

THE TALE.

Lordings, there is in Yorkshire, as I guess, A marshy country called Holderness, In which there went a limitour about To preach, and eke to beg, it is no doubt. And so befell that on a day this frere Had preached at a church in his mannere, And specially, above every thing, Excited he the people in his preaching To trentals, <1> and to give, for Godde's sake, Wherewith men mighte holy houses make, There as divine service is honour'd, Not there as it is wasted and devour'd, Nor where it needeth not for to be given, As to possessioners, <2> that may liven, Thanked be God, in wealth and abundance. "Trentals," said he, "deliver from penance Their friendes' soules, as well old as young, Yea, when that they be hastily y-sung, -- Not for to hold a priest jolly and gay, He singeth not but one mass in a day. "Deliver out," quoth he, "anon the souls. Full hard it is, with flesh-hook or with owls* *awls To be y-clawed, or to burn or bake: <3> Now speed you hastily, for Christe's sake." And when this friar had said all his intent, With qui cum patre<4> forth his way he went, When folk in church had giv'n him what them lest;* *pleased He went his way, no longer would he rest, With scrip and tipped staff, *y-tucked high:* *with his robe tucked In every house he gan to pore* and pry, up high* *peer And begged meal and cheese, or elles corn. His fellow had a staff tipped with horn, A pair of tables* all of ivory, *writing tablets And a pointel* y-polish'd fetisly,** *pencil **daintily And wrote alway the names, as he stood; Of all the folk that gave them any good, Askaunce* that he woulde for them pray. *see note <5> "Give us a bushel wheat, or malt, or rey,* *rye A Godde's kichel,* or a trip** of cheese, *little cake<6> **scrap Or elles what you list, we may not chese;* *choose A Godde's halfpenny, <6> or a mass penny; Or give us of your brawn, if ye have any; A dagon* of your blanket, leve dame, *remnant Our sister dear, -- lo, here I write your name,-- Bacon or beef, or such thing as ye find." A sturdy harlot* went them aye behind, *manservant <7> That was their hoste's man, and bare a sack, And what men gave them, laid it on his back And when that he was out at door, anon He *planed away* the names every one, *rubbed out* That he before had written in his tables: He served them with nifles* and with fables. -- *silly tales

"Nay, there thou liest, thou Sompnour," quoth the Frere. "Peace," quoth our Host, "for Christe's mother dear; Tell forth thy tale, and spare it not at all." "So thrive I," quoth this Sompnour, "so I shall." --

So long he went from house to house, till he Came to a house, where he was
wont to be Refreshed more than in a hundred places Sick lay the husband
man, whose that the place is, Bed-rid upon a couche low he lay: "Deus
hic,"* quoth he; "O Thomas friend, good day," *God be here* Said this
friar, all courteously and soft. "Thomas," quoth he, "God *yield it you,* full
oft *reward you for* Have I upon this bench fared full well, Here have I
eaten many a merry meal." And from the bench he drove away the cat, And
laid adown his potent* and his hat, *staff <8> Andeke his
scrip, and sat himself adown: His fellow was y-walked into town Forth with
his knave,* into that hostelry *servant Where as he shope*
him that night to lie. *shaped, purposed

"O deare master," quoth this sicke man, "How have ye fared since that
March began? I saw you not this fortentnight and more." "God wot," quoth he,
"labour'd have I full sore; And specially for thy salvation Have I said many a
precious orison, And for mine other friendes, God them bless. I have this
day been at your church at mess,* *mass And said sermon
after my simple wit, Not all after the text of Holy Writ; For it is hard to you,
as I suppose, And therefore will I teach you aye the glose.* *gloss,
comment Glosing is a full glorious thing certain, For letter slayeth, as we
clerkes* sayn. *scholars There have I taught them to be
charitable, And spend their good where it is reasonable. And there I saw our
dame; where is she?" "Yonder I trow that in the yard she be," Saide this
man; "and she will come anon." "Hey master, welcome be ye by Saint John,"
Saide this wife; "how fare ye heartily?"

This friar riseth up full courteously, And her embraceth *in his armes
narrow,* *closely And kiss'th her sweet, and chirketh as a
sparrow With his lippes: "Dame," quoth he, "right well, As he that is your
servant every deal.* *whit Thanked be God, that gave you
soul and life, Yet saw I not this day so fair a wife In all the churche, God so
save me," "Yea, God amend defaultes, Sir," quoth she; "Algates* welcome be
ye, by my fay." *always "Grand mercy, Dame; that have I
found alway. But of your greate goodness, by your leave, I woulde pray you
that ye not you grieve, I will with Thomas speak *a little throw:* *a
little while* These curates be so negligent and slow To grope tenderly a
conscience. In shrift* and preaching is my diligence *confession
And study in Peter's wordes and in Paul's; I walk and fishe Christian
menne's souls, To yield our Lord Jesus his proper rent; To spread his word
is alle mine intent." "Now by your faith, O deare Sir," quoth she, "Chide him
right well, for sainte charity. He is aye angry as is a pismire,*
ant Though that he have all that he can desire, Though I him wrie at
night, and make him warm, *cover And ov'r him lay my leg and

eke mine arm, He groaneth as our boar that lies in sty: Other disport of him right none have I, I may not please him in no manner case." "O Thomas, *je vous dis,* Thomas, Thomas, *I tell you* This *maketh the fiend,* this must be amended. *is the devil's work* Ire is a thing that high God hath defended,* *forbidden And thereof will I speak a word or two." "Now, master," quoth the wife, "ere that I go, What will ye dine? I will go thereabout." "Now, Dame," quoth he, "je vous dis sans doute, <9> Had I not of a capon but the liver, And of your white bread not but a shiver,* *thin slice And after that a roasted pigge's head, (But I would that for me no beast were dead,) Then had I with you homely suffisance. I am a man of little sustenance. My spirit hath its fost'ring in the Bible. My body is aye so ready and penible* *painstaking To wake,* that my stomach is destroy'd. *watch I pray you, Dame, that ye be not annoy'd, Though I so friendly you my counsel shew; By God, I would have told it but to few." "Now, Sir," quoth she, "but one word ere I go; My child is dead within these weeke's two, Soon after that ye went out of this town."

"His death saw I by revelatioun," Said this friar, "at home in our dortour.* *dormitory <10> I dare well say, that less than half an hour Mter his death, I saw him borne to bliss In mine vision, so God me wiss.* *direct So did our sexton, and our fermerere,* *infirmiry-keeper That have been true friars fifty year, -- They may now, God be thanked of his love, Make their jubilee, and walk above.<12> And up I rose, and all our convent eke, With many a teare trilling on my cheek, Withoute noise or clattering of bells, Te Deum was our song, and nothing else, Save that to Christ I bade an orison, Thanking him of my revelation. For, Sir and Dame, truste me right well, Our orisons be more effectuel, And more we see of Christe's secret things, Than *borel folk,* although that they be kings. *laymen*<13> We live in povert', and in abstinence, And borel folk in riches and dispence Of meat and drink, and in their foul delight. We have this worlde's lust* all in despight** *pleasure **contempt Lazar and Dives lived diversely, And diverse guerdon* hadde they thereby. *reward Whoso will pray, he must fast and be clean, And fat his soul, and keep his body lean We fare as saith th' apostle; cloth* and food *clothing Suffice us, although they be not full good. The cleanness and the fasting of us freres Maketh that Christ accepteth our prayeres. Lo, Moses forty days and forty night Fasted, ere that the high God full of might Spake with him in the mountain of Sinai: With empty womb* of fasting many a day *stomach Received he the lawe, that was writ With Godde's finger; and Eli,<14> well ye wit,* *know In Mount Horeb, ere he had any speech With highe God, that is our live's leech,* *physician, healer He fasted long, and was in contemplanse. Aaron, that had the temple in governance, And eke the other priestes every one, Into the temple when they

shoulde gon To praye for the people, and do service, They woulde drincken in
 no manner wise No drinke, which that might them drunken make, But there
 in abstinence pray and wake, Lest that they died: take heed what I say --
 But* they be sober that for the people pray -- *unless Ware that,
 I say -- no more: for it sufficeth. Our Lord Jesus, as Holy Writ deviseth,*
 *narrates Gave us example of fasting and prayeres: Therefore we
 mendicants, we sely* freres, *simple, lowly Be wedded to povert'
 and continence, To charity, humbles, and abstinence, To persecution for
 righteousness, To weeping, misericorde,* and to cleanness.
 *compassion And therefore may ye see that our prayeres (I speak of us, we
 mendicants, we freres), Be to the highe God more acceptable Than youres,
 with your feastes at your table. From Paradise first, if I shall not lie, Was
 man out chased for his gluttony, And chaste was man in Paradise certain.
 But hark now, Thomas, what I shall thee sayn; I have no text of it, as I
 suppose, But I shall find it in *a manner glose;* *a kind of comment*
 That specially our sweet Lord Jesus Spake this of friars, when he saide
 thus, 'Blessed be they that poor in spirit be' And so forth all the gospel may
 ye see, Whether it be liker our profession, Or theirs that swimmen in
 possession; Fy on their pomp, and on their gluttony, And on their
 lewedness! I them defy. Me thinketh they be like Jovinian,<15> Fat as a
 whale, and walking as a swan; All vinolent* as bottle in the spence;**
 *full of wine **store-room Their prayer is of full great reverence; When they
 for soules say the Psalm of David, Lo, 'Buf' they say, Cor meum
 eructavit.<16> Who follow Christe's gospel and his lore*
 doctrine But we, that humble be, and chaste, and pore, *poor
 Workers of Godde's word, not auditours?* *hearers Therefore
 right as a hawk *upon a sours* *rising* Up springs into the
 air, right so prayeres Of charitable and chaste busy freres *Make their
 sours* to Godde's eares two. *rise* Thomas, Thomas, so
 may I ride or go, And by that lord that called is Saint Ive, *N'ere thou our
 brother, shouldest thou not thrive;* *see note <17> In our chapter pray
 we day and night To Christ, that he thee sende health and might, Thy body
 for to *wielde hastily.* *soon be able to move freely*

"God wot," quoth he, "nothing thereof feel I; So help me Christ, as I in fewe
 years Have spende upon *divers manner freres* *friars of various sorts*
 Full many a pound, yet fare I ne'er the bet;* *better Certain my
 good have I almost beset:* *spend Farewell my gold, for it
 is all ago.* *gone The friar answer'd, "O Thomas, dost
 thou so? What needest thou diverse friars to seech?* *seek
 What needeth him that hath a perfect leech,* *healer To seeken
 other leeches in the town? Your inconstance is your confusioun. Hold ye
 then me, or elles our convent, To praye for you insufficient? Thomas, that

jape* it is not worth a mite; *jest Your malady is *for we have
too lite.* *because we have Ah, give that convent half a quarter
oats; too little* And give that convent four and twenty groats;
And give that friar a penny, and let him go! Nay, nay, Thomas, it may no
thing be so. What is a farthing worth parted on twelve? Lo, each thing that
is oned* in himselfe *made one, united Is more strong than when it
is y-scatter'd. Thomas, of me thou shalt not be y-flatter'd, Thou wouldest
have our labour all for nought. The highe God, that all this world hath
wrought, Saith, that the workman worthy is his hire Thomas, nought of your
treasure I desire As for myself, but that all our convent To pray for you is
aye so diligent: And for to builde Christe's owen church. Thomas, if ye will
learne for to wirch,* *work Of building up of churches may
ye find If it be good, in Thomas' life of Ind.<18> Ye lie here full of anger and
of ire, With which the devil sets your heart on fire, And chide here this holy
innocent Your wife, that is so meek and patient. And therefore trow* me,
Thomas, if thee lest,** *believe **please Ne strive not with thy wife, as
for the best. And bear this word away now, by thy faith, Touching such
thing, lo, what the wise man saith: 'Within thy house be thou no lion; To thy
subjects do none oppression; Nor make thou thine acquaintance for to flee.'
And yet, Thomas, eftsoones* charge I thee, *again Beware
from ire that in thy bosom sleeps, Ware from the serpent, that so slily creeps
Under the grass, and stingeth subtilly. Beware, my son, and hearken
patiently, That twenty thousand men have lost their lives For striving with
their lemans* and their wives. *mistresses Now since ye have so holy
and meek a wife, What needeth you, Thomas, to make strife? There is, y-
wis,* no serpent so cruel, *certainly When men tread on his
tail nor half so fell,* *fierce As woman is, when she hath caught
an ire; Very* vengeance is then all her desire. *pure, only Ire is
a sin, one of the greate seven, Abominable to the God of heaven, And to
himself it is destruction. This every lewed* vicar and parson
ignorant Can say, how ire engenders homicide; Ire is in sooth th' executor
of pride. *executioner I could of ire you say so mucche sorrow,
My tale shoulde last until to-morrow. And therefore pray I God both day and
ight, An irous* man God send him little might. *passionate It is
great harm, and certes great pity To set an irous man in high degree.

"Whilom* there was an irous potestate,** *once **judge<19> As
saith Senec, that during his estate* *term of office Upon a day
out rode knightes two; And, as fortune would that it were so, The one of
them came home, the other not. Anon the knight before the judge is
brought, That saide thus; 'Thou hast thy fellow slain, For which I doom thee
to the death certain.' And to another knight commanded he; 'Go, lead him to
the death, I charge thee.' And happened, as they went by the way Toward

the place where as he should dey,* *die The knight came,
which men weened* had been dead *thought Then thoughte they it
was the beste rede* *counsel To lead them both unto the
judge again. They saide, 'Lord, the knight hath not y-slain His fellow; here
he standeth whole alive.' 'Ye shall be dead,' quoth he, 'so may I thrive, That
is to say, both one, and two, and three.' And to the firste knight right thus
spake he: 'I damned thee, thou must algate* be dead: *at all events
And thou also must needes lose thine head, For thou the cause art why thy
fellow dieth.' And to the thirde knight right thus he sayeth, 'Thou hast not
done that I commanded thee.' And thus he did do slay them alle three.

Irous Cambyses was eke dronkelew,* *a drunkard And aye
delighted him to be a shrew.* *vicious, ill-tempered And so befell, a
lord of his meinie,* *suite That loved virtuous morality,
Said on a day betwixt them two right thus: 'A lord is lost, if he be vicious.
[An irous man is like a frantic beast, In which there is of wisdom *none
arrest*:] *no control* And drunkenness is eke a foul record Of any
man, and namely* of a lord. *especially There is full many
an eye and many an ear *Awaiting on* a lord, he knows not where.
watching For Godde's love, drink more attemperly:
*temperately Wine maketh man to lose wretchedly His mind, and eke his
limbes every one.' 'The reverse shalt thou see,' quoth he, 'anon, And prove it
by thine own experience, That wine doth to folk no such offence. There is no
wine bereaveth me my might Of hand, nor foot, nor of mine eyen sight.' And
for despite he dranke muche more A hundred part* than he had done
before, *times And right anon this cursed irous wretch This
knighte's sone let* before him fetch, *caused Commanding
him he should before him stand: And suddenly he took his bow in hand,
And up the string he pulled to his ear, And with an arrow slew the child
right there. 'Now whether have I a sicker* hand or non?'"** *sure
**not Quoth he; 'Is all my might and mind agone? Hath wine bereaved me
mine eyen sight?' Why should I tell the answer of the knight? His son was
slain, there is no more to say. Beware therefore with lordes how ye play,*
*use freedom Sing placebo;<20> and I shall if I can, *But if* it be unto a
poore man: *unless To a poor man men should his
vices tell, But not t' a lord, though he should go to hell. Lo, irous Cyrus,
thilke* Persian, *that How he destroy'd the river of
Gisen,<21> For that a horse of his was drowned therein, When that he
wente Babylon to win: He made that the river was so small, That women
mighte wade it *over all.* *everywhere Lo, what said he, that
so well teache can, 'Be thou no fellow to an irous man, Nor with no wood*
man walke by the way, *furious Lest thee repent;' I will no
farther say.

"Now, Thomas, leve* brother, leave thine ire, *dear Thou shalt
 me find as just as is as squire; Hold not the devil's knife aye at thine heaat;
 Thine anger doth thee all too sore smart;* *pain But shew to
 me all thy confession." "Nay," quoth the sicke man, "by Saint Simon I have
 been shriven* this day of my curate; *confessed I have him told
 all wholly mine estate. Needeth no more to speak of it, saith he, But if me
 list of mine humility." "Give me then of thy good to make our cloister,"
 Quoth he, "for many a mussel and many an oyster, When other men have
 been full well at ease, Hath been our food, our cloister for to rese:*
 raise, build And yet, God wot, unneth the fundament** *scarcely
 **foundation Performed is, nor of our pavement Is not a tile yet within our
 wones:* *habitation By God, we owe forty pound for stones.
 Now help, Thomas, for *him that harrow'd hell,* *Christ <22> For
 elles must we oure bookes sell, And if ye lack our predication, Then goes
 this world all to destruction. For whoso from this world would us bereave,
 So God me save, Thomas, by your leave, He would bereave out of this world
 the sun For who can teach and worken as we conne?* *know how
 to do And that is not of little time (quoth he), But since Elijah was, and
 Elisee,* *Elisha Have friars been, that find I of record, In
 charity, y-thanked be our Lord. Now, Thomas, help for sainte charity." And
 down anon he set him on his knee, The sick man waxed well-nigh wood* for
 ire, *mad He woulde that the friar had been a-fire With his
 false dissimulation. "Such thing as is in my possession," Quoth he, "that
 may I give you and none other: Ye say me thus, how that I am your brother."
 "Yea, certes," quoth this friar, "yea, truste well; I took our Dame the letter of
 our seal"<23> "Now well," quoth he, "and somewhat shall I give Unto your
 holy convent while I live; And in thine hand thou shalt it have anon, On this
 condition, and other none, That thou depart* it so, my deare brother,
 *divide That every friar have as much as other: This shalt thou swear on thy
 profession, Withoute fraud or cavillation."** *quibbling "I
 swear it," quoth the friar, "upon my faith." And therewithal his hand in his
 he lay'th; "Lo here my faith, in me shall be no lack." "Then put thine hand
 adown right by my back," Saide this man, "and grope well behind, Beneath
 my buttock, there thou shalt find A thing, that I have hid in privy." "Ah,"
 thought this friar, "that shall go with me." And down his hand he launched
 to the clift,* *cleft In hope for to finde there a gift. And when
 this sicke man felte this frere About his taile groping there and here, Amid
 his hand he let the friar a fart; There is no capel* drawing in a cart,
 *horse That might have let a fart of such a soun'. The friar up start, as doth
 a wood* lioun: *fierce "Ah, false churl," quoth he, "for Godde's
 bones, This hast thou in despite done for the nones.* *on purpose
 Thou shalt abie* this fart, if that I may." *suffer for His meinie,*

which that heard of this affray, *servants Came leaping in, and
 chased out the frere, And forth he went with a full angry cheer*
 *countenance And fetch'd his fellow, there as lay his store: He looked as it
 were a wilde boar, And grounde with his teeth, so was he wroth. A sturdy
 pace down to the court he go'th, Where as there wonn'd* a man of great
 honour, *dwelt To whom that he was always confessour: This
 worthy man was lord of that village. This friar came, as he were in a rage,
 Where as this lord sat eating at his board: Unnethes* might the friar speak
 one word, *with difficulty Till at the last he saide, "God you see."*
 *save

This lord gan look, and said, "Ben'dicite! What? Friar John, what manner
 world is this? I see well that there something is amiss; Ye look as though the
 wood were full of thieves. Sit down anon, and tell me what your grieve* is,
 *grievance, grief And it shall be amended, if I may." "I have," quoth he, "had
 a despite to-day, God *yielde you,* adown in your village,
 *reward you That in this world is none so poor a page, That would not have
 abominatioun Of that I have received in your town: And yet ne grieveth me
 nothing so sore, As that the olde churl, with lockes hoar, Blasphemed hath
 our holy convent eke." "Now, master," quoth this lord, "I you beseek" -- "No
 master, Sir," quoth he, "but servitour, Though I have had in schoole that
 honour. <24> God liketh not, that men us Rabbi call Neither in market, nor
 in your large hall." *No force,* quoth he; "but tell me all your grief."
 no matter Sir," quoth this friar, "an odious mischief This day betid* is to
 mine order and me, *befallen And so par consequence to each
 degree Of holy churche, God amend it soon." "Sir," quoth the lord, "ye know
 what is to doon:* *do *Distemp'r you not,* ye be my confessour.
 be not impatient Ye be the salt of th' earth, and the savour; For Godde's
 love your patience now hold; Tell me your grief." And he anon him told As ye
 have heard before, ye know well what. The lady of the house aye stiller sat,
 Till she had hearde what the friar said, "Hey, Godde's mother;" quoth she,
 "blissful maid, Is there ought elles? tell me faithfully." "Madame," quoth he,
 "how thinketh you thereby?" "How thinketh me?" quoth she; "so God me
 speed, I say, a churl hath done a churlish deed, What should I say? God let
 him never the;* *thrive His sicke head is full of vanity; I hold
 him in *a manner phrenesy."**a sort of frenzy* "Madame," quoth he,
 "by God, I shall not lie, But I in other wise may be awreke,*
 *revenged I shall defame him *ov'r all there* I speak; *wherever
 This false blasphemour, that charged me To parte that will not departed be,
 To every man alike, with mischance."

The lord sat still, as he were in a trance, And in his heart he rolled up and
 down, "How had this churl imaginatioun To shewe such a problem to the

frere. Never ere now heard I of such matter; I trow* the Devil put it in his mind. *believe In all arsmetrik* shall there no man find, *arithmetic Before this day, of such a question. Who shoulde make a demonstration, That every man should have alike his part As of the sound and savour of a fart? O nice* proude churl, I shrew** his face. *foolish **curse Lo, Sires," quoth the lord, "with harde grace, Who ever heard of such a thing ere now? To every man alike? tell me how. It is impossible, it may not be. Hey nice* churl, God let him never the.** *foolish **thrive The rumbling of a fart, and every soun', Is but of air reverberatioun, And ever wasteth lite* and lite* away; *little There is no man can deemen,* by my fay, *judge, decide If that it were departed* equally. *divided What? lo, my churl, lo yet how shrewedly* *impiously, wickedly Unto my confessour to-day he spake; I hold him certain a demoniac. Now eat your meat, and let the churl go play, Let him go hang himself a devil way!"

Now stood the lorde's squier at the board, That carv'd his meat, and hearde word by word Of all this thing, which that I have you said. "My lord," quoth he, "be ye not *evil paid,* *displeased* I coulde telle, for a gowne-cloth,* *cloth for a gown* To you, Sir Friar, so that ye be not wrot, How that this fart should even* dealed be *equally Among your convent, if it liked thee." "Tell," quoth the lord, "and thou shalt have anon A gowne-cloth, by God and by Saint John." "My lord," quoth he, "when that the weather is fair, Withoute wind, or perturbing of air, Let* bring a cart-wheel here into this hall, cause* But looke that it have its spokes all; Twelve spokes hath a cart-wheel commonly; And bring me then twelve friars, know ye why? For thirteen is a convent as I guess;<25> Your confessor here, for his worthiness, Shall *perform up* the number of his convent. *complete* Then shall they kneel adown by one assent, And to each spoke's end, in this mannere, Full sadly* lay his nose shall a frere; *carefully, steadily Your noble confessor there, God him save, Shall hold his nose upright under the nave. Then shall this churl, with belly stiff and tought* *tight As any tabour,* hither be y-brought; *drum And set him on the wheel right of this cart Upon the nave, and make him let a fart, And ye shall see, on peril of my life, By very proof that is demonstrative, That equally the sound of it will wend,* *go And eke the stink, unto the spokes' end, Save that this worthy man, your confessour' (Because he is a man of great honour), Shall have the firste fruit, as reason is; The noble usage of friars yet it is, The worthy men of them shall first be served, And certainly he hath it well deserved; He hath to-day taught us so muche good With preaching in the pulpit where he stood, That I may vouchesafe, I say for me, He had the firste smell of fartes three; And so would all his brethren hardily; He beareth

him so fair and holily."

The lord, the lady, and each man, save the frere, Saide, that Jankin spake in this matter As well as Euclid, or as Ptolemy. Touching the churl, they said that subtilty And high wit made him speaken as he spake; He is no fool, nor no demoniac. And Jankin hath y-won a newe gown; My tale is done, we are almost at town.