

CUT AND COME AGAIN

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Cut is an onomatopoeic word -- its sharp sound suggests hidden sinister meanings. Cutpurses have disappeared -- a purse being slightly passee -- and their place taken by pickpockets. Cutthroats -- not all of whom are overcharging shopkeepers -- seem to have increased, thanks to the encores of certain political parties.

Fortunately, cutting a man dead inflicts no physical injury -- only a supposed insult -- on him. If the man is a creditor, or an income tax collector, cutting him is, indeed, a pis aller. The alternative is to cut and run.

Students nowadays are prone to cutting lectures and devoting themselves to more "trendy" occupations like transport-burning in many parts of the world. And, it is no longer considered the thing to cut one's coat according to one's cloth. For coats today are meant to be turned, rather than worn. But who shall condemn either the students or the political defectors? Condemnation cuts no ice with anyone, just as blessings butter no parsnips.

Just as students are cutting their lectures, businessmen are engaged in cutting their losses. They have precious little room for ploys and gambits, and have to cut things fine. Sir Andrew Aguecheek in Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" was, indeed, fond of cutting capers. He was, however, always caught on the wrong foot when Sir Toby Belch was cutting jokes. When will the days of cut-and-come-again return? Nevermore, it would seem.

In a life of countless difficulties, one must get used to cuts and thrusts, but cuts imply much more than severances. A person who is a cut above his fellows does not generally let anyone forget it. And, in these days of closed, single-track minds, a person who appreciates arguments which cut both ways will take some finding. Parti pris blinds one to points of view other than one's own. The Marxists and the militant radicals are liable to cut up rough if they are gently reminded that they have neither the monopoly nor the means of social amelioration.

Apart from all that, this is very much the era of short cuts. Particularly, short cuts in the shape of cribs, cram-books, and coaches or tutors. To the flunkey, the straight line of hard work seems to be a long detour. He prefers the short cut of buttering up. In boxing, however, the famed upper cut is not the short cut. The short cut is a straight right in the solar plexus.

A cut is most succulent in a cutlet and most inviting in a cut-price store.

The unkindest cut of all in history was made by Brutus when he stabbed Caesar to the detriment of Rome and, indeed, everybody. But Antony's was also a cutting comment, reaching "the heart of the matter" in Graham Greene's language.

Demetrius in "Titus Andronicus" confers another kind of immortality on cut:

What man! more water glideth by the mill
Than wots the miller of; and easy it is
Of a cut loaf to steal a shive, we know.