

Here following Master Thomas More wrote
in his youth for his pastime.¹

(I) *A merry jest how a sergeant would learn to play the friar.*² *Written by Master Thomas More in his youth.*

Wise men always,
Affirm and say,
That best is for a man:
Diligently,
For to apply, 5
The business that he can³
And in no wise,⁴
To enterprise,⁵
Another faculty,
For he that will, 10
And can no skill,
Is never like to thee.⁶
He that hath left,
The hosiers⁷ craft,
And falleth to making shone,⁸ 15
The smith that shall,
To painting fall,
His thrift is well nigh done.
A black draper,⁹
With white paper, 20
To go to writing school,
An old butler,
Become a cutler,¹⁰
I wene¹¹ shall prove a fool.

¹ Source text for our modernization comes from *The English Works of Thomas More*, editors W.E. Campbell, A.W. Reed, R.W. Chambers, and W.A.G. Doyle-Davidson, vol. 1 (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode Limited, 1931). Cited as “Campbell and Reed” hereafter. We have modernized font and some spelling here, but left many archaic word forms in the text in order to maintain the original rhyme and meter.

² “Friar” for the obsolete form, “frere.” In the Roman Catholic Church, a friar was “a brother or member of one of the certain religious orders founded in the 13th century and afterwards, of which the chief were the four mendicant orders: the Franciscans; the Augustines; the Dominicans; and the Carmelites” (*OED*).

³ Campbell and Reed suggest “knows” for “can.”

⁴ Wise: “Manner, mode, fashion, style” (*OED*).

⁵ “Enterprise”: “To take in hand (a work), take upon oneself (a condition), attempt our undertake (a war, an expedition, etc.), run the risk of or venture upon (danger)” (*OED*).

⁶ Campbell and Reed suggest “thrive” for “thee.”

⁷ Hosier: “One who makes or deals in hose (stockings and socks) and frame—knitted or woven underclothing generally. Also used more generally for a man’s outfitter or haberdasher” (*OED*).

⁸ Shone: “Obsolete plural of shoe” (*OED*).

⁹ Draper: “Originally, one who made (wollen) cloth. Subsequently, a dealer in cloth, and now by extension, in other articles of textile manufacture: often qualified as wollen, linen draper” (*OED*).

¹⁰ Cutler: “One who makes, deals in, or repairs knives and similar cutting utensils” (*OED*).

¹¹ Wene: Variant of “ween”: In regard to what is present or past: To think, surmise, suppose, conceive, believe,

And an old trot, ¹²	25
That can God wot, ¹³	
Nothing but kiss the cup,	
With her physic, ¹⁴	
Will keep one sick,	
Till she have soused ¹⁵ him up.	30
A man of law,	
That never saw,	
The ways to buy and sell,	
Wenyng to rise,	
By merchandise,	35
I pray God speed him well.	
A merchant eke, ¹⁶	
That will go seek,	
By all the means he may,	
To fall in suit,	40
Till he dispute,	
His money clean away.	
Pleading ¹⁷ the law,	
For every straw,	
Shall prove a thrifty man,	45
With bate ¹⁸ and strife,	
But by my life,	
I cannot tell you when.	
When an hatter ¹⁹	
Will go smatter, ²⁰	50
In philosophy,	
Or a peddler,	
Wax a meddler, ²¹	
In theology,	
All that ensues,	55
Such crafts new,	
They drive so far a cast, ²²	
That evermore,	
They do therefore,	

consider" (*OED*).

¹² A "trot" is "an old woman; usually disparaging: an old beldame, a hag" (*OED*).

¹³ Know for "wot."

¹⁴ Physic: "The knowledge of the human body; especially, the theory of diseases and their treatment; medical science, medicine" (*OED*).

¹⁵ This line the *OED* uses as its example for "soused," which means "to bring to extremities."

¹⁶ "Eke" means "also."

¹⁷ Campbell and Reed suggest "pleading" for the archaic "pletynng."

¹⁸ Bate: "Contention, strife, discord" (*OED*).

¹⁹ Hatter: "A maker or dealer in hats" (*OED*).

²⁰ "Smatter" means "to talk ignorantly or superficially, to prate or chatter, of something" (*OED*).

²¹ Wax a meddler: Become or grow a meddler in theological matters.

²² That is, they throw so far off the mark.

Beshrew²³ themselves at last. 60
 This thing was tried
 And verified,
 Here by a sergeant late,
 That thriftly²⁴ was,
 Or he could pass, 65
 Wrapped²⁵ about the pate,²⁶
 While that he would
 See how he could,
 In God's name play the friar:
 Now if you will. 70
 Know how it feel,
 Take heed and ye
 shall hear.

It happed²⁷ so,
 Not long a go, 75
 A thrifty man there died,
 An hundred pound,
 Of nobles round,
 That had he laid aside:
 His son he would, 80
 Should have this gold,
 For to begin with all:
 But to suffice
 His child, well thrice,²⁸
 That money was too small. 85
 Yet or this day
 I have heard say,
 That many a man certesse,²⁹
 Hath with good cast,³⁰
 Be³¹ rich at last, 90
 That hath begonne with less.
 But this young man,

²³ "Beshrew" probably means one of the following: "treat evilly, use ill, abuse," or "to wish all that is bad," or as an "imprecatory expression" (a curse) such as "evil befall thee" (*OED*).

²⁴ Thriftly: "In a becoming or seemly manner, properly . . ." (*OED*).

²⁵ "Wrapped" for the original "rapped."

²⁶ "Pate" means "the head, the skull: more particularly applied to that part which is usually covered with hair" (*OED*).

²⁷ It happed so: it happened so.

²⁸ Well thrice: that is, three times the amount of money left to this child would not have been sufficient.

²⁹ Probably a variant of "certes," which means: "of a truth, of a certainty, certainly, assuredly. Used to confirm a statement" (*OED*).

³⁰ "Cast" is used in the following sense: "A throw or stroke of fortune; hence, fortune, chance, opportunity; lot, fate" (*OED*).

³¹ Be: that is, become rich.

So well began, His money to employ, That certainly, His policy, To see it was a joy. For lest some blast, Might overcast, ³²	95
His ship, or by mischance, Men with some wile, Might him beguile, And diminish ³³ his substance, For to put out, All manner doubt	100 105
He made a good purvey ³⁴ For every whyt, ³⁵ By his own wit, And toke ³⁶ an other way: First fair and well, Thereof much dele, ³⁷	110
He digged ³⁸ it in a pot, But then him thought, ³⁹ That way was nought, ⁴⁰	115
And there he left it not. So was he fain, ⁴¹ From thence again, To put it in a cup, And by and by, Covetously,	120
He supped it fair up. ⁴² In his own breast, He thought it best, His money to enclose, Then wist ⁴³ he well,	125

³² "Overcast" is made into a compound. The original reads "Might over cast . . .". The metaphor simply describes a ship that is overturned.

³³ "Diminish" replaces "minish."

³⁴ "Purvey" means "to forsee" (*OED*).

³⁵ Whyt: Probably a form of "wight," which means "person" (*OED*).

³⁶ Toke: obsolete past tense of take (*OED*).

³⁷ Dele: Obsolete variant of "deal" which appears "with other, and comparative words, as more, most, less, better, and the like, distinguishing one of two parts, or part from the remainder" (*OED*). "Much dele" refers to the amount of money that was placed into a pot.

³⁸ Campbell and Reed suggest "put" for "digged".

³⁹ But then him thought: that is, but then he thought, or a thought occurred to him.

⁴⁰ Campbell and Reed suggest "useless" for "nought."

⁴¹ Fain: "To be delighted or glad, rejoice" (*OED*).

⁴² He supped it fair up: A figurative use of "supped" wherein the inherited riches are swallowed up or consumed.

⁴³ Wist: knew.

Whatever fell,
 He could it never lose.
 He borrowed then,
 Of other men,
 Money and merchandise 130
 Never paid it,
 Up he laid it,
 In like manner wise.
 Yet on the gere,⁴⁴
 That he would were, 135
 He rought⁴⁵ not what he spent,
 So it were nice,
 As for the price,
 Could him not miscontent.⁴⁶
 With lusty⁴⁷ sport, 140
 And with resort,⁴⁸
 Of jolly company,
 In mirth and play,
 Full many a day,
 He lived merely.⁴⁹ 145
 And men had sworn,
 Some man is born,
 To have a lucky hour,
 And so was he,
 For such degree, 150
 He gat⁵⁰ and such honor,
 That without doubt,
 When he went out,
 A sergeant well and fair,
 Was ready straight, 155
 On him to wait,
 As soon as on the mayor.
 But he doubtless,
 Of his meekness,
 Hated such pomp and pride, 160
 And would not go,
 Companied so,
 But drew himself a side,
 To saint Katherine,
 Straight as a line, 165

⁴⁴ Campbell and Reed suggest “dress” for “gere.”

⁴⁵ Campbell and Reed suggest “cared” for “rought.”

⁴⁶ Miscontent: discontent, which means “Not content; discontented, dissatisfied; ill-pleased” (*OED*).

⁴⁷ Lusty: “Of persons and their attributes: Joyful, merry, jocund; cheerful, lively” (*OED*).

⁴⁸ Resort: “That which one has recourse for aid or assistance, or in order to accomplish some end” (*OED*).

⁴⁹ Campbell and Reed suggest “merrily” for “merely.”

⁵⁰ Gat: past tense of get (*OED*).

He gate him at a tide,⁵¹
 For devotion,
 Or promotion,
 There would he needs abide.
 There spent he fast,⁵² 170
 Till all was past,
 And to him came there many,
 To ask their debt,
 But none could get,
 The valor⁵³ of a penny. 175
 With visage⁵⁴ stout,⁵⁵
 He bare⁵⁶ it out,
 Even unto the hard hedge,⁵⁷
 A month or twain,⁵⁸
 Till he was fain, 180
 To lay his gown to pledge.
 Then was he there,
 In greater fear,
 Than ere that he came thither,
 And would as fain, 185
 Depart again,
 But that he wist not whither.
 Then after this,
 To a friend of his,
 He went and there abode,⁵⁹ 190
 Where as he lay,
 So sick alway,
 He might not come abrode.⁶⁰

 It happed then,
 A merchant man, 195
 That he ought⁶¹ money to,
 Of an officer,
 Then gan inquire,⁶²

⁵¹ Tide: "time" (*OED*).

⁵² Fast: "With firm grasp, attachment, or adhesion; so as not to permit of escape or detachment; tightly, securely" (*OED*).

⁵³ "Valor" means "the amount in money, etc., that a thing is worth; = VALUE" (*OED*).

⁵⁴ Visage: "The face or features as expressive of feeling or temperament; the countenance" (*OED*).

⁵⁵ Stout: "Proud, haughty, arrogant" (*OED*).

⁵⁶ Bare: bore.

⁵⁷ Campbell and Reed suggest "very limit" for "hedge."

⁵⁸ Twain: "two" (*OED*).

⁵⁹ Abode: past tense of abide (*OED*).

⁶⁰ "Abrode" is probably an archaic spelling for "abroad," which means "out of one's house or abode; out of doors; out in the open air" (*OED*).

⁶¹ Campbell and Reed suggest "owed" for "ought."

What him was best to do. And he answered, Be not aferde, ⁶³	200
Take an action therefore, I you behest, ⁶⁴ I shall him rest, ⁶⁵ And then care for no more.	205
I fear quod ⁶⁶ he, It will not be, For he will not come out. The sergeant said, Be not afraid, It shall be brought about. In many a game, Like to the same, Have I been well in ure, ⁶⁷ And for your sake, Let me be bake, ⁶⁸ But if I do this cure.	210 215
Thus part they both, And forth then goth, ⁶⁹ A pace this officer, And for a day, All his array, He changed with a friar. So was he dight ⁷⁰ That no man might,	220 225
Him for a friar deny, He dopped and dooked, ⁷¹ He spoke and looked, So religiously. Yet in a glass, ⁷²	230

⁶² "Inquire" for the original "enquire."

⁶³ Aferde: afeard, which means "affected with fear or terror; frightened, afraid" (*OED*).

⁶⁴ "Behest" is a transitive verb that means "to vow, promise" (*OED*). *I promise you* is the line's meaning.

⁶⁵ Rest: "arrest" (*OED*).

⁶⁶ Quod: said.

⁶⁷ Campbell and Reed suggest "well used to."

⁶⁸ A figurative use of "bake," meaning "to prepare, make ready" (*OED*). In context, the sergeant will concoct a plan.

⁶⁹ Goth: goeth.

⁷⁰ Campbell and Reed suggest "dressed" for "dight."

⁷¹ Campell and Reed suggest "ducked" and "curtsied" for "dopped" and "dooked."

⁷² Glass: that is, in a mirror.

Or he would pass,
He toted⁷³ and he peered,
His heart for pride,
Leapt in his side,
To see how well he friared.⁷⁴ 235

Then forth a pace,
Unto the place,
He goeth in God's name,⁷⁵
To do this deed,
But now take heed, 240
For here beginneth the game.

He drew him nigh,
And softly,
Straight at the door he knocked:
And a damsel, 245
That heard him well,
There came and it unlocked.

The friar said,
God speed⁷⁶ fair maid,
Here lodgeth such a man, 250
It is told me:

Well sir quod she,
And if he do what then?
Quod he mistress,
No harm doubtless: 255

It longeth⁷⁷ for our order,⁷⁸
To hurt no man,
But as we can,
Every wight to forder.⁷⁹
With him truly, 260

Fain speak would I.
Sir quod she by my fay,⁸⁰

⁷³ Campbell and Reed suggest “looked” for “toted.”

⁷⁴ “Friared” replaces “freered.” More turns “friar” into a verb—friared—that puns upon “fared.” Fare means “to ‘go on,’ behave, conduct oneself, act. To ‘go’; to happen; to turn out.” (*OED*).

⁷⁵ The humor lies in the ambiguity of going forth in the name of God. Dressed as a friar—that is, in disguise—the sergeant goes in the name of God.

⁷⁶ God speed: “To further or assist (a person); to cause to succeed or prosper” (*OED*).

⁷⁷ It longeth: it belongs.

⁷⁸ For our order: that is, the religious order in which he feigns membership.

⁷⁹ Forder: further, which means: “To help forward, assist (usually things; less frequently persons); to promote, favor (an action or movement)” (*OED*).

⁸⁰ Fay: “Religious belief,” or “Faith” (*OED*).

He is so sick,⁸¹
 Ye be not like,⁸²
 To speak with him today. 265
 Quod he fare may,⁸³
 Yet I you pray,
 This much at my desire,
 Vouchsafe⁸⁴ to do,
 As go him to, 270
 And say an austen⁸⁵ friar.
 Would with him speak,
 And matters break,
 For his avayle⁸⁶ certain.
 Quod she I will, 275
 Stand ye here still,
 Till I come down again.
 Up is she go,
 And told him so,
 As she was bode⁸⁷ to say. 280
 He mistrusting,
 No maner thing,
 Said maiden go thy way,
 And fetch him hyder,⁸⁸
 That we togyder,⁸⁹ 285
 May talk. Adown she goeth,
 Up she him brought,
 No harm she thought,
 But it made some folk wrothe.⁹⁰

This officer, 290
 This feigned friar,
 When he was come aloft,
 He dopped then,
 And greet this man,
 Religiously and oft. 295
 And he again,

⁸¹ "Sick" replaces the original "sike."

⁸² Like: likely.

⁸³ Campbell and Reed suggest "maiden" for "may." "Fare may" is the sergeant's version of "fair maiden."

⁸⁴ Vouchsafe: "to confer or bestow (some thing, favor, or benefit) on a person" (*OED*).

⁸⁵ Austen: "variant of Austin, Augustinian" (*OED*). Here the poem reveals what kind of friar the sergeant dresses up as.

⁸⁶ "Avayle" could be a variant of "avail", which means "benefit" or "advantage" (*OED*).

⁸⁷ Bode: "command, order, behest" (*OED*).

⁸⁸ Hyder: "Obsolete form of "hither" (*OED*).

⁸⁹ Togyder: together.

⁹⁰ Wrothe: wrathful.

Right glad and fain,
 Took him there by the hand,
 The friar then said.
 Ye be dismayed, 300
 With trouble I understand.
 Indeed quod he,
 It hath with me,
 Been better than it is.
 Sir quod the friar, 305
 Be of good cheer,
 Yet shall it after this.
 For Christ's sake,
 Look that you take,
 No thought within your breast: 310
 God may tourne⁹¹ all,
 And so he shall,
 I trust unto the best.
 But I would now,
 Comen⁹² with you, 315
 In counsel if you please,
 Or else nat⁹³
 Of matters that,
 Shall set your heart at ease.

Down went the maid, 320
 The merchant said,
 Now say on gentle friar,
 Of this tiding,
 That ye me bring,
 I long full sore to hear. 325

When there was none,
 But they alone,
 The friar with evil grace,⁹⁴
 Said, I rest the,⁹⁵
 Come on with me, 330
 And out he took his mace:⁹⁶
 Thou shalt obey,

⁹¹ Tourne: Obsolete form of turn (*OED*).

⁹² Campbell and Reed suggest "talk" for "comen."

⁹³ Nat: Obsolete form of not (*OED*).

⁹⁴ "Evil grace" is an oxymoron that captures some of More's humor in the poem.

⁹⁵ I rest the: I arrest thee.

⁹⁶ Mace: "A heavy staff or club, either entirely of metal or having a metal head, often spiked: formerly a regular weapon of war. In early use, a club of any kind" (*OED*).

Come on thy way,
 I have thee in my clouche,⁹⁷
 Thou goest not hence, 335
 For all the pence,⁹⁸
 The mayor hath in his pouch.⁹⁹

This merchant there,
 For wrath and fear,
 He waxing welnygh¹⁰⁰ wood,¹⁰¹ 340
 Said whoreson¹⁰² thief,
 With a mischief,
 Who hath taught thee thy good.

And with his fist,
 Upon the list,¹⁰³ 345
 He gave him such a blow,
 That backward down,
 Almost in sowne,¹⁰⁴

The friar is overthrow.
 Yet was this man, 350
 Well fearder¹⁰⁵ then,
 Lest he the friar had slain,

Till with good raps,
 And heavy claps,
 He dawde¹⁰⁶ him up again. 355
 The friar took heart,
 And up he start,

And well he laid about,
 And so there goeth,
 Between them both, 360
 Many a lusty¹⁰⁷ clout.¹⁰⁸

They rent and tear,
 Each other's hair,
 And clave¹⁰⁹ together fast,
 Till with lugging, 365

⁹⁷ Clouche: Obsolete form of "clutch" (*OED*); hence, "clutches."

⁹⁸ Pence: A collective plural of penny (*OED*).

⁹⁹ Pouch: "A bag, sack, or receptacle of small or moderate size, used for various purposes, esp. for carrying small articles; a pocket as a distinct receptacle worn outside the dress" (*OED*).

¹⁰⁰ "Welnygh" probably means "well nigh," or "well near."

¹⁰¹ Campbell and Reed suggest "mad" for "wood." In context, the line may read, "He was growing well near mad."

¹⁰² "Whoreson" replaces "horson."

¹⁰³ Campbell and Reed suggest "ear" for "list."

¹⁰⁴ Campbell and Reed suggest "swoon" for "swone."

¹⁰⁵ Fearder: "Affected with fear, frightened, afraid, timid" (*OED*).

¹⁰⁶ Campbell and Reed suggest "roused" for "dawde."

¹⁰⁷ Lusty: "Full of healthy vigor" (*OED*).

¹⁰⁸ Clout: "A small piece or shred produced by tearing or rending; in later use chiefly a shred of cloth, a rag" (*OED*).

¹⁰⁹ "Clave" is the "past tense of cleave" (*OED*).

And with tugging,
They fell down both at last.
Then on the ground,
Together round,
With many a sad stroke, 370
They roll and rumble,
They turn and tumble,
As pigs¹¹⁰ do in a poke.¹¹¹

So long above,
They heve¹¹² and shove, 375
Together that at last,
The maid and wife,
To break the strife,
Hyed¹¹³ them upward fast.
And when they spy, 380
The captains lie,
Both waltrin¹¹⁴ on the place,
The friar's hood,
They pulled a good,
Adown about his face. 385
While he was blind
The wench behind,
Lent him laid¹¹⁵ on the floor,
Many a joule,¹¹⁶ 390
About the noule,¹¹⁷
With a great batyldore.¹¹⁸
The wife came yet
And with her feet,
She holpe¹¹⁹ to keep him down,
And with her rock, 395

¹¹⁰ "Pigs" for "pygges."

¹¹¹ Poke: "A bag; a small sack: applied to a bag of any material or description, but usually smaller than a sack" (*OED*).

¹¹² Heve: Obsolete form of heave (*OED*).

¹¹³ Perhaps "hyed" means "tied."

¹¹⁴ Campbell and Reed suggest "rolling" for "waltrin."

¹¹⁵ Laid is a past participle of lay, which may mean: "To bring or cast down from an erect position (in Old English often, to strike down, slay)" (*OED*).

¹¹⁶ "Joule" is an obsolete form of "jowl," which means "a bump; a blow, especially on the head; a knock, a stroke" (*OED*).

¹¹⁷ "Noule" is probably an obsolete form of "noll," which means "the top or crown of the head; the head generally; the noddle" (*OED*).

¹¹⁸ "Batyldore" is probably a variant of "battledore," which was "a beetle or wooden 'bat' used in washing, also (when made cylindrical) for smoothing out or 'mangling' linen clothes; hence also applied to similarly shaped instruments, e.g. the paddle of a canoe, a utensil for inserting loaves into an oven, or a glass-ware into the kiln, etc." (*OED*).

¹¹⁹ Holpe: past tense and past participle of 'help' (*OED*).

Many a knock,
 She gave him on the crown.
 They laid his mace,
 About¹²⁰ his face,
 That he was wood for pain: 400
 The friar frappe,
 Gate¹²¹ many a swappe,¹²²
 Till he was full nigh slain.
 Up they him lift,
 And with ill thrift, 405
 Headling¹²³ along the stair.
 Down they him threw,
 And said adieu,
 Command¹²⁴ us to the mayor.

The friar arose, 410
 But I suppose,
 Amazed¹²⁵ was his head,
 He shook his ears,
 And from great fears,
 He thought him well a fled. 415
 Quod he now lost,
 Is all this cost,
 We be never the near.
 I'll mote¹²⁶ he the,¹²⁷
 That caused me, 420
 To make myself a friar.

Now masters all,
 Here now I shall,
 End there as I began,
 In any wise, 425
 I would avyse,¹²⁸

¹²⁰ "About" is an adverb modifying "laid," which describes position: "On the outside, on the outer surface of; on every side of; all around; around, surrounding" (*OED*). More simply means they strike the "friar" on the head.

¹²¹ Gate: "variant of 'got,' which means "acquired" (*OED*).

¹²² "Swappe" is probably a variant of "swap": "An act of swapping or striking; a stroke, a blow" (*OED*).

¹²³ Headling: "With the head foremost; headlong" (*OED*).

¹²⁴ "Command" is probably a variant of "commend": "To give in trust or charge, deliver to one's care or keeping; to commit, entrust" (*OED*). The word is used with sarcasm here.

¹²⁵ Amazed: "driven stupid; stunned or stupefied, as by a blow; out of one's wits;" or "bewildered, confounded, confused, perplexed" (*OED*).

¹²⁶ "Mote" means "expressing permission or possibility" (*OED*).

¹²⁷ Campbell and Reed suggest "thrive" for "the." Hence, the friar says in reference to his lost prisoner, "I'll bet he thrives."

¹²⁸ Avyse: "Obsolete form of advice, or advise" (*OED*).

And counsel every man,
His own craft use,
All new refuse,
And lightly let them gone:
Play not the friar,
Now make good chere,¹²⁹
And welcome every chone.¹³⁰

430

Finis.

¹²⁹ Chere: cheer.

¹³⁰ Every chone: every one.