The Friar, the Summoner,

the Friar’s Prologue and the Friar’s Tale
The Friar, another cleric, is even less a man of God than the Monk. A member of a mendicant order of men who lived on what they could get by begging, he has become a professional fundraiser, the best in his friary because of some special skills: personal charm, a good singing voice, an attractive little lisp, a talent for mending quarrels and having the right little gift for the ladies, and a forgiving way in the confessional especially when he expects a generous donation. He can find good economic reasons to cultivate the company of the rich rather than the poor.

**Here is the description of the roguish Friar from the General Prologue**

> A FRIAR there was, a wanton and a merry,  
> A limiter, a full solémpné man.\(^1\)  
> In all the orders four is none that can  
> So much of dalliance and fair language.  
> He had made full many a marriage  
> Of youngé women at his owné cost.\(^2\)  
> Unto his order he was a noble post.  
> Full well beloved and familiar was he  
> With franklins over all in his country,  
> And eke with worthy women of the town,  
>  
> His manner in the confessional  
> For he had power of confession,  
> As said himself, more than a curate,  
> For of his order he was licentiate.\(^3\)  
> Full sweetély heard he confession  
> And pleasant was his absolutïon.  
> He was an easy man to give penánce

\(^1\) A Friar (Fr. "frère") was a member of one of four religious orders of men. Some were "mendicants," who depended on what they could get by begging. Our friar, a "limiter," has a begging district within which he must stay. "Solempne" cannot mean "solemn" except as heavy irony.

\(^2\) licentiate: Sometimes the pope or bishop would reserve to himself or to a special delegate (licentiate) the right to hear the confessions of prominent public sinners, guilty of particularly heinous offences. This would have no relevance to the ordinary confession-goer, for whom the Friar had no more "power of confession" than the "curate" or "parson."
There as he wist to have a good pittance, 
expected / offering

225 For unto a poor order for to give
Is signè that a man is well y-shrive, 
confessed
For if he gave, he durst make avaut
dared / boast
He wistè that a man was répentaunt, ¹
He knew
For many a man so hard is of his heart,

230 He may not weep though that him sorè smart.
it hurts him sharply
Therefore, instead of weeping and [of] prayers
Men may give silver to the poorè freres.²
friars

The company he cultivated

His tipet was aye farsèd full of knives
hood was always packed
And pinnès for to given faire wives.

235 And certainly he had a merry note—
Well could he sing and playen on a rote.
stringed instrument
Of yeddings he bore utterly the prize.
ballad songs
His neck was white as is the fleur de lys;
lily
Thereto he strong was as a champion.
But also / fighter

240 He knew the taverns well in every town
And every hosteler and tappester
innkeeper & barmaid
Bet than a lazor or a beggester,³
Better / leper or beggar
For unto such a worthy man as he

245 To have with sickè lazars acquaintance.
lepers
It is not honest, it may not advance
proper / profit
For to dealen with no such poraille,
poor people
But all with rich and sellers of vitaille.
food
And overall there as profit should arise,
everywhere that

¹ For if ... repentaunt: "For if he (the penitent) gave (an offering), he (the Friar) would dare to say that he knew the man was truly repentant."

² freres: This, the plural of the F rench word for "brother", is the MS spelling, which is retained in singular or plural when it seems to help the rhyme with words like "dear" or "prayer". Otherwise the modern word "friars(s)" is used.

³ Tapster, beggester: the -ster ending signified, strictly, a female. It survives (barely) in "spinster."
250 Courteous he was and lowly of service; and humble

**His smooth begging manner, effective even on the poorest**

There was no man nowhere so virtuous.¹
He was the besté beggar in his house

252a And gave a certain farmé for the grant.²
252b None of his brethren came there in his haunt. district
For though a widow hadde not a shoe,
So pleasant was his "In Principio" his blessing

255 Yet he would have a farthing ere he went. 1/4 of a penny
His purchase was well better than his rent.³

**He had other talents and attractions**

And rage he could as it were right a whelp. frolic like a puppy
In lovédays there could he muchel help, On mediation days
For there he was not like a cloisterer.⁴

260 With a threadbare cope as is a pooré scholar, cloak
But he was like a master or a pope.⁵
Of double worsted was his semi-cope, short cloak
And rounded as a bell out of the press. the mold
Somewhat he lisped for his wantonness in affectation

265 To make his English sweet upon his tongue,
And in his harping when that he had sung,
His eyen twinkled in his head aright eyes
As do the starrés in the frosty night. stars
This worthy limiter was cleft Huberd. was called

¹ Virtuous: The meaning of virtuous ("obliging? effective"?) would seem to depend on whether one takes this line with the preceding or the following line.

² And gave ...: He had paid a certain fee (’farm’) for the monopoly (’grant’) of begging in his district (’haunt’). The couplet And gave ... haunt occurs only in MS Hengwrt of the Six Text.

³ His purchase...: His income from the begging was much larger than his outlay for the monopoly.

⁴ cloisterer: probably a "real" friar who stayed largely within his cloister, satisfied with poor clothes according to his vow of poverty.

⁵ master: possibly Master of Arts, a rather more eminent degree than it is now, though hardly making its holder as exalted as the pope.
For convenience we insert here also the portrait of the Friar’s antagonist, the Summoner, from the General Prologue

The Summoner’s unappetizing physical appearance

A SUMMONER was there with us in that place
That had a fire-red cherubinè’s face,
For saucèfleme he was with eyen narrow.
And hot he was and lecherous as a sparrow.

With scaled brows black, and piled beard,
Of his visagè children were afeard.
There n’as quicksilver, litharge nor brimstone,

Boras, ceruse, nor oil of tartar none,
Nor ointment that wouldè cleanse and bite
That him might helpen of his whelkès white,
Nor of the knobbès sitting on his cheeks.

Well loved he garlic, onion and eke leeks,
And for to drinken strong winè, red as blood;
Then would he speak and cry as he were wood.

His verbal peculiarities when drunk

And when that he well drunken had the wine,
Then would he speake no word but Latin.
A fewè termès had he, two or three
That he had learned out of some decree.
No wonder is; he heard it all the day.
And eke you knowen well how that a jay
Can clepen "Wat" as well as can the Pope.
But whoso could in other things him grope,

Then had he spent all his philosophy.

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1  623: A Summoner was a man who delivered summonses for alleged public sinners to appear at the Archdeacon’s ecclesiastical court. The description of his semi-leprous body is meant to be disgusting, a metaphor for his spiritual state.

2  624: Medieval artists painted the faces of cherubs red. The summoner is of course less cherubic than satanic.

3  626: Sparrows were Venus's birds, considered lecherous presumably because they were so many.
Aye, "Questio quid juris" would he cry.1 "What is the law?"

**His opinion of his work and his employer**

He was a gentle harlot, and a kind. rascal
A better fellow shouldé men not find:
He wouldé suffer for a quart of wine allow
650 A good fellow to have his concubine keep
A twelvemonth, and excuse him at the full. let him off
Full privily a Finch eke could he pull.2 secretly
And if he found owhere a good fellow, anywhere
He wouldé teachen him to have no awe

655 In such a case, of the archdeacon's curse
But if a man's soul were in his purse, unless
For in his purse he should y-punished be.
"Purse is the archdeacon's hell," said he.
But well I wot, he lied right indeed. I know
660 Of cursing ought each guilty man to dread, absolution
For curse will slay right as assoiling saveth let him beware
And also 'ware him of "Significavit."3

**His informants**

In daunger had he, at his owné guise power / disposal
The youngé girls of the diocese 4
The youngé girls of the diocese 4
665 And knew their council and was all their redde. adviser
A garland had he set upon his head
tavern sign
As great as it were for an aléstake.
A buckler had he made him of a cake.5 shield

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1 646: "The question is: What is the law?" This is a lawyer's phrase which the Summoner heard regularly in the archdeacon's court.

2 652: "Secretly he would enjoy a girl himself" or "He could do a clever trick."

3 662: The writ of excommunication began with the word "Significavit."

4 664: "girls" probably meant "prostitutes," as it still can. See "Friars Tale," below, lines 1355 ff.

5 667: A tavern "sign" was a large wreath or broom on a pole. Acting the buffoon, the Summoner has also turned a thin cake into a shield.
THE FRIAR'S TALE

Introduction

At the end of the Wife of Bath's very long prologue, the Friar laughingly said "This was a long preamble of a tale," which indeed it is, and one of the most famous surely. The Summoner rebuked him for interjecting himself at all, and made some insulting remarks about friars in general and this friar in particular. The angry response of the Friar was to promise an unflattering tale about summoners, which we come to now as the confrontation is renewed at the end of the Wife's tale. This creation of antagonisms between characters is one of the best examples of the kind of "dramatic" arrangement of tales and tellers which was mentioned in the General Introduction. The stories told by Friar and Summoner are made to spring out of personal animosities, and are not just handed to the characters indiscriminately. This particular confrontation is especially well set up, for it allows Chaucer's satire of some aspects of his society to appear to come from the mouths of the very types who are being satirized, rather than from any moralist, whether the author or someone else.

The Friar's Tale is really an extended gloss on the word "summoner," the kind of person who does a nasty job as to the manner born, nastily. One day, on his way to squeeze the last few pennies out of a poor old widow on a false charge, a summoner runs into a "yeoman" who professes to be a bailiff down on his luck. Both swear eternal brotherhood, and swap confidences about their practices, and in the course of the exchange the summoner makes a confession of his sins; but this is no sacramental confession to God and His priest, and boastfulness not remorse predominates. So the bailiff "gan a little for to smile," as well he might, for when he reveals that it is to the devil himself that the summoner has just made his confession, that scoundrel does not turn in flight; he is just mildly surprised and curious about conditions in Hell. He himself is something like sin incarnate, so why should he be surprised at seeing a mirror image of himself?

What perhaps surprises the reader is that the bailiff / devil is both more of a gentleman and more of an orthodox Christian theologian than the summoner. He knows that only those are damned who damn themselves. As he says more than once in different ways, he takes only what people freely give him:
I ride about my purchasing
To wit [learn] if men will give me anything

This point is made with humorous clarity in the central incident with the carter who curses his horses to Hell and damnation. But the devil will not take the horses because he knows that the carter does not mean it. His cuss words do not really express his "intent," a word that crops up about six times in this short tale, emphasizing the major point, which the summoner never gets.

Another word that recurs throughout the story even more frequently than "intent" is "brother" and its derivative "brotherhood," a subject on which the Tales wax sardonic more than once, as in The Knight's Tale and The Pardoner's Tale, though here it takes an interesting twist: the summoner is a true brother to the devil, and nothing can break that bond.

Notice how the tale that starts out as just a tale, turns into a sermon "exemplum" at the end as the Friar drops easily into his natural role as a preacher who professes to know a good deal about Hell, a claim that the pilgrim Summoner seizes upon with relish when he starts his counter-attack.
PROLOGUE to the FRIAR'S TALE

The quarrel between the Friar and the Summoner is resumed after its interruption during the Wife of Bath's narrative.

This worthy limiter, this noble Frere, fine beggar
He made always a manner lowering cheer scowling face
Upon the Summoner, but for honesty decency
No villain's word as yet to him spoke he. No rude word
But at the last he said unto the Wife: Wife of Bath

1270 "Dame," quod he, "God give you right good life. Madam, said he
You have here touched, all so may I thee, I declare
In school matter great difficulty. In academic debate
You have said muchel thing right well, I say:
But, Dame, here as we ridden by the way,

1275 Us needeth not to speaken but of game. entertainment
And let authorities, in God's name, And leave citations also
To preaching, and to school eke of clergy. But if it like unto this company, if it please
But if it like unto this company,
I will you of a summoner tell a game. a story

1280 Pardee, you may well knowe by the name, By God
That of a summoner may no good be said. annoyed
I pray that none of you be evil apaid. with summonses
A summoner is a runner up and down beaten
With mandements for fornication, polite

1285 And is y-beat at every town's end."
Our Host then spoke: "Ah, Sir, you should be hend position
And courteous, as a man of your estate.
In company we will have no debate.
Telleth your tale, and let the Summoner be."

1290 "Nay," quod the Summoner, "let him say to me said the S.
What so him list. When it comes to my lot, What he likes / turn
By God I shall him quitten every grot. get even w. / every bit
I shall him tellen what a great honour
It is to be a flattering limiter, beggar

1295 And of many another manner crime, go over
Which needeth not rehearsen at this time,
And his office I shall him tell ywis."
Our Host answered: "Peace, no more of this."
And after this he said unto the Frere:
1300  "Tell forth your tale, my leve master dear."

THE FRIAR'S TALE

Portray of a high cleric who levies fines on every offence against church law

Whilom there was dwelling in my country
An archdeacon, a man of high degree,\(^1\)
That boldly did execution,
In punishing of fornication,
1305  Of witchcraft and eke of bawdry,
Of defamation and avowtery,
Of church-reeves and of testaments,
Of contracts and of lack of sacraments,
Of usury and of simony also.
1310  But certes lechers did he greatest woe.
They should singen, if that they were hent.\(^2\)
And small tithers weren foul y-shent,
If any person would upon them 'plain.
There might astert him no pecunial pain.\(^3\)
1315  For small tithes, and small offering
He made the people piteously to sing,
For ere the bishop caught them with his hook,

\(^1\) Archdeacons, who ranked just below bishops, conducted ecclesiastical courts in specified areas of the diocese.

\(^2\) They should singen ...: Here and five lines below, the song they would sing was Welaway!, a cry of lament. Next line: smalle tithers ...: "People who skimmed on their tithes were really heavily fined." Tithes were the 10 per cent of their income that the laity theoretically owed to the church.

\(^3\) There might ...: This seems to mean that no possible monetary fine (pecunial pain) could escape him (might astert him).
They were in the archdeacon's book,
And then had he through his jurisdiction
1320 Power to do on them correction.

*The archdeacon's agent, an unscrupulous summoner*

He had a Summoner ready to his hand,
A slyer boy was none in Engeland.
For subtly he had his espial spy ring
That taught him where that it might him avail. showed him / profit him
1325 He couldë spare of lechers one or two let off
To teachen him to four and twenty more, To lead him
For though this Summoner wood were as a hare, angry
To tell his harlotry I will not spare, debauchery
For we be out of his correction.

They have of us no jurisdiction,
Ne never shall have, term of all their lives." length of
"Peter, so be the women of the stives," By St. P. / brothels
Quod this Summoner, "y-put out of our cure." jurisdiction
"Peace, with mischance and with misaventure," 1 fume
1335 Thus said Our Host, "and let him tell his tale.
Now telleth forth, though that the Summoner gale, Ne spareth not, mine ownè master dear."

*The summoner is a thief who uses pimps and prostitutes as informers*

"This falsè thief, this Summoner," quod the Frere, pimps
"Had always bawdes ready to his hand,"
1340 As any hawk to lure in Engeland, 2 That told him all the secrets that they knew, not recent
For their acquaintance was not come of new. their agents secretly
They weren his approvers privily.
He took himself a great profit thereby:

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1 Peace...: "Quiet! bad luck to you!" w. mischance and w. misavventro both mean much the same thing.

2 Falconers lured their hawks back by showing them the lure, something that attracted them, such as another bird, real or not.
He had ...: He also had prostitutes (wenches) in his pay who told him who their clients were, titled or common.

The summoner would go through the motions of summoning to court both his prostitute informant and her client, where he would take a substantial bribe from the man to keep his name out of the record. The girl too would go free, of course.

"No hunting dog could tell a deer wounded by the archers from a healthy one as well as could this summoner smell a secret lecher, an adulterer (avowter), or an (illicit) lover."
Therefore on it he set all his intent.¹

*One day the summoner meets a strange yeoman*

1375 And so befell, that once upon a day
This Summoner, ever waiting on his prey,
Went for to summon a widow, an old ribibe,
Feigning a cause, for he would have a bribe.                 old bag
And happed that he saw before him ride

1380 A gay yeoman under a forest side. A well-dressed
A bow he bore and arrows bright and keen.
He had upon a courtepy of green, green coat
A hat upon his head with fringes black.
"Sir," quod this Summoner, "hail, and well atake." & well met

1385 "Welcome," quod he, "and every good fellow.²
Where ridest thou under this greenè shaw?" wood
Saidè this yeoman. "Wilt thou far to-day?"
This Summoner him answered, and said, "Nay.
Here fastè by," quod he, "is mine intent close by

1390 To riden for to raisen up a rent
to say that he was a Summoner, for the name.)
That 'longeth to my lord's duity."
due to my lord
"Art thou then a bailiff?" "Yea," quod he.
(He durstè not for very filth and shame dared
Say that he was a Summoner, for the name.)

1395 "De par dieux," quod this yeoman, "dearè brother,³
Thou art a bailiff, and I am another.
I am unknowen, as in this country.
Of thine acquaintance I would prayen thee, By God
And eke of brotherhood, if that you lest. if you like

¹ The word intent occurs with considerable frequency in this tale, emphasising the fact that wickedness is a matter of choice. This summoner could never claim "The devil made me do it."

² It is worth noting that the rest of the story proper is conducted almost exclusively in dialogue, except for a few lines. If all the instances of phrases like said he, quod he were omitted, it would function well as a short play.

³ Brother occurs even more often than intent in this tale. Here first used by the "yeoman," it is happily taken up by the summoner. Chaucer is notably sceptical about contracts of "brotherhood" at all levels. See, e.g. the tales of the Knight and the Pardoner. The devil and the summoner are more nearly "brothers" than the characters in these other tales.
"As full of spitefulness are these shrikes" (birds that impaled their victims on a thorn).

There was a tradition in England as elsewhere in Europe that associated Hell and the devil with the North. Southern Englishmen like Chaucer also enjoyed mocking northerners and their speech (see the clerks in the Reeve's Tale). Even the Parson boasts that he is a "southern man." Hence, the term soft speech may be sardonic. That is, a real northerner would not have soft speech. Hence, one more clue that the "bailiff" is not what he seems, a clue the stupid summoner misses.

FRIAR'S TALE

I have gold and silver in my chest.
If that thee hap to come into our shire, our county
All shall be thine, right as thou wilt desire."

They swear eternal brotherhood

"Grammercy," quod this Summoner, "by my faith." Many thanks
Ever each in other's hand his truth he layth, Each one
For to be sworn brothers till they die.
In dalliance they ridden forth their way.
This Summoner, which that was as full of jangles,
As full of venom be these wariangles, 1 chatter
And ever inquiring upon every thing:
Brother," quod he, "where is now your dwelling,
Another day if that I should you seek?"
This yeoman answered him in softé speech:
"Brother," quod he, "far in the North country, 2
Where as I hope some time I shall thee see.
Ere we depart I shall thee so well wiss, Before we separate / guide
That of mine house ne shalt thou never miss."
"Now, brother," quod this Summoner, "I you pray,
Teach me, while that we ridden by the way,
(Since that you be a bailiff as am I)
Some subtlety, and tell me faithfully Some technique
In mine offíc how I may most win, my position
And spareth not for conscience nor for sin,
But as my brother tell me how do you."

They confess their sins to each other with pride rather than remorse

"Now by my truthé, brother dear," said he,

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1 "As full of spitefulness are these shrikes" (birds that impaled their victims on a thorn).

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"As I shall tellen thee a faithful tale.
My wages be full straitè and full small.
My lord is hard to me and daungerous, & difficult to please
And my office is full laborious, my job
And therefore by extortïons I live.

Forsooth, I take all that men will me give.
Algates by sleightè or by violence
From year to year I win all my dispense.
I can no better tellen faithfully."
"Now certès," quod this Summoner, "so fare I.
I sparè not to taken, God it wot,
But if it be too heavy or too hot,
What I may get in counsel privily, quietly & secretly
No manner conscience of that have I.
N'ere mine extortïon, I might not liven,
Nor of such japès will I not be shriven.
Stomach nor conscience ne know I none.
I shrew these shriftè-fathers every one.¹
Well be we met, by God and by Saint Jame.
But, levè brother, tell me then thy name,"

Quod this Summoner. In this meanè while
This yeoman 'gan a little for to smile.

The "yeoman's" true identity

"Brother," quod he, "wilt thou that I thee tell?
I am a fiend, my dwelling is in Hell, a devil
And here I ride about my purchasing, business
To wit if men will give me any thing— To find out
My purchase is th'effect of all my rent.²
Look how thou ridest for the same intent
To winnè good, thou reckest never how, To get money, you care
Right so fare I, for ride I would right now
Unto the worldè's ende for a prey."

¹ I shrew …: "I have no time for these priests who hear confessions (shrift)." That is, he is not at all remorseful about what he does.

² My purchase …: "What people will give me (my purchase) is my total income (rent)."
"Ah," quod this Summoner, "benstee! What say you! bless me!
I weened you were a yeoman truly. I thought
You have a man's shape as well as I.
Have you a figure then determinate regular form
1460 In Hell, where you be in your estate?" at home

Some devilish truths

"Nay certainly," quod he, "there have we none,
But when us liketh we can take us one, When we please
Or elsè make you seem that we be shape make it seem to you
Sometime like a man; or like an ape
1465 Or like an angel can I ride or go. ride or walk
It is no wonder thing though it be so.
A lousy juggler can deceiven thee,
And pardee yet can I more craft than he." by God I have more skill
"Why," quod the Summoner, "ride you then or go or walk
1470 In sundry shapes, and not always in one?"
"For we," quod he, "will us such formès make
As most is able our prey for to take."
"What maketh you to have all this labour?"
"Full many a causè, leve Sir Summoner,"
1475 Saide this fiend. "But alle thing hath time.¹
The day is short, and it is passèd prime, it's after 9
And yet ne won I nothing in this day. I've made
I will intend to winning, if I may. attend
And not intend our wittès to declare, secrets to reveal(?)
1480 For, brother mine, thy wit is all too bare your mind
To understand, although I told them thee.

Even devils are subject to limits set by God

But for thou askest why labouïren we:
For sometimes we be Godé's instruments
And meanès to do His commandements,
1485 When that Him list, upon His créatures, when He pleases

¹ "There is a proper time for everything."
The Lives of the Saints contained stories of devils who had to act as servants to saints, including St. Dunstan of Canterbury, and some apostles including Peter, Andrew and Thomas.

"Do you make bodies for yourselves (the second you) out of the four elements?" (fire, water, earth and air).

Sometimes ...: "Sometimes we create illusions and enter dead bodies (?)"

Witness on Job, whom that we diden woe. And sometimes have we might of bothe two, This is to say, of soul and body eke. And sometimes be we suffered for to seek

1490 Only the body and not the soul to grieve.
Witness on Job, whom that we diden woe. And sometimes have we might of bothe two, This is to say, of soul and body eke. And sometimes be we suffered for to seek

1495 Upon a man, and do his soul unrest And not his body, and all is for the best— When he withstandeth our temptation, It is a cause of his salvation,
Albeit that it was not our intent

1500 He should be safe; but that we would him hent. And sometimes be we servants unto man, As to the archbishop Saint Dunstan. And to the apostles servant eke was I."¹
"Yet tell me," quod the Summoner, "faithfully, honestly

1505 Make you you newè bodies, thus always Of elements?" ² The fiend answéréd, "Nay: Sometimes we feign, and sometimes we arise With deade bodies,³ in full sundry wise, And speak as reasonably and fair and well,

1510 As to the Phytoness did Samuel; And yet will some men say it was not he. I do no force of your divinity.

A sinister promise

But one thing warn I thee, I will not jape, Thou wilt algatès wit how we be shape:

¹ The Lives of the Saints contained stories of devils who had to act as servants to saints, including St. Dunstan of Canterbury, and some apostles including Peter, Andrew and Thomas.

² "Do you make bodies for yourselves (the second you) out of the four elements?" (fire, water, earth and air).

³ Sometimes ....: "Sometimes we create illusions and enter dead bodies (?)"
Thou shalt hereafter, my brother dear,
Come where thee needest not of me to lere,
For thou shalt by thine own experience
Con in a chairè read of this senténce,¹
Better than Virgil, while he was alive,
Or Dante also. Now let us riden blive,
For I will holde company with thee,
Till it be so that thou forsakest me."
"Nay," quod this Summoner, "that shall not betide.
I am a yeoman, knowen is full wide.
My truthè will I hold, as in this case.²
For though thou wert the devil Satanas,
My truthè will I hold to thee, my brother,
As I am sworn, and each of us to other,
For to be truè brothers in this case.
And both we go abouten our purcháse.
Take thou thy part, what that men will thee give,
And I shall mine. Thus may we bothè live.
And if that any of us have more than other,
Let him be true, and part it with his brother."
"I grantè," quod the devil, "by my fay."
And with that word they riden forth their way.

The devil teaches the summoner a theological lesson about intentions

And right at th' entering of the townè's end,
To which this Summoner shope him for to wend,
They saw a cart, that charged was with hay,
Which that a carter drove forth on his way.
Deep was the way, for which the cartè stood.
The carter smote, and cried as he were wood,

¹ For thou ... also: "From your own experience you will be able (thou shalt con) to read a lecture in a (professor's) chair on this subject (sentence) better than Virgil while he was alive, or Dante' (both of whom wrote poems partly about visits to Hell).

² Nay ... case: This claim implies that to be a yeoman is synonymous with loyalty and fidelity to one's word. Pledging one's troth or truth in various situations, even outside of brotherhood contracts, is another topic of especial interest to Chaucer, and treated in, e.g., the tales of the Franklin and Shipman.
"Hey Scot! Hey Brock! What! Spare you for the stones? ¹
The fiend," quod he, "fetch you, body and bones, ¹⁵⁴⁵
As farforthly as ever you were foaled,
So muchel woe as I have with you tholed.
The devil have all, both horse, and cart, and hay."

This Summoner said: "Here shall we have a play."
And near the fiend he drew, as nought ne were,²
Full privily, and rounèd in his ear:
"Hearken, my brother, hearken, by thy faith,
Hearest thou not how that the carter saith?
Hent it anon, for he has given it thee,
Both hay and cart, and eke his caples three."
"Nay," quod the devil, "God wot, never a deal.
It is not his intent, trust thou me well.
Ask him thyself, if thou not trowest me,
Or els stint a while and thou shalt see.
This carter thwacks his horses on the croup,
And they began to drawen and to stoop.
"Hey, now," quod he. "There! Jesus Christ you bless,
And all His handiwork, both more and less!
That was well twight, mine ownè liard boy,
I prayè God to save thee — and Saint Loy.
Now is my cart out of the slough, pardee."
"Lo, brother," quod the fiend, "what told I thee?
Here may you see, mine ownè deare brother,
The churl spoke one thing, but he thought another.
Let us go forth abouten our viage.
Here win I nothing upon carriage." ³

The summoner now tries to teach the devil a different kind of lesson

¹ Deep ... stones: The road was deeply rutted, for which (reason) the cart stopped. The carter whipped (the horses) and shouted as if he were mad (wood). "Hey, Scot, Brock. Are you stopping because of these stones?" Scot and Brock are two of the very few names we know of for working horses in medieval literature.

² "As if he were not a devil" (but an acquaintance)?

³ Probably some sort of pun is intended on "carriage," a cart, and "carriage," money that a lord could collect from his tenant for transportation of the lord's goods: "I'm not making any profit on carts (or on carriage)"
When that they comen somewhat out of town,
This Summoner to his brother gan to roun.
"Brother," quod he, "here wones an old rebeck,
That had almost as lief to lose her neck,

1575 As for to give a penny of her good.
I will have twelve pence though that she be wood,
Or I will summon her unto our office.
And yet, God wot, of her know I no vice.
But for thou canst not, as in this country,

1580 Winnen thy cost, take here example of me."
This Summoner clappeth at the widow's gate:
"Come out," quod he, "thou olde virycle.
I trow thou hast some friar or priest with thee."
"Who clappeth?" said this wife, "Bendicitee.

1585 God save you, Sir. What is your sweetë will?"
"I have," quod he, "of summons here a bill.
On pain of cursing, look that thou be
To-morrow before the archédeacon's knee,¹
To answer to the court of certain things."

1590 "Now lord," quod she, "Christ Jesus, King of Kings,
So wisly helpë me, as I ne may.
I have been sick, and that full many a day.
I may not go so far," quod she, "nor ride
But I be dead—so pricks it in my side.

1595 May I not ask a libel, Sir Summoner,
And answer there by my procurator
To such thing as men will opposen me?"
"Yes," quod this Summoner, "pay anon—let's see—
Twelve pence to me, and I will thee acquit.

1600 I shall no profit have thereby but lit.
My master has the profit and not I.
Come off, and let me riden hastily.

¹ I have ...: "I have here a writ summoning you to court. On pain of excommunication (cursing), see that you appear before the archdeacon tomorrow to answer certain charges in court."
Give me twelve pence. I may no longer tarry."
"Twelve pence?" quod she, "now lady Sainté Mary Virgin Mary
So wisely help me out of care and sin,
This wide world though that I should it win
Ne have I not twelve pence within my hold. ¹
You knowen well that I am poor and old.
Kith your almess upon me, a poor wretch." Show mercy
"Nay then," quod he, "the foulé fiend me fetch
If I thee excuse, though thou shouldst be spilt." ²
"Alas!" quod she, "God wot, I have no guilt."

The summoner goes too far

"Pay me," quod he, "or by the sweet Saint Anne
As I will bear away thy newe pan
For debt which that thou owest me of old,
When that thou madest thy husband [a] cuckold, you were unfaithful
I paid at home for thy correction."
"Thou liest," quod she, "by my salvation.
Ne was I ne'er ere now, widow nor wife,
Summoned unto your court in all my life.
Ne never I was but of my body true.
Unto the devil rough and black of hue
Give I thy body and my pan also."

Intent again

And when the devil heard her cursen so
Upon her knees, he said in this maner:
"Now, Mabely, mine owne mother dear,
Is this your will in earnest that you say?"

¹ "If you were to give me the whole world for producing twelve pence right now, (I could not do it because) I don't have it."
² the foul .... "may the foul devil seize me if I let you off even if I know that paying) will ruin you."
"The devil," quod she, "so fetch him ere he die,¹
And pan and all, but he will him repent." unless he repents

'The devil,' quod she, "so fetch him ere he die,
And pan and all, but he will him repent." unless he repents

1635 "Nay, old stot, that is not mine intent old bag
Quod this Summoner, "for to repentè me
For any thing that I have had of thee.
I would I had thy smock and every cloth."
"Now, brother," quod the devil, "be not wroth. angry

The Friar narrating this tale is a professional preacher, and here he drops very naturally back from the dramatic exemplum he has just been telling, into the exhortation typical of the end of a sermon.

1640 Thy body and this pan be mine by right.
Thou shalt with me to Hêlê yet to-night,
Where thou shalt knownen of our privity secrets
More than a Master of Divinity."

And with that word the foulè fiend him hent. seized

1640 Body and soul, he with the devil went
Where as these Summoners have their heritaże.
And God that mad after his imáge
Mankind, save and guide us all and some,²
And leave these Summoners good men to become. And cause

The friar narrator changes mode ³

1645 Lordings, I could have told you," quod this Frere, ladies & g’men
"Had I had leisure of this Summoner here,
After the text of Christ, and Paul, and John, According to
And of our other doctors many a one, church teachers
terrify
Such painès, that your heartès might agrise,

1650 Albeit so no tongue may it devise,
Though that I might a thousand winters tell, Although
The pains of thilkè cursed house of Hêl.
But for to keep us from that cursed place,
Waketh, and prayeth Jesus of his grace,  
Stay awake
So keep us from the tempter, Satanas.  
Listen to
Hearken this word, beware as in this case.  
Stay awake
The lion sits in his await alway  
in ambush
To slay the innocent, if that he may.  
(Ps 10:9)
Disposeth aye your heartês to withstand  
always
The fiend that would you maken thrall and bond.¹  
enslave you
He may not temptê you over your might,  
your ability
For Christ will be your champion and your knight.
And prayeth that these Summoners them repent  
seizes them
Of their misdeeds, ere that the fiend them hent."

The Response of the Pilgrim Summoner:
A short scatological narrative about friars

This Summoner in his stirrups high he stood,  
so angry
Upon this Friar his hearte was so wood,  
shook with anger
That like an aspen leaf he quoke for ire.  
"Lordings," quod he, "but one thing I desire:
I you beseech, that of your courtesy,
Since you have heard this falsê Friar lie,  
allow me
As suffer me I may my talê tell.
This Friar boasteth that he knoweth Hell,  
God knows
And, God it wot, that it is little wonder.
Friars and fiendês be but little asunder.
For, pardee, you have often time heard tell,  
carried off
How that a friar ravished was to Hell
In spirit oncê by a vision,
And as an angel led him up and down,
To showen him the painês that were there,
In all the placê saw he not a frere.
Of other folk he saw enough in woe.
Unto this angel spoke the friar tho:
`Now, Sir,' quod he, `have friars such a grace,

¹ Disposeth ... bond: “Always keep your hearts ready to resist the devil who would like to make you his servants and slaves” (thrall and bond)
That none of them shall come into this place?"

`Yes,' quod this angel, `many a million.'
And unto Satanas he led him down.
`And now has Satanas,' said he, `a tail
Broader than of a carrick is the sail.'
"Hold up thy tail, thou Satanas," quod he,

"Show forth thine arse, and let the friar see
Where is the nest of friars in this place."
And ere that half a furlong way of space,¹
Right so as bees out swarming from a hive,
Out of the devil's arse there gan to drive

A twenty thousand friars on a rout
And throughout Hell swarmed all about,
And came again, as fast as they may go,
And in his arse they crepten every one.
He clapt his tail again, and lay full still.

This friar, when he lookèd had his fill
Upon the torments of this sorry place,
His spirit God restorèd of His grace
Unto his body again, and he awoke.
But natheless for fear yet he quoke,

So was the devil's arse aye in his mind,
That is his heritage of very kind.

God save you allè — save this cursed Frere.
My prologue will I end in this mannèr."

¹ And ere ...: "And before you could go a furlong" (one eighth of a mile). That is, in a short time.