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Constable from Barnstable. No luck yet; library still picketed.

Since this might be from a nursery rhyme, thought it might prove fruitful to check that audience. Called two intelligent mothers of intelligent children (the children 8 to 10, young enough to remember every syllable of everything they've ever heard, old enough to remember where it might be found) - all real readers. Mother A remembered the phrase instantly but no more than just that; checked several books where she expected to find it, without result. Is sure she heard it as part of a question on a quiz show years ago, which suggests it's something not too well known. Mother B and her daughter - available for instant consultation - had never heard of it; to her the phrase suggests a nonsense rhyme - a good thought.

As soon as it's possible again to get into the library, which has a large children's section, we'll check nursery and nonsense rhymes and - where I think it might be run down - books on the origins of this sort of thing.