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Proverbial Lore in Nebraska

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PROVERBIAL LORE IN NEBRASKA

BY EMMA LOUISE SNAPP

LINCOLN, NEBRASKA

1933

PREFACE

The following study attempts to list and to classify the proverbs and proverbial phrases in current oral use in Nebraska. My chief source for the collection was the talk of persons with whom I have been in contact for the last six months. The amount of proverbial lore on the lips of representatives of many walks of life is astonishing; one can have no conception of its extent until he consciously listens for it and keeps a record of what he hears. Further, friends in Lincoln and in other parts of the state gathered and sent to me many lists of the current proverbial expressions that they knew. The members of classes in American Literature at the University of Nebraska, classes made up of students coming from many different communities, contributed a considerable number. I also consulted collections of proverbial lore and the sayings that I immediately recognized as current were incorporated into my lists. I have lived most of my life in Nebraska so that I felt confident that any expression with which I was very familiar is in circulation in the state. In instances where there was the least doubt, however, I had the sayings identified by other Nebraskans.

My collection in no sense represents an exhaustive study of the subject. The very nature of proverbial lore makes a complete and finished list an impossibility. Proverbial lore, like all other lore, is a growing, living thing, changing from day to day. The figurative language popular today may become proverbial tomorrow, or it may pass into oblivion.

The organization of material that I have used is arbitrary; it was fixed upon for convenience in arranging a large number of proverbs and proverbial phrases. It is based on two types of groupings. The first type brings together a collection of proverbs concerning a certain subject, such as the section on Women, Love, and Marriage. In the other type, the sayings listed together are all derived from a common source, though they apply to many phases of life; e.g., the aphoristic sayings from animal life are significant chiefly as interpretations of human nature. In some cases, notably the section on weather, both types of classification are utilized.

I wish to express my indebtedness to Dr. Louise Pound, Professor of English at the University of Nebraska, for suggesting this study and for encouragement and practical aid while it was in preparation. I owe sincere appreciation also to the many persons who helped me in my compilation of lists of proverbial expressions in Nebraska.

EMMA LOUISE SNAPP

Lincoln, Nebraska

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INTRODUCTION

To define a proverb is a difficult task because of the many elements involved. Two characteristics, however, seem essential; proverbs must be aphoristic and they must be in wide oral currency. They are written as well as spoken, of course, but it is chiefly by word of mouth that they gain and hold their surprisingly large place in the language.

Proverbs and proverbial phrases are grouped separately in this collection; the differentiation between them is based on their form. The rigidity of the form of the proverb is one of its salient characteristics. The phrase, on the other hand, may vary according to its application. The proverbial phrases listed in this collection, such as "to eat humble pie," may assume any of several forms, varying in tense and person, determined by the way they are used. Perhaps it is because of their brevity, and this very characteristic of greater freedom in form, that stock proverbial phrases are more numerous than proverbs themselves. It is, perhaps, a commentary on the modern desire for speed and brevity, even in conversation, that phrases, rather than proverbs, make up most of the proverbial lore of recent origin in this collection.

A study of the history of the proverbial lore current in Nebraska reveals the fact that a very large percentage of it came from England. A smaller percentage has come from other European and Asiatic folklore. An astonishing number of imported expressions have been adopted in their entirety, even when they preserve archaic allusions or customs no longer in existence. Many Nebraskans use sayings such as "to carry coals to Newcastle" and "to look both ways for Sunday" that certainly have no experiential significance to them. Others of these expressions have been made over; e.g., the popular Americanism, "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" was doubtless modeled on the English proverb, "Eat an apple on going to bed and you'll keep the doctor from earning his bread." The fact that many proverbs are centuries old, however, does not mean that the day of proverb-making is past. New occupations, new sports, even new inventions offer opportunities for the birth of new proverbial expres-

sions. The phrases "to step on the gas" and "to broadcast one's troubles" are obviously of recent origin.

One of the most interesting aspects of the study of proverbial language is the manner in which it is constantly employed by persons who have no conception of its original meaning. Often when an individual says "as busy as a beaver," he is not reflecting his knowledge of the industrious character of the beaver; rather, he is using a saying, the metaphorical force of which has been impressed on his mind through hearing it employed many times to convey a certain meaning. Even expressions, the origins of which are unknown, such as "to be at sixes and sevens" and "as queer as Dick's hatband" are used by a speaker with perfect confidence that his meaning will be well conveyed. Through years of wide circulation, such proverbial phrases have gained a strong connotative significance.

Occasionally the oral use of a proverb is prefixed by some remark, such as, "as the saying goes," or the colloquial and facetious "as the feller says." Usually, however, proverbs have become so fixed a part of the language of Nebraskans that their users seem unconscious that they are employing stock sayings.

The various groupings used in arranging the proverbs listed in the following pages suggest the wide scope of proverbial lore in source and content. From every class of life, from every occupation and field of human endeavor are derived stock sayings which, because of certain almost indefinable, yet real, qualities of memorableness, have become a part of the everyday language of Nebraska folk.

I

PROVERBIAL LORE FROM THE BIBLE

Biblical proverbs and proverbial sayings form a sizable portion of the proverbial lore of Nebraskans. Such lore, like other folklore, is largely oral. The stories, the characters, the very terminology of the Bible have formed a staple part of the language experience of the inhabitants of Nebraska from their early childhood.

In the proverbs themselves, the Biblical terminology seems to have been preserved with varying degrees of success. There are often minor modifications in wording or sentence order but sometimes the change is so great that the identity of the proverb as a Biblical product is almost entirely lost. An instance is "Man proposes but God disposes," the long and varied history of which is discussed by Taylor.¹ In some cases the inadvertent loss of a word or two in the oral version causes a change in meaning. For example, the oral proverb, "Money is the root of all evil" is a misquotation of "The love of money is the root of all evil." Occasionally in oral speech, only a part of a Biblical proverb is used, with the understanding on the part of the speaker that his hearers are familiar enough with it to complete it for themselves. Examples of such curtailed sayings are, "The sins of the fathers" and "Cast your bread upon waters."

The proverbial phrases of Biblical origin are of two definite classes: those using the exact phraseology of the Bible and those suggested by Biblical stories and lore. To the former class belong such familiar expressions as "casting pearls before swine" and "the blind leading the blind." The group suggested by the characters or incidents in Bible stories is very large. Its size is a commentary on the widespread appeal of Bible lore. Many of the important persons in these stories have managed to get themselves and their characteristics into permanent currency in our everyday language. Old Testament figures are represented in such expressions as "as meek as Moses," "the patience of Job," and "He's a Jonah." From the stories of the life of Christ we have such

¹ Archer Taylor, *The Proverb*, pp. 55-56. 1931.

widely used sayings as "thirty pieces of silver" and "to wash one's hands of a thing."

It is obvious that the various authors of the Bible made use of figurative expressions in current use in their own periods. This means that many of the proverbial sayings occurring in the Bible probably had their origin in another literature or oral speech.

In the following list of proverbial sayings of Biblical origin, no attempt is made to distinguish the two classes.

Proverbs

1. A friend loveth at all times.
2. A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches.
3. A kingdom divided against itself cannot stand.
4. A little child shall lead them.
5. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.
Very often in oral usage, this is reduced to the proverbial saying, "a little leaven."
6. A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country.
7. A soft answer turneth away wrath.
8. Answer a fool according to his folly.
9. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he.
10. As ye would that men should do to you, do ye unto them.
11. Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?
12. Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots?
This is an interesting example of the effectiveness of a proverb cast in the form of an interrogation.
13. Cast thy bread upon the waters and it shall be returned to thee after many days.
Often only the first clause of this proverb is used.
14. Charity covers a multitude of sins.
15. Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow you die.
The wording in the Bible is, "Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we shall die."
16. Get thee behind me, Satan.
17. God is not mocked.
18. Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways and be wise.
In oral usage often only the first part of this proverb is used.
19. He that is without sin, let him cast the first stone.
20. He that ruleth his spirit is better than he that taketh a city.
21. Hide not your light under a bushel.
22. Honor thy father and thy mother.
23. Hope deferred maketh the heart sick.
24. I have fought a good fight; I have finished the course.
The proverbial sayings, "to fight a good fight" and "to finish the course," are shortened portions of this proverb.
25. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven.
26. It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.
This is an example of the use in the Gospels of a proverb of non-Christian origin. The expression was current among the Romans of Jesus' day and was used by the Greek dramatists, Æschylus (525-456 B. C.) and Euripides (480-406 B. C.).²
27. Judge not that ye be not judged.

² Dwight E. Marvin, *Curiosities in Proverbs*, pp. 119-120, 1916.

28. No man can serve two masters.
29. Physician, heal thyself.
This "seems to have been a current proverb when the Nazarenes quoted it against Jesus as a rebuke."³
30. Pride goeth before a fall.
This is a misquotation. The wording in the Bible is "Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall."
31. Render unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's.
32. She hath done what she could.
33. Spare the rod and spoil the child.
34. Strain at a gnat and swallow a camel.
35. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.
36. Take my yoke upon you.
37. The laborer is worthy of his hire.
38. The Lord loveth a cheerful giver.
39. The poor ye have always with you.
40. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong.
41. The Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath.
42. The tree is known by its fruit.
43. The wages of sin is death.
44. The way of the transgressor is hard.
45. The wicked flee when none pursue.
46. Train up a child in the way he should go.
47. Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.
Commonly this proverb is shortened to the first three words; the curtailment greatly alters the meaning.
48. We have an advocate with the father.
49. Where there is no vision, the people perish.
50. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?
51. Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.
52. Whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth.
53. Whosoever hath, to him shall be given.
54. Wine is a mocker.

Proverbial Phrases

1. a coat of many colors.
2. a Judas kiss.
3. a pearl of great price.
4. a prisoner of hope.
5. a Samson shorn of his strength.
6. a thorn in the flesh.
7. an abomination unto the Lord.
8. an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.
9. as meek as Moses.
10. as old as Methuselah.
11. as poor as Job.
12. as poor as Job's turkey.
This singular proverb seems to be a variant of the preceding one, on the assumption, one supposes, that since Job is poor, his turkey will be poorer.
13. as unalterable as the laws of the Medes and Persians.
14. balm of Gilead.
15. by precept and example.
16. forbidden fruit.
17. Garden of Gethsemane.
18. in the twinkling of an eye.
This is probably an example of the chronicler's use of a current proverbial expression. It is found in 1 Corinthians XV:52.

³ Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

19. like David and Jonathan.

This is said of two men who are close friends.

20. like manna from heaven.

21. loaves and fishes.

22. no room in the inn.

23. out of the mouths of babes and sucklings.

24. precept on precept.

25. the cry of Rachel.

This refers to the cry of a mother bereft of her children.

26. the day of judgment.

27. the foolish virgin.

28. the mark of Cain.

29. the prodigal son.

30. the promised land.

31. the salt of the earth.

32. the strength of Samson.

33. the tree of knowledge.

34. the weaker vessel.

This metaphorical expression is used in 1 Peter III:7 to refer to women.

35. the widow's mite.

36. the wisdom of Solomon.

37. the writing in the sand.

38. the writing on the wall.

39. they that are born of woman.

40. thirty pieces of silver.

41. to be a doubting Thomas.

42. to be a good Samaritan.

43. to be a Jezebel.

44. to be a Jonah.

A "Jonah" is a person who brings bad luck.

45. to be a Judas.

46. to be a Magdalene.

47. to be an Ananias.

48. to be eyes to the blind.

49. to be hanged as high as Haman.

50. to be no respecter of persons.

51. to bear one's cross.

52. to build one's house on sands.

53. to cast pearls before swine.

54. to cast the first stone.

55. to dig a pit for one's self.

56. to have the patience of Job.

57. to heap coals of fire on his head.

58. to kill the fatted calf.

59. to look as if it came out of the ark.

This is said of a thing of great age.

60. to return good for evil.

61. to rob Peter to pay Paul.

62. to sell one's birthright for a mess of pottage.

63. to serve God and Mammon.

64. to turn the other cheek.

65. to wash one's hands of a thing.

66. when Gabriel blows his horn.

II

LORE FROM ANIMAL LIFE

Animal life seems to offer the greatest single source of proverbial lore in Nebraska. This is a natural outcome of the predominance of agricultural life in the state. The use of animal proverbs is not confined to rural regions, of course. Much animal proverbial lore, especially that of domesticated animals, is common to all sections of Nebraska. Expressions concerning prairie-dogs and jack rabbits are found most often in western Nebraska where these animals are most numerous.

The many comparisons taken from animal life are usually employed to illustrate some characteristic of human nature; it is in this application to human beings that their chief importance lies. The majority of these comparisons refer to undesirable human traits; "as greedy as a pig," "as contrary as a mule," and "as dumb as an ox," are examples. Less disparaging are such comparisons as "as busy as a bee" and "as gentle as a lamb." Some animals are used for both commendatory and abusive comparisons. From the equine family we have both the expressions, "to have good horse sense" and "to eat like a horse." On the whole, however, one particular characteristic seems to be attached to each animal. This tendency is illustrated in such common metaphorical names as "cur," "hog," "bear," and "cow."

Most of these sayings refer to the animals themselves, but a few are concerned with their relations with man. Instances of this kind are "Love me, love my dog" and "Do not look a gift horse in the mouth."

The horse leads all other animals in the proverbial lore of Nebraska. The dog and the cat vie with each other for second place. Cattle, pigs, and sheep also provide a large number of proverbs. Small wild animals, such as rabbits and squirrels, form a surprisingly prolific source, whereas foxes, bears, and wolves figure less prominently in everyday speech. Least common of all are animals not in-

digenous to this part of the country, yet these are not entirely unrepresented. Very well known, indeed, are such expressions as "as bold as a lion" and "as big as an elephant."

Included in this group dealing with lore from animal life are fowls, insects, birds, reptiles, and fish. These offer material for a large number of comparisons. Here, too, there are such pronounced characteristics that metaphorical expressions such as "snake," "bird," and "sucker" convey definite meanings. In this section all of the expressions relating to one animal or animal group are placed together. Alphabetical arrangement is preserved within these subdivisions.

(1) DOGS

Proverbs

1. A dead dog tells no tales.
2. A dog that will bring a bone will take one away.
3. Barking dogs do not bite.
4. Dog eat dog.
5. Every dog has his day.
6. Give a dog a bad name and you may as well hang him.
7. His bark is worse than his bite.
8. I have a bone to pick with you.
9. Let sleeping dogs lie.
10. Love me, love my dog.
11. The hair of the dog is good for the bite.

Proverbial Phrases

12. as crooked as a dog's hind leg.
13. as much use for a thing as a dog has for two tails.
14. as playful as a puppy.
15. as sick as a dog.
16. as sleepy as a dog.
17. as sound as a hound's tooth.
18. as thick as fleas on a dog's back.
19. bulldog tenacity.
20. dog days.
21. enough to make a dog laugh.
22. gone to the dogs.
23. like a scared hound.
24. puppy love.
25. since Hec was a pup.
26. to be a dog in the manger.
27. to die a dog's death.
28. to dog his footsteps.
29. to eat like a dog.
30. to fawn like a dog.
31. to go off with one's tail between one's legs.
32. to have a bulldog jaw.

- 33. to lead a dog's life.
- 34. to lick one's chops.
- 35. to make no bones about a thing.
- 36. to put on dog.
- 37. to work like a dog.

(2) CATS

Proverbs

- 38. A cat may look at a king.
- 39. A singed cat avoids the fire.
- 40. Care killed a cat.
- 41. Cats that wear gloves catch no mice.
- 42. Curiosity killed a cat.
- 43. There are more ways to kill a cat than to choke it on hot butter.
- 44. When the cat's away, the mouse will play.
- 45. You have to catch a cat before you skin it.

Proverbial Phrases

- 46. a different breed of cats.
- 47. as black as a stack of black cats.
- 48. as common as a back-fence cat.
- 49. as green as cat's eyes.
- 50. as harmless as a kitten.
- 51. as high as a cat's back.
- 52. as nervous as a cat.
- 53. as playful as a kitten.
- 54. as sick as a cat.
- 55. as weak as a cat.
- 56. like a cat caught licking cream.
- 57. like a cat licking paste.
- 58. not room enough to cuss a cat in.
- Variant: not room enough to swing a cat in.
- 59. to bell the cat.

This means to undertake a difficult task.

- 60. to grin like a chessy cat.

The word "chessy" is a mispronunciation of the word "Cheshire" but the incorrect form is that common in current usage.

- 61. to hate water like a cat.
- 62. to have as many lives as a cat.
- 63. to let the cat out of the bag.
- 64. to live a cat and dog life.
- 65. to make a cat's paw of.
- 66. to make the fur fly.
- 67. to purr like a cat.
- 68. to rain cats and dogs.
- 69. to rub one's fur the wrong way.
- 70. to see how the cat jumps.

(3) HORSES

Proverbs

- 71. A short horse is soon curried.
- 72. Every horse thinks his own pack the heaviest.
- 73. Never look a gift horse in the mouth.
- 74. Sit tight.

This expression comes from horseback riding.

- 75. There is life in the old horse yet.
- 76. You can drive a willing horse to death.
- 77. You can lead a horse to water but you can't make him drink.

Proverbial Phrases

- 78. a horse laugh.
- 79. a mare's nest.
- 80. as coarse as a horse's tail.
- 81. as contrary as a mule.
- 82. as frisky as a colt.
- 83. as poor as a race horse.
- 84. as skittish as a colt.
- 85. as sick as a horse.
- 86. as silly as an ass.
- 87. head up and tail over the dashboard.
This expression is used of one who is anxious to go.
- 88. hoss and hoss.
This is an expression used in gambling. It means equal.
- 89. kicked by the same mule.
- 90. one-horse town.
- 91. the nerve of a government mule.
This expression is a legacy from Civil War times. The government had a large number of mules in the service.
- 92. to be a dark horse.
- 93. to be a horse of a different color.
- 94. to be a horse for work.
- 95. to be close on the heels of.
- 96. to be on one's high horse.
- 97. to be raring to go.
- 98. to bridle one's tongue.
- 99. to browse through a library.
- 100. to die in the harness.
- 101. to eat like a horse.
- 102. to feel one's oats.
- 103. to get the bit in his mouth.
- 104. to give him line enough.
- 105. to go Shank's mare.
This means to walk.
- 106. to have good horse sense.
- 107. to have her tail over the line.
This means to be ready to go.
- 108. to hold one's horses.
- 109. to hold the whip hand.
- 110. to hoof it.
- 111. to kick over the traces.
- 112. to lock the stable door after the horse is stolen.
- 113. to put the cart before the horse.
- 114. to put the saddle on the wrong horse.
- 115. to ride for a fall.
- 116. to work for a dead horse.

(4) HOGS

Proverbs

- 117. Root, hog, or die.
- 118. You can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear.
- 119. You can't make a whistle out of a pig's tail.

Proverbial Phrases

- 120. a hog-killing time.
This means a pleasant, exhilarating time. An illustration of its use is, "We had a hog-killing time at the party."
- 121. as dirty as a pig.
- 122. as fat as a pig.

- 123. as greedy as a pig.
- 124. as independent as a hog on ice.
- 125. to be left to dance in the hog trough.
- 126. to bleed like a stuck pig.
- 127. to buy a pig in a poke.
- 128. to eat like a pig.
- 129. to get a good scald on a thing.
This means to do a thing well. It comes from the butchering of hogs.
- 130. to go whole hog or none.
- 131. to have the wrong sow by the ear.
- 132. to make a pig of one's self.
- 133. to wait as one pig waits for another.

(5) SHEEP

Proverbs

- 134. Anybody that would take a dare,
Would kill a sheep and eat the hair.
- 135. He might as well be hung for a sheep as a lamb.
- 136. His mind is a-wool-gathering.
- 137. There is one black sheep in every flock.

Proverbial Phrases

- 138. as dumb as a sheep.
- 139. as gentle as a lamb.
- 140. as meek as a lamb.
- 141. to be a black sheep.
- 142. to cast sheep's eyes.
- 143. to fleece anyone.

(6) CATTLE

Proverbs

- 144. Don't swallow the cow and worry with the tail.
This proverb is related in meaning to the Biblical saying, "Strain at a gnat and swallow a camel."
- 145. Give that calf more rope.
- 146. That will bring her to her milk.
This expression means, "That will convince her."

Proverbial Phrases

- 147. as dangerous as a mad bull.
- 148. as dumb as an ox.
- 149. as fat as a cow.
- 150. as graceful as a cow.
This ironic comparison is sometimes made more ridiculous by changing it to "as graceful as the bird they call the cow."
- 151. as safe as a cow in the stock yards.
- 152. as strong as an ox.
- 153. like a bull in a china closet.
- 154. like a red rag to a bull.
- 155. till the cows come home.
- 156. to draw in one's horns.
- 157. to kick like a bay steer.
- 158. to look like a dying calf.
- 159. to take the bull by the horns.

(7) FOXES, BEARS, AND WOLVES

Proverbs

160. A sleeping fox catches no poultry.
 161. The strength of the pack is the wolf and the strength of the wolf is the pack.

Proverbial Phrases

162. a bear hug.
 163. a wolf in sheep's clothing.
 164. as clumsy as a bear.
 165. as cross as a bear.
 166. as hungry as a bear.
 167. as rough as a bear.
 168. as sly as a fox.
 169. like a bear after wild honey.
 170. to cry "wolf" too often.
 This expression comes from the story of "The Boy who Cried Wolf," one of Æsop's fables.
 171. to eat like a wolf.
 172. to keep the wolf from the door.
 173. to wolf one's food.

(8) RODENTS

Proverbs

174. Rats desert a sinking ship.

Proverbial Phrases

175. as busy as a beaver.
 176. as fast as a jack rabbit in front of a prairie fire.
 177. as flip as a prairie dog.
 This expression which comes from the sandhill region of Nebraska is used especially to refer to a girl who swishes her skirts as the dog flips his tail.
 178. as perky as a rabbit's ears.
 179. as poor as a church mouse.
 180. as quick as a prairie-dog.
 181. as scared as a rabbit.
 182. as slick as a rat.
 183. as thin as a rat.
 184. as wet as a drowned rat.
 185. as wild as a March hare.
 186. as timid as a mouse.
 187. as tiny as a mouse.
 188. like a rat in a trap.
 189. to chatter like a chipmunk.
 190. to die like a cornered rat.
 191. to fight like a rat in a corner.
 192. to jump like a rabbit.
 193. to look like a drowned rat.
 194. to run like a scared rabbit.
 195. to scamper like a squirrel.
 196. to work like a beaver.
 197. to yip like a prairie-dog.

(9) ANIMALS NOT INDIGENOUS TO NEBRASKA

Proverbial Phrases

198. as big as a hippopotamus.
 199. as bold as a brass monkey.

- 200. as bold as a lion.
- 201. as crazy as a baboon.
- 202. as dry as a camel.
- 203. as fierce as a tiger.
- 204. as fleet as a deer.
See under 206.
- 205. as hairy as an ape.
- 206. as swift as an antelope.
Antelope were formerly abundant in Nebraska. Witness Antelope County,
Antelope Creek, etc.
- 207. as tough as rhinoceros hide.
- 208. cold enough to freeze a brass monkey.
- 209. like a stag at bay.
- 210. to act like a monkey.
- 211. to ape.
- 212. to beard the lion in his den.
- 213. to get the lion's share.
- 214. to have a neck like a giraffe's.
- 215. to have a rhinoceros hide.
- 216. to have an elephant on one's hands.
- 217. to laugh like a hyena.
- 218. to monkey with a buzz-saw.

(10) REPTILES, FROGS

Proverbs

- 219. If it were a snake, it would bite you.
- 220. The worm will turn.

Proverbial Phrases

- 221. a big frog in a little puddle.
- 222. as cold as a frog.
- 223. as cold as a snake.
- 224. as crooked as a snake.
- 225. as deadly as a cobra.
- 226. as hoarse as a frog.
- 227. as poisonous as a snake.
- 228. as slippery as an eel.
- 229. as treacherous as a snake.
- 230. as ugly as a turtle.
- 231. as wise as a serpent.
- 232. crocodile tears.
Taylor says this expression "is explained by the old belief that crocodiles enticed unwary men into their power by imitating a weeping child."¹
- 233. like a stuffed toad.
- 234. lower than a snake's belly.
- 235. madder than snakes in haying.
- 236. to blink like a frog in sweet milk.
- 237. to croak like a frog.
- 238. to dive like a frog.
- 239. to go at a snail's pace.
- 240. to hiss like a snake.
- 241. to jump like a frog.
- 242. to nourish a viper in one's bosom.
- 243. to stick out one's head like a turtle.
- 244. to worm one's way through.

¹ Archer Taylor, *The Proverb*, pp. 197-198.

(11) FOWLS

Proverbs

245. A setting hen never grows fat.
 246. Chickens come home to roost.
 247. What's sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.

Proverbial Phrases

248. a cock and bull story.
 249. as a duck takes to water.
 250. as busy as an old hen with two chicks.
 251. as cocky as a rooster.
 252. as downy as a chick.
 253. as game as a fighting cock.
 254. as mad as a wet hen.
 255. as proud as a turkey cock.
 256. as scarce as hens' teeth.
 257. knee high to a duck.
 258. like a chicken with its head off.
 259. like water off a duck's back.
 260. to be the biggest duck in the puddle.
 261. to cackle like a hen.
 262. to cook his goose.
 263. to count one's chickens before they are hatched.
 264. to crow like a rooster.
 265. to fly the coop.
 266. to have sand in one's gizzard.
 267. to look like a dying duck in a thunderstorm.
 268. to strut like a turkey cock.
 269. to talk turkey.

To talk business is the meaning of this expression.

(12) BIRDS

Proverbs

270. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
 271. A little bird told me.
 272. Birds of a feather flock together.
 273. Every bird likes to hear himself sing.
 274. Every crow thinks her own bird the blackest.
 275. Fine feathers make fine birds.
 276. One swallow does not make a summer.
 277. The bird that can sing and won't sing ought to be made to sing.
 278. The birds have flown.
 279. The early bird catches the worm.

Proverbial Phrases

280. as black as a crow.
 281. as blind as a bat.
 282. as blind as an owl.
 283. as blind as a wren.
 284. as chipper as a sparrow.
 285. as crazy as a hoot owl.
 286. as crazy as a loon.
 287. as free as a bird.
 288. as gay as a bird of paradise.
 289. as graceful as a swan.

- 290. as light as a feather.
- 291. as mean as a jaybird.
- 292. as meek as a dove.
- 293. as naked as a jay.
- 294. as plump as a partridge.
- 295. as proud as a peacock.
- 296. as small as a wren.
- 297. as sneaking as a chicken hawk.
- 298. as tame as a pigeon.
- 299. as the crow flies.
- 300. as tough as boiled owl.
- 301. as vain as a peacock.
- 302. as wise as an owl.
- 303. bats in the belfry.
- 304. like a hawk watching a chicken.
- 305. not enough to keep a canary alive.
- 306. to be pigeon-breasted.
- 307. to bill and coo.
- 308. to hammer like a woodpecker.
- 309. to have a neck like a crane's.
- 310. to kill two birds with one stone.
- 311. to open one's mouth like a young robin.
- 312. to put salt on a bird's tail.
- 313. to say a crow is white.
- This means to tell a falsehood.
- 314. to screech like an owl.
- 315. to sing like a bird.
- Variant: to sing like a lark.
- 316. to soar like an eagle.
- 317. to whistle like a quail.

(13) FISH

Proverbs

- 318. All's fish that comes to his net.
- 319. Every fish that escapes seems greater than it is.
- 320. It is a silly fish that is caught twice with the same bait.
- 321. There are just as good fish in the sea as ever were caught.

Proverbial Phrases

- 322. a pretty kettle of fish.
- 323. as big as a whale.
- 324. as cold as a fish.
- 325. as dead as a herring.
- 326. as much backbone as a jellyfish.
- 327. as red as a boiled lobster.
- 328. as slippery as an eel.
- 329. like a fish out of water.
- 330. to be packed in like sardines in a box.
- 331. to crab.
- 332. to crawfish out.
- 333. to drink like a fish.
- 334. to fish for a thing.
- 335. to have a mouth like a sucker's.
- 336. to have other fish to fry.
- 337. to jump like a trout.
- 338. to shut up like an oyster.
- 339. to sponge one's way.

(14) INSECTS

Proverbial Phrases

- 340. a bee in his bonnet.
- 341. a bug in his ear.
- 342. a fly in the ointment.
- 343. as busy as a bee.
- 344. as cheerful as a cricket.
- 345. as crazy as a bedbug.
- 346. as full as a tick.
- 347. as gay as a butterfly.
- 348. as green as a grasshopper.
- 349. as happy as a cricket.
- 350. as lively as a cricket
- 351. as mad as a hornet.
- 352. as spry as a cricket.
- 353. knee high to a grasshopper.
- 354. like a moth in a candle.
- 355. to bring a hornet's nest about one's ears.
- 356. to buzz around like a gnat.
- 357. to buzz like a bee.
- 358. to chirp like a cricket.
- 359. to flit like a butterfly.
- 360. to put a flea in his ear.
- 361. to spit tobacco juice like a grasshopper.
- 362. to sting like a hornet.

(15) MISCELLANEOUS GROUP OF ANIMAL PROVERBIAL PHRASES

- 363. as blind as a mole.
- 364. as lousy as a pet coon.
- 365. as nimble as a goat.
- 366. as sly as a mink.
- 367. to be hidebound.
- 368. to be neither fish nor flesh nor good red herring.
- 369. to be the goat.
- 370. to get one's goat.
 Variants: to get one's nanny.
 to get one's angora.
- 371. to have a stomach like a goat.
- 372. to scamper like a goat.
- 373. to smell like a goat.
- 374. to smell like a skunk.
- 375. to turn tail.

III

NATURE

The proverbial lore grouped in this section is derived from nature in its various aspects. An exception is weather, which is treated separately. Natural objects, being a part of the environment of all Nebraskans, form a prolific source of the aphoristic sayings current in the state.

The inevitable passing of time is a matter of great interest; illustrative is the traditional saying, "Time and tide wait for no man." The phenomena of day and night have become a part of daily speech in such commonly used expressions as "The darkest hour is just before the dawn," and "The longest day will come to an end." Trees, flowers, streams, rocks, the moon, the sun, and stars all have qualities which are somehow applicable in a figurative way to the lives of human beings. These qualities have managed to get themselves established in many proverbs. Among the best known are: "Great oaks from little acorns grow," and "Every rose has its thorn."

Obviously, natural objects afford a fertile field for the production of proverbial phrases. Similes such as "as blue as the sky" and "as old as the hills" are very numerous.

Proverbs

1. A rolling stone gathers no moss.
2. A tree is known by its fruit.
3. Constant dripping wears away the hardest stone.
4. Diamond cut diamond.
5. Distance lends enchantment.
6. Do not whistle until you are out of the woods.
7. Every cloud has a silver lining.
8. Every rose has its thorn.
9. Far off fields are greenest.
10. Go to grass.
11. Great oaks from little acorns grow.
12. He is not out of the woods, yet.
13. He let no grass grow under his feet.
14. He went through the woods and through the woods and picked up a crooked stick at last.
15. He will never set the world on fire.
16. Ill weeds grow apace.
17. It beats all the way the weeds grow.
18. It goes against the grain.
19. It's a long road that has no turning.

- Variant: It's a long lane that has no turning.
 20. More water has gone under the bridge.
 Variant: More water has run down the hill.
 Both these expressions are used to indicate passage of time.
 21. Never is a long time.
 22. Oil and water will not mix.
 23. Steady pecking makes a hole in the rock.
 24. Stick to your bush.
 This proverb comes from berry picking.
 25. Still waters run deep.
 26. Take time by the forelock.
 27. The darkest hour is just before the dawn.
 28. The longest day will come to an end.
 29. The moon is made of green cheese.
 30. The night hath ears.
 31. There's nothing new under the sun.
 32. Time and tide wait for no man.
 33. Where there's smoke, there's some fire.
 34. You cannot see the woods for the trees.
 35. You never miss the water till the well runs dry.
 36. You can't get blood out of a turnip.

Proverbial Phrases

1. a bed of roses.
 2. a bolt from the blue.
 3. as bald as an egg.
 4. as big as all outdoors.
 5. as black as tar.
 6. as blue as indigo.
 7. as blue as the sky.
 8. as bold as brass.
 9. as brown as a berry.
 10. as clear as a crystal.
 11. as cool as a cucumber.
 12. as cross as two sticks.
 13. as deep as the sea.
 14. as dry as a bone.
 15. as dry as dust.
 16. as easy as falling off a log.
 17. as fleecy as a cloud.
 18. as free as air.
 19. as free as the wind.
 20. as good as gold.
 21. as gray as putty.
 22. as green as a gourd.
 23. as green as grass.
 24. as happy as the day is long.
 25. as hard as a rock.
 26. as heavy as lead.
 27. as high as heaven.
 28. as large as life.
- Sometimes the words, "and twice as natural" are added.
29. as light as day.
 30. as much alike as two peas in a pod.
 31. as old as the hills.
 32. as pure as a lily.
 33. as red as a beet.

34. as soft as thistle-down.
35. as sweet as a rose.
36. as tight as the bark on a tree.
37. as welcome as a snowball in hell.
38. as white as snow.
39. like a bump on a log.
40. not the only pebble on the beach.
41. small potatoes and few in a hill.
This is said of a thing of inferior quality.
42. sour grapes.
43. to be a clinging vine.
44. to be a diamond in the rough.
45. to be a hard nut to crack.
46. to be between the bark and the wood.
This saying is related in meaning to the one which follows it; it means to be between two evils.
47. to be between the devil and the deep blue sea.
48. to be between two fires.
49. to be born under a lucky star.
50. to be in clover.
51. to be rotten to the core.
52. to be the apple of his eye.
53. to be tied to a sour apple tree.
This means to be married to an undesirable person.
54. to blush like a rose.
55. to break the ice.
56. to call it a day.
57. to cut the ground from under his feet.
58. to dry up on the vine.
This is used to designate a non-progressive person.
59. to gild the lily.
60. to go through fire and water.
61. to go to seed.
62. to grow like a weed.
63. to lay a straw to.
64. to leave no stone unturned.
65. to look as if one had been drawn through a knot hole.
66. to look like the last rose of summer.
67. to pull the wool over his eyes.
68. to quake like an aspen leaf.
69. to rattle like peas in a pod.
70. to skate on thin ice.
71. to split a hair.
72. to steal his thunder.
73. to stick like a burr.
74. to turn night into day.

IV WEATHER

Proverbial lore about weather is less extensive in Nebraska than a consideration of the widespread interest and importance of the subject would lead one to expect. It seems reasonable to assume that a large body of proverbs on weather would be current in a state predominately agricultural in its interests, yet the following list of such expressions is comparatively small. The explanation is that weather folklore takes various forms; there are current signs, omens, and traditions, as well as proverbs, on the subject of weather. It is definiteness of form which differentiates a proverb from other folklore. Advice as to the proper time of planting, for example, is usually not proverbial because the wording of it is not constant, although the content may be fairly stable.

The majority of weather proverbs are prognostic in nature. This tendency toward forecasting is illustrated in the saying, "April showers bring May flowers." The practical value of such weather predictions is questionable. They often express in a general way obvious truths that have almost no prognostic value. That even those who use weather proverbs have a healthy doubt of their trustworthiness is indicated in the axiom, "All signs fail in dry weather."

The proverbs grouped here include not only the prophetic weather sayings which must be taken literally, but also aphorisms which are derived from weather conditions and have a figurative significance. Illustrative of these metaphorical weather proverbs are "After a storm comes a calm," and "Lightning never strikes twice in the same place." This figurative quality is especially apparent in the proverbial phrases listed in this section. Such expressions as "as right as rain" and "to look like a thunder cloud" are examples.

Rhymed proverbs seem to be more numerous in this group than in any other section. Doubtless they owe much of their longevity to use of rhyme.

Proverbs

1. A green Christmas makes a full church yard.
Variant: A mild winter makes a full church yard.
2. After a storm comes a calm.
3. All signs fail in dry weather.
4. April showers bring May flowers.
5. Evening red and morning gray help the traveler on his way;
Evening gray and morning red bring down rain upon his head.
6. Every cloud has a silver lining.
7. Friday is always the fairest or foulest.
8. If March comes in like a lamb, it will go out like a lion.
The reverse of this is also in current oral use.
9. If it rains on Easter, it will rain for seven Sundays in order.
10. It never rains but it pours.
11. It's an ill wind that blows nobody good.
12. Lightning never strikes twice in the same place.
13. Make hay while the sun shines.
14. Rain before seven; dry before eleven.
Variant: Rain at seven; fine at eleven.
15. Rainbow in the east, sign of a farmer's feast;
Rainbow in the west, sign of a farmer's rest.
16. Red sky in the morning, sailors take warning,
Red sky at night; sailor's delight.
17. Set your sail the way the wind blows.
18. She brings her sun dogs with her.
This saying is most common in the sandhill region where sun dogs are more prevalent than in other parts of the state. It refers to a woman who makes a good initial impression yet is suspected by the pessimistic of being less than she seems.
19. Snowbirds fly high.
This means they are flying in bunches, which indicates a storm.
20. Straws show the way the wind blows.
21. Sunshine when it rains, rain tomorrow.
22. The almanac-writer makes the almanac but God makes the weather.
23. The north wind doth blow
And we shall have snow.
24. There is always a calm before a storm.
25. Those who are weather-wise are rarely otherwise.
26. Thunder in the morning; thunder in the evening.
The figurative meaning of this is that if one wakes up feeling cross, he will be cross all day.
37. When a rain crow calls, there will be rain.
28. When the wind is in the east
It's good for neither man nor beast.
29. When the wind's in the west
The weather's at the best.

Proverbial Phrases

1. as fast as greased lightning.
2. as loud as thunder.
3. as right as rain.
4. in the merry month of May.
5. midsummer madness.
6. to find a pot of gold at the foot of the rainbow.
7. to have spring fever.
8. to keep something for a rainy day.

9. to know which way the wind blows.
10. to leave under a cloud.
11. to look like a thunder cloud.
12. to see a storm brewing.
This means to see trouble coming.
13. to steal another's thunder.
14. to think the sun rises or sets in a certain person.
15. to thunder.

V

WOMEN, LOVE, AND MARRIAGE

Love and marriage are experiences which are common to the majority of humankind; therefore they are productive of much proverbial lore. Love is a subject of universal interest, either sympathetic or hostile. Marriage, probably the most important of all human relationships, naturally looms large in the sayings of most languages.

The proverbs on love and courtship indicate a sympathetic point of view, on the whole. Such maxims as "All the world loves a lover," and "Love laughs at locksmiths," show a kindly tolerance. On the other hand, the aphoristic sayings dealing with marriage are hardly complimentary to that institution. "A young man married is a young man marred," and "Marriage is a lottery" manifest a distinctly unsympathetic attitude.

Feminine nature has always been the subject of much comment and controversy, some of which has been translated into proverbial lore and has become an established part of the language. Some sayings on women are of a gallant nature, commending their beauty and virtue, but a larger part are either patronizing in tone or openly disparaging. Especially held up to ridicule and censure are the alleged feminine traits of laziness and inconsistency. "A woman's 'no' means 'yes'" illustrates this point of view. Even beauty seems to be regarded as a doubtful asset; to the possessor of it is usually attributed some less desirable trait. Instances of this are "Beauty is but skin deep," and "Beauty never boiled a pot."

It is interesting to note that masculine nature, as distinct from human nature, does not provide material for a correspondingly large body of proverbs. This and the quality of the sayings on women seem to indicate that men, not women, originated most proverbial lore of this type.

Proverbs

1. A scolding wife and a smoking chimney are two bad companions.
2. A whistling girl and a crowing hen
Always come to some bad end.
3. A woman's hair is her crowning glory.

4. A woman's "no" means "yes."
5. A young man married is a young man marred.
Shakespeare used this proverb in a slightly different form: "A young man married is a man that's marred," in *All's Well That Ends Well*, II, iii.
6. Absence makes the heart grow fonder.
7. All is fair in love and war.
8. All the world loves a lover.
Variant: All mankind loves a lover.
9. Be off with the old love before you are on with the new.
10. Beauty is but skin deep.
11. Beauty never boiled a pot.
12. "Because" is a woman's answer.
13. Better be an old man's darling than a young man's slave.
14. Disguise our bondage as we will,
 'Tis woman, woman rules us still.
This quotation, which has become proverbial through use, is from Thomas Moore's poem, *Sovereign Women*.
15. Every Jack must have his Jill.
16. Faint heart ne'er won fair lady.
17. For if she will, she will, you may depend on it;
 And if she won't she won't, and there's an end to it.
18. Happy is the bride the sun shines on,
 Sorry is the bride the rain rains on.
19. Happy is the wooing that is not long in doing.
20. He that would the daughter win
 Must with the mother first begin.
21. He was married before he was dry behind the ears.
22. Her tongue is loose at both ends and tied in the middle.
23. If you change the name and not the letter
 You change for the worse and not for the better.
24. It is better not to spoil two families.
This is said when two unattractive persons marry.
25. It is better not to wed May with December.
26. It takes two to make a match.
27. Love is blind.
28. Love laughs at locksmiths.
29. Love me little, love me long.
30. Love will find a way.
31. Man's work is from sun to sun
 But woman's work is never done.
32. Many a heart is caught on the rebound.
33. Marriage is a lottery.
34. Marriages are made in heaven.
35. Marry in haste and repent at leisure.
36. None but the brave deserve the fair.
From Dryden's Ode, *Alexander's Feast*.
37. Old maids' children are always the best.
38. She has set her cap for him.
39. She wears the breeches at their house.
40. Sweets to the sweet.
This quotation is from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, V, i.
41. The course of true love never runs smooth.
42. The longest way round is the shortest way home.
43. 'Tis better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all.
This well-known saying we owe to Tennyson. It is found in the poem, *In Memoriam*, XXVII, 4.
44. Two is company, three's a crowd.

45. What will Mrs. Grundy say?

Mrs. Grundy has come to stand for a scandalmonger. This saying in the form of an interrogation is from a play by Thomas Morton, *Speed the Plough*, I, 1. 1798.

46. Where cobwebs grow

Beaux never go.

47. Wiving and hanging go by destiny.

This proverb was quoted by Shakespeare in *The Merchant of Venice*, II, ix.

"The ancient saying is no heresy,
Hanging and wiving go by destiny."

VI

VICE AND FOLLY

The comparatively large number of proverbs and proverbial phrases on vice and folly which are current in Nebraska bears witness to the truth of Shakespeare's generalization, "The evil that men do lives after them." In the appended list of proverbs, there are verbal monuments to the weaknesses of many generations of men. Proverbs on this subject are very numerous, not only because to sin is common to all mankind, but also because to speak ill of other persons is a characteristic tendency of human nature. Probably many of the adages in this group owe their longevity, and perhaps their very birth, to this not very commendable trait. The use of pejorative proverbial expressions offers a convenient and effective means of reviling one's enemies. Such sayings as "as false as hell," or "born to be hanged" are illustrations of the succinctness and extreme efficacy of this group.

Aphoristic sayings on vice and folly exemplify a realistic, and sometimes even a cynical point of view toward life. There is validity in Emerson's remark, "That which the droning world, chained to appearances, will not allow the realist to say in his own words, it will suffer him to say in proverbs without contradiction."¹

Many of these proverbs are admonitions and cautions against certain lines of conduct; these usually begin with "don't." Others deal with the inevitability of punishment following sin. Among the phrases, human frailties are subjected to vigorous but unflattering comparisons.

Although the proverbs in this group are often cynical, perhaps even malicious, they are essentially moral. In a discussion of the ethics of this type of folklore, Taylor comments, "Proverbs will not champion martyrdom or villainy."² The truth of this statement is evidenced by the list of proverbs and proverbial phrases which follows. Sin and folly are condemned with the force and potency characteristic of proverbial language.

¹ "Compensation" in *Essays*, First Series.

² Archer Taylor, *The Proverb*, p. 168.

Proverbs

1. A guilty conscience needs no accuser.
2. A lie that is half truth is the blackest lie.
3. A little education is a dangerous thing.
4. A sin confessed is half forgiven.
5. All hell has broken loose.
6. Ask me no questions and I'll tell you no lies.
7. Avoid all appearance of evil.
8. Beware of too great a bargain.
9. Confess and be hanged.
10. Don't bite the hand that feeds you.
11. Don't cross the bridge before you come to it.
12. Don't cut off your nose to spite your face.
13. Don't holler till you are hurt.
14. Don't judge others by yourself.
15. Don't kick a man when he is down.
16. Don't pay too much for your whistle.
This comes from a story of Benjamin Franklin in which he, in his own words, "paid dear, very dear for his whistle."
17. Don't put off till to-morrow what you can do to-day.
18. Don't sail too near the wind.
19. Don't trouble trouble till trouble troubles you.
20. Easy come, easy go.
21. Every man for himself and the devil take the hindmost.
22. Fools and children tell the truth.
23. Fool's names and fool's faces
Are always seen in public places.
24. Fools rush in where angels fear to tread.
25. Fortune favors fools.
26. Give a man an ill name and hang him.
Variant: Give a dog an ill name and hang him.
27. Give a thief rope enough and he'll hang himself.
28. Give him an inch and he'll take a mile.
29. Haste makes waste.
30. He can't see an inch before his nose.
31. He doesn't dare show his head.
32. He jests at scars who never felt a wound.
This proverb we owe to Shakespeare. It is found in *Romeo and Juliet*, II, ii.
33. He strokes with one hand and stabs with the other.
34. He that will not work shall not eat.
35. He wants the whole world with a fence around it.
Variants: He wants the whole world with a potato patch on the other side.
 He wants the world with a fence around it and a slice off the moon.
36. It is a sin to steal a pin.
37. It takes a thief to catch a thief.
38. Lazy wretch at table doth stretch.
39. Lost time can never be found again.
40. Man convinced against his will
Is of the same opinion still.
41. Murder will out.
42. Neither a borrower nor a lender be.
This proverb comes from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, I, iii.
43. Never let the sun set on your anger.
44. None so deaf as he who won't hear.
45. Of two evils, choose the lesser.

46. One may smile and smile and be a villain.

This exact wording is found in Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, I, v.

47. Procrastination is the thief of time.
 48. Show me a liar and I'll show you a thief.
 49. The devil some mischief finds for idle hands to do.
 50. The idle brain is the devil's workshop.
 51. The road to hell is paved with good intentions.
 52. There is honor among thieves.
 53. There is no fool like an old fool.
 54. They that touch pitch will be defiled.
 55. They who live in glass houses should not throw stones.
 56. Whatever is begun in anger ends in shame.
 57. What's yours is mine and what's mine is my own.
 58. When thieves quarrel, honest men get their dues.
 59. Who dances to the tune must pay the piper (fiddler).
 60. You are an honest man and I'm your uncle and that's two lies.
 61. You can't judge a book by its covers.
 62. You can't play with fire without burning your fingers.
 63. You can't play with pitch without getting your fingers black.

Proverbial Phrases

1. a fool's paradise.
2. all appearances of evil.
3. as drunk as a lord.
4. as false as hell.
5. as false as the devil.
6. as thick as two thieves.
7. by hook or crook.
8. man's inhumanity to man.

This phrase is from a line in Burns' poem, *Man That Was Made to Mourn*.

9. mean enough to steal the pennies from his dead grandmother's eyes.

Variant: mean enough to steal the pennies from a dead nigger's eyes.

This refers to the practice, formerly employed, of placing pennies on the eyes of a corpse to weight down the lids while they were still warm.

10. to add insult to injury.
11. to be afraid of one's own shadow.
12. to be born to be hanged.
13. to be caught red-handed.
14. to be generous to a fault.
15. to be more sinned against than sinning.
16. to be not so black as he is painted.
17. to be not worthy to be mentioned in the same breath.
18. to blow one's own horn.
19. to borrow trouble.
20. to cry out before one is hurt.
21. to cut and run.

This carries an implication of cowardice.

22. to damn with faint praise.
23. to get away with murder.
24. to give some one a black eye.
25. to have a heart as black as hell.
26. to have not enough sense to come in out of the rain.
27. to have not enough sense to pound sand in a rat hole.
28. to kill with kindness.

This is an old expression. Thomas Heywood wrote in 1603 a comedy named *A Woman Kille with Kindnesse*.

29. to play fast and loose.

30. to play with fire.

31. to play the fool.

32. to play whaley.

This expression, common in oral language, is not usually included in collections of proverbs. It means to do the wrong thing.

33. to stick one's head in the noose.

34. to tell tales out of school.

35. to tilt at windmills.

An incident in *Don Quixote* by Cervantes, furnishes the origin for this expression. It means to dissipate one's energy in futile combat.

36. to tramp all day in a half bushel.

This is said of a person who expends a great deal of energy but accomplishes little.

37. to wink at a thing.

38. when patience ceases to be a virtue.

VII

VIRTUE AND WISDOM

Less productive of proverbial lore than vice and folly, the topics of the preceding section, are the opposite human characteristics of virtue and wisdom. The tendency to talk less about the desirable qualities of men than about their faults and weaknesses seems to be universal. Virtue and wisdom are admirable but less interesting than vice and folly as topics of conversation; and it is in conversation that most proverbial lore gains its wide currency.

In Professor Archer Taylor's discussion of the ethical traits of proverbs, he states that "A sound skepticism pervades proverbial wisdom,"¹ and that "The most striking trait in the ethics of proverbs is the adherence to the middle way."² These two characteristics of proverbial lore are particularly well exemplified in the aphoristic sayings in the following group.

Many of the proverbs on virtue and wisdom are of an admonitory nature, encouraging the acquisition of the obvious virtues of honesty, industry, thrift, perseverance, and prudence. Kindness and tolerance are less commonly treated, although "Bear and forebear," and "Give the devil his dues" are well known. Industry and its associated virtue, perseverance, are the qualities most universally approved. Examples are "Better wear out than rust out," and "A used key is always bright." Second in the list of highly commended traits seems to be honesty.

Proverbs on wisdom are very scarce, indeed. "Great minds run in the same channel," and "Wise men change their minds; fools never" are among the few sayings celebrating the sagacity of mankind. The infrequency of proverbs on this subject indicates again the curious reluctance of human beings to laud their fellows. Ready to praise the judgment of individuals, they refuse to consider wisdom characteristic enough to be proverbial.

Interesting to notice in this group are the proverbs of a consolatory type which contain a kind of promise of reward

¹*The Proverb*, p. 169.

²*Ibid.*, p. 168.

of virtue. "Be good and you'll be happy," and the cheerful "You can't keep a good man down" illustrate this group. Commenting on proverbs of this kind, Professor Taylor says, "Just as reflective men see life in the light of eternal truths and formulate them in apothegms and aphorisms, so the folk seeks and finds support in the common humanity of proverbial philosophy."³

Proverbs

1. A patch beside a patch is neighborly
But a patch upon a patch is beggarly.
2. A task well begun is half done.
3. A thing worth doing at all is worth doing well.
4. A used key is always bright.
5. A word to the wise is sufficient.
6. All work and no play make Jack a dull boy,
But all play and no work make Jack a mere toy.
7. An honest confession is good for the soul.
8. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
9. Appearances are deceitful.
10. Be good and you'll be happy.
11. Be just before you are generous.
12. Be sure you are right; then go ahead.
13. Bear and forbear.
14. Better bend than break.
15. Better late than never.
In complete contradiction to this is the saying, "Better never late."
16. Better wear out than rust out.
17. Brevity is the soul of wit.
This saying we owe to Shakespeare. It is found in *Hamlet* II, ii.
18. Charity begins at home.
19. Discretion is the better part of valor.
20. Eternal vigilance is the price of liberty.
21. Experience is a dear school but fools learn in no other.
Variant: Experience is the best teacher.
22. First come, first served.
23. Give the devil his dues.
24. Give to the world the best you have and the best will come back to you.
This quotation is from an American poem, *Life's Mirror*, by Madeline Bridges (Mary Ainge DeVere), whose work appeared 1870-1915.
25. God helps him who helps himself.
26. Great minds run in the same channels.
27. Grin and bear it.
28. Handsome is as handsome does.
Variant: Pretty is as pretty does.
29. He will stick to it if it takes all summer.
30. He wouldn't steal a pin.
31. His word is as good as his bond.
32. Honesty is the best policy.
33. If at first you don't succeed, try, try again.
34. It is never too late to mend.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 169.

35. It will all be the same in a hundred years.
36. It's a poor rule that won't work both ways.
37. It's no use trying to please everybody.
Variant: You can't please everybody.
38. Keep your tongue within your teeth.
39. Know yourself.
This is a proverb of Greek origin. It was the motto of the oracle of Apollo at Delphi.
40. Knowledge is power.
41. Let well enough alone.
42. Live and learn.
43. Live and let live.
44. Make hay while the sun shines.
45. Man proposes, God disposes.
46. Many a truth is spoken in jest.
47. My mind is a kingdom to me.
This proverb has a long and varied literary history. Its poetic form is, "My mind to me a kingdom is."
48. No man can live unto himself.
49. One good turn deserves another.
50. One to-day is worth two to-morrows.
51. Opportunity knocks but once at every man's door.
52. Practice makes perfect.
53. Practice what you preach.
54. Rome was not built in a day.
This is one of the very few proverbs current in Nebraska which has a historic background.
55. Second thoughts are best thoughts.
56. Slow and steady does it.
57. Some are wise and some otherwise.
58. Success is two per cent inspiration and ninety-eight perspiration.
59. Sweet are the uses of adversity.
This proverb is found in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, II, i.
60. Tell the truth and shame the devil.
61. The good die young.
62. The middle path is the safe path.
63. There are two sides to every story.
64. There is no royal road to learning.
65. There is no time like the present.
66. There is nothing that costs so little nor goes so far as courtesy.
67. They who cannot have what they like should learn to like what they have.
68. To err is human, to forgive divine.
Alexander Pope's phrasing in his *Essay on Criticism*.
69. To the pure, all things are pure.
70. Truth is stranger than fiction.
71. Virtue is its own reward.
72. Well begun is half done.
73. What can't be cured.
Must be endured.
74. Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise.
This is the last line of the poem, *On a Distant Prospect of Eton College*, by Thomas Gray.
75. Where there's a will, there's a way.
76. Where there's room in the heart, there's room in the house.
77. Wise men change their minds; fools never.
78. You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must forge one out for yourself.
80. You can't keep a good man down.

VIII

MONEY

Money and its allied subjects, poverty and wealth, are of universal interest. Even a cursory reading of collections of proverbs of various nations reveals the widespread human regard for the possession of means. That Nebraskans are not excluded from this general concern for worldly wealth is demonstrated by the list of proverbs and proverbial phrases on the subject current in their state.

A study of the history of these expressions shows that but few of them are of recent origin; the majority have come from the proverbial lore of England or other countries. Such sayings as "Penny wise; pound foolish" have become current in Nebraska, although there is no pound in the system of currency used here, probably because there is no other expression which conveys the same meaning in such a pointed manner. Singular, too, is the tenacity with which the phrase, "as rich as Croesus" has kept its place in the language, since Croesus lived in the sixth century B. C., and has been succeeded by many far wealthier men.

Many old English proverbs on this subject emphasized the superiority of the man of wealth over his less affluent fellow. An instance of this is the saying, "poor but honest." Not many expressions of this type have taken root in Nebraska soil; perhaps this may be accounted for by the ideals of democracy held and propagated by the pioneers of the state. "It is no sin to be poor," and "The more he has, the more he wants" illustrate this tendency away from veneration for the rich man. A feeling of respect and strong approval for the money itself has not died down, however, as is attested in the proverbs, "Money talks," and "Money makes the mare go."

The widespread use of money doubtless accounts for its fertility in providing comparisons to illustrate and illuminate traits of human nature. "To feel like thirty cents" and "as bright as a dollar" are examples of this large group.

Proverbs

1. A bad penny always turns up.
2. ~~A~~ fool and his money are soon parted.
3. ~~A~~ penny saved is a penny earned.

4. All is not gold that glitters.
Shakespeare was quoting an old international proverb when he used this in *The Merchant of Venice*, II, vii.
5. Beggars cannot be choosers.
6. Better an empty purse than an empty head.
7. Beware of little expense.
8. Every man has his price.
Variant: All men have their price.
9. He that waits for a dead man's shoes may long go barefoot.
10. He who buys what he does not need will often need what he cannot buy.
11. His money burns a hole in his pocket.
12. If you would know the value of money, try to borrow some.
13. It is no sin to be poor.
14. Money is a good servant but a bad master.
15. Money makes the man.
16. Money makes the mare go.
17. Money makes the pot boil.
18. Money talks.
19. My tastes do not fit my pocketbook.
20. Nothing makes money faster than money.
21. Penny wise; pound foolish.
22. Possession is nine points of the law.
23. Poverty is no disgrace.
To this are sometimes added the words, "but being ashamed of it is."
24. Put a beggar on horseback and he will ride to the devil.
25. Riches and wealth will soon fade away.
But manners and learning will never decay.
26. Riches have wings.
This is probably a shortened version of the Biblical proverb, "Riches certainly make themselves wings."
27. Save at the spigot and waste at the bung.
28. Take care of the dimes and the dollars will take care of themselves.
29. The more we have, the more we want.
30. That's too much sugar for a cent.
31. Them as has gets.
32. Waste not; want not.
33. Wilful waste brings woeful want.

Proverbial Phrases

1. a beggar on horseback.
2. a penny for your thoughts.
3. as bright as a dollar.
4. as rich as a Jew.
5. as rich as Cræsus.
6. ill gotten gain.
7. not for love nor money.
8. to bank on a thing.
9. to be born with a silver spoon in one's mouth.
10. to be head over heels in debt.
11. to be not worth a continental.
12. to be not worth a plugged nickel.
13. to be not worth a rap.
"Rap" means a coin of infinitesimal value. Dean Swift in his *Drapier's Letters* (1755) mentions a rap as a counterfeit coin, worth about half a farthing, which passed current for a half penny in Ireland in the 18th century, owing to the scarcity of genuine money.
14. to be poor but honest.
15. to be poor but proud.

16. to be up to his eyes in debt.
17. to buy something for a song.
18. to buy something for nothing.
19. to buy something on a shoe string.
20. to feel like thirty cents.
21. to get more than one bargained for.
22. to have not a penny to bless one's self with.
23. to have not a penny to one's name.
24. to have not a penny to rub against another.
25. to live from hand to mouth.
26. to make both ends meet.
27. to make capital of something.
28. to pay him back in his own coin.
29. to sow money.

Variant: to scatter money.

These expressions mean to spend money very freely.

30. wouldn't give a nickel for a car load.
 31. wouldn't give a nickel with a hole in it.
- Variant: wouldn't give a plugged nickel.

IX

HOME LIFE

Home life is a many-faceted subject. Included in the section dealing with it are proverbs and proverbial phrases on the allied topics of household tasks, child nature and such acts as eating, usually carried on in the home.

The home itself, widely celebrated in verse and prose, is the theme of rather fewer proverbs than might be expected. Some express an affectionate regard for home, e.g., "East or west, home is best." Others such as "A home is a place to eat and sleep" indicate a more casual attitude. Sayings on child nature, as distinct from human nature in general, are very few.

From household tasks have come such well-known proverbs as "A new broom sweeps clean," and "Too many cooks spoil the broth." It is interesting to note that the phase of the homemaker's work which is most productive of proverbial lore is cooking; sewing and cleaning excite much less general interest, evidently. The tools of the housekeeper, the needle, the broom, and various cooking utensils, loom large in our everyday proverbial allusions.

Eating and sleeping are common to all mankind; therefore they yield a large number of well-known sayings. Closely related to these two topics is the subject of health; in fact, some admonitions in regard to eating and sleeping might be classified as health proverbs, e.g., "An apple a day keeps the doctor away" and "One hour's sleep before midnight is worth two hours' afterward."

Among the proverbial phrases dealing with home life, food provides material for a large number of similes. Illustrative of this group are "as easy as pie" and "as flat as a pancake." The three foods oftenest mentioned in these sayings are bread, pie, and cake. Household duties are represented in such proverbial phrases as "to wash one's dirty linen in public" and "to put on the shelf."

Proverbs

1. A burnt child dreads the fire.
2. A man's home is his castle.
This is related to the proverb, "In my own home, I am king."
3. A new broom sweeps clean.
4. A pitcher that goes off to the well is broken at last.
5. A stitch in time saves nine.
6. A watched kettle never boils.
7. An apple a day keeps the doctor away.
A predecessor of this American expression is the English proverb:
 "Eat an apple on going to bed
 And you'll keep the doctor from earning his bread."
8. As you have made your bed, so you must lie in it.
9. Bread is the staff of life.
An interesting old English version of this proverb is, "Bread is the staff
 of life but beer is life itself."
10. Children and fools tell the truth.
11. Children should be seen and not heard.
12. Cut your sail according to your cloth.
13. Do not bite off more than you can chew.
14. Do not put all your eggs in one basket.
15. Early to bed and early to rise
 Makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.
This is one of Benjamin Franklin's adages included in his preface to
Poor Richard Improved.
16. East or west, home is best.
17. Eat to live, do not live to eat.
18. Every tub must sit on its own bottom.
19. Half a loaf is better than no bread at all.
20. Health is wealth.
21. His bread is buttered on both sides.
22. Home is where my hat is off.
23. How sharper than a serpent's tooth is a thankless child.
This quotation is from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, I, iv.
24. Hunger is the best sauce.
25. It will all come out in the wash.
26. Little chests may hold great treasures.
27. Little pitchers have big ears.
28. Many men dig their graves with their teeth.
29. One hour's sleep before midnight is worth two hour's after.
30. Silks and satins put out the kitchen fire.
31. Sweep your own doorstep off first.
32. That's meat and drink to me.
33. That might happen in the best regulated family.
34. The fat is in the fire.
35. The nearer the bone, the sweeter the meat.
36. The pot calls the kettle black.
37. The proof of the pudding in the eating thereof.
38. There's many a slip 'twixt the cup and the lip.
This is an old saying coming from the Greeks.
 Its translated form is: "Many things happen between the cup and the
 upper lip."
39. There's no place like home.
Occasionally in oral usage, this is prefixed by the phrase, "Be it ever so
 humble," from the song, *Home Sweet Home*, by John Howard Payne
 (1823). It is related to the English proverb, "Home is home, though
 never so homely."
40. This won't buy the baby any shoes nor pay for the ones he has.
41. Too many cooks spoil the broth.

42. We must all eat a peck of dirt before we die.
43. Welcome the coming and speed the parting guest.
44. What is home without a mother?
45. What's one man's meat is another man's poison.
46. You cannot eat your cake and have it.
47. You cannot spoil a rotten egg.
48. Your cake is all dough.

Proverbial Phrases

1. a pot boiler.
2. a tempest in a teapot.
3. as black as chimney soot.
4. as easy as a pie.
5. as flat as a pancake.
6. as if butter would not melt in his mouth.
7. as innocent as a new-born babe.
8. as red as a new-born baby.
9. as short as pie crust.
10. as slow as molasses in January.
11. as soft as butter.
12. as thick as three in a bed.
13. as tight as the paper on the wall.
14. as warm as toast.
15. to add fuel to the flame.
16. to be at loose ends.
17. to be cut over the same pattern.
18. to be half-baked.

This is an abbreviation of an English proverbial expression, "to be put in with the bread and taken out with the cakes, to be half-baked."¹

19. to be in hot water.
20. to be not worth his salt.
21. to be on pins and needles
22. to be tied to one's mother's apron strings.
23. to bring home the bacon.
24. to carry water on both shoulders.
25. to eat humble pie.
26. to eat one out of house and home.
27. to eat his bread.

This is related to the phrase, "to sleep under his roof." They both mean to accept another's hospitality.

28. to eat one's heart out.
29. to eat one's words.
30. to fetch some one over the coals.
Variant: to rake some one over the coals.
31. to get into hot water.
32. to get out on the wrong side of the bed.
Variant: to get out of bed with the wrong foot first.
33. to go like a house afire.
34. to go like clock work.
35. to go to bed supperless.
37. to go to pot.
38. to hang by a thread.
39. to have a bellyful.
40. to have a bitter pill to swallow.
41. to have a family skeleton.

¹ G. L. Apperson, *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*, p. 376. 1929.

- 42. to have a finger in the pie.
- 43. to have a mind like a sieve.
- 44. to jump out of the frying pan into the fire.
- 45. to know on which side one's bread is buttered.
- 46. to make one's mouth water.
- 47. to make the pot boil.
- 48. to make up out of whole cloth.
- 49. to pin him down.
- 50. to pin one's faith to a thing.
- 51. to pour water in a sieve.
- 52. to put on the shelf.

In keeping with the American preference for shortened forms, this has been abbreviated to the expression, "to shelve."

- 53. to put one's finger in the pie.
- 54. to raise the roof.
- 55. to return to one's mutton.

This means to return to whatever one was doing.

- 56. to rise betimes.
- 57. to sleep like a log.
- 58. to sleep like a top.
- 59. to sleep with one eye open.
- 60. to spill the beans.
- 61. to stew in one's own juice.

Variant: to fry in one's own grease.

- 62. to take it with a grain of salt.
- 63. to take one's medicine.
- 64. to take the cake.
- 65. to take two bites at a cherry.

This is used of a very fastidious person.

- 66. to wash one's dirty linen in public.

Variant: to air one's dirty linen in public.

X

PROFESSIONS AND TRADES

The characteristics peculiar to specific professions and trades are neither well enough known nor of enough general interest to cause them to be very productive as sources of proverbial lore. Every profession or trade has its own particular jargon and set of idiomatic expressions, but such sayings are usually employed only by persons who are actually engaged in a profession or trade. It is only occasionally that one of these expressions establishes itself as a part of the language of the folk. Examples of these rare instances are "Stick to your last," derived from the cobbler's work, and "The shoemaker's child goes barefoot."

Proverbial phrases finding their origin in the professions and trades are more common than proverbs proper. Among the artistic professions, the actor's is particularly prolific of stock sayings. "To give the show away" and "to take one's cue" have come to possess a figurative significance understood and applied by many who are not directly concerned with the stage. Military and commercial life each contribute several phrases and many professions and trades are the sources of one or two widely current expressions.

Some of the sayings in this list are obviously of recent origin, notably those referring to trades in which modern mechanical devices are used, e.g., "to blow off steam" and "to be a live wire."

Proverbs

1. A fair exchange is no robbery.
2. A poor workman always blames his tools.
3. Always tell your doctor and your lawyer the truth.
4. Business is business.
5. If "ifs" and "ands" were pots and pans,
There were little need of tinkers.
6. It's a poor workman who loses his tools.
7. It's all in the day's work.
8. Jack of all trades; master of none.
9. Keep thy shop and thy shop will keep thee.
10. Politics make queer bedfellows.
11. Stick to your last.
12. Stick to your text.
13. The die is cast.

14. The postman takes a nice, long walk on his vacation.
This ironic saying is used to refer to one who cannot get away from his business even in his leisure hours.
15. The shoemaker's child goes barefoot.
Variant: The shoemaker's wife goes barefoot.
16. There are tricks in all trades.
17. Watch your step.
18. You're the doctor.
This is an Americanism, meaning, "You are directing this."

Proverbial Phrases

(1) FROM THE ARTISTIC PROFESSIONS

1. a song and a dance.
2. the drama of life.
3. to act a part.
4. to be a puppet.
5. to be in the limelight.
Variant: to be in the spotlight.
6. to be the power behind the scenes.
7. to change one's tune.
8. to give some one a big hand.
9. to give the show away.
10. to have the leading role.
11. to put the finishing touches on a thing.
12. to set the stage for an event.
13. to stage a come-back.
14. to stage a farce.
This is related in meaning to the more common "to make a scene."
15. to steal some one's stuff.
16. to take one's cue.
17. to take one's last curtain.

(2) FROM MILITARY LIFE

18. to bear the brunt of the attack.
19. to fall into line.
20. to pass muster.
21. to soldier on the job.
22. to stand one's ground.
23. to steal a march on another.

(3) FROM UNCLASSIFIED TRADES AND PROFESSIONS

24. a baker's dozen.
25. as busy as a cranberry merchant.
26. as sober as a judge.
27. to be a live wire.
28. to be bought and sold.
This means to be betrayed.
29. to blow off steam.
30. to come under the hammer.
This expression comes from the language of the auctioneer.
31. to feel sold.
The meaning of this phrase is to feel chagrined.
32. to get more than one bargained for.
33. to go at a thing hammer and tongs.
34. to have a screw loose.
35. to have a thing in black and white.
36. to have one's work cut out for one.

- 37. to have other irons in the fire.
- 38. to hit the nail on the head.
- 39. to keep one's nose to the grindstone.
- 40. to knock off work.
- 41. to lay down on the job.
- 42. to make the best of a bad bargain.
- 43. to mean business.
- 44. to put through the mill.
- 45. to strike a balance.
- 46. to talk shop.
- 47. to throw on the scrap heap.
This is often abbreviated to the phrase "to scrap."
- 48. to turn the scales.

XI

SPORTS AND GAMES

The emphasis placed on sports and games in modern life is reflected in the sizable body of proverbial lore on these subjects current in Nebraska. Some of these, such as "to be in at the killing" and "to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds," are heritages from old England, but the majority are of comparatively recent origin and many of them are conspicuously American. Most of the phrases on hunting and shooting came from England or there are expressions parallel in meaning to them in English proverbial lore. Obviously, however, the sayings derived from the national sport of baseball are distinctively American in origin and use.

This popular game of baseball has produced several sayings that are widely current even among persons unfamiliar with the game. Boxing, wrestling, and horse-racing are other sources of a considerable number of proverbial sayings. Phrases derived from football and golf are fewer than the popularity of these games would indicate.

Card playing, perhaps because it involves participators, rather than spectators, is the most productive of current aphoristic sayings. Most of these may refer to any card game but some had their origin in specific games, e.g., "to have a poker face" and "to euchre."

All of the phrases in this group are figurative in nature; they are not expressions concerning sports and games but sayings derived from those activities applicable to many fields of life. It will be noted that the list is made up almost entirely of phrases rather than of proverbs proper.

Proverbial Phrases

(1) FROM BASEBALL

1. Play ball.

This expression in very wide current use, means to go ahead with the business in hand.

2. right off the bat.

3. to be a south paw.

4. to be caught with one's foot off base.

5. to get to first base.

This is most often used in a negative form; e.g., "He will never get to first base."

6. to have one's inning.
7. to have two strikes on him.
8. to make a home run.

This is used of a success of any kind. A characteristic American abbreviation of this, also used figuratively, is "to homer."

9. to strike out.
10. to umpire.

(2) FROM BOXING AND WRESTLING

11. at the clang of the gong.
12. to be an intellectual heavy-weight.
13. to be down but not out.
14. to give a body blow.
15. to go to the mat with.
16. to have him on the hip.
17. to hit below the belt.
18. to take the count.
19. to throw up the sponge.

(3) FROM HORSE RACING

20. to back the wrong horse.
21. to be left at the post.
22. to be neck and neck.
23. to be out of the running.
24. to be the runner-up.
25. to get in under the wire.
26. to hold the whip hand.
27. to win by a nose.

(4) FROM CARD PLAYING

28. to call his bluff.
29. to euchre.
30. to expose one's hand.
31. to get the dirty end of the deal.
32. to have a poker face
33. to have all the cards stacked against one.
34. to have an ace up one's sleeve.
35. to hold the winning cards.
36. to lay all one's cards on the table.
37. to pass the buck.

To pass the buck is to pass the deal.

38. to play one's ace first.
39. to play one's trump card.
40. to stand pat.

This term comes from the game of poker.

41. to trump one's partner's ace.

FROM HUNTING AND SHOOTING

42. as sure as shooting.
43. to back track.

This expression means to retrace one's steps or to withdraw from a position. In one usage it comes from the actions of hunting dogs.

44. to bag one's game.
45. to bark up the wrong tree.
46. to be after bigger game.
47. to be in at the killing.
48. to fall into the trap.
49. to have shot all one's ammunition.

- 50. to hit the bull's eye.
- 51. to lead some one a merry chase.
- 52. to make a random shot.
- 53. to miss the mark.
- 54. to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds.
- 55. to shoot in the dark.
- 56. to shoot wide of the mark.

(6) FROM MISCELLANEOUS GAMES AND SPORTS

- 57. at this stage of the game.
- 58. to be in the swim.
- 59. to be on the safe side.
- 60. to be thrown for a loss.
- 61. to delay the game.
- 62. to even up old scores.
- 63. to go unto a huddle.
- 64. to have much (or little) at stake.
- 65. to keep one's eye on the ball.
- 66. to kick a goal.
- 67. to make a hole in one.
- 68. to play safe.
- 69. to play the game.
- 70. to play with loaded dice.

This phrase means to cheat.

- 71. to run a race.

This is applied to almost every kind of a contest, particularly political.

- 72. to stake everything on one throw.

XII

PROVERBIAL APOTHEGMS

Almost all proverbial lore owes much of its effectiveness to the figurative language in which it is phrased. Apothegms, however, are merely truisms which have gained currency through much repetition. The distinguishing characteristic of such a group of proverbs is their lack of metaphor. Professor Archer Taylor defines the apothegm as, "merely a bald assertion which is recognized as proverbial only because we have heard it often and because it can be applied to many different situations."¹ "What has happened once can happen again" and "Mistakes will happen" are proverbs containing no figurative language to make them vivid, but they represent something universal in human experience and wisdom and therefore have become a permanent part of the language.

It is difficult to discover the origin and to trace the development of such truisms. Generalizations concerning the more obvious truths of life have been made by all peoples. Some such generalizations have lived for centuries; others are long dead and forgotten. Although the majority of apothegms may be justly considered mere platitudes, they assume a connotative significance from long usage and from their associations. Such very commonplace sayings as, "There must be a first time for everything" and "What's done is done" are very effective when used in certain situations. These platitudes gain a certain dignity as well as emotional significance with age.

The number of apothegms current in Nebraska is not large. It is surprising to note what a very small per cent of all the proverbial lore used by Nebraskans has no figurative basis.²

Proverbs

1. A genius is born, not made.
2. A man can die but once.
3. A place for everything and everything in its place.

¹ *The Proverb*, p. 5.

² The grouping and discussion of this section of Nebraska proverbial lore were suggested by the section on "Proverbial Apothegms" in Professor Archer Taylor's book, *The Proverb*, pp. 5-10.

4. All men must die.
5. Boys will be boys.
6. Christmas comes but once a year.
7. Circumstances alter cases.
8. Dead men tell no tales.

This proverb "arose in a ruthless, quarrelsome society. Although we are perhaps inclined to associate it with the moral code of a pirate, it must be older than Captain Kidd and belong to a somewhat higher social level, for it is already an established proverb in Elizabethan times."³

9. Enough is enough.

Sayings which approximate this in meaning but are not apothegms are "Enough is as good as a feast," and "Enough is as good as plenty."

10. Everybody's business is nobody's business.
11. Everything comes to him who waits.
12. If you can't be good, be careful.
13. If you want a thing well done, do it yourself.
14. It is easier said than done.
15. It is never too late to learn.
16. It's all in the day's work.
17. It's hard to know when to keep still.
18. Live and learn.
19. Long expected comes at last.
20. Many a true word is spoken in jest.
21. Many hands make light work.
22. Mistakes will happen.
23. Necessity knows no law.
24. No man can lose what he never has had.
25. Seeing is believing.
- Variant: To see is to believe.
26. The young may die; the old must die.
27. There is a time for everything.
28. There is no harm in asking.
29. There is nothing certain in this world but death.

Sometimes in oral usage, the words "and taxes" are added to this proverb.

30. There must be a first time for everything.
- Variant: Everything must have a beginning.
31. To-morrow never comes.
32. Troubles never come singly.
33. Unlooked for often comes.
43. What has happened once can happen again.
35. What's done is done.
36. What you don't know won't hurt you.
37. You can never tell until you've tried.
38. Wonders will never cease.

³ Taylor, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

XIII

MISCELLANEOUS PROVERBIAL LORE

There is current in Nebraska a large body of proverbial utterances which do not fall into any of the preceding classifications. These are listed together in this section. Whenever it seemed practicable, those related in meaning were brought together under a subheading.

This miscellaneous group reveals the wide range of the subject-matter of proverbial lore. Almost every conceivable field of human activity is represented. Sea life, clothing, instruments and tools, books and stories, and even forms of punishment yield a sizable number. The largest of these minor groups is concerned with friends and relatives. Most of these proverbs exhibit a distinctly sympathetic attitude toward friendship, e.g., "A friend in need is a friend indeed." A few, however, such as the cynical, "Save a man from his friends," question its value. Typical examples of phrases referring to parts of the body, another group, are "on the other hand" and "to have one's nose out of joint."

The number derived from history is very small; the obvious reason is the transitory nature of historical subject-matter. Many expressions which were on every tongue as recently as the period of the World War have now passed into oblivion, and almost no proverbial monuments of earlier historical happenings remain. Another rather unproductive source is the narrative. Aside from the expressions which come from the *Æsopic* fables (listed in this collection with animal proverbs) there are few which are indebted to stories for their origin.

The history of many of these unclassified proverbs and proverbial phrases is difficult to trace. In numerous cases the origin is entirely unknown and in others the explanations offered seem to be of doubtful validity. Some phrases, the origin of which is uncertain are "to be at sixes and sevens" and "to burn one's bridges behind one."

Occasionally, isolated proverbs are derived from literature. An individual author may say a thing in so aphoristic and

pithy a manner that his words get themselves into oral circulation and eventually become proverbial. Illustrative of these sayings of individual invention are Shakespeare's "There is a divinity that shapes our ends" and Pope's "To err is human; to forgive divine."

Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases

(1) FROM CLOTHING

1. Clothes make the man.
Sometimes the reverse of this is heard: "Clothes do not make the man."
2. If the shoe fits, wear it.
3. That is where the shoe pinches.
4. The shoe is on the other foot.
5. You cannot judge by appearances.
6. as comfortable as an old shoe.
7. as common as an old shoe.
8. as soft as silk.
9. to be all wool and a yard wide.
10. to be down at the heels.
11. to be hand in glove with.
12. to be out at the elbows.
13. to die with one's boots on.
14. to give him the mitten.
15. to keep a thing under one's hat.
16. to laugh up one's sleeve.
17. to pin one's faith to another man's sleeve.
18. to wear one's heart on one's sleeve.

(2) ON FORMS OF PUNISHMENT

19. to be crucified.
20. to be driven from pillar to post.
Taylor offers the conjecture that this expression refers "to the treatment of Christ before the crucifixion."¹
21. to be on the rack.
22. to come out at the little end of the horn.
Hazlitt gives an interesting explanation of the origin of this expression. The horn, he explains, was a sixteenth century instrument of torture through which the victim was pulled. By the time he reached the little end, he was sadly elongated and compressed.²
23. to put the screws on.
24. to run the gauntlet.

(3) FROM PARTS OF THE BODY

25. as plain as the nose on your face.
26. at one's fingers' ends.
27. at one's tongue's end.
Variant: on the tip of one's tongue.
28. cold hand; warm heart.
29. not to let one's right hand know what one's left hand is doing.
30. on the other hand.
31. to be a sight for sore eyes.
32. to be on one's last legs.
33. to follow one's nose.

¹ Taylor, *The Proverb*, p. 193.

² See Hazlitt, *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*, pp. 467-468.

34. to go at a thing, tooth and toe nail.
35. to have him under one's thumb.
36. to have more wits (or courage) in one's little finger than another has in his whole body.
37. to have not a leg to stand on.
38. to have one foot in the grave.
39. to have one's brains in one's feet.
This is used of a person who is not very intelligent but who is an excellent dancer.
40. to have one's hands full.
41. to have one's nose out of joint.
42. to keep a civil tongue in one's head.
43. to laugh on the wrong side of one's mouth.
44. to laugh out of the corner of one's mouth.
45. to lead some one by the nose.
46. to let a thing go in at one ear and out at the other.
47. to let your head save your heels.
48. to put one's shoulder to the wheel.
49. to say a thing with one's tongue in one's cheek.
50. to step on some one's toes.
51. to sup sorrow through one's nostrils.
52. to take it out of his skin.
53. to talk one's leg off.
54. to wind some one around one's little finger.
55. to use elbow grease.

(4) ON SEA LIFE

56. A drowning man will catch at a straw.
57. A small leak may sink a great ship.
58. Weight is what sinks the ship.
59. any port in a storm.
60. like trying to drink the ocean dry.
61. to be in the same boat with.
62. to fly under false colors.
This probably comes from piratical sea life.
63. to go on the rocks.
64. to pour oil on troubled waters.
65. to put in an oar.
66. to rest on one's oars.
Related in meaning to this is the expression, "to rest on one's laurels."
67. to sail close to the wind.
68. to steer clear of.
69. to walk the plank.

(5) ON BOOKS AND STORIES

70. A good tale may be marred in the telling.
71. A tale never loses in the telling.
72. Thereby hangs a tale.
That this was current in Shakespeare's time is evidenced by the fact that it appears in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, I, iv, and in Fletcher's *Two Noble Kinsmen*, III, iii.
73. You cannot judge a book by its binding.
74. a twice told tale.
75. to make a long story short.
76. to read a lecture to.
77. to read between the lines.
78. to turn over a new leaf.

(6) ON TOOLS AND INSTRUMENTS

79. as dull as a hoe.
80. as fit as a fiddle.
81. as hard as nails.
82. as hollow as a drum.
83. as keen as a razor.
84. as keen as a two-edged sword.
85. as sharp as a knife.
86. as sharp as an ax.
87. as smart as a steel-trap.
88. as smart as a whip.
89. as tight as a drum.
90. as true as steel.
91. not worth a fiddlestick.
92. to call a spade a spade.
93. to harp on a thing.
- Variant: to harp on the same string.
94. to have an ax to grind.
95. to have two strings to one's bow.
96. to hit the nail on the head.
97. to lay it on with a trowel.
98. to play second fiddle.

(7) ON FRIENDS AND RELATIVES

99. A friend in need is a friend indeed.
100. A friend to everybody is a friend to nobody.
101. A man is known by the company he keeps.
102. A daughter is a daughter all her life;
A son is a son till he gets a wife.
103. A mother is a mother all her life;
A father is a father till he gets a new wife.
104. Blood is thicker than water.
105. Choose your friends like your books; few but choice.
106. Familiarity breeds contempt.
This proverb has several different forms. The biblical proverb, "A prophet is not without honor save in his own country" is related to it. So also is "No man is a hero to his valet."
107. Friends must part.
108. In union there is strength.
109. It's a wise father that knows his own son.
110. It takes two to make a bargain.
111. It takes two to make a quarrel.
112. Like begets like.
113. Like father, like son.
114. Like master, like man.
115. Old friends and old wine are best.
116. Save a man from his friends.
An extended form of this rather cynical proverb is quoted by Hazlitt: "Save a man from his friends and leave him to struggle with his enemies."³
117. The way to lose a friend is to lend him money.
118. What is bred in the bone will out in the flesh.
119. You may know him by the company he keeps.
120. You never know your friends till you are in need.

³ *Op. cit.*, p. 374.

(8) UNCLASSIFIED MISCELLANEOUS PROVERBS

121. A chain is no stronger than its weakest link.
122. A little nonsense, now and then,
Is relished by the best of men.
123. A man is as young as he feels.
124. A poor excuse is better than none.
125. A thing of beauty is a joy forever.
This quotation is from the poem *Endymion* by John Keats.
126. Actions speak louder than words.
127. All roads lead to Rome.
128. All things come to him who waits.
129. All's well that ends well.
130. Bad news travels fast.
131. Barkis is willin'.
Barkis is a character in Dickens' *David Copperfield*.
132. Coming events cast their shadows before.
This is in line from the poem, *Lochiel's Warning*, by Thomas Campbell.
133. Comparisons are odious.
134. Distance lends enchantment.
Given currency by Thomas Campbell's poem, *Pleasures of Hope*.
135. Fact is stronger than fiction.
Variant: Truth is stranger than fiction.
136. Forewarned is forearmed.
137. Half of the world doesn't know how the other half lives.
138. History repeats itself.
139. If the mountain will not come to Mahomet,
Mahomet will have to go to the mountain.
140. Ignorance of the law excuses nobody.
141. Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery.
142. Justice is blind.
143. Laugh and grow fat.
144. Laugh and the world laughs with you.
This is a line from the poem, *The Way of the World*, by Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1855-1919).
145. Least expected is sure to happen.
146. Let bygones be bygones.
147. Long expected comes at last.
148. Misery loves company.
149. Misfortunes never come singly.
150. Necessity is the mother of invention.
151. Necessity knows no law.
152. Never say die.
153. No news is good news.
154. Once bitten; twice shy.
155. Out of sight is out of mind.
156. Put that in your pipe and smoke it.
157. Raw dabs make fat lads.
158. Silence gives consent.
159. So goes Monday, so goes all the week.
160. Speak of the devil and he'll appear.
Variant: Speak of the angels and you'll hear the flutter of their wings.
161. Speech is silver but silence is golden.
162. Sticks and stones will break your bones but names will never hurt you.
This contradicts the proverb, "Give a dog an ill name and you may as well hang him."
163. Take while the taking is good.

164. Talk is cheap.
165. The better the day, the better the deed.
166. The die is cast.
167. The end justifies the means.
168. The mills of the gods grind slow but they grind exceeding fine.
This is an old Greek saying, used by Euripides and by the Roman poet Juvenal.
169. The tables are turned.
170. The third time is the charm.
171. The wish is father to the thought.
172. There are three generations from shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves.
Taylor quotes an interesting English predecessor of this American proverb: "There is nobbut three generations atween clogs and clogs."⁴
173. There is no accounting for tastes.
An amusing variant of this is, "'Everybody to his own notion', said the old woman as she kissed the cow."
174. There is safety in numbers.
175. There's a divinity that shapes our ends.
This well-known saying we owe to Shakespeare. It is found in *Hamlet*, V, ii.
176. There's the rub.
Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, III, i, is the source of this.
177. Variety is the spice of life.
In Cowper's poem *The Task*, Bk. II, 1. 506 is found the line, "Variety's the very spice of life."
178. What you want in the nation of to-morrow put in the schools of to-day.
179. When in Rome, do as the Romans do.

(9) UNCLASSIFIED MISCELLANEOUS PHRASES

180. a turn for the better.
181. a yellow streak.
182. as black as ink.
183. as bright as a button.
184. as broad as it is long.
185. as clear as a bell.
186. as dull as ditch water.
187. as fast as hops.
188. as pleased as Punch.
This English phrase probably owes its longevity to its alliterative quality.
189. as queer as Dick's hatband.
This singular proverbial phrase came from England but English collectors of proverbs seem to know nothing of its origin. The phrase continues to the effect that the band went three times around the hat but would not meet at last.
190. as slick as a whistle.
191. as sure as death.
192. as sure as God made little apples.
193. as white as death.
194. at his wit's end.
195. at sixes and sevens.
The origin of this phrase is not known certainly. One explanation which is not verified is that it is derived from the game of backgammon.
196. before one could say "Jack Robinson."
Compare the popular song, *Jack Robinson*, current in the early nineteenth century. Its last line is, "And he was off before you could say Jack Robinson."⁵
197. between you and me and the gate post.
198. by fits and starts.

⁴ *Op. cit.*, p. 11.

⁵ John Ashton, *Modern Street Ballads*, p. 256. 1888.

199. fit for a king.
200. for all the world.
201. from the sublime to the ridiculous.
202. good riddance to bad rubbish.
203. in the nick of time.
204. more than you could shake a stick at.
205. more truth than poetry.
206. on the spur of the moment.
207. once in a life time.
208. other things being equal.
209. six of one and half dozen of the other.
210. the irony of fate.
211. the long and the short of it.
212. till the crack of doom.
213. times without number.
214. to be a fifth wheel.
215. to be a hail-fellow, well met.
216. to be a nine day's wonder.
217. to be an Indian giver.
218. to be full of one's self.
219. to be high time for a thing.
220. to be in a brown study.
This was "originally simply 'in a study' and this form persisted for centuries after the inexplicable 'brown' had been introduced."⁶
212. to be in the seventh heaven.
222. to be last but not least.
223. to be tarred with the same stick.
Related to this in meaning is "to be kicked by the same mule."
224. to be dead spit of.
Variant: to be spittin' image of.
 These singular expressions refer to similarity in looks. They are used mostly of the resemblance between a child and its parent. Probably from "as alike as two spits," "to the the spit and image of." See *American Speech*, V, 496.
225. to be the worse for wear.
226. to be up to snuff.
227. to beggar description.
228. to blow hot and cold with the same breath.
229. to build castles in the air.
Variant: to build castles in Spain.
230. to burst of envy.
231. to bury the hatchet.
This is one of the few expressions remaining in our language which came from association with the Indian.
232. to carry coals to Newcastle.
233. to carry through to the bitter end.
234. to come to the end of one's rope.
235. to come to the end of the road.
236. to dance attendance on.
237. to find some hole to creep out of (or into).
238. to give as good as one gets.
239. to give some one a wide berth.
240. to give tit for tat.
241. to have heaven on earth.
242. to have hell on earth.
243. to have the last word.
244. to know what's what.

⁶ Apperson, *English Proverbs and Proverbial Phrases*, p. 70.

- 245. to leave one in the lurch.
- 246. to let him whistle for it.
- 247. to look high and low for a thing.
- 248. to look nine ways for Sunday.

Variant: to look both ways for Sunday.

These expressions mean to squint. Hazlitt quotes this amusing sentence from Witt's *Recreations*, 1640, (repr. 1817, p. 168). "He was born in the middle of the week, and looked baath ways for Sunday." ⁷

- 249. to murder the king's English.
- 250. to put a spoke in his wheel.
- 251. to read the riot act.

Taylor explains that this "refers to the actual reading aloud which precedes the dispersing of a mob in England." ⁸

- 252. to reckon without one's host.
- 253. to rub it in.

Variant: to rub salt into the wound.

The first of these which is the more common of the two is probably a shortened form of the second.

- 254. to run amuck.

Hazlitt gives an interesting explanation of this expression which comes from a custom of the Malayans. The Malay *amok* means rushing in a frenzy to the commission of indiscriminate murder. ⁹

- 255. to set one's heart on a thing.
- 256. to sit tight.
- 257. to smell to heaven.
- 258. to split hairs.
- 259. to step high, wide and handsome
- 260. to storm the castle.
- 261. to take French leave.
- 262. to take some one down a peg.
- 263. to talk a blue streak.
- 264. to throw dust in his eyes.
- 265. to walk chalk.
- 266. to walk out on.
- 267. to work like a Trojan.
- 268. too much of a good thing.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. 482.

⁸ *Op. cit.*, p. 192.

⁹ *Op. cit.*, p. 490.

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