

Everyman in His humour

The play opens with a prologue addressing the audience. This play will have no absurdities but instead will be realistic in events and language. It will not whisk the audience away to a foreign land, but will portray a contemporary place and time for people to laugh at.

The first act starts with old man Knowell at his house. Master Stephen, a country man who is easily deceived, has come to visit his uncle, Knowell, and his cousin, Edward Knowell (Knowell's son). A servant enters and after some conversation, Stephen leaves. This allows the servant to deliver a letter to Knowell that is meant for his son. The elder Knowell reads it, knowing it is not for him. Knowell is offended by how impolite and louche the letter's writer, a young man named Wellbred is, and calls in Brainworm to give the letter to his son and not tell him he read it. Knowell vows he will not force his son to be a good man, but will try to compel him to be one freely.

Brainworm brings Edward the letter and admits that Edward's father read it. Stephen enters, inquiring about the man that brought the letter. He wants to go after the man because of his perceived rudeness, but he is far gone. Edward asks Stephen if he would like to come with him to Wellbred's, and Stephen eagerly agrees.

Matthew arrives to Cob's the water-bearer's house looking for a Captain Bobadil. Cob says he is his guest. Mathew does not believe this, but Cob insists that the man fell asleep on his bench the night before. A servant of Cob's then takes Mathew to Bobadil. The scene ends with a monologue by Cob about the drama in his master Kitley's house and his annoyance with Bobadil, who owes his wife Tib money.

Bobadil and Matthew discuss the previous night's events. Bobadil asks to keep it a secret that he spent the night there, and Matthew agrees. Matthew shares a play he likes and then the conversation moves to Matthew's own work. Downright, Wellbred's brother, had insulted it and threatened to beat Matthew. Bobadil offers to teach Mathew how to fight, and the two head off to a tavern.

Act Two opens at the house of Kitley, a merchant at the Old Jewry. His man Cash and the squire Downright enter. Kitley gives his cashier some work to do. Next, Kitley hesitantly tells the squire that Wellbred, who is the brother of his own wife, Dame Kitley, has become disrespectful. While Wellbred's actions anger Downright, Kitley remains calm. Kitley says that he has no authority over Wellbred and that he cannot scold him for fear of backlash.

Bobadil and Matthew enter, but quickly leave when they do not find Wellbred. Downright wants to follow them and fight, but Kitley tells him not to go. The squire leaves, and Kitley reflects on the possibility of the women in his life—his wife and his sister—being overcome by these lecherous men who are spending time in his house.

In the Moorfields, the open areas of land in London, Brainworm is disguised as a soldier. He wants to interrupt Knowell's following of his son. Stephen and Edward enter. Stephen loses his purse, which holds a ring from a mistress. Brainworm appears and offers his sword for

sale since he is reduced to poverty. Though Edward tries to discourage Stephen from buying a knife off of the “soldier,” Stephen says he will buy it anyway.

Still in the Moorfields, Knowell is torn between disappointment due to the letter to his son, and memories of his own youth. His speech turns to the way that parents shape their children, often in a bad way. Knowell is happy he did not do so with his own son. Yet, he sees that his son has gone astray and is not pleased. Brainworm enters in his disguise as before and begs for beer and money. Knowell scolds the “soldier” for begging, and tells him to be a better gentleman. Brainworm claims to not know how to find work, but Knowell says he will show him.

The first scene of Act Three takes place in a tavern with Matthew, Bobadil, and Wellbred. Mathew and Bobadil speak of not liking Wellbred’s brother, Downright. Edward Knowell and Stephen enter. Wellbred and Edward laugh about the letter Wellbred sent, and how it was wrongly delivered to the elder Knowell.

The conversation turns to the military service served by both Stephen and Bobadil. Bobadil in particular shares a story about fighting with his trusty rapier. He and Stephen compare their swords (Stephen’s is the one he bought from Brainworm). They all insult his common sword, which makes Stephen angry. Just then, Brainworm enters still disguised. Brainworm admits to fooling Stephen into buying the knife. The group of men learn the elder Knowell is headed their way, and they leave in order to not be found. Brainworm also reveals his true identity to Edward, who is grateful to be looked after this way.

Cash helps Kitley prepare to conduct some suspicious business exchanging money. Kitley then wishes to tell Cash a secret, but he feels that Cash is hesitant to swear to keep it so he does not reveal it, and instead sends Cash to do another job. Before he leaves, Kitley asks his cashier to tell him if Wellbred comes to his house with the company of any other man. Additionally, he asks that Cash keep the whole business private from Dame Kitley.

Cob enters in distress. Cash tries to convince Cob that it is his “humour” making him so distressed. As he continues to speak of fear and persecution, Matthew, Bobadil, Stephen, Wellbred, Brainworm, and Edward enter. Cash and Cob exit. The group of men discuss Brainworm’s clever trick earlier. Cash reenters looking for a servant to tell Kitley that men are here, and accidentally lets out that Kitley went to Justice Clement’s. The men continue to talk, this time about tobacco, and Bobadil boasts about its many uses. Then Cob and Cash reenter and Cob begins talking about recent deaths attributed to tobacco. Bobadil beats the man, but the others pull him away.

At Justice Clement’s house, Cob warns Kitley about the men at his house. Kitley is worried about his wife and sister giving into desire for the men. Cob tries to put his worries at bay. After Kitley leaves, Cob states that he wants revenge on Bobadil for smoking tobacco and borrowing money from his wife.

Justice Clement, his clerk Roger Formal, and Knowell enter. Clement and Cob converse about Cob's life and meager possessions. Cob then asks the Justice for peace by punishing Bobadil and tells him about the tobacco. Instead, the Justice orders his clerk to put Cob in jail for insulting tobacco and being a rascal. He relents, but Cob's plan for revenge is over.

In Act Four, Downright and Dame Kately discuss the visiting men. Downright wants the lady to make the men leave, but she insists she has no power over them. Matthew, Bobadil, Wellbred, Edward Knowell, Stephen, Brainworm, and Kately's sister Bridget enter. Mathew and Bridget talk a bit flirtatiously but are interrupted by the group of men arguing. Matthew tries to impress the group with his poetry but they have mixed reviews. Wellbred does not think that the poems are enough for Dame Kately and Bridget but the ladies think they are. Downright tries to get the group of men to leave by threatening them. They all draw swords and start to fight but are pulled apart by Cash and some other men of the house. Kately enters asking about the quarrel but the men all exit. Bridget and Dame Kately admit to being impressed by Edward, who tried to stop the fighting, which makes Kately greatly distressed. He decides to search for the rascal.

Cob and his Wife Tib bicker. Cob asks his wife to let no one in to the house and she agrees. At the tavern, Stephen, Edward, Wellbred, and Brainworm convene. Wellbred sends Brainworm, disguised as a soldier, to give a message to his brother. Edward and Wellbred converse about Bridget. Edward admits to being in love with her and Wellbred wants to bring them together, but Edward is not sure he should try.

In the Old Jewry, Roger Formal and Knowell are looking for the soldier that Knowell met earlier. Brainworm enters dressed again as the soldier, Fitz-well, and in the persona of Fitz-well working for Knowell, he admits to telling Matthew and the other men about Knowell going to Justice Clement's house. Knowell then sends him with Formal and he goes to Cob's house to find the group of men.

Back at the Moorfields, the group of men gossip about Downright. Matthew and Bobadil fence a little, which leads into Bobadil telling a story about fencing some young men and continually winning. He claims that he is doing the nation a favor by sparing the lives of those men that keep coming after him to fight. Bobadil says he would not draw his sword on Downright if he appeared, and coincidentally, Downright does come by just then. Downright tells Bobadil to fight, and Downright successfully disarms the man. To close the scene, Stephen picks up Downright's cloak that he left there and claims it as his own.

Back at Kately's house with Kately, Wellbred, Dame Kately, and Bridget, Kately scolds Wellbred for fighting with the men earlier. Brainworm enters dressed as Roger Formal and says Clement wants to see Kately. Kately privately tells Cash to keep an eye on his wife. When Kately leaves, his wife wonders why he has been wanting Cob so much lately, and, to tease her, Wellbred says that Cob's wife is tawdry. She is perturbed and decides to bring Cash with her to track her husband to Cob and Tib's house.

This leaves Bridget and Wellbred alone to discuss Bridget's admirer, and she decides to meet with Edward. Kately returns and interrupts them, becoming angry when he learns that his wife and Cash went somewhere together.

Matthew and Bobadil are in a street discussing their reputations after the previous events. Brainworm then enters dressed as Formal and the men try to get Downright in legal trouble. Brainworm says he will help the men for a price. Since Mathew and Bobadil have no money, they pawn some of their belongings to get him to agree.

Knowell is looking for his son at Cob's house. Cob's wife Tib is fearful that Knowell is a constable but speaks to him anyway. She shuts the door almost immediately when Dame Kately and Cash arrive. The two ask for Kately, but he is not there. Instead he arrives just then so Kately and his wife argue. Each believes that they are being cheated on. Cob enters and believes what Kately says about his place being a whorehouse.

Brainworm is dressed as a legal officer. He supposedly bears a warrant for Downright, which allows Bobadil and Matthew to arrest Downright. Stephen enters in Downright's cloak so the men mistakenly try to arrest him. He is then actually arrested by the disguised Brainworm for supposedly stealing Downright's cloak. All of the men head to Justice Clement.

Act Five is at Justice Clement's house. Clement, Knowell, Kately, Dame Kately, Tib, Cash, Cob and servants enter. They are sorting out the business of how each was given false messages by Clement's man. Clement realizes that they were both tricked to go to Cob's house. Bobadil and Matthew enter, and speak of their warrant for Downright. Then Stephen, Downright, and the disguised Brainworm enter. Those men bring forth their quarrel about the cloak, as well as the issue of Formal's supposed man who had the warrant for Downright's arrest. Clement wants to jail Brainworm for not having served the warrants correctly. Brainworm reveals himself, and the tricks he played are exposed. His tricks on Knowell and Kately earlier are also revealed. Roger Formal then enters, apologetic that he got drunk and had his clothes stolen (Brainworm's doing, to pretend to be him).

Wellbred reveals Edward and Bridget's marriage, and Clement orders them to be brought here for congratulations. The men out Matthew's propensity for poetry and Clement recites some off the top of his head, but they realize that Matthew just reads others' work and passes it off as his own. Clement orders his collection of verses to be burned. He also makes Stephen give Downright his cloak back and urges Tib and Cob renew their vows. To end the play, Justice Clement tells each person to clean themselves of their overweening emotions, and they all celebrate