MAKE WE MERRY MORE AND LESS
An Anthology of Medieval English Popular Literature

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Conceived as a companion volume to the well-received Simple Forms: Essays on Medieval English Popular Literature (2015), Make We Merry More and Less is a comprehensive anthology of popular medieval literature from the twelfth century onwards. Uniquely, the book is divided by genre, allowing readers to make connections between texts usually presented individually.

This anthology offers a fruitful exploration of the boundary between literary and popular culture, and showcases an impressive breadth of literature, including songs, drama, and ballads. Familiar texts such as the visions of Margery Kempe and the Paston family letters are featured alongside lesser-known works, often oral. This striking diversity extends to the language: the anthology includes Scottish literature and original translations of Latin and French texts.

The illuminating introduction offers essential information that will enhance the reader’s enjoyment of the chosen texts. Each of the chapters is accompanied by a clear summary explaining the particular delights of the literature selected and the rationale behind the choices made. An invaluable resource to gain an in-depth understanding of the culture of the period, this is essential reading for any student or scholar of medieval English literature, and for anyone interested in folklore or popular material of the time.

The book was left unfinished at Gray’s death; it is here edited by Jane Bliss. As with all Open Book publications, this entire book is freely available to read on the publisher’s website. Printed and digital editions, together with supplementary digital material, can also be found at www.openbookpublishers.com

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Chapter 5

Merry Tales

The short comic tale seems to have been a favourite form in medieval popular literature.¹ Large numbers survive, and they show considerable variety, reflecting the variety of the wider medieval comic tradition. I will try to give some idea of this variety, in topic, form, and treatment. Medieval comedy is sometimes crude and vulgar, sometimes more detached and witty, offering some kind of entertainment or ‘game’. It may be genial, but sometimes seems darker and more cruel, finding entertainment in physical as well as in moral deformity. It makes enthusiastic use of cunning tricks and tricksters, adroit answers, ingenuity and intelligence. Some tales seem totally amoral, and would no doubt have needed the defence offered in Chaucer’s dictum, ‘men shal nat maken ernest of game’. And yet some are curiously similar to moral, exemplary tales (as in The Wright’s Chaste Wife).

Tales appear in both verse and prose and take many forms — too many for them all to be represented here. We have only one example of the fabliau (a word used of verse tales which flourished in France from the twelfth century, but part of a wider and much earlier tradition, and which were given highly sophisticated treatment by Chaucer). Fabliaux and fabliau-like tales characteristically give vigorous expression in terse and simple style to a decidedly non-idealistic view of life. The setting is non-courtly, the characters are often tradesmen, merchants,

¹ Gray called this chapter ‘Comic Tales’, but ‘Merry’ in the table of contents. I retain ‘Merry’ so as to match his chapter-title in Simple Forms.
and their womenfolk, clerics and students. Plot and action are very important, as is direct speech and conversation. There is a combination of realism (especially in ‘local’ details) with a plot that is decidedly non-realistic — much more so than that of a romance, though not usually as extreme as the wild ‘eldritch’ fantasy of some Scottish comic tales. Much fun is had with stereotype: old men with young wives, lecherous clerics and monks, women as objects of desire and adept at fulfilling their own desires. Fabliaux in the narrow sense, like those in French verse, are rare in English before Chaucer; the Early Middle English Dame Sirith, a version of the story of the ‘weeping puppy’, is an early example. But many of the comic tales printed here have distinctly fabliau-like elements, such as the magically adhesive Basin in number i. To encourage a comparison in literary treatment I have included extracts from two examples of a popular comic tale, in which a ruler meets one of his subjects and is entertained by him, but not recognised. And to remind us of the long continuity of the merry tale I have included examples from a late flowering from the age of printing, examples of the jestbooks of the sixteenth and later centuries.

i) The Tale of the Basyn

An example of a simple comic story with a happy ending, based on a folktale motif: ‘all stuck together’; a well-known example is Grimms’ ‘The Golden Goose’.

‘Off talys and trifulles many man tellys; Summe byn trew and sum byn ellis [otherwise].’ There were two brothers: a parson, sensible, ‘a good clerke’ and rich; the other, his father’s heir, feckless and ‘a febull husbande’ ruled by his wife: ‘He durst not onys speke a worde When she bade be stille’. He and his wife spend all their money and he has to ask for money from his brother. That is soon gone, and he has to ask

2 The Weeping Puppy, see chapter 4 number viii above.
3 The Tale of the Basin is in Ten Fifteenth-century Comic Poems, ed. Furrow, although it is unlikely Gray used this edition; see also Medieval Comic Tales, where it is called The Tale of the Pot (sc. chamber-pot).
4 Grimms’ Fairy Tales (London, n.d; a previous owner has dated his copy 1896). This well-known and finely-illustrated edition does not give story-numbers; The Golden Goose (Grimms’ number 64) is pp. 197–200. The story is found in Andrew Lang’s Red Fairy Book (and elsewhere).
again. The parson agrees, but warns him and discovers why he ‘lyves in dispayre’: there is a merry priest, Sir John, who ‘harpys and gytryns [plays the gittern] and syngs … wresttels and lepis and casts the ston also.’ The parson instructs his brother to obtain ‘the vessell owt of the chambur — the same that thei make water in’, and bring it to him. This done, the parson performs a ‘prive experiment’ on it, and the brother takes it back home and places it beside the bed in the chamber. He rides away, to the delight of his wife, who prepares a feast for Sir John. [vv. 125–223]

... She sent after sir John
Prively at a posturne yate, as still as any ston.
They eton and dronken, as thei were wonte to done
Till that thaym list to bedde for to gon,
   Softly and stille.
Within a litull while sir John con wake,
And nedis° water he most make; of necessity
He wist° wher he shulde the basyn take, knew
   Right at his owne wille.

He toke the basyn to make watur in
He mught not get his hondis awey, all this worde° to wyn; world
His handis fro the basyn myght he not twyn.° separate
‘Alas!’ seid sir John, ‘how shall I now begynne,
   Here is sum wychcrafte!’
Faste the basyn con he holde,
And alle his body tremeld° for colde — shook
Lever° than a .c. pounde he wolde, rather
   That hit were him rafte.° pulled

Ryght as a chapmon shulde sell his ware,
The basyn in the chaumbeur betwix his hondis he bare.
The wyfe was agrevyd he stode so long thare
And askid why so, hit was a nyce fare,° foolish behaviour
   So stille ther to stonde.
‘What, woman,’ he seid, ‘in gode fay,’° faith
Thu must helpe, gif thou may,
That this basyn were away,
    Hit will not fro my honde.’

Upstert the godewyfe, for nothyng wolde she lette,º
And bothe hir hondis on the basyn she sette.
Thus sone wer thai bothe fast, and he never the bette;º
Hit was a myssefelisshippe a man to have imette,
    Be day or be nyght.

They began clepeº and crye
To a wenche that lay thaim bye,
That she shulde come on hyeº
    To helpe yif she myght.

Upstert the wench, er she was halfe waked,
And ran to hir maistrys all balyº naked.
‘Alas,’ seid her maistrys, ‘who hase this sorow maked?
Helpe this basyn wer awey, that oure sorow were slakyd.º
    Here is a sory chaunce!’º
To the basyn the wenche she raste,
For to helpe had she caste —
Thus were they sone alle thre fast,
    Hit was a nyce daunce …

[They dance all night until sunrise. The priest’s clerk rings the ‘day-bell’ for his master to say Matins, and he comes and sees the priest’s plight]

… Anon as sir John can se, he began to call;
Be that worde thei come down into the hall.
‘Why goo ye soo?’ quod the clerke, ‘hit is shame for you alle.
Why goo ye so nakyd? Foule mot yow falle.
    The basyn shalle yow froo.’
To the basyn he made a brayde,º
And bothe his hondis theron he leyde —
The furst worde that the clerke seyde,
    ‘Alas! what shall I doo?’

The carter fro the halle-dureº erth can he throw,
With a shevell in his hande, to make it clene, I trowe
When he saw thaym go rounde upon a row.
He wende hit hade bene folys of the fayre he tolde it in his
He seide he wolde assay iwyss; Unneth he durst go in for fere,
Alle save the clerke nakyd were — When he saw the wench go there,
Hym thoght hit went amysse.

The wench was his special, that hoppid on the rowte — ‘Lette go the basyn, er thu shalle have a clowte!’
He hit the wenche with a shevell above on the bottom
The shevyll stucked then fast, withowte any dowte,
And he hengett on the ende.
The carter with a sory chaunce
Among thaim all he led the daunce;
In Englonde, Scotllond, ne in Fraunce
A man shulde non sich fynde.

The godeman and the parson came in that stounde,
Alle that fayre feliship dawnsyng thei founde,
The godeman seid to sir John, ‘be cockis swete wounde,
Thu shalle lese thine harnesse or a .c. pounde — Truly thu shalle not chese.’
Sir John seid, ‘in good fay,
Helpe this basyn were awey,
And that mone will I pay,
Er I this harnes lese.’

The parson charmyd the basyn that it fell thaim fro,
Every man then hastely on thaire wey can goo:
The preest went out of contre for shame he hade thoo,
And then thai levyd their lewtnesse, and did no more soo,
But waxe wyse and ware.
Thus the godeman and his wyfe
Levyd togeder without strenfe.
Mary, for her jouyes fyfe,⁵
   Shelde us alle fro care.

ii) The King and the Hermit

The possibilities, usually comic or satirical, of the ‘unrecognised’ or disguised ruler forced to meet one of his subjects seems to have fascinated popular storytellers. Of the various examples, two are relatively well-known: ‘John the Reeve’ (in PFMS, vol ii, 550), and the Scottish Rauf Coilyear. We include extracts from the second (iii below); and from The Kynge and the Hermyt, a tale in which the author seems to enjoy the way in which the king’s curiosity reveals a certain ambiguity in this ‘hermit’ of Sherwood.⁶

Jesu that is hevyn kyng,
Yiff⁶ them all god endyng,
   Yf it be thy wyll,
And yif them parte of hevyn gam,⁹
That well can calle gestes same,⁹
   With mete and drinke to fylle.
When that men be glad and blyth,
Than were solas god to lyth,⁹
   He that wold be style⁹
Of a kyng I wyll yow telle.
What aventour hym befelle,
   He that wyll herke theretylle.

It felle be god Edwerd deys,
For soth so this romans seys.

⁵ A reference to the Five (or other number) Joys of Mary, formulae used to aid meditation and prayer.
⁶ In Ten Bourdes, ed. Furrow.
The King and the Hermit

Herkyns — I will you telle.
The kyng to Scherwod gan wend …
[... to hunt the great hart. He asks his foresters where in the forest is the best hunting, and an old forester describes a very large deer: ‘so grete a hed as he bare Sych one saw I never are’.]
Upon the morne thei ryden fast
With hundes and with hornes blast;

To wodde than are thei wente.
Nettes and gynnes\(^o\) than leyd he, \(\text{traps}\)
Every archer to hys tre

With bowys redy bent …
[The king pursues a deer through the forest all day, until the light begins to fade. He is alone and does not know where he is, nor how to get out of the forest. He recalls that he has heard poor men call on Saint Julian to give them lodging, so he too calls on him …]

… as he rode whyll he had lyght,
And at the last he hade syght

Of an hermyte hym besyde
Of that syght he was full feyn,
For he wold gladly be in the pleyn,\(^o\) \(\text{open}\)
And theder he gan to ryde.

An hermitage he found ther,
He trowyd\(^o\) a chapel that it wer.

Then seyd the kyng that tyde,
‘Now, seynt Julyan a bonne hostel,\(^7\)
As pylgrymes trow full wele,
Yonder I wyll abyde.’

A lytell yate\(^o\) he fond ne[y],\(^2\) \(\text{gate} \quad \text{near}\)
Thereon he gan to call and cry,

That within myght here.
That herd an hermyte ther within,
Unto the yate he gan to wyn,

Bedyng\(^o\) his prayer.

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\(^7\) Julian was the patron saint of travellers (and of their good lodging).
And when the hermyt saw the kyng,
He seyd, ‘Sir, gode evyn[yng].’
‘Wele worth thee, sir frere,’
I prey thee I myght be thy gest,
For I have ryden wyllº in this forest,
And nyght neyghesº me nere.’

The hermyte seyd, ‘So mote I the,
For sych a lord as ye be,
Y have non herbour tyllº
Bot if it wer for pore a wyght,
I ne der not herbour hym a nyght,
But he for faute schuldspyllº.
I won here in wylde[r]nes,
With rotys and ryndesº among wyld bests,
As it is my Lordes wylle.’

[So the king asks for directions to the town. But, hearing that it is five miles,
and ‘a wyld wey’, he announces, ‘Ermyte, I schall harborow with ye this
nyght’. ‘Sych gode as thou fynde here, take’, says the hermit — and there is
little food on offer. With the remark ‘a nyght wyll sone be gon’ the king busies
himself, hewing the wood and attending to the stable. When he relaxes in
front of the fire, he begins to muse …]

…The kyng seyd, ‘Be Gods are,’
Andº I sych an hermyte were,
And wonyd in this forest,
When forsters were gon to slep[e],
Than I wold cast off my copeº,
And wake both est and weste,
Wyth a bow of hueº full strong
And arowys knyte in a thong,
That wold me lyke best.
The kyng of venyson hath non nede,
Yit might me hape to have a bredeº.
To glad me and my gest.’
ii) The King and the Hermit

[Ignoring this, the hermit asks him where he dwells: ‘in the kyngs courte ... many a dey’ says the king, and he describes the long and tiring chase of the deer. He asks for food: ‘thou take sych gode as we have,’ says the hermit, and brings out bread and cheese and thin drink. ‘Hermit,’ says the king, ‘You live in a merry place. And you should learn to shoot.’ But the hermit is worried about being imprisoned and in fear of being hanged. The king says he would keep it secret, and makes a direct request: ‘Now, hermyte, for thy profession, Yiff thou have any venison, Thou yiff me of the best.’ The hermit still demurs: ‘I eat no meat, and drink milk.’ But he seems to recognise something in his guest.]

‘Thou semys a felow,’º seyd the frere.  
a good chap

‘It is long gon seth any was here,  
Bot thou thyselfe tonght.’

Unto a cofyr he gan go.
And toke forth candylles two,  
And sone thei were ilyght.º  
lit
A cloth he brought, and bred full whyte,  
And venyson ibake tyte.º  
quickly

Ayenº he yede ful ryght,º  
back
Venyson isaltº and fresch he brought,  
salted
And bade him cheze;º wheroff hym thought  
choose
Colopysº for to dyght.º  
slices prepare

Well may ye wyte inowº they had,  
enough
The kyng ete, and made hym glad,  
And grete laughtur he lowgh,
‘Nere I had spoke of archery
I myght have ete my bred full dryghe!’º  
dry
The kyng made it full towghe,º  
gave him a hard time about it
‘Now Crystes blyssing have sych a frere,
That thus cane ordeyn our soper,
And stalke under the wode bowe.º  
bough
The kyng hymselfe, so mote I the,º  
prosper
Ys not better at es than we,
Andº we have drinke inowghe.’  
if
[The hermit produces a good supply, and teaches the king some ‘play’ appropriate to a ‘felow’, exchanging the drinkers’ cries of ‘fusty bandias’ and ‘stryke pantere’ as the cup goes round.\(^8\) The king is delighted, and promises to repay the hermit. ‘But’, says the hermit, ‘I will be forgotten when you come to your lord’s hall, or perhaps, if you think upon this play, it may amuse gentyll men.’ ‘No,’ says his guest, ‘the king’s gate will be opened.’ ‘But do you expect me’, says the hermit, ‘to stand in the mire at the king’s gate?’]

‘... I have neyghbors here nyghhand;
I send them of my presente

\[S\]ydes\(^9\) of the wyld dere, \(\text{sides}\)
Of my presantes they are feyn,

Bred and ale thei send me ageyn;\(^9\) \(\text{in exchange}\)

Thuskates\(^9\) ly I here.’ \(\text{in this way}\)
The kyng seyd, ‘So mote I the,

Hermyte, me pays wele\(^9\) with thee, \(\text{I am well pleased}\)

Thou arte a horpyd\(^9\) frere.’ \(\text{bold}\)

The kyng seyd, ‘Yit myght ye com sum dey
Unto the courte for to pley,

Aventourys\(^9\) for to sene;\(^9\) \(\text{adventures see}\)

Thou wote not what thee betyde may
Or that thou gon awey’ …

[And he assures him that no one there will ‘missay’ him. The hermit assents to this, since his guest seems to be a ‘trew man’. ‘I schall aventore the gate’ [risk the journey]; but who is he to ask for? ‘Jake Flecher\(^9\) is the answer; ‘all men knowys me at home’. The hermit begins to confide …]

‘Aryse up, Jake, and go with me,
And more off my privyte\(^9\) \(\text{secrets}\)

Thou schall se somthyng,’
Into a chambyr he hym lede.
The kyng saughe aboute the hermytes bed

Brod arowis hynge.
The frere gaff hym bow in hond,

‘Jake,’ he seyd, ‘draw up the bond.’\(^9\) \(\text{string}\)

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\(^8\) These nonsense phrases may or may not mean something like ‘This is good stuff!’
‘Drink up!’

\(^9\) Jack Fletcher, that is a maker of arrows.
He myght oneth styre\(^o\) the streng.  
‘Sir,’ he seyd, ‘so have I blys,  
There is no archer that may schot in this,  
    That is with my lord the kyng …’

… ‘Jake, seth thou can of flecher crafte,  
Thou may me es\(^o\) with a schafte.’  
    Then seyd Jake, ‘I schall …’

‘Jake, and I wyst that thow were trew,  
Or and I thee better knew,  
    Mour thou schuldes se.’

The kyng to hym grete othys swer,  
‘The covenand we made whyle are\(^o\)  
    I wyll that it hold be.’

Till two trowys\(^o\) he gan him lede.  
Off venyson there was many a brede\(^o\)  
    ‘Jake, how thinkes thee?  
Whyle there is dere in this forest,  
Somtyme I may have of the best …’

[They return to their ‘pley’, and sit with ‘fusty bandyas’ and ‘stryke pantere’  
until it is almost day. In the morning they leave. The hermit accompanies the  
king for ‘a myle or two’. When they part, the hermit repeats his promise to  
come to the court before the following night, and the king rides homewards.  
His men are searching for him …]  
… They cryghed and blew with hydoys bere,\(^o\)  
Yiff thei myght of ther lord here.\(^o\)  
    Wher that ever he were.  
When the kyng his bugyll blew,  
Knyghtes and fosters wele it knew,  
    And lystind to him there.

Many men, that wer masyd and made,\(^o\)  
The blast of that horn made them glad,  
    To the town than gan they fare.  
[Here the copy breaks off, without revealing what happened to the hermit at  
court.]
This Scottish tale of the same type, a cross between rhymed and alliterative verse, is placed here, although it is often classified as a ‘Charlemagne romance’, a kind with which the author was clearly familiar. It was perhaps conceived as a burlesque Charlemagne romance. Whatever category we place it in, it is a fascinating and delightful work, contrasting the two main characters with some delicate irony and giving each a distinctive ‘voice’ and attitude.

King Charles and his splendid retinue ride out from Paris, but on the moor they encounter a fierce tempest, and the company is scattered. The king finds himself alone in the mountains. Night is falling, and he can see no sign of any shelter. Then ‘ane cant carl’ comes riding along, ‘with ane capill [horse] and twa creillis [baskets] cuplit [coupled] abufe’. He is Rauf Coilyear, so-called because he sells coal and charcoal. The king, who is not recognised by Rauf, asks him to bring him to some ‘harbery’. However, the nearest seems to be Rauf’s own house. The king gratefully accepts his offer of ‘harbery’, however simple, and they set off together. But Rauf prophetically remarks, ‘Thank me not over airtie [early], for dreid that we threip [quarrel]’. Rauf’s manner of speaking is direct and sometimes abrupt, and it turns out that he has a short temper to match. There is a small contretemps when they come to Rauf’s dwelling, and they each insist that the other should enter first. This is resolved by Rauf grabbing the king by the neck ‘twa part in tene’ [half in anger], and reading him a brief, tough lesson in ‘courtesy’: ‘gif thow of courtasie couth, yhow hes foryet it clene.’ ‘Now is anis [the first time]’ he says ominously, as they go in — Rauf confidently and overbearingly, like an ‘imperious host’ of legend, the king uneasily and cautiously. Supper is made ready [vv. 144–234]

Sone was the supper dichtº and the fyre betº
And thay had weschin,º iwis, the worthiest was their.
‘Tak my wyfe be the hand in feir,º withoutin let,º
And gang begin the buird,’º said the coilyear.
‘That war unsemand,º for suith, and thy self unset,’º

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10 ed. Herrtage.
The king profferitº him to gang and maid ane strange fair,º
‘Now is twyse,’ said the carl, ‘me think thow hes foryet.’º
He leit gyrd toº the king, withoutin ony mair,
And hit him under the eirº with his richt hand,
Quhill he stakkeritº thairwithall
Half the breidº of the hall,
He fainº never of ane fall,
Quhillº he the eird fand.º
Heº start up stoutly agane, uneisº micht he stand,
For anger of that outrayº that he had their tane.º
Heº callit on Gyliane his wyfe, ‘Ga, tak him be the hand
And gang agane to the buirdº quhair ye suld eir have gane.
Schir, thow art unskilfull,º and that sall I warrand;º
Thow byrdº to have nurtourº aneuch and thow hes nane.
Thow hes walkit, iwis, in mony wyld land,
The mair vertew thow suld have to keip the fra blame,
Thow suld be courtes of kindº and ane cunnand courtier
Thochtº that I simpill be,
Do as I bid the.
The hous is myne, pardie.
And all that is heir.’

The king said to him self, ‘This is ane evill lyfe,
Yit was I never in my lyfe thusgaitº leird,º
And I have oftymes bene quhair gude hes bene ryfe,º
That maist couthº of courtasie in this Cristin eird.º
Is naneº sa gude as leif ofº and mak na mair stryfe,
For I am stonischt at this straikº that hes me thus steird.’º
In feir fairlie he foundis,º with the gude wyfe,
Qhailº the colyear bad, so braithlie he beird.º
Quhenº he had done his bidding, as him gude thocht,º

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° urged countenance
° forgotten let fly at ear
° until he staggered pretended fell to the floor
° (Charles) scarcely
° insult taken
° (Rauf) table
° uncouth warrant
° ought good manners
° courteous by nature
° though
° in this way taught
° frequent
° knew earth
° nothing leave off
° blow perturbed
° together courteously he goes
° where loudly he shouted
° when seemed
Doun he sat the king near
And maid him glaid and gude cheir
And said, 'Ye ar welcum heir,\textsuperscript{9} here
Be him that me bocht.\textsuperscript{9} redeemed

Quhen thay war servit and set to the suppar,
Gyll and the gentill king, Charlis of micht,
Syne\textsuperscript{9} on the tother syde sat the coilyear;
Thus war thay marschellit but mair\textsuperscript{9} and matchit\textsuperscript{9} that nicht.
Thay brocht breid to the buird\textsuperscript{9} and braun of ane bair,\textsuperscript{9}
And the worthiest wyne went upon hicht,\textsuperscript{9}
Thay beirnes\textsuperscript{9} as I wene, thay had aneuch\textsuperscript{9} their
Within that burelie bigging,\textsuperscript{9} byrnand\textsuperscript{9} full bricht.
Syne enteris their daynteis\textsuperscript{9} on deis\textsuperscript{9} dicht dayntelie.
Within that worthy wane\textsuperscript{9}
Forsuith\textsuperscript{9} wantit thay nane,\textsuperscript{9}
With blyith\textsuperscript{9} cheir sayis Gyliane,
'Schir, dois glaidlie.\textsuperscript{9} set to merrily

The Carll carpit\textsuperscript{9} to the king cumlie and clair,\textsuperscript{9}
'Schir, the forestaris, for suith, of this forest,
Thay have me all at invy\textsuperscript{9} for dreid of\textsuperscript{9} the deir,\textsuperscript{9}
Thay threip\textsuperscript{9} that I thring doun\textsuperscript{9} of the fattest,
Thay say I sall to Paris their to compeer\textsuperscript{9}
Befoir our cumlie king, in dule to be drest,\textsuperscript{9}
Sic manassing thay me mak\textsuperscript{9} for suith ilk year,\textsuperscript{9}
And yit aneuch\textsuperscript{9} sall I have for me and ane gest.
Thairfoir sic as thow seis, spend on\textsuperscript{9} and not spair.\textsuperscript{9} spared
Thus said the gentill Charles the Mane\textsuperscript{9}
To the coilyear agane,
'The king himself hes bene fane\textsuperscript{9} would have been glad
Sum tyme of sic fair.\textsuperscript{9} such fare
Of capounis and cunningis\(^9\) thay had plenty,
With wyne at their will and eik\(^9\) vennysoun,
Byrdis\(^9\) bakin in breid,\(^9\)\(^9\), the best that may be;
Thus full freschlie thay fure into fusio\(n\).\(^9\)
The carll with ane cleir voce carpit on he,\(^9\)
Said, ‘Gyll, lat the cop raik\(^9\) for my bennysoun\(^9\)
And gar our gaist\(^9\) begin and syne\(^9\) drink thow to me;
Sen he is ane stranger, me think it ressoun.’\(^9\)
Thay drank dreichlie\(^9\) about, thay wosche\(^9\) and thay
rais.\(^9\)
The king with ane blyith cheir\(^9\)
Thankit the coilyear,
Syne\(^9\) all the thre into feir\(^9\)
To the fyre gais.\(^9\)

Quhen thay had maid thame eis\(^9\) the coilyear tald
Mony sindrie taillis\(^9\) efter suppair.
Ane bricht byrnanf fyre was byrnand full bald,\(^9\)
The king held gude countenance and company
bar\(^9\)
And ever to his asking ane answer he yald,\(^9\)
Quhill\(^9\) at the last he began to frane farther mair,\(^9\)
‘In faith, friend, I wald wit, tell gif\(^9\) ye wald,
Quhair is thy maist wynning?’\(^9\) said the coilyear.
‘Out of weir,’\(^9\) said the king, ‘I wayndit\(^9\) never to tell.
With my lady the queen
In office maist\(^9\) have I bene,
All thir yeiris fyftene,\(^9\)
In the court for to dwell.’

Further questioning leads to the king giving his name as ‘Wymond of
the Wardrop’, in the queen’s chamber, and inviting Rauf to come to the
court, remarking that he will find it a profitable market for his fuel. Rauf
says that he does not know where the court is, and that he is reluctant to
go to a place where he is unknown. The king attempts to reassure him,
and in the morning when they part Rauf announces that he will indeed
try to sell his coal at court. The king goes his way, and is reunited with his retinue and his knights. They return to Paris with great ceremony and festivity. Rauf fills two baskets and, rejecting a warning from his wife about the stranger’s ‘gentrise’ (‘Lat me wrik as I will, the weird [fate] is mine awin’), also sets out in search of ‘Wymond’. On the way he has an encounter with the knight Sir Roland, and finally forces his way into court. In a brief ‘recognition scene’ he glimpses Wymond: ‘Yone is wymond, I wait … I ken him weill thocht he be cled in uther clothing.’ He is very alarmed, especially when the king tells his nobles how he was treated in Rauf’s house. They laugh, but say he deserves to be hanged. The king, however, will not allow such treatment to the man who ‘succourit my lyfe in sa evil ane nicht … that carll for his courtasie salbe maid knicht.’ And so he is and, after a further battle with a Saracen, Magog, he becomes Marshal of France.

iv) The Freiris of Berwik

A Scottish fabliau, formerly attributed (without solid evidence) to William Dunbar. The anonymous author has produced a literary gem. It is one of the most enjoyable fabliaux in the English language: the action moves swiftly in its rather complicated route to a comic conclusion, with characters being nicely differentiated. The author obviously delights both in the everyday setting, and in the traditionally exaggerated turns of the plot. The comedy is sharp and satirical, but not overly dark and destructive.

In Berwick, ‘a nobill toun’, are two Jacobin friars, Allane and Robert. ‘Ryght wondir weill plesit thai all wyffis And tawld thame tailis of haly sanctis’. Friar Allan was old and tired, but Friar Robert is young and hot of blood. Returning to the town when night is falling they are worried that they will find the gates closed, and decide to find lodging outside the town. They come to the house of one Symon, who had a fair wife — ‘bot scho wes sumthing dynk and dengerous’ [dressy and haughty]. Alesone receives them, tells them that her husband is away in the countryside, and gives them drink. As they are telling their merry tales, they hear

\[11\text{ Also in Ten Bourdes, ed. Furrow (a revised version of her Fifteenth-Century Comic Poems). I have made sparing use of Furrow’s notes, only where Gray left a question-mark, because it is not certain he used this edition.}\]
the prayer bell of their own abbey and know that they cannot return. They ask for lodging for the night. The wife, at first reluctant, finally agrees that they can stay up in the loft. In fact, the wife is pleased ‘that thay wer closet ther’, because she has a tryst with her lover, a rich and powerful grey friar, and she dresses up for the occasion, ‘als proud as ony papingo’. Up in the loft friar Robert makes a little hole with his bodkin so that he can see what is going on. The grey friar is sitting in his chair like a prelate, and the wife is whispering in his ear. Then there is a sudden commotion, a knocking on the gate and a cry: Simon the husband has returned unexpectedly. The wife is annoyed that her plans for the evening have been brought to nothing, and the grey friar is filled with alarm … [vv. 204 to end]

… ‘Quhat sall I do, allace?’ the freir can say,
‘Hyd yow’, scho said, ‘quhill he be brocht to rest,
Into yon troich,º I think it for the best —
It lyis mekleº and huge in all yone nuke,º
It held a bollº of meill quhen that we buke.’º
Than undir it scho gart him creip in hy,º
And bad him lurk their verry quyetly;
Scho closit him and syne went on hir way.
‘Quhat sall I do, allace?’ the freir can say.
Syne to hir madin spedyly scho spak,
‘Go to the fyre, and the meitis fra it tak.
Be bissy als, and slokkin outº the fyre,
Ga clois yn burd,º and tak away the chyre,º
And lok up all into yone almeryº
That being done, thow sowpº the hous clene syne,
That na appearance of feistº be heir sene,
Bot sobirly our selffis dois sustene.’
And syne, withowt tin ony mair delay,
Scho castis of hailº hir fresch array.
Than went scho to hir bed annone,
And tholitº him to knok his fill, Symone.
Quhen he for knoking tyritº wes and cryid,
Abowt he went unto the udire other syd,
And on Alesone fast cold did he cry,
And at the last scho anserit crabitly crossly
‘Ach, quha be this that knawis sa weill my name?
Go hens,’ scho sayis, ‘for Symon is fra hame,
And I will herbry no gaistis shelter no guests heir parfey.
Thairfoir I pray yow to wend on your way,
For at this tyme ye may nocht lugit lodged be.’
Than Symone said, ‘Fair dame, ken ye nocht me?
I am your Symone and husband owner of this place.’
‘Ar ye my spous Symone?’ scho sayis, ‘allace!
Be misknawlege I had almaist misgane, made a mistake
Quha wenit expected that ye sa lait wald haif cum hame?’
Scho stertis quickly up and gettis licht in hy, jumps
And oppinit than the yet gate full haistely,
Scho tuk fra him his geir at all devyis, completely
Syne welcomit him on maist hairtly wyis manner
He bad the maddin kindill on the fyre, kindle
‘Syne graith me meit, prepare me food and tak ye all thy hyre.’
The gudwyf said schortly, ‘Ye may trow
Heir is no meir that ganand is for yow.’ suitable
‘How sa, fair deme, lady ga gait get me cheis and breid,
Ga fill the stowp, flagon hald me no mair in pleid, argument
For I am very tyrit, wett, and cauld.’
Than up scho rais, and durst nocht mair be bauld,
Cuverit the burde, set meit in hy, table quickly
Ane sowsit nolt-fute soused cow’s foot ane scheipheid sheep’s head haistely;
And sum cauld meit scho brocht to him believe, at once
And fillit the stowp. The gudman than wes blyth, happy
Than satt he doun, and swoir, ‘Be all hallow saints
I fair richt weill, and if I had ane gud fallow;
Dame, eit with me and drink, gif that ye may.’ if
Said the gudwyf, ‘Devill in the tim may I, not at this ungodly hour
It wer mair meit into your bed to be, fitting
Than now to sit desyrand company.’
Freir Robert said, ‘Allace, gud bruder deir,
I waldº the gudman wist that we wer heir,  
would
Quha waitº perchance sum bettir wald he fair —  
knows
For sickerlyº my hairt will ay be sairº  
certainly ever sorrowful
Gif yone scheipheid withº Symon birneistº be,  
by burnished
Sa mekill gud cheir being in the almerie.”º  
locker
And with that word he gaif ane hoistº anone.  
cough
The gudman hard, and speirit,º ‘Quha is yone?’  
asked
The gudwyf said, ‘Yone ar freiris tway.’º  
two
Symone said, ‘Tell me quhat freiris be thay.’
‘Yone is freir Robert and sillyº freir Allane,  
good, poor
That all this day hes travellit with grit pane.
Beº thay come heir it wes so very lait,  
when
Curfiwº wes rung and closit wes thair yait,º  
curfew gate
And in yond loft I gaif thame harbrye.’
The gudman said, ‘Sa God haif part of me,
Thaº freiris twa ar hairtly welcome hidder,  
those
Ga call thame doun, that we ma drink togidder.’
The gudwyf said, ‘I reidº yow lat thame be,  
advise
Thay had levirº sleip norº sit in cumpanye.’
The gudman said unto the maid thone,º  
then
‘Go, pray thame baith to cum till me annone,’
And sone the tropº the madin oppinit then,  
trapdoor
And bad thame baith cum doun to the gudman.
Freir Robert said, ‘Now be sweit sanct Jame,
The gudman is very welcome hame,
And for his weilfair dalie do we pray;
We sall annone cum dailie do we say.’
Than with that word thay start up baith attone,º  
一起
And doun the tropº delyverlyº thay come,  
ladder quickly
Halsitº Symone als sone as thay him se,  
greeted
And he agane thame welcomit hairtfullie.
And said, ‘Cum heir, myne awin bredirº deir,  
brothers
And sett yow doun sone besyd me heir,
For I am now allone, as ye may se;
Thairfore sitt doun and beir me cumpanye,
And tak yow pairt of sic gud as we haif.’
Freir Allane said, ‘Ser, I pray God yow saif,
For heir is now annuch⁰ of Godis gud.’
Than Symon anserit, ‘Now be the rud,⁰
Yit wald I gif⁰ ane croun of gold for me,
For sum gud meit and drink amangis us thre.’
Freir Robert said, ‘Quhat drinkis wald ye craif,⁰
Or quhat meitis desyre ye for to haif?
For I haif mony sindry⁰ practikis seir,
Beyond the sey⁰ in Pareis did I leir,⁰
That I wald preve⁰ glaidly for your saik,
And for your demys,⁰ that harbry cowd us maik.⁰
I tak on hand,⁰ and ye will counsale keip,⁰
That I sall gar⁰ yow se, or⁰ ever I sleip,
Of the best meit that is in this cuntre,
Of Gascone wyne, gif ony⁰ in it be,
Or, be thair ony within ane hundredth myle,
It salbe heir within a bony quhyle.’
The gudman had grit mervell of this taill,
And said, ‘My hairt [will] neir be hail⁰
Bot gif ye preve that practik or ye pairte,⁰
To mak ane sport.’ And than the freir upstart;
He tuk his buk and to the flure⁰ he gais,⁰
He turnis it our,⁰ and reidis it a littill space,
And to the eist direct he turnis his face,
Syne to the west he turnit and lukit doun,
And tuk his buk and red ane orisoun —
And ay his eyne⁰ wer on the almery,
And on the troch⁰ quhair⁰ that freir Johine did ly.
Than sat he doun and kest abak his hude,
He granit,⁰ and he glowrit,⁰ as he wer woid,⁰
And quhylis⁰ still he satt in studeing,⁰
And uthir quhylis upoun his buk reding;
And quhylis with baith his handis he wald clap,
And uthir quhylis wald he glor and gaip;
Syne in the sowth he turnit him abowt
Weill thriris\textsuperscript{9} and mair, than lawly\textsuperscript{9} cowd he lowt,\textsuperscript{9} bow
Quhen that he come near the almery.
Thairat our dame had woundir grit invy,\textsuperscript{9} displeasure
For in her haert scho had ane persaving\textsuperscript{9} perception
That he had knawin all hir govirning.\textsuperscript{9} arrangements
Scho saw him gif the almery sic a straik,\textsuperscript{9} such a blow
Unto hir self scho said, 'Full weill I wait\textsuperscript{9} know
I am bot schent,\textsuperscript{9} he knawis full weill my thoicht;
Qhhat sall I do? Allace, that I wes wrocht!\textsuperscript{9} created
Get Symon wit,\textsuperscript{9} it wilbe deir doing.\textsuperscript{9} gets to know a fine mess
Be that\textsuperscript{9} the freir had left his studeing,
And on his feit he startis up full sture,\textsuperscript{9} sternly
And come agane, and seyit all his cure
‘Now is it done, and ye sall haif playntie
Of breid and wyne, the best in this cuntre;
Thairfoir, fair dame, get up deliverlie,\textsuperscript{9} smartly
And ga belyfe\textsuperscript{9} unto yone almerie,
And oppin it and se ye bring us syne
Ane pair of boissis\textsuperscript{9} full of Gascone wyne,
Thay had ane galloun and mair, that wait\textsuperscript{9} I weill;
And bring us als the mayne breid\textsuperscript{9} in a creill,\textsuperscript{9} fine bread (wicker) basket
Ane pair of cunyngis,\textsuperscript{9} fat and het pywand,\textsuperscript{9} rabbits piping hot
The caponis als ye sall us bring fra hand,
Twa pair of pertrikis,\textsuperscript{9} I wait there is no ma;\textsuperscript{9} partridges more
And eik\textsuperscript{9} of pluveris\textsuperscript{9} se that ye bring us twa.’
The gudwyf wist it wes no variance,\textsuperscript{9} alternative
Scho knew the freir had sene hir govrirance,
Scho saw it wes no bute\textsuperscript{9} for to deny
With that scho went unto the almery
And oppinit it, and than scho fand their
All that the freir had spokin of befoir.
Scho stert abak, as scho wer in afray
And sanyt hir, and smyland crowd scho say,
‘Ha, banadicite, quhat may this bene?
Quha evir afoir hes sic a fairly sene?
Sa grit a mervell as now hes apnit heir,
Quhat sall I say? He is ane haly freir;
He said full suth of all that he did say.’
Scho brocht all furth, and on the burd crow lay
Baith breid and wyne, and uthir thingis moir,
Cunyngis and caponis, as ye haif hard befoir,
Pertrikis and pluveris befoir thame hes scho brocht.
The freir knew well and saw thair wantit nocht,
Bot all wes furth brocht evin at his devyis,
And Symone saw it appinnit on this wyis.
He had grit wondir, and sweris be the mone
That freir Robert weill his dett had done,
‘He may be callit ane man of grit science,
Sa suddanly that all this purviance
Hes brocht us heir, throw his grit subteltie
And throw his knawlege in filosophie —
In ane gud tyme it wes quhen he come hidder;
Now fill the cop that we ma drink togidder.
And mak gud cheir eftir this langsum day,
For I haif riddin ane wonder wilsome way.
Now God be lovit, heir is suffisance
Unto us all throw your gud govranance.’
And than annone thay drank evin round abowt
Of Gascone wyne; the freiris playit cop owt.
Thay sportit thame, and makis mirry cheir
With sangis lowd, baith Symone and the freir.
And on this wyis the lang nicht thay ourdraf
Nothing thay want that thay desyrd to haif.
Than Symon said to the gudwyf in hy,
‘Cum heir, fair dame, and sett yow doun me by,
And tak parte of sic gud as we haif heir,
iv) The Freiris of Berwik

And hairtly I yow pray to thank this freir
Off his bening\(^0\) grit besines and cure,
That he hes done to us upoun this flure,\(^0\)
And brocht us meit and drink haboundantlie,
Quhairfoir of richt we aucht\(^0\) mirry to be.’
Bot all their sport, quhen thay wer maist at eis,\(^0\)
Unto our deme it was bot littill pleis\(^0\)
For uther thing thair wes into\(^0\) hir thocht;\(^0\)
Scho wes so red,\(^0\) hir hairt wes ay on floc\(^0\)
That throw the freir scho sowld\(^0\) discoverit be,
To him scho lukit ofttymes effeiritlie\(^0\)
And ay disparit\(^0\) in hart wes scho,
That he had witt\(^0\) of all hir purveance\(^0\) to.\(^0\)
Thus satt scho still, and wist no udir wane;\(^0\)
Quhatevir thay say, scho lute\(^0\) him all allane,\(^0\)
Bot scho drank with thame into company
With fenyeit\(^0\) cheir and hert full wo and hevy.
Bot thay wer blyth annuche,\(^0\) God watt, and sang,
For ay the wyne was rakand\(^0\) thame amang,
Qhill at the last thay woix\(^0\) richt blyth ilkone.\(^0\)
Than Symone said unto the freir annone,
‘I marvell mikill\(^0\) how that this may be,
Intill\(^0\) schort tyme that ye sa\(^0\) suddanlye
Hes brocht to us sa mony denteis deir.’
‘Thairof haif ye no marvell,’ quod the freir.
‘I haif ane pege\(^0\) full prevy\(^0\) of my awin,\(^0\)
Qhenevir I list, will cum to me unknawin.\(^0\)
And bring to me sie\(^0\) thing as I will haif;
Qhatevir I list it neidis\(^0\) me nocht to craif.\(^0\)
Thairfoir be blyth and tak\(^0\) in pacience,
And trest ye weill I sall do diligence.\(^0\)
Gif that ye list or thinkis to haif moir,\(^0\)
It salbe had and I sall stand thairfoir,
Incontinent\(^0\) that samyn\(^0\) sall ye se.
Bot I protest\(^0\) that ye keip it previe,\(^0\)
Latt no man wit that I can do sic thing.’
Than Symone swoir and said, ‘Be hevynnis king,
It salbe kepit prevy as for me,”
as far as I am concerned
Bot, bruder deir, your servand wald” I se,
would
Gif it yow pleis, that we may drynk togidder,
know not if
For I wait nocht gif” ye ma ay cum hidder”
come hither

Quhen that we want our neidis sic as this.’
The freir said, ‘Nay, so mot” I haif hevynis blis,
may
Yow to haif the sicht” of my serwand
sight
It can” nocht be — ye sall weill understand,
must
That ye may se him graithly” in his awin kynd,”
readily own form
Bot ye anone sowld” go owt of your mynd.
immediately should
He is so fowll and ugly for to se.

I dar nocht awnter” for to tak on” me
venture undertake
To bring him hidder heir into our sicht,

And namely” now so lait into the nicht,
epecially
Bot gif it wer on sic a maner wyis”
in such a kind of way
Him to translait” or ellis disagyis”
transform disguise
Fra his awin kind into ane uder stait.’
other form
Than Symone said, ‘I mak no moir debait,”
argument
As pleisis” yow so likis it to me,
pleases
As evir ye list,” bot fane” wald I him se,’
wish gladly
Freyr Robert said, ‘Sen that your will is so,

Tell onto me withouttin wourdis mo,
Intill qhata kynd” sall I him gar” appeir?’
form cause
Than Symone said, ‘In liknes of a freir,

In quhyt” cullour, right as your self it war,”
white were
For quhyt cullour will na body deir.”

Freyr Robert said that swa it cowld nocht be,

For sic causis as he may weill foirse,”
foresee
That he compeir” into our habeit” quhyt:
appear monastic dress
‘Untill” our ordour it wer a grit dispyte,”
onto insult
That ony sic unworthy wicht” as he

Intill” our habeit men sowld behald or se.
in
Bot sen it pleissis yow that ar heir,
iv) The Freirs of Berwik

Ye sall him se in liknes of a freir,
In habeit blak it was his kind to weir,
Into sic wyis that he sall no man deir.

Gif ye so do, and rewll yow at all wyis
To hald yow clois and still at my devyis,
Quhatever it be ye owdir se or heir,
Ye speik no word nor mak no kynd of steir.
Bot hald yow clois, quhill I haif done my cure.
Than said he, ‘Semon, ye mone be on the flure,
Neirhand besyd, with staff into your hand;
Haif ye no dreid, I sall yow ay warrand.’
Than Symone said, ‘I assent that it be swa.’
And up he start, and gat a libberla
Into his hand, and on the flure he stert,
Sumthing effrayit, thocht stalwart was his hart.
Than to the freir said Symone verry sone,
‘Now tell me, maister, quhat ye will haif done.’
‘Nothing,’ he said, ‘bot hald yow clois and still.
Quhatever I do, tak ye gud tent thairtill,
And near the dur ye hyd yow prevely,
And quhen I bid yow stryk, strek hardely,
Into the nek se that ye hit him richt.’
‘That sall I warrand,’ quod he, ‘with all my micht.’
Thus on the flure I leif him standand still,
Bydand his tyme, and turne agane I will,
How that the freir did take his buke in hy,
And turnit our the levis full besely,
Ane full lang space, and quhen he had done swa,
Toward the troch withoutin wordis ma
He gois belyfe, and on this wyis sayis he,
‘Ha, how! Hurlybas, now I conjure the,
That thou uprys and sone to me appear
In habeit blak in liknes of a freir;
Owt of this troch, quhair that thou dois ly
Thow raxe thy sone, and mak no dyn nor cry.
Thow tumbill our the troch that we may se,
And unto us thou schaw the oppinlie,
And in this place se that thou no man greif;
Bot draw thy handis boith into thy sleif,
And pull thy cowll doun owttour thy face.
Thow may thank God that thou gettis sic a grace
Thairfoir thow turs the to thyne awin ressett,
Se this be done and mak no moir debait;
In thy depairsting se thou mak no deray;
Unto no wicht, bot frely pas thy way;
And in this place se that thou cum no moir,
Bot I command the, or ellis the charge befoir,
And our the stair se that thou ga gud speid;
Gif thou dois nocht, on thy awin perrell beid.'
With that the freir, that under the troch lay,
Raxit him sone, bot he wes in afray,
And up he rais, and wist na bettir wayn,
Bot of the troch he tumlit our the stane
Syne fra the samyn quhairin he thocht him lang
Unto the dur he preisit him to gang,
With hevy cheir and drery countenamce,
For nevir befoir him hapnit sic a chance.
And quhen freir Robert saw him gangand by,
Unto the gudman full lowdlly cowd he cry,
‘Stryk, stryk herdely, for now is tyme to the.'
With that Symone a felloun flap lait fle.
With his burdoun he hit him on the nek;
He wes sa fierce he fell owttour the sek,
And brak his heid upoun ane mustard stane.
Be this freir Johine attour the stair is gane
In sic wyis that mist he hes the trap,
And in ane myr he fell — sic wes his hap —
Wes fourty futis of breid undir the stair,
Yeit gatº he up with clethingº nothing fair, yet got clothes
Full dreerelieº upoun his feit he stude, miserably
And throw the myre full smertlyº than he yude,º quickly went
And our the wall he clamº richt haistely, climbed
Quhilkº round abowt wes laid with stanis dry. which
Of his eschapingº in hairt he wes full fane,º escape glad
I trowº he salbe laithº to cum agane. believe will be loath
With that freir Robert stert abak and saw
Quhailr the gudman lay sa woundir lawº wondrously low
Upoun the flure, and bleidandº wes his heid;º bleeding head
He stertº to him, and wentº he had bene deid,º hurried thought
And clawchtº him up withowttin wordis moir,º caught
And to the dur delyverlyº him bureº quickly carried
And fraº the wind wes blawin twyisº in his face, when blown twice
Than he ourcomeº within a lytill space,º came to
And than freir Robert franyt at him fast,º asked him earnestly
Quhat ailitº him to be so soir agast. what ailed
He said, ‘Yone [feynd had maidº me in effray]’º made
‘Latt be,’ quod he, ‘the werst is all away — sorrow no more
Mak mirry, man, and se ye morne na mairº — sorrow no more
Ye haif him strikinº quyt owttourº the stair. knocked quite over
I saw him slip, gif I the suthº can tell, truth
Doun our the stair. Intill a myr he fell.
Bot lat him go, he wes a graceles gaistº spirit
And bounº yow to your bed, for it is best,’ go
Thus Symonis heid upoun the stane wes brokin,
And our the stair the freir in myre hes loppinº leapt
And tap our tail;º he fyldº wes top over tail defile
woundir illº wondrously badly
And Alesone on na waysis gatº hir will. no ways got
This is the story that hapnit of that freir,
No moir there is, bot Chryst us help most deirº dear
Scotland produced a remarkable tradition of popular comic tales: Colkrelbie Sow, Sym and his Bruder, and some which find comic entertainment of a weird ‘eldritch’ kind, as in Lichtoun’s Dreme or The Gyre Carling (the ‘mother witch’ of Scotland). Sadly, there is no space to celebrate this varied tradition here in the manner it deserves. We must be content with the lively Freiris of Berwik (above) and the following little tale of how Kitty found an alehouse close to the gate of heaven.

My gudame was a gay wif, bot scho wes right gend. Scho duelt furth fer into France upon Falkland Fell; Thay callit her Kynd Kittok, quhasa hir weill kend. Scho wes like a caldron cruke cler under kell, Thay threpit that scho deit of thrist, and maid a gud end. Efter hir dede, scho dredit nought in hevin for to duell, And sa to hevin the hie way dreidles scho wend. Yit scho wanderit and yeid by to ane elriche well. Scho met thar, as I wene, Ane ask rydand on a snail, And cryit, ‘Ourtane fallow, hail!’ And raid ane inche behind the tail, Till it wes near evin.

Sa scho had hap to be horsit to hir herbry shelter Att ane ailhous near hevin, it nyghttit thaim thare; Scho deit of thrist in this warld, that gert hir be so dry, Scho never eit, bot drank our mesur and mair. Scho sleipit quhill the morn at none, and rais airly until

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12 For Kynd Kittok (Kittie), as well as The Freiris of Berwick, see The Poems of William Dunbar, ed. MacKenzie.
13 See Gray’s Later Medieval English Literature (on Scottish writing, headed Robert Henryson), pp. 509 ff (book-list pp. 531–2).
vi) The Wright’s Chaste Wife

And to the yettis\(^9\) of hevin fast can\(^9\) the wif\(^9\) gates\(^9\) did\(^9\) go\(^9\)
And by sanct Petir, in at the yet scho stall prevely,\(^9\) stole secretly
God lukit\(^9\) and saw hir lattin\(^9\) in and lewch\(^9\) his hert sair.

And thar yeris sevin
Scho levit a gud life,
And wes our Ladyis hen wif,
And held sanct Petir at strif,
Ay quhill\(^9\) scho wes in hevin.

Sche lukit out on a day and thought right lang
To se the ailhous beside, intill ane evill hour;
And out of hevin the hie gait caught\(^9\) the wif gaing\(^9\) did\(^9\) go
For to get hir ane fresche drink — the aill of hevin wes sour.
Scho come againe to hevinnis yet, quhen the bell rang,
Saint Petir hat\(^9\) hir with a club, quhill a gret clour\(^9\)
Rais\(^9\) in hie heid,\(^9\) because the wif yeid wrang.

Than to the ailhous agane scho ran the pycharis to pour.

And for to brew and baik.

Frendis, I pray yow hertfully
Gi\(^9\) ye be thirsty or dry,\(^9\)
Drink with my guddame, as ye ga by,
Anys\(^9\) for my saik.

vi) The Wright’s Chaste Wife\(^{14}\)

An example of how a comic tale can also be a moral tale. Similarly, stories which appear in the pages of moralists and preachers, like that of the poor man and his cow, which illustrates how mercy increases temporal goods, can also appear in fabliaux — like the French ‘Brunain’.\(^{15}\)

Allmyghty God, maker of alle,

\(^{14}\) Adam of Cobsham: The Wright’s Chaste Wife, ed. Furnivall.

\(^{15}\) ‘Brunain, la vache au prêtre’ is one of Jean Bodel’s fabliaux. This Old French poet wrote chansons de geste as well as fabliaux; he lived c. 1165–c. 1210, in Arras.
Save you my sovereigns in tower and hall,
   And send you good grace!
If ye will a stounde blynne,
Of a story I will beginne,
   And tell you all the case.
Many farleys that I have herd,
Ye would have wondyr how yt ferde —
   Lystyn, and ye schall here …

[An honest, hard-working wright is slow to enter marriage, but finally chooses the fair daughter of a widow in the area. The widow says that the only marriage portion she can give him is a garland of roses. However, it has a marvellous property: if his wife is faithful the roses will retain their colour, but if she is fickle the colour will change. They are married and return home after the festivities. Then the wright is struck by the thought that his wife is so beautiful that other men will desire to have her ‘and that hastily and sone’. And so he plans and builds a crafty room from which no one can escape, ‘wyth wallys stronge as eny stel and dorres sotylly made and wele’. It has a cunningly-made trapdoor with a ‘pit’ beneath it: ‘whoso touchyd yt ony thing, Into the pyt he schuld flyng.’ The wright is summoned by the lord of the town to work on the construction of a wooden hall which will take two or three months …]

The lord seyd, ‘woulth thou have thi wyfe?
I wyll send after her blyveth quickly
   That sche may come to the.’
The wryght hys garlond hadde take wyth hym.
That was bryght and no thing dimme,
   Yt was feyre on to see.

The lord ayx thy hym as he satt,
‘Felowe, where hadyst thou this hatte
   That ys so feyre and newe?’
[And when he hears of its marvellous nature …]
The lord thought ‘By Godys myght,
That wyll I wete thyss same nyght
   Whether thyss tale be trewe.’
To the wryghtes howse anon he went,
He fonde the wyfe therin presente
   That was so bryght and schene,
Sone he hayled her trewly,
And so dyd sche the lord curtesly,
   Sche seyd, ‘Welcome ye be!’
Thus seyd the wyfe of the hows,
‘Syr, howe faryth my swete spowse
   That hewyth upon your tre?’

‘Sertes, dame,’ he seyd, ‘wele,
And I am come, so have I hele,
   To wete the wylle of the.
My love ys so upon the cast
That ne thynketh my hert wolle brest,º
   It wolle none otherwise be!

Good dame, graunt me thy grace
To pley with the in some prevy place
   For gold and eke for fee.’º
‘Good syr, lett be your fare,
And of such words speke no mare
   For hys love that dyed on tre —

Hadde we onys begonne that gle,
My husbond by his garlond myght see,
   For sorowe he would wexe woode.’º
‘Certes, dame,’ he seyd, ‘naye.
Love me, I pray you, in that ye maye —
   For Godys love change thy mode,

Forty marke schall be youre mede
Of sylver and of gold[e] rede,
   And thay schall do the good.’
[‘Syr, that deede schall be done’, she says, and asks for the money. She takes it and says …]
‘… into the chambyr wyll we,
That no man schall us see;
   No lenger wyll we spare.’
Up the steyer they gan hye;
The stepes were made so queyntly\(^9\) cunningly
That farther myght he nott fare.

The lord stumblyld as he went in hast,
He fell doune into that chaste\(^8\) pit
Forty fote and somedele more.
The lord began to crye,
The wyfe seyd to hym in hye,\(^9\) quickly
‘Syr, what do ye there?’

‘Dame, I cannot seye howe
That I am come hydder nowe
To thys hows that ys so newe;
I am so depe in thys sure flore
That I ne can come owte att no dore —
Good dame, on me thou rewe!’
[But she refuses, until her husband will return …]
… The lord arose and lokyd abowte
If he myght anywere gete owte,
Butt yt holpe hym ryght noght,
The wallys were so thycke wythin,
That he nowhere myght owte wynne
But helpe to hym were brought …
[Angrily he threatens the wife, but she says she does not care: ‘I recke nere
While I am here and thou art there, I schrewe here that the doth drede.’ Putting
him out of her mind, she retires to her loft and carries on with her own tasks.
On the next day he asks for some food, but that will not be forthcoming unless
he is willing to ‘swete or swynke.’]
‘… I have both hempe and lyne,\(^9\) flax
And a betyngstocke\(^8\) full fyne, beating-stock
And a swyngyll\(^8\) good and grete. board
If thou wylt worke, tell me sone.’
‘Dame, bring yt forthe, yt schall be done,
Full gladly would I ete.’
vi) The Wright’s Chaste Wife

[She throws the tools down to him in the pit ‘wyth a grete hete’. ‘Syr lord … have thou that And lerne for to swete’, and he begins to beat. So he carries on working, and the wife gives him food if his work is satisfactory, but ‘hys men knewe nott of hys woo Nor of ther lordes pyne.’ But his steward notices his absence.]

The stuard to the wryght gan saye,
‘Sawe thou owte of my lord todaye,
    Whether that he ys wen[t]?’
The wryght answerde and seyd ‘Naye —
I sawe hym nott syth yesterday;
    I trowe that he be schent.’

The stuard stode the wryght by,
And of hys garlond had ferly
    What that yt bemente …
[When he learns of its power …]
The stuard thought, ‘By Godes myght,
That schal I preve thys same nyght
    Whether thou blys or banne.’
And into hys chambyr he gan gone,
And toke treasure full good wone,
    And forth he speedde hemº than.

Butt he ne stynt att no stone
Tyll he unto the wryghtes hows come
    That ylke same nyght.
He met the wyfe amidde the gate,
About the necke he gan her take.
    And seyd, ‘My dere wyght,

All the gode that ys myne
I wyll the geve to be thyne
    To lye by the all nyght.’
[As with the lord, she demurs, but the steward presses twenty marks on her.
She remarks …]
‘Syr, andº I graunt that to you,
    if
Lett no man wete butt we two nowe.’  
He seyd, ‘Nay, wythowtyn drede.’
The stuard thought, ‘Sykerly  
Women beth both queynte and slye …’

… Up the sterys sche hym le[d]de  
Tyll he saw the wrightes bedde —  
Of tresoure thought he none;

He went and stumblyd att a stone,  
Into the seller he fylle sone,  
   Downe to the bare flore.  
The lord seyd, ‘What devyll art thou?  
And thou hadest falle on me nowe,  
   Thou hadest hurt me full sore!’

The stuard stert and staryd abowte  
If he might owerº gete owte  
Att hole lesse or mare.  
The lord seyd, ‘Welcome, and sytt be tyme,  
For thou schalt helpe to dyght this lyneº  
For all thy fers[e] fare.’

The stuard lokyd on the knyght.  
He seyd, ‘Syr, For Godes myght,  
   My lord, what do you here?’
[The steward, who seems to have a high opinion of himself, is very reluctant to work: ‘rather would I dy for hungyr Wythowte hosull or shryfte’. The lord’s rejoinder, ‘Thowe wylt worke, yt thou hungyr welle. What worke that the be brought’, is soon proved true: ‘The lord satt and dyd hys werke, The stuard drewe into the derke, Gret sorowe was in hys thought’. When the lord is given his dinner, he will not share it with the steward.]

The stuard satt all in a stody,  
His lord had forgote curtesy.  
   Tho seyd the stuard, ‘Geve me some.’
The lord seyd, ‘Sorowe have the morsel or sopeº  
   bread soaked in liquid
vi) The Wright’s Chaste Wife

That schall come in thy throte!
   Nott si much as o crome! crumb

Butt thou wylt helpe to dyght this lyne, unless
Much hungyr yt schall be thyne
   Though thou make much mone.’

[The steward capitulates. Meanwhile, back in the town, the lord’s people are increasingly worried about his fate. The proctor of the parish church approaches the wright, hears of the power of his garland, and immediately reacts in the same way as the lord and the steward: ‘in good faye That schall I wete thys same daye Whether yt may so be’. He goes to the wife and makes his proposition, which is received in the same manner as those of his predecessors. He offers twenty marks, and this is accepted.]

Nowe hath sche the treasure tane, taken
And up the steyre be they gane,
   (What helpyth yt to lye?)
The wyfe went the steyre beside.
The proctoure went a lytyll to wyde —
   He fell downe by and by.

Whan he into the seller felle
He wente to have sonke into helle, thought
   He was in hert full sory.
The stuard lokyd on the knyght,
And seyd, ‘Proctoure, for Godes myght,
   Come and sytt us by.’

The proctoure began to stare,
For he was he wyst never whare,
   Butt wele he knewe the knyght
And the stuard tht swyngelyd the lyne.
He seyd, ‘Syres, for Godes pyne,
   What do ye here this nyght?’

The stuard seyd, ‘God geve the care,
Thowe camyst to loke howe we fare,

   Nowe helpe this lyne were dyght.’

[The proctor pleads lack of training: ‘I lernyd never in lond For to have a swyngell in hond By day nor be nyght’. But the need for food begins to make itself felt: ‘the proctoure stode in a stody Whether he might worke hem by’. Finally …]

The proctoure began to knocke,
The good wyfe rawteº hym a rocke,º gave distaff
  For therto hadde sche nede,

Sche seyd, ‘Whan I was mayde at home,
Other werke cowed I do none
  My lyfe therwyth to lede.’
Sche gave hym in hande a rocke hynde,º well-made
And bade hem fast for to wynde
  Or ellys to lett be hys dede.

‘Yes, dame,’ he seyd, ‘so have I hele,
I schall yt worke bothe feyre and welle
  As ye have taute me …’
[The lord criticises his workmanship, but the three of them sit and toil away ‘tyll the wekedayes were past’.]

Then the wright, home came he,
And as he cam by hys hows syde
He herd noyse that was nott rydeº small
  Of persons two or thre …
[‘What ys thys dynne?’ he asks, and his wife tells him it is workmen who have come to help them. When the wright sees his lord there he is very alarmed, but the knight apologises and asks for mercy …]}

The wryght bade hys wyfe lett hym owte.
‘Naye, then sorowe come on my snowte
  If they passe hens todaye
Tyll that my lady coome and see
Howe they would have done with me …’
[So the lady is brought, ‘for to fett home her lord and knight … therto sche seyd noght.’ She is glad that her lord is alive, and …]

Whan sche came unto the steyre aboven,
Sche lokyd unto the seller downe,
    And seyd — this is nott to leyne —

‘Good syres, what doo you here?’
‘Dame, we by owre mete full dere,
   Wyth gret travayle and peyne;
I pray you helpe that we were owte,
And I wyll swere wythowtyn dowte
   Never to come here agayne.’

The lady spake the wyfe untylle,
And seyd, ‘Dame, yt yt be youre wylle,
   What doo thes meyny here?’
The carpentarys wyfe her anserd sykerly,
‘All they would have leyne me by,
   Everych, in ther manere.

Gold and sylver they me brought,
And forsoke yt, and would yt noght,
   The ryche gyftes so clere.
Wyllyng they were to do me schame —
I toke ther gyftes wythowtyn blame,
   And ther they be all thre!’

The lady answerd her anon,
‘I have thynges to do att home
   Mo than two or thre —
I wyst my lord never do right noght
Of no thing that schuld be wrought,
   Such as fallyth to me.’

The lady lawghed and made good game
Whan they came owte all insame
   From the swyngyll tre …
... And when they cam up aboven
They turnyd abowte and lokyd downe,
   The lord seyd, ‘so God save me,

Yet hadde I never such a fytte
As I have hadde in that lowe pytte —
   So Mary so mutt me spede!’

[The lord and the lady return home, and the steward and the proctor ride off,
vowing not to return. All the treasure that the suitors brought is given by the
lady to the wright’s wife. And the wright’s garland remains ‘feyre of hewe.’]
I take wytnes att gret and small,
Thus trewe bene good women all
   That nowe bene on lyve ….

vii) ‘Noodle’ Stories

This little sub-category of the comic tale, in which a fool demonstrates
his own folly, was obviously popular. In the fifteenth and sixteenth
centuries this kind of folly was attributed especially to the inhabitants
of Gotham in Nottinghamshire.

The Man who had a Goose

… Som tyme ther was a man that had a guse. And sho warpyd everilk
day ane egg. And on a tyme he umthoght that he wold hafe all thies
eggis at ons, and he slew his guse and oppend hur, and he fand bod one
egg in hur. And so for grete haste that he had of that at was for to com,
he loste all.

Penning the Cuckoo

On a tyme the men of Gotam wold have pynned the Cockow that she
should sing all the yeare and in the myddest of the towne they dyd make
a hedge (round in compass), and they had got a cocow, and put her in it

\[16 Simple Forms, pp. 146–7 (where he calls them Numskull stories). Three of these
four are in The Book of Noodles, ed. Clouston; I have not so far identified the first.
Its analogues are, of course, the story of the goose that laid the golden eggs; and
another about the wife who overfed her hen to get more eggs but ended up with
only a fat hen.\]
and sayde, ‘Singe here all the yeare, and thou shalte lacke neyther meate nor drincke.’ The Cocow, as soone as shee was set within the hedge, flew her waye. ‘A vengeaunce on her!’ sayde they, ‘We made not our hedge high ynough.’

Runaway Cheese

There was a man of Gotam the which went to the market to Nottingham to sell cheese. And as he was goynge downe the hyll to Nottingham bridge, one of his cheeses dyd fall out of his poake, and did runne downe the hyll. ‘A horsons,’ said the fellow, ‘Can you runne to the market alone I will sende the one after the other of you.’ He layde downe hys poake, and tooke the cheeses, and dyd trundle them downe the hyll one after another; and some ran into one busshe, and some into another. And at the laste he sayde, ‘I charge you all meete me in the market place.’ When the fellowe dyd come into the market place to meete hys cheeses, hee dyd tarie tyll the market was almoste done. Then he went about, and dyd enquire of hys neighboures, and other men if they did see his cheeses come to the market. ‘Who shoulde bringe them?’ sayd one of the market men. ‘Marye! themselves,’ sayd the fellow, ‘They knew the way well ynoughe.’ He taryed still tyll it was nyght. At nyghte he said, ‘A vengeaunce on them al! I dyd feare to see that my cheeses dyd runne so faste, that they runne beyond the market. I am sure that they be almoste now at Yorke.’ He hyred a horse to ryde after to Yorke to seeke hys cheeses wheare they were not. But to thys daye, no man coulde tell hym of hys cheeses.

A Demonic Grasshopper

On a tyme theare was one of Gotam mowynge in the meads, and found a great gras-hopper. He dyd caste downe hys sythe and dyd runne home to his neighbours and sayde that there was a devill in the fyelde that hopped in the grasse. Then there was everye man readey wythe clubbes and staves, wythe holbardes [halberds] and other weapons, to go to kill the grasshopper. Whan they did come to the place where that the Grashopper shoulde bee, sayde the one to the other, ‘Lette everye man crosse hymselfe from this devil, for we wyll not meddle wyth hym.’ And so they returned home againe and sayde, ‘Wee weare well bleste thys daye that we went no further.’ ‘A! cowardes!’ sayd he that
had the sythe in the mead, ‘Helpe me to fetch my sithe.’ ‘No,’ saide they, ‘It is good to sleap in a whole skynne. Better it is to leese [lose] thy sithe, than to mar all.’

German Merry Tales Translated

viii) How that Howleglas would fly from the Town House of Maybrough¹⁷

After that, came Howleglass to Maybrough where he did many marvellous things that his name was there well known. Then bade the principal of the town that he should do something that was never seen before. Then said he that he would go to the highest of the Council House and fly from it. And anon that was known through all the town that Howleglass would fly from the top of the Council House in such that all the town was there assembled and gathered in the market place to see him. Upon the top of the House stood Howleglass with his hands waving as though he would have flown. Whereat he laughed and said to the people, ‘I thought there had been no more fools than myself. But I see well that here is a whole town full. For had ye altogether said that ye would have flown, yet I would not have believed you. And now ye believe one afore that saith he will fly, which thing is impossible, for I have no wings, and no man can fly without wings.’ And then went he his way from the top of the Council House, and left the folk there standing. And then departed the folk from thence, some blaming him and some laughing, saying, ‘He is a shrewd fool, for he telleth us the truth.’

ix) The Parson and the Bishop’s Lady Paramour¹⁸

The parson of Kalenborowe perceyvynge that the bysshope wolde have hym with hym to every church-holowyng [hallowing], he sought a wile to byde at home and kepe howse with his servant or wenche, for it was moste his ease. And incontinent he went to the byssopes soverayne lady and prayed her that she wolde help hym that he might byde at

¹⁷ This anti-hero is also known as Till Eulenspiegel, a German folk hero or anti-hero. In A Hundred Merry Tales (ed. Zall), the first story is on p. 167.

¹⁸ In Gray’s Later Medieval English Literature, see pp. 223–4, where this story is described (the English version is probably from a Dutch prose version of a Low German text; references on p. 228).
home and nat go to no churche-halowynge, ‘And I wyll gyve you a gode rewarde’. She answered agayne and sayd, ‘That is nat in my power.’ The parson sayd, ‘Yes,’ and sayd, ‘Holde here a purse with money for your labour, for I knowe well the bysshope wyll lay with you tonight; thus I pray you to shewe me the hour of his commyng that I may lay under the bed.’ She answered and saide, ‘Than come at seven of the clocke, for eight of the clocke is his houre.’ And in the meane season she prepared the chamber lyke an erthely paradyse and sett rownde about the wallis of it candellis burnynge bright against the bishopes commyng, and at the houre assigned the parson came and crepte under the bedde in her chamber. Whan the bisshope com, he merveyled sore to se this sight and asked her what it ment. ‘My lorde,’ she saide, ‘this is for the honoure of you, for this nyght I hope ye wyll halowe my lytell chapel standing benethe my navyll in Venus valaye and that by and by, or ellys from hens forth I wyll shewe you no point of love whilst I leve.’

The bysshope went to bedde with his soverayn lady and he fulfilled all her desire and began to holowe her chapel to the best of his power. The parson laynge under the bedde herd this right well and began fore to singe with a hye voice lyke as they do at every church-holowynge in this maner, ‘Terribilis est locus iste’,19 wherof the bishop marvayled and was abashed and blessed hym with the signe of the holy crosse, and wenynge to hym that the devyll had bene in the chamber, and wolde have conjured hym. Than spake the parson laynge under the bedde with grete haste, saynge thus (and with that he crepte out), ‘Reverende fader, I fere so sore to breke your commaundement that I had lever crepe on hande and fote to fulfyll your mynde and wyll than to be absent at any of all your churche-holowinges, and for that cause I wolde be at this chapel also.’ The bysshope sayde, ‘I had nat called the to be at the holownge herof! I trowe the devyll brought the hether! Get the hens out of my sight and come nomore to me!’ ‘My lorde, I thanke you and also your lady paramours.’ Thus wente the preste on his way and thanked God that he was so rydde from the bysshope, and so come home and kepte house with his fayr wenche as he was wonte to do, the whiche was glad of his commyng home, for she had great disease of suche thynges as he was wonte to helpe her of. And some that envied the preste shewed the

19 This is a dreadful place!
bysshop that he had suche a fayre wenche. And because he had layde under the bysshops bedde and played hym that false touche, the bisshope sent a commission ento hym, that upon payne of curssinge he shold put awaye frome hym his yonge lusty wenche, and to kepe his house that he shold take an olde woman of xl yere of age, or ellys he sholde be put in pryson. The parson, hering this, made a gret mournynge complaint to his wenche and said, ‘Now must I washe and plasse, wringe and singe and do al my besines myself’, wherof she gave hym gode comforte and said, ‘The whele of fortune shall turne ones againe’, and so departed for a seson. And than he toke gode hert a grece, and said to himself, ‘No force, yet shal I begyle hym, for I wyll kepe ii wenches of xx yere of age, and twise xx maketh xl! Holde thyne owne, parson!’

Early Sixteenth-Century Jests

x) Wedded Men at the Gates of Heaven

A certain wedded man there was, which when he was dead came to heaven-gates to saint Peter, and said he came to claim his heritage which he had deserved. Saint Peter asked him what he was, and he said, ‘A wedded man.’ Anon Saint Peter opened the gate and bade him come in, and sayd he was worthy to have his heritage because he had had much trouble, and was worthy to have a crown of glory. Anon after that there came another man that claimed heaven, and said to Saint Peter that he had had two wives; to whom Saint Peter answered and said, ‘Come in, for thou art worthy to have a double crown of glory, for thou hast had double trouble.’ At the last there came a third claiming heaven, and said to Saint Peter that he had had three wives and desired to come in. ‘What!’ quod Saint Peter, ‘Thou hast been once in trouble and thereof delivered, and then willingly wouldst be troubled again, and yet again thereof delivered; and for all that couldst not beware the third time, but entered’st willingly in trouble again! Therefore go thy way to hell, for thou shalt never come in heaven, for thou art not worthy.’

This tale is a warning to them that have been twice in peril to beware how they come therein the third time.

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20 In A Hundred Merry Tales (ed. Zall), pp. 85–6.
xi) No Welshmen in Heaven

I find written among old jests how God made Saint Peter porter of heaven, and that God of his goodness, soon after his Passion, suffered many men to come to the kingdom of heaven with small deserving; at which time there was in heaven a great company of Welshmen which with their cracking [bragging] and babbling troubled all the others. Wherefore God said to Saint Peter that he was weary of them and that he would fain have them out of heaven. To whom Saint Peter said, ‘Good Lord, I warrant you, that shall be done.’ Wherefore Saint Peter went out of heaven-gates and cried with a loud voice, ‘Caws pob!’ that is as much as to say ‘roasted cheese’ — which thing the Welshmen hearing, ran out of heaven a great pace. And when Saint Peter saw them all out, he suddenly went into heaven and locked the door, and so sparr’d all the Welshmen out.

By this ye may see that it is no wisdom for a man to love or to set his mind too much upon any delicate or worldly pleasure whereby he shall lose the celestial and eternal joy.

21 Ibid. (p. 132), though judging by its spelling of (for example) ‘Cause Bob!’ Gray probably used a different edition.