

Above par, below par (popular).

To be *above* or *below par* signifies that the person using the expression is in better or worse health than usual. It is derived from the commercial term which refers to the price of stock, in that case the meaning being "average" or "level." *Above par* signifies also tolerably drunk; possessed of money beyond one's actual expense.

Abracadabra (medical), applied to any senseless gibberish or extravagant notion. Organic evolution has been stated to be the new *abracadabra* of science.

The French use the epithet *abracadabrant*, which is best rendered by "stunning" or "flabbergasting." *Abracadabra* was a cabalistic word in the Middle Ages. It was written in successive lines in the form of an inverted triangle, each line being shorter by a letter than the one above, till the last letter *A* formed the apex of a triangle at the bottom. It was said to have magical power, and when hung around the neck it was supposed to act as a charm against ague. It is thought to be derived from the Hebrew *ab*, father, *ruach*, spirit, and *dabar*, word. According to this derivation it represents the Trinity.

Abraham (popular), a cheap and trashy slop shop.

Abraham's balsam or **hempen elixir** (provincial), execution by

hanging. So named from the hemp tree, a kind of willow, that is called *Abraham's balm* by botanists. By the gypsies it is called *Father's balm*, and it is used by them as a preservative of chastity. There is a peculiar stone in the marshy districts of the North of England called *Abraham's stone*; a piece of this stone is worn by the lower classes round their necks as a charm against ague, thus following the tradition that Abraham wore a precious stone round his neck to preserve him from disease; when Abraham died, God placed this stone in the sun.

Abraham cove (thieves), a mean, beggarly, despised thief, or rather sneak. Decker writes in 1608 that "The *Abraham cove* is a lustie strong rogue who walketh with a slade about his guarrons" (a sheet about his body). The Hon. Justice Matsel, of New York, in the *Rogue's Lexicon*, registers *Abraham cove* "a naked or poor man; a beggar in rags" (*Grove*).

Abraham grains (thieves), a publican who brews his own beer.

Abraham-man or **Abram-man** (ancient cant), a naked vagabond, a lame or sick beggar, a begging impostor. The Abraham ward in Bedlam had certain inmates who were allowed to go begging on behalf of the hospital, and were called