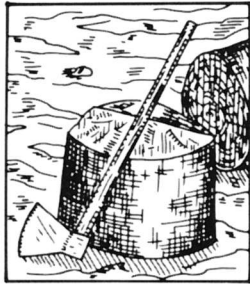
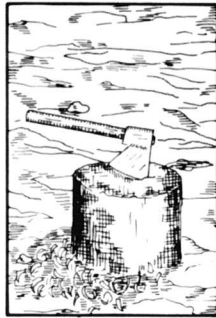


THE DEBATE OF THE CARPENTER'S TOOLS

Over the years, tool users have written a number of poems about their tools. This 16th century poem turns the tables, and it is the tools that do the talking. They discuss amongst themselves the drunken habits of their owner, and who is helping and who is condemning his master. As well as being an amusing narrative, it also informs us about the tools available to a carpenter, known as a “wright”, at that period.

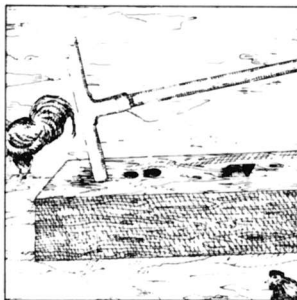
The poem and illustrations are reproduced from *The Woodwright's Workbook: Further Explorations in Traditional Woodcraft* by kind permission of the author, Roy Underhill. Roy is the presenter of the long-running American television series “The Woodwright's Shop” and author of several books on traditional woodworking. He also runs a wood-working school in Pittsboro, North Carolina.

The chip ax said unto the wright:
“Meat and drink I shall thee plyght,
But clothes and shoes of leather tan,
Find them where as ere thou can;
For though thou work all that thou can,
Thou'll never be a wealthy man,
Nor none that longs this craft unto,
For no thing that they can do.”

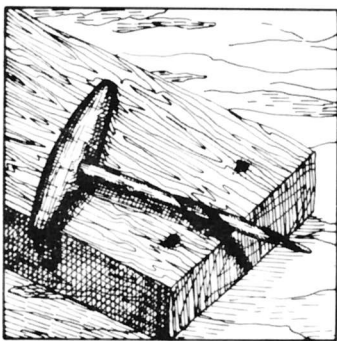


“Wherefore,” said the belte,
“Great strokes for him I shall pelte;
My master shall do full well then,
Both to clothe and feed his men.”

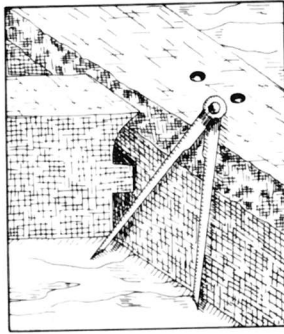
“Nay, nay,” said the twybylle,
“Unreason is thy only skylle.
Truly, truly it will not be,
Wealth I think we'll never see.”



“Yea, yea,” said the wymbylle,
“I am as round as a thimble;
My master's work I will remember,
I shall creep fast into the timber,
To help my master within a stounde
To store his coffer with twenty pounds.”



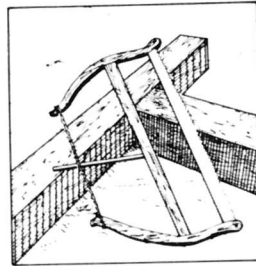
“Nay, nay,” said the compass,
 “Thou art a fool in that case.
 For thou speakes without advisement;
 Therefore thou getyst not thy intent.
 Know thou well- it shall be so,
 What lightly comes, shall lightly go;
 Tho’ thou earn more than any five,
 Yet shall thy master never thrive.”



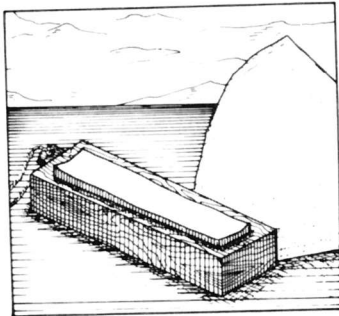
The groping-iren then spake he:
 “Compass, who hath grieved thee?
 My master yet may thrive full well,
 How he shall, I will thee tell;
 I am his servant true and good,
 I assure thee, compass, by the Rood,
 Work I shall both night and day;
 To get him goods I shall assay.”



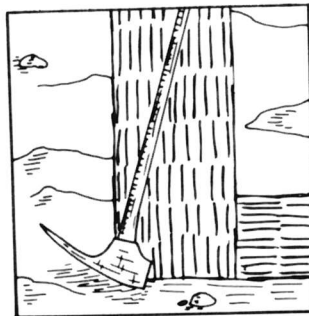
“Nay, nay,” said the saw,
 “It is but boast that thou dost blow,
 For though thou work both day and night,
 He will not thrive, I say thee right;
 He lives too near the ale-wife,
 And for this shall he never thrive.”

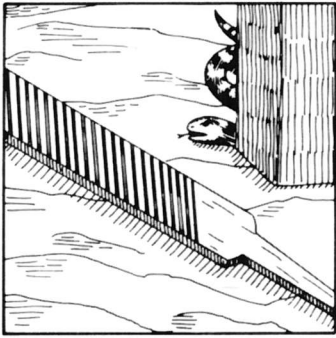


Then said the whetstone:
 “Tho oft my master’s thryft be gone,
 I shall him help within this year
 To get him twenty marks clear;
 His axes shall I make full sharp,
 That they may lightly do their work;
 To make my master a rich man
 I shall assay, if that I can.”



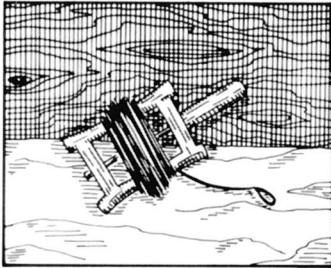
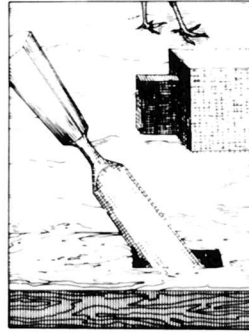
To him then said the adz,
 And said: “Yea, sir, God glads!
 To speak of thrift it will not be,
 Wealth will our master never see,
 For he will drink more in a day
 Than thou can lightly earn in twey;
 Therefore thy tongue I bid thee hold,
 And speak no more words so bold.”





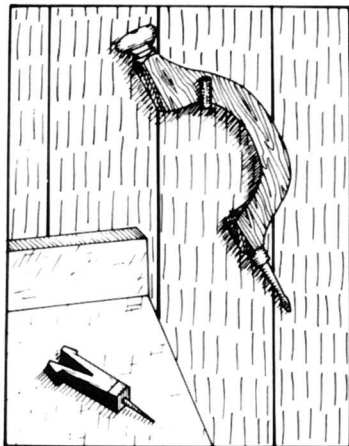
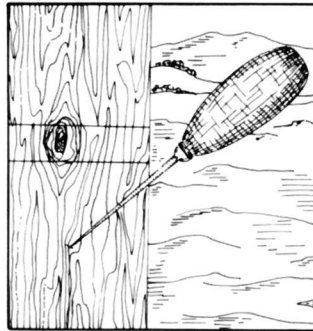
To the adz then said the file:
 “Thou should not thy master so revile,
 For though oft he be unhappy,
 Yet to his thrift thou shouldst see:
 For I think, ere tomorrow’s noon,
 To earn my master a pair of shoes;
 For I shall rub with all my might,
 My masters tools to make bright,
 So that, within a little space,
 My master’s purse I shall increase.”

Than said the chisel:
 “If he ever thrive, he bears him well;
 For though thou rub till thy head ache,
 His wealth from him it will be take:
 For he loves good ale so well,
 That he therefore his head will sell:
 For he some days seven pence will drink;
 How he shall thrive I cannot think.”



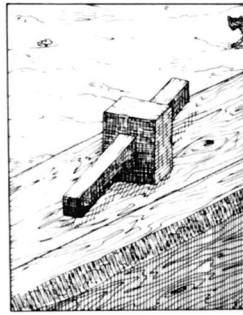
“Yea, yea,” said the line and the chalk,
 “My master is like too many folk;
 Though he love ale far too well
 To thrive, and this I shall him tell;
 I shall mark well upon the wood,
 And keep his measures true and good,
 And so by my measures all,
 To prosper well my master shall.”

Than bespake the prykyng-knife:
 “He lives too nigh the ale-wyfe;
 She makes oft-times his purse full thin,
 No penny sometimes she leaves therein.
 Tho’ thou get more than other three,
 Wealthy man he can not be.”

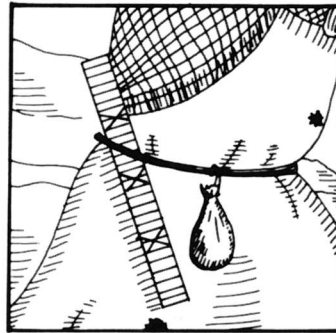


“Yea, yea,” said the piercer,
 “That which I say it shall be sure;
 Why chide ye each one with another?
 Know ye not well I am your brother;
 Therefore none contrary me,
 For as I say, so shall it be.
 My master yet shall be full rich;
 As far as I may reach and stretch,
 I will him help with all my might,

Both by day and by night,
Fast to run into the wood,
And bite I shall with mouth full good,
And this I swear, by my crown,
To make him sheriff of the town.”

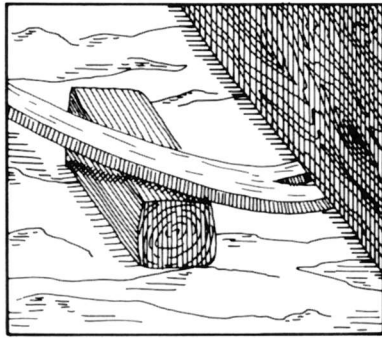


Then the crow began to speak,
As if his heart was like to break,
To hear his brother so reviled,
And said: “Thou speaks like a child;
Tho’ my master spend ever so fast,
Enough he shall have at the last,
Fortune he’ll have as much as they,
That drank not a penny till their dying day.”

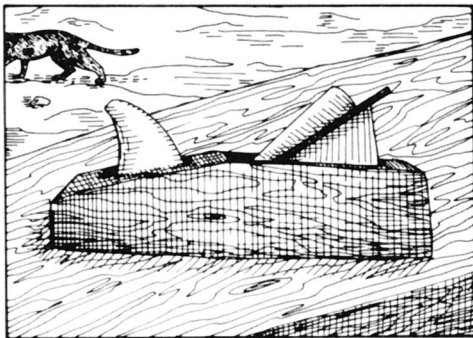


“What, sir rule,” said the plane,
“Another reason I will thee say;
Tho’ oft my master have no stock,
Yet thy master thou should not mock;
For yet a means I shall see,
So that my master shall prosperous be.
I shall him help, both day and night,
To get him good with all my might,
I shall cleanse on every side
To help my master in his pride.”

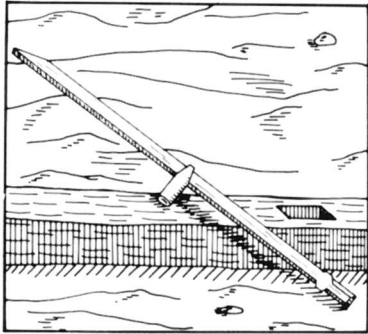
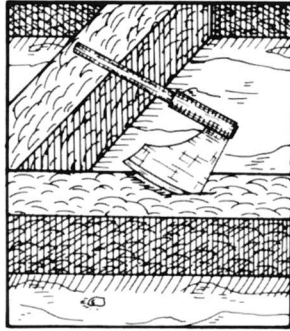
“Soft, sir,” said the skantyllion,
“I think your luck be nearly done;
Ever so cruel thou art in word,
And yet thou art not worth a turd!
For all the good that thou get might,
He will spend it in one night.”



“Yea, yea,” said the Rule
“In faith, thou art a fool,
For, if he dies and has right nought,
Who trusts that thou will give him ought?
Thus shall he lie upon the ground,
And be buried like a hound:
For, if a man have ought before,
When he has need, it is good store.”

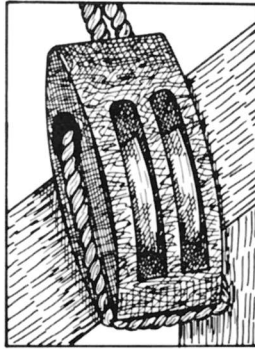


The broad ax said withouten miss,
 He said: "The plane my brother is;
 We two shall cleanse and make full plain,
 That no man shall us gainsay,
 And get our master in a year
 More silver than a man may bear."

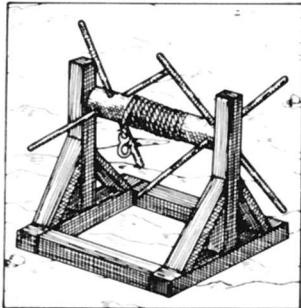


"Nay, nay," said the twyvette,
 "Wealth I swear be from you fetched,
 To keep my master in his pride;
 In this country ye can not abyde,
 Unless ye steal and be a thief,
 And put many men to grief:
 For he will drink more in an hour
 Than two men may earn in four.
 When ye have wrought all that ye can,
 Still shall he never be a wealthy man."

Then be-spake the pullyff,
 With great strong words and stiff:
 "Hold, sir twyvette, me think you grieved;
 What devil hath you so deceived?
 Tho' oft he spend more in a year
 Of gold and silver than thou may bear,
 I shall him help with all my might;
 I hope to make him yet a knight."

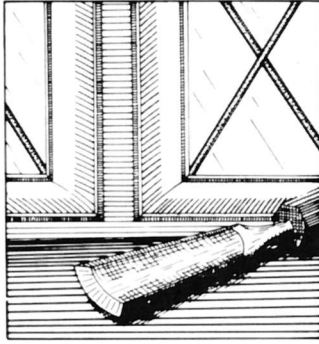


"What, sir," said the windlass, "rule,
 Me thinks thou art but a fool;
 For thou speaks out of season,
 It will not be, by simple reason;
 A carpenter to be a knight?
 That was ever against right;
 Therefore shall I tell thee a saw,
 'Who would be high - shall be brought low.'"



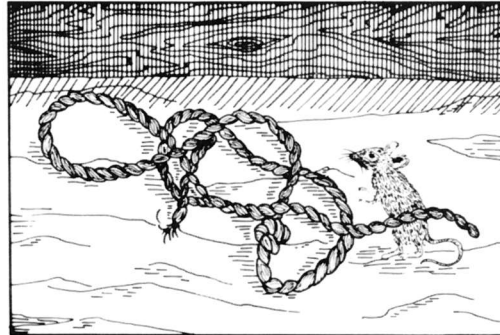
"Yea," then said the rule-stone,
 "My master hath many foes;
 If ye would help him at his need,
 Then my master should succeed;
 But what so ever ye bragg or boast,
 My master yet shall rule the roost:
 For, as I am a true man,
 I shall him help all that I can."





The gouge said: "The devil's dirt
For anything that thou can work!
For all that ever thou can do,
It is not worth an old shoe.
Thou hast been apprentice these seven year
And still thy craft have yet to learn;
If thou could work as well as he,
Our master's wealth shall never be."

"Soft, sir," said the cable-rope,
"Methinks good ale is in your tope;
For thou speaks as thou would fight,
And would, if thou had any might.
But I shall tell thee another tale,
How my master I shall avail;
Haul and pull I shall full fast
To raise houses, while I may last,
And so, within a little throw,
My master's wealth shall surely grow."

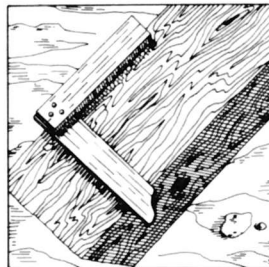


Then spake the wright's wife:
"Neither of you shall ever thrive,
Neither the master, nor the men,
For nothing that ye do can:
For he will spend within a month
More wealth than any three men hath."

The square said: "What sey ye, dame?
Ye should not speak my master shame."

"Square, I have no other cause,
I swear thee, by Saint Eustase:
For all the yarn that I may spin,
To spend at ale he thinks no sin.
He will spend more in an hour,
Than thou and I can get in four."

"Yet me thinks ye be to blame
To give my master such a name:
For tho' he spend more than ye have,
Yet his worship ye should save."



“Mary, I shrew him and thee too,
And all them that do as ye do:
For his servant I trust thou be,
Therefore gain thou’ll never see;
For if thou learn that craft from him,
Thy wealth I swear shall be full thin.”

The draught-nail then spake he,
And said: “Dame, that is no lie,
Ye know the manner of these freaks,
That thus of my master speaks;
But listen to me a little space,
I shall now tell thee all the case,
How they work for their good,
I will not lie, by the Rood!
When they have worked an hour or two,
At once to the ale they will go,
And drink and toast there constantly:
‘Thou to me,’ and ‘I to thee.’
And one says, ‘The ax shall pay for this,
Therefore the cup once I shall kiss’;
And when they come to work again,
The belte to his master will this say:
‘Master, work us not out of reason,
The day is very long of season;
Small strokes let us slowly hack,
And sometimes let us ease our backs’;
The wymbulle speaks softly, ‘Ah, sire,
Seven pence of a day is small hire

For wrights, that work so fast,
And in our work have great haste.’
The groping iren then says full soon:
‘Master, want ye this work well done?
Let us not work until we sweat,
For catching of over great heat.
For we may happen after cold to take,
Then one stroke may we not hack.’
Then be-spake the whetstone,
And said: ‘Master, we want to go home:
For fast it draws unto the night;
Our supper by now I know is dyght.’
The line and stone, the piercer and file,
Say ‘That is a good council!’



The crow, the plane, and the square,
Say, ‘We have earned well our hire!’
And thus with frauds and falsehood
Comes many a true man to no good.
Therefore, by all that I can see,
They shall never thrive nor wealthy be;
Therefore this craft I will go fro,
And to another will I go.”

Then answered the wife in hie:
“If I might, so would I,
But I am to him bound so fast,
That off my halter I may not cast;
Therefore the priest that bound me apprentice
He shall truly have my curse,
And ever he shall have, til I die,
In whatever country that he abide.”

Therefore, wrights, take heed of this,
That ye may mend what is amiss,
If truly that ye do your labor
For that will be unto your honor;
And greeve you nothing at this song,
But ever make merry your selves among.
And not at him that it did make,
No envy of him should ye take,
Nor none of you should do him blame,
Because the craft hath done him shame.