

# *The Social Significance of New England Idiomatic Phrases*

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## I.

THE Pennsylvania German with his sing-song, the southern damsel with her delightful drawl, and Eliza Doolittle are not the only folk who have been noteworthy for their manner of speech. So also has the New Englander—and the most striking element in his mode of communication is more than a peculiar manner of managing his vocal cords. It is the garnering and the persistent use of a really extraordinary assemblage of similes and metaphors—perhaps as extraordinary an assemblage as any nation or region of the world has displayed, except perhaps the Chinese whose whole language might be thought of as consisting of nothing but similes! The British people, from whom the original New Englanders took their descent as well as many choice idiomatic phrases, may have remained the latter's chief rival in this practice, but I believe the citizenry of the newer country to have proceeded to originate many sprightly phrases of their own and to have added these to the scores or hundreds which they brought over from the mother country through many decades.

The tracing of origins of all such phrases quite properly stimulates the zeal of the folklorist or antiquarian. Roughly I would myself estimate that something like a third of the total mass could easily be tracked to the Bible, Shakespeare, other English writers, medieval life, and similar non-

American sources; a third, or something like that proportion, seem to bear the indicia of local origin; and the remainder might have derived from either source. However, for my main argument, the locus of origin is not a critical matter. It is clear that the New Englanders surely gave birth to *some* delightful phrases; and it is also clear that the phrases which they annexed from other sources were equally picturesque and imaginative. I am concerned principally with what this creativity and this borrowing signified. More important, I think, is my belief that the total stock of these phrases reached a maximum around the early years of the present century, and now is diminishing. This element in our civilization is declining. Likewise more important seems my contention that the accumulation of this treasury of phrases was a democratic, social process, and so constitutes an achievement in which the whole region may take pride.<sup>1</sup>

I speak of similes and metaphors—"soft as a kitten's ear," "crooked as a hound's hind leg," "to step into dead men's shoes," and the like. Of these phrases, I have assembled something close to two thousand specimens that I knew in my younger days, and so did my sister, and friends of my own age and general upbringing—chiefly sons and daughters of professional men in modest-sized cities of eastern Massachusetts. And I am not here concerned with proverbs, although the true New Englander knew well enough not to "look a gift horse in the mouth," that "lazy folks take the most pains," and some scores more. Nor am I taking note of exclamations, "Gosh all hemlock," "bless

<sup>1</sup> I am instructed by my learned colleague at Harvard, Professor Joshua Whatmough (*Language, A Modern Synthesis*, p. 106) that what I am interested in is not "speech" or just talking; nor language in the abstract, as when an anthropologist speaks of language being a vehicle of civilization; nor language in the narrower or specific sense of the mode of communication of a given tribe or people; but utterance or the particular mode in which ideas are expressed for conveyance to one or more listeners, for purposes of communication.

my soul," and the like, which were in many cases mere watered-down profanity; while also I have tried to draw a line between colorless or pure motor phrases—"like as not" or "push one's advantage,"—and such more picturesque expressions as "to pull a long face" or "fresh as a daisy." Finally, I should state that I am not concerned with individual terms—neither the meaning of "gumption" or "flannel cakes"—nor with the geographical boundaries in the use of "bucket" and "wooden pail"—no, nor with the times when particular words crept individually into use. Matters such as the foregoing have formed the bases of serious, laborious, and costly inquiries, but they seem to me to smack of antiquarianism.

The multiplicity of the truly picturesque and imaginative similes and metaphors becomes believable as soon as one's mind is alerted to the material. A sports writer in the *Boston Herald* spoke recently of certain teams as "working like Trojans," although I suspect that he could not locate historic Troy for one nor speculate advisedly on why the inhabitants of that city should ever have labored with particular assiduity. At the Harvard Club I overheard an "old grad" speaking of someone, probably a stupid Yale graduate, as "poor as a church mouse." And in the course of a call on an old friend of New England extraction, she told me of the marked improvement in her son's personal habits; "now," she said, "George is pizzun neat."

Indeed, the stream of such phrases had become so great and its components employed so widely that, even in my youth, numerous phrases were used uncritically; apparently they had become altered, twisted, or corrupted. However, they continued to be bandied about just as if they had literal sense. A common expression ran to the effect that things were "in apple-pie order." We knew that the goods were arranged neatly; but I have never heard an authorita-

tive explanation for the use of this particular term.<sup>2</sup> And I could list a score of expressions of which the same was (and is) true:

before one can say Jack Robinson,  
beat one all hollow,  
come out the small end of the horn,  
clean as a pig's whistle,  
dead as a door nail,  
funny as a crutch, etc., etc.

Widespread use of similes and metaphors could have provided the opportunity for yet a more amusing consequence, a form of corruption possible only within a mind skilled in malapropism. Such a person did serve at Harvard not so many years ago. Once, intending a compliment to a friend dressed in a light-colored summer suit, he said that Don looked "as pure as a driven lily"; and, on another occasion, when he sought to recommend a younger man for promotion, he asserted that, given a job to do, Jimmie "never left a stone unthrown"<sup>3</sup>

<sup>2</sup> I believe that the phrase stems from the manner in which a good New England cook prepared the apples for the filling of an apple pie. I have seen the job done many times. My aunt used to slice the apples and lay the slices in regular circles on the pie plate (already covered with the dough of the lower crust), each slice overlapping another all around the circular dish. Typically, as I recall it, there were two such circles, one around the outer rim and one inside the first; but each was uniform in character, the effect being like the overlapping blades of an electric fan. On this base, other slices were laid less precisely, especially toward the central part of the circle, the number perhaps varying with the cook's estimate of the fibre-content of the particular apples that she happened at the time to be using.

<sup>3</sup> Tangential to my line of thought is the fact that many of the phrases cited in this essay will be familiar to persons brought up in other parts of the country or even nurtured abroad, especially in England. There has been (and undoubtedly is) a large overlapping in the stock of idiomatic phrases used in all English-speaking communities; the fact of migration of peoples from England would take care of that; while the overlapping within the United States could be explained by reference to the internal migration of people out of New England (and into New England also, for that matter). In the domestic diffusion of similes and metaphors out of New England, perhaps migrant "schoolma'ams," clergymen, and "travelling salesmen" played conspicuous parts.

To be sure, I would go on to claim that New England's accumulation and employment of such phrases were exceptional, even for the whole United States; but this is based only upon personal experience, my own travels in the country, and the contacts over nearly half a century with students and faculty drawn from all quarters of the nation.

## II.

The aggregate of some fifteen hundred or two thousand reasonably piquant similes and metaphors known to my generation in its earlier years can be broken down into various subgroupings for purposes of description. One line of analysis is that of origin, already mentioned. To be sure, the sources of many idiomatic phrases used in New England are frequently unknown or obscure, despite an appreciable amount of work expended in such interesting quests; but there is no question that New England adopted phrases from many sources.

The diversity of origin of the similes and metaphors is revealed by the following tabulation:

The Bible	to see the handwriting on the wall the apple of one's eye
classical literature	to accept a statement with a grain of salt to hang by a hair
necromancy or fortune-telling (at least in reasonable probability)	black as the ace of spades to be afraid to call one's soul his own
medieval life	to beat the bushes to have more than one string to one's bow
Shakespeare	to wear one's heart on one's sleeve something rotten in the state of Denmark
experience with the American Indian	to bury the hatchet to paddle one's own canoe
farm life in America	to squawk like a guinea hen crooked as a rail fence
forestry	to let the chips fall where they may to break the log jam
fairy tales	to bell the cat to pull another's chestnuts out of the fire

English life	a bull in a china shop to buy a pig in a poke
nautical life	to be on one's beam ends between the devil and the deep blue sea
handicraft experience	to have too many irons in the fire to hit the nail on the head
business	to write off as a dead loss to sell like hot cakes
country sports	to bark up the wrong tree to drag a red herring across a trail
life in rural areas	easy as rolling off a log low as a snake's belly

This diversity of origins did not in reality mean a diversity in character. For example, there is an imaginative quality in scores of phrases deriving, it seems, from divers sources: "old as Methuselah," "happy as a clam at high tide," "scarce as hen's teeth," "beside one's self with anger," "have a bear by the tail," etc. And the existence of this quality seems to have significance, as I have already intimated. It must be that the quality had appeal to the intellectual or emotional equipment of the ordinary New Englander. He enjoyed the imagery of "burning the candle at both ends," "biting off more than one can chew," and the like, just as a Frenchman enjoys wines for their pleasant tastes or bouquets, or an Austrian would gladly sit all day listening to pleasant music.

Most of the imaginative phrases immediately foregoing and, indeed, the great majority of all those heretofore mentioned, manifest yet another character, namely, they derive from plain, down-to-earth experience in the community or, drawn from abroad, were perfectly appropriate to that life. Yes, there were literary or high-tone similes and metaphors out of the Scriptures, Shakespeare, fairy tales, and other

portions of our written heritage; but these items did not bulk large in quantity; and I suspect that many of these literary jewels were late additions to the total stock, coming in when New Englanders began to be self-conscious of their cultural derivation from an earlier civilization, and were pleased to establish contacts with it. And it may be especially noteworthy that the number of Biblical phrases seems quite meager for an area which on other evidence must be regarded as deeply religious in character. The great bulk of the similes and metaphors, on the other hand, were on the level of "snug as a bug in a rug," "clean as a hound's tooth," or "to know which side one's bread is buttered on." Perhaps the larger classification under which many of the items could be located would be that of naturalistic: from "blue as the sky" to a confusion "like bees around a honeycomb," and from "sly as a fox" to "running one's head into a stone wall." The New Englanders observed, and were apperceptive of the world in which they lived. They may not always have stopped to inquire into its inner meaning, but they made it a part of their intellectual world.

Again, a study of the similes and metaphors at the New Englander's disposal makes manifest that neither fulsomeness of a favorable opinion nor acidity in an adverse judgment was characteristic of the region's mode of communication. Often an extreme opinion was spiced with an element of humor. A person putting on a show of great activity might well be pictured as resembling "a hen on a hot griddle," while one's perfectly good, perhaps excellent external appearance might be greeted with the satirical description of "big as life and twice as natural." On the other hand, a person who was proceeding with exasperating moderation might be alleged to be "as slow as molasses in January"; if one appeared peculiarly stupid, he might be accused of "not knowing enough to come in out of the

rain," or of being "unable to find salt water in the sea"; while a person presenting an extremely dishevelled or disorderly condition might be accorded the most vigorous of the New Englander's critical appraisals: the individual looked like "something the cat had dragged in."

Finally, there are a goodly number of these similes and metaphors which seem to make evident the New Englander's bent toward handicraftsmanship—perhaps a counterpart to his supposed "instinct of contrivance," his capacity to shine as a "tinker," or a "jack of all trades." Several of these phrases relate to industrial processes, themselves now long since discarded and unknown to the present generation. These items may warrant some special attention on both these counts.

To be on tenterhooks:

This phrase, brought over from England, refers to a process carried on there by which woolen cloth of relatively uniform width was obtained in early years. After the wool had been spun, the cloth woven, and the goods then submitted to the fulling process, the wet fabrics, now shrunken and thickened, were taken into the fields and fixed upon wooden frames. These frames, approximately the width and length of the ordinary "piece" of cloth, possessed rows of steel teeth—called "tenters"—on their inner edges. If the edges of the "piece" of cloth were impaled upon these teeth and the fabric left to dry in the sun, the inner strains of the wet fabrics resolved themselves as best they could, straining against one another. In other words, the cloth was dried under tension.

Not worth a tinker's dam:

There was never an "n" at the end of the word "dam" nor any intention of accusing every tinker of profanity.



The "dam" in the case was a wall of clay or other cheap material moulded about a joint of piping which the tinker wished to join solidly with solder. When the process had been completed, the "dam" was thrown away.

To be unwilling to "touch something with a ten-foot pole" [or "with a barge pole"]:

The alternative form seems to me to suggest the right explanation for a phrase that I have heard widely used in New England, but which I have never seen explained. The earliest cross-country traffic canal in this country was the Middlesex, which ran from Charlestown, Massachusetts, to Chelmsford, across the Merrimack River from Lowell; it passed through a region that still sheltered many wild animals, and was sustaining perhaps many head of domestic livestock that was allowed to roam unfenced areas; some of these animals would be bound to jump or fall into this line of water and be drowned; and, until their bodies wholly disintegrated, these materials would be something which one "would not touch with a barge pole"—quite likely a "ten-foot" affair.

All wool and a yard wide:

Among the cloths turned out in the early New England wool manufacture, a variety made up of a cotton warp and a wool filling was popular. It was called "satinet" and was produced by the mile. Less common, but by no means unknown was a variety of flannel, in which cotton fibers were mixed with wool ones prior to the spinning process, so that the two materials were really commingled. Also the looms on which almost all cloths were woven were 27 inches in width. Consequently a fabric which was "all wool and a yard wide" really was extraordinary for that period.

Not to cut much ice:

Until the advent of chemical freezing, ice for household use was secured from lakes and ponds during the cold spells of northern winters, stored in "ice houses" that were maintained on the edges of the lakes, and distributed in the warm weather. The ice was actually "cut." It was sawed into blocks about two feet square—if possible, two feet cube—by men operating long hand saws that were thrust down through holes cut in the ice. An inefficient workman did "not cut much ice."

[To constitute] a lead pipe cinch:

"Cinch" was a name applied to a hand tool used by plumbers to cut threads in pipe when out on jobs. Usually it came equipped with steel cutting teeth, and such a tool put to cutting a thread in a lead pipe would go through the metal with great ease.<sup>4</sup>

Not to set the Thames [or tems] on fire:

This peculiar phrase surely came to us from England, and had no connection with the Harvard-Yale boat race on the Connecticut river of the same name! And I do not know whether it arrived here in the "Thames" or the "tems" form; I suspect the former. However, the notion of a person or object setting fire to water always seemed to me a rather stupid one, and once, when I was working on the development of the wool manufacture in Great Britain, I ran upon an explication that seemed much more reasonable.

The word "tems" was used in Scotland to designate the wooden beam on which the wooden shuttle was passed back and forth in a hand loom. The shuttle was bound to develop some friction as it scraped upon the beam, especially if propelled back and forth on the device called the

<sup>4</sup>This explanation is based on recollections of data which I should surely now find difficult to run to ground.

“flying shuttle.” In the case of a lazy, slowly moving weaver, this friction did not matter, but an active, zealous man might push the shuttle back and forth so rapidly that he could get the “tems” to smoking a bit; he might “set the tems on fire.” And the author of this explication went on to assert that Gilbert and Sullivan, unfamiliar with the niceties of ancient Scottish wool-cloth manufacture, substituted a word that sounded much the same; and since their time we have been talking about the river “Thames” being ignited.

### III.

The swelling of the volume of similes and metaphors over the years, by domestic creation or by adoption from abroad, permitted the New Englander of the latter 19th and early 20th centuries to differentiate phrases, all at his command. There were differentiations of intended vigor in a certain line of praise or criticism; and, although individual speakers were sometimes known to deviate from the normal, all the well-brought-up inhabitants of the area generally agreed in recognizing the several differences. For instance, if a friend reported to me that his father had become “mad as a hornet” at some prank of ours, I knew that I need not worry; if he spoke of his father as “mad as a wet hen,” well, things were pretty bad; but if he came and said that his father was “mad enough to chew nails,” I realized that I had best stay clear of the man. Similarly, if a girl was described as “homely as a hedge fence,” she wasn’t really too bad; if her appearance rated the description of “homely as a witch,” well, one stayed away mostly; but if she allegedly was “homely enough to stop a clock,” surely her case was pretty hopeless.

A somewhat similar set of conventions had developed with respect to the social acceptability of the several phrases.

Mr. Ki Chiu Kwong, author of a "Dictionary of English Phrases" published in New York in 1881, appreciated this sort of differentiation in the establishment of his categories of "idiomatic" (or polite), "colloquial," and "slang and cant" phrases in his voluminous compendium. If one were talking with children, a New Englander might state, anent a condition of confusion, that things were "all higglety-pigglety"; if he were conversing with more mature persons, he would assert that things were "at sixes and sevens"; and, if he were making a public address, he might speak of "Ossa being piled on Pelion." Correspondingly, a boy would readily characterize a peculiar person as "crazy as a bed-bug," when speaking with his contemporaries; but he would tell his father that the person was "crazy as a coot," and would inform his teacher that the individual was "mad as a March hare," at least as soon as he had picked up this stylish simile from his elders. And these differentiations were learned by all New Englanders as part of their general education.

#### IV.

Certain features relative to similes and metaphors in New England's mode of communication—their quantity, their naturalism, and, in many cases, their rather obvious home-grown character—provoke the question of the mechanism by which new items came to be added to the stock. Just because a farmer thought that there was sense in the similes "wise as an owl" and "blind as a bat" did not mean that a decade or two later the whole New England community might be utilizing the same figures of speech. Nor, until fairly late in the 19th century, were conditions suitable for transmission through literary media: a body of polite literature, including periodicals, which would publish materials in which such "folksy" phrases might seem appro-

priate, and a public with sufficiently widespread education so that metaphors and similes in "folksy" tales would be read and thus be made potentially available for propagation in the various communities. Early newspapers seem to have constituted poor channels for such flows of social change.

Many of the English-bred phrases doubtlessly came to New England in the baggage of the immigrants from Plymouth Rock downwards; and others, even some of those derived from Shakespeare or the classics, could well have come over with the teachers and ministers and other educated men who moved to the colonies or later to the thriving New England states. And, of course, there were numerous return visits to the mother country all through the decades, except for short periods of war.

The lyceums, launched particularly in the 1830's and 1840's, may have helped in the diffusion within the New England area. But I suspect that the spread of these truly literary items had to await the enlargement of a "reading public" in New England, more particularly in the decades after 1860.

More interesting and puzzling are the cases of the "home-grown" phrases. Here the bevy of "popular" itinerant speakers of the post-Civil War era may have contributed—Artemus Ward, Mark Twain, Josh Billings, and the like; but I am doubtful whether they should be rated high in this process of communication. I would suggest the probability, almost the necessity, of a mechanism consisting of three interrelated parts. One part, and an overriding one, was the oral character of the society of the area in its earlier days. The famed cracker-barrel at the country store and the sewing bee at the local church are but somewhat conspicuous examples of what was almost universal in the smaller communities. People read relatively little; they

talked. One had to "have his tongue hung in the middle and wagging at both ends" in order to be unusual—or a person who "talked one deaf, dumb, and blind!"

A second, and an important element in the social apparatus was a group of long-lived, tough, talkative individuals, men and women—few in number, to be sure, but freed of normal chores by their partial incapacitation, free to exercise their tongues most of the day. Such individuals were likely to be the cynosures of growing aggregates of relatives and admiring friends, and the attention and admiration in turn no doubt served to stimulate the recipients to higher performances. I knew such a person in my youth, a woman of 80 or 85 living in Newfields, New Hampshire, called affectionately "Mammie" Pike by everyone, and still "bright as a button" in everybody's opinion. Such spare, tough persons probably did remain "bright"; they were quite capable of originating novel ways of picturing eagerness or dislike or other common attitudes, and they were strong-minded enough both to like their own ways of communication, and to repeat a phrase that seemed to them pat.

The third element in the mechanism was the broadcasting system. An essential portion of that system, of course, was the circle of admiring relatives and friends above-mentioned. Not only did they serve to take the new saying out of the sitting room or the barn and start it through the community's other sitting rooms and barns as the bright new way that "Mammie" Pike or her equivalent was expressing some thought, but also to bring out-of-town visitors into contact with such innovating celebrities. I was taken in to see Mrs. Pike by my grandfather, Mrs. Pike's Methodist pastor. By actions of both types, the first stage in the dissemination process was provided.

The second stage in the process—the second portion of the distributing apparatus—pertained to an aggregate

where such a person as "Mammie" Pike no longer was important, that is, to the total society of the region. Here zealously for the novelties might have become chilled when the beloved phrases of charmed circles reached the cool air of humdrum life. But a more widely operating force seems to me to have taken over, as I read the record and consider the potentialities. Many New Englanders, if not a good majority, were endowed with a liking for the neat simile and the picturesque metaphor. They appreciated a situation where one should "fish or cut bait"; their minds found sardonic humor in the thought that a friend could not "open his mouth without putting his foot into it"; and their spirits rose skyward when they first heard, and to some extent when they themselves found suitable occasions to repeat, that a person was so surprised as to "jump right out of his skin," that a person trying to conceal a secret smart trick might "look like the cat that had swallowed the canary"; or that a young lady might have a dress which fitted her like "a duck's foot in the mud"!

Evidence tending to support the foregoing hypothesis seems to me to lie in the fact, hitherto ignored, that, while each community revels in the possession and use of a common body of idiomatic phrases, it was also true that particular phrases were favored by particular families, and these particular phrases not employed in numerous other families. One family of my acquaintance had the habit of referring to a small object as "no bigger than a pint of cider," but our household would be likely to employ a slightly different approach: the object would be described as "no bigger than a flea," was "only knee-high to a grasshopper," or some such. Another family liked to roll out—on appropriate occasions, of course—two phrases really unknown in my father's household: "queer as Dick's hat-band," and "ready to ride out." The head of this latter family now has no notion who "Dick"

might have been, while the second phrase, utilized with reference to a room in great disorder, seems now to make no sense at all to this same lady. I venture to conclude that phrases did start their careers at almost numberless points in New England, drifted around the whole community through diverse channels, and in some cases never did reach broad or general acceptance. Like logs floating downstream in the Maine springtime "runs," some phrases became, as it were, stranded on the sides of the rivers.

The evolution of the similes and metaphors of New England, then, was a social process—"social" as the sociologist would define the term. A bias of the society toward oral communication, a deference for persons of a ripe old age, the institutions of the family, the church, and the country store, and a broadly dispersed enjoyment of novel phrases—these all were essential. Wherefore, in a sense, the region as a whole and a large proportion of its inhabitants must be given credit for the total achievement.

## V.

The timing of the achievement raises a further interesting problem—or series of problems. That there were accretions through the decades, probably even through the centuries, cannot be doubted. I see no reason why many of the Indian-sprung phrases—"to camp on someone's trail," "to smoke the pipe of peace," and the like—should not have become orally current in colonial days. Some items can be more precisely dated. There is the group of monetary references: "not worth a Continental," "not worth a plugged nickel," or "bright as a silver dollar." The "Continental" bills of credit were issued under the Confederation



during the Revolutionary War—and issued much too generously to maintain their value in relation to the precious metals; “nickels” were not issued until 1866; while “silver dollars” were coined only in 1878 after a lapse of nearly 75 years—and quite surely the “bright” dollars were those of the later emission. Then there are the phrases that stemmed from railroad operations—“clear the track,” “asleep at the switch,” etc.; and the first American railroad was launched in 1828. A fair number of others would be dated more or less accurately without much trouble, such as those, like “poor as Job’s turkey,” that came from Sam Slick.<sup>5</sup> Still the calculation of what the statistician would call a time series relative to the whole phenomenon would require a goodly period of research and might well in the end prove possible only with a high degree of error.

The attainment of an apogee—a period when, by measure of the total number in use and by estimate of their social valuation, similes and metaphors had reached their level of maximum importance—can also be placed on the total time scale with but rough approximation. Other observers may contend that there has really been no decline, merely a straight line of growth. I hold to the contrary, and would contend that the golden era was roughly between 1880 and 1910.

The evidence anent the rise in importance till this 1880–1910 era is largely circumstantial. There are the actual datable accretions to the stock, to which reference was made just above; and there is the fact that the “dictionaries” relating to such materials expanded in size: Bartlett’s “Glossary of Words and Phrases” grew appreciably between

<sup>5</sup> “Sam Slick” was the pen name of Thomas Chandler Haliburton, who was actually born in Nova Scotia, and lived most of his life in England, but who contributed a series of literary sketches—hypothetically about a Yankee clockmaker and pedlar—to a Nova Scotian newspaper. These were subsequently assembled into books which appeared mostly in the 1850’s.

its edition of 1848 and the version of 1878, Kwong's book of 1881 was still larger, etc. (or was the expansion merely the result of variant assiduities among the compilers, or the cheapened costs of printing?). Also I would contend that until this era, despite the growth of cities, the force of the "oral tradition" continued strong.

Since about 1910—quite clearly, as it seems to me—there has been a decline in the place of similes and metaphors in New England's life. The idea of a decrease in significance is again in part the result of personal appraisal: I hear fewer expressions of the sort than I used to in earlier decades; younger folks seem to me to employ the phrases less frequently than their elders do; and really it is only people of my generation who hark back to pungent similes and colorful metaphors to push an argument home or to disconcert a verbal opponent.

A number of factors can be adduced to make reasonable the position that I have just proposed: the years since about 1910 have been those of the expanding "ice cap" of passivity, where much "oral" communication is that from the motion picture film, the phonograph, the umpire's voice, and the television actors; the immigrant peoples seem not to have brought anywhere near the stock of similes and metaphors that they found here; peoples of variant ethnic origins hesitate to employ figures of speech in conversation with one another or in writing for common consumption; and the trend of education toward science, social studies, and vocational purposes has undercut the study of English literature in the schools—and one finds few colorful similes in biology, mathematics, or stenography. To be sure, there have been additions to the stock of current idiomatic phrases out of sport and science and city life; but on the whole the volume of the currently used supply seems to me much diminished. Perhaps this is a gain. I choose to think it a loss.

## VI.

Finally, what is the meaning of the whole phenomenon—the rise and at least some continuing use of a sizable quantity of picturesque similes and metaphors with which New Englanders “salted and peppered” their modes of communication whether they were minister, clerk, or day laborer, whether seaman, handicraftsman, or farmer, whether grown man, young lady, or urchin? Perhaps, to be sure, future inquiries will *prove*, as I have earlier suggested, that New Englanders created, adopted, and cherished a larger quantum held more closely to their breasts than did English, French, Italians, Russians, or other peoples at any point in time. Then still other questions would be in order. We had best limit ourselves to less pretentious ones.

Even on the less exalted level, one is handicapped by the general lack of attention by scholars to this range of inquiry. More attention, it seems, has been given to the influence of language on men than that of men on language—to put the matter in succinct but inaccurate terms. Much interest has gone—quite properly—into semantics, mass communication practices, and the like. Only a few writers, chiefly anthropologists, give me much assistance.

The flexibility in the New Englander's acceptance of picturesque phrases seems of some significance—phrases being added, phrases disappearing, phrases corrupted out of rational meaning, etc. A recent author, speaking of language in general in all of America, but seeing language as reflecting human nature and human society as well as human vocal systems, generalizes that the environment in this country produced “a linguistic climate that was favorable to change.”<sup>6</sup> There is nothing in the evidence upon New England similes and metaphors to challenge this simple

<sup>6</sup> Charlton Laird, *The Miracle of Language* (1953), p. 249.

view. Another author, writing some years ago, thought to see a throwing-off of "linguistic authority" with the achievement of political independence.<sup>7</sup> In the light of the considerable number of phrases out of medieval and early modern England—"to call a spade a spade," "to go wool-gathering," etc.—that remain in our pool of expressions, it seems unlikely that the New Englanders were so rash as to deny themselves the pleasure of such importations when they resolved to clothe themselves in native homespun and shun British wool cloths.

The flexibility of our supply of similes and metaphors might be held to manifest the looseness of social structuring in this part of the country; anyone could launch phrases into the stream of local communication. More particularly, one could observe that, at least after the Mathers lost their hold over the situation, New England had no equivalent of a Confucius or Mahomet, and no Shakespeare, Bobbie Burns, or (in another civilization) Goethe, to give the unscholarly innovator a feeling of inadequacy. New Englanders were free to evolve their own complicated set of idiomatic phrases and expect every youth to master the assembly!

Probably more important in appraising this aspect of New England utterance is a consideration suggested to me by a young sociological friend at Columbia, Sigmund Diamond. He wondered whether the character of simile and metaphor found in the New Englander's intellectual equipment could not be looked upon as in general the natives' assessment of the world, their appraisal of the total situation. This seems to me an excellent line of analysis, partly because the evidence is involuntary; nobody planned things a certain way; nobody told the natives what they *ought* to use in the way of idiomatic phrases; and a large

<sup>7</sup> Otto Jespersen, *Language; Its Nature, Development, and Origin* (1922), p. 26.

proportion of the whole population participated in the process of development. Even those of us—the great majority, to tell the truth—who never created a single such phrase did at least choose among those that we knew, and repeated what we liked; we helped in the process of selection.

In this light, the collection of similes and metaphors seems to tell us that the typical New Englander was willing to accept novelties (as in fact we know from other data); that he was naturalistic, being impressed by all phenomena from “clear as crystal” to the improbability of “catching a weasel asleep;” that he was softly critical, being content, for example, that his opponent might “laugh out the other side of his mouth” in due time; and that he was, in a way of speaking, a tinker of ideas as he was one of mechanical contraptions: his mind welcomed the fancifulness of “putting another’s nose out of joint,” of a person’s “bringing the house down around one’s ears,” or of one “trying to find a needle in a haystack.” His mind was nimble, with an ingrown sense of humor. It seems to contrast with what appears at least one quality of the French mind in the area of language, its delight in the niceties of construction, or with that of the German mind in the same relationship, its love of complexity in word form and sentence compounding. The modern German has come quite a way toward simplification; I wonder, however, if the true Teutonic character in this area is not revealed by the practices of the baroque period. Look merely at a title-page of that era.

Possibly, in addition, the utilization of a complex sophisticated collection of similes and metaphors, shared with his friends in the New England world, gave the individual inhabitant a sense of belonging; he shared with them in the appreciation of refinements among the host of items. Yet, likewise, the availability of a large collection presented the New Englander with the opportunity of frequent personal

achievement; he could summon a truly pat phrase to clinch an argument; he could parade a nice new metaphor or simile that he had recently learned from his grandmother.

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly of all, the conservation and use of idiomatic phrases served the inhabitants of the region as a substitute for a book of guidance. I recall a story told of Joseph Schaffner by his son, the Mr. Schaffner who was in more ways than one the central figure in the original firm of Hart, Schaffner & Marx. The senior Mr. Schaffner spent some of his early manhood in a northern Indiana town; he took part in nightly debates on politics and whatnot at the local store; lacking formal education himself, he was impressed by the ease with which a lawyer member of the group seemed to be able to get the better of nearly any debate by the quotation of a phrase or even a couplet which came in often very opportunely; and, one evening as the group dispersed, he screwed up his courage to ask his acquaintance the name of the great mind that appeared to have decided so many human problems; and the lawyer replied quite good humoredly, "Oh, to be sure, he is a useful writer; his name is Alexander Pope."

The New Englanders had no Pope; also, as I have indicated, neither Shakespeare nor other such author counted for much in their thoughts. But a good phrase did—as also did proverbs when they chanced to suit the occasion. A simile or metaphor was available for nearly every requirement. And typically the appeal to authority proceeded something as follows:

If I were annoyed by the action of a friend, I would be likely to begin my protest with the statement that I "had a bone to pick" with him; and the lightness of touch obvious in the phrase would serve as a signal to him—and to myself too—that we should hold our tempers and discuss our difficulties in a rational manner.

Again, I might feel astonishment or distress at the apparent disregard of his health—as well as good appearance—which a friend or acquaintance was showing at the meals of which I was an observer. Perhaps I felt that I had no license to offer seriously worded advice, let alone attempt to scold him for his intemperance. However, I could convey my feeling of solicitude, wrapped up, as it were, in a cloak of friendliness, by remarking that he seemed intent on “digging his grave with his teeth.”

To be sure, such quasi-directives could be put to one's private advantage—with the potentiality carried by almost any good instrument or social practice. If I were uncertain as to the wisest choice between alternatives rationally almost equivalent, an opponent might worsen my standing with any third persons who might be listening, by alleging that I was “like the ass between two bales of hay.” The simile had, in effect, reduced me to the position of a stupid animal; I was seemingly without sense or potentiality of reasonable decision.

Generally, however, the assemblage of idiomatic phrases may be looked upon as comparable for the mass of New Englanders to the silver plate, the trophies of early China voyages, or just long lists of entries in the family Bibles which some New England families were fortunate enough to possess. The attitudes revealed in the similes and metaphors were something for New Englanders to live up to. They were rules of action, of which all inhabitants of the region were made conscious by the mere act of participating in community talk.

To the social historian, therefore, my collection of similes and metaphors may serve in a fashion somewhat comparable to (if humbler than) the paintings of New England artists or the volumes composed by New England philosophers, namely, to preserve a significant facet of New England

life. More meaningful than individual words and more spontaneous than formal proverbs, these idiomatic phrases seem indeed to possess a substance sufficiently great to incite further scholarly inquiry. Possibly the quantity and quality of the New Englander's stock can be compared with similar linguistic arsenals in other parts of our large country, with the typical Frenchman's, or Italian's, or Russian's. And perhaps such comparisons would prove a useful means of understanding these other peoples—at least for New Englanders!

### *A Collection of Typical New England Similes and Metaphors*

In the ensuing phrases where alternative forms were used, the portion of the longer form that was sometimes included and sometimes omitted has been placed within brackets.

#### A.

To *accept* a statement with a grain of salt.  
 To have an *Achilles* heel.  
 To *act* as if one had been brought up in a barn [or saw mill].  
 To *add* fuel to the flames.  
 To *add* insult to injury.  
 To *add* one's two-cents' worth.  
 To be *afraid* of one's own shadow.  
 To be *afraid* to call one's soul his own.  
 To *air* [or voice] one's grievances.  
 To be *alive* and kicking.  
 To be *all* cut up by some event.  
 To be *all* dressed up with no place to go.  
 Another's actions being *all* fuss and feathers.  
 To be *all* one to a person, that is, a matter of indifference.  
 To be *all* over but the shouting.  
*All* the world and his wife.  
 To be *all* to the mustard [or good].  
 To be *all* up in the air about something.  
 To be *all* wool and a yard wide.

Not to *amount* to a hill of beans.  
 Not to *amount* to Hannah Cook.  
*Another* county heard from.  
 To be *anxious* as a brooding hen.  
 The *apple* of discord.  
 The *apple* of one's eye.  
 In *apple-pie* order.  
 To *argue* [or talk] until one is black in the face.  
 The *arm* [or limb] of the law.  
 To be *armed* to the teeth.  
 To *arrive* with bells on.  
 To be *asking* for trouble.  
 To be *asleep* at the switch.  
 To *attempt* to carry water on both shoulders.  
 To *avoid* [or run away from] someone or something as one would the plague.  
 To have an *axe* to grind.

#### B.

To *back* and fill.  
 To have no *backbone*.  
 To be *badly* bitten by some idea.



To have something in the *bag*.

To depart *bag* and baggage.

To pull one's *bag* of tricks.

To be a *bag* of wind.

*Bald* as a billiard ball [or a turnip].

To be *balky* as a mule.

To be the *bane* of one's existence [or life].

To *bark* up the wrong tree.

To have a *barrel* of fun.

To *bask* in the sunshine of another's favor.

Like a *bat* out of Hell.

To have *bats* in the belfry.

To *be* in one's gift.

To *be* in someone's pocket.

To be on one's *beam-ends*.

To have a *bear* by the tail.

Like a *bear* with a sore head.

To *beard* the lion in his den.

To *beat* about the bush.

To *beat* [or lick] the tar out of someone.

To *beat* [or whip] the devil around the stump.

To *beat* someone all hollow.

To *beat* something into [or out of] another's head.

To *beat* the band.

To *beat* the bushes.

To *beat* the Dutch.

To *beat* the living daylights out of someone.

To be at somebody's *beck* and call.

A *bed* of roses.

To have a *bee* in one's bonnet.

Like *bees* around a honey-comb.

*Before* one can say Jack Robinson.

To *begin* at the bottom in a business.

To *bell* the cat.

To *bellow* like a bull.

To be *beside* one's self with anger.

To be wearing one's *best* bib and tucker.

The *best* thing to come down the pike.

To *bet* one's boots.

To *bet* one's bottom dollar.

To be *between* the devil and the deep blue sea.

To be *beyond* the pale.

To be *big* as a barn.

To be *big* as all out of doors.

A young man being too *big* for his britches.

To be no *bigger* than a flea.

To be no *bigger* than a minute.

To be no *bigger* than a pint of cider.

*Birds* of a feather.

To *bite* off more than one can chew.

To *bite* the dust.

To *bite* the hand that feeds one.

To be *bitter* as gall.

To be a *bitter* pill to swallow.

To be *black* as a crow.

To be *black* as ink.

To be *black* as one's hat.

To be *black* as soot.

To be *black* as the ace of spades.

To be in another's *black* books.

To *blaze* a [new] trail.

To be *blind* as a bat.

To constitute the *blind* leading the blind.

To realize that the *bloom* is off the rose.

To be *blooming* like a rose.

To *blow* first hot, and then cold.

To *blow* one's own horn [or trumpet].

To *blow* someone up sky-high.

To *blow* the dust [or cobwebs] out of one's brain.

So frail as to be *blown* away by the next breeze.

To be *blue* as the ocean.

To be *blue* as the sky.

To be in a *blue* funk.

Like a *blue* streak.

To *blush* like a bride.

To *blush* like a rose.

To display a *boarding-house* reach.

To be *bold* as brass.

Like a *bolt* from the blue.

To have a *bone* to pick with someone.

To be *bored* to death [or tears].

To have been *born* on the wrong side of the railroad tracks.

To be *born* with a silver spoon in one's mouth.

Not *born* yesterday.

To *borrow* trouble.

To *bow* to the inevitable.

To *break* out in a new [or fresh] place.

To *break* the ice.  
 To *break* the log-jam.  
 To *break* the thread of a discourse.  
 To *break* up housekeeping.  
 Not to *breathe* a syllable of so-and-so.  
 To be *bred* in the bone.  
 To *bridge* the gap.  
 To be *bright* as a button.  
 To be *bright* as a [silver] dollar.  
 To *bring* down the house.  
 To *bring* home the bacon.  
 To *bring* order out of chaos.  
 To *bring* someone up to the mark [or up to scratch].  
 To *bring* the house down around one's ears.  
 To *bring* things to a pretty pass.  
 To *bring* to book.  
 To be as *broad* as it is long.  
 To be *brown* as a berry.  
 To be in a *brown* study.  
 To *build* a fire under a person.  
 To *build* a house on the sands.  
 To *build* castles in the air [in Spain].  
 Like a *bull* in a china shop.  
 To act like a *bump* on a log.  
 To *burn* daylight.  
 To *burn* one's bridges behind him.  
 To *burn* one's fingers.  
 To *burn* the candle at both ends.  
 To *burn* the midnight oil.  
 To be *burnt* out of house and home.  
 To *bury* the hatchet.  
 To have no *business* there, i.e., in a certain location.  
 To be *busy* as a bee.  
 To be *busy* as a hen with one chick.  
 To be *busy* as a one-armed paper-hanger with the hives.  
 To *butt* one's head against a stone wall.  
 As if *butter* would not melt in a person's mouth.  
 To *button* one's mouth [or lip].  
 To *buy* a pig in a poke.

## C.

To be in *cahoots* with someone.  
 To *call* a spade a spade.

To *call* it a day.  
 To *call* off one's dogs.  
 To *call* someone on the carpet.  
 To *call* the turn.  
 To *camp* on another's trail.  
 To *cap* the climax.  
 To *capture* another's attention [or imagination].  
 Not to *care* a fig about something or somebody.  
 Not to *care* a straw.  
 To be *careful* as a cat walking on egg shells.  
 To be *carried* away by one's enthusiasms.  
 To *carry* beer to Munich.  
 To *carry* coals to Newcastle.  
 To *carry* matters with a high hand.  
 To *carry* on a crusade against something.  
 To *carry* [or bear] a grudge.  
 To *carry* [or have] a chip on one's shoulder.  
 To *carry* something too far.  
 To *carry* the day.  
 To *carve* a niche for one's self.  
 To *cash* in one's chips.  
 To offer or supply *cash* on the barrel-head.  
 To *cast* about for something.  
 To be *cast* in a different mold.  
 To *cast* in one's lot with someone else.  
 To *cast* [or make] sheep's eyes at someone.  
 To *cast* [or put] into the shade.  
 To *cast* pearls before swine.  
 To *cast* the die.  
 To look like the *cat* that had swallowed [or eaten] the canary.  
 To *catch* a Tartar.  
 To *catch* a weasel asleep.  
 To *catch* another red-handed.  
 To *catch* someone napping.  
 To *catch* someone's eye.  
 Like *cats* on the back fence.  
 To be *caught* flat-footed.  
 To be *caught* in the toils.  
 To *champ* at the bit.  
 The *chance* of a lifetime.  
 To *change* hands.  
 To have or experience a *change* of heart.  
 To *change* one's tune.  
 To be as *changeable* as the weather.

- To *chart* one's course.  
 To be always *chasing* rainbows.  
 To *chatter* like a magpie.  
 To be *cheap* as dirt.  
 To *cheat* the eye-teeth out of someone.  
 To sit *cheek* by jowl.  
 To be angry enough to *chew* [or bite] nails  
   [or a ten-penny nail, or one's nails].  
 To *chew* the rag.  
 To act like *children* out from school.  
 Not to have a *Chinaman's* chance.  
 To be a *chip* off the old block.  
 To *chirp* as merrily as a cricket.  
 To *claim* one's pound of flesh.  
 To be *clean* as a hound's tooth.  
 To be *clean* as a pig's whistle.  
 To *cleanse* the Augean stables.  
 To be *clear* as a bell.  
 To be *clear* as crystal.  
 To be *clear* as mud.  
 To be *clear* as noon-day.  
 To *clear* the decks.  
 To *clear* the track for some action.  
 To be *clever* as a bird-dog.  
 To be *clever* as a coot.  
 To be too *clever* for words.  
 To *climb* [or get] on the band wagon.  
 To *cling* like a leech.  
 To *cling* like a vine.  
 To *clip* somebody's wings.  
 To *close* one's eyes to evils [or unpleasant  
   facts].  
 To be in *clover*.  
 A *cock* and bull story.  
*Cock* of the walk.  
 To *coin* a new phrase.  
 To be *cold* as a fish.  
 To be *cold* as a stone.  
 To do something in *cold* blood.  
 To be *colder* than a woman's heart.  
 To be *colder* than Greenland.  
 To *collect* one's wits.  
 To *come* a cropper.  
 To *come* down in the world.  
 To *come* [down] off one's perch.  
 To *come* down to earth.  
 To do something *come* Hell or high water.
- Chickens *come* home to roost.  
 To *come* off with a whole skin.  
 To *come* off with flying colors.  
 To *come* [or go] on the town.  
 To *come* out flat-footedly.  
 To *come* out the small [or little] end of the  
   horn.  
 To *come* to a head.  
 To *come* to a standstill.  
 To *come* to an untimely [or bad] end.  
 To *come* to grief.  
 To *come* to grips with something.  
 To *come* to life.  
 To *come* to naught.  
 To *come* to the ears of someone.  
 To *come* to the point.  
 To *come* to the same thing as some other  
   contention.  
 To *come* up to scratch.  
 To be *comfortable* as an old shoe.  
 To be *common* as dirt.  
 To have *conniption* fits.  
 To *cook* one's goose.  
 To look as if he had been in the *cookie-jar*.  
 To be *cool* as a cucumber.  
 To *cool* one's heels.  
 Not in a *coon's* age.  
 To *count* noses.  
 To *count* one's chickens before they are  
   hatched.  
 To be *countless* as the stars.  
 The *crack* of dawn.  
 The *crack* of doom.  
 To *crack* the whip.  
 An object or idea not all that it is *cracked*  
   up to be.  
 To *cramp* another's style.  
 To be *crazy* as a bed-bug.  
 To be *crazy* as a coot [or loon].  
 To be *crazy* with the heat.  
 To be *crooked* as a hound's hind leg.  
 To be *crooked* as a pig's tail.  
 To be *crooked* as a rail fence.  
 To be *crooked* as a ram's horn.  
 To be *cross* as a bear.  
 To be *cross* as a setting hen.  
 To be *cross* as two sticks.

- To be or act at *cross* purposes.  
 To *cross* someone's palm with money.  
 To *cross* swords with someone.  
 To *cross* the Rubicon.  
 To be *crossed* in love.  
 To measure distances as the *crow* flies.  
 To *cry* as if one's heart would break.  
 To *cry* over spilled milk.  
 To *cry* "wolf" once too often.  
 To *cudgel* one's brains.  
 To *curry* favor with someone.  
 To *cut* a big dash.  
 To *cut* a figure.  
 To *cut* a wide swath.  
 To be [all] *cut* and dried.  
 To *cut* and run.  
 To *cut* another person dead [or cold].  
 To *cut* another person short.  
 To *cut* didoes.  
 To *cut* no ice with someone.  
 To *cut* off one's nose to spite one's face.  
 To *cut* off someone without a shilling.  
 To *cut* one's coat [or suit] according to one's cloth.  
 To have *cut* one's eye teeth.  
 To *cut* one's own throat by a certain act.  
 To *cut* one's teeth on certain work.  
 To have been *cut* out of the same piece of goods as another person.  
 To *cut* the Gordian knot.  
 To *cut* the ground out from under one.  
 To *cut* things pretty fine.  
 To be *cut* to the quick.  
 To *cut* up monkey-shines.  
 To be *cute* as a bug's ear.  
 To be *cute* as a button.
- D.
- To be *dainty* as a doll.  
 To be like *Damon* and Pythias.  
 To be *damp* as a dungeon.  
 To *dance* attendance on someone.  
 To be *dancing* on air.  
 To be like *Darby* and Joan.  
 To be in the *dark* about something.  
 To be *dark* as a dungeon.  
 To be *dark* as Egypt.
- To be *dark* as midnight [pitch, or a pocket].  
 To be *dark* as the black hole of Calcutta.  
 Not to *darken* another person's door.  
 The *darling* of the gods.  
 To be like *David* and Jonathan.  
 To wind up in *Davy* Jones' locker.  
 One's *days* to be numbered.  
 To be *dead* as a door nail.  
 To be *dead* as the dodo bird.  
 To be a *dead* duck.  
 A *dead* give-away.  
 To be *deaf* as a haddock.  
 To be *deaf* as a post.  
 To be *deaf* as an adder.  
 To be the *death* of someone.  
 To be at *death's* door.  
 To *detect* a fine Italian hand.  
*Diamond* cut diamond.  
 To *die* in harness.  
 To *die* with one's boots on.  
 The *difference* between Tweedledum and Tweedledee.  
 To be *different* as day and night.  
 To *dig* down deep for some purpose.  
 To *dig* one's grave with one's teeth.  
 To *dip* one's pen in venom.  
 To *do* one's heart good.  
 To *do* someone one better.  
 To *do* something up brown.  
 To *do* something with one's eyes open [or shut].  
 To *do* the handsome thing.  
 To *do* things by halves.  
 To *do* yeoman service.  
 To run up in numbers as a *dog* has fleas.  
 To be in the *dog* house.  
 To be a *dog* in the manger.  
 To *dog* one's steps.  
 To slink away like a *dog* with his tail between his legs.  
 To *dot* the i's and cross the t's.  
 To *double* in brass.  
 To *douse* the glim.  
 To be *down* at the heels.  
 To be *down* in the mouth.  
 To be *down* on one's luck.  
 To be *down* upon someone.

To *drag* a red herring across a trail.  
 To *drag* one's heels [or feet].  
 To *drag* one's name [or one's family's name] in the mud.  
 To *drag* something in by the ears into an argument.  
 To *draw* a bead on something.  
 To *draw* a blank.  
 To *draw* a line at something.  
 To *draw* a long bow.  
 To *draw* a veil over something.  
 To *draw* in one's horns.  
 To *draw* [run or turn] a straight furrow.  
 To be *dressed* fit to kill.  
 To be *dressed* up to the nines.  
 To *drift* with the current [or tide].  
 To *drink* like a fish.  
 To *drive* a hard bargain.  
 To *drive* a person out of his wits [or mind].  
 To *drive* a person to drink.  
 To *drive* someone into a corner in an argument.  
 To be *driven* from pillar to post.  
 Not a *drop* in the bucket.  
 Willing to fight at the *drop* of a hat.  
 To *drop* [or fall] like a plummet.  
 To *drop* something like a hot potato.  
 To have had a *drop* too much.  
 To be a *drug* on the market.  
 To be *drunk* as a lord.  
 To be *dry* as a bone.  
 To be *dry* as a powder horn.  
 A young person not *dry* behind the ears.  
 The dress fitting like a *duck's* foot in the mud.  
 To be *dull* as ditchwater [or dishwater].  
 To be *dumb* as an ox.  
 To *dump* one's worries [or cares] into another's lap.  
 To be *dyed* in the wool.

## E.

To *earn* one's bread and butter.  
 To be at *ease* in one's inn.  
 To be *easy* as falling [or rolling] off a log.  
 To be *easy* as pie.  
 To be *easy* as taking candy from a baby.

To be an *easy* mark.  
 To *eat* crow.  
 To *eat* humble pie.  
 To *eat* like a bird.  
 To *eat* like a pig [or hog].  
 To *eat* one's hat.  
 To *eat* one's heart out.  
 To *eat* one's words.  
 To *eat* out of one's hand.  
 To be at someone's *elbow*.  
 To arrive at the *eleventh* hour.  
 An *embarrassment* of riches.  
 To be at the *end* of one's rope [or tether].  
 To *end* [or go up] in smoke.  
 The *ends* of the earth.  
 To *entertain* an angel unawares.  
 To be on *everyone's* lips [or in everyone's mouth].  
*Everything* but the kitchen sink put in the soup.  
 To have an *eye* to the main chance.  
 To have or get an *eye-full*.  
 To have *eyes* as big as saucers.  
 One's *eyes* being bigger than one's stomach.  
 To have *eyes* like a cat.  
 To have *eyes* like a hawk [or eagle].  
 To have *eyes* like stars.  
 In the *eyes* of the law.  
 To have *eyes* that look like two holes in a blanket.

## F.

To have a *face* that only a mother could love.  
 To have a *face* that would stop a clock.  
 To *face* the music.  
 A *fair* weather friend.  
 To have things *fall* about one's ears.  
 Something of importance might *fall* between the stools.  
 To *fall* by the wayside.  
 To *fall* flat.  
 To *fall* flat on one's face.  
 To *fall* head over heels in love.  
 To *fall* on someone like a ton of bricks.  
 To *fall* to one's lot.  
 To *fall* to the ground.

To *fan* the flames of discord.  
 To be *fast* as greased lightning.  
 To be *fat* as a butter-ball.  
 The *fat* of the land.  
 The *fat* to be in the fire.  
 A *feast* of reason and a flow of soul.  
 To constitute a *feather* in one's cap.  
 To *feel* like a million dollars.  
 To *feel* like two cents.  
 To *feel* [or look] blue.  
 To be *feeling* one's oats.  
 To have *feet* of clay.  
 To get something at one *fell* swoop.  
 In and out like a *fiddler's* elbow.  
 To *fight* fire with fire.  
 To *fight* like a wildcat.  
 To *fight* like Kilkeny cats.  
 To *fight* shy of something.  
 To *fight* tooth and nail.  
 To *fill* an aching void.  
 To *fill* another man's shoes.  
 To *fill* the air with one's complaints.  
 To *fill* the bill.  
 To *find* a mare's nest.  
 To *find* a needle in a haystack.  
 To *find* it in one's heart to do a certain thing.  
 To *find* the cure [or remedy] worse than the disease.  
 To be *fine* as silk.  
 To be in *fine* feather.  
 To have a *finger* in the pie.  
 To have one's *fingers* in too many pies.  
 To have one's *fingers* on the pulse of things going on.  
 To be *firm* as a rock.  
 To seem improbable at *first* blush.  
 To *fish* for compliments.  
 To *fish* in troubled waters.  
 To *fish* or cut bait.  
 To be like a *fish* out of water.  
 To be *fit* as a fiddle.  
 To *fit* like a glove.  
 To *fit* like the paper on the wall.  
 To *fit* [or suit] to a T.  
 To be *fit* to be tied.  
 By *fits* and starts [or snatches].

A *flash* in the pan.  
 To be *flat* as a pancake.  
 To be *flat* as the palm of one's hand.  
 To be *flat* on one's back.  
 To *flatter* one's self.  
 To *flee* with the fox and run with the hounds.  
 One's own *flesh* and blood.  
 A person to have no *fies* on him.  
 To *flog* a dead horse.  
*Flotsam* and jetsam.  
 To *fly* about like a chicken with its head off.  
 To *fly* in the face of something.  
 To constitute the *fly* in the ointment.  
 To *fly* into a passion.  
 To *fly* off the handle.  
 To *fly* the coop.  
 To *follow* in the footsteps of someone.  
 To *follow* the herd.  
 To *follow* the path of least resistance.  
 To *follow* suit.  
 A *fool's* paradise.  
 To *foot* the bill.  
 To be *foot-loose* and fancy-free.  
 To *forge* links in a chain of evidence or reasoning.  
 To be *free* as a bird.  
 To be *fresh* as a daisy.  
 To be *fresh* as paint.  
 To have a *friend* at court.  
 To be *frightened* out of a year's growth.  
 To be *frightened* out of one's wits [or skin].  
 To be *frightened* to death.  
 To be *frisky* as a colt.  
 To be a big *frog* in a small puddle.  
 To be *full* as a tick.  
 To be *full* of beans.  
 To be as *full* of holes as a sieve.  
 To be *full* of prunes.  
 To have as much *fun* as [or more fun than] a barrel of monkeys.  
 To be *funny* as a crutch.

## G.

A *game* at which two can play.  
 To be *gathered* to one's fathers.  
 To be *generous* to a fault.

- To be *gentle* as a lamb.  
 To *get* a line on a person.  
 To *get* all steamed up about something.  
 To *get* along swimmingly.  
 To be able to *get* along with the devil.  
 To *get* down to brass tacks.  
 To *get* even with someone, even if one had to dance on his grave.  
 To *get* in another's hair.  
 To *get* in one's licks.  
 To *get* in the last cracks [or word].  
 To *get* into harness.  
 To *get* into [or find one's self in] hot water.  
 To *get* into the act.  
 To *get* into the short rows.  
 To *get* it where the chicken got the axe.  
 To *get* off on the wrong foot.  
 To *get* off the rails.  
 To *get* one's back up.  
 To *get* one's dander up.  
 To *get* one's goat.  
 To *get* one's tentacles upon something [or somebody].  
 To *get* out of hand.  
 To *get* something nailed down.  
 To *get* such and such for one's pains.  
 To *get* the axe.  
 To *get* the bit in one's teeth [and run wildly].  
 To *get* the hang of something.  
 To *get* the lion's share.  
 To *get* the mitten.  
 To *get* the sack.  
 To *get* the short end of the stick.  
 To *get* the upper hand.  
 To *get* the wrong sow by the ear.  
 To *get* there with both feet.  
 To *get* under another person's skin.  
 To *get* under the wire.  
 To *get* up on one's ear.  
 To *get* while the getting is good.  
 To *get* wind of something.  
 To have not the *ghost* of a chance.  
 To *gild* [or paint] the lily.  
 To *gird* up one's loins.  
 To *give* a lift to one's spirits.  
 To *give* a person short shrift.  
 To *give* an inkling of something.  
 The *give* and take of contention.  
 To *give* another a good [or bad] character.  
 To *give* another person a piece of one's mind.  
 To *give* cards [and spades].  
 To *give* free rein to one's fancies.  
 To *give* it to a person.  
 To *give* one a chill down one's back.  
 To *give* one fits.  
 To *give* one the creeps.  
 To *give* one's eye teeth for something.  
 To *give* one's self away.  
 To *give* [or lend] an ear.  
 To *give* someone a black eye.  
 To *give* someone a course of sprouts.  
 To *give* someone a lashing with one's tongue [or a tongue-lashing].  
 To *give* someone a wide berth.  
 To *give* someone [or to be] a pain in the neck.  
 To *give* someone [or to turn] the cold shoulder.  
 To *give* someone the gate.  
 To *give* someone the go-by.  
 To *give* someone the rough side of one's hand [or tongue].  
 To *give* someone the third degree.  
 To *give* something a lick and a promise.  
 To *give* the devil his due.  
 To *give* up the ghost.  
 To have something *gnawing* at one's vitals.  
 To *go* about one's business.  
 To *go* against one's stomach.  
 To *go* against the grain.  
 To *go* all around Robin Hood's barn.  
 To *go* along like a house afire.  
 To *go* at a snail's pace.  
 To have something *go* begging.  
 To *go* by the board.  
 To *go* farther and fare worse.  
 To *go* haywire.  
 To *go* hog wild.  
 To *go* in one ear and out the other.  
 To *go* it blind.  
 To *go* like the wind.  
 To *go* looking for trouble.  
 To *go* off half-cocked.  
 To *go* off on one's ear.

To *go* on a bender.  
 To *go* on a fool's errand.  
 To *go* [or be dragged] through the mill.  
 To *go* [or be gone] to pot.  
 To *go* [or fly] off at a tangent.  
 To *go* out like a light.  
 To *go* out of one's way to help, argue, etc.  
 To *go* the way of all flesh.  
 To *go* the whole hog.  
 To *go* to bed with the chickens.  
 To have something *go* to one's head.  
 To *go* to smash.  
 To *go* to the bad.  
 To *go* to the devil [or deuce].  
 To *go* to the dogs.  
 To *go* to the wall.  
 To *go* to the well once too often.  
 To *go* up in smoke.  
 To *go* up in the air.  
 To *go* up the spout.  
 To *go* way back and sit down.  
 To *go* white [or pale] around the gills.  
 To be *going* great guns.  
 To be *going* to hell in a hack.  
 To be *good* as gold.  
 To be or put on one's *good* behavior.  
 To be *good* for nothing.  
 To be in a person's *good* [or bad] graces.  
 To have a *good* [or great] mind to do something.  
 A *good* round sum.  
 The *goose* hanging high.  
 To have *gotten* out of the wrong side of the bed.  
 To *grasp* a person where the hair is short.  
 To *grasp* at straws.  
 To *grate* upon one's ears [or nerves].  
 To be *gray* as a badger.  
 To *grease* another person's palm.  
 To *grease* the wheels.  
 To be *greedy* as a pig [or hog].  
 To be all *Greek* to someone.  
 To be *green* as grass.  
 The *green-eyed* monster.  
 To *grin* and bear it.  
 To *grin* like a Cheshire cat.  
 To *grind* one's teeth at something.

To *grind* the faces of the poor.  
 To *grip* like a vise.  
 To be *grist* for one's mill.  
 To *grit* one's teeth.  
 To have the *ground* sliding out from under one.  
 To *grow* like a mushroom.  
 To *grow* like a weed.  
 To be on one's *guard*.  
 To *gum* up the works.

## H.

To escape by a *hair's* breadth.  
*Half* past kissing time, time to kiss again.  
 To be *half* seas over.  
 Some action to be *half* the battle.  
 To go at something *hammer* and tongs.  
 To be *hand* in glove with someone.  
 To *hand* one something on a silver platter [or waiter].  
 To *hand* someone his walking papers.  
 To *handle* with kid gloves.  
 To *hang* by a hair [or thread].  
 To *hang* by one's eyelashes.  
 To *hang* on another's lips [or words].  
 To *hang* out one's shingle.  
 To *hang* out [or run up] the white flag.  
 To *hang* up one's fiddle.  
 To be *happy* as a clam at high tide.  
 To be *happy* as a June-bug.  
 To be *hard* as a brick [or a rock].  
 To be *hard* as nails.  
 To be *hard* as steel.  
 A *hard* nut to crack.  
 To be *hard* on another's heels.  
 A *hard* [or long] row to hoe.  
 To have *hard* sledding.  
 To be *harder* than Pharaoh's heart.  
*Hardness* of heart.  
 To keep *harping* on the same string.  
 To *hate* someone worse than poison.  
 To *haul* someone over the coals.  
 To *have* a head like a tack.  
 To *have* a head on one's shoulders.  
 To *have* a heart of stone.  
 To *have* another person's number.  
 To *have* another think coming.



To *have* designs on someone.  
 To *have* had one's day.  
 To *have* kittens.  
 To *have* one's hands full.  
 To *have* one's hands tied.  
 To *have* one's head screwed on right.  
 To *have* one's head turned.  
 To *have* one's heart in his mouth.  
 To *have* one's heart in his shoes.  
 To *have* one's heart in the right place.  
 To *have* someone by the ears.  
 To *have* someone in one's vest-pocket.  
 To *have* something at one's fingers' ends [or tips].  
 To *have* something [or somebody] under one's wing.  
 To *have* the blues.  
 To *have* the goods on someone.  
 To *have* the worst of it.  
 To be *headed* for destruction [or trouble].  
 To *heal* the breach.  
 To *heap* coals of fire on someone's head.  
 To one's *heart's* content.  
 As if the *heavens* would fall.  
 To be *heavy* as lead.  
 To be on the *heels* of someone.  
 The *height* of one's ambition.  
 To be *helpless* as a new-born babe.  
 To be active as a *hen* on a hot griddle.  
 To be *here* today and gone tomorrow.  
 To *hew* to the line.  
 To *hide* behind a woman's skirts.  
 To *hide* one's talents under a bushel [or in a napkin].  
 To be *high* and dry.  
 To be *high* as a kite.  
 To be on one's *high* horse.  
 To have *high* words.  
 To *hit* below the belt.  
 To *hit* it off together.  
 To be unable to *hit* the broad side of a barn door.  
 To *hit* the ceiling.  
 To *hit* the hay.  
 To *hit* the high spots.  
 To *hit* the jack-pot.  
 To *hit* the nail on the head.

To *hitch* one's wagon to a star.  
 To be *hoist* on one's own petard.  
 Not to *hold* a candle in comparison.  
 To *hold* a mirror up to nature.  
 To *hold* no brief for someone [or some opinion].  
 To have *hold* of the wrong end of the stick.  
 To *hold* on like grim death.  
 To *hold* on to something for dear life.  
 To *hold* one's breath.  
 To *hold* one's horses.  
 To *hold* one's nose.  
 To *hold* one's tongue.  
 To *hold* the fort.  
 Not to *hold* water.  
 To *holler* before one is out of the woods.  
 To be *homely* as a hedge [or mud] fence.  
 To be *homely* as a witch.  
 To be *honest* as the day is long.  
 To do something on one's own *hook*.  
 To secure something by *hook* or by crook.  
 To *hop* about like a parched pea [or like a pea on a hot skillet].  
 To be *hopping* mad.  
 To be on the *horns* of the dilemma.  
 To be a *horse* of another color.  
 To be all *hot* and bothered about something.  
 To be *hot* as blazes [or blue blazes].  
 To be *hot* as the hinges of Hades.  
 To be *hot* as Tophet.  
 To talk as if one had a *hot* potato in his mouth.  
 To be *hot* under the collar.  
 To be in *hot* water.  
 A great *hue* and cry.  
 To *hug* one's self.  
 To be *hung* for a sheep as well as a lamb.  
 To be *hungry* as a bear.  
 To be *hungry* enough to eat a horse and chase the driver.

## I.

To be *idle* as a painted ship upon a painted ocean.  
 To find one's *imagination* playing pranks.  
 To be *in* at the kill.  
 To be *in* for it.

To be *in* over one's depth.  
 To be *in* the cards.  
 To be *industrious* as a beaver.  
 To be *innocent* as babes in the woods.  
 To have the *inside* track.  
 To have an *itching* foot.

## J.

To be *Job's* comforter.  
 To *jog* another person's elbow.  
 To *jog* another's memory.  
 To *join* the procession.  
 To *jump* at the chance.  
 To *jump* down another's throat.  
 To *jump* from the frying pan into the fire.  
 To *jump* [or get pushed] off the deep end.  
 To *jump* right out of one's skin.  
 To *jump* the gun.  
 To be *just* hitting one's stride.

## K.

To *keep* a person in the dark.  
 To *keep* a sharp lookout.  
 To *keep* a stiff upper lip.  
 To *keep* abreast of things.  
 To *keep* an eye on something.  
 To *keep* body and soul together.  
 To *keep* company with someone.  
 To *keep* one's distance.  
 To *keep* one's ear to the ground.  
 To *keep* one's eyes glued to something.  
 To *keep* one's eyes peeled [or skinned].  
 To *keep* one's hair on.  
 To *keep* one's hand in.  
 To *keep* one's head above water.  
 To *keep* one's nose to the grindstone.  
 To *keep* one's own counsel.  
 To *keep* one's powder dry.  
 To *keep* one's shirt on.  
 To *keep* one's weather eye open.  
 To *keep* one's wits about one.  
 To *keep* [or have] one's fingers crossed.  
 To *keep* [or hold] a person at arm's length.  
 To *keep* something under one's hat.  
 To *keep* the latch-string out.  
 To *keep* the pot boiling.  
 To *keep* the wolf from the door.

To *keep* to the straight and narrow [path].  
 To *kick* against the pricks.  
 To *kick*, i.e., object like a mule.  
 To *kick* [or complain] like a steer.  
 To *kick* over the traces.  
 To *kick* the bucket.  
 To *kick* up a row [or a fuss].  
 To *kick* up one's heels.  
 To *kid* the pants off someone.  
 To *kill* a person with kindness.  
 To *kill* the fatted calf.  
 To *kill* the goose that laid the golden eggs.  
 To *kill* two birds with one stone.  
 To *kiss* and make up.  
 To *kiss* the money good-bye.  
 To have *kissed* the Blarney stone.  
 The whole *kit* and kaboodle.  
*Knee-high* to a grasshopper [or mosquito].  
 To *knock* on the head.  
 To *knock* one for a loop.  
 To *knock* [or beat] the tar out of someone.  
 To *knock* someone galley-west.  
 To *knock* the spots off someone.  
 To *knock* the stuffings out of one.  
 To be *knocked* into a cocked hat.  
 So surprised as to be *knocked* over with a feather.  
 Not to *know* a person from a hole in the ground.  
 To *know* a thing or two.  
 Not to *know* another person from Adam.  
 Not to *know* enough to come in out of the rain.  
 Not to *know* if one is afoot or on horseback.  
 Not to *know* one's own mind.  
 To *know* something inside and out.  
 To *know* something [or somebody] like a book.  
 To *know* the ropes.  
 So stupid as not to *know* which end is up.  
 To *know* which side one's bread is buttered on.

## L.

To *ladle* out compliments.  
 To have something *laid* at one's door.  
 To be *laid* on the shelf.  
 To be led like a *lamb* to the slaughter.

To *land* always on one's feet.  
 To be in the *land* of the living.  
 To do a *land office* business.  
 To live in the *lap* of luxury.  
 Some fate to lie in the *lap* of the gods.  
 Something to occur at the *last* gasp.  
 To be on one's *last* legs.  
 To *laugh* and grow fat.  
 To *laugh* like a horse [or hyena].  
 To *laugh* like a jackass.  
 To *laugh* out of the other side of one's mouth.  
 To *laugh* up one's sleeve.  
 Something to constitute no *laughing* matter.  
 To *lay* a charge at somebody's door.  
 To *lay* down the law.  
 To *lay* it on the line.  
 To *lay* it on thick.  
 To *lay* one's cards on the table.  
 To *lay* one's self out for another person.  
 To *lay* the axe to the root of something.  
 To *lay* the foundation for something.  
 To *lay* up [or save] for a rainy day.  
 To *lead* a cat-and-dog life.  
 To *lead* a dog's life.  
 To have *lead* in one's pants [or shoes].  
 Something to constitute a *lead* pipe cinch.  
 To *lead* someone a pretty chase [or dance].  
 To *lead* someone by the nose.  
 To *lead* someone to the altar.  
 To be in *leading* strings.  
 To *leak* like a sieve.  
 To make a *leap* in the dark.  
 To *leave* no stone unturned.  
 To *leave* [or let] well-enough alone.  
 To *leave* someone in the lurch.  
 To *leave* someone out in the cold.  
 To be *left* holding the bag.  
 To be *left* to shift for one's self.  
 To be *left* to the tender mercies of someone [or something].  
 To make a *left-handed* compliment.  
 Not to have a *leg* to stand on.  
 To *lend* a [helping] hand.  
 To *lend* an ear.  
 The *length* and breadth of the land.  
 In *less* than no time.

To *let* a person have his head.  
 To *let* by-gones be by-gones.  
 To *let* down the bars.  
 To *let* grass grow under one's feet.  
 Not to *let* one's right hand know what his left hand is doing.  
 To *let* sleeping dogs lie.  
 To *let* the cat out of the bag.  
 To *let* the chips fall where they may.  
 To *let* the dead bury the dead.  
 To *let* the devil take the hindermost.  
 To *let* the world roll by.  
 To *let* things slide.  
 To *lick* another's boots.  
 To *lick* something [or someone] into shape.  
 To *lie* [or be] at the root of something.  
 To *lie* down and let another walk over one.  
 To *lie* in one's teeth.  
 To *lie* like a trooper.  
 To do something as if one's *life* depended on it.  
 Some object to be *light* as a feather.  
*Light-fingered* gentry.  
 To be *like* one possessed.  
 Not to *like* the cut of a man's jib.  
 To be *limp* as a rag.  
 To secure the *lion's* share.  
 To *list* to starboard when walking "under the influence."  
 To *live* by one's wits.  
 To *live* from hand to mouth.  
 To *live* in [the state of] single blessedness.  
 To *live* like a king.  
 To *live* on easy street.  
 To *live* on the fat of the land.  
 To *live* the life of Riley.  
 To act as *lively* as a cricket.  
 To be *loaded* for bear.  
*Lock*, stock, and barrel.  
 To *lock* [close or shut] the door after the horse is stolen.  
 To *lock* horns with another in argument.  
 To be at *loggerheads*.  
 To *loll* in the lap of luxury.  
 The *long* and short of some argument.  
 Something to be *long* as one's arm.  
 Not by a *long* chalk [or shot].

- To have a *long* head.  
 Not to *look* a gift horse in the mouth.  
 To *look* a sight.  
 To *look* as if one had a ram-rod down his back.  
 To *look* as if one had been drawn through a knot-hole.  
 To *look* as if one had lost his last friend.  
 To *look* as if one had slept in one's clothes.  
 To *look* as if one had swallowed a poker.  
 To *look* as if one had the cares of the world on his shoulders.  
 To *look* as much alike as two peas in a pod.  
 To *look* daggers at someone.  
 To *look* down one's nose.  
 To *look* like a dying calf.  
 To *look* like a scarecrow.  
 To *look* like something the cat dragged in [or brought in].  
 To *look* like the last rose of summer.  
 To *look* like the missing link.  
 To *look* like the wrath of God.  
 To *look* like the wreck of the *Hesperus*.  
 To *look* nine [or forty] ways for Sunday.  
 To *look* on the sunny [or dark] side of things.  
 To *look* through rose-colored glasses.  
 To be at *loose* ends.  
 To *loosen* one's purse-strings.  
 To *lose* no sleep over something.  
 To *lose* no time in doing something.  
 To *lose* one's bearings.  
 To *lose* one's grip.  
 To *lose* one's shirt.  
 To *lose* one's temper.  
 To *lose* one's wits over something.  
 To be at a *loss* about something.  
 Nature to have *lost* the pattern.  
 To be *loud* enough to wake the dead.  
 To be *lovely* as a June morning.  
 To feel as *low* as a whale's [or snake's] belly.  
 To be at *low* ebb.  
 To have a *lump* in one's throat.
- M.
- To be *mad* as a hatter.  
 To be *mad* as a hornet.
- To be *mad* as a March hare.  
 To be *mad* as a wet hen.  
 To be *mad* enough to bite [or chew] someone's head [or ear] off.  
 To be so *mad* that one cannot see straight.  
 To be so *mad* that one could spit.  
 To be *made* a laughing-stock of.  
 To be *made* of money.  
 To be on the *make*.  
 To *make* a bee line.  
 To *make* a break for somewhere.  
 To *make* a cat's paw of someone.  
 To *make* a clean breast of some error or evil-doing.  
 To *make* a clean sweep.  
 Humorous enough to *make* a dog laugh.  
 To *make* a fool out of someone.  
 To *make* a go of something.  
 To *make* a great to-do [or stir] about something.  
 To *make* a killing.  
 To *make* a long story short.  
 To *make* a man of someone.  
 To *make* a mess of a job or opportunity.  
 To *make* a monkey out of another.  
 To *make* a mountain out of a mole hill.  
 To *make* a parade of one's virtues [or feelings].  
 To be unable to *make* a silk purse out of a sow's ear.  
 To *make* a spectacle of one's self.  
 To *make* a virtue out of necessity.  
 To *make* both ends meet.  
 To *make* bricks without straw.  
 To *make* capital out of some event.  
 To *make* collars for Hough's Neck.  
 To *make* hash of someone [or his ideas].  
 To *make* haste slowly.  
 To *make* hay while the sun shines.  
 To *make* it one's business to do so-and-so.  
 To *make* little [or nothing] of something.  
 To *make* mince-meat of someone [or his ideas].  
 To *make* neither heads nor tails of something.  
 To *make* no bones about something.  
 To *make* one sick to his stomach.

To *make* one sit up and take notice.  
 To *make* one's blood boil.  
 To *make* one's blood run cold.  
 Enough to *make* one's flesh creep.  
 A tale grisly enough to *make* one's hair curl.  
 To *make* one's hair stand on end.  
 To *make* one's mark.  
 To *make* one's mouth water.  
 To *make* one's peace with another.  
 To *make* one's pile.  
 To *make* one's self agreeable to another.  
 To *make* one's self at home.  
 To *make* one's self scarce.  
 To *make* short work of something.  
 To *make* the air blue with profanity.  
 To *make* the best of things.  
 To *make* the best out of a poor bargain.  
 To *make* the fur fly.  
 To *make* the grade.  
 To *make* the mare go.  
 To *make* things hum.  
 To *make* tracks.  
 To *make* two bites to a cherry.  
 The weather to *make* up its mind.  
*Manna* from heaven.  
 To have the *map* of Ireland on one's face.  
 To *marry* in haste and repent at leisure.  
 To be *mean* as all get-out.  
 To be *mean* as pusley.  
 To *mean* business.  
 One to be so *mean* that he would take pennies from a dead man's eyes.  
 To be *meeek* as a lamb.  
 To *meet* another person half-way.  
 To *meet* one's Waterloo.  
 To be on the *mend*.  
 To *mend* one's political fences.  
 The *milk* of human kindness.  
 To *mind* one's p's and q's.  
 To see something in one's *mind's* eye.  
 To *miss* the boat.  
 To be unable to *mix* oil and water.  
*Money* burning a hole in one's pocket.  
 As tedious as a *month* of Sundays.  
 Assuming the *moon* to be made of green cheese.  
 To be *more* than a match for another.

To be *more* than flesh and blood can stand [or bear].  
 To find something *more* than one bargained for.  
 To have *more* than one string to one's bow.  
 To suspect the existence of *more* than strikes the eye.  
*Motionless* [or still] as a statue.  
 To *move* heaven and earth in an effort to accomplish something.  
 To *move* in the best circles.  
 To be too *much* of a good thing.  
 To be too *much* of a muchness.  
 To *muddy* the waters.  
 To be *num* as an oyster.  
 To *murder* the King's English.

## N.

To *nail* a lie.  
 To *nail* one's colors to the masthead.  
 To be *naked* as the day one was born.  
 To be *neat* as a pin.  
 To finish a contest *neck* and neck.  
 To have a *neck* like a giraffe.  
 To be located in a certain *neck* of the woods.  
 An object to be *neither* fish, flesh, nor fowl, nor good red herring.  
 To be *neither* hay nor grass.  
 To be *nervous* as a witch.  
 A person would *never* set the Thames [or tems] on fire.  
*Never* too late to mend.  
 To be *next* door to death.  
 To have something *next* to one's heart.  
 An unsuspected item to constitute the *nigger* in the woodpile.  
 To *nip* something in the bud.  
 To have *nobody* home in the upper story [or one's head].  
 A place to be *noisy* as a boiler shop.  
 A place so *noisy* that one cannot hear one's self think.  
 A condition to be *none* of my funeral.  
 To have one's *nose* in other people's business.  
 To be *not* in it.

A success being *nothing* to write home about.

As if *nothing* was too good for one.

To *nourish* a viper in one's bosom.

*Numberless* as the fish in the sea.

*Numberless* as the sands of the desert.

To present an involved matter in a *nut-shell*.

## O.

To be *off* one's nut.

To be *old* as Adam [or Methuselah].

To be *old* as the hills.

To find an *old* head on young shoulders.

Something to happen *once* in a blue moon.

*Once* in a dog's age [or coon's age].

To be *one* cut above someone else.

To proceed *one* foot forward and two feet backward.

To have *one* foot in the grave.

Not the *only* pebble on the beach.

To have everything *open* and above-board.

An *open-and-shut* day.

Not to be able to *open* one's mouth without putting one's foot into it.

To *open* Pandora's box.

To *open* the eyes of another.

To have *other* fish to fry.

To consider the *other* side of the shield [or coin].

To be *out* at the elbows [or heels].

Affairs to be *out* of joint.

To be *out* of kilter [or whack].

To be *out* of one's class.

To be *out* of patience.

To be *out* of pocket.

To be *out* of sorts.

To be *out* of the woods.

To make up a story *out* of whole cloth.

To be, or find one's self *out* on a limb.

To have someone *over* a barrel.

To *overstay* one's welcome.

To *own* to the soft impeachment.

## P.

To be *packed* in together like sardines in a can.

To *paddle* one's own canoe.

To *paint* a rosy picture.

To *paint* the town red.

To be *pale* as a ghost.

To *pan* out well.

To *pare* expenses down to the bone.

To *pass* from mouth to mouth.

To *pass* muster.

To *pass* [or toss] in one's chips.

To *pass* the buck.

To *pass* the hat for financial contributions.

To *pat* someone on the back [or give someone a pat on the back].

To *pave* the way for some event.

To *pay* for dead party.

To *pay* one's respects to another person.

To *pay* someone in his own coin.

To *pay* the piper.

To *pay* through the nose.

To *play* ducks and drakes with someone.

To *play* fast and loose.

To *play* for high stakes.

To *play* hookey.

To *play* into another person's hands.

To *play* one person off against another.

To *play* one's cards well.

To *play* [or act] the fool.

To *play* second fiddle.

To *play* the mischief with one.

To *play* to the galleries.

To *play* with fire.

To *play* with loaded dice.

To *play* with the buzz-saw.

To be as *pleased* as a cat with two tails.

To be as *pleased* as Punch.

To *pluck* up by the roots.

To *pocket* an insult.

To *point* the finger of scorn.

To *poison* someone's mind against a third person.

To *poke* fun at someone.

To be *poles* apart.

To *polish* the apple.

To be *poor* as a church mouse.

To be *poor* as Job's turkey.

To *pop* the question.

To seek any *port* in a storm.

To *possess* one's soul in patience.

- To believe to detect the *pot* calling the kettle black.
- To *pour* cold water on a scheme or idea.
- To *pour* contempt on something [or somebody].
- To *pour* it on thick.
- To *pour* oil on troubled waters.
- To *pour* out the vials of one's wrath.
- To *practice* what one preaches.
- To *praise* some one [or something] to the skies.
- To believe something *precious* as pearls.
- To *present* some consideration in a new light.
- To be *pressed* for time.
- To *presume* on another's good nature.
- To find someone *pretty* as a picture.
- Some situation to constitute a *pretty* kettle of fish.
- To *prick* up one's ears.
- To *prolong* the agony.
- To *promise* the moon.
- Proud* as a boy with a new top.
- Proud* as a peacock.
- Proud* as Lucifer.
- To *puff* like a locomotive [or steam engine].
- To *pull* a boner.
- To *pull* a fast one.
- To *pull* another person's leg.
- To *pull* another's chestnuts out of the fire.
- To *pull* one's own weight.
- To *pull* one's self together.
- To *pull* [or draw] a long face.
- To *pull* out all the stops.
- To *pull* rabbits out of a hat.
- To *pull* the rug out from under someone.
- To *pull* the wires [or strings].
- To *pull* the wool over someone's eyes.
- To *pull* up one's stakes.
- To *pull* well in double harness.
- To *pull* well in tandem.
- An end gained with difficulty being like *pulling* teeth.
- To believe something to be as *pure* as the driven snow.
- To *pursue* something to the bitter end.
- To *push* one's self forward.
- To *push* someone over the edge.
- To be *pushing* up the daisies.
- To *put* a bug [or flea] in another's ear.
- To *put* a damper on some action or projected action.
- To *put* a good face on something.
- To *put* a man on his mettle.
- To *put* a person in his place.
- To *put* a spoke in another's wheel.
- To *put* all of one's eggs in one basket.
- To *put* another in the shade.
- To *put* another's nose out of joint.
- To *put* in the licks.
- To *put* on airs.
- To *put* on ice.
- To *put* on style.
- To *put* on the brakes.
- To *put* on the dog.
- To be able hardly to *put* one foot in front of the other.
- To *put* one's best foot forward.
- To *put* one's foot down.
- To *put* one's foot in his mouth.
- To *put* one's foot in it.
- To *put* one's hand into his pocket.
- To *put* one's hand to the plough.
- To *put* one's house in order.
- To *peck* away at something.
- To *peddle* one's own papers.
- To be *penny-wise* and pound-foolish.
- To submit to *petticoat* government.
- To *pick* to pieces.
- To be the *picture* of health.
- To *piece* together the scraps of evidence.
- To be like a *pig* in clover.
- To *pile* Ossa on Pelion.
- To drive or pursue someone from *pillar* to post.
- To be *pilloried* for one's opinions.
- To *pinch* one's self to be sure that he isn't dreaming.
- To *pinch* pennies.
- The *pink* of perfection.
- To be on *pins* and needles.
- To have a *place* for everything, and everything in its place.
- To have no *place* to hang one's hat.

To have no *place* to lay one's head.  
 Something being as *plain* as A B C.  
 To be *plain* as a pike-staff.  
 To be *plain* as day.  
 To be *plain* as the nose on one's face.  
 To *plant* the seeds of discord.  
 To *play* at ducks and drakes.  
 To *play* both ends against the middle.  
 To *put* one's head in a hornet's nest.  
 To *put* one's head into a noose.  
 To *put* one's pride in his pocket.  
 To *put* one's self in another's shoes.  
 To *put* on one's thinking cap.  
 To *put* one's shoulder to the wheel.  
 To *put* [or lay] heads together.  
 To *put* [or set] one's wits to work.  
 To *put* [or set] to rights.  
 To *put* out of humor.  
 To *put* out of the way.  
 To *put* pen to paper.  
 To *put* the cart before the horse.  
 To *put* the clamps on a person's enthusiasm.  
 To *put* the finishing touches on something.  
 To *put* the kibosh on some scheme.  
 To *put* the screws on someone.  
 To *put* the skids under someone.  
 To *put* two and two together.  
 To be *putty* in someone's hands.

## Q.

To act as if she thought herself the *Queen*  
 of the May.  
 Prepared to the *queen's* taste.  
 To be *quick* as a flash.  
 To be *quick* as a wink.  
 To be *quiet* as a lamb.  
 To be *quiet* as a millpond.  
 To be *quiet* as a mouse.  
 All *quiet* on the Potomac.  
 So *quiet* that one could hear a pin drop.  
 To *quote* chapter and verse.  
 To *quote* Scripture to one's purpose.

## R.

To *rack* one's brains.  
*Rag*, tag, and bob-tassel.  
 To *rain* cats and dogs.

To *rain* in sheets.  
 To *rain* pitchforks.  
 To *raise* a person's hackles.  
 To *raise* Cain [or Ned, the old Harry, the old Nick].  
 To *raise* havoc with one's plans [or beliefs].  
 To *raise* the devil [or deuce].  
 To *rake* someone over the coals.  
 To *rap* a person's knuckles.  
 Something being *rarer* than a three-legged calf.  
 To *rattle* the dry bones of theology or theory.  
 To *reach* the breaking point.  
 To *reach* the top of the ladder.  
 To *read* a lecture [or sermon] to someone.  
 To *read* between the lines.  
 To *read* the Riot Act to someone.  
 To be *ready* to do something at the drop of a hat.  
 To be *ready* to take the law into one's own hands.  
 To *receive* someone with open arms.  
 To *reckon* without one's host.  
 To be *red* as a beet.  
 To be *red* as a rose.  
 Something acting like a *red* flag to a bull.  
 A *red-letter* day.  
 To be *reduced* to a skeleton [or shadow].  
 To *regard* things with a bilious [or jaundiced] eye.  
 To be *regular* as clock-work.  
 To *rest* on one's oars [or laurels].  
 To *return* the compliment.  
 To *return* to one's first love.  
 To be *rich* as Croesus.  
 To *ride* a willing horse to death.  
 To *ride* one's hobby or hobbies in ideas.  
 To *ride* roughshod over a person's feelings.  
 To *ride* Shank's mare.  
 To be *riding* for a fall.  
 Something constituting the *rift* in the lute.  
 To be *right* as rain.  
 To be in the *right* church but in the wrong pew.  
 Something being *right* down one's alley.  
 To be in one's *right* mind.



Something occurring *right* off the bat [or reel].  
 To be on the *right* [or wrong] tack.  
 To *ring* the changes on a given theme.  
 To *rise* from rags to riches.  
 To *rise* to the occasion.  
 To be *robbing* Peter to pay Paul.  
 To be *robbing* the cradle.  
 To *rock* the boat.  
 To be on the *rocks*.  
 To *roll* out [or get out] the red carpet.  
 To *roll* up one's sleeves.  
 To be *rolling* in wealth.  
 Not to have *room* enough to swing a cat.  
 To pull out *root* and branch.  
 Something constituting a *rope* of sand.  
 To be *round* as a barrel.  
 A *royal* road.  
 To *rub* elbows with others.  
 To *rub* someone the wrong way.  
 To operate by *rule* of thumb.  
 To *rule* the roost.  
 To *run* a good thing into the ground.  
 To *run* a person ragged.  
 To *run* a rumor to ground.  
 To *run* as if the Devil were after one.  
 To have something *run* in a person's blood.  
 To *run* like a deer [or a greyhound].  
 To *run* like a scared rabbit.  
 To *run* one's head into a stone wall.  
 To *run* out of steam.  
 To *run* the gauntlet.

## S.

To *sail* close to the wind.  
 To *sail* [or be sailing] between Scylla and Charybdis.  
 To *sail* [or be sailing] under false colors.  
 To *salt* away one's savings.  
 The *salt* of the earth.  
 To be in the *same* boat with another.  
 To *sap* the foundations of something.  
 To be *savage* as a meat axe.  
 To *save* at the spiggot and lose at the bung-hole.  
 To *save* one's bacon.

To *save* up for a rainy day.  
 Not to *say* "boo."  
 To *say* nothing and saw wood.  
 Certain items being *scarce* as hen's teeth.  
 To *scare* the [living] daylights out of a person.  
 To be *scared* out of a year's growth.  
 To be *scared* stiff.  
 To find things *scattered* to the four winds.  
 To *scold* like a magpie.  
 To *scrape* the bottom of the barrel.  
 To *scrape* up an acquaintance with someone.  
 To have a *screw* loose.  
 To *screw* up one's courage to the sticking point.  
 To *seal* one's lips.  
 To *see* [clearly] with half an eye.  
 To *see* daylight ahead.  
 To *see* eye to eye.  
 To *see* how the land lies.  
 To *see* no farther than the end of one's nose.  
 To *see* one's way clear.  
 To *see* [or find] neither hide nor hair of someone.  
 To *see* the handwriting on the wall.  
 Something to *see* the light of day.  
 To wait to *see* which way the cat will jump.  
 Like a man who had *seen* better days.  
 To *seize* [or take] time by the forelock.  
 To *sell* like hot cakes.  
 To *sell* [or buy] a house over another man's head.  
 To *sell* something for a song.  
 To *send* a boy to do a man's errand.  
 To *send* a chill down one's back.  
 To *send* another person about his business.  
 To *send* someone on a fool's errand.  
 To *send* someone packing.  
 To *send* up a trial balloon.  
 To have no more *sense* than a billy goat.  
 To *separate* [or winnow] the wheat from the chaff.  
 To *separate* the sheep from the goats.  
 To *set* a great store by something.  
 To *set* a thief to catch a thief.  
 A woman to *set* her cap.

- To *set* one's face against something [or somebody].  
 To *set* one's heart on something.  
 To *set* one's teeth on edge.  
 To *set* someone by the ears.  
 To *settle* an old score [or account].  
 To *settle* another's hash.  
 To have *seven* league boots.  
 To be in *seventh* Heaven.  
 To *shake* a leg.  
 To *shake* a stick at somebody.  
 To *shake* in one's boots [or shoes].  
 To *shake* like a jelly.  
 To *shake* off the yoke.  
 To *shake* one's sides [with laughter].  
 To *shake* the dust of a place off one's feet.  
 To be *sharp* as a knife.  
 To be *sharp* [or keen] as a razor.  
 To *sharpen* one's wits.  
 To be *sharper* than a serpent's tooth.  
 To *shed* crocodile tears.  
 To *shed* [or shrug off] troubles [or responsibilities] like water off a duck's back.  
 When one's *ship* comes in.  
 Like *ships* that pass in the night.  
 To *shiver* [or shake] like an aspen tree.  
 Where the *shoe* pinches.  
 The *shoemaker* sticking to his last.  
 To *shoot* the works.  
 To be on *short* commons.  
 A *shot* in the dark.  
 To come out of a place as if he had been *shot* out of a gun.  
 A *shot-gun* marriage.  
 To *shout* something from the house tops.  
 To *show* off one's paces.  
 To *show* one's hand.  
 To *show* the white feather.  
 To *shut* up like a clam.  
 To *shut* up shop.  
 To *shuffle* off this mortal coil.  
 To be *sick* as a dog.  
 To be a *sick* pigeon.  
 A *sight* for sore eyes.  
 To *sign* on the dotted line.  
 To *sign* one's John Hancock.  
 To be *silent* as the grave.
- To be *silent* as the Sphinx.  
 All the time *since* Hector was a pup.  
 To *sing* a different tune.  
 To *sing* like a meadow-lark.  
 To be so embarrassed that one could *sink* into the ground [or through the floor].  
 To *sink* one's teeth into a problem.  
 To *sink* or swim.  
 Persons to *sink* their differences.  
 To *sit* in judgment.  
 To *sit* on the anxious [or uneasy] seat.  
 To *sit* on the fence.  
 Six of one and half a dozen of the other.  
 To be all at *sixes* and sevens.  
 To *skate* on thin ice.  
 To have a *skeleton* at the feast.  
 To have a *skeleton* in one's closet.  
 To *skim* the cream off something.  
 To *skim* the surface of something.  
 To prevail or escape by the *skin* of one's teeth.  
 A certain event being no *skin* off one's nose.  
 To *skin* the pants off a person.  
 To be *skinny* [or thin] as a bean pole.  
 To *sleep* like a log.  
 To *sleep* like a top.  
 To *sleep* the sleep of the innocent and pure in heart.  
 To have not *slept* a wink.  
 Some event proceeding *slick* as a whistle.  
 To be *slimy* as a snail.  
 To *slip* through one's fingers.  
*Slippery* as an eel.  
 A "*slough* of despond."  
 To be *slow* as a coach.  
 To be *slow* as a tortoise.  
 To be as *slow* as [cold] molasses [running uphill] in January.  
 To be *sly* as a fox.  
 To be *smart* as a steel trap.  
 To be *smart* as a whip.  
 To *smell* a rat.  
 To *smell* fishy.  
 To *smell* like a nanny goat.  
 To *smell* to high Heaven.  
 To enjoy the *smiles* of fortune.  
 To *smite* a group hip and thigh.

- To *smoke* like a chimney.  
 To *smoke* the pipe of peace.  
 To be *smooth* as a smelt.  
 To be *smooth* as silk.  
 A *snake* in the grass.  
 To *snap* one's fingers at something.  
 Not to be *sneezed* at.  
 To *sniff* one's nose at something.  
 To *snoop* about like a cat in a strange garret.  
 To have no more chance than a *snowball* in Hell.  
 To be *snowed* under.  
 To be *snug* as a bug in a rug.  
 To be *sober* [or solemn] as a judge.  
 To be *soft* [or smooth] as a kitten's ear.  
 To be *soft* [or smooth] as velvet.  
 To be *soft* as putty.  
 To be *sold* down the river.  
 To be *solid* as the Rock of Gibraltar.  
 To be in *solid* with someone.  
 To be *some* pumpkins.  
 To think *something* rotten [in the state of Denmark].  
 To be *sore* as a boil.  
 To be *sore* as a pup.  
 To be *sound* as a nut.  
 To be in the *soup*.  
 To be *sour* as a crabapple.  
 To have to eat *sour* grapes.  
 To *sow* one's wild oats.  
 To *sow* the wind and reap the whirlwind.  
 To *spar* for time.  
 To *spare* the rod and spoil the child.  
 To *speak* a good word for another.  
 To *speak* off the cuff.  
 To *speak* out of turn.  
 To *speak* volumes.  
 To *spend* money like a drunken sailor.  
 To *spend* [or lose] money hand over fist.  
 To *spike* the guns of an opponent.  
 To *spill* one's troubles [or grievances].  
 To *spill* the beans.  
 To *spin* a yarn [or story].  
 To *spin* like a top.  
 To be *spineless* as a jelly-fish.  
 To intend to do something in *spite* of Hell or high water.  
 To *split* hairs.  
 To *split* one's sides laughing.  
 To *split* the difference.  
 To be *spoiling* for a fight.  
 To *spread* like wild fire.  
 To *spread* one's self.  
 To *spread* [or lay] on compliments with a trowel.  
 To *spread* the gospel.  
 To *spring* up like mushrooms.  
 To act on the *spur* of the moment.  
 To *square* one's account.  
 Trying to fit a *square* peg into a round hole.  
 To *squawk* like a guinea hen.  
 To *squeal* like a stuck pig.  
 To *squeeze* the juice out of a situation.  
 To suffer a *stab* in the back.  
 To hazard a *stab* in the dark.  
 Bread being the *staff* of life.  
 To *stagger* [or shake] belief [or the imagination].  
 The old *stamping* ground.  
 Not to *stand* a chance.  
 To *stand* in good stead.  
 To *stand* in one's own light.  
 To *stand* like an ass between two bales of hay.  
 Not to *stand* on ceremony.  
 To *stand* on its own bottom.  
 To *stand* on one foot and then on the other.  
 To *stand* on one's dignity.  
 To *stand* on one's own legs.  
 To *stand* one's ground.  
 To *stand* the gaff.  
 To *stand* the racket.  
 To *stand* up and be counted.  
 To *stand* without hitching.  
 To *start* from scratch.  
 To *starve* in the midst of plenty.  
 To *steal* a march on someone.  
 To *stem* the tide [or torrent].  
 A *step* in the right direction.  
 To *step* into [or to be waiting for] dead men's shoes.  
 To look as if one had just *stepped* out of a bandbox.  
 To *stew* in one's own juice.

- To *stick* as tight as a limpet.  
 To *stick* closer than a brother.  
 To *stick* in one's oar.  
 To *stick* like a plaster.  
 To *stick* out like a sore thumb.  
 To *stick* to one's guns.  
 To *stick* up for one's principles [or beliefs].  
 Something *sticking* in one's craw [or throat].  
*Stiff* as a board.  
*Stiff* as a poker.  
*Stiff* as a ram-rod.  
 To *sting* to the quick.  
 To *stir* up trouble.  
 A place being within a *stone's* throw.  
 To *stop* one's ears from hearing unwelcome news or opinions.  
 To be *straight* as a die.  
 To be *straight* as a loon's leg.  
 To be *straight* as a string.  
 To be *straight* as an arrow.  
*Straight* from the horse's mouth.  
 To *strain* at a gnat and swallow a camel.  
 To *strain* at the bit [or leash].  
 The *straw* that broke the camel's back.  
 To *stray* from the beaten path.  
 By *stretch* of one's imagination.  
 To *stretch* [or strain] a point.  
 To *stretch* the truth.  
 To *strike* a balance.  
 To *strike* a bargain.  
 To *strike* a gold mine.  
 To *strike* a sour note.  
 To *strike* it rich.  
 To *strike* one's tent.  
 To *strike* [or be stricken] dumb.  
 To *strike* up an acquaintance.  
 To *strike* while the iron is hot.  
 To *strip* a person of his dignity.  
 To *stroke* someone the wrong way.  
 To be *strong* as a bull.  
 To be *strong* as a horse [or an ox].  
 To be *strong* as a lion.  
 Coffee so *strong* that it can walk off by itself.  
 To *strut* about like a turkey cock [or peacock].  
 To *stub* one's toe.  
 To be *stubborn* as a mule.  
 To be *stubborn* as Balaam's ass.  
 To be *stuck* in one's ways.  
 To *sugar* the pill.  
 A *Sunday* go-to-meeting suit of clothes.  
*Sure* as fate.  
*Sure* as God made little fishes [or little green apples].  
*Sure* as I'm standing here.  
*Sure* as night follows day.  
*Sure* as one was born.  
*Sure* as one's alive.  
*Sure* as shooting.  
*Sure* as taxes [or as death and taxes].  
*Sure* as two and two make four.  
 To *swallow* something hook, line, and sinker.  
 To *swarm* like locusts.  
 To *swear* like a trooper.  
 To *sweat* blood over something.  
 By the *sweat* of one's brow.  
 To *sweep* a girl right off her feet.  
 To *sweep* the dirt under the beds.  
 To be *sweet* as new-mown hay.  
 To be *sweet* as sugar.  
 To be *sweet* as switchel.  
 To have a *sweet* tooth.  
 To *swell* up like a pouter pigeon.  
 To *swim* like a fish.  
 To have the *sword* of Damocles hanging over one.

## T.

- To *take* a back seat.  
 To *take* a cat nap.  
 A mother to *take* a child over her checkered apron.  
 To *take* a dim view.  
 To *take* a flyer.  
 To *take* a hitch in one's pants.  
 To *take* a leaf out of someone else's book.  
 To *take* a load off one's mind.  
 To *take* a man at his own valuation.  
 To *take* a man at his word.  
 To *take* a new lease on life.  
 To *take* a new tack.  
 To *take* a person's head off.

- To *take* another's word for something.  
 To *take* down one's hair.  
 To *take* for granted.  
 To *take* forty winks [or steal the same].  
 To *take* French leave.  
 A father to *take* his son out behind the woodshed.  
 To *take* in good part.  
 To *take* it into one's head.  
 To *take* one's breath away.  
 To *take* [or have to take] some of one's own medicine.  
 To *take* [or sign] the pledge.  
 To *take* pot-luck.  
 To *take* pot shots at somebody or some proposal.  
 To *take* someone down a peg.  
 To *take* something amiss.  
 To *take* something in one's stride.  
 To *take* something lying down.  
 To *take* something on one's shoulders.  
 To *take* something out of someone else's hide.  
 To *take* stock of the situation.  
 To *take* the bitter with the sweet.  
 To *take* the bread out of someone's mouth.  
 To *take* the bull by the horns.  
 To *take* the cake.  
 To *take* the edge off something.  
 To *take* the plunge.  
 To *take* the reins into one's own hands.  
 To *take* the rough with the smooth.  
 To *take* the starch out of one.  
 To *take* the will for the deed.  
 To *take* the wind out of someone's sails.  
 To *take* the words right out of someone else's mouth.  
 To *take* to one's heels.  
 To *take* to some line of action like a duck to water.  
 To *take* to the tall timber.  
 To *take* up the thread of a discourse.  
 To be *taken* aback.  
 To *talk* a blue streak.  
 To *talk* as if one's mouth were full of hot mush.  
 To *talk* behind one's back.
- To *talk* off the cuff.  
 To *talk* one deaf, dumb, and blind.  
 To *talk* [or scold] until the person was blue [or black] in the face.  
 To *talk* out of the top of one's head.  
 To *talk* straight from the shoulder.  
 To *talk* through one's hat.  
 To *talk* till the cows come home.  
 To *talk* to another like a Dutch uncle.  
 To *talk* turkey.  
 To *talk* with one's tongue in his cheek.  
 To *tan* another's hide.  
 To be *tarred* with the same brush as another person.  
 To be *taut* as a bowstring.  
 To *teach* one's grandmother to suck eggs.  
 To *teach* the young idea how to shoot.  
 To *tear* one's hair in vexation.  
 To *tear* one's heart out.  
 To *tell* a tall tale.  
 To *tell* tales out of school.  
 To *temper* the wind to the shorn lamb.  
 Something to constitute a *tempest* in a tea-pot.  
 To be at the *tender* mercies of someone [or something].  
 To be on *tenterhooks*.  
 To *thank* one's lucky stars.  
 To be *thankful* for small favors, larger ones in proportion.  
 To be *thick* as fleas.  
 To be *thick* as locusts.  
 To be *thick* as pea soup.  
 To be *thick* as thieves.  
 Fog to be so *thick* that one can cut it with a knife.  
 A congestion of people to be *thicker* than bees around a honey comb [or flies around a honey pot].  
 To be *thick-skinned* as a rhinoceros.  
 To be *thin* as a dime.  
 To be *thin* as a lath [or rail].  
 To be *thin* as a toothpick.  
 To be *thin* as the paper on the wall.  
 The *thin* edge of the wedge.  
*Things* to come to a pretty pass.  
 To *think* better of something.

- To *think* no more of something.  
 To *think* the world of someone.  
 To constitute a *thorn* in the side.  
 To adhere to some position *through* fire and water.  
 To adhere *through* thick and thin.  
 To *throw* a fit.  
 To *throw* a monkey-wrench into the machinery.  
 To *throw* a person out of a place on his ear.  
 To *throw* a sop to Cerberus.  
 To *throw* down the gauntlet [or glove].  
 To *throw* dust in someone's eyes.  
 Not to *throw* good money after bad.  
 To *throw* in one's fortunes [or luck] with another.  
 To *throw* in [up] the sponge.  
 To *throw* light on a question.  
 To *throw* mud at another.  
 To *throw* one's hat into the ring.  
 To *throw* one's self at the head of another.  
 To *throw* something in another's teeth.  
 To *throw* stones at another.  
 To be *thrown* to the wolves.  
 To *thrust* one's nose into something.  
 To *tickle* one's funny bone.  
 To *tickle* one's palate.  
 To be *tickled* to death.  
 To *tie* a can to the dog.  
 To *tie* the [nuptial] knot.  
 To *tie* up the loose ends.  
 To be *tied* to someone's apron-strings.  
 To be *tight* as a drum.  
 To *tighten* one's belt.  
 To dally as if one had all the *time* in the world.  
 To have *time* on one's hands.  
*Time* out of mind.  
 To be *timid* as a mouse.  
 Certain words being on the *tip* of one's tongue.  
 To *tip* the wink.  
 A woman with a big hat looking like a *toad* under a cabbage leaf.  
 To be on one's *toes*.  
 To have a *tongue* hung in the middle [and wagging at both ends].  
 To have *too* many irons in the fire.  
 To be *toothless* as an old hag.  
 To perform to the *top* of one's bent.  
*Touch* and go.  
 Would not *touch* something with a ten-foot pole [or with a barge pole].  
 To be *tough* as boiled owl.  
 To be *tough* as sole or shoe leather.  
 A person being a *tough* rooster [or customer].  
 To *toy* with another's affections.  
 To *trade* on one's reputation.  
 To *tread* in another man's footsteps.  
 To *tread* on someone's toes [or corns].  
 To *tread* on the heels of someone.  
 To *tread* the boards.  
 To *treasure* up in memory.  
 To *treat* another like dirt under one's feet.  
 To *treat* someone like a stepchild.  
 To be *treated* like a dog.  
 To *tremble* in the balance.  
 To *trim* one's sails.  
 To *trip* the light fantastic toe.  
 To *trouble* one's self [or one's head] about something.  
 To *trust* a person no farther than one can see him.  
 To *try* something on the dog.  
 Enough to *try* the patience of a Philadelphia lawyer.  
 To *try* the patience of Job.  
 To *try* to lift one's self by his boot-straps.  
 To *try* to teach an old dog new tricks.  
 To *tumble* all over one's self in one's hurry.  
 To *turn* a cold shoulder on someone.  
 To *turn* a deaf ear to someone.  
 Not to *turn* a hair.  
 To *turn* a penny.  
 To *turn* another out in the cold.  
 To *turn* one's back on someone [or something].  
 To *turn* over a new leaf.  
 To cause someone to *turn* over in his grave.  
 To *turn* the corner.  
 To *turn* the house [or room] upside down in an attempt to find something.  
 So homely that she would *turn* the milk sour.

To *turn* the other cheek.  
 To *turn* the tables on someone.  
 To *turn* thumbs down.  
 To *turn* up one's nose.  
 To *turn* up one's toes.  
 To *twist* someone around one's little finger.  
 To have *two* left feet.  
 To be of *two* minds about some matter.  
 To do something in *two* shakes of a lamb's tail.  
 To be *two* sheets to the windward.

## U.

To be *ugly* as a baboon.  
 To be *ugly* as sin.  
 To be so stupid that one is *unable* to boil water without burning it.  
 So stupid as to be *unable* to find salt water in the sea.  
 To be *unable* to get a word in edge-wise.  
 To be *unable* to see the forest for the trees.  
 To be *unable* to tell chalk from cheese.  
 To *unburden* one's mind.  
 To be *under* a cloud.  
 To be *under* someone's thumb.  
 To be *under* the weather.  
 To be *unwilling* to have missed some event for the world.  
 To be *unwilling* to lift a hand [or finger] to aid someone or some project.  
 To be *up* a stump.  
 To be *up* a tree.  
 To be *up* and coming.  
 To be *up* in arms about something.  
 To be *up* in the clouds.  
 To have something *up* one's sleeve.  
 To be *up* to no good.  
 To be *up* to one's elbows in work [or trouble].  
 To be *up* to snuff.  
 To be *up* to something.  
 To have the *upper* hand.  
 To be *uppermost* in one's mind.  
 The *ups* and downs of fortune.  
 To *upset* the apple cart.  
 To *use* vinegar to catch flies.

## V.

To *vent* one's spleen.  
 To have a *voice* in the matter.  
 To have a *voice* like a fog-horn.

## W.

To hear *wailing* and gnashing of teeth.  
 To *walk* on pins and needles.  
 To *walk* [or skip] along as if one didn't have a care in the world.  
 To *walk* with one's head in the air.  
 To *wallow* in the mire.  
 To *wander* around like a lost soul.  
 To *want* the world with a fence around it.  
 To be *warm* as toast.  
 To *warm* the cockles of one's heart.  
 To have no more *warmth* than an iceberg.  
 To *wash* one's dirty linen in public.  
 To *wash* one's hands of somebody [or some cause].  
 To be all *washed* up.  
 To *waste* one's substance in riotous living.  
 To *watch* which way the wind blows.  
 To observe *water* finding its own level.  
 To constitute *water* over the dam.  
 To be *weak* in the upper story.  
 To be *weak* [or limp] as a rag.  
 Something constituting a *weak* reed to lean on.  
 To *wear* one's heart on one's sleeve.  
 To *weather* the storm.  
 To be *wedded* to an opinion.  
 To be *weighed* in the balance and found wanting.  
 To have something *weighing* on one's mind.  
 To be as *welcome* as a skunk at a garden party.  
*Welcome* as the flowers in May.  
 To be *wet* as a drowned rat.  
 To be a *wet* blanket anent some proposal [or to throw a *wet* blanket on some scheme].  
 To *wet* one's whistle.  
 To have *wheels* in one's head.  
*When* all's said and done.  
 To *whet* one's appetite.

- To have the *whip-hand*.  
 To *whistle* for one's money.  
 To be *whistling* in the dark.  
 To become *white* as a sheet.  
 To have a *white* elephant on one's hands.  
 To *whittle* away one's advantageous position.  
 Something being as *wide* as a barn door.  
 To be *wide* of the mark.  
 To find the *wife* in a family wearing the trousers.  
 To go or be sent on a *wild-goose-chase*.  
 To have a *will* [or no will] of one's own.  
 To *win* by fair means or foul.  
 To *win* one's spurs.  
 To *win* [or prevail] by a whisker.  
 To *wind* up in the gutter.  
 To *wind* up one's affairs.  
 To *wind* up [or end] in smoke.  
 To have not had a *wink* of sleep.  
 To *wipe* off old scores.  
 To *wipe* [or mop] up the ground with someone.  
 To *wipe* the slate clean.  
 To *wipe* the smile off one's face.  
 To be *wise* as an old owl.  
 The *wish* being father to the thought.  
 To be *within* an ace of being something.  
 To be *without* a leg to stand on.  
 To have done something *without* anyone being the wiser.  
 To do something *without* batting an eyelash.  
*Without* benefit of clergy.  
*Without* rhyme or reason.  
 To have one's *wits* about one.  
 To be at one's *wit's* end.  
 To be or go *wool-gathering*.  
 To *work* both sides of the street.  
 To have one's *work* cut out for one.  
 To *work* like a beaver [a dog, or a horse].  
 To *work* like a Trojan.  
 To *work* like a Turk.  
 To *work* one's fingers to the bone.  
 To *work* with one eye on the clock.  
 To have the *world* by the tail.  
 To *worm* one's self into another's confidence [or affections].  
 To be *worn* to a frazzle.  
*Worse* and more of it.  
 To be the *worse* for wear.  
 To *worship* the ground another walks on.  
 If the *worst* comes to the worst.  
 To be not *worth* a Continental.  
 To be not *worth* a hill of beans.  
 To be not *worth* a plugged nickel.  
 To be not *worth* a red cent.  
 To be not *worth* a tinker's dam.  
 A man not *worth* his salt.  
 To be *worth* its weight in gold.  
 To be *worth* more dead than alive.  
 Not *worth* shucks.  
 Not *worth* the powder to blow something to bits [or to Hades].  
 All *wound-up* like a clock.  
 To be *wrapped* up in one's self.  
 To attempt to *wring* blood from a turnip [or a stone].  
 To be *wringing* wet.  
 To *write* off as a dead loss.  
 Words or sentiments *written* in water [or in sand].

## Y.

To have a *yellow* streak down one's back.



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