraid we've backed the wrong horse this time. (*W. B.*)

Over-estimating one's strength:

to bite off more than one can chew — to try to achieve something beyond one's power; to underestimate the difficulties

He works overtime, attends evening classes, and studies French; I think he bit off more than *he* can chew. (*K.. H.*)

Over-estimating one's chances:

to count one's chickens before they are hatched — to be too hopeful of one's chances

I'm not counting my chickens before they're hatched, Simon. I tell you Linnet won't let us down!
(*A. Chr.*)

"Dinny will have two boys and a girl." "Deuce she will! That's counting her chickens rather fast." (*J. G.*)

Do not catch your chickens before they are hatched. (Do not

be too optimistic — proverbial advice to those likely to suffer disappointment through miscalculation.) Getting things in the wrong order:

to put the cart before the horse — to do or put things in the wrong order; to reverse the proper order of things

"Well, Charles, I hope we shan't have a crime this week-end." "Why? Because we've got a detective in the house? Rather putting the cart before the horse, aren't you Tolly?" (*A. Chr.*)

To say "I was lazy because I didn't study" is to put the cart before the horse. (*A. H.*)

To read English novels before you have mastered English grammar is to put the cart before the horse. (*K. H.*)

Colloquial phrases to express failure include the following: **to fall through** — to fail to materialise; to come to nothing; to fail

We were going into partnership, but the scheme fell through. (*D. E. S.*)

He made careful plans but they all fell through. (*A. H.*)

to miss the bus — to fail to seize a vital opportunity

There were several vacancies in the new plant, but Geoffrey missed the bus. (*K. H.*) While the industry was paralyzed by the strike, our competitors stepped in and seized our trade, and we found we had missed the bus again. (*W. B.*)

to be a flop — to be a complete failure, a fiasco

The play was a flop. (*W. B.*)

The first American attempt to launch an artificial satellite proved to be a flop. (*D. W.*)

to go to the wall — to fail; to succumb to superior force; to get the worst of it (Out of the proverb: **The weakest goes to the wall.**)

In the conflict throughout the house the women had gone to the wall. (*J. G.*)
Business is a hard game, and the weak go to the wall.
I played the game for all it was worth. (*St.*)

to come a cropper — to fail badly or suffer disaster; to fall heavily

He came a cropper in an examination. (*A. H.*)
"Well, all I hope, Mr, Hoopdriver, is that you'll get fine weather," said Miss Howe. "And not come any nasty coppers." (*H. W.*)

to take a plough — to fail in an examination

My son wasted his time in pubs and night-clubs; he has taken a plough now. (*K. H.*)

to fall flat — to fail to have the intended effect; to evoke no favourable reaction or response from an audience (of a speech, performance)

His best jokes all fell flat. (i. e. did not make anyone laugh) (*A. H.*)
The scheme fell flat. (i. e. failed completely) (*A. H.*)
The new play fell completely flat and was only weakly applauded. (*K. H.*)

not to come off — to fail

When I knew him, he had been a scientist who had not come off, and at the same time an embittered bachelor. (*C. S.*)

Failure to obtain any results or make further progress may be described by the following colloquial phrases:

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to draw a blank — to get nothing; to obtain a negative or no result

As regards a link with Mr. Babbington, you have drawn the blank — yes, but you have collected other suggestive information. (*A. Chr.*)

not to get (someone) anywhere — to obtain no result; to make no progress

It's not getting us anywhere. — We're not making any progress.

Stop throwing around your recriminations, Lieutenant — they'll never get us anywhere. (*S. H.*)
"Don't speak like that to me!" Martin broke out. Then getting back his usual tone he said: "Look, this isn't going to get us anywhere." (*C. S.*) Carruthers pleaded. "But we don't want that old stuff. It hasn't been getting us anywhere." (*S. H.*)

A check to progress may be put in this way: **a set-back; to have (suffer) a set-back.**

I can't really understand why he had this sudden set-back. (*A Chr.*)

He was improving, improving very much. Then for some reason he had a set-back. (*A. Chr.*)

But in spite of all precautions, he had a set-back. (*D. L.*)

She did not shut her eyes to any set-back, and yet maintained an absolute and unqualified faith that the cause would triumph in the end. (*C. S.*)

to get (be) stuck (for) — to be brought to a halt; to make no headway

I'm not satisfied with the way things are going. I don't want them to get stuck and they will get stuck unless we're careful. (*C. S.*) "Are you stuck so soon?" Erik sat down and silently took one of the cigarettes from the desk. "I'm not stuck, " he said in dejection, "I was able to follow everything." (*M. W.*)

To fail a person in a time of need is colloquially **to let him (her) down**.

"I tell you Linnet won't let us down!" "I might let her down". (*A. Chr.*)

Darling Linnet — you're a real friend! I knew you were. You wouldn't let me down — ever. "*(A. Chr.)*

The girl in the restaurant mentioned a friend — a friend who, she was very positive, would not let her down. (*A. Chr.*)

If my health let me down, I had lost. (*C. S.*)

I've done my best not to let them down. (*C. S.*)

Commiseration for a failure may be expressed thus:

Bad luck! Rotten luck! Hard lines! Better luck next time: Your luck was cut.

"Bad luck!" exclaimed Ronnie Owen before he knew he had spoken. (*B. R.*) "Rotten luck, isn't it?"

"Rotten." (*S. M.*)

"Oh, dear, that was hard lines, " said Miss Moss, trying to appear indifferent. (*K. M.*) He's won again. My luck is definitely out tonight. (*W. B.*)

Some proverbial comments:

A miss is as good as a mile. (A failure is still a failure even though it came near to success.)

"If it hadn't been that the revolver wasn't cocked, you'd be lying dead there now." Mr. Ledbetter said nothing but he felt that the room was swaying. "A miss is as good as a mile. It's lucky for both of us it wasn't". (*H. W.*)

It is no use crying over spilt milk. (When we have made mistakes through carelessness, or suffered loss that cannot be recovered, we should not waste our time weeping)

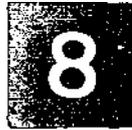
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or regretting what has happened, but should make the best of it and be more careful in the future.)

"Oh, dear me!" exclaimed Carrie. Then she settled back with a sigh. "There's no use crying over spilt milk," she said. "It's too late." (*Th. D.*)

Every dog has his day. (Neither success nor failure is permanent, even the most wretched person can expect at least one day of good fortune in his life.)

Well, every dog has his clay; and I have had mine: I cannot complain. (*B. Sh.*)



PERPLEXITY, INDECISION AND CONFUSION

Perplexity is colloquially expressed by these phrases: to be (feel) (all) at sea. This phrase is applied to a person confused, puzzled, not knowing how to act or in uncertainty of mind.

He was all at sea when he began his new job (*A. H.*)

She felt, indeed, completely at sea as to what really moved the mind of the authority. (*J. G.*)

"Everything's simply perfect at his stud farm.

Luckily I really am frightfully keen about horses. I didn't feel at sea with Mr. Muskham." (*J. G.*)

To be at one's wits' end is to be greatly perplexed, not to know what to do or say (in an emergency). This phrase registers complete perplexity with regard to action.

The car broke down on our way to Edinburgh. I could not find the defect, though I tried my hardest and soon I was at my wits' end. (*K. H.*) "Hard up, are you?"

"My dear Hastings, I don't mind telling you that I'm at my wits' end for money." (*A. Chr.*) Now she was breathing rather quickly, yet spoke slowly: "Mrs. Howels was at her wits' end." (*A. C.*)
But in that flash was seen the other Carrie — poor, hungry, drifting at her wits' end. (*Th. D.*)

To be at a loss is to be puzzled and perplexed, to be in uncertainty or unable to decide. This phrase is often modified by various adverbs of degree and frequency.

He is never at a loss for an effective moral attitude (*B. S.*)

Freddie revived himself quickly. He was seldom at a loss, and never for any length of time. (*A. C.*) "My dear Louisa. My poor daughter." He was so much at a loss at that place, that he stopped altogether. (*Ch. D.*)

You know, Venetia, you have a mind like a man.

You're never at a loss. (*S. M.*) For once she seemed at a loss. (*A. Chr.*) The two men on either side of her were momentarily at a loss. (*A. Chr.*)

He was completely at a loss as to what step to take next... . (*A. C.*)

The doctor was for once slightly at a loss. (*A. C.*)

"But do you know, " he asked quite at a loss, "the extent of what you ask?" (*Ch. D.*)

to be in a maze — to be in a state of confusion or bewilderment

I was in a maze when I received the news. (*K. H.*)

The perplexity caused by ambiguous behaviour finds an outlet in these questions: **What's he up to? What's he after? What's his (little) game?**

"What's Dondolo been up to?" asked Tolachian trying to get the drift of what was on the other two men's minds.

"What's he been up to?" said Bing "His old tricks "
(*S. H.*)

"What have you been up to? Where have you
been?" he repeated. (*A. C.*)

"What are you after?" said Smithers in a noisy
whisper and with a detective eye on the papers... .

"Oh, — nothing, " said Lewisham blandly, with
his hand falling casually over his memoranda.

"What's your particular little game?" (*H. W.*)

Perplexity and indecision also use these phrases:

to be in a quandary — to be in a perplexing situation or in
a dilemma

The weather was so changeable that I was in a
quandary what things to take with me. Escaping the
last drive, Dinny walked home by herself. Her sense
of humour was tickled, but she was in a quandary.

(*J. G.*)

When Hurstwood. got back to his office again he
was in greater quandary than ever. (*Th. D.*)

**To be in a dilemma or to be caught (put) on the horns of
the dilemma** is colloquial for to be faced with a difficult
choice (and hence to be perplexed). Also: **to put (place)
someone in a dilemma.**

Dawson-Hill was in a dilemma. He was too shrewd
a man, too good a lawyer, not to have seen the crisis
coming. (*C. S.*)

George found himself in a fix last week. He had
promised to go to his friend Arthur's engagement
party on Friday, Then the Managing Director
invited him to dinner the same evening, and this put
George on the horns of a dilemma, either he must
disappoint his old friend or he must risk offending
the great man. (*M. E. M.*) With a strong mental
effort Sir Lawrence tried to place himself in a like
dilemma. (*J. G.*) The direct question placed Andrew
in a dilemma (*A. C.*)

To fall between two stools is to fail through hesitating be-
tween two courses of action, to lose an opportunity through

inability to decide between two alternatives. So as the proverb puts it:

Between two stools you fall to the ground. (A person who cannot decide which of two courses to follow or who tries to follow two courses at the same time may fail to follow either.)

"So how it's to go on I don't know. Lawrence doesn't save a penny."

We're falling between two stools, Em; and one fine day we shall reach the floor with a bump " (*J. G.*)

He tried to keep in with the two opponents, but - he fell between two stools. (*K. H.*)

to be in two (twenty) minds — to be undecided; to hesitate

"When I saw you last, " he said, "I was in two minds. We talked and you expressed your opinion." (*J. G.*)

She was in two minds whether to speak of the feeling Corven's face had roused in her. (*J. G.*) I'm still in two minds about his proposals. (*K. H.*) I was in twenty minds whether to go or stay.

The following proverb warns us of danger of hesitation: **He who hesitates is lost.** (Hesitation causes one to lose one's chances.)

not to know one's (own) mind — to be undecided; to be full of doubt and hesitation

"I don't hold with a man marrying till he knows his own mind, " she went on. "And a man doesn't know his own mind till he's thirty or thirty-five."

(*S. M.*)

Mother, how changeable you are! You don't seem to know your own mind for *a* single moment.

(*O. W.*)

You are trifling with me, sir. You said that you did not know your own mind before. (*B. Sh.*)

If you're undecided as to how some important problem should be solved, it's better to sleep on (over) it (i. e. wait till to-morrow before taking any important decision.

After a night's sleep and calm thought your decision is likely to be a wise one — wiser than if you decide hurriedly.)

I don't feel able to come down finally one way or the other until I've slept on it. (C. S.)

"I'm obliged to tell you, " said Brown, "that I'm astonished to hear the bare suggestion. Ail I can hope is that when you've slept on it you will realize how unforgivable all of us here would judge any such action to be." (C. S.) I told him I would give her a shake-down here, last night, in order that he might sleep on it before he decided to let her have any association with Louisa. (Ch. D.)

When I'm in a jam about something, I always like to sleep on it before I come to a decision (M. E. M.)

Indecision sometimes finds expression in Yes and No.

Gus had saved her. Did she wish he hadn't? No and yes. (V. L.)

"Did you mind him doing that?" Jane took a moment to answer. "Well, yes and no." (W. B.)

to shilly-shally — to be unable to make up one's mind; to be undecided

He's a weak man and he shilly-shallied. (S. M.)

This shilly-shallying with the question is absurd. (O. W.)

My dear, it's no good shilly-shallying. We can't go on like this. (S. M.)

That's not quite fair, " said Brown steadily, "but I don't want to shilly-shally." (C. S.)

Some common phrases to express **confusion** are:

a) confusion of action

not to know which way to turn — to be confused and not to know how to act or what to do (or say)

It's not too much trouble, mother. I'll tell you tonight, " I said not knowing which way to turn. (C. S.)

Oh, this is awful — I don't know what to do nor
which way to turn! (*M. T.*)

not to know if one is standing on one's head or one's heels

—
to be confused; not to know how to act or what to do (say)

I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels
when you all start on me like this. (*B. Sh.*) I got
information so contradictory that I didn't know
whether I stood on my head or my heels. (*K. H.*)

**Not to know what to do for the best and not to know
whether one is coming or going are also similarly used.**

If I leave her I know she'll ask for me. But if
I stay she'll only find fault with me. I don't know
what to do for the best. (*W. B.*)
He doesn't know whether he is coming or going.
(*W. B.*)
Oh, this is awful. I don't know what to do for
the best.

b) confusion of thought

**to be (get) all mixed up or to be (get) all muddled up — to
be**

confused in mind

"Greg, will you admit one thing?" she said getting
up.

"Then I'm going. You're all mixed up inside you,
aren't you?" ...

"Yes," I said, "war and all that stuff." "But that's
not what I mean. I'm allowing for that. It's you —
inside yourself — that's mixed up — yes, all
muddled and churned up Aren't you?" (*J. P.*)

"Give me a chance to think it over," he replied
exhausted. "I'm too damned mixed up." (*M. W.*)
Don't go now about samples and prices and cross-
breeds and things, because anyhow it's boring and I
get all mixed up. (*J. P.*) I'm getting slightly
muddled," said Crawford, not sounding so in the
least. (*C. S.*)

I can't think straight may be used with the same meaning.

"I know." He rubbed his forehead. "I got things all wrong. There are times when I can't think straight. I get muddled." (*A. Chr.*)

c) confusion and disorder in general

Some adverbial and adjectival phrases in common use are: **(all) at sixes and sevens** is used of things which are in a state of utter confusion or out of order.

The servants have gone off leaving everything at sixes and sevens. (*W. M.*) We have just transported the machines into the new workshop, and everything is at sixes and sevens. (*K. H.*) There's a regular shindy in the house; and everything at sixes and sevens. (*W. Th.*) I'm doing my level best but everything is at sixes and sevens. (*L. L.*)

upside down — in disorder; in confusion

"I don't know what I've done, " said Soames huskily.

"I never have. It's all upside down. I was fond of her; I've always been." (*J. G.*)

"Oh, dear, " said Mrs.-Alington, "I hope they are not turning the place upside down." (*J. P.*)

Topsyturvy is similarly used.

(to be) in a muddie (mess, tangle) — in a state of confusion and disorder

"Oh, do come in, " Cynthia urged her after a pause that was just a moment too long. "Everything's in an awful muddle. But do come in." (*N. C.*) After he had finished packing the furniture, the whole room was in a mess. (*A. H.*) Everything was in a tangle and I couldn't find what I wanted. (*A. H.*)

helter-skelter — (in) disorderly haste (used of a precipitate action, often in making a hasty retreat)

When the rain came the cricketers rushed helter-skelter for the pavilion. (*W. B.*) I knew that Geraldine kept her papers in two drawers at the bottom of her desk. Into these she had thrown what she wanted to keep, helter-skelter. ... (*L. A.*)

pell-mell — in a confused, disordered manner

... when looking down into the lock from the quay, you might fancy it was a huge box into which flowers of every hue and shade had been thrown pell-mell. ... (*J. J.*)

higgledy-piggledy — in utter confusion or complete disorder

Trager had one of those minds in which little bits of observation, deduction, flashes of inspiration, and ideas born of a wide experience floated about higgledy-piggledy. ... (*V. L.*)

haywire — in an unusual, confused manner; confused (used of things that seem to act illogically and uncontrollably)

I don't know what's happened to the Ruritarians. Their foreign policy seems to have gone completely haywire. (*W. B.*) This radio's gone haywire. (*D. A. S.*)

a bear garden (a bedlam) — a place full of noise and confusion

But the way he's gone about it, it's making the college into a bear garden. (*C. S.*)
The room was just like a bedlam when I went in.

A pretty (nice, fine) kettle of fish is colloquial for a confused and difficult situation.

When she had gone Soames reached for the letter. "A pretty kettle of fish," he muttered. (*J. G.*) The apprentice had broken the driving motor of the machine. It was a nice kettle of fish. (*K. H.*)

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PLAINNESS AND EASINESS

The following colloquial phrases and comparisons are used to underline the fact that something is quite clear and plain: (to be) as plain as a pikestaff — (to be) perfectly clear and obvious

That Jane would have trouble with the fellow was as plain as a pikestaff; he had no more idea of money than a cow. (*J. G.*)

I can't give you long time to make up your mind. That's as plain as a pikestaff, isn't it? (*C. S.*) Why do you ask me again? Everything is as plain as a pikestaff. (*K. H.*)

to stick out a mile — to be obvious, extremely conspicuous

By the way, I confess I think Nightingale's had a rough deal. The one thing that sticks out a mile to my eye is that he's as blameless as a babe unborn. (*C. S.*)

I knew that sooner or later she would break down. It stuck out a mile. (*S. M.*)

Don't tell any more lies. I can prove you were there. It's sticking out a mile. (*J. P.*)

(to be) as plain as the nose on one's face — (to be) perfectly obvious

Alice's voice: You mustn't talk like that. The servants will —

Langdon's voice: It's as plain as the nose on my face! (*CD. R.*)

It's as plain as the nose on your face, Roebuck, that she won't go because she doesn't want to be separated from this man.... (*B. Sh.*)

(to be) as clear (plain) as day (daylight)

"Oh, come!" said Summerhayes, opening his lips for the first time. "Surely the whole thing is clear as daylight. The man's caught red-handed." (*A. Chr.*) Presently he said to himself: "What to do is as plain as day, now." (*M. T.*)

it leaps to the eye(s) — it is extremely conspicuous; it stands out; it catches one's eye

"You are what we call 'quick in the uptake!'" "Ah, that, it leaps to the eye." (*A. Chr.*) They tell me he is away — in Cornwall. It leaps to the eye where he has gone. (*A. Chr.*)

to see something with half an eye — to see it easily because it is obvious

Anyone can see with half an eye that you're in love with her. (*A. W.*)
We could see with half an eye that he was a swindler. (*K.H.*)
I saw with half an eye that all was over. (*R. S.*) You can see with half an eye that she is in love. (*D. E. S.*)

it (that) goes without saying — it is quite obvious

"I prefer your not taking advantage of this offer." Lammlein raised his hands. "But that goes without saying, sir." (*S. H.*) "And, remember all this is in confidence." "Oh, of course — that goes without saying." (*A. Chr.*)
"We have to keep friends anyhow and hear of each other." "That goes without saying." (*H. W.*)

Comparisons are also commonly used to underline the fact that a thing is easy to do:

(it's) as easy (simple) as falling off a log — extremely easy (simple)

"Easy as falling off a log, if you use your head properly, " it was saying. "All it needs is timing.

Pick your moment." (*N. C.*)

"I don't quite follow you, Freddy, " Manson said.

"Why, it's as simple as falling off a log..." (*A. C.*)

(it's) as easy as kiss your hand (my thumb) — extremely easy

When two attendants got out their stretcher and walked importantly through the middle of the crowd, Connie followed them closely like a kind of plain-clothes nurse. She was inside the shop as easy as kiss your hand. (*N. C.*)

As easy as ABC; as easy as winking; as easy as shelling peas

are similarly used.

"Easy as shelling peas, " he kept telling himself.

"Easy as winking. And a cool fifty at the end of it." (*N. C.*)

He found the job they had given him as easy as shelling peas. (*K. H.*)

"Well, it's as easy as ABC, " she said. (*A. Chr.*)

Plain sailing is colloquial for clear and straight course; freedom from difficulties, obstacles; **it's all plain sailing now** (difficulties are overcome).

The case was comparatively plain sailing. (*S. M.*)

After we engaged a guide everything was plain sailing. (*A. H.*)

Verbal phrases connected with the idea of easiness are: to **take something in one's stride** — to do it easily; to do it without any special effort

How d'you like the old car now? I've lengthened her a good two feet. Isn't she grand? Mind you, there's still a little bother with the gearbox.

We didn't quite take the hill in our stride, as
ye might say! (*A. C.*)
"Boche patrols all over!" "Two armored cars!"
Mantin took the news in his stride. He seemed
to know what was up. (*S. H.*)
They could not take their luck in their stride.
(*C. S.*)

to waltz (romp) through (**an examination**) — to do it with
ease

He waltzed through his examinations. (*W. B.*)

Other phrases similarly used are: **I can do it blindfold; I can
do it standing on my head; I can do it with my hands tied
behind my back**, all meaning *I can do it quite easily, without
efforts*.

He can do it standing on his head. (*W. B.*)

a walk-over — an easy victory; a complete and easy victory
in a competition.

"How were the Finals?"
Bill grinned. "Oh, them, " he said. "They're jam.
They're a walk-over." (*N. C.*)
They had a walk-over in the men's doubles
(*W. B.*)

To have an easy victory is **to win hands down**.

Bickering. Oh, come! the garden party was fright-
fully exciting. My heart began beating like any-
thing.

Higgins. Yes, for the first three minutes. But when I
saw we were going to win hands down, I felt like a
bear in a cage, hanging about doing nothing. (*B.
Sh.*)

He won all his money hands down. (*K. H.*) You can
leave all the rest to me — it's all over but the
shouting, and we win hands down. (*J. F.*)

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Colloquial phrases that serve to correct a misapprehension about the ease and comfort of something (a job, etc.) are: **it's not all beer and skittles; it's not all lavender** — it's not all pleasure, comfort and ease

An editor's job is not all beer and skittles. (*W. B.*)

An entertainer's life is not all beer and skittles (*W.*

B.) It's not all lavender being a queen. (*D. E. S.*)

it's no picnic — it's not easy; it's not an easy and pleasant affair

A proverb on the same lines:

Life is not all beer and skittles. (Life contains trouble as well as pleasures and one should expect to meet difficulties in life as well as easy times.)



PROGRESS, ACHIEVEMENT, SUCCESS

Progress and success in the affairs of life may be expressed by these colloquial phrases:

to make good — to succeed in spite of obstacles; to make a success of things

Well, I made good in the end, didn't I, and there's a little token to remember it by. (*J. M.*) I had been employed in one business and another quite a good few years, more years than I cared to look back upon; and yet I hadn't made good. I hadn't made good, and I knew I hadn't made good, and sometimes this knowledge that I hadn't made good made me feel bad. (*S. L.*) What if he didn't make good? (*M. W.*) If he doesn't make good, sack him. (*A. Chr.*) ... but they couldn't deny he had made good (*S. M.*)

to get on (very well) — to progress with one's profession or business; to make a success of things; to prosper

When I had first entered the great houses in which she was brought up, I had been a poor young man determined to get on. (*C. S.*)

You talk as if I was some kind of dirty crook.

I only want to get on. (*A. C.*)

"How will you get on without a team?" Roy said unhappily.

"I won't get on, unless you give me a hand."

(*J. Ald.*)

But Herbert got on very well at school. He was a good worker and far from stupid. His reports were excellent. (*S. M.*)

"How have you been getting on?" "All right, " she said regarding him. (*H. W.*)

to shape well — to give promise of success

Our plans are shaping well. (*A. H.*)

"Well hit, Harris!" shouted Bonover, and began to clap his hands. "Well hit, sir." "Harris shapes very well, " said Mr. Lewisham. (*H. W.*)

It would be best of Irene to come quietly to us at Robin Hill, and see how things shape. (*J. G.*)

to make out (*Amer.*) — to get along; to succeed

Well, if it ain't old Barnacle Bill back from the sea!
How are you making out, Dad? (*J. M.*)

A person who is successful in life through one's own efforts is said to be self-made.

He was a success himself and proud of it. He was self-made. No one had helped him. He owed to no man. (*J. L.*)

I said I was a self-made man; and I am not ashamed of it. (*B. Sh.*)

Pretty well this, for a self-made man. (*Ch. D.*)

The idea of achievement or success is also contained in the following phrases in common use:
to make it — ultimately succeed (frequently applied to a punctual arrival)

There you are, Edgar. I thought I wouldn't make it in time. (*A. Chr.*)

The list of examinations which stood between Erik and degree was made even more formidable by Maxwell's quiet recitation. "Some fellows make it, and others don't. It depends on what you want."

"I want to make it," said Erik simply. (*M. W.*)

The train leaves at 7.25; can we make it? (reach the station in time to catch it) (*A. H.*)

to pull (bring) off something — to bring to a successful conclusion; to succeed in a plan, in winning something, etc.
Also: **to pull it off and bring it down.**

He said: "I hope I can pull it off."

"You've got to pull it off," his partner said.

(*A. Chr.*)

That's a large order, and it may take us a long time, but we'll pull it off. (*M. W.*)

"Well, look here," Tom went on, "I've got an idea and it's a big thing. If we can pull it off and bring it down, I believe we can put it over."

(*S. L.*)

"You ought to bring off something," she teased me, "with your automatic competence." (*C. S.*)

I never made up my mind to do a thing yet that I didn't bring it off. (*B. Sh.*)

"I must say," she cried, "I should like to bring off something for him." (*C. S.*)

to do the trick — to achieve one's object

You don't need million volts. Perhaps a quarter would do the trick. (*M. W.*) I think I've done the trick this time. I just gave them a bit of straight talk and it went home.

Be careful. Say nothing. Get outside men to do the trick. (*F. H.*)

"It wouldn't have done any good," I said. "It would have done the trick." (*C. S.*)

to come off — to succeed; to reach a satisfactory end

The work's come off pretty well all things considered. (*C. S.*)

He sat very still without replying. What's the matter, Erik, didn't the conference come off? Can't the experiment be made practical? (*M. W.*)

Brilliant success may be described thus: **to come off (through) with flying colours** — to make a great success of something; to emerge from an affair with honour and success

At the recent examinations, Peter came off with flying colours. (*W. M.*)

The Tottenham Hotspurs are a very good football team. Last year they came off with flying colours. (*K. N.*)

I know you have the stuff and that you'll come through with flying colours one of these days. (*G. M.*)

Bing, if given the right instructions, would have come through on this mission with flying colours and, if necessary, would have brought in Yasha, by his ear. (*S. H.*)

to sweep (carry) all (everything) before one — to have complete, uninterrupted success

They carried everything before them. (*A. H.*) She came to London to do the season, and, by George, she did it. She just swept everything before her. (*S. M.*)

Robert carried all before him in the school sports. (*W. B.*)

to make a hit (often to make a great, magnificent, etc., hit)
— to be a popular success (generally applied to a performance of some type)

She wrote One-Way-Traffic. I saw it twice. It made a great hit. (*A. Chr.*)

"I don't believe I could act, Charlie," Carry went on pettishly. "You don't think I could, do you?" "Sure. Out o'sight. I bet you make a hit." (*Th. D.*)

Pride in success is described by the phrase:

(it's) a feather in one's cap — (it's) an event to justify satisfaction and pride.

All the six Smith children have done well — a feather in old Smith's cap. (*D. E. S.*)

He won the race, which is another feather in his cap. (*K. H.*)

He's a liberal-minded man for sure. It's a feather in his bonnet right enough. (*A. C.*)

To achieve two objects with one action is **to kill two birds with one stone.**

He's an important guy in this country. If I only had known, I would have taken you in with me; we could have killed two birds with one stone. (*S. H.*)

She doesn't like this at all so she aims to kill two birds with one stone. (*P. Ch.*)

Confidence in ultimate success or victory may be put in this way: **(to be) in the bag** — (to be) a virtual certainty; (to be) well in hand. Also: **to have something in the bag.**

"That meant the majority was in the bag," said Martin. (*C. S.*)

"I'm not going to sell you something we haven't got," said Luke. "It's not in the bag yet." (*C. S.*) He says if they draft me it's in the bag. (*S. H.*) I had taken it for granted that Frances Getliffe had the next Mastership in the bag. (*C. S.*)

It's all over but (bar) the shouting and the battle's as good
as won also express virtually certain achievement.

You can leave all the rest to me — it's all over but
the shouting, and we win hands down. (*J. F.*)

To convert defeat into victory (or success) is **to turn the
tables (on somebody)** — to gain a victory or a position of
superiority after having been defeated or in a position of
inferiority, to change possible defeat into victory.

And what a nuisance I used to think you — that
miserable little kid Gina. Well, the tables are turned
now. You've got me where you want me, haven't
you, Gina? (*A. Chr.*) In an old way, the tables
seemed to have been turned. It did not seem as
though Lewis Serrocold had come into the room to
answer police questioning. (*A. Chr.*)

The independence of success made its first faint
showing. With the tables turned, she was looking
down, rather than up to her lover. (*Th. D.*)

A narrow margin of success, especially escaping disaster
(danger, defeat, death, etc.) by a very narrow margin, is
expressed thus: **to have a narrow squeak (shave); to have a
narrow (near) escape** — to escape from disaster, danger, etc.,
by a very small margin

I had some narrow squeaks now and then, but
I always came through all right. (*S. M.*)

She had a near escape before, you remember,
at this very place when that boulder crashed
down — ah! (*A. Chr.*)

Yesterday she had a very narrow escape from
death. (*A. Chr.*)

It must have been a very near escape. (*A. Chr.*)

(to be) a near thing (a close thing; a close shave) — (to be)
a very narrow escape

"I see, " said Chaffery; "but it will be a pretty close
shave for all that — " (*H. W.*) "It will be a devilish
close thing, " said Lewisham with a quite
unreasonable exultation. (*H. W.*)

touch-and-go — an extremely narrow margin of safety or time (often used of a serious operation or a dangerous task)

"I congratulate you," he heard the doctor say; "it was touch and go." (*J. G.*) I'd no time to think. I just acted like a flash. It was almost exciting. I knew it was touch and go that time. (*A. Chr.*)

"I'll come with you," he said. It was touch-and-go for a moment. But Doreen realized that she mustn't lose her temper in front of all these people. (*A. Chr.*)

It was touch-and-go whether the doctor would get there in time. (*A. H.*)

Success in escaping punishment is expressed thus: **to get away with (it)** or **to get away with murder** — to commit an unofficial or illegal act and escape the consequences

"I've been letting you get away with murder!" Willoughby said. "And don't think that I don't know it." "Murder?" Lammlein asked innocently. "That's just an expression. I could have said rape, theft, lies — anything." (*S. H.*) Say you think I could make good now? Otherwise how should I have got away with taking everybody in? (*B. R.*)

"You damned fool," she said thickly, "do you think you can treat me as you have done and get away with it?" (*A. Chr.*)

Some proverbial comments:

Nothing succeeds like success. (One success leads to another.

When one has learned to achieve success it is easy to be continuously successful.) This is often ironical. Success often depends on making a good start:

A good beginning is half the battle. (When undertaking anything new, it is important that you should start with

enthusiasm and energy; then you are more likely to succeed with the next of the undertaking.)

Well begun is half done expresses the same idea. (A good beginning makes it easy to finish a piece of work successfully.)

11

RUIN AND WASTE

Ruin and decay may be colloquially described thus: **to go to the dogs** — to be ruined; to deteriorate completely

Only England could have produced him, and he always said that the country was going to the dogs. (*O. W.*)

He began to think that London was no place for a white man. It had just gone to the dogs, that was the long and short of it... (*S. M.*) Can't make out how you stand London Society. The thing has gone to the dogs, a lot of damned nobodies talking about nothing. (*O. W.*) If the country doesn't go to the dogs or the Radicals, we shall have you Prime Minister, some day. (*O. W.*)

(to be) on its last legs — (to be) a hopeless state of decay; almost exhausted; about to die

Darling, you must order yourself a new dinner-jacket; yours is on its last legs — shoulders rather! (*B. R.*)

People had grown tired of saying that the "Disunion" was on its last legs. (*J. G.*) Slash! The whip fell among the dogs savagely especially on the one which had fallen. "Don't, Mason, " Malemute kid begged, "the poor devil's on its last legs." (*J. L.*)

to go to pieces — to break up (physically, mentally or morally)

I suppose you're terribly busy, but honestly, Erik, unless I talk to someone I'll go to pieces. (*M. W.*)
Then when his wife died about six or seven years ago, he seemed to go all to pieces. (*C. D.*) After firing the shot, this young man went completely to pieces. (*A. Chr.*) His nerves had gone to pieces. (*A. C.*)

To fall to pieces usually expresses physical decay of things.

Tapestries and drapes and chair-covers all satin and brocade and stuff — and it's falling to pieces. (*A. Chr.*) . The old building was falling to pieces. (*B. H.*)

to go from bad to worse — to become ruined

I told him that you've let things slide for long enough. No wonder you're seeing it all go from bad to worse. (*C. S.*)
It was the end of the good fellowship that had so long obtained between the four fat men. Things went from bad to worse. (*S. M.*)

to go to pot — to become broken, weak or useless; to be discarded as useless (This is slangy.)

Why has prosperity gone to pot? (*J. G.*)
He shouldn't wonder if the Empire split up and went to pot. (*J. G.*)
"Don't you know?" said Walton. "He's gone all to pot, poor devil." (*S. M.*)

to go to the bad — to deteriorate completely; to be ruined; to become of depraved character; to associate with evil companions

If you make idle, dissipated people your companions, you are sure to go to the bad. (*W. M.*)

if the worst comes to the worst — if things are as bad as they can possibly be

If the worst comes to the worst, the Master will have to make it up. (*C. S.*)
Even if worst comes to worst, I've got enough to live on for six months. (*Th. D.*)
In my opinion, it will pass over. And if the worst comes to the worst — it couldn't last more than a few months, a very few months, a very few months. (*S. B.*)

(to be) done for — (to be) ruined; worn out or beyond further use; injured, etc.

I'm afraid the shoes are done for; throw them away. (*A. H.*)
It's quite useless, " said Elizabeth; "He's done for. He'll never be able to recover." (*R. A.*)
I realized that I felt finished and done for. (*J. P.*)
The country's done for. (i. e. ruined) (*A. H.*)

(to be) all up (all U. P.) — (to be) finished; the worst has happened

"What's the use?" he thought. "It's all up with me. I'll quit this." (*Th. D.*) It's all up with him. (i. e. his case is hopeless) (*A. H.*)

the last straw — the event or blow under which one finally collapses; a slight addition to a burden, task, hardship, etc. which makes it unbearable (Out of the proverb: The last straw breaks the camel's back.)

"My God!" Andrew said, trying out his numb fingers. "That was the last straw." (*A. C.*) If I were a parishioner, she would be visiting me, which would be the last straw. (*C. S.*) "Well, you are a thief and a blackguard." It had been the last straw on a sorely loaded consciousness; reaching up from his chair Dartie seized his wife's arm and recalling the achievement of his boyhood, twisted it. (*J. G.*)

to ride for a fall — to act in such a way that disaster or failure will probably be the result; act with recklessness that makes disaster practically inevitable

Yes, his health is all right, but he's riding for a fall.
(*A. Chr.*)

I feel she's riding for a bad fall, but I hope I should do the same. (*J. G.*)

Other phrases dealing with the idea of ruin include the following: bringing a person to ruin is colloquially described thus:

to cook a person's goose — to bring to ruin, destroy; to do for him

Smith has finally cooked Brown's goose.

(*D. E. S.*)

Mrs. Doyle opened that telegram by mistake, you see. If she were ever to repeat what was in it before me, he knew his goose would be cooked.

(*A. Chr.*)

Of course when he did that he cooked his goose as far as promotion was concerned. (*A. W.*)

to settle a person's hash — to do for, make an end of him
"I've settled her hash all right," she said. (*S. M.*)

Spoiling someone's plans is put in this way: to spike someone's guns — to wreck his plans

The idea of the inspector spiking Gun's guns so neatly by accident was hugely comic. (*V. L.*) The senior engineer had several times said he would not consent to the introduction of new production methods. The production engineer, however, spiked his guns by having two new machines installed. (*K. H.*)

to queer the (somebody's) pitch — to upset prearranged plans

I know I can do it, if no one tries to queer my pitch.
(*V. L.*)

"Clare, you look so lovely." "That, if true, is not a reason for queering my pitch at home." (*J. G.*)

He's queered his pitch with that unfortunate interview. (*W. B.*)

to put a spoke in a person's wheel — to spoil his plans

In your own best interests perhaps I should put a spoke in your wheel. (*C. S.*) He ought perhaps to have put a spoke in the wheel of their marriage; they were too young. ... (*J. G.*) I could have easily finished the experiments if they had not put a spoke in my wheel. (*K. H.*)

Waste is variously expressed by these colloquial phrases:

Wasting effort:

a wild-goose chase — a practically hopeless pursuit or search; a foolish and useless enterprise

Wolfe knew that the Colonel was remembering that he had sent Michaelmas on a wild-goose chase; but it was a small consideration now. (*S. A.*) The Colonel shook his head. "He is the best man I've got. I don't like sending him on a wild-goose chase." (*S. A.*)

I hope you won't insist on my starting off on a wild-goose chase. (*St.*)

I hope you won't insist on my starting off on a wild-goose chase after the fellow now. (*B. Sh.*) "I wish now they'd found him in the river." "They may still; this is a bit of a wild-goose chase." (*J. G.*)

to flog (beat) a dead horse — to waste energy

We discussed some incidents that had happened long ago, it was really flogging a dead horse.

(*K. H.*)

I'm flogging a dead horse, (i. e. wasting my energies) (*W. B.*)

to carry coals to Newcastle — to do something which is unnecessary; to use one's effort uneconomically

To write another book on the same topic means to carry coals to Newcastle. (*K. H.*)

Sending a can of olives to Greece would be like carrying coals to Newcastle. (*W. B.*)

Wasting one's breath (words), i. e. talking uselessly, is described in this way:

I might as well talk to a brick wall. I might as well save my breath. (What I say has no effect.) My words fall on deaf ears. (Nobody listens to me.)

What I say goes in at one ear and out of the other. (You don't listen to me.)

"So that's your line?" she said. "You're wasting your breath on me." (*V. L.*)

It's no use talking to Tuppy. You might as well talk to a brick wall. (*O. W.*)

The information went in one ear of Lola and out of the other. (*Th. D.*)

I might as well save my breath, for all the notice they take of me. (*W. B.*)

Wasting money:

to play (make) ducks and drakes with one's money — to waste money; spend it extravagantly

He played ducks and drakes with his money instead of paying the family's debts. (*K. H.*) He soon made ducks and drakes of what I'd left him. (*W. B.*)

to go down the drain — to be wasted

"All right, all right, " Connie answered. "What's wrong with me paying for myself if it all goes down the drain?" (*N. C.*) My £100 has all gone down the drain. (*W. B.*) That's another £50 down the drain! (*W. B.*) And it was his second evening of revision... that went down the drain as he said it. (*N. C.*)

A proverbial warning against extravagance and wastefulness:
Waste not; want not. (Be economical and careful, then you may never be in need.)

12

SCOLDING, BLAME AND COMPLAINTS

Some colloquial phrases connected with the idea of scolding are: a flea in one's ear is colloquial for a sharp reprimand.

...and if I see you next or nigh my house I'll put you in the ditch with a flea in your ear: mind that now.

(B. Sh.)

Irene was in front; that young fellow what had they nicknamed him — "The Buccaneer!" — looked precious hangdog there behind her; had got a flea in his ear, he shouldn't wonder. *(J. G.)*

to tick a person off (to give a person a good ticking off) — to reprimand, scold or blame him

She's no beggar on horseback; as Ronny said I couldn't help admiring the way she ticked off those journalist fellows. *(B. R.)* She gave Augustus a good ticking off for talking too much about his pictures *(V. L.)*

to tell a person off (to give a person a good telling off) — to rebuke, scold or reprimand him

Listen, unless you can learn to flatter your guests, I'm not coming back again, I can be told off at home. *(M. W.)*

Last time he had spoken to this astounding girl it had been to tell her off for insulting his people who trusted and liked her. *(B. R.)*

And now — well, you can't be allowed to go on like this; that's that. Somebody'd got to give you a good telling off. *(B. R.)*

I'd tell her off proper. *(K. M.)*

to give a person a piece (bit) of one's mind — to rebuke him;
to tell him frankly what one thinks of him, his behaviour,
etc.

Oh, if I could only pay that woman, I'd give her a piece of my mind that she wouldn't forget. I'd tell her off proper. (*K. M.*) I'd like to go back there and give them a piece of my mind — they're asleep most of the time. (*S. H.*) ... one day he would forget himself and give her not a piece, but the whole of his mind. (*S. M.*)

to give a person a (good) dressing down — to scold or beat him

Father gave Mary a dressing down when she told him that she had broken off the engagement. (*K. H.*)

to be (come) down on a person — to be severe upon him; to scold, blame or punish him

"You'll have Zel down on you if you start shooting," Roy said. (*J. Ald.*)
My mother did not like it, and she came down on us severely. (*B. H.*)

To be at a person means the same thing.

"Go on," he growled. "Give me all my faults when you're about it. Suspicious! Jealous! You've been at me before! Oh, and I'm too young, I suppose." (*A. C.*)
He finds out eventually, and he'll be at you in the end, ay, and make it a bitter end. (*A. C.*) My mother is always at me about my behaviour at meals. (*B. H.*)

to give a person a good talking to — to scold or rebuke him

I'll give her a good talking to when she comes. I'm not going to stand any of her nonsense. (*B. Sh.*)
"I must give her a good talking to this afternoon," said Lewisham... (*H. W.*)

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Give it him hot! is colloquial for rebuke him severely. An official reprimand may be colloquially put in this way: **to have (call) a person on the carpet (mat)** — to censure; to summon for reprimand. **To be on the carpet** (to be censured or summoned for reprimand) is also similarly used.

The Headmaster had me on the mat this morning.
He wanted to know who was responsible for the uproar last night in the dormitory. (*W. B.*) The unpunctual clerk was repeatedly on the carpet. (*W. M.*)

to call (haul) a person over the coals — to censure or rebuke him

Now tell me, why is that a conscience can't haul a man over the coals once for an offence and then let him alone. (*M. T.*)

to teach a person a lesson — to give him a rebuke or punishment which will serve as a warning

Well, sir, we shall teach you and your townspeople a lesson they will not forget. (*B. Sh.*) And I think it's time they were taught a lesson. (*C. S.*)
I'll teach him to meddle in my affairs. (*C. D.*) It's a great mistake, when one has attained a certain position in the world to be too genteel about teaching people a lesson. (*C. S.*)

to put a person in his place — to reprimand him severely or take him down

I should just like to take a taxi to the corner of Tottenham Court Road and get out there and tell it to wait for me, just to put the girls in their place a bit. (*B. Sh.*)

An insulting and abusive reprimand is expressed by the phrase:

to call a person names — to insult him by using bad names

"Steady-on! Don't you go a-calling us names, please."

"One minute!" said Mr. Hoopdriver. "It wasn't I began calling names." (*H. W.*)

To go for a person may be similarly used with the meaning *to abuse, to blame, to reprimand*.

The manager went for the office boy, who he said, was saucy. (*B. H.*)

The speaker went for the profiteers. (*U. D.*)

to snap (bite) a person's head (nose) off — to speak to him rudely, angrily or impatiently

Make up your mind. First you tell me it's no good. When I agree, you snap my head off. (*M. W.*) The old lady bit the boy's nose off because he had broken her window-pane. (*K. H.*) There's no need to snap my head off. I only want a civil answer to a civil question. (*W. B.*)

To receive heavy censure or punishment is colloquially speaking to get it in the neck.

Any one that worries you, my dear, will get it in the neck from me, and you can be sure of that. (*V. L.*)

She hadn't half been wanting to see him get it in the neck from someone without being able to answer back. (*N. C.*)

You don't know what's going on. You sit here in Paris and send home yards of silk and cases of cognac while we get it in the neck. (*S. H.*)

To catch it and **to get it hot** mean the same thing.

"You'll catch it! (You'll be scolded, punished, etc.) (*A. H.*)

He'll get it hot for it.

To blame someone is also colloquially **to put (fix, lay) the blame on him** — to say that a person is responsible for,

My father grinned. "She always puts the blame on me. I have to bear it." (*C. S.*)

I warn you it's no use trying to put the blame on me. How was I to know the sort of fellow he was? (*B. Sh.*)

"I don't quite see why they tried to fix the blame on John," I remarked. (*A. Chr.*)

Another phrase for to blame a person is **to find fault with a person**. It may be not so strong as to blame and have the meaning *to complain, to criticize*.

"Please!" The foreman lifted his hand and cleared his throat again. "It's not our job to find fault with each other. It's our job to find the prisoner guilty." (*N. C.*)

People sometimes find fault with others when they should blame themselves. (*W. M.*)

Mother is constantly finding fault with my husband. (*K. H.*)

To find fault with a thing is to find it deficient in some particular. The phrase implies that you point out the fault.

I cannot find fault with Miss Sharp's conduct. (*W. Th.*)

"Any more fault to find with the evidence?" I inquired satirically. (*A. Chr.*)

to pick on a person — to find fault with him

Why don't you pick on him? He's the one to benefit — not me. (*A. Chr.*)

It's no use picking on them when they're so young and tender. I can't stand it. (*K. R.*)

And, of course, Cheese-Face had picked on him again, and there was another fight... (*J. L.*)

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Why pick on me? may be used as a protest by a person absolving himself from blame.

All I say is, why pick on me when I don't benefit by her death? (*A. Chr.*)

Tommy showed Krone into an armchair. "Why pick on me, Krone?" Tommy said. (*R. K.*)

Note also the following patterns:

I'm (he's, etc.) to blame. (I'm (he's, etc.) to be blamed.)

I admit I was entirely to blame. (*A. Chr.*)

Who is to blame? (Who is to be blamed?) It's **all (entirely) my (his, etc.) fault.**

"How do you account for your pistol being used?"

"Well — I'm afraid I may be to blame there. Quite soon after getting abroad there was a conversation in the saloon one evening, and I mentioned then that I always carried a revolver with me when I travel. I'm certainly to blame there." (*A. Chr.*)

These doors are exceedingly treacherous. They ought, of course, to have glass windows to them. It is entirely my fault for not having brought the matter before the Borough Council. (*A. C.*) It will be all your fault if we're late. (*W. B.*)

If you suspect a person of some misbehaviour or think that he is capable of it although you have no proof that he is to blame, you may say: **I wouldn't put it past (beyond) him.**

She may even teach Mark how to relax. I wouldn't put it past her. (*L. A.*)

I shouldn't have put it past him to do a trick like that. (*C. D.*)

I wouldn't put it beyond him to countermand my instructions when I've gone. (*W. B.*)

to have a bone to pick (with a person) — to have a cause of complaint against him

Here! I've a bone to pick with you about the way you spoke to me yesterday. (*A. W.*)

Introductory phrases for general complaints of not too explosive a nature include the following: it's a bit thick or it's a bit much (or off).

I was really annoyed now. "Look here, Bridget, I must say that's a bit thick. You don't know — " "I do know, " she interrupted mocking me. "And it isn't a bit thick." (*J. P.*) Don't you think it's a bit thick that when you've been thoroughly decent with people they should go out of their way to do the dirty on you? (*S. M.*) "I must say, sir, " her husband echoed, "it's a bit much." (*L. A.*)

You are the limit! It's the limit! or There's a limit! express extreme annoyance and mark the end of toleration.

I know we haven't been alone much, but that could easily have been managed. I do think you are the limit, Gregory. (*J. P.*)
Watching for a moment of weakness, she wrenched it free; then placing the dining table between them, said between her teeth: "You are the limit, Monty." (*J. G.*)
What is the matter with you? I'll make a certain allowance for your nerves. But there's a limit! (*S. H.*)

To exaggerate a complaint and make a lot of fuss about it is:
to make a song and dance about it.

"I wouldn't make too much of a song and dance about it, if I were you, " he said. "You'll have to walk warily. She'll have a lot to forgive too." (*S. M.*)
When she spoke it was quite calmly, as though — well, as though she'd just missed a bus and would have to wait for another. As though it was a nuisance, you know, but nothing to make a song and dance about. (*S. M.*)
The world's always in a hole, only in old days people didn't make a song about it. (*J. G.*)

To make a mountain out of a mole-hill is similarly used with the meaning *to exaggerate; make difficulties appear much greater than they really are.*

I dare say I've been making a mountain out of a mole-hill. I must just wait patiently for his letter. (*S. M.*)

Don't take it too seriously, James has surely made a mountain out of a mole-hill. (*K. H.*)

13

SECRETS

To avoid telling a secret is **to keep it**. **Keeping something secret** and saying nothing about it may be also colloquially expressed by these phrases: **to keep (it, something) dark** — to keep secret. Also: **to keep someone in the dark** (about something).

You're not in love with somebody, are you — and have been keeping it dark? (*J. P.*) Somebody has to know these things beforehand no matter how dark they're kept. (*B. Sh.*) "Good God!" he exclaimed, "then it isn't poetry you're writing. I thought that's what you were keeping dark." (*E. L.*) You may have been right to keep dark, as you call it, so far as the doctors are concerned....

(*J. G.*)

"Well, I think it is very unfair to keep me in the dark about the facts."

"I'm not keeping you in the dark. Every fact that I know is in your possession." (*A. Chr.*)

Mum's the word — say nothing about the matter; be silent. Also: keep mum — remain silent.

"Don't say anything about this," he asked. "Just let it be private between the two of us."

"Mum's the word," Connie promised. (*N. C.*) Keep mum about this. (*A. H.*)

to keep one's mouth shut — to remain silent, say nothing about

Has none of you any idea when it's useful to keep your mouths shut? (*C. S.*)

Why can't I keep my mouth shut? (*S. H.*)

Do you think all that came from keeping my mouth shut? No: it came from keeping my ears and eyes open. (*B. Sh.*)

to keep something under one's hat — to keep it secret

He kept under his hat what he had seen that evening. (*K. H.*)

We're going to fight them and soon we'll get 'em out. Keep that under your hat, Brother Mac Adams. (*A. S.*)

not to breathe a word (a syllable) to a soul — to keep it secret; to say nothing

Before she left Connie gave her oath that she wouldn't breathe a word to a soul. (*N. C.*) She had never let him know — never breathed a word. (*J. G.*)

My lips are sealed. — I won't tell it anyone; I can keep a secret.

"My lips are sealed," said the statesman. "I shall not tell you what my policy is." "Mum's the word," Connie promised. "Sealed lips, that's me." (*N. C.*)

To keep it (something) to oneself may also be used with the meaning *not to tell anyone*.

"Well, Julian?" said Martin. "I didn't think I ought to keep it to myself any longer." (*C. S.*) "I hope you'll keep this to yourself," she said. (*A. Chr.*)

I fancy she's a woman who likes — well, to keep things to herself. (*A. Chr.*)

But I decided that if I made any interesting and important discoveries — and no doubt I should — I would keep them to myself, and surprise Poirot with the ultimate result. (*A. Chr.*)

Common comparisons are: **as mute as a fish; as silent as the grave.**

I will be as silent as the grave, but honestly I don't understand what does it all mean? (*S. M.*) I will be as silent as the grave. I swear it. (*B. Sh.*)

A person keeping his plans secret is said **to keep his own counsel.**

He was a man who kept his own counsel, and a very patient man. (*A. Chr.*)

to take a person into one's confidence — to tell him something private or secret

"That is why, " said Poirot, "I could take no one into my confidence." (*A. Chr.*) After some reflecting, I decided to take John into my confidence and leave him to make the matter public or not as he thought fit. (*A. Chr.*)

An adverbial phrase: **under the rose** — surreptitiously; in secret.

In Ireland, having no mistletoe, the girls are obliged to kiss under the rose. (*A. W.*)

Practical advice to avoid revealing a secret is contained in the following proverbial phrase: Never **let your right hand know what your left hand is doing.** The fact that something is told in confidence (as a secret) may be underlined by the following colloquial phrases: **between you and me**

between you and me and the doorpost (the gatepost, the wall, etc.) between ourselves — in strict confidence

Between you and me, Freddy, I never had much time for this Manson of yours, but that's neither here nor there. (*A. C.*)

"Between you and me, Sir, " remarked Japp, "I'd sooner have any amount of rumours than be arrested for murder." (*A. Chr.*) But between you an' me an' the old doorpost I am worried about that dame. (*P. Ch.*) Well, between you and me and the wall, Sir Pearce, I think the less we say about that until the war's over, the better. (*B. Sh.*) "I'll tell you a secret, " I whispered, "just between ourselves, George. I'm beginning to hate the dam' story." (*J. P.*)
Between ourselves, there are only three distinguished men here ... (*C. S.*)

On the other hand, talking too much and revealing a secret may be colloquially put in this way: **to give the show away** — to reveal, unconsciously or maliciously

Well, at any minute, old Babbington in the most innocent way in the world, might give the show away. (*A. Chr.*)
Lloyd looked over his shoulder at the other men. "Don't give the show away, " he said. (*J. F.*)

to let the cat out of the bag — to reveal unintentionally

In the last cabinet meeting the Prime Minister let the cat out of the bag revealing the true circumstances of the case. (*K. H.*) I shouldn't have let the cat out of the bag. But there it is — it's a lucky start for you, my dear fellow. (*A. C.*)

to spill the beans — to reveal a secret; to confess all

Maybe the old boy had heard something about Alex and was going to spill the beans to the Serrocolds. (*A. Chr.*)
Whoever is poisoning Mrs. Serrocold killed Guid-bransen to prevent him spilling the beans. (*A. Chr.*)
I'm goin' to spill the beans. I'll tell you the whole truth. (*P. Ch.*)

to blurt out — to say something without thought, un-
guardedly; hence reveal a secret

Has that fool Skeffington to blurt out the whole
story before any of us have had a chance to have
a look at it? (*C. S.*)

He remembered how... June had blurted out to
him that Fleur ought to have married her young
brother. (*J. G.*)

"If you do want to know the truth, " he blurted
out, "it put me to a hell of a lot of trouble!"
(*A. C.*)

to let out — to reveal a secret

"George and I talked it — "

"Oh! His name's 'George, ' is it?"

"Yes. Did I let that out?" (*R. A.*)

Blackmail! Oh, Mr. Sartorius, do you think I
would let out a word about your premises? (*B. Sh.*)

to let on — to reveal (a secret); to betray (a fact)

I haven't heard a word about anything. She ob-
viously wasn't going to let on. (*B. R.*) Don't let on
that I told you. (*W. B.*)

to let a person in on (the secret, idea, plan, etc.) — to
make it known to him; to reveal it to him

I got one or two ideas that I will let you in on. (*P.*
Ch.)

Erik smiled. "Why not let them in on the good
news?" (*M. W.*)

A leakage of information is described thus: to leak out — to
become generally known after being a secret (in spite of
efforts to keep it secret)

The news has leaked out. (*A. H.*)

It was the sort of thing that, if talked over,
would certainly leak out. (*J. G.*)

A little bird is a facetious term for an anonymous informer, hence **A little bird tells (told) me** means / *know it from anonymous sources.*

A little bird tells me you're getting married
next month. (*D. E. S.*)
"But I don't see how you know." George closed
the other eye.
"A little bird, Lady Curven." (*J. G.*)
He has so wanted to have a son himself. A little
bird has always told me that. (*J. G.*)

Inducing a person to talk and so to reveal a secret may be put in this way:

to draw a person out — to make him talk and so reveal a secret

She expressed no surprise nor emotion at Sir
Charle's overnight decision. Nor could Mr.
Satterthwaite draw her out on the point. (*A. Chr.*)

to pump (someone) — to question persistently to try to obtain all information possible

You've roused all Aunt Dagmar's suspicions.
She was pumping you, but, like an idiot, you
couldn't see it. (*A. Chr.*)
Miss Milton. That was her name. Perhaps he'd
tell some more. "It's no good pumping. Is that
all you're after?" (*H. W.*)
"...have you, you nasty man, come just to pump
me about murders?" (*A. Chr.*)

14

SUSPICION, DECEPTION, DISBELIEF

Suspicion may be expressed by these colloquial phrases in common use:

to be (look, sound) fishy — to be (look, sound) suspicious or doubtful

fishy — arousing suspicion; suspicious; of a disreputable or doubtful character

I don't like that. It sounds a bit fishy to me. (*A. W.*)
"You mean that in your belief Jacqueline de Bellefort shot madame Doyle?" Poirot asked.
"That's what it looks like to me." "It all sounds rather fishy to me." (*A. Chr.*) There was something fishy about Dondolo's solicitude, something frightening. (*S. H.*) He was a new man — Sir Bartholomew had only him a fortnight and the moment after the crime he disappears — vanishes into the air. That looks a bit fishy, doesn't it? (*A. Chr.*) This is a fishy story. (*A. H.*)

to smell a rat — - to become suspicious; to have suspicions

No, Sir, it wouldn't do. If he is what he may be, he would smell a rat. (*V. L.*) "The fool, " muttered Louis Lemire. "He only got what he deserved. He should have smelt a rat." (*S. M.*)

to have (have got) a hunch — to have a strong feeling of suspicion; to have a suspicion which has no logical basis, a premonition

I've got a hunch that he did it, but there's nothing to go on. (*J. F.*) He has a hunch that he is being tricked. (*A. H.*) He says he's got a hunch there's something wrong with the plan, but he can't put his finger on it. (*R. K.*)

There's a catch in it (somewhere) expresses suspicion that everything is not what it appears to be.

"Do you remember what it was you fell over?"
Connie thought again. She felt that there was a catch in it somewhere. (*N. C.*) I thought there was a catch in it somewhere. (*B. Sh.*)

a mare's nest — an unfounded suspicion; a baseless rumour; a mere invention. Often: **to find a mare's nest**,

I'm much obliged to you. A pretty mare's nest arresting him would have been. (*A. Chr.*) Soames rose. "Never mind that. Please watch 47, and take care not to find a mare's nest. Good-morning!" Mr. Polteed's eye glinted at the words "mare's nest!" (*J. G.*)

Among colloquial phrases containing the idea of deception the following are very common:

to take someone in — to deceive him; to cheat

Don't you dare try this game on me? I taught it to you and it doesn't take me in. (*B. Sh.*) "How malicious you are, Alex dear." "Because I refuse to be taken in by you?" (*A. Chr.*) I am sure you could be taken in, you know, if a clever person worked on your good nature. (*V. L.*)

to pull someone's leg — to deceive jokingly; to make fun of

Other phrases similarly used are:

to have someone on and to kid someone — to deceive. They mean almost the same as *to pull someone's leg*.

I'm kidding means *I'm joking; I'm not telling the truth; it is only intended as a joke*.

You're having me on. — You're not serious; you don't mean what you say; you're making fun of me.

Andrew did not smile. "I didn't ask you to pull my leg, Mr Sillman. I'm dead serious about this girl." (*A. C.*)

"What does she say?" asked Neil. "She's pulling your leg, " replied the Captain smiling. (*S. M.*) You're losing your sense of humour, Wendy. I won't dare try to pull your leg in future. (*V. L.*) Can't you see he's just having you on? (*W. B.*) I didn't really mean it. I was just having you on. (*W. B.*)

He kidded her into believing that he was a bachelor. (*D. E. S.*)

to pull the wool over someone's eyes — to deceive him

Yet this is merely to pull the wool over the eyes of the people (*Th. D.*) It is hardly to be supposed that his friend could pull the wool over his eyes. (*A. Chr.*)

eyewash — deceit, trickery, a misleading, frequently flattering statement

Don't trust his nice, friendly manner; that's all eyewash, and actually he hates you. (*A. W.*) He told me he'd called to see my paintings, but I knew that was eyewash. (*D. E. S.*) Why don't you leave the man alone, Captain? Can't you see he doesn't care about this eyewash? (*S. H.*)

to put one over somebody — to deceive him; to fool him

"You're really putting one over the warden, " Samson said to Roy.
Then he stopped. His dark, sharp eyes had been somewhat bloodshot. I bet you think you're putting one over me." (*S. H.*)

to let a person down — to deceive and disappoint him; to fail him in a time of need

Deplorable if she lets you down. (*B. R.*) I'm a trusting kind of fellow — and it pays, you know. I've hardly ever been let down. (*A. Chr.*)

to pull something (one) on a person (*Amer.*) — to deceive him

By God, you'll suffer for insulting me and my guests in this way. By God, you will! Think you could pull this one on me, eh? (*E. L.*)

to do the dirty on (somebody) — to swindle; to treat shamefully

Don't you think it's a bit thick that when you've been thoroughly decent with people they should go out of their way to do the dirty on you? (*S. M.*)

To do one down is colloquial for to cheat, to deceive him.

I've been done down by my best friend. (*A. C.*)

"How many people have you seen done down in your time?"

"Quite a lot, " I said, "but not quite — " "Then why the sweet hell don't you go and put that right?"

"I was going to say, " I replied, "not quite in this way. And just because a lot of people are done down inevitably, that's no reason to add another."
(*C. S.*)

to do brown — to swindle; often in the passive: **to be done brown** — to be swindled

Don't go to that shop or you'll be done brown. (*A. W.*)

He was too clever for me and I was done brown.
(*B. H.*)

to pull a fast one (over, on) — to take a tactical advantage of, by a sudden manoeuvre or a clever swindle (trick, deception)

He tried to pull a fast one on me, and I listened like I was in a hopdream. (*E. L.*) This mug Grant then pulls another fast one. (*P. Ch.*)

To mislead someone deliberately is: **to draw a red herring across the track (path)** — to introduce an irrelevant matter, to distract attention **a red herring** — an irrelevant matter intended to divert attention

But whatever possessed you to draw that absurd red herring? (*C. S.*)

The butler seems to me a very clumsy red herring.
(*A. Chr.*)

When we came to talk about the bad quality of the motors, Yenkins drew a red herring across the path. (*K. H.*)

§.

to put (throw) someone off the scent — to deceive him by giving wrong information, etc.

He tried to put me off the scent. (*A. H.*) The swindler threw the police off the scent. (*K. H.*)

To lead someone up the path (garden path) is similarly used with the meaning *to deceive; to impose on*.

The young man led Mary up the garden path. (*K. H.*)

A deceitful person may be figuratively described as a snake in the grass.

He proved to be a snake in the grass. (*A. W.*) He was a veritable snake in the grass. (*W. B.*) We had always suspected she was a snake in the grass; now our suspicion was confirmed. (*K. H.*)

To become a victim of deception is colloquially **to fall for it or to swallow it**, i.e. to believe, to accept as true something that is untrue.

I never thought she'd fall for that old story. (*D. E. S.*)

Mr. Satterthwaite thought: "He's looking to see if I swallow this story." (*A. Chr.*)

Do you think he'll swallow that explanation? (*W. B.*)

Proverbial reminders not to be deceived by the appearance of things or people:

All that glitters is not gold.

Appearances are deceptive.

There's more to it than meets the eye.

"What do you mean?" "I mean that all is not gold that glitters. I mean that though this lady is rich and beautiful and beloved, there is all the same something that is not right." (*A. Chr.*)

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"There's more here, Sir, however, " he said, "than meets the eye. I don't believe in suicide, nor in pure accident myself." (*J. G.*)

Disbelief uses the following phrases:

Tell that to the marines (horse marines). (Tell your story but no one will believe you.)

Tell me (us) another one! (I (we) don't believe this story.)

The phrases are used to express disbelief in an impossible story.

"To mention that to the Committee, " Sir Lawrence said slowly, "would certainly be telling it to the marines." (*J. G.*)

When he started talking about his adventures in Central Africa, I couldn't help saying, "Tell that to the horse marines!" (*K. H.*) The climate's all right when it isn't too dry or too wet — it suits my wife fine, but, sir, when they talk about making your fortune all I can say is tell it to the marines. (*J. G.*) *Pygmalion* ... So come to the point, I have succeeded in making artificial human beings. Real live ones, I mean. *Incredulous voices.* Oh, come! Tell us another. (*B. Sh.*)

You're telling me! may be similarly used.

I put on a sort of modest look. "No, " I tell her. "I'm not a guy who goes for dames." "You're telling me!" she says. (*P. Ch.*)

Other exclamatory phrases of disbelief are: **Get away with you!** or **Go (get) along with you!** — friendly expressions of disbelief, meaning *I don't believe a word of what you are saying.* **You don't say!**

...my foot! — exclamation of disbelief following repetition of a previous remark: **George is a gentleman. Gentleman my foot! A likely tale!** (A most unlikely tale.)

"Pretty little thing, " said Mr. Sunbury tentatively after the young things have left.

"Pretty my foot! All that paint and powder." (S. M.)
"I may have been fascinated — held in a kind of
spell — by a certain quality of life — " "Oh, quality
of life my foot. You just stayed in love with her and
didn't know it." (J. P.) "What I want to get at, and
what we all ought to know is — where this girl got
those pearls?" "She has told us they were given to
her." "A likely tale!" (B. R.)

Figments of the imagination are described thus:

a tall story — a story difficult to believe; an exaggerated
story

"Well, " said Troy, "how did he get here?"
"Guerilla, " explained Traub. "The Russians sent
him back through the lines to work as a guerilla.
In Riga the Germans caught him and tortured
him."
"Tall story, " said Troy. (S. H.)

a cock-and-bull story (tale, yarn) — a fantastic and in-
credible story

He told us that cock-and-bull story before. (W. B.)
The judge did not believe the defendant's cock-and-
bull story. (K. H.)

It's far-fetched, (i. e. It strains one's credulity.)

That's far-fetched, I am afraid. (V. L.) For many
reasons which you might think farfetched, I had and
still have a feeling that I ought to spend the War in
the ranks and in the line. (R. A.)

thin (generally **a bit thin**) — unconvincing, improbably weak

Her story about leaving her purse on the piano
sounded a bit thin. (D. E. S.)

Unbelievable good fortune is described thus: It's too good to be true.

His voice trembled a little as he spoke. It all seemed too good to be true. (*N. C.*)

15

TASTES, PREFERENCES, INCLINATIONS

Tastes differ, or as another proverb puts it: **one man's meat is another man's poison** — one person may hate what another likes.

There is no accounting for tastes is another proverb meaning the same thing. But it often implies that the speaker has the better taste.

To like someone (or something) may be colloquially expressed by these phrases: **to take a fancy (liking) to someone (something)**

Well, the truth is, I've taken a sort of fancy to you, Governor ... (*B. Sh.*) I took a fancy to him at once. (*S. M.*) He seemed to take rather a fancy to me. (*J. G.*) I took a great fancy to young Arbuthnot the moment I met him. (*O. W.*)

You'll think me absurd, but do you know I've taken a great fancy to this fan that I was silly enough to run away with last night from your ball. (*O. W.*)

She might take quite a liking to her brother-in-law. (*A. Chr.*) The old man's taken a liking to it. (*A. Chr.*)

to take to somebody — to become fond of somebody; to form a liking for somebody

Hetty had already taken to the girl. ... (*V. L.*) My father took to him a lot the only time they met, and my father's darned difficult to please. (*Gr. Gr.*)

to have a soft spot for somebody (something)

She still sounded ratty. Nevertheless, I thought she had a soft spot for him. (C. S.) ... he liked observing human nature, and he had a soft spot for lovers. (A. Chr.)

to be fond of somebody (something)

He was fond of mysteries, and he liked observing human nature, and he had a soft spot for lovers. (A. Chr.)

He's close, he's narrow, he's not very fond of anyone except himself and his wife. (C. S.)

To grow on someone is to win the liking, favour or admiration of.

If a **person (a thing) grows on you**, it means that you get to like him (it) more and more; you find him (it) more attractive as the time passes.

..she's just a child of Nature who positively grows on you. (B. R.)

It's surprising how the little thing grows on one. (B. R.)

You may not like the picture at first but it will grow on you.

(To be) after one's own heart is (to be) of the sort one very much likes or approves of.

Michael says your new Member, Dornford is after his own heart. (J. G.) However, cheer up; we are going to have a day after your own heart. (B. Sh.)

A blue-eyed boy (a white-headed boy) is colloquial for a favourite for the time being.

Take care of young Rogers — he's the blue-eyed boy in this office. (A. W.)

To be crazy (mad) about (on) something (somebody) is to be

greatly attached to; very fond of or enthusiastic about. To be keen on (about) and to be nuts on (about) have the same significance.

I'm crazy about him. He's crazy about me. We can't live without each other. (*A. Chr.*)

She's mad about music.

"Which of us is it you're so keen on knowing?"

"It's all three, " I said earnestly. (*J. P.*)

Luckily I really am frightfully keen about horses. (*J. G.*)

Michael's such dead nuts on her that he's getting dull... . (*J. G.*)

I'm nuts about her. She's nuts about him. (*D. A. S.*)

Some other phrases in common use are:

(to be) up one's street — suited to one's tastes (or powers)

"He thinks you're just a very nice elderly lady who was at school with his wife." He shook his head at her. "We know you're a bit more than that, Miss Marple, aren't you? Crime is right up your street." (*A. Chr.*)

to be one's cup of tea — the sort of thing (person) that 'pleases or appeals to one

A camping holiday is just my cup of tea. (*W. B.*) "I can't pretend, " I said, "that he's exactly my cup of tea." (*C. S.*)

It suits me to a "T" (down to the ground) expresses a high degree of satisfaction.

Harris said, however, that the river would suit him to a "T"... .

...It suited me to a "T" too, and Harris and I both said it was a good idea of Georges... . (*J. J.*)

If you like something you may, colloquially speaking, get a kick out of it, that is, enjoy it; feel a strong sense of satisfaction.

I dare say she got no end of kick out of doing it. Living it. (*B. R.*)

Some people might get a kick out of it. I didn't.

(A. Chr.)

She got a kick out of living. (R. K.)

To prefer one course of action to another or to like it more than another may be colloquially expressed by these phrases:

I'd rather...

I'd sooner...

Infinitive without **to**

I'd just as soon...

Which would you rather have, tea or coffee?

(A. H.)

Me and Moosier here have met before — and there's no man's judgement I'd sooner take than his.

I would much sooner dance with you. (O. W.)

They'd dine out with people and make themselves very pleasant but it was pretty obvious that they'd just as soon have stayed at home. (S. M.)

She says she'd just as soon sit and watch the tennis. (W. B.)

Indifference is expressed by these phrases in common use:

It's all one (the same) to me.

"Butterfly or Oxford," he said.

"It's all one to me!" (W. C.)

"What are you going to give us, Nikitin?"

"Anything you like," said Nikitin, "it's all one to me." (E. L.)

"Say what you think," said Banford.

"It's all the same to me," said March. (D. L.)

not to care

a button
twopence a
rap two hoots

a fig two pins
a row of pins a
hoot, etc.

"I don't care twopence about money, " said Herbert.
(*S. M.*)

...I'm bound to tell you that I don't care two pins if
you think me plain or not. (*S. M.*) I don't care a rap
what your stepfather is. (*H. W.*) I don't care two
hoots what counsel'll do. (*V. L.*) "I don't, " said old
Jolyon, "care a fig for his opinion." (*J. G.*)

To dislike something or somebody may be colloquially put
in this way:

it's (he's) not my cup of tea — it (he) doesn't suit my taste;
it is not the sort of thing (person) to appeal to me

"She's not my cup of tea." He grinned. "And I'm
not hers." (*C. S.*)

Mountaineering isn't exactly my cup of tea. (*W.B.*)

to have no time for somebody (something) — to dislike
(him, it)

Between you and me, Freddy, I never had much
time for this Manson, but that's neither here nor
there. (*A. C.*)

I've no time for this sensational journalism. (*W. B.*)

**I can't stand (bear) it (him) or I can't stand (bear) the
sight of him (it)** — I dislike it (him) very much

I can't play. My fingers won't obey me. And
I can't stand the sound of piano. (*B. Sh.*)

I can't stand awful old men. (*C. S.*)

She just can't bear the sight of me. (*C. S.*)

And as for your blunder in taking my wife's
fan from here and leaving it about in Darlington's
room, it is unpardonable.

I can't bear the sight of it now. (*O. W.*)

**I don't care for it; I have no liking for it; it is not to my
liking (taste)** are similarly used, all meaning *it is not to my
taste; I don't like it.*

I don't care for the book. (*H. P.*)

I don't care for chips fried in olive oil, (*W. B.*)

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Mr. Claye sighed. "It's a job I've no liking for," he said. (*J. F.*)

John's way of doing things is not at all to my liking. (*W. M.*)

to go (be) against the grain — to be distasteful or contrary to inclination

A thing I've never been able to understand is why a woman thinks it worth while to make you do something you don't want to. She'd rather you did a thing against the grain than not do it at all. (*S. At.*)

This prosecution goes very much against the grain of an honest man. (*B. Sh.*)

Emphatic **I like that!** means just the opposite of what it says: it's used as an explosive protest against some suggestion.

"It's mine. Joe Morgan made me a present of it." "A present! Ho! I like that! He's not 'ere to deny it." (*A. C.*)

Colloquial phrases to express **aversion and disgust** include the following:

It sticks in my gizzard (crawl, throat, gullet). — It leaves a feeling of strong dislike or disgust.

That business with Fleur sticks in my gizzard, as old Forsyte would have said. (*J. G.*)

She didn't sentimentalise herself but just admitted that this Dessie business stuck in her gullet.

(*V. L.*)

But it sticks in my gullet not to do one's best for the chap with a record like this. (*C. S.*)

I wouldn't touch him (it) with a pair of tongs, i. e. he (it) is so disgusting that I will have nothing to do with him (it).

Let her keep her fortune. I wouldn't touch her with the tongs if she had thousands and millions. (*B. Sh.*)

I was so ragged and dirty, that you wouldn't have touched me with a pair of tongs. (*Ch. D.*)

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to give one the creeps (the willies) — to cause one to have a feeling of strong dislike or revulsion

His sentimental smile gave her the willies. (*V. L.*)
This weather gives me the creeps. Nothing but rain,
rain, rain. (*W. B.*)

To make one sick (shudder) means the same thing. If **you don't like it, you can lump it** means *If you don't like it, all you can do is to resign yourself and put up with it, however unwillingly.*

"Flying a kite, you, a grown man. Contemptible I call it."

"I don't care what you call it. I like it, and if you don't like it you can lump it." (*S. M.*) "So if, well — if this new arrangement were made, Margaret Cook might not like it — " "Couldn't she be told she would have to lump it." (*B. R.*)

16

TALK AND DISCUSSION

Informal conversation may be colloquially described by these general phrases:

to have a few words with or **to have a word with** — to have a short talk with; to discuss briefly .

After breakfast, Dorcas came up to me rather mysteriously, and asked if she might have a few words with me. (*A. Chr.*)

"I thought I would come up for a little chat, " she said brightly. "I haven't had a word with you for a day or two." (*A. C.*)

You can have a quiet word with him here, mum. (*B. Sh.*)

"As a matter of fact, " he said to Martin, "I should like a word with you." (C. S.)

to have a (little) chat (with) — one more phrase with the same meaning

"Your mother and I have been having a little chat, " Mark explained. (L. A.)
Well, thank you Matron, I'm glad to have had a little chat with you. (A. Chr.)
Assunta comes down to have a chat with me now and then and then I give her a bit of money... . (S. M.)

The gift of the gab is colloquial for power of fluent and effective speech, and **to have the gift of the gab** is to have the ability to speak fluently and effectively; to be eloquent.

"You've got ideas." "Other people's." "And the gift of the gab." (J. G.)
He was good company, the type of the agreeable rattle and he had a truly Irish gift of the gab. (S. M.)
You've got the gift of the gab with a pen, Mont... . (J. G.)

Small talk is light conversation on unimportant subjects; **chit-chat** has the same significance — trivial conversation.

At emotional moments like this, Mr. Josser was always a bit awkward. He hadn't got any flow of small talk. (N. C.)
"I gave up going to my colleagues' wives' parties before you were born, my dear young man, " Winslow said. He added: "I have no small talk." (C. S.)
Oh, that's the new small talk. To do a person it means to kill him. (B. Sh.)
"All right, " she said. "Let's talk about you. I don't feel like chit-chat either." (M. W.)

Waffle (noun and verb) is also similarly used with the meaning *talk without pausing; gabble*.

Gossip (noun and verb) is small talk usually about people as is also **tittle-tattle** (idle talk and rumours).

She likes to have a good gossip with a neighbour over the garden fence. (*A. H.*)

She is too fond of gossip (or tittle-tattle). (*A. H.*)

A garrulous person (a chatterbox) is said:

to talk (chatter) nineteen to the dozen — to chatter incessantly

Captain Bredon soon had his arms round two slim waists. They all talked nineteen to the dozen. They were gay. (*S. M.*)

At tea-time he came down to the drawing-room and found them talking, as he expressed it, nineteen to the dozen. (*J. G.*)

So as a rule I'm silent, but when I find a sympathetic victim — well, you've already had a bitter experience of how I chatter nineteen to the dozen. (*R. A.*)

to talk somebody's (one's) head off; to talk the leg off an iron pot; to talk the hind leg off a donkey — to talk a great deal; to bore a person by talking too much

Andrew, you can talk my head off, but you can't change wrong into right. (*B. Sh.*)

The insurance-agent talked Father's head off.

(*K. H.*)

She could talk the hind leg off a donkey. (*W. B.*)

Among chatterboxes one **can't get a word in edgeways** (i. e. unable to speak because others are talking continuously).

Sorry. When Pickering starts shouting nobody can get a word in edgeways. (*B. Sh.*)

The two elderly ladies were talking incessantly, so that Jane could not get a word in edgeways.

(*K. H.*)

"Well, my friend, " cried Poirot before I could get in a word, "what do you think?" (*A. Chr.*)

A verbose person may be also termed:

long-winded — tediously long, verbose; fond of hearing oneself talk

The speaker was dreadfully long-winded. (*W. B.*)

The preacher was very long-winded even for a preacher. (*A. W.*)

I cannot relate what he told me in his own words. He repeated himself. He was very long-winded and he told me his story confusedly ... (*S. M.*)

On the other hand avoidance of prolixity is colloquially expressed by these phrases:

(to put something) in a nutshell — in the fewest possible words; in brief

This is the story in a nutshell. (*A. W.*)

In a nutshell, I have given him notice and will go to Manchester next week. (*K. H.*)

It was at this moment that the idea came to him which he afterwards imparted at Timothy's in this nutshell: "I shouldn't wonder a bit if that architect chap were sweet upon Mrs. Soames!" (*J. G.*)

"To put it in a nutshell, " said Charles slowly, "you're willing to come in with me because you think my business could be built up." (*7. W.*)

to cut (make) a long story short... — the substance of it... ; all that need be said...

Well, to cut a long story short, they thought it would be more economical to live at the villa and Laura had the idea that it would keep Tito out of mischief. (*S. M.*)

Well, to make a long story short, she asked me to go to Paris for a week or two till she had consolidated her position. (*S. M.*)

the long and the short of it... — all that need be said; the upshot

Well, the long and the short of it is that officials mustn't gamble. (*B. Sh.*)

I won't repeat her language, it fair startled me but the long and the short of it was she was jealous of the kite. (S. M.)

Two common proverbs commenting on speech and silence: **Speech is silver, silence is gold.** (Silence is better than speech in some circumstances. The proverb is usually quoted to children who talk too much.) **Least said soonest mended.** (By saying very little or keeping silence one may avoid getting into trouble. By saying too much one may bring trouble on oneself or one's friends and may often find it difficult to repair the damage that has been done.)

Plain speaking uses the following phrases: **to call a spade a spade** — to speak plainly; to speak with complete — and generally unpopular — frankness

"I think you're the rudest man I've ever met, " she said in a remote, reflective tone. "And the most mercenary."

"Why? Because I call a spade a spade?" (L. A.)
There's no family pride about me, there's no imaginative sentimental humbug about me. I call a spade a spade ... (Ch. D.)

I am talking about facts, mademoiselle — plain ugly facts. Let's call the spade the spade and say it in one short sentence. Your mother drinks, mademoiselle. (A. Chr.)

This is no time for wearing the shallow mask of manners. When I see a spade I call it a spade. (O. W.)

to go straight to the point or to come to the point — to speak directly about the matter being discussed and stop talking about unimportant and less important matters

He was silent for a minute or two. Then he went straight to the point. "Have you come to a decision, Linnet?" (A. Chr.) Having settled his guest in a chair, the actor went straight to the point. "I'm not going to beat about the bush, " he said. (A. Chr.)

I wish Fleur didn't always go straight to the point.

(J. G.)

As I was in a hurry I asked him to come to the point at once. *(A. W.)*

not to beat about the bush — to concentrate on the main subject; not to ramble around without ever getting to the point

to beat about the bush — to talk about everything except the most important point; to talk round a subject; approach a subject in a roundabout and evasive way

Not to beat about the bush, I have reason to believe that that sweet and innocent lady is being slowly poisoned. *(A. Chr.)*

Having settled his guest in a chair the actor went straight to the point. "I'm not going to beat about the bush," he said. *(A. Chr.)*

"I didn't see any point in beating about the bush," said Skeffington. *(C. S.)*

He spoke bluntly, aware that it was no use to beat about the bush. *(A. Chr.)*

to come (get) down to brass tacks — to stop discussing general principles, plans, etc. and turn attention to practical details

I haven't got all the afternoon to waste. It's time we got down to brass tacks. *(C. S.)* He looks as if he had plenty of determination but when you come down to brass tacks he has no backbone. *(S. M.)*

to say (have) one's say — to state one's views; to express one's opinion

You have said your say; I am going to say mine. *(Ch. D.)*

Winifred, a woman of strong character, let him have his say, at the end of which he lapsed into sulky silence. *(J. G.)*

Plain speaking also implies the use of firm language. In this case the following phrases are common:

not to mince matters (words) — to speak plainly or bluntly

I didn't mince matters, but told him plainly
I thought him a scoundrel. (*D. E. S.*)
You can recall for yourself, Harthouse, what
I said to him. I didn't mince the matter with
him. (*Ch. D.*)
Oh, I am not going to mince words for you.
I know you thoroughly. (*O. W.*)
He spoke with fire and conviction, mincing no
words in his attack upon the slaves and their
morality and tactics... (*V. L.*)

Not to pull one's punches is used with the same meaning.

Mrs. Tyson had turned very white. "You don't pull your punches, do you?" she murmured. "But it may be different with Hugo. Yes!" she exclaimed turning on me with glittering eyes. (*L. A.*) I didn't pull my punches. (*W. B.*)

to tell a person straight that... — to say forcibly and firmly to him that... Also: **to give it him straight.**

I told him straight that I didn't want him around the place any longer. (*W. B.*)
Well, she's never coming here again, I tell you that straight. (*S. M.*)
I'll give it to you straight, Savina. We're stuck for another year. (*M. W.*)

to speak one's mind — to say plainly what one thinks

"At any rate, " she burst out, "I've spoken my mind!" (*A. Chr.*)
You don't mind my speaking my mind this way, dear? (*J. L.*)
On an occasion of this kind it becomes more than a moral duty to speak one's mind. (*O. W.*)

To draw a person out is colloquial for to encourage him to talk.

After dinner mamma undertook "to draw him out" and showed him photographs. (*S. L.*) She knew how to draw people out and whenever a topic seemed to be exhausted she had a remark ready to revive it... (*S. M.*)

To talk about or discuss one's business or profession in non-professional hours is: **to talk shop**.

Don't let's talk shop out of hours, Ellis. It can wait. Tomorrow is also a day. (*C. S.*) Please can I see you again? I don't always talk shop. (*A. C.*)

to talk through one's hat — to talk irrelevantly or without knowledge; to talk nonsense

You're talking through your hat. You're crazy. What's got into you anyhow? (*Th. D.*) "I wasn't talking through my hat!" protested Bing. "I mean it, Lieutenant." (*S. H.*) Many of our politicians are paid £ 400 a year for talking through their hats. (*A. W.*)

Now you're talking! implies that what you said before was irrelevant but now you're talking sensibly and cogently.

Higglns. How much?
The Flower Girl (coming back to him triumphant).
Now you're talking! I thought you'd come off it when you saw a chance of getting back a bit of what you chucked at me last night. (*B. Sh.*)

Queen Ann is dead! is an ironical answer to a person imparting old news.

Talk about Queen Ann being dead! Talk about news with whiskers on! (*B. R.*)

To break the news is to impart bad news only. If it's good news one simply tells it to someone.

Couldn't you have broken the news more gently? — you've nearly killed him. (*J. F.*) The minister is to break the news to you. He'll be here presently. (*B. Sh.*)

To butt in (cut in) is colloquial for to interrupt a conversation; to interfere in a conversation.

How would he have liked it if I'd kept butting in when he was talking? (*N. C.*) I hope I'm not butting in, but you must let me say how much I admire your business-like capacity. (*A. Chr.*)
Excuse me, miss, for buttin' in that way. (*V. L.*)
"Think of the credit for you, " Andrew cut in quickly. (*A. C.*)

to answer (a person) back — to give a rude answer; to be impolite; to reply impudently

Mary, Mary, don't answer your father back! It's dreadful to hear you speak up to him like that ... (*A. C.*)

Common phrases for introducing some topic (remark) into a conversation or discussion are **by the way ... incidentally ... talking of ... that reminds me ...** They may be similarly used and usually refer to something the speaker has just thought of.

By the way, you know there are still two more people to come. Your friends — the Nixey's. (*V. P.*)
"Incidentally, " said Coot, "haven't you got on the track of these pictures from the Papoulis collection yet?" (*V. L.*)
"Talking of servants, " said Mr. Smith, when he had applauded the cook. "I suppose that detective fellow told you what Peter had been?" (*V. L.*) Ah! That reminds me I want some money. (*B. Sh.*)

to broach the idea (subject, matter, etc.) — to begin to talk about it; to open a subject of discussion

I had been turning over an idea in my head, and I felt that the moment had now come to broach it. (*A. Chr.*)

I knew that if I did not quickly broach the subject on my mind, this terrible emotion would conquer me. (*A. C.*)

to keep the ball rolling — to prevent the conversation (or the excitement, amusement) from flagging

Whenever our conversation began to flag, it was Mr. Aungiers who kept the ball rolling by telling some amusing episode from his life. (*K. H.*) Dinner that evening was strangely quiet. Faynes did his best to keep the ball rolling, with the help of his host, but Hetty was very thoughtful, Dassy sad, and Ned preoccupied. (*V. L.*)

Phrases dealing with discussion include the following: to talk (things) over — to discuss something in a friendly manner

He's leaving England in a day or two, and there are several things we have to talk over. (*J. P.*) Come now, Nurse Lloyd, don't misunderstand me. Suppose we talk this over together in the front room. (*A. C.*)

He was going to talk over one or two points with Dr. Maverick this evening. (*A. Chr.*) Bring along your young man and let me have a look at him and we'll talk this over. (*A. Chr.*)

to thrash (thresh) something out — to discuss it thoroughly; to clear up (a problem, etc.) by discussion

"Let us thresh the matter out," said Chaffery, crossing his legs. "Let us thresh the matter out." (*H. W.*)

At four o'clock, when it was all over, Andrew threshed the matter out with Gill and Hope in Gill's room. (*A. C.*)

You must stop to supper — and you and I must thresh these things out. (*H. W.*)

A **huddle** is colloquial for a confidential discussion, and **to go into a huddle** is to discuss privately.

Then the foreman said something about tackle, and the two teams went into a huddle to discuss it. (C. N.)

And I don't want a lot of so-called experts goin' into a huddle and pulling me round in circles, (A. C.)

to get together — to meet in friendly discussion; to confer

Look here, old man, we've got to get together again. Soon. I can't get over it. (A. C.) Then we'll get together and go through all this material and try to make some sense of it. (M. W.) Let's get together on this thing. (M. W.)

To put heads together is similarly used with the meaning *to consult together; to meet in friendly discussion; to deliberate.*

You didn't put your heads together as to what you would say to us? (J. G.) If we put our heads together, we may find a solution. (D. E. S.) She added: "We've been putting our heads together." "Have you?" (C. S.)

to weigh (discuss) the pros and cons — to balance the points in favour with those against

We must always weigh the pros and cons before deciding whether to invest our money or to let it stay in the bank. (W. B.) He's weighing up the pros and cons. He's going to do the best for himself. (C. S.)

An irrelevant topic in the discussion or conversation is said **to be beside the point.**

There was a silence. Linnet controlled herself with an effort and said in a cold voice: "All

this is quite beside the point!" "No, it is not beside the point." (*A. Chr.*)
"Don't let's argue about that, Leo, " I said quietly.
"It's beside the point, anyhow." "No, it isn't, " he cried. (*J. P.*)

Here is proverbial comment on advisability of consultation and discussion:

Two **heads are better than one**. (Two persons in consultation may find the right answer to a problem.)

To turn to Hilary was second nature with him — and surely, in such a task two heads were better than one! (*J. G.*)

17

TIME AND OPPORTUNITY

Time flies, how time flies, time does fly are colloquial comments on the rapid flow of time. They often imply: time passes quickly — so don't waste it. Some colloquial phrases that express the idea of quickness are:

in no time (in less than no time) — very soon; very quickly

"You'll be sick of that in no time." I don't think so." (*J. G.*)

There's a sergeant I was doing business with — he promised he would have me out of jail in no time. (*S. H.*)

She was back in no time with a tray ... (*A. C.*) ... — and then, in less than no time, off you drowse to sleep — ... (*S. L.*)

before you can say Jack Robinson or before you know where you are — very quickly, very soon, in no time

"Now you sit down, " she said, "and I'll make up the bed before you can say Jack Robinson." (S. M.)
If I tell him you're our man you'll get a letter from him before you can say Jack Robinson. (C. S) One thing leads to another, and before you know where you are you're mixed up with a lot of riff-raff and you can't get rid of them. (S. M.) For God's sake, hurry, Doctor. We'll have this roof down on us before we know where we are. (A. C.)

in a twink; in a twinkling; in the twinkling of an eye — very quickly, in a moment

I'll be ready in a twink. The plumber repaired the water-tap in the twinkling of an eye. (K. H.)

In a jiffy; in a second (in half a second); in half a mo; in a minute are similarly used, all meaning *very soon; very quickly*.

Come up to my room and have a wash. Lunch'll be ready in a jiffy. (J. G.)
Wait there, I'll be back in half a second. (A. W.)
"No objection at all, my boy. I'll just go through the cash, lock up, and be with you in half-a-mo, " said Mr. Claye ... (J. F.)
Show him into the study, please, and say I'll be there in a minute. (J. G.)
"I'll bring you the other things in a minute, " said the waitress. (J. G.)

Half a mo (moment) or half a minute usually means *wait a little time*.

Johnson? Half a mo! Yes, the name is familiar to me. (A. W.)
Now, then, we'll have a try at the door. Half

a moment, though, isn't there a door into Miss Cynthia's room? (*A. Chr.*) "scuse me half a minute, Mrs. Owen," exclaimed Ronnie's new client. (*B. R.*)

On the other hand *a long time* is colloquially expressed by these phrases of exaggeration:

(for) donkey's years — a long time; (for) ages

Hello! I haven't seen you for donkey's years.

(*A. W.*)

"Isn't she working?"

"Well, no, she says, after working for donkey's years as you might say, now she's married she's going to take it easy. ..." (*S. M.*)

"Oh, I came to tell you Uncle is very anxious for you to play something for him this evening," Dessy said suddenly. "Will you?"

"My dear, I haven't practised for donkey's years."
(*V. L.*)

till Doomsday or till Kingdom come — a long time; for ever

Go on! If you wait for me, you'll wait till Doomsday. (*A. W.*)

"I haven't an opening. And I may not have one for a year."

"I can wait a year."

"But I can't promise you one even then. I might die or retire. If you wait for me, you may wait till Doomsday." (*L. A.*)

"You could live up here till Kingdom come," he said to Moose, "and no one would ever find out, particularly those dumb wardens." (*J. Ald.*)

A month (week) of Sundays is similarly used meaning *a long time* or *never*.

It will take me a month of Sundays to do it.

(*A. W.*)

I've been with Mr. Gallagher for four years now and a better gentleman you wouldn't find in a week of Sundays. (*S. M.*)

He'll not learn to swim in a month of Sundays.
(*W. B.*)

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Don't be half an hour means *Don't be long about it*

Go and put on your hat and don't be half an hour about it. (*A. W.*)

Once in a blue moon is colloquial for rarely or never.

And the food's pretty rough. You know how these peasants eat: macaroni on Sundays and meat once in a blue moon. (*S. M.*) That only happens once in a blue moon. (*A. W.*) He calls on me once in a blue moon.

A lot of water has flown under the bridge since we last met is a usual comment when you haven't seen people for a long time.

Of things that in your opinion bear no more delay or should have happened long ago you may say: **it's high time (he came); it's about time (we left)**. Note the form of the verb in the following clauses, if there is one.

What! You have not learnt geography? Well, well, it's high time you did. (*A. W.*) The general feeling is that if we're not married it's high time we were. (*S. M.*) It's about time you knew how to behave yourself.

Note also these patterns with similar meaning:

... and about time too.

... and not before it's time.

"Come along, " he said. "We're" ready for you."
"About time too, " Connie answered and joined the little queue that was going upstairs. (*N. C.*) So you're ready? And not before it's time!

(Rather) late **in the day** is colloquial for at a late stage, very late, especially unreasonably.

"What exactly do you want?"
"She deserted me. I want a divorce."
"Rather late in the day, isn't it?" (*J. G.*)

I am not going to begin to be polite now about old Bounderby. It would be rather late in the day. (*Ch. D.*)

"Consent?" thought Jolyon. "Rather late in the day to ask for that." (*J. G.*)

How goes the enemy? is colloquial for *What is the time?* One can kill time that is find ways of passing time without being bored; busy oneself in some useless thing but so as to make the time pass without tediousness.

"What have you been doing?" his mother used to ask him when he came in late for dinner.

"Oh, hanging about just to kill time." Even at the age of sixteen he had found it necessary to kill time. (*J. M.*)

Look, let's not talk about atomic energy or the problems and pleasures of marriage. Let's just kill time. (*M. W.*)

As a matter of fact, you're not interested in sides, you just want to kill time. (*M. W.*)

That would kill the night. We lords of the earth, I reflected as I climbed into bed, are always trying to kill time now — generally with a blunt instrument. (*J. P.*)

To take one's time is not to be in a hurry, and the advice Take your time means: *Do not hurry.*

"Sit down!" said Jolly. "Take your time! Think it over well...." "...Take your time," said Jolly again; "I don't want to be unfair." (*J. G.*)

"I must say, Lewis," he said, "the old boys are taking their time." (*C. S.*)

Leave that to me, Mrs. Dudgeon; and take your time. (*B. S.*)

The operator seemed to be taking his time. (*S. H.*)

"I don't know," I answered. I took my time to think. (*S. M.*)

The proverb Better late than never suggests that it is better to arrive late than never to arrive at all, or be late in the performance of anything rather than never do it. The

proverb is usually quoted to a person who has apologised or being late. Another proverb derived from this one is: **But better never late**. The idea of exactness is expressed in the colloquial **on the dot**, that is, exactly on time, promptly.

We were to dine with the Greens at seven and we reached their house on the dot. (*S. M.*) "We'll be ready on the dot, " said Hetty. (*V. L.*) She says: "Hello, pal. You're right on the dot. Let's go and have a little drink." (*P. Ch.*)

To make good time is not to be late, or even **to be ahead of time** (in advance).

Gorin has come ahead of time to get the lay of the land. (*M. W.*)

When you are **behind time** (late) you may have **to make up for lost time**, that is, to hurry in order to recover lost time.

"Quick, girls, " urged Mamma, "do up your father's garters for him. Look sharp now, he's behind time!" (*A. C.*)

He paused. "We've got a lot of work to do, " he added, looking hard to Mr. Jossier. "Making up for lost time." (*N. C.*)

But I'll not rest till I've made it up to you.
Let's make up for lost time. (*A. C.*)

One can **spend time or pass the time** (use it up); **waste time** (spend time uselessly) and **lose time** (let time pass without turning it to account), but one should remember the proverb: **Lost time is never found again**. A convenient or favourable time (or occasion) is **an opportunity and to seize (grasp) an (the) opportunity** means *to see and promptly make use of one*.

Old Jolyon was not slow to seize the opportunity this gave him. (*J. G.*)

Winterbourne seized the opportunity to put forward one or two ideas he had been thinking over ... (*R. A.*)

Seizing the opportunity may be also colloquially expressed in these words of wisdom:

Strike while the iron's hot. (Choose the best time for doing anything, the time when circumstances are most favourable.)

"You see, " he heard Soames say, "we can't have it all begin over again. There's a limit; we must strike while the iron's hot." (*J. G.*)

Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today or **Do it now.** (If you have any task to do, do it today; do not postpone doing what you can do now.)

"Never put off till tomorrow, Charlie, what you can do today, " said the man in the velveteen coat. (*H. W.*)

Opportunity only knocks once or **Opportunity seldom knocks twice.** (If an opportunity is neglected, it may not come again for a long time.)

"Opportunity only knocks once! Remember that, " cried Gay. (*G. S.*)

Blast Mr. Blaker. "Opportunity only knocks once, " he told himself. (*N. C.*)

Other proverbs in common use are:

Make hay while the sun shines. (Make the best and earliest use of your opportunities.)

Time and tide wait for no man. (If an opportunity slips away, it may not come again for a long time.)

To take (grasp) time by the forelock. (To use an opportunity as soon as it appears.)

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18

WORK AND BUSINESS

Colloquial phrases concerned with work and business include the following:

to be on the job — to be at work; to be working; especially working well

Despite all Mrs. Josser's warnings, Mr. Josser was back on the job again. (*N. C.*) Nobody knows his business. Nobody knows how he spends his time. Even when he's on the job, he ... disappears most of each day soon as his work is done. (*J. L.*)

(to be) on the go — (to be) at work or doing something active

I'll keep the car on the go about here till you come. (*B. Sh.*)
I do my best. I'm on the go night and day. (*D. A. S.*)
I've been on the go ever since daybreak. (*H. W.*)

to get down to (one's work, business, etc.) — to settle down to it seriously

The holidays are over; we must get down to work again. (*A. H.*)
He paused and then said in his ordinary everyday voice: "Let's get down to it." (*A. Chr.*)
The Jossers were just having a cup of tea before they got down to things. (*N. C.*)

to get on with work (job, etc.) — to advance in doing it;
to progress with one's business

I couldn't back out on them even if I wanted to. And I don't want to. However, let's get on with the work. (*M. W.*)

"How are you getting on with my cousin's house?"
"It'll be finished in about a week." (*J. G.*) We've
had enough amusement and must get on with our
job. (*J. P.*)

The general idea of being (very) busy may be expressed by
the following phrase in common use:

to have one's hands full — to be very busy; to have as
much to do as one is able to do

When a man is so busily engaged that he cannot attempt
anything more, he is said to have his hands full.

My hands are full (or) I have my hands full.
(i. e. I am fully occupied.) (*A. H.*)

At the end of his visit, as Andrew stood, talking
to her at the door of her house, he remarked with
regret: "You have your hands full. It's a pity
you must keep Idris home from school." (*A. C.*)

"What if I ask Jack Burton to give you a hand?"
Roy told him. "Jack will do what he can ..."

"He's got his own hands full," Sam said. (*J. Ald.*)
"Another thing is," he goes on, "we've got our
hands pretty full." (*P. Ch.*)

Do not expect him to help you; he has his hands
full. (*W. M.*)

We have our hands full preparing the show.
(*K. H.*)

To have a lot of work on one's hands means the same
thing,

Shouldn't I look foolish to forgo a competent
adviser now that I've got a lot of work on my hands.
(*B. R.*)

To have (a lot) on also means *to be very busy*,

I've a lot on this week, but next week I shall
probably have more time to spare. (*W. B.*) Have you
anything on this afternoon? (i. e. Have you any
engagement? Are you free?) (*A. H.*)

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Other phrases expressing the notion of being busy include the following: **to be snowed under with work; not to have a minute to spare; to be (hard) at it.**

After so much inactivity it's good to be hard at it again. (*W. B.*)

If well-behaved they even on occasion served as house-boys. Cooper kept them hard at it.

He liked to see them work. (*S. M.*)

I wish I could help you with the Garden Party, but I really haven't a minute to spare. (*W. B.*)

I'm snowed under with work this week, but next week I'll probably have more time.

(to have) other fish to fry — (to have) other business to do (and therefore be busy)

No; I can't go now. I've got other fish to fry. If you can see through this mystery, it's more than I can. I'm beaten, and I confess it. In any case I've other fish to fry. (*A. Chr.*) What did you mean by saying you had other fish to fry, Sir Charles? (*A. Chr.*)

A common simile describing a busy person is: **as busy as a bee.**

She had no sooner done this, than off she was again; and there she stood once more, as brisk and busy as a bee... (*Ch. D.*)

A busy person may protest (against some additional work, etc.) in the following words: **I have only one pair of hands.**

"Can't you look after yourselves for once? I've only got one pair of hands, you know, " said their harassed mother. (*W. B.*)

The idea of working too hard is expressed in the following phrases: **to burn the candle at both ends** — to work too hard; use all one's energy; stay up late and get up early

"I'm worried about you, " she said.

"What's the matter?"

"You mustn't burn the candle at both ends, "

(*C. S.*)

to overdo it — to make oneself too tired by working too hard

"Mind you don't go overdoing it now you are here," he remarked at last, as though Mr. Josser's return had been his own idea entirely. "Take it easy, remember no late hours." (*N. C.*)

"And if I might suggest, Miss Dinny, a little sea air for you."

"Yes, Blore, I was thinking of it."

"I'm glad, miss; one overdoes it at this time of the year." (*J. G.*)

Other phrases connected with the idea of much work include the following: **to work one's fingers to the bone** — to work very hard

I intend to go at my profession in earnest, and work my fingers to the bone. (*B. Sh.*) In the cotton-mills young girls and women worked their fingers to the bone. (*K. H.*)

to put one's back into something — to work very hard at it

"That's why I'd rather else tackled her... Firstly," he smiled ruefully, "I shall be accused of not putting my back into the job, and secondly — well — she's a friend — you understand?" (*A. Chr.*)

to keep one's nose to the grindstone — to work hard and labouriously

John wants to take the doctor's degree; he has to keep his nose to the grindstone. (*K. H.*)

to have one's work cut out (for one) — to have as much work as one can do; to have a difficult task

It's a big job, he'll have his work cut out for him. (*A. H.*)

I expect to have my work cut out for me. I shall act and I shall act promptly. (*S. M.*) "Huph!" said Soames. "Commissions! You'll have your work cut out, if you begin that sort of thing!" (*J. G.*)

"Mrs. Nunro is a great friend of mine. She's been kindness itself to me. I won't hear a word said against her." "Then I'm afraid you'll have your job cut out for you if you stay here much longer." (*S. At.*)

Getting over the hard, preliminary work may be colloquially put in this way: **to break the back (the neck) of a thing (job, etc.)** —

to have disposed of the main part of the task

We have broken the back of it; what remains to be done is easy. (*K. H.*)

In an hour's time we shall have broken the back of the job. (*W. B.*)

This has been a big job but I have broken the back of it now. (*Eck.*)

Other common phrases dealing with work are: to sack a person — to dismiss him from work to get (be given) the sack — to be dismissed from a job

As a matter of fact, I hadn't thought they would want to sack me, but — (*B. R.*) We'll wait three months — to make sure you don't get the sack — and then — (*A. Chr.*) He's just given me the sack; and I have four children looking to me for their bread. (*B. Sh.*) For the last five years he's been in the City in a stuffy office. And now they're cutting down and he's got the sack. (*A. Chr.*)

To get (be given) one's cards means the same thing.

If the men don't return by tomorrow they'll get their cards. (*W. B.*)

to be kicked out — to be thrown out; to be dismissed with contempt

"Did Almond play?" asked Kenning. "You bet your life he didn't," said Walton. "They kicked him out of the team last season." (*S. M.*)

to give notice (to one's employer) — to give official warning of one's intention to cease employment

"And are you his manager?"

"I have given him notice. In a couple of weeks
I shall have shaken off his accursed slavery."

(A. C. D.)

I had a man called Foreman then, the best valet
I ever had, and why do you think he gave me
notice? *(S. M.)*

to knock off — to stop work for a (short) period

The work went well all the morning, and it was half
past one when I knocked off for lunch. *(J. P.)*
Today's Friday. Let's knock off until Monday. *(M.
W.)*

to pack (it) up and **to pack in** have the same significance —
to leave off work

Let's pack in and have a drink together. I've got sort
of a date to-night but there's plenty of time. *(M.
W.)*

But we can't pack up. ... We have to carry on. *(J.
P.)*

To call it a day may be similarly used with the meaning *to
consider that particular period of work finished.*

"You must have had something in mind?" said De
Witt. "You didn't think you'd close shop and call it a
day?" *(S. H.)*

A rest from work is a **break**.

When I came to Kremmen I said to myself: Now
you're going to take a little break. *(S. H.)* A week-
end at Brighton makes a nice break. *(W. B.)*

to be at a loose end — to be without definite occupation; to
have nothing to do although you would like to be occupied

I'm at a loose end so I was telling Mr. Croxton a
thing or two about the City. *(J. P.)* She's at a loose
end, you know, badly wants something to do. *(J. G.)*

to kick one's heels — to be waiting for work; to waste time waiting uselessly

You've just got to kick your heels and look as though you like it. (C. S.)
I won't leave you here to kick your heels. (J. G.)

to twiddle one's thumbs — to wait in forced inaction; to be idle

I can't stay here for ever twiddling my thumbs. Better give it up and call on her in the late afternoon. (J. G.)
She's nothing else to do, it seems, but to sit and twiddle her thumbs. (W. B.)

To shirk work (i. e. to avoid it) may be also colloquially put in this way:

to play truant (play hookey) — to remain away from one's place of work, especially school, without a good reason

I happened to have nothing very pressing just then to tie me, and I determined to play hookey from my consulting room for half a day and go over to Eastfolk museum. (H. W.)
"What made you run away? Playing truant, eh?"
"I don't know." (Gr. Gr.)
It was a wonderful day, so the two boys decided to play truant and go swimming. (K. H.)

Some proverbs concerned with work: **All work and no play make Jack a dull boy.** (People, especially children, should not be kept at work for too long but should be given time for games and rest.) **Many hands make light work.** (Work is easy when several people share it.)

"Sorted this lot? I thought we shouldn't get through them this afternoon!" "Many 'ands, anyway two pairs, make light work." (B. R.)

Put your shoulder to the wheel. (Do not stand idle looking at any work that has to be done, but set to work with a good will.)

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19

RESPONSIBILITY

Colloquial phrases concerned with the idea of responsibility include the following:

Leave it to me expresses a willingness to undertake responsibility and means *I'll make myself responsible for it*. The latter is also colloquially used.

You must stay and have dinner with us. Leave it to me to tell your father. (7. G.) "You leave it to me," she said. "I'll see her." (S. M.)

"And the show at the pavilion?" she giggled. "You must leave that to me, my dear." (V. L.) I'll make myself responsible for the arrangement. I see no reason why I should make myself responsible for his mistakes. (W. B.) "You'll leave everything to me?" he said. "Everything," she echoed. (A. C.)

it's up to you — - it is your responsibility; the responsibility rests with you

It's up to you to teach him better. (D. E. S.) It's up to you to break the news to her. (W. B.) It was up to me to tell her about Helen. (W. B.) It was up to her to take that decision.

to take (something) on — to accept responsibility

You've taken a bit too much, on ... Most of the stuff isn't your responsibility. (W. B.) John has taken on that job at the office for the time being. (W. B.) I'm not going to take any more work on now, I'm too busy.

To take it upon oneself means *undertaking something arbitrarily*, i. e. without proper authorisation.

He strikes me as taking a bit too much on himself.
(*W. B.*)

Look here, Charles. I take all responsibility on myself. (*A. Chr.*)

(to have something) on ones hand(s) — (to have it) resting on one as a responsibility, under one's charge

Myself, I don't bother about the surgeries, I have the hospital on my hands. (*A. C.*) I have an empty house on my hands. (*A. H.*) "You have grave affairs on hand?" Poirot shook his head. (*A. Chr.*)

to let oneself in for — being involved in some unpleasant responsibility (difficulty, loss)

"My word, she doesn't know what she's letting herself in for," said Banford... (*D. L.*) If I'd known what I was letting myself in for, I wouldn't have come here. (*B. Sh.*) I oughtn't to have let you in for this, Jean, it was I who brought the young things together, you know. (*J. G.*)

Do you two boys know what you're letting yourself in for? (*S. H.*)

(to do something) off one's own bat — (to do it) on one's own initiative, and the action is usually regarded favourably

He arranged the show completely off his own bat. (*W. B.*)

Do you think he acted off his own bat?

to be landed with someone (something) — to have an unpleasant responsibility thrust upon one

I am landed with her as a travelling companion. (*W. B.*)

to carry (take) the can (back) — to have to answer for other people's misdeeds, bear the chief burden of blame

I'm not responsible and I'm certainly not going to carry the can.

I suppose I will have to take the can back for the lot.
(*W. B.*)

to carry (hold) the baby — to be left with an unpleasant responsibility or task

We moved house just when Dad was on a business trip. So Mummy and I had to carry the baby alone.
(*K. N.*) He was left holding the baby. (*W. B.*)

To shift the responsibility on to someone else is to pass the buck (baby).

Yates had no desire to go to the kitchen. He passed the buck to Bing... (*S. H.*) You're always trying to pass the buck to somebody.

Other expressions for evasion of responsibility are: that's your (his, etc.) funeral — that's your (his, etc.) responsibility in the event of failure; whatever happens, you alone are responsible that's your (his, etc.) look-out — in case of failure, you (he, etc.) alone are responsible is similarly used

All right, it's your funeral. But I still think you ought to have a definite figure in mind.
(*M. W.*)

If the car breaks down, it will be your funeral.
(*D. E. S.*)

"Oh, well, it's not my funeral, " he went on.

"If the governor wants to keep him on here whether he's fitted for anything special or not, that's his look-out." (*Th. D.*)

Never you mind what I look her for; that's my look-out. (*Ch. D.*)

"If you wait for me, you may wait till Doomsday." "I guess that's my look-out." (*L. A.*)

it's (not) my (his, etc.) pigeon — it's (not) my (his, etc.) concern

Leave the unpacking to me. That's my pigeon. You can get the kettle boiling for the tea. (*W. B.*) The prisoners are my pigeon, and you've got no right to interfere. (*S. M.*) "One understands," the detective said to the chief... "that this lady I have seen is not our pigeon at all." (*V. L.*) But isn't it his pigeon?

to wash one's hand of something (somebody) — to disclaim all further responsibility for it (him)

If you must come to grief, you must; I wash my hands of it. (*J. G.*)
Either you cut it out, or we should have to wash our hands of the whole business. (*C. S.*)
If you don't come back to-morrow, I'll wash my hands of you.
If you marry that wastrel, I shall wash my hands of you. (*W. B.*)

The evasion of responsibility is also expressed thus: **to hang back** — to be reluctant to assume responsibility; show unwillingness to act or move

You were driving yourself with the idea that I wouldn't be able to hang back if you set a fast pace. (*M. W.*)
When the officer asked for volunteers, not one soldier hung back. (*A. H.*)

to back out — to withdraw from understanding, agreement, etc.

Do you think I'm trying to back out? (*M. W.*)
I had been lying. There was still time to back out. (*C. S.*)
Aren't you going to help us? Are you backing out?

to shirk it (responsibility, danger, work, etc.) — to avoid it

Mind you, we may have to tell you that it's not your vocation. One mustn't shirk one's responsibilities. (C. S.)

With you at the end awaiting me, I have never shirked. (7. L.)

Unpleasant to be thought a shirker by one's own mother. But it wasn't shirking. (J. G.)

Have it your own way! resigns responsibility to someone who has been persistently clamouring for it. It means *Do just what you want to, I refuse to argue or discuss it further!*

He grinned. "Have it your own way. You always do." (V. L.)

Very well then, have it your own way. I leave it in your hands. (A. Chr.)

"All right, have it your own way," he said. (S. M.)

20

THOUGHTS, CONCLUSIONS AND DECISIONS

Here belong such colloquial phrases in common use: **to put on one's thinking cap** — to consider; to meditate on a special problem

I must put on my thinking cap, before I can take a decision. (K. H.)

It's no good asking me now. I've got to put on my thinking cap. I want to get to the bottom of this affair. (R. K.)

to think something over — to consider it, to reflect upon it

"While you were away, I thought it over," she went on. (M. W.)

Sister, I've been thinking things over and I've made up my mind to go. (*A. C.*)

to play (toy) with the idea — to give it some consideration but to be undecided whether to adopt it; to allow the mind to think about (but not in a serious way)

I'm toying with the idea of spending next winter on a lecture tour overseas. (*W. B.*) He played with the idea of calling the man, as if his voice could have some mystic significance. (*M. W.*)

put that in your pipe and smoke it — accept and consider the statement

"Well, she's never coming here again, I tell you that straight."

"That's what you think. I'm engaged to her, so put that in your pipe and smoke it." (*S. M.*) "I don't know what you're talking about, " he said, "but you're insulting Lady Rayle. And since you know so much, you might just as well put it in your pipe and smoke it." (*Ch. D.*) If you don't take your training serious, I'll take you off the team; you can put that in your pipe and smoke it (*K. H.*)

to put two and two together — - to judge or guess the significance of pieces of information or evidence; to form an opinion or conclusion after considering fact

Did you not put two and two together, and reflect that it was not Alfred Inglethorp who was quarreling with his wife? (*A. Chr.*) "I have no definite proof of course, but I can put two and two together, " replied Miss Moir coldly. (*A. C.*)

So Joe and I put two and two together and figured Charlie must have discovered what was going on. (*R. K.*)

Since the ball at Roger's he had seen too clearly how the land lay — he could put two and two together quicker than most men. (*J. G.*)

of the evidence is expressed by the

But afterwards in the drawing-room she sat down by Mrs. Small determined to get to the bottom of the matter. (J. G.)

It's jolly hard to get to the bottom of it. (J. G.) Mrs Babbington, I want to get to the bottom of this I want to find out the truth. (A. Chr.) I think we shall get to the bottom of this affair. (J. F.)

To dissolve any doubts about a conclusion or judgement, it may be necessary:
to check up on it — to make certain by checking

Any time you want to check up on it, call up Senator Holtzer at the Senate Office Building in Washington. (M. W.)

After all, it was her treat and she didn't want to share it with anyone. So she decided to check up on things first. (N. C.)

We shall have to check up on that, of course. (A. Chr.)

This morning he decided to check up on the thing himself ... (S. H.)

to think twice about doing something — to think carefully whether to do it or not; to avoid hasty action

But one or two members of the society have put an interesting point of views which has made me think twice before saying no once and for all. (C. S.)

"Queer, " he thought. "If she were plain I shouldn't be thinking twice about it. Beauty is the devil when you're sensitive to it!". (J. G.)

on second thoughts - after deliberation

Mr Faynes turned back towards the house. On a second thought, he went to the Lodge instead, and sat down to write a letter ... (V. L.)

"The day has been too much for her." "Seems so," Yates agreed. Women cracked easily. On second thoughts he felt that this wasn't the answer, that there must be something more behind her hysteria. (S. H.)

Wisdom of careful thinking and caution is summed up in the proverb:

Second thoughts are best.

A warning comment on hasty conclusions or judgements is contained in the following humorous saying:

Don't jump to conclusions — you might get a nasty fall.

to jump to conclusions — to judge hastily

"Stephen Restarick, " exclaimed Sergeant Lake joyfully.

"Now don't jump to conclusions, " Inspector Curry warned him. "Ten to one that's what we're meant to think." (A. Chr.) I don't see how anyone could blame us for jumping to the conclusions we did. (A. Chr.)

to come to a decision — to reach a decision, to decide

He was silent for a minute or two. Then he went straight to the point. "Have you come to a decision, Linnet?" (A. Chr.) Suddenly he seemed to come to a decision. (A. Chr.)

to make up one's mind — to come to a decision

to change one's mind — to alter one's decision or purpose

Now I've changed my mind. I've changed my mind simply because I feel like changing my mind. I'm the only around here who can feel like changing my mind. I'm the only one around here who can do it, and the way I happen to make up my mind at the moment is the way things happen to get run around here all the goddamn way down the goddamn line! (M. W.) Sister, I've been thinking things over and I've made up my mind to go. (A. C.)

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to think better of something — to think about again and decide to give up (a plan, idea, etc.); to change one's mind

Perhaps he had thought better of the idea of having a private chat with Wendy. (*V. L.*) I've got to make sure Leslie doesn't think better of giving me my chance. (*B. R.*)

To make a decision that is final and irrevocable is: to burn one's boats (bridges) — to do something which makes it impossible to change one's plans; deliberately make retreat or surrender impossible

He said, "You remember Cortez, the fellow who burnt his boats? I've burned mine. I've got to kill myself. You see I stole that car. We'd be stopped in the next town. It's too late even to go back." (*Gr. Gr.*)

He begged her again to see him, he implored her to have strength, he repeated that she meant everything in the world to him, he was frightened that she would let people influence her, he asked her to burn her boats and bolt with him to Paris. (*S. M.*)

To let chance or luck decide an issue is to toss up for it — to decide something by tossing up a coin. ("Heads" or "Tails"?)

Who's to pay for the drinks? Let's toss up for it. (*A. H.*)

"What do you think you want to do, Morris?" She looked up at him; looked swiftly away. "Might — toss up for it, Mr. Ronny." (*B. R.*)

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List of Books and Abbreviations Used

Ball, W. J. A Practical Guide to Colloquial Idiom. (*W. B.*) *Eckersley, C. E.* Essential English for Foreign Students. (*Eck.*) *Freeman, W. A.* Concise Dictionary of English Slang. (*D. E. S.*) *Hackenber, K.* Englische idiomatische Redewendungen. (*K. H.*) *Henderson B. L. K.* A Dictionary of English Idioms. (*B. H.*) *Hornby, A. S., Gatenby, E. V.* and *Wakefield, H.* The Advanced

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(*D. A. S.*)

Worrall, A. J. English Idioms for Foreign Students. (*A. W.*) *Wyld, H. C.* The Universal Dictionary of the English Language. (*U.D.*) *A. B. Кунин, Англо-русский фразеологический словарь (A. K.)*

Aldington, R. (R. A.)
Aldridge, J. (J. Ald.)
Auchincloss, L. (L. A.)
Christie, A. (A. Chr.)
Ckeyney, P. (P. Ch.)
Collins, N. (N. C.)
Cronin, A. J. (A. C.)
Derleth, A. (A. Der.)
Dickens, Ch. (Ch. D.)
Dickson, C. (C. D.)
Dreiser, Th. (Th. D.)
Fletcher, J. S. (J. F.)
Galsworthy, J. (J. G.)
Gow, J. and A. D. 'Usseau. (D. R.)
Green, G. (Gr. Gr.)
Hardy, F. J. (F. H.)
Heim, S. (S. H.)
Jerome K. Jerome. (J. J.)
Kelston, R. (R. K.)
Lawrence, D. H. (D. L.)
Leacock, St. (S. L.)
Lindsay, L. (L. Lind.)
Linklater, E. (E. L.)

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*Loder, V. (V. L.)
London, J. (J. L.)
Mansfield, K. (K. M.)
Maugham, W. S. (S. M.)
Modern English Short Stories. (St.)
Moore, J. (J. M.)
Porter, K. (K. P.)
Priestley, J. B. (J. P.)
Prichard, K. S. (K. Pr.)
Ruck, B. (B. R.)
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Saxton, A. (A. S.)
Shaw, B. (B. Sh.)
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Stevenson, R. L. (R. S.)
Thackeray, W. (W. Th.)
Twain, M. (M. T.)
Wells, H. (H. W.)
Wilde, O. (O. W.)
Wilson, M. (M. W.)*

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