

Me off! Though it should break you! Come along,
 Pay up! he said. 'But I've done nothing wrong!'
 'You pay at once, or by the sweet St Anne,'
 He said, 'I'll carry off your frying-pan
 For debt, the new one, owed me since the day
 You cuckolded your husband. Did I pay
 For the correction then or did I not?'
 'You lie!' she said. 'On my salvation! What?
 Correction? Whether as widow or as wife;
 I've never had a summons in my life;
 I never cuckolded my poor old man!
 And as for you and for your frying-pan
 The hairiest, blackest devil out of Hell
 Carry you off and take the pan as well!'
 Seeing her kneel and curse, the devil spoke:
 'Now, Mother Mabel, is this all a joke,
 Or do you really mean the things you say?'
 'The devil,' she said, 'can carry him away
 With pan and all unless he will repent!'
 'No, you old cow, I have no such intent,'
 The summoner said, 'there's no repentance due
 For anything I ever had of you.
 I'd strip you naked, smock and rag and clout!'
 The devil said, 'What are you cross about,
 Dear brother? You and this pan are mine by right.
 You yet shall be in Hell with me tonight,
 Where you'll know more about our mystery
 Than any Doctor of Divinity.'
 And on the word this foul fiend made a swoop
 And dragged him, body and soul, to join the troupe
 In Hell, where summoners have their special shelf.
 And God, who in the image of Himself
 Created man, guide us to Abraham's lap,
 And make this Summoner here a decent chap!
 My lords, I could have told you, never fear,
 Had I the time to save this Summoner here,
 Following texts from Christ and Paul and John
 And many teachers who are dead and gone,

Of torments that are fit to terrorize
 Your hearts, though tongue of man can scarce devise
 Such things, or in a thousand winters tell
 The pain of that accursed house of Hell.
 Watch therefore, and pray Jesus of his grace
 To keep us out of that accursed place
 And ward off Satan, tempting us from glory;
 Ponder my words, reflect upon my story.
 The lion's always on the watch for prey
 To kill the innocent, if so he may,
 And so dispose your heart that it withstand
 The fiend who would enslave you in his band.
 He may not tempt you, though, above your might,
 For Christ will be your champion and your knight.
 And, Summoners, flee the sins that so beset you,
 And learn repentance ere the devil get you.

THE SUMMONER'S TALE

The Summoner's Prologue

The Summoner rose in wrath against the Friar
 High in his stirrups, and he quaked with ire.
 He stood there trembling like an aspen leaf.
 'I've only one desire,' he said, 'it's brief,
 And one your courtesy will not deny;
 Since you have heard this filthy friar lie,
 Let me refute him. I've a tale to tell!
 This friar boasts his knowledge about Hell,
 And if he does, God knows it's little wonder;
 Friars and fiends are seldom far asunder.
 Lord knows you must have often heard them tell
 Of how a friar was ravished down to Hell

Once in a vision, taken there in spirit.
 An angel led him up and down to ferret
 Among the torments – various kinds of fire –
 And yet he never saw a single friar
 Though he saw plenty of other kinds of folk
 In pain enough. At last this friar spoke:
 “Sir, are the friars in such a state of grace,”
 He said, “none ever come into this place?”
 “Why, yes,” the angel answered, “many a million!”
 And led him down to Lucifer’s pavilion.
 “Satan,” the angel said, “has got a tail
 As broad or broader than a barge’s sail.
 Hold up thy tail, thou Satan!” then said he,
 “Show forth thine arse and let the friar see
 The nest ordained for friars in this place!”
 Ere the tail rose a furlong into space
 From underneath it there began to drive,
 Much as if bees were swarming from a hive,
 Some twenty thousand friars in a rout
 And swarmed all over Hell and round about,
 And then came back as fast as they could run
 And crept into his arse again, each one.
 He clapped his tail on them and then lay still.
 And after when the friar had looked his fill
 On all the torments in that sorry place
 His spirit was restored by Heaven’s grace
 Back to his body again and he awoke.
 But all the same the terror made him choke,
 So much the devil’s arse was in his mind,
 The natural heritage of all his kind.
 God save you all except this cursed Friar,
 For that is all the prologue I require.’

The Summoner’s Tale

My lords, there lies – in Yorkshire, as I guess –
 A marshy district known as Holderness,

In which a friar, a limiter, went about
 To preach his sermons and to beg, no doubt.
 And on a certain day it so befell,
 When he had preached in church, and cast his spell
 With one main object, far above the rest,
 To fire his congregation with a zest
 For buying trentals, * and for Jesu’s sake
 To give the wherewithal for friars to make
 Their holy houses, where the Lord is dowered
 With truest honour, not to be devoured
 By those to whom there is no need to give
 Like those endowed already, who can live,
 Thanks be to God, in affluence and glory.
 ‘Trentals,’ he said, ‘can fetch from Purgatory
 The souls of all your friends, both old and young,
 Yes, even when they’re very quickly sung
 – Not that a priest is frivolous or gay
 Because he only sings one mass a day –
 Release the souls,’ he thundered, ‘from the pit,
 Deliver them from the flesh-hook and the spit!
 What agony to be dawed, to burn, to bake!
 Be quick, exert yourselves, for Jesu’s sake!’
 When he had finished all he had to say,
 With *qui cum Patre** off he went his way.
 When folk had put their pennies in the plate
 He used to go away, he wouldn’t wait.
 With scrip and pointed staff uplifted high
 He went from house to house to poke and pry
 And beg a little meal and cheese, or corn.
 His comrade had a staff was tipped with horn,
 And bore two ivory tablets, wax-anoointed,
 Also a stylus elegantly pointed.
 He always wrote the names down as he stood
 Of those who gave him offerings or food
 (Prentence of praying for them by and by).
 ‘Give us a bushel of barley, malt or rye,
 A wee God’s cookie, then, a slice of cheese,
 It’s not for us to choose, but as you please;

A penny to say mass, or half a penny,
 Some of your brawn perhaps — you haven't any? —
 Well then, a bit of blanket, worthy dame,
 Our well-beloved sister! There's your name,
 It's down. Beef? Bacon? Anything you can find!
 A sturdy varlet followed them behind —
 The servant for their guests, and bore a sack,
 What they were given he carried on his back.
 Once out of doors again and business done,
 He used to plane the names out, every one
 That he had written on his waxen tables.
 He'd served them all with fairy-tales and fables.
 'No, there you lie, you Summoner!' cried the Friar;
 'Peace! said our Host. 'Who cares if he's a liar?
 Tell on your story! Let the Friar keep still
 Never you spare him, Summoner!' 'Nor I will.'
 On went this friar from house to house till he
 Came upon one where he was wont to be
 Better refreshed than anywhere in town.
 The householder was sick and lying down.
 Bedridden on a couch the fellow lay.
 'Deus hi! Friend Thomas, how are we today?'
 The Friar said, taking pains to soften
 His voice politely; 'God protect you! Often —
 How often! — I've sat upon this very bench to steal
 Your kindness and enjoyed a merry meal!
 And, from the bench, he drove away the cat,
 And, laying down his pointed staff, his hat,
 And then his scrip, he settled softly down.
 His comrade was off walking in the town;
 He and his varlet had gone off to see
 The hostel where they aimed, that night, to be.
 'O my dear master,' said this ailing man,
 'How have things been with you since March began?
 Ain't seen you this last fortnight now, or more.'
 'God knows,' he answered, 'I have laboured sore
 And, more especially, have said in care
 Of your salvation many a precious prayer,

And for our other friends, but let that pass.
 I went this morning to your church for Mass,
 And preached according to my simple wit,
 It wasn't all on texts from Holy Writ,
 For that's too hard for you as I suppose,
 And I prefer to paraphrase or gloze.
 Glozing's a glorious thing, and anyway
 "The letter killeth" as we clerics say.
 And so I taught them to be charitable
 And spend their goods where it is reasonable;
 And there I saw your wife — Ah, where is she?
 'Out in the yard, I think, or ought to be,'
 The fellow said; 'she'll come, she can't be far.'
 'Why, sir, you're welcome, by St John you are!'
 The woman said, 'I hope you're keeping sprightly?'
 Up from his bench the friar rose politely
 Embracing her — the clasp was somewhat narrow —
 And kissed her sweetly; chirping like a sparrow
 As his lips parted. 'Ma'am,' he said, 'I'm fine.
 Your servant, Ma'am,' he said, 'in all that's mine.
 Thanks be to God that gave you soul and life
 I haven't seen a prettier little wife
 In all the church today, upon my word!
 'Well, God amend defects! the woman purred.
 'At any rate you're welcome, I'll be bound.'
 'My warmest thanks! That's what I've always found.
 If I may trespass — you're so very kind —
 On your good nature; if you wouldn't mind,
 I want to talk to Thomas here; you know
 These curates are so negligent and slow
 At groping consciences with tenderness.
 I study how to preach and to confess,
 Earnestly read St Peter and St Paul
 And walk about to fish and make a haul
 Of Christian souls, pay Christ his proper rent,
 And if I spread His word I am content.'
 'Now, my dear master, by your leave,' said she,
 'Scold the man well, for by the Trinity,

He is as irritable as an ant,
 Though he has everything a man can want.
 I try to keep him warm at night, I squeeze him,
 Put my leg over him, or arm, to please him,
 And all he does is grunt, like boar in sry!
 I get no other sport of him, not I.

No way of pleasing him at all, I promise.
 'O Thomas, *je vous dis*, O Thomas, Thomas!
 That is the devil's work and must be chidden.
 Anger's a thing by Heavenly God forbidden;

I mean to speak of that, a word or so.'

'Now, master,' said the wife, 'before I go,
 What would you like for dinner? What would suit?'

'Well, Ma'am,' he answered, '*je vous dis sans doute*,
 If I could have a little chicken-liver

And some of your soft bread – the merest shiver –
 And then a pig's head roasted – but, do you see?

I won't have any creature killed for me –
 It would be homely and sufficient fare.

The sustenance I take is very spare;
 You see, my spirit draws its nourishment

Out of the Bible, and my body's spent
 In pains and prayers; my stomach is destroyed.

'However, Ma'am, you mustn't be annoyed
 To hear me speak as frankly as I do,

For these are things I tell to very few.'
 'Before I leave you, sir, you ought to know,'

She said, 'my baby died two weeks ago,
 Just after you left town on visitation.'

'I know. I saw his death by revelation,'
 Replied the friar, 'in our dormitory.

I saw the little fellow borne to glory,
 I dare say it was less than half an hour

After his death indeed. To God the power!
 Our sexton and our infirmarian,

They saw it too, both friars, boy and man,
 These fifty years, thank God. They now are free

To walk alone, they've reached their jubilee.*

I rose at once, in fact the entire place
 Rose, and the tears were trickling down my face;
 There was no noise, no clattering bells were rung,
 But a *Te Deum* – nothing else – was sung.

Save that I made an act of adoration
 To Christ, to thank Him for His revelation.
 For I assure you both, believe me well,
 Our orisons are more effectual

And we see more of Christ's most secret things
 Than common people do, or even kings.
 We live in poverty and abstinence

But common folk in riches and expense
 On food and drink, and other foul delight;
 But we condemn all worldly appetite.

'Dives and Lazarus lived differently,
 And different their guerdon had to be.
 Whoever prays must fast, he must keep clean,
 Fatten his soul and make his body lean.

We follow the Apostle; clothes and food
 Suffice us though they may be rough and rude,
 Our purity and fasting have sufficed

To make our prayers acceptable to Christ.
 'Moses had fasted forty days and nights
 Before Almighty God, upon the heights

Of Sinai, came down to speak with him,
 And with an empty stomach, frail of limb,
 Moses received the law Jehovah drew

With his own finger; and Elijah too
 When in Mount Horeb, ere he could have speech
 With that Almighty Lord, who is the leech

Of life, had fasted long on contemplation.
 'Aaron no less, under whose domination
 The temple was, and other Levites too,

When they approached the temple to renew
 Their services and supplications, they
 Refrained from drinking – drinking, that's to say,

That might have made them drunk – attending there
 In abstinence, in watching and in prayer

Lest they should die. Take heed of what I say,
Unless the priest is sober who would pray
For you — but there! I've said enough of it.

'Jesus our Lord, it says in Holy Writ.
Fasted and prayed, and patterned our desires,
And so we mendicants, we simple friars
Have wedded poverty and continence,
Charity, humbleness and penitence,
And persecution too for righteousness;
Pure, merciful, austere, but quick to bless
Though weeping often. Therefore our desires
— I'm speaking of ourselves, mendicant friars —
Are more acceptable to God, more able
Than yours, with all your feasts upon the table.

'I speak the truth: gluttony was the vice
That first flung Adam out of Paradise,
And man was chaste in Eden, I may mention.

'But listen to me, Thomas, pay attention.

Though there's no text exactly, I suppose,
Yet in a manner of speaking, if I gloze
A little, you will see our Lord referred
Especially to friars in the word

"Blessed are the poor in spirit." Think and look,
Study the gospels, search the Holy Book,
And see if it be liker our profession

Than theirs who swim in riches and possession.
Fie on their pomp! Fie on their gluttony!
Their ignorance is a disgrace to see:

'Jovinian makes a good comparison,
'Fat as a whale and waddling like a swan,"

They stink of wine like bottles in a bar,
How reverent their supplications are!

When they say prayers for souls their psalm of David
Is just a 'Burp! *Cor meum eructavit!*'*

Who follows on the gospel, tracks the spoor
Of Christ, but we the humble, chaste and poor,
The doers of the word, not hearers only?
And as a hawk springs up into the lonely

Regions of heaven, so the prayer aspires
Of charitable, chaste and busy friars,

Takes flight and enters in at God's two ears.

O Thomas, Thomas! Let me say with tears

And by that patron who is called St Ives,

Where were your hope to be as one that thrives

If you were not our brother? Day and night

Our Chapter prays the Lord to send you might,

Strengthen your body, girdle it and belt it!

'God knows,' the fellow said, 'I haven't felt it.

So help me Christ, I've spent a lot in hire,

These last few years, on various kinds of friar,

Aye, many a pound; and yet I'm none the better.

I've poured it out. I'm very near a debtor.

Farewell my gold, it's gone; no more to go!

'O Thomas!' said the friar. 'Did you so?

What need to seek out "various kinds of friar"?

Who, with a perfect doctor, could require

To seek out other doctors in the town?

Your own inconsistency has let you down.

Do you suppose our convent, and I too,

Are insufficient, then, to pray for you?

Thomas, that joke's not good. Your faith is brittle.

You're ill because you've given us too little.

'Ah! give that convent half a quarter of oats!'

'Ah! give that convent four and twenty groats!'

'No, Thomas, Thomas, it should not be so!

What is a farthing worth if split in twelve?

An undivided thing is (if you delve

Into your wits) stronger than when it's scattered.

Thomas, by me you never shall be flattered.

You're trying to get our work for nothing, eh?

What does Almighty God who made us say?

"The labourer is worthy of his hire."

Thomas, you know it's not that I desire

Your treasure for myself; it should be spent,

Seeing our convent is so diligent

In prayer for you, to build the church of Christ.
 Thomas! If you would learn or be enticed
 To learn what good there is in building churches,
 Your namesake's life will further your researches,
 St Thomas of India. There you lie in ire,
 The devil having set your heart on fire,
 And chide this foolish, innocent woman here,
 Your wife, so meek, so patient, so sincere.
 So, Thomas, please let this be understood:
 No wrangling with your wife! It's for your good.
 And take this thought away to fill your head
 Touching this matter; wisely was it said:
 "Then be not as a lion in thy house,
 A terror to thy household, tyrannous,
 Nor such that thine acquaintance flees away."
 I charge you, Thomas, once again and say,
 Beware of her that in your bosom sleeps;
 Beware the serpent that so slyly creeps
 Amidst the grass and stings with subtlety.
 Beware, my son, and listen patiently,
 For twenty thousand men have lost their lives
 For wrangling with their lovers and their wives.
 And since you have so holy and meek a wife,
 What, Thomas, is the need for all this strife?
 No serpent is so cruel, truth to tell,
 If one should tread upon his tail, so fell
 As women who have given way to ire.
 Vengeance is then the sum of their desire.
 Ire is a sin, one of the deadly seven,
 Abominable unto God in Heaven,
 And a destruction to yourself, none quicker.
 Every illiterate parson, every vicar
 Can tell that ire engenders homicide.
 For ire is the executor of pride.
 Were I to say what ire can bring in sorrow
 To man, my tale would last until tomorrow.
 So day and night I pray as best I can
 God send no power to an angry man!

Great harm can come of it, great misery,
 When angry men are set in high degree.
 'Once on a time an angry potentate,
 Seneca says, bore rule over a state.
 A certain day two knights went riding out
 And fortune willed that it should come about
 That one of them returned, the other not.
 The knight was brought to judgement on the spot;
 This judge gave sentence: "You have killed your friend.
 You are condemned to death and that's the end."
 And to another knight was standing by
 He turned and said, "Go, lead him out to die."
 And so it happened as they went along
 To the appointed place, towards the throng
 There came the knight that was reported dead.
 So it seemed best that both of them be led
 Together back before the judge again.
 "My lord," they said, "the knight has not been slain;
 His friend is guiltless. As you see, they thrive."
 "You all shall die," said he, "as I'm alive!
 You first, the second, you, and you the third!"
 And turning to the first he said this word:
 "I have condemned you. You must therefore die."
 Then to the next, "You too, and this is why:
 Your comrade clearly owes his death to you."
 Then to the third he turned and said, "You too;
 You had my orders; they were not fulfilled."
 And so it was the three of them were killed.
 'An angry man and drunken was Cambysses,
 Who took great joy in showing off his vices.
 A knight, it happened, in his company,
 Given to virtue and morality,
 In private conference with him began:
 "A lord is lost if he's a vicious man,
 And drunkenness is filthy to record
 Of any man, especially a lord.
 Many the eye and ear that takes good care
 To spy on lords, they can't be certain where.

For God's love be more temperate in your drink.
For wine will rob you of your power to think
And incapacitate your members too."

"You'll see," said he, "the opposite is true,
And prove it by your own experience
That wine has no such power of offence.
There is no wine so strong as to deny
Strength to my hand or foot or sight of eye."

'And out of spite he drank as much, nay, more
A hundred times than he had drunk before
And right away this angry, cursed wretch
Gave an immediate command to fetch
This noble's son, and there he made him stand;
Then snatching up a bow into his hand
Drew string to ear, and aiming it with care
He shot him with an arrow then and there.

"Now have I got a steady hand or not?
Now have my mental powers gone to rot?"
The tyrant said, "Has wine destroyed my sight?"
'Why should I tell the answer of the knight?
His son was slain, there is no more to say.
Dealing with lords be careful in your play;
You sing *Placebo!* I shall if I can,

Except when talking to some poor old man.
To tell their vices to the poor is well,
But not to lords, though they should go to Hell.
'Cyrus the Persian was an evil-liver
And given to anger; he destroyed the river
Gyson in which his horse was drowned, upon
His expedition to take Babylon.

That river in his rage was so diminished
Women could wade it by the time he'd finished.
'Solomon teaches us as no one can:
'Make thou no friendship with an angry man;
And with a furious man take not thy way,
Lest thou repent it'; there's no more to say.
'Leave anger, Thomas, brother, have a care!
You'll find me just. I'm like a joiner's square.

That devil's knife, O draw it from your heart!
It is your anger causes you to smart.
Make your confession to me if you can.'

'No, by St Simon,' said the ailing man,
'The curate came and shrived me here today.
I told him everything I had to say.'

There's no more need to speak of it,' said he,
'Unless I care to, from humility.'

'Then give me of your gold to make our cloister,'
Said he, 'for many a mussel, many an oyster,
When other men eat well and fill their cup,
Has been our food, to build our cloister up.
And yet we've hardly finished the foundation.

There's not a tile as yet or tessellation
Upon the pavement that we hope to own,
And forty pound is owing still for stone.

'Now, Thomas, help, for Him that harrowed Hell,
For otherwise we shall be forced to sell
Our books, and if you lacked our predication
The world would quickly fall to desolation.
To cheat it of our sermons and bereave
The world of us, dear Thomas, by your leave,
Were worse than to bereave it of the sun.
Who teaches and who works as we have done?
And for a long, long time,' he said, 'because
There have been friars since Elijah was;
Elisha too was one (the books record)
In charity with us, I thank our Lord.

Now Thomas, help, for holy charity!
And down at once he went upon his knee.

The ailing man was nearly mad with ire;
He would have very gladly burnt the friar,
Him and his lying speech and false profession.

'I'll give you what I have in my possession,
Such as it is,' he said, 'I have none other.
You said a moment back I was your brother?
'Believe it,' said the friar, 'and none better;
I brought your wife our sealed Fraternal Letter!'

'Well now,' he said, 'there's something I can give
Your holy convent, if I am to live.

And you shall have it in your hand to own
On one condition and on one alone,
That you divide it equally, dear brother,
And every friar to have as much as other.
But swear by your profession to the thing,
And without fraudulence or cavilling,

'I swear it by my faith!' the friar said,
Clasping the hand of the poor man in bed.

'My hand on it! In me shall be no lack.'
'Well, then, reach down your hand along my back,'

The sick man said, 'and if you grope behind,
Beneath my buttocks you are sure to find

Something I've hidden there for secrecy.'
'Ah!' thought the friar, 'that's the thing for me!'

And down he launched his hand and searched the cleft
In hope of profiting by gift or theft.

When the sick man could feel him here and there
Groping about his fundament with care,
Into that friar's hand he blew a fart.

There never was a farmhorse drawing cart
That farted with a more prodigious sound.

Mad as a lion then the friar spun round,
'You treacherous lout!' he cried, 'God's bones and blight!

You did it on purpose! It was done for spite!
You shall pay dearly for that fart, I say!'

The sick man's servants, hearing the affray,
Came leaping in and chased away the friar,

And off he went still spluttering with ire
To find his comrade where he kept his goods.

He looked like a wild boar out of the woods,
Gnashing his teeth, he was so furious.

He strode along towards the manor-house
Where lived a man of honour and possession

Who used to seek the friar in confession.
This worthy man was the manorial lord;

As he was sitting eating at his board

In came the friar in a towering rage

Almost past speech for anger by that stage,
But in the end 'God bless you, sir,' said he.

The lord stared back. 'Hey, *benedictus!*
It's Friar John! What sort of world is this?

It's easy seen that something is amiss!
You look as if the thieves were in the wood;

Sit down and say if I can do you good;
I'll settle matters for you, if I can!'

'I have received an insult,' said the man.
'God give you joy — below here, in your village,

In all the world there is no serf at tillage
So poor but would have held in execration

And counted it as an abomination
The affront that I've been offered in your town.

And yet, what grieves me most, this hoary down
Blasphemed against our holy convent too!'

'Now, master,' said the lord, 'I beg of you —'
'No master, sir,' he said, 'your servitor!

Although the Schools did me that honour, sir,
But still God wishes not that men should call

Us "Rabbi" either here in your large hall
Or in the market.' 'Never mind,' said he,

'Tell me your trouble.' 'Sir, there was done to me,
And to my Order too, an odious wrong;

Per consequens to all that may belong
To Holy Church itself. May God amend it.'

'Sir,' said the lord, 'you know the way to end it.
Keep calm, you're my confessor; I know your worth.

You are the salt and savour of the earth.
For love of God be patient and unfold

The matter of your grief.' So then he told
The story (you have heard it) with a will.

The lady of the house sat very still
Till she had heard the friar's whole tirade.

'Mother of God,' she said, 'O blessed Maid!
And is there nothing else? Now tell me true.'

'Madam,' he answered, 'May I hear your view?'

'My view?' she said. 'God help us! What's the need? I say a churl has done a churlish deed.

What should I say? May God deny him ease! His poor sick head is full of vanities.

I think he must have had some kind of fit.'

'Madam,' said he, 'I'll pay him out for it, By God I will! There are within my reach

Several ways; for instance I can preach,

I can defame him! I won't be derided

Or hidden divide what cannot be divided

In equal parts — God damn his ignorance!

The lord had sat like someone in a trance,

Rolling in heart the problem up and down,

How the imagination of a clown

Had hit on this conundrum for the friar.

'I never before heard such a thing transpire;

I think the devil put it in his mind.

In all arithmetic you couldn't find

Until today so tricky an equation.

How could one set about a demonstration

Where every man alike should have his part

Both of the sound and savour of a fart?

Proud churl! O nice distinction! Damn his nerve!

He then went on more gravely to observe,

'Who ever heard of such a thing till now!

"To every man alike?" Good Lord, but how?

It is impossible, it cannot be!

Aha, nice churl! God send him misery!

The rumbling of a fart or any sound

Is only air reverberating round,

What's more, diminishingly, bit by bit.

Upon my word! No one could have the wit

To see it was divided equally.

To think a churl, a churl of mine, could be

So shrewd, and to my own confessor too!

He's certainly demoniac in my view!

Now eat your food and leave the churl alone

And let the devil hang him for his own!

Now the lord's squire was standing by and heard
The tale as he was carving, word for word,

And saw the problem you have heard defined.

'My lord,' he said, 'I hope you will not mind,

But, for a piece of cloth to make a gown,

I'd tell the friar — but he mustn't frown —

How such a fart could equally be shared

Between him and his convent, if I cared.'

His lord replied, 'Well, tell us then, go on,

And you shall have your gown-cloth, by St John.'

'Well, when the weather, sir,' he said, 'is fair,

When there's no wind or movement in the air,

Then have a cart-wheel brought into this hall,

But see the spokes are fitted — twelve in all,

A cartwheel has twelve spokes — then, by and by,

Bring me twelve friars. You will ask me why?

Well, thirteen make a convent, as I guess.

And this confessor here, for worthiness,

Shall bring the number to thirteen, my lord.

Then they shall all kneel down with one accord;

To each spoke's end a friar, I propose,

Shall very seriously lay his nose.

Your excellent confessor, whom God save,

Shall put his nose right up under the nave.

And then the churl, with belly stiff and taut

As drum or tabor, hither shall be brought,

Set on the wheel thus taken from the cart

Above the nave, and made to let a fart.

Then you will see, as surely as I live,

And by a proof that is demonstrative,

That equally the sound of it will wend,

Together with the stink, to the spokes' end,

Save that this worthy friar, your confessor,

Being of great honour, they of lesser,

Shall have the first-fruits, as is only right.

A noble custom, in which friars unite,

Is that a worthy man should first be served

And certainly it will be well-deserved.

Today his preaching did us so much good,
Being beneath the pulpit where he stood,
That I'd allow him, if it fell to me,
First smell of every fart, say up to three,
And so would all his convent I am sure,
His bearing is so holy, fair and pure.'

The lord and lady — all except the friar —
Thought Jacky's answer all they could desire,
As wise as Euclid or as Prolemy.
As for the churl, it was his subtlety,
His wit, they said, to think of such a crack.
'He is no fool, he's no demoniac!'
And Jacky has acquired a new gown.
My tale is done; we've almost come to town.