A DICTIONARY OF CATCH PHRASES

British and American,
from the Sixteenth Century
to the Present Day

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A DICTIONARY OF CATCH PHRASES

Other Works by Eric Partridge

Routledge & Kegan Paul:

ORIGINS: AN ETYMOLOGICAL DICTIONARY OF MODERN ENGLISH; 4th edn (US: Macmillan).
A DICTIONARY OF THE UNDERWORLD; 3rd edn (US: Macmillan).
A DICTIONARY OF SLANG AND UNCONVENTIONAL ENGLISH: vol. 1, 5th edn; vol. 2, 7th edn (US: Macmillan).
A DICTIONARY OF HISTORICAL SLANG – that is, up to 1914, ed. Jacqueline Simpson (US: Macmillan).
A SMALLER SLANG DICTIONARY; 2nd edn (US: Philosophical Library). Also in British paperback.
SLANG TODAY AND YESTERDAY; 4th edn.
SHAKESPEARE'S BAWDY: AN ESSAY AND A GLOSSARY; 3rd edn (US: Dutton). Also in a British, and an American, paperback.
A DICTIONARY OF CLICHÉS; numerous printings (US: a Dutton paperback).
COMIC ALPHABETS: A LIGHT-HEARTED HISTORY (now available only in US: Hobbs, Dorman).

André Deutsch:

SWIFT'S 'POLITE CONVERSATION': A COMMENTARY EDITION (US: Westview Press).
CHAMBER OF HORRORS: OFFICIALESE, BRITISH AND AMERICAN (US: Westview Press).

Hamish Hamilton:

USAGE AND ABUSAGE: A GUIDE TO GOOD ENGLISH; numerous edns. (Also in a Penguin paperback, both British and American.)
NAME THIS CHILD: A DICTIONARY OF CHRISTIAN OR GIVEN NAMES; many printings. (Also an Evans Brothers paperback: *Name Your Child.*)

Books for Libraries, Inc. (Plainview: New York State):

Many republications of books out of print in Britain, including: Francis Grose's A CLASSICAL DICTIONARY OF THE VULGAR TONGUE, a commentary edn; NAME INTO WORD, a dictionary of proper names become common property; ENGLISH: A COURSE FOR HUMAN BEINGS; (with John Brophy) THE LONG TRAIL, being songs and slang of the British soldier in WW1, and (with Wilfred Granville and Frank Roberts) A DICTIONARY OF FORCES' SLANG, of all three services in WW2; A NEW TESTAMENT WORD-BOOK; LEXICOGRAPHY: A PERSONAL MEMOIR; and seven volumes of essays on language (general) and words (particular). Also some books literary rather than linguistic, e.g.: GLIMPSES (short stories); JOURNEY TO THE EDGE OF MORNING (autobiographical essays); THE FRENCH ROMANTICS' KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH LITERATURE; EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH ROMANTIC POETRY.

PREFACE

After a longish period of *ad hoc* reading and note-making (with, since, a continual 'spare-time' reading) I began to write, not merely compile, this dictionary in September 1973 and completed the writing almost exactly two years later.

I have been deeply interested in catch phrases ever since during the First World War when, a private in the Australian infantry, I heard so many; in both *Slang Today and Yesterday* and, 1937 onwards, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, I have paid them considerable – and increasing – attention. Moreover, as I have always read rather widely in American fiction and humour, I did not start from scratch in that vast field.

But I could not have adequately treated either the catch phrases of the United States or those of the British Commonwealth of Nations without the constant, faithful, extraordinarily generous assistance of friends and acquaintances and pen-friends. In the list of acknowledgments, I have named all the more copious and helpful – at least, I like to think that I've done so. Probably there are a few unforgivable omissions; I can but ask forgiveness.

There are, however, three acknowledgments, in a different order of things, to be made right here. I have to thank *Newsweek* for permission to quote a long passage from an article by the late John – son of Ring – Lardner; and Mr Edward Albee for his unqualified permission to quote freely from his perturbing and remarkable plays, so sensitive to the nuances of colloquial usage. In yet another order, I owe a very special debt to Mr Norman Franklin, who has, a score of times, saved me from making an ass of myself and, several score of times, supplied much-needed information.

The Introduction is intentionally very brief: I don't pretend to an ability to define the indefinable: I have merely attempted to indicate what a catch phrase is, there being many varieties of this elusive phenomenon; a phenomenon at once linguistic and literary – one that furnishes numerous *marginalia* to social history and to the thought-patterns of civilization.

Finally, a caution. I have, although very seldom, written an entry in such a way as to allow the reader to see just how it grew from a vague idea into a certainty or, at least, a virtual certainty.

Late 1976 EP

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I have not counted the number of entries; it can hardly be less than 3,000 – a figure that will, I hope, be increased both by my own further research and by further contributions from my loyal helpers, as well as from all those reviewers and general readers who will have noticed omissions and defects.

To generous friends and acquaintances and pen-friends I owe much: and of these, perhaps the most helpful have been the following (an asterisk* indicates a very considerable indebtedness):

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*The late Wilfred Granville – like Mr Franklyn, an indefatigable helper – who died on 23 March 1974.

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Dr Edward Hodnett, American scholar.

*Dr Douglas Leechman, an authority on Canadiana.

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*Mr Barry Prentice of Sydney, Australia; copiously and perspicaciously.
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Mrs Camilla Raab of Routledge & Kegan Paul.
*Mr Peter Sanders of Godalming, Surrey.
Professor Harold Shapiro, University of North Carolina.
*The late Frank Shaw, authority on 'Scouse' – the speech of the Merseyside. (See the note at *do the other* in the dictionary.)
*Dr Joseph T. Shipley of New York; patiently and most helpfully.
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*Mr Ramsey Spencer (bless him too) of Camberley, Surrey.
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INTRODUCTION

Man is a creature who lives not by bread alone, but principally by catchwords.
R. L. Stevenson, *Virginibus Puerisque* (Part II), 1881

Friends – and others – have often asked me, 'What the devil *is* a catch phrase?' I don't know. But I do know that my sympathy lies with the lexicographers.

Consult the standard dictionaries, the best and the greatest: you will notice that they tacitly admit the impossibility of precise definition. Perhaps cravenly, I hope that the following brief 'wafflings' will be reinforced by the willingness of readers to allow that 'example is better than precept' and thus enable me to 'get away with it'. A pen-friend, who has, for thirty years or more, copiously contributed both slang terms, on the one hand, and catch phrases (not, of course, necessarily slangy) on the other, tells me that the best definition he has seen is this: 'A catch phrase is a phrase that has caught on, and pleases the populace.' I'll go along with that, provided these substitutions be accepted: 'saying' for 'phrase'; and 'public' for the tendentious 'populace'.

Frequently, catch phrases are not, in the grammarians' sense, phrases at all, but sentences. Catch phrases, like the closely linked proverbial sayings, are self-contained, as, obviously, clichés are too. Catch phrases are usually more pointed and 'human' than clichés, although the former sometimes arise from, and often they generate, the latter. Occasionally, catch phrases stem from *too* famous quotations. Catch phrases often supply – indeed they are – conversational gambits; often, too, they add a pithy, perhaps earthy, comment. Apart from the unavoidable 'he-she' and 'we-you-they' conveniences, they are immutable. You will have perceived that the categories Catch Phrase, Proverbial Saying, Famous Quotation, Cliché, may co-exist: they are not snobbishly exclusive, any one of any other. All depends on the context, the nuance, the tone.

Precepts mystify: examples clarify. Here, in roughly chronological order, are a few catch phrases.

The proverbial *no one can say black is my eye* developed, probably late in the sixteenth century, into the catch phrase, *black* is – later, *black's – your eye*, you're at fault, you're guilty, whence *black's the white of my eye*, a nautical protestation of innocence. Nor is this catch phrase entirely extinct.

I'll have your guts for garters, a threat originally serious, but in late nineteenth to twentieth century usually humorous, has likewise had an astonishingly long history. In Robert Greene's *James the Fourth*, 1598, we find, 'I'll make garters of thy guts, thou villain'; and in an early seventeenth-century parish register, my formidably erudite friend, Dr Jack Lindsay, discovered the prototype: *I'll have your guts for garter points*. In the twentieth century, the modern form has been mostly a Cockney, and often a racecourse, semi-humorous threat.

Another catch phrase with an historical background is *hay is for horses*, which duly acquired the variant *'ay is for 'orses*. In Swift's *Polite Conversation* (the most fertile and valuable single literary source of them all), 1738, we read:

NEVEROUT: Hay, Madam, did you call me?
MISS: Hay! Why; hay is for horses.

Nowadays, the catch phrase is usually addressed to someone who has used either *hey* (as in 'Hey there, you!') or *eh?* for 'I beg your pardon.' This refreshing domesticity – compare, for instance, *'she' is a cat's mother* – became, inevitably in its colloquial form, *'ay is for 'orses*, incorporated in the Comic Phonetic Alphabet. You know the sort of thing: '*B* is for honey' – '*C* is for fish' – and the rest of it. Perhaps, however, I should add that, in Swift, *hay* is a mere phonetic variant of the exclamatory *hey* and is therefore associated with *eh*, whence the entirely natural *'ay is....*

A characteristically nineteenth-century catch phrase is *Lushington is his master*, he's a drunkard, which has derived from the synonymous eighteenth to nineteenth-century *Alderman Lushington is concerned.* Clearly there is both a pun on *lush*, an old low-slang term for strong liquor, and on that convivial society or club known as *the City of Lushington* (recorded by the indispensable *Oxford English Dictionary*).

Originating early in the present century, *hullo, baby! – how's nurse?* was an urban and civilian jocularity before the licentious soldiery blithely adopted and popularized it during those extraordinarily formative years, 1914–18. It was spoken to any girl pushing a perambulator. So far as I'm aware, it had, in the army and the air force at least, fallen into disuse by the time the Second World War arrived; it does, however, exemplify the wit and the humour that mark so many catch phrases.

A WW2 phrase that has impressed me with its wit (and its realism) is the mock-Latin *illegitimis non carborundum*, which, after the war, spread to civilians throughout the British Commonwealth, even to those who had no Latin. Meaning 'Don't let the bastards grind' – idiomatically 'wear' and colloquially 'get' – 'you down', it is generally supposed to have been coined by Military Intelligence. *To coin a phrase – that figures.* (Two other post-WW2 catch phrases.)

But *illegitimis non carborundum* does not stand alone in its gravity. I'll cite only two other, at first intensely serious, catch phrases: the First World War's *hanging on the old barbed wire*; and the socially and sociologically, racially and historically, far-reaching and important creation of the (probably early) 1930s, a catch phrase remaining predominantly grave – to wit, *some of my best friends are Jews*, to which I shall attempt to do justice.

Watch how you go!

ABBREVIATIONS

Adams	Franklin P. Adams (1881–1960). *Baseball's Sad Lexicon*, 1936(?)
Am	John Russell Bartlett, *Americanisms*, 1848; 2nd edn, 1859; 4th edn, 1877
anon.	anonymous
Apperson	G. L. Apperson, *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*, 1929
AS	Sidney J. Baker, *Australia Speaks*, 1953
Baker	Sidney J. Baker, *Australian Slang*, 1942; 3rd edn, 1943; revised edn, 1959
Bartlett	John Russell Bartlett, *Bartlett's Familiar Quotations*, 14th edn, 1968
Baumann	Heinrich Baumann, *Londinismen*, 1887
BE	B.E., Gent, *Dictionary of the Canting Crew*, 1698–9
Benham	Gurney Benham, *Dictionary of Quotations*, 1907, revised edn, 1948
Berrey	Lester V. Berrey and Melvin Van Dan Bark, *The American Thesaurus of Slang*, 1942
B & L	A. Barrère and C. G. Leland, *Dictionary*, 2 vols, 1889–90
Bowen	F. Bowen, *Sea Slang*, 1929
B & P	John Brophy and Eric Partridge, *Songs and Slang of the British Soldier: 1914–1918*, 1930; 3rd edn, 1931; republished as *The Long Trail*, 1965
BQ	Burton Stevenson, *Book of Quotations*, 5th edn, 1946
Brewer	E. C. Brewer, *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable*, revised and enlarged edn, 1952
Brophy	John Brophy, *English Prose*, 1932
C	century
c.	*circa* (about the year ——)
cf	compare
Clarke	John Clarke, *Paroemiologia*, 1639. Sometimes noted as *P*
CM	Clarence Major, *Black Slang: A Dictionary of Afro-American Talk*, 1970 in US, 1971 in Britain
Cobb	Irvin S. Cobb, *Eating in Two or Three Languages*, 1919
Cohen	J. M. and M. J. Cohen, *Penguin Dictionary of Quotations*, 1960
Collinson	W. E. Collinson, *Contemporary English: A Personal Speech Record*, 1927
c.p.	catchphrase; pl., c.pp.
DAE	W. L. Craigie and R. J. Hulbert, *A Dictionary of American English*, 1938–44
D. Am.	M. M. Mathews, *A Dictionary of Americanisms*, 1950
DCCU	Helen Dahlskog, *A Dictionary of Contemporary and Colloquial Usage*, 1971
DD	Oliver Herford, *The Deb's Dictionary*, 1931
DNWP	Anne Baker, *A Dictionary of Northamptonshire Words and Phrases*, 1854
DSUE	Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang*, 1937; edn quoted is 7th edn, 1970, unless otherwise stated
ed	edited
EDD	Joseph Wright, ed., *The English Dialect Dictionary*, 1896–1905
edn	edition

e.g.	for example
Egan	edition of Grose (q.v.), 1823
EJ	Edward B. Jenkinson, *People, Words and Dictionaries*, 1972
EP	Eric Partridge
esp.	especial; especially
Farb	Peter Farb, *Word Play*, 1973 in US, 1974 in Britain
Farmer	John S. Farmer, *Americanisms – Old and New*, 1889
F & G	E. Fraser and J. Gibbons, *Soldier and Sailor Words and Phrases*, 1925
F & H	John S. Farmer and W. E. Henley, *Slang and Its Analogues*, 1890–1904
Folb	Edith A. Folb, *A Comparative Study of Urban Black Argot*, 1972
Foster	Brian Foster, *The Changing English Language*, 1968
Fr.	French
Fuller	Thomas ('Proverbs') Fuller, *Proverbs*, 1732
G	Thomas Fuller, *Gnomologia: Adagies and Proverbs*, 1732
Ger.	German
Gr.	Greek
Granville	Wilfred Granville, *Dictionary of Theatrical Terms*, 1952
Greig	J. Y. T. Greig, *Breaking Priscian's Head; or English as She Will be Wrote and Spoke*, 1928
Grose	Francis Grose, *A Classical Dictionary of the Vulgar Tongue*, 1785; 2nd edn, 1788; 3rd edn, 1796; Pierce Egan edn, 1823
Heywood	John Heywood, *Proverbs*, 1546
HLM	H. L. Mencken, *The American Language*, 1921; 2nd edn, 1922; 4th edn, 1936; Supp. 1 = Supplement One, 1945; Supp. 2 = Supplement Two, 1948
Holt	Alfred A. Holt, *Phrase Origins*, 1936
H & P	J. L. Hunt and A. G. Pringle, *Service Slang*, 1943
Hotten	John Camden Hotten, *The Slang Dictionary*, 1859; 2nd edn, 1860; 3rd edn, 1864; 4th edn, 1870; 5th edn, 1874
Howell	James Howell, *Proverbs*, 1659
ibid.	*ibidem*, in the same authority or book
Irwin	Godfrey Irwin, *American Tramp and Underworld Songs and Slang*, 1931
It.	Italian
Jamieson	John Jamieson, *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, 1808
JB	'Jon Bee', *Dictionary*, 1823
Kelly	James Kelly, *Collection of Scottish Proverbs*, 1721
L.	Latin
LB	*The Lexicon Balatronicum*, 1811
l.c.	in or at the passage or book cited
Lyell	T. Lyell, *Slang, Phrase and Idiom in Colloquial English*, 1931
M	James Maitland, *The American Slang Dictionary*, 1891
Mackay	Charles Mackay's essay 'Popular Follies of Great Cities', in *Memoirs of Extraordinary Popular Delusions*, 1841. Available in reprint
McKnight	G. H. McKnight, *English Words and Their Background*, 1923
Manchon	J. Manchon, *Le Slang*, 1923

Matsell	George Matsell, *Vocabulum*, 1859
Moncrieff	W. T. Moncrieff, *Tom and Jerry, or Life in London* (a comedy), 1821
NZS	Sidney J. Baker, *New Zealand Slang*, 1941
ODEP	*The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, 3rd edn, 1970
ODQ	*The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*
OED	*The Oxford English Dictionary: OED* Supp.: Supplement, 1933
P	See Clarke
PG	Francis Grose, *A Proverbial Glossary*, 1787
PGR	E. Partridge, W. Granville and F. Roberts, *A Dictionary of Forces' Slang: 1939–1945*, 1948
pl.	plural
RAF	Royal Air Force
Ray	John ('Proverbial') Ray, *English Proverbs*, 1670; 2nd edn, 1678; enlarged edn, 1813
RS	Edwin Radford and Alan Smith, *To Coin a Phrase*, 1973
S	Jonathan Swift, *Polite Conversation*, 1738, in EP's edn, 1963
Safire	William Safire, *The New Language of Politics*, 1968
Sailors' Slang	Wilfred Granville, *A Dictionary of Sailors' Slang*, 1962
sc.	*L*: scilicet, namely
SE	Standard English
SS	Wilfred Granville, *Sea Slang of the Twentieth Century*, 1949
Stevenson	Burton Stevenson, *Dictionary of Quotations*, 5th edn, 1946
STY	Eric Partridge, *Slang Today and Yesterday*, 1933
Thornton	R. H. Thornton, *American Glossary*, 1912
U	Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of the Underworld*, 2nd edn, 1961; *U3*=3rd edn supplement, 1968
US	United States of America; also as adjective, American
V	Schele de Vere, *Americanisms*, 1871; 2nd edn, 1872
Vaux	John Hardy Vaux, 'Glossary of Cant', in *Memoirs*, written *c.* 1812, published 1818
Ware	J. Redding Ware, *Passing English*, 1909
Webster	Noah Webster (1758–1843). *The Living Webster Encyclopedia of the English Language*; *American Dictionary of the English Language*, 1828; *Webster's New International Dictionary*, 1909, 2nd edn, 1934; *Webster's Third New International Dictionary*, 3rd edn
Weekley	Ernest Weekley, *An Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, 1921
W & F	H. Wentworth and S. B. Flexner, *A Dictionary of American Slang*, 1960
W-J	C. H. Ward-Jackson, *It's a Piece of Cake, or RAF Slang Made Easy*, 1943
WW1	First World War (1914–18)
WW2	Second World War (1939–45)
YB	Henry Yule and A. C. Burnell, *Hobson-Jobson*, 1886: edn by W. Crooke, 1903
[.....]	signifies that the entry so enclosed, although doubtfully eligible, is yet worthy of comment

A

à d'autres! Tell that to the Marines! It occurs in Shadwell, *The Sullen Lovers*, 1668, Act IV: '*Ninny*. Pshaw, pshaw, ad'autre, ad'autre, I can't abide you should put your tricks upon me' – glossed thus by George Saintsbury in his edn of four Shadwell plays: 'I.e. "à d'autres" ("tell someone else that"). It was a specially fashionable French catchword among English coxcombs and coquettes of the time. See Dryden's *Marriage à la Mode*', 1673. In short, fashionable in the fashionable London of *c.* 1660–80.

about as high as three penn'orth (or pennyworth) of coppers is a C20 c.p. applied to very short persons, but seldom heard after *c.* 1950.

[**Abyssinia!** belongs to ONE-WORD CATCH PHRASES. It means 'I'll be seein(g) you' and dates from the Abyssinian War, 1935–6.]

accidentally on purpose. Only apparently accidental, but really – and often maliciously – on purpose: since *c.* 1880 in Britain and since *c.* 1885 in US, according to W & F, who add that, in the latter, it was 'in popular student use *c.* 1940'.

according to plan was, in WW1 *communiqués*, a distressingly frequent excuse for failure, e.g. an enforced retreat; it soon became used ironically for anything, however trivial, that did *not* go according to plan. 'Oh, nonsense, old man! All according to plan, don't you know.?' (The Germans, in their *communiqués*, used an equivalent: *planmässig*.) In WW2, there was the similar phrase, *withdrawing to a prepared position*.

act your age! Act naturally – not as if you were much younger than, in fact, you are: adopted, *c.* 1920, from US, where it had an alternative – **be your age!**, likewise adopted. (*DSUE*; Berrey.)

[**apa changhol dua malam.** 'An example of "mangled Malay" from the 1950s. Literally the whole was meant to translate "What-ho to-night?" Intelligence Corps people during the Malayan Emergency (late 1940s–early 1950s).' Thus Paul Beale, on 6 November 1975.]

after his end, usually preceded by **he's**. This is a C20 workmen's c.p., applied to a man 'chasing' a woman, *end* connoting 'tail', as the variant **after his hole** makes clear.

after the Lord Mayor's show; or, in full, **after the Lord Mayor's show comes the shit-cart**. Originally (late C19) a Cockney c.p. applied to the cleaning-up (especially of horse-dung) necessary after the Lord Mayor of London's annual procession and soon extended to any comparable situation; hence in WW1 it was, mostly on the Western Front, addressed to a man returning from leave, esp. if he were just in time for a 'show' – as 'the troops', with a rueful jocularity, described an attack. Among civilians, it is extant, although not in cultured or highly educated circles.

after you, Claude – no, after you, Cecil! Characterizing an old-world, old-time, courtesy, this exchange of civilities occurred in an 'ITMA' show, produced by the BBC in (I seem to remember) 1940. Although it was already, in 1946, slightly obsolescent, yet it is still, in the latish 1970s, far from being obsolete. The Canadian version, as Dr Douglas Leechman informed me in 1959, is **after you, my dear Alphonse – no, after you, Gaston**, with variant **after you, Alphonse** (Leechman, January 1969. 'In derision of French bowing and scraping') – and was, by 1960, slightly obsolescent, and by 1970, very; current also in US, where, however, it often took the form, **you first, my dear Alphonse** (or **Alfonso**). Note that all of them were spoken in an ingratiating manner. Cf:

after you I come first is an American variant of **after you, Claude** .... (Berrey.) Cf:

after you is manners implies the speaker's consciousness, usually jocular and ironic, of inferiority: since late C17; by 1900, obsolescent – and by 1940, virtually obsolete. As so often happens, the earliest printed record occurs in S, 1738 (Dialogue II): 'Oh! madam: after you is good manners.' Elliptical for: 'For me to come after you – to make way for you – is only right.'

after you, miss, with the two two's and the two b's. See **two white** ....

after you, my dear Alphonse (or **Alfonso**). See **after you, Claude**.

after you with the po, Jane! A jocular domestic c.p. of – very approximately – *c.* 1840–90. The reference is obviously to a *pot* (*de chambre*) or *vase de nuit*, the *milieu* non-aristocratic, the form an elaboration of **after you with** this or that. (Laurie Atkinson, 25 December 1974.)

after you with the push! A street – esp. London – c.p. addressed no less politely than ironically to one who has rudely pushed his way past the speaker: *c.* 1900–14. (Ware.)

after you with the trough! Addressed to someone who has belched and implying not only that he has eaten too fast but also that he has the manners, or the lack of manners, expectable of a pig: originating, *c.* 1930 or a little earlier, in the North Country and still, in 1970 anyway, used mostly there.

age before beauty is mostly a girl's mock courtesy addressed to an old – or, at best, an elderly – man: late C19–20, but rarely heard after (say) 1960.

On entering a room, two people would joke:

'Age before beauty!'

'No, dust before the broom.'

(With thanks to Mrs Shirley M. Pearce, 12 January 1975.)

age of miracles is past – the, was contentiously used by free-thinkers during C18, challengingly by agnostics during C19 and by all cynics and most sceptics in C20. By (say) 1918, it had become a cliché; by 1945 or 1946, it was so often employed, both derisively and in such varied applications, that since then it has been also a c.p. A manifest miracle, yet I've never seen it posed, is recorded in the penultimate paragraph of **some of my best friends are Jews**.

agents. See **I have my agents.**

ah! que je can be bête! What a fool – or, how stupid – I am! This c.p. of *c.* 1899–1912 is, by Redding Ware, classified as 'half-society', by which he presumably means 'the fashionable section of the *demi-monde*'. Macaronic: Fr. *que*, how, and *je*, I, and *bête*, stupid.

ah there! 'What can be more revolting than phrases like *Whoa, Emma*; *Ah there!*; *Get there, Eli*; *Go it, Susan, I'll hold your bonnet*; *Everybody's doing it*; *Good night, Irene*; *O you kid!* in vogue' – that is, in the US – 'not long ago.' Thus McKnight. Cf:

ah there, my size – I'll steal you. In a footnote on p. 566 of the 4th edn. 1936, HLM includes this phrase among half a dozen of which he says that when the 'logical content' of the phrase is sheer silliness the populace quickly tires of it: 'Thus "Ah there, my size, I'll steal you", "Where did you get that hat?" ... and their congeners were all short-lived.' Obviously it's US, but, so far, I've been unable to determine, even approximately, how long it did last – or precisely when.

aid of? – **what's this in.** See **what's this in aid of?**

***ain't* ain't grammar** is a humorous phrase, elicited by someone using *ain't*, as, e.g., in 'That ain't funny': since *c.* 1920.

ain't coming!, indicating a firm refusal, was current among US negroes during the 1940s, as CM tells us.

ain't it a fact? and **ain't it the truth?** are US phrases dating from *c.* 1910 – or earlier – and recorded in Berrey; the latter is also recorded by McKnight. Both are exclamatory rather than interrogative.

ain't it grand to be blooming well dead! – current in the 1930s, but naturally WW2 killed it – comes from a Leslie Sarony song of the period. (Vernon Noble, 10 May 1976.) Clearly a pun on 'Ain't it grand (just) to be alive!'

ain't love grand! expresses pleasure, originally at being in love, derivatively in other situations; and often either ironically or derisively. US at first (and still so), it became, *c.* 1930, also British: I heard it, 1919 or 1920, in Australia. Cf:

ain't Nature grand (? or !) is a 'c.p. apposite to anything from illegitimate offspring to tripping over a muddy path' (Laurie Atkinson, late 1974): late C19–20.

ain't that a laugh? Well, that's really a joke: US: C20. (Colonel Albert Moe, 15 June 1975). Cf the next two:

ain't that nothin'! implies a usually irritated displeasure, is characteristically US, dates from *c.* 1920, and derives from – and forms – the opposite of:

ain't that something – or, in rural dialect, **somepin'!** Indicative of considerable pleasure, this pleasantly terse US c.p. dates from *c.* 1918. Like the preceding, it is recorded in Berrey.

ain't that the limit? Can you beat that?: US: C20. (Colonel Moe, 15 June 1975.)

ain't that the truth? An emphatic, c.p. form of 'Well, that really is the truth, isn't it?': US: C20. (Colonel Moe, 15 June 1975.)

ain't we got fun (? or !) This late C19–20 US c.p. roughly answers to the British **we don't get much money – but we do see life!** (Colonel Moe, 15 June 1975.)

ain't you right! This US c.p. was 'circulating in the year 1920' (McKnight) – esp. among students; it seems to have become obsolete by 1930.

ain't you (or **yer**) **wild you** (or **ye'**) **can't get at it?** was, *c.* 1910–30, loudly and jeeringly intoned, at young girls passing, by Cockney adolescent youths, as Julian Franklyn told me in 1968. From the louts, who usually added *yer muvver's sewn yer draws up*, it ascended, *c.* 1920, to Cockney children as a 'taunting call, especially by children able to keep some desired object to themselves' (Laurie Atkinson, also in 1968).

Alamo. See **remember the Alamo!**

alas, my poor brother! A generalization of a famous Bovril advertisement of the 1920s. It showed a fine-looking bull mourning the brother quintessenced in a tin of Bovril. (Recorded in 1927 by the late Professor W. E. Collinson in his valuable book; I remember seeing it in the *Strand Magazine*, where so many famous advertisements appeared – and not a few c.pp. originated.)

Alderman Lushington is concerned and **Lushington is his master**, respectively 'Well, he *drinks*, you know' and 'He's a hopeless drunkard' – indeed *Lushington* (or *lushington*) soon came to mean 'drunkard'. The former belongs to *c.* 1780–1900, the latter to *c.* 1825–90. Perhaps a pun on the low-slang *lush*, strong liquor, and *Lushington*, the brewer; with influence from *the City of Lushington*, a convivial society that, flourishing *c.* 1750–1895, is recorded by *OED*. This use of *concerned* occurs in several C18–19 c.pp.

'alf a mo, Kaiser! belongs to the years 1915–18: it was, in fact, a 1915–16 recruiting poster thus captioned, the picture showing 'a "Tommy" lighting a cigarette prior to unslinging his rifle and going into action. The catch phrase was widely adopted in England' (F & G). Cf **Kitchener wants you.** The phrase survived, in civilian use, until the late 1930s, and not only in Britain.

alive and well and living in –. See **God is alive and well ... .**

all alive and kissing. See **still alive and kissing.**

all ashore as is going ashore! 'Used, outside of the original context, by, e.g., the driver of a car hastening his passengers – or rather the passengers' friends – taking over long to say good-bye' (Professor John W. Clark, in a letter dated 5 December 1968). US: apparently since the middle 1950s. Also, I surmise, a Cockneyism.

all behind – like a fat woman (or – **like Barney's bull**), often shortened to **like Barney's bull.** A low c.p. applied, late C19–20 and esp. in Australia, to one who is extremely late, or much delayed, in arriving, also to one who is physically exhausted or otherwise distressed. To the *bull* version (the commoner), either *hitched, buggered and bewildered* or (*well*) *fucked and far from home*, is added; both, however, often stand by themselves. The *fat woman* version is often used literally, 'having a very large bottom', and is then often shortened to **all behind** – cf **all bum**; in Western Australia, there exists the variation, **all behind in Melbourne** – a sly 'dig', not notably true. With the connotation of lateness or delay, the Australian version is ... **like Barney's bull.** A later variant is **all behind – like a cow's tail**, which a friend assures me was used in a BBC TV play on 3 December 1970.

all betty! (or **it's all betty!**) It's all up – the 'caper' is over, the game lost – we've completely failed: an underworld c.p. of *c.*

1870–1920; the opposite of **it's all bob** or **Bob's your uncle**, this sort of pun (*Bob* – *Betty*) being not rare in cant; but also deriving from **all my eye and Betty Martin**. (Recorded by B & L.)

all bum! was, *c.* 1860–1900, a street – esp. a London street – cry directed at a woman wearing a bustle; therefore cf **all behind – like a fat woman**.

all chiefs and no Indians, sometimes elaborated, esp. in Sydney, by the addition of **like the University Regiment**. This Australian c.p. arose *c.* 1940 and, whereas the longer form became obsolete very soon after the end of WW2, the shorter is still active; no longer restricted to Australia, it has also, since *c.* 1950, been much more widely applied: from 'all Officers and no Other Ranks' (in John Braine's *The Pious Agent*, 1975, '"Well, we're a merchant bank, after all. More officers than privates, so to speak."'), it means 'all bosses and no workers' – 'all presidents (or chairmen) and no, or too few, executives' – and similar nuances.

all contributions gratefully received, with **however small** originally and still often added. Used literally, it does not, of course, qualify; used allusively or in very different circumstances, it has, since *c.* 1925, been a c.p., as in '"Dying for a smoke! Anyone give me a cigarette?" A long silence. Then "All I have left is half a cigarette – the one behind my ear. Welcome to that, if you want it." No silence. "All contributions gratefully received. Ta."' (From a novel published in 1969, Catherine Aird's *The Complete Steel*.)

all coppers are is a 'truncated version of the c.p. "All coppers are bastards", current since, at latest, 1945. This itself is only the last line of the chanted jingle, "I'll sing you a song, it's not very long: all coppers .... etc." Obviously one would choose one's company with care before letting this dangerously abusive statement loose, even in jest' (Paul Beale, 18 July 1974). I heard it first in the late 1920s, and I suspect that it has existed throughout C20 and, among professional criminals and crooks, for at least a generation longer. It is a slanderous misstatement at the expense of an, in the majority, fine body of men, grossly underpaid ever since it was founded. Cf, semantically, 'once a policeman, always a policeman', which is not a c.p., for it follows the pattern of 'once a schoolteacher, always a schoolteacher', a much-exaggerated piece of dogma. Every profession, trade, occupation, has its black sheep.

all day! is a children's and young people's rejoinder to the query 'What's the date – is it the *X*th?' If the question is simply 'What's the date?' the answer is 'The *X*th – *all day*.' Arising *c.* 1890 – if not a decade or two earlier – it was, by 1960, very slightly obsolescent, yet it doesn't, even now, look at all moribund.

all done by kindness! This ironic late C19–20 phrase occurs in that unjustly forgotten novel, W. L. George's *The Making of an Englishman*, 1914. It is often used in jocularly explanatory response to, e.g., 'How on earth did you manage to do *that*?'; also as in 'Not at all! All done by kindness, I assure you' – 'a nonchalant c.p. of dismissal of thanks for an action that is done to someone else's advantage' (Wilfred Granville, in a letter dated 14 January 1969). It seems, as Professor T. B. W. Reid has (6 December 1974) reminded me, to have originated with performing animals and the assurances of their trainers. Cf and contrast:

all done with (occasionally **by**) **mirrors**, often preceded by **it's**. A phrase uttered when something very clever or extremely ingenious has been done: since *c.* 1920, at latest. It probably originated either among or, at the least, in relation to stage conjurors. In Noël Coward's *Private Lives*, performed and published in 1933, occurs (Act II) this illuminating example:

> AMANDA [*wistfully clutching his hand*]: That's serious enough, isn't it?
>
> ELYOT: No, no, it isn't. Death's very laughable, such a cunning little mystery. All done with mirrors.

Occasional variant: *all done with pieces of string*, probably in reference to Heath Robinson's contraptions.

all dressed up and no place (US) (or **nowhere**) **to go** originated, *c.* 1915, in 'a song by Raymond Hitchcock, an American comedian' (Collinson); by 1937 it was obsolescent – as it still is, yet, like **all day!** above, very far from obsolete.

all dressed up like Astor's horse, US: since '*c.* 1930 (? obs.). Perhaps largely Broadway lingo; possibly invented by Damon Runyon. Intended to suggest that someone was overdressed' (Edward Hodnett, 18 August 1975).

all fine ladies are witches: C18. In S, Dialogue II, we find:

> LADY SM.: You have hit it; I believe you are a Witch.
>
> MISS: O, Madam, the Gentlemen say, all fine Ladies are Witches; but I pretend to no such Thing.

An allusion to women's intuition?

all gas and gaiters is the shortened – the c.p. – form of 'All is gas and gaiters' in Dickens's *Nicholas Nickleby*, 1838–9. In civilian life, the c.p. is often applied to bishops and archbishops: a reference to the gaiters they wear and to the facile eloquence beloved by so many of them; indeed *gas and gaiters* has come to mean 'mere verbiage'. But the c.p. has not been much used after *c.* 1950. See also **attitude is the art of gunnery ....**

all honey or all turd with them, usually preceded by **it is**. They are either close friends or bitter enemies – they fly from one extreme to the other: mid C18–mid C19. (Grose, 3rd edn, 1796.)

all I know is what I read in the papers, which we owe to Will Rogers, the so-called 'cowboy philosopher', is the c.p. form of the words beginning his 'letter' of 21 May 1926: '*Dear Mr Coolidge*: Well all I know is just what I read in the papers' (Will Rogers, *The Letters of a Self-Made Diplomat to His President*, 1927): by which he meant that all he knew of events in the US was what he could glean from the English newspapers. A particular and topical reference became, as is the way in the genesis of c.pp., general and enduring: and this one has 'worn very well', esp. in US, where, very properly, it has always been far more popular than in Britain, not that it's in the least rare even in Britain. Mr W. J. Burke has, on 9 March 1975, told me that, in the US, it continues to be very widely used.

The interpretation made above is very British, however natural it may sound. An old friend, Dr Joseph T. Shipley, wrote thus to me on 3 December 1974:

> I showed [your 'item'] to ... a publisher. He said: 'This misses the point. Wherever Will Rogers was, the expression means: "*I'm just an ordinary citizen.* I don't read the highbrow journals, the magazines that tell you the news isn't so; I'm not a professor; I don't go to listen to men that call themselves experts: all I know is what I read in

the papers – and that makes me as good a citizen as the next man."

'The sentence also implies: "I don't trust them pernickety persuaders always telling you they know what isn't so. I get my facts from the papers, and that's good enough for me."'

Then, on his own account, Dr Shipley adds:

(Note the naïve implication: 'All I *know* ...'. If it's in the papers, it's true. A man may try to lie to me; print doesn't lie!) The catch phrase 'All I know is what I read in the papers' is an implied assertion that all *you* (i.e., anyone) can know is what you read in the papers; and my opinion is therefore as good as the next man's, and that's the way it is and should be in this democracy. That's what Will Rogers felt, and that's the spirit underlying his humor and a main source of his popularity.

A long discussion for a short sentence! But it does mean more than it says. And I think the final implication above (that the simple man is as qualified a citizen as the self-styled expert) deserves mention.

Yes, indeed!

all in the seven. See **it's all in the seven**.

all in the twelve. See **it's all in the twelve**.

all is bob. See **Bob's your uncle**.

all is rug. See **all's rug**.

all jam and Jerusalem is a slightly derogatory c.p. directed at Women's Institutes since *c.* 1925. Whereas *jam* arises from the jam-making contents, *Jerusalem* refers to Blake's 'Jerusalem' being sung at every meeting – less in piety than as a signature. A very English phrase concerning a very English institution.

all Lombard Street to a Brummagem sixpence is a c.p. – a jocular variation of **all Lombard Street to a china orange**. Meaning 'heavy odds', the original and originating **all Lombard Street to a china orange** (a piece of chinaware) has the further variants **... to ninepence** and **... to an egg-shell**; all three variants arose in C19 – and all, as c.pp., are obsolete. The reference is to the wealth of this famous London street.

all my eye (and Betty Martin), often preceded by **that's**. 'That is utter nonsense.' The shorter form seems to have been the earlier, Goldsmith using it in 1768; yet Francis Grose, in his dictionary, shows the variant *that's my eye, Betty Martin* to have been already familiar in 1785. Grose's form became obsolete before 1900, as did such variants as *all my eye, Betty* (Thomas Moore, 1819) and *all my eye and Tommy* (John Poole's *Hamlet Travestied*, 1811), this mysterious *Tommy* recurring, as Ernest Weekley long ago pointed out, in the phrases *like Hell and Tommy* and the earlier *play Hell and Tommy*. The predominant short form is (*that's*) *all my eye*, which recurs in, e.g., R. S. Surtees, *Hillingdon Hall; or, The Cockney Squire*, 1845; there, in chapter XVI, we read, ' "The land's worked out!" says another, slopin' off in the night without payin' his rent. "That's all my eye!" exclaimed Mr Jorrocks.' Surtees uses it again in *Hawbuck Grange*, 1847.

I think that the original form was *all my eye!*, which later acquired the variant *my eye!*: perhaps cf the slangy and synonymous Fr. *mon oeil!*, which could, indeed, have generated *all my eye*, if, in fact, the Fr. phrase preceded the English, although probably each arose independently of the other and was created by that 'spontaneous combustion' which would account for so much that is otherwise unaccountable in English. The full *all my eye and Betty Martin* is less used in the 1970s than it was in the 1870s, but 'there's life in the old girl yet'.

Inevitably the *and Betty Martin* part of the complete phrase has caused much trouble and even more hot air: who *was* she? I suspect that she was a 'character' of the lusty London of the 1770s and that no record of her exists other than in this c.p. In *The Disagreeable Surprise: A Musical Farce*, ?1828, George Daniel makes Billy Bombast say, 'My first literary attempt was a flaming advertisement ... My next was a Satirical Poem ... I then composed the whole art and mystery of Blacking or Every Man his own Polisher; which turned out all Betty Martin ...' and thus offers us yet another variant: and in the Earl of Glengall's *The Irish Tutor; or, New Lights: A Comic Piece*, performed in 1823 and published *c.* 1830, the spurious Dr O'Toole says to his tutor, 'Hark ye, sirrah, hem – [*Aside to him*] It's all Betty Martin. I have demaned myself by brushing your coat, to *tache* you modesty.' 'Jon Bee' in his dictionary, 1823, propounded a theory silently adopted a generation later by William Camden Hutton, that *Betty Martin* derives from, and corrupts the L. *o(h), mihi, beate Martine* (St Martin of Tours), which, they said, occurs in a prayer that apparently doesn't exist. Slightly more probable is the theory advanced by Dr L. A. Waddell in his highly speculative book, *The Phoenician Origin of Britons, Scots, and Anglo-Saxons*, 1914; to the effect that *all my eye and Betty Martin* derives, entire, from L. *O mihi, Britomartis*, 'Oh, (bring help) to me, Britomartis', who, we are told, was the tutelary goddess of Crete and whose cult was either identical or, at the least, associated with the sun-cult of the Phoenicians – who traded with Britons for Cornish tin. Such etymologies lose sight of a basic problem: how did – how *could* – the Cockneys, among whom the phrase originated, ever come to even encounter either of these two religious and erudite L. phrases? The relationship appears wildly improbable.

Such energetic ingenuity is supererogatory, these erudite imaginings being inherently much less convincing than the theory of simple English origin. To me, anyway, *all my eye and Betty Martin!* no more than elaborates *all my eye!*; and as for Betty Martin, well! the English language, in its less formal aspects, affords many examples of mysterious characters appearing in a phrase and recorded nowhere else. In this instance, however, there was, in the (?) latter part of C18, 'an abandoned woman' named Grace, an actress, who induced a Mr Martin to marry her. She became notorious as Betty Martin: and favourite expressions of hers were *my eye!* and *all my eye*, as Charles Lee Lewis tells us in his *Memoirs*, 1805. Even that immensely erudite poet, Southey, remarked, in *The Doctor*, 1834–7, that he was 'puzzled by this expression'. (And Mr Ronald Pearsall, of Landscove, Devon, imparts *his* erudition to me on 12 January 1975.)

In South Africa, *Betsy*. (Professor A. C. Partridge.)

all my eye and my elbow! and **all my eye and my grandmother!** are London variants of **all my eye and Betty Martin**: strictly, the *grandmother* version stems from the *elbow* version. The latter is recorded by Ware for 1882, and seems to have fallen into disuse by 1920; the former is recorded in Baumann, 1887, and was obsolescent by 1937 and obsolete by 1970. Note also