

## The World of Words

Kisao YAMAGUCHI

### I. Introduction

In order to express more fully our ideas of people, articles, surroundings and happenings, we draw on area not our own. Thus a person is described as being a star, a pig, a goose, a flower or some color (yellow, green, white)—all in the area of the impossible.

These were gathered in the United States and Japan during the past few years. The first estimate of my ability to record these quotations was set at one-half dozen. The half dozen has grown to 5000, but the author is only able to present one hundred or so here for lack of space. They were brought to mind out of dim and misty past, most through the waking hours of night. You contributed some, others we snatched as you unwittingly spoke them in conversation. If they were not written down as they came to mind they would soon vanish into thin air.

"I thought of one the other day, but now I cannot remember what it was." This was heard a number of times and is characteristic of how they vanish.

You have given us a few origins, but we don't have them all. It may be fun to trace them and see how it all happened.

These sayings and expressions were very common in that day when.....  
 ...everything relative to planting had to be done either in the light or the dark of the moon.

...the sign of the Zodiac determined the day that you could safely operate on livestock without their bleeding to death.

...an assafidity bag was worn about the neck as a safeguard agaomst doseash.

...everyone drank Sassafras Tea as a spring tonic and also to thin the blood.

...a piece of tape was placed beneath the nose and yellow yarn about the neck to prevent a nose bleed.

...warts were removed by various and wierd methods.

...a horse shoe was hung over the door to insure good luck.

...a brass tack was driven in the heel of the shoe and a chessnut carried in the pocket as a preventative for rheumatism.

...crosses and signs were placed about the premises and on the palm of the hand to ward off the devil.

...Lions Head and Arbuckles were the only brands of coffee on the market.

...thunder soured the milk and kept the eggs from hatching.

...folks blew out the gas instead of turning it off.  
 ...you had to walk softly to keep the oven cake from falling.  
 ...black cats, broken mirrors, leaning ladders, number 13 and many other superstitions were a constant threat to life and happiness.

It is hoped that these pages will bring information, interest and give direction to those who read it.

## II. Expressions, Idioms and Quotations

A wild goose chase.....having no results.  
 A fly-by-night .....not substantial.  
 Hold your horses .....calm down.  
 A make-shift .....something that will just do.  
 Slip shod .....not substantial. Horses shod with smooth shoes cannot travel on ice.  
 Doing big business on a small scale.....a small business that is profitable.  
 Doing business on a shoe string...with small capital and no backing.  
 A thorn in the flesh .....St. Paul.  
 The goose hangs high .....a year of plenty.  
 You hit the nail on the head.....said the right thing.  
 Put it down in black and white...put it down with pen and ink.  
 Small potatoes .....too small to complain about.  
 That's a horse of another color...that's different.  
 Having the inside track.....a great advantage. Jockeys jokceyed great lengths of time in order to get it.  
 Put your John Henry here .....sign your name here.  
 He feathered his nest.....got something out of deal.  
 A wild cat company .....not substantial.  
 Shoo fly, don't bother me.....don't want to take a srand on some community problem or moral issue.  
 It leans toward Jones .....it's not plumb.  
 Shirt tail relations .....distant ones.  
 He tooted his onw horn.....sung his own praises.  
 It's time to hit the hay.....go to bed. Harvesters slept in the hay and straw.  
 A wall flower.....a person who does not enter into party games and dances; from flower by that name.  
 I'm as tight as a tick.....than you, I'll eat no more: bed tick, sheep tick, etc.  
 A Hill Billy.....from the hills.  
 The bird with a broken pinion never soars so high again.....after doing evil it's hard to regain the heights again.  
 A dark horse.....a surprise candidate or horse who wins an elec-

tion or race.

A new broom sweeps clean.....a new man shows better at the beginning.

He doesn't measure up .....lacks qualities.

A great state of affairs.....things are in a mess.

The last frontier .....there isn't any.

He knows his way around .....well informed.

It falls on deaf ears .....ignored the proposition.

Cutting each other's throat .....takinge advantag by under-selling each other.

The black sheep of the family ...there was always one black sheep in every farm flock.

A ne'er-do-well .....never successful.

Now streak it.....youngsters were told to go on an errand in a hurry by this term, go like a streak.

We will put down a black mark for him.....didn't mark the grade.

Doing business in the red .....going behind.

Out of a clear sky .....something unexpected.

The die is cast .....already in the mold.

Threw the book at him .....police gave him all the penalties they could.

A man of destiny.....destined to do big things.

Friday the thirteenth .....a day of bad luck as some think.

A self-made man .....lacked opportunities.

The dawn of a new day .....looking for better times.

I don't chew may tabacco twice...you heard me the first time.

First, last and all the time .....nothing but.

Cut a mellon .....divided the profits to stockholders.

The better half .....the wife.

A far cry from old methods .....vast improvement.

Dame Fortune smiled on her .....good fortune came to her.

That put the game on ice .....it's safe.

He got his dander up.....becoming heated over something.

The winds of adversity.....misfortune befell him.

You have another guess coming...if you think you are going to do so and so.

Fell by the wayside.....gave up.

Don't cross the bridge until you come to it.....worry after you get there.

Put out the fire.....a relief pitcher stopped the scoring.

That's just the ticket.....or just the checker. something that suits.

Pin money .....small earnings for the wife to spend.

Won in a breeze .....or won in a walk, won easily.

He's straining at the leash .....anxious to go as a dog does.

He doesn't know a hill of beans...doesn't know about anything.

It could be seen with half an eye.....could be seen very plainly.

Don't shoot until you see the whites of their eyes.....let them get close. From the  
American Revolution.

A horse, a horse, my kingdom for a horse.....the king wanted to flee the battle.  
The negro said he didn't want no horse holding  
him back.

It went in one ear and out the other.....paid no attention.

Smoked the peace pipe .....it's all settled.

Handed to him on a silver platter.....gave it to him without effort on his part.

Gave him a song and dance .....tried to convince him.

His words would melt in your mouth.....his praise was overdone.

Water won't run uphill .....it can't be done.

He jumped the gun.....too soon.

Water seeks its level.....those who have the same interests.

Rules with an iron hand .....gives no quarter.

It gives me the creeps .....it makes my skin crawl.

There's no use splitting hairs ...getting things down too fine a point.

It's the case of dog eat dog .....trying to get the best of each other.

Watchman, what of the night.....what happened while we were sleeping?

There was a lot of blood and thunder.....the same as a western play.

There's something in the wind ...something brewing, something going on.

The power behind the throne.....the one who directs the policies or does the work.

It was a tame affair .....not much doing.

A double-barreled charge .....a minister serving two churches, from a double-  
barreled shotgun.

Without leave or license .....without permission.

Nipped in the bud .....before it got started.

Dressed fit to kill .....anything fit to kill was in fine shape, in best  
style.

It doesn't add up .....the argument doesn't make sense.

He laid down the law.....told them what was what.

He's up in the air .....disturbed.

Keep it under your hat .....don't tell anyone.

A dark, brown taste .....a shocked feeling.

It's my bread and butter .....my living.

A wind fall .....something that falls in your lap as fruit blown  
from a tree.

A bottle neck.....a narrow space for traffic.

It was fair and square .....on the level.

I'll let my hair down.....relax.

Pull yourself together.....don't go to pieces.

What's eating on you .....what's wrong with you?

Couldn't worm it out of him .....got no information.

He's on the water wagon.....not drinking.  
A straight laced person.....one who is strict.  
A white collar worker .....an office worker.  
They have your number .....prison number.  
Dog days .....hot, sultry days of July or August.  
Dog tire .....too tired to breath.  
Look for us when you see us coming.....we don't know when we will be back.  
The coast is clear .....there's no one around, nothing on the road.  
In all my born days .....I haven't seen anything like this.  
He got a good ducking .....fell in the water.  
The bell weather .....political leader, from the Bell Weather sheep.  
A pretty kettle of fish .....Scotch boating parties cooked their catch of fish  
in a large kettle for their picnic dinner.  
Weep and the world is with you...snore and you sleep alone.  
We'll do it by hook or crook ....the fishhook and shepherd's crook were very im-  
portant.  
This hurts me worse than it does you.....a prelude to a spanking.  
The shoe will be on the other foot.....when I get through with you.  
He has had his ups and sowns...successes and failures.  
He was aquashed.....sat on, turned down.  
I rode shanks poneys.....walked.  
Opportunity knocks but once .....it's been disproven.  
Got soused .....drunk.  
Couldn't pry it out of him with a crossbar.....got no information.  
Let come Hell or High Water.....I'll stick to my guns.  
It's as broad as it is long .....no difference in the way it's done.  
That took the wind out of his sails.....lost his enthusiasm.  
Got hot under the collar .....getting angry over a matter. A horse would  
sometimes scald by getting hot under the collar.  
He crawfished .....backed out. A crawfish, instead of turning  
around, just swims backwards.  
He high-tailed it .....in a hurry. Deer, Buffalo, etc. run with tail high.  
He's not onto the ropes.....inexperienced. There are a multitude of ropes  
on a sailing ship to be handled.  
He puffed like a steam engine...out of wind.  
It was all cut and dried .....decided before-hand. From drying strips of beef  
before the open fire.  
In a pig's eye.....I doubt it.  
Quick on the trigger .....a fast reply.  
He was a plunger .....went into things in a big way.  
He was a sponger .....sponging off of othere.

- Flip me your flipper .....shake hands.
- Putting teeth in it .....making it severe.
- Topsy-turvy.....upside down, or a cyclone has struck it.
- They had a big blow-out .....a grand party.
- Wet your whistle .....have a drink.
- A green horn.....enexperinced. From a deer horn, soft and im-  
mature.
- A tender foot.....same as above, not used to rough going.
- When my ship comes in .....when I got some cash.
- Footprints on the sands of time...marks to be remembered.
- He can't hold a candle to so-and-so.....someone is better.
- A bad actor .....one not to be trusted.
- It just makes my blood boil .....something said or seen makes me angry.
- A month of Sundays .....that's how long it will take.
- Burning the candle at both ends...early and late.
- He bit off more than he could chew.....more work than he could handle, from a  
chew of tabacco.
- He has a hard row to hoe .....difficult work, a garden row.
- It was hard to swallow.....didn't believe it.
- A hard dose to take .....an imposition, undeserved, criticism or treatment.
- Show your colors .....Where do you stand? Ships at sea were required  
to show their flags in passing.
- Growing pains .....business expansion problems. From the idea that  
young people pains because of growth.
- My wife has left my bed and board.....I will not be responsible for any debts other  
than my own.
- Brought home the bacon .....copped the prize. A Civil War term. Raiders  
rode home, each with his sword sticking through  
a slab of bacon.
- It's a cinch .....sure to succeed.
- Chewing the rag .....or chewing the fat. Conversing or arguing with  
each other. From the idea of giving babies rags,  
bacon or chunks of fat as pacifiers. A string  
was tied to the fat and rind, in case of swallow-  
ing it could be pulled back out.
- Tar bucket .....a tag-along. From the tar bucket that was used  
for grease and hung on the back of the wagon.
- He got cold feet .....lost his nerve.
- He sat on a red hot stove .....a hot position, the hot seat.
- Put that in your pipe and smoke it.....making it emphatic.
- Took the wouds right out of my mouth.....I was going to say that.

You put the words in my mouth...said it for me.

I'll put the words in your mouth...God said to Moses.

Took the bull by the horns.....took things into his own hands. Probably from  
bull dogging. The Romans turned somersaults  
on a bull's back.

I'll put a bee in your bonnett.....something you are not supposed to know.

I'll put a bug in your ear.....same as above.

Flew the track .....went back on the deal. From a race horse out  
of control.

A high stepper .....High Society. From a fancy high-stepping buggy  
horse.