

**THE TALE OF THE BASYN AND THE FRERE  
AND THE BOY: TWO EARLY TALES OF  
MAGIC PRINTED FROM MANUSCRIPTS  
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The Tale of the Basyn and The Frere and the Boy: two early tales of magic printed from manuscripts preserved in the Public library of the University of Cambridge by Thomas Wright

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**THOMAS WRIGHT**

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# The Tale of the **Sasyn** and the **Frere** and the **Boy**

Two Early Tales of Magic Printed from Manuscripts  
presented in the Public Library of the  
University of Cambridge



London  
William Pickering

MCCCXXXI

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TO  
**M. FERDINAND WOLF,**  
OF VIENNA, AS A TOKEN OF SINCERE REGARD  
AND ESTEEM.

PREFACE TO THE TALES OF A BASIN, AND  
OF THE FRIAR AND THE BOY.



**B**OTH the following poems have already appeared in print, in different modern collections, although in the one case not from the manuscript which I have followed. Our earlier ballads and stories illustrative of the popular superstitions and mythology are however scarce, and, when we meet with them, are worthy

of preservation. I am sure, therefore, that no excuse will be necessary for printing, in preference to many other curious poems, two of the most generally popular of our tales of magic and enchantment in the earliest forms that we at present know. They have both been published in different shapes up to a very recent period, and one is found, with little variation, among the national stories of many different peoples.

Among the old stories and miracles of the monks,



there is no more common method of detecting and sometimes punishing crimes, than by fixing the offenders to the object of their crime, or to the place or thing which has witnessed it. The stories of the monks were sometimes the types of those of the peasantry, but they were, probably, still more commonly taken from them, and the similarity between earlier saints' legends and later popular tales, may, in very many cases, be taken as a proof of the antiquity of the latter. In the preface to the *Tournament of Tottenham* I have stated my reasons for believing the manuscript which contains the *Tale of a Basin*, as well as that ballad, to have been written in the earlier half of the fourteenth century. The story again makes its appearance, with some little variation, among the broadside ballads which were so common during the sixteenth and particularly the seventeenth centuries. In the catalogue of a collection of ballads which was in the possession of the late Mr. Heber, I find the following title—"The Lancashire Cuckold, or the Country Parish Clark betrayed by a Conjuror's enchanted Chamber Pot, printed for J. Blare." This gives us good reason for believing that the story had not lost its popularity from the fourteenth to the eighteenth century. It occurs again in a common chap-book, "The History of Jack Horner, containing the Witty Pranks he played from his Youth to his Riper

Years, being pleasant for Winter Evenings," of which the earliest copy I have seen is one of the Aldermary Church-yard books. It there forms chapter vi. "Jack's kindness to the Inn-keeper, whom he puts in a way to pay his debts." By this time the sect who were the object of popular slander was greatly changed, and the person of the monk is replaced by that of a Quaker. It must be premised that our hero (Jack) had obtained a pipe like that with which the Jack of our second ballad tormented the friar, and in a similar manner, and also a coat of invisibility, the substitute for the German tarn-kappe. The inn-keeper, of whose wife the rich Quaker was amorous, is in distress, and unable to obtain two hundred pounds, which he is bound to pay on a certain day. Jack comforts him, and promises to aid him:—

"Mount thy bay nag, and take thy cloak  
 With thy warm morning gown,  
 And lodge within a hollow oak,  
 A mile or two from town.  
 There you may sleep in sweet content  
 All night, and take your rest,  
 Then leave it to my management,  
 And, sir, a pleasant jest  
 Next morning there you shall behold,  
 The like ne'er seen before,  
 Which shall produce a sum of gold,  
 Nay likewise silver store."

The inn-keeper follows his counsel, and Jack, by means of his invisible coat, introduces himself into the house, and witnesses the feasting and familiarity of the Quaker and the hostess. In the night both, with their maid also, are fixed to the chamber pot, and Jack, by means of his magical pipe, leads them dancing through the town to the tree where the inn-keeper is concealed, who comes from his hiding place, menaces the Quaker with the same punishment as is threatened to the monk in the older ballad, and only lets him go on the payment of the two hundred pound of which he has need. The specimen we have given is sufficient to show the wretched doggerel for which the older spirited rhymes have been exchanged.

I ought to add that the *Tale of a Basin* has been printed by Mr. Hartsborne, in his *Early Metrical Tales*, but with its full share of the blunders by which that book is disfigured and rendered worse than useless. It had been previously printed by Jameson, with about equal accuracy.

The other tale I have printed, that of the Friar and the Boy, has been still more generally popular. The manuscript which contains our copy is proved by internal evidence to have been written during the reign of Henry VI., and not, as Ritson states, in that of Henry VII. Its shelf mark, in the Public Library of