

Modern  
Proverbs  
and  
Proverbial  
Sayings

**MODERN PROVERBS  
AND  
PROVERBIAL SAYINGS**

**BARTLETT JERE WHITING**

**HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS**

**Cambridge, Massachusetts**

**and London, England**

**1989**

Copyright © 1989 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

This volume was prepared for the printer by Joseph Harris,  
Susan Deskis, and Maud Wilcox.

Publication of the book has been aided by a grant from the  
Hyder Edward Rollins Fund of Harvard University.

This book is printed on acid-free paper, and its binding materials  
have been chosen for strength and durability.

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Whiting, Bartlett Jere, 1904—  
Modern proverbs and proverbial sayings / Bartlett Jere Whiting.  
p. cm.

Bibliography: p.

ISBN 0-674-58053-2

1. Proverbs.	2. Proverbs, English—Dictionaries.	I. Title.
PN6403.W48	1989	89-31520
398.9'21—dc20		CIP

## FOREWORD

by *Larry D. Benson*

Around Harvard Yard one used to hear the story of how President Lowell, motoring down a back road in the countryside near Belfast, Maine, in the late summer of 1921, espied a boy sitting beneath a tree intent upon a book. Pleased and puzzled at this display of literacy in so unexpected a setting, he stopped his automobile and asked the lad, "What are you reading?" "Aristophanes, sir." "In Greek?" "Why, yes sir." "Get in this car, boy. You are going to Cambridge with me." That, students assured one another, is how Professor Whiting first came to Harvard.

Of course, even those who repeated the story knew it was apocryphal; the young Bartlett J. Whiting applied to and was accepted as a freshman by Harvard College in the usual prosaic manner. But the story persisted because it contained three of the most important facts about him—his close association with his native Maine, his long relationship with Harvard, and his lifelong devotion to reading. He began reading as a boy in the house in which he was born in East Northport, near Belfast; he continued during his more than a half century at Harvard; and when he became emeritus he returned to Maine to carry on his reading in that same house in which a lifetime of reading began. He was and is an insatiable reader, even now when the failing sight of his one usable eye (the other was blinded in boyhood) makes it possible only with bright illumination and a magnifying glass.

His taste in reading is and was broad; he read the classics, and he read the medieval literatures that he professed, but he also read widely and deeply in later English and American literature and in modern authors, from the works of established standard writers (such as James Joyce, one of his favorites for citation in this volume) to the most ephemeral varieties of fiction and nonfiction. He especially enjoyed historical novels, and for some years he wrote a regular (and regularly amusing) review of the year's output of historical fiction set in the Middle Ages—all of it, whether good or bad—which was published in the learned journal *Speculum*. One of that journal's learned subscribers objected to what he considered a waste of space on ephemera and he wrote with some

## Foreword

asperity to the editor, suggesting in effect that this annual review be dropped, so that the footnotes in the other articles could be longer. Mr. Whiting was delighted at the opportunity to defend his interest in the genre, and in his next review of the year's output he effectively silenced his critic with a long history of attacks on historical fiction, beginning with the unsympathetic reviewers of Sir Walter Scott's *Waverley* novels. The critic was silenced but probably unsatisfied, since not many readers have Mr. Whiting's breadth of literary sympathies. That breadth was shown when the editor of his *Festschrift* some years ago was casting about for a photograph of him to adorn the collection of scholarly essays to be published in his honor. There were few to choose from and those few rather more solemn than he customarily appeared. The problem was solved by a candid snapshot, taken when Mr. Whiting was reading the Sunday comics in the *Boston Globe*. Suitably cropped, it admirably served the purpose.

Throughout his years of reading Mr. Whiting took notes, most especially notes on the proverbs and proverbial sayings that appeared in his reading. He had been interested in proverbs since his undergraduate days, and his doctoral thesis, which was directed by George Lyman Kittredge, concerned that topic. One chapter of the thesis formed the nucleus of his first book, *Chaucer's Use of Proverbs* (1934), and this was followed by other studies of proverbs in early literature, *Proverbs in the Earlier English Drama* (1938) and *Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings From Scottish Writers Before 1600* (1949). But from the beginning he had also been interested in the proverbs in later literature, and he was already reading systematically for *A Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, 1820 to 1880* (1958), compiled in collaboration with Archer Taylor, and for the three works that crown his career: *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500*, prepared in collaboration with his wife, Helen Wescott Whiting (1968), *Early American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* (1977), and the present volume.

That he produced all three of these basic reference works entirely by his own efforts, with the assistance of his wife, Helen, is a remarkable fact in these days when such works are ordinarily undertaken by teams of scholars, backed by banks of computers, troops of research assistants, and funded by large grants from the federal government or private foundations.

For all three volumes his working method was the same. From the time he began teaching, Mr. Whiting made a practice of removing, after he had graded the examinations, any unused pages from his students' bluebooks. The torn pages served very well for note paper, and they saved the cost of buying notebooks. As he read through a book, he would write the title and necessary bibliographical information at the top of a recycled bluebook page and then jot down the page numbers and quotations for any proverbs, sentences, or proverbial sayings that he came across. A book particularly rich in proverbial materials might yield two or three pages of such notes, in which case they were carefully clipped together before being stacked, along with others, on open shelves in his study, weighted down with a variety of curious artifacts.

At regular intervals, as he was reading for *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases*, Mr. Whiting would copy each of the citations intended for use in this work from bluebook pages to 3" x 5" pieces of paper. Occasionally a cardboard index card would be used, but slips of paper, more economical than cards, were the preferred form. The slips were then stored in an oak file cabinet salvaged from the Widener catalogue room and, when that was full, in shoe boxes of varying brands and dimensions. The file cabinet was discarded when he retired and moved back to his house in Maine, where he turned his principal attention to *Early American Proverbs*. It was perhaps more efficient to work with shoe boxes alone; they were spread on shelves in the pantry and on tables in his study, the tops off, so that he could easily insert new slips. They seemed somewhat precariously balanced to a visitor, especially one who had enjoyed his hospitality (his frugality affected only himself and he was a generous host) and who would customarily remain well on the other side of the room lest he lurch into and upset the filing system.

A good deal of editing was involved in the transcription of the material from the bluebook pages onto the slips; a preliminary selection was made, and by no means were all quotations in the bluebooks transcribed. The next step was filing the slips in the shoe boxes; as categories became apparent, headings were established or altered, a more nearly final selection of quotations was made, references and cross-references were inserted, and slips of accepted readings were paperclipped together. The final step in editing was the typing of the entries for submission to the press, which he did on his ancient Remington manual. It would have been hard to involve anyone else, for not only was his handwriting difficult to decipher—a postcard from Mr. Whiting would provide an hour's occupation for the most skilled paleographer—the typing was a crucial stage of editing, when he made his final decisions on classifications and the final selection of quotations.

This was the practice followed in preparing his *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500*. The same procedure was used for his *Early American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*. The recycled bluebook pages for this work had been accumulating in other stacks on the shelves (since he did much of the reading for all three of these works concurrently). Since the slips of paper and index cards used for the previous work were no longer needed but it would have been wasteful to throw them away, he merely turned them over and wrote the quotations for *Early American Proverbs* on the backs. He had to be careful in typing them to make sure he was looking at the correct side. But the system worked. For the present volume, the same frugal recycling was employed. This time the cards were turned upside down; on many of the slips the quotation for the present volume is at the top, an unrelated one for *Early American Proverbs* is upside down at the bottom, and on the back is a citation for *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases*. An occasional slip contains a fourth citation for one of his earlier works, a Scots proverb or a line from an Elizabethan play, for this thrifty practice began early. The newly

## Foreword

transcribed slips were then tightly packed into the same thirty shoe boxes that had served so well for the previous volumes. "Waste not, want not" is still a common proverb (W31), but it is said more often than done (D193), and even in our ecologically enlightened times it is doubtful that this triumph of Maine frugality will soon be matched.

The list of books that had to be read for *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly Before 1500* was pretty well established by the period that was to be covered, since Old and Middle English are fairly self-contained bodies of literature, with some leakage at the end (hence the *Mainly* of the title). The list of books to be read for *Early American Proverbs* was a good deal more difficult to specify; though the period of time to be covered was shorter, the amount and range of printed materials was much greater. Nevertheless principles of selection were defined and a list of books to be included was established.

The present volume presented a very different problem, for Mr. Whiting was reading many of the materials—books, magazines, newspapers—as or shortly after they appeared from around 1930 to the early 1980s, and the corpus was continually expanding. He decided simply to record what he read in his leisure hours; that worked, since his own reading was so wide and various in scope. He recorded proverbs and proverbial sayings from well over six thousand books for the present volume, in addition to the magazines and newspapers he regularly read—the Boston papers, mainly the *Boston Globe* and the *Herald*, the *New York Times*, and the *Daily News* of Bangor, Maine. The bluebook pages that record his reading of books published in 1960 (those that proved useful for the proverbs they contained—his other reading recorded in other notes or left unrecorded) show that for this year alone he read 157 books in the odd hours when he was not teaching his popular undergraduate course on Chaucer, holding seminars, directing theses, serving on the Widener Library Committee, ordering acquisitions for the Child Library, serving as a Councillor of the Mediaeval Academy of America, reviewing scholarly books, writing his witty reports as the Mediaeval Academy's delegate to the American Council of Learned Societies, and fulfilling a variety of other professional and institutional responsibilities, including the chairmanship of his department.

Not all the cited books dated 1960 were read in or immediately after that year. When he finished *Early American Proverbs* in 1977, he was able to turn his full attention to the present project and catch up on his reading, filling in lacunae—such as the *New Yorker* magazine, most issues of which he had not had time to read but every one of which he had saved. Visitors to Northport in the late 1970s would find Mr. Whiting fully abreast of the news of the presidential campaigns of 1940 and 1944 or the progress of the Second World War, as chronicled in "The Talk of the Town" in that magazine.

The books cited for the year 1960 are a fair example of the books culled for this volume. There are "serious" novels (by writers such as John O'Hara, Muriel Spark, Elizabeth Bowen), comic novels (Nathaniel Benchley, P. G. Wode-

## Foreword

house, one of his favorites), mysteries (Rex Stout, Agatha Christie, Erle Stanley Gardner, and others), plays (Tennessee Williams), biographies, autobiographies, collections of letters, and histories of contemporary events (such as Theodore H. White's *Making of the President*, 1960). It is a generous sampling of what was published that year.

It is also a necessarily idiosyncratic list, reflecting Mr. Whiting's own tastes. There is, for example, a heavy component of murder mysteries, shocking to some who might expect a Harvard Professor of English to spend his evenings with more uplifting forms of modern literature. In this Mr. Whiting had the precedent of his seniors on the Harvard faculty, such as the famous Egyptologist who left the Widener Library his collection of over 1900 mystery novels—each carefully graded from A to D—and, most notably, his teacher George Lyman Kittredge, who gave the Widener Library his own extensive collection of murder mysteries, including one volume, *The White Circle* by the now justly forgotten Carroll J. Day (1926), on the last page of which Mr. Kittredge jotted down the proverbs he had encountered in that book.

Poetry is scarcely represented at all in the quotations in this volume, and light reading clearly predominates. This is hardly surprising: formal literature since at least the eighteenth century has generally avoided the use of proverbs, which, as Mr. Whiting noted in the Introduction to *Early American Proverbs*, are more often found in works cast in the "easy and unbuttoned style." It is inevitable that those literary forms that favor the colloquial style should be most heavily represented.

It is inevitable too, and fortunate, that the works read reflect Mr. Whiting's own taste. This volume is the product of the reading of one man, and of the one man better qualified than any other in our time to recognize a proverbial usage when he saw one—no mean trick, for the proverb, sentence, and proverbial phrase are notoriously resistant to exact definition. "Finally," Mr. Whiting wrote in his introduction to *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases*, "the collector relies on his own judgment . . . . There comes to be a sense of recognition, a pricking of the thumbs, which says that a statement is proverbial." Mr. Whiting's thumbs pricked more accurately than will anyone else's for many years to come.

In the past few years, Mr. Whiting has suffered from a deterioration of vision in his one usable eye. Reading became increasingly difficult in the early 1980s, and he turned his attention mainly to the editing of the entries in the shoe boxes. He completed this task before his failing eyesight made further work impossible, but he had not begun to transfer the quotations from the slips to a typed final form. Had it not been for the determination of the staff of the Harvard University Press, most notably Maud Wilcox, and the selfless devotion of his friend and former student, Professor Joseph Harris, this volume would never have appeared and the thirty shoe boxes would still be sitting on the pantry shelves and desk in Northport.



## INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This book is patterned after B. J. Whiting's previous collections of proverbs and is similar in format to his *Early American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*.

*Headings.* Each numbered entry in the book gives twentieth-century instances of a proverb or proverbial phrase. The heading, or lemma, gives the usual wording of the saying, with variations indicated in parentheses. Where there are many or extensive variations the notation (*varied*) follows the lemma. Longer proverbs are sometimes curtailed in the heading, as in A32, When Adam dived and Eve span *etc.* In every lemma a key word, ordinarily the first important noun or verb, is capitalized and set in boldface type.

*Alphabetization.* The entries are alphabetized by their key words. Sayings with the same key word are arranged in alphabetical order, reading from left to right but ignoring initial A, An, and The. Substantive and verbal uses of the same key word are separated, however (*work* the noun precedes *work* the verb); and the few occurrences of homonyms (such as *hide*, *skin*, and *hide*, conceal) are separated as well. Plural and possessive nouns are grouped under the singular form, and verbs are normally alphabetized under the infinitive.

*Quotations.* Within each entry the quotations are arranged in chronological order, with the dates given in boldface. The source is identified by the author's first initial(s) and surname and the first word or words of the title; thus Gerald Durrell, *My Family and Other Animals* appears as GDurrell *My Family*, Wyndham Lewis, *The Apes of God* as WLewis *Apes*. Pseudonyms (such as Doctor X, Bryher, FRS, Xantippe) are given as they appear on the title page of the book; anonymous works are so labeled or appear without an author's name preceding the title. Biographies and critical studies of well-known figures are usually cited by the subject's surname, with or without initials. The place of publication is given in parentheses; New York, London, Boston, Chicago, Indianapolis, Los Angeles, and Philadelphia are abbreviated to initial letters: NY, L, and so forth. In the case of editions of diaries or collections of letters, the boldface date is the date of the diary entry or letter and the publication date of the volume is included in parentheses, along with the place. After the parenthesis comes the page reference and then the quotation. A semicolon and page number at the end of a quotation indicate a second occurrence of the same saying in the same book.

## Introductory Note

*References.* Following the quotations, there are references (in most entries) to compilations in which earlier examples of the saying can be found; full titles of the works are given in the list of abbreviations. Readers interested in looking into the origin or prior history of a proverb can find a helpful starting point in these works. The books most frequently cited are Whiting's previous collections (especially EAP, TW, and Whiting) and *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*. Further references in those books are ordinarily not repeated.

*Cross-references.* At the end of the entry there may be cross-references to more or less parallel sayings within this volume. Such references are easy to multiply, as Mr. Whiting points out, and he has not attempted to be systematic or exhaustive in his cross-referencing.

Collections and so-called dictionaries of proverbs do not as a rule provide definitions, and for good reason. Proverbial expressions, drawing on folk wisdom and shared experience, convey their message (if not a strict "meaning") more effectively than a definition could. And many proverbs are not susceptible of definition. A standard exercise in folklore classes demonstrates that many familiar proverbs are understood in contradictory ways. "A rolling stone gathers no moss" is none the less cogent because half its users regard moss as good, half as bad.

Sprinkled among the 5,567 proverbial sayings in this book are terms that may be unfamiliar to some readers (*galley-west* or *pot-valiant*, for example). Such terms are not glossed in the lemmas but the quotations generally make them clear enough, and almost all of them can be found in an unabridged dictionary. Within an entry there is occasionally a brief gloss giving the context of quotation, sometimes to highlight different ways in which a saying is used.

There is no bibliography. Mr. Whiting decided long ago that an alphabetical list of the sources—numbering some six thousand—from which the quotations are drawn would be of little use and would increase the size and price of the book inordinately. As it is, the book is long, longer no doubt than it would have been if the author's eyesight had not failed. Earlier he weeded out a great number of quotations in the process of copying them onto entry slips (transcribing them from the sheets on which he had originally recorded them) and then grouping them under their lemmas. Had he been able to prepare a typescript, he would have done further pruning of repetitive examples of many of the sayings. Most readers will not be bothered, we trust, by an occasional overabundance of quotations, or fret over minor inconsistencies of styling in headings and titles. The book was typeset directly from the handwritten entry slips, and changes in proof other than corrections of printer's errors had to be kept to a minimum.

J. H.  
S. D.  
M.W.

## ABBREVIATIONS

- Apperson: G. L. Apperson, *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases: A Historical Dictionary* (London: Dent, 1929).
- Barbour: Frances M. Barbour, *Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases of Illinois* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965).
- Bartlett: John Bartlett, *Familiar Quotations: A Collection of Passages, Phrases and Proverbs Traced to Their Sources in Ancient and Modern Literature*, 14th ed., rev. Emily Morison Beck (Boston: Little, Brown, 1968).
- Berrey: Lester V. Berrey and Melvin Van den Bark, *The American Thesaurus of Slang: A Complete Reference Book of Colloquial Speech* (New York: Crowell, 1942).
- Bradley: F. W. Bradley, "South Carolina Proverbs," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 1 (1937), 57-101.
- Brunvand: Jan Harold Brunvand, *A Dictionary of Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases from Books Published by Indiana Authors before 1890* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1961).
- Champion: Selwyn G. Champion, *Racial Proverbs: A Selection of the World's Proverbs Arranged Linguistically*, 2nd ed. (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1950).
- Clark: J. D. Clark, "Similes from the Folk Speech of the South: A Supplement to Wilstach's Compilation," *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 4 (1940), 205-26.
- Colcord: Joanna C. Colcord, *Sea Language Comes Ashore* (New York: Cornell Maritime Press, 1945).
- Cole: Arthur H. Cole, "The Social Significance of New England Idiomatic Phrases," *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* n.s. 70 (1960), 21-68.
- DA: *A Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles*, ed. Mitford M. Mathews (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951).
- DARE: Frederic G. Cassidy, ed., *Dictionary of American Regional English* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1985-).
- DBC: Detective Book Club.
- Dunwoody: H. H. C. Dunwoody, *Weather Proverbs* (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1883).
- EAP: Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Early American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1977).
- Hand: Wayland D. Hand, *Popular Beliefs and Superstitions from North Carolina*, in *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, 7 vols. (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1952-1964), vols. 6-7.

## Abbreviations

- Hislop: Alexander Hislop, *The Proverbs of Scotland* (Edinburgh: E. and S. Livingstone, 1868).
- JAFL: *Journal of American Folklore*.
- Janson: Horst W. Janson, *Apes and Ape Lore in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance* (London: Warburg Institute, University of London, 1952).
- Leach: Maria Leach, ed., *Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, 2 vols. (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1949–1950).
- Lean: Vincent S. Lean, *Lean's Collectanea*, 4 vols. in 5 (Bristol, Eng.: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1902–1904).
- NADS: *Newsletter of the American Dialect Society*.
- NED: *A New English Dictionary on Historical Principles*, 1884–1928, reissued, with Supplement, as *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 13 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933).
- Oxford: *The Oxford Dictionary of English Proverbs*, 3rd ed., rev. F. P. Wilson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).
- Oxford DQ: *The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1966).
- Partridge: Eric Partridge, *A Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English*, 5th ed. (London: Routledge, 1961).
- Spears: Richard A. Spears, *Slang and Euphemism: A Dictionary of Oaths, Curses, Insults, Sexual Slang and Metaphor, Racial Slurs, Drug Talk, Homosexual Lingo, and Related Matters* (Middle Village, N.Y.: Jonathan David, 1981).
- Taylor Index: Archer Taylor, *An Index to "The Proverb,"* FF Communications, 113 (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1934).
- Taylor Prov. Comp.: Archer Taylor, *Proverbial Comparisons and Similes from California*, *Folklore Studies*, 3 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1954).
- Taylor Proverb: Archer Taylor, *The Proverb* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1931).
- Taylor Western Folklore: Archer Taylor, "More Proverbial Comparisons from California," *Western Folklore* 17 (1958), 12–20.
- Tilley: Morris P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950).
- TW: Archer Taylor and Bartlett Jere Whiting, *A Dictionary of American Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases, 1820–1880* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967).
- Wentworth: Harold Wentworth and Stuart B. Flexner, *Dictionary of American Slang* (New York: Crowell, 1960).
- Whiting: Bartlett Jere Whiting, with Helen Wescott Whiting, *Proverbs, Sentences, and Proverbial Phrases from English Writings Mainly before 1500* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1968).
- Whiting Chaucer: Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Chaucer's Use of Proverbs*, *Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature*, 11 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1934).
- Whiting Devil: Bartlett Jere Whiting, "The Devil and Hell in Current English Literary Idiom," *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 20 (1938), 201–47.
- Whiting Drama: Bartlett Jere Whiting, *Proverbs in the Earlier English Drama, with Illustrations from Contemporary French Plays*, *Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature*, 14 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1938).

## Abbreviations

- Whiting NC: B. J. Whiting, ed., "Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings," in *The Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*, vol. 1 (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1952), pp. 331-501.
- Whiting Scots: B. J. Whiting, "Proverbs and Proverbial Sayings from Scottish Writings before 1600," *Mediaeval Studies* 11 (1949), 123-205; 13 (1951), 87-164.
- Wilstach: Frank Jenners Wilstach, *A Dictionary of Similes* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 1973).

# A

## A1 From A to izzard

**1931** HSKeeler *Matilda* (NY) 329: He's lying from A to izzard. **1937** CBClason *Blind* (NY) 125: We went over the whole district from A to izzard. TW 1; Brunvand 1.

## A2 From A to Z

**1903** ADMcFaul *Ike Glidden* (B) 21: I know horses from A to Z. **1914** JLondon *Letters* ed KHendrick (NY 1965) 421: Frank Norris from A to Z. **1936** FWCrofts *Man Overboard* (NY) 233: The case was discussed from A to Z. **1950** RStout *In the Best* (NY) 32: I know him from A to Z. **1955** FCrane *Death* (NY) 141: Go over the premises from a to z. **1960** MSpark *Ballad* (L) 166: To go through the factory from A to Z. **1971** JCreasey *Murder* (NY) 151: [He] fixed it from A to Z. **1974** PGWodehouse *Cat-Nappers* (NY) 11: He knows his spots from A to Z. EAP A1; TW 1.

## A3 Not to know A from Adam's off ox

**1967** JFDobie *Some Part* (B) 78: He doesn't know A from Adam's off ox. Cf. Whiting NC 360: From a bull's foot. Cf. Not to know one from Adam *below*.

## A4 To give (get) A for effort

**1941** VWMason *Rio Casino* (NY) 60: We'll give that lad A for effort. **1947** VWMason *Saigon* (NY) 228: But you get A for effort. **1954** JPotts *Go* (NY) 113: You had to give him an A for Effort. **1960** TPowell *Man-killer* (NY) 119: I'll give you an A for effort. Wentworth 2.

## A5 As clear as A B C

**1931** MMagill *Murder* (P) 312: It's as clear as ABC. EAP A4.

## A6 As easy as A B C

**1930** DDeane *Mystery* (L) 137: Easy as A.B.C. **1932** GCollins *Channel* (L) 68: No harder than ABC. EAP A5; Taylor *Western Folklore* 17(1958) 13.

## A7 As plain as A B C

**1906** JCLincoln *Mr. Pratt* (NY) 14: As plain as A B C. **1934** KLivingston *Dodd* (NY) 258: As plain as ABC. **1953** CBKelland *Sinister* (NY DBC) 144: That's plain as A B C. EAP A7; Brunvand 1.

## A8 As simple as A B C

**1916** WLewis *Letters* ed WKRose (L 1963) 79: As simple as A.B.C. **1931** RKeeverne *Fleet* (NY) 238: It's as simple as ABC. **1937** JRhode *Hop Fields* (L) 208: It's as simple as ABC. **1957** AAmos *Fatal* (NY) 163: Simple as ABC. Taylor *Prov. Comp.* 73.

## A9 To learn (know, teach) one's A B C

**1903** EChilders *Riddle* (NY 1940) 109: To learn their ABC. **1929** SMartyn *Recluse* (NY) 108: You don't even know the a b c of the thing. **1946** HHowe *We Happy* (NY) 197: A man who knew his worldly ABC. **1962** JCreasey *Death* (NY DBC) 92: Your chaps don't need teaching their ABC. **1972** Minnes *Open* (NY) 162: You're drawing me into teaching you your own A.B.C. EAP A3.

## A10 To be A 1 (A Number 1)

1905 MLPeabody *To Be Young* (B 1967) 314: We have an A. I. brother-in-law. 1906 JCLincoln *Mr. Pratt* (NY) 53: That was A No. 1. 1910 JCLincoln *Depot Master* (NY) 96: An A1, gold-plated saint. 1918 BMalinowski *Diary* (NY 1967) 259: Health is A1. 1922 VBridges *Greensea* (NY) 64: An A1 lunch. 1922 JJoyce *Ulysses* (NY 1934) 104: Everything went off A1. 1932 APowell *Venusberg* (L 1955) 154: He may be an A1 lad. 1933 PATaylor *Mystery* (NY) 63: She's an a-number-one cook. 1940 HAshbrook *Murder Comes* (NY) 65: A regular little A. no. 1 son of a bitch. 1948 ESherry *Sudden* (NY) 47: He ended up an A one souse. 1955 PDennis *Auntie* (NY) 73: She's an A number one bitch. 1965 AGilbert *Voice* (NY) 121: It had been A-1. 1966 HWaugh *Pure* (NY) 26: The A-number-one suspect. 1970 GBagby *Killer* (NY) 10: She's . . . in A-1 shape. TW 1.

## A11 In Abraham's bosom

1931 LHollingworth *Death* (L) 190: No Father Abraham to take them to his bosom. 1935 JRhode *Mystery* (L) 127: Look down from Abraham's bosom. 1939 FBeeding *Ten Holy* (NY) 33: Abraham's Bosom [a cocktail]. 1947 RDavies *Diary* (Toronto) 135: Making its way toward Abraham's bosom. 1954 ADuggan *Leopards* (L) 203: King John, now in Abraham's bosom. 1966 NBlake *Morning* (NY) 208: To the shelter of Abraham's bosom. 1969 RNye *Tales* (L) 155: "I'll soon be lying in Beelzebub's bosom." I corrected her. "Surely you mean Abraham's." 1975 MButterworth *Man in* (NY) 7: Gone to Abraham's bosom. EAP A8; TW 2.

## A12 Absence makes the heart grow fonder (varied)

1929 TCobb *Crime* (L) 133: It was impossible for absence or anything else to make her heart grow fonder. 1930 IWray *Vye* (L) 133: That proverb about absence making the heart grow fonder, is quite untrue. 1933 HAdams *Woman* (L) 255: Not absence makes the heart grow fonder, and that sort of rot. 1935 RCWoodthorpe *Shadow* (NY) 162: Distance makes the heart grow fonder.

1937 WETurpin *These Low* (NY) 317: Absence makes the heart grow fonder. 1943 AAMacGregor *Auld Reekie* (L) 17: Contrary to the popular adage, his absence from the home was making his heart grow the more bitter. 1948 HActon *Memoirs* (L) 352: Absence had not made my heart grow fonder of Europe. 1952 DGBrowne *Scalpel* (NY) 410: There is another proverb about absence to the effect that it inflames violent passions. 1958 RHutton *Of Those* (L) 66: On the principle that absence makes the heart grow fonder. 1960 TCurley *It's a Wise* (NY) 51: Absence makes the hard grow harder [sexual]. 1960 RFraser *Trout's* (L) 140: It's absence makes the heart grow fonder. 1961 WCooper *Scenes* (NY) 50: Absence had not lived up to its reputation. 1975 FHHall *In the Lamb* (I) 63: If absence makes the heart grow fonder. EAP A11.

## A13 The Absent is always wrong

1912 HHMunro *Unbearable* (NY 1928) 41: The absent may be always wrong. 1927 HAshton-Wolfe *Outlaws* (L) 116: The absent one is always wrong. EAP A13.

## A14 Out of the [Abundance] of the heart the mouth speaks (varied)

1936 SFowles *Hand in Print* (L) 103: Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh. 1944 LAGStrong *All Fall* (NY) 190: Out of the heart the mouth speaketh. EAP A15; TW 2.

## A15 An Accent (etc.) that one could cut with a knife (varied)

1929 FDGrierson *Murder* (L) 238: A common Cockney accent you could cut with a knife. 1932 IGraig *Baxter's* (L) 37: An accent that could be cut with a knife. 1937 JBentley *Whitney* (L) 88: An Oxford accent so pronounced that one could almost cut it with a knife. 1938 DHume *Corpses* (L) 42: The atmosphere had changed. It could have been cut with the proverbial knife. 1941 PWilde *Design* (NY) 34: The pause was so thick that you could have cut it with a knife. 1947 MCarleton *Swan* (NY) 66: A down-east accent that could be cut with a knife. 1948 PCheyney *Dance* (NY DBC) 11: One of those silences that you could cut

with a knife. 1950 ESGardner *Musical* (NY) 17: There's a pall hanging over this place which you can cut with a knife. 1953 JFleming *Good* (L) 158: A Cockney accent you could cut with a knife. 1959 EMButler *Paper* (L) 150: A silence you could cut with a knife. 1959 HReilly *Not Me* (NY DBC) 137: You could have cut the tension in the house with a knife. 1964 GSimenon *Maigret's* (NY DBC) 64: An accent you could cut with a knife. 1967 LPDavies *Artificial* (NY) 145: The air was thick enough to cut with a knife. 1969 HLiggett *Murder* (L) 111: The silence was thick enough to cut with a knife. 1973 JSymons *Plot* (NY) 51: The atmosphere is one you could cut with a knife [angry]. Taylor *Prov. Comp.* 81: So thick.

**A16 Accidents (mistakes) will happen**

1922 JSFletcher *Herapath* (NY) 110: Accidents will happen. 1924 JSFletcher *Time-Worn* (NY) 134: Mistakes will happen. 1932 NKlein *No! No!* (NY) 148: Mistakes will happen to anybody. 1943 CEVulliamy *Polderoy* (L) 151: Accidents will happen, even to the most expert. 1950 BCarey *Man Who* (NY) 186: Accidents can happen. 1957 DJEnright *Heaven* (L) 156: Accidents will happen. 1957 AWilson *Bit* (L) 134: Accidents may happen to anyone. 1965 KLau-mer *Galactic* (NY) 143: Accidents will happen, you know. 1975 MDelving *Bored* (NY) 45: Of course, accidents will happen. EAP A16; TW 247: Mistakes (3).

**A17 Accidents happen in the best regulated families (varied)**

1928 WRoughead *Malice* (L) 47: Accidents will happen in the best regulated families. 1930 KCStrahan *Death* (NY) 26: Accidents happen in the best regulated families. 1932 NKlein *No! No!* (NY) 203: Murder can happen in the best of families. 1935 MBurton *Devereux* (L) 169: Accidents will happen, even to the best regulated policemen. 1941 AChristie *Evil under* (NY) 78: Accidents happen in the best-regulated households. 1950 RStout *In the Best Families* (NY). 1951 DBOlsen *Cat* (NY) 19: Accidents happen in the best, and so on. 1961 ZHenderson *Pilgrimage* (NY) 127: These things happen in the best of families. 1972 JMcClure *Cat-*

*erpillar* (NY) 219: Accidents happen in the best regulated families. EAP A17.

**A18 There is no Accounting for tastes (varied)**

1922 JSFletcher *Ravensdene* (NY) 118: No accounting for tastes. 1922 JJoyce *Ulysses* (NY 1934) 151: No accounting for tastes. 1933 CBint *Three Strangers* (L) 190: There is no accounting for tastes. 1935 JRhode *Shot at Dawn* (NY) 27: There's no accounting for likes and dislikes. 1937 PGWode-house *Laughing* (NY) 120: No accounting for tastes. 1943 PATaylor *Going* (NY) 22: Jeanne was always saying that there was no accounting for some people's taste, and adding some pungent comment about the old lady who insisted on kissing her pig. 1954 EWBarnes *Lady* (NY) 50: There was no accounting for tastes. 1964 WJovanovich *Now* (NY) 11: There is no accounting for people's tastes. 1971 CAird *Late* (NY) 28: There's no accounting for habit. 1971 DFJones *Denver* (NY) 202: There's no accounting for some people's tastes. EAP A18. Cf. Tastes below.

**A19 As black (bald) as the Ace of spades (varied)**

1929 CBarry *Clue* (NY) 214: He's as black as the ace of spades. 1930 HFootner *Viper* (L) 223: Black as the Knave of Spades. 1932 VWilliams *Fog* (B) 225: You could be as bald as the ace of spades. 1936 PGWode-house *Young Men* (NY) 224: He was as black as the ace of spades. 1948 AHandley *Kiss* (P) 149: They were as black as the ace of spades. 1959 ASillitoe *Saturday* (NY) 45: As black as the ace of spades. 1965 LHWhitten *Progeny* (NY) 80: As black as spades. 1967 JPurdy *Eustace* (NY) 70: Black as the ace of spades and twice as baleful. 1973 APrice *Colonel* (NY) 32: She was black as the ace of spades. 1977 LBlock *Burglars* (NY) 35: The thing turned as black as the deuce of spades. TW 3(2).

**A20 To be Ace high**

1938 VWMason *Cairo* (NY) 125: I guess I rate ace high with her. 1940 DHume *Five Aces* (L) 26: You're ace high. Wentworth 2.



## Ace

### A21 To be within an Ace

1932 PHerring *Murder* (L) 289: We had our man within an ace. EAP A21.

### A22 To have an Ace in the hole

1921 ERBurroughs *Mucker* (NY) 271: I have an ace-in-the-hole: 280, 291. 1930 MBDix *Murder* (L) 176: Keep him as an ace in the hole. 1937 CFGregg *Wrong House* (L) 251: That's merely the ace in the hole. 1947 MCarleton *Swan* (NY) 92: Iris was an ace in the hole. 1957 IWallace *Square* (NY) 58: His ace in the hole was a large ranch. 1969 JBoyd *Pollinators* (NY) 55: I have a true ace in a real hole. Wentworth 2.

### A23 Achilles heel

1919 HFAshurst *Diary* ed GFSparks (Tucson 1962) 92: The Achilles heel to the United States. 1922 JJoyce *Ulysses* (NY 1934) 642: The vulnerable point too of tender Achilles: 644. 1930 AGilbert *Mystery* (NY) 159: We all have a heel of Achilles: 55, 140. 1941 RAdlington *Life* (NY) 252: Achilles had his vulnerable heel. 1949 JBo-nett *Dead Lion* (L 1953) 76: She had an Achilles heel. 1951 LFord *Murder Is* (NY) 73: Even Achilles probably never went around bragging about his heel. 1953 IFleming *Casino* (L) 18: His gross physical habits . . . are an Achilles heel. 1958 TLS 1/24 38: The status of the Negro is the Achilles heel of the United States. 1958 BHerald 2/6 6: Taxation strikes at the Achilles heel of the racketeer. 1958 CI Blackstone *Dewey* (L 1965) 54: A flair for baring the Achilles heel and sticking a dagger into it. 1964 LLRue *World* (P) 109: Another Achilles heel is the racoon's insatiable curiosity. 1966 DRMason *From Carthage* (NY) 159: Even the professional psychologist had an Achilles' heel of *amour propre*. 1970 LKronenberger *No Whippings* (B) 147: To put its Achilles' heel inside a policeman's boot. 1977 DWilliams *Treasure* (NY) 41: His uncanny knack for exposing the Achilles' heel that left clay feet unprotected. EAP A23.

### A24 Actions speak louder than words (varied)

1949 JBCabell *Jurgen* (NY 1922) 85: My actions often speak more unmistakably

than my words. 182: Actions speak louder than words. 1926 CFJenkins *Button Gwinnett* (NY) 184: It is a trite saying that actions speak louder than words. 1934 NChild *Diamond* (L) 77: Actions speak louder than results. 1936 *New Yorker* 9/19 59: Actions speak louder than words. 1937 PGWodehouse *Laughing* (NY) 120: Actions speak louder than words. 1939 JFarjeon *Seven Dead* (I) 314: It's actions that speak, not words. 1956 JDunbar *Golden* (B) 161: Her actions would speak louder than words. 1958 BKendrick *Clear* (NY) 31: My actions may shout out louder than words. 1964 PKinsley *Three* (L) 123: Actions speak louder than words. EAP A28.

### A25 As dead as Adam

1924 JSFletcher *Mazaroff* (NY) 31: Dead as Adam. TW 3(2).

### A26 As naked as Adam

1932 RMarshall *Jane* (NY) 147: Naked as Adam. 1959 CDBowen *Adventures* (B) 175: Naked as Adam. 1959 EWeeks *In Friendly* (B) 154: Pygmies . . . as naked as Adam. Wilstach 542.

### A27 As old as Adam

1934 JFarjeon *Simister* (NY) 191: It was as old as Adam. 1937 GGoodchild *Call Me-Lean* (L) 25: Many of them were as old as Adam. 1957 TLS 4/19-242: Such an attitude . . . is . . . well-nigh as old as Adam. Tilley A28.

### A28 Adam's ale

1933 NBell *Lord* (B) 159: Adam's ale [water]. 1953 JRMacdonald *Meat* (NY) 68: Adam's ale, my mother called it. 1960 JLodwick *Moon* (L) 166: Adam's ale. EAP A29; DARE i 10.

### A29 Not to know one (something) from Adam (Eve) (varied)

1909 JCLincoln *Kenzak* (NY) 289: A strange critter that I didn't know from Adam's cat. 1910 EPhillipotts *Tales* (NY) 333: We didn't know from Adam where we was to. 1911 JCLincoln *Woman-haters* (NY) 149: Folks you . . . don't know from Adam. 1913 JSFletcher *Secret* (L 1918) 41: Would not have known Killingley from Adam. 1916