

THE SECOND NUN'S TALE <1>

The minister and novice* unto vices, *nurse Which that
men call in English idleness, The porter at the gate is of delices;*
*delights T'eschew, and by her contrar' her oppress, -- That is to say, by
lawful business,* -- *occupation, activity Well oughte we to *do our
all intent* *apply ourselves* Lest that the fiend through idleness
us hent.* *seize

For he, that with his thousand cordes sly Continually us waiteth to beclap,*
*entangle, bind When he may man in idleness espy, He can so lightly catch
him in his trap, Till that a man be hent* right by the lappe,** *seize
**hem He is not ware the fiend hath him in hand; Well ought we work, and
idleness withstand.

And though men dreaded never for to die, Yet see men well by reason,
doubteless, That idleness is root of sluggardy, Of which there cometh never
good increase; And see that sloth them holdeth in a leas,* *leash
<2> Only to sleep, and for to eat and drink, And to devouren all that others
swink.* *labour

And, for to put us from such idleness, That cause is of so great confusion, I
have here done my faithful business, After the Legend, in translation Right
of thy glorious life and passion, -- Thou with thy garland wrought of rose
and lily, Thee mean I, maid and martyr, Saint Cecilie.

And thou, thou art the flow'r of virgins all, Of whom that Bernard list so well
to write, <3> To thee at my beginning first I call; Thou comfort of us
wretches, do me indite Thy maiden's death, that won through her merite Th'
eternal life, and o'er the fiend victory, As man may after readen in her story.

Thou maid and mother, daughter of thy Son, Thou well of mercy, sinful
soules' cure, In whom that God of bounte chose to won;*
*dwell Thou humble and high o'er every creature, Thou nobilest, *so far
forth our nature,* *as far as our nature admits* That no disdain the Maker
had of kind,* *nature His Son in blood and flesh to clothe
and wind.* *wrap

Within the cloister of thy blissful sides Took manne's shape th' eternal love
and peace, That of *the trine compass* Lord and guide is *the
trinity* Whom earth, and sea, and heav'n, *out of release,*

*unceasingly *Aye hery;* and thou, Virgin wemmeless,* *forever praise*
*immaculate Bare of thy body, and dweltest maiden pure, The Creator of
every creature.

Assembled is in thee magnificence <4> With mercy, goodness, and with such
pity, That thou, that art the sun of excellence, Not only helpest them that
pray to thee, But oftentime, of thy benignity, Full freely, ere that men thine
help beseech, Thou go'st before, and art their lives' leech.* *healer,
saviour.

Now help, thou meek and blissful faire maid, Me, flemed* wretch, in this
desert of gall; *banished, outcast Think on the woman Cananee that
said That whelpes eat some of the crumbes all That from their Lorde's table
be y-fall;<5> And though that I, unworthy son of Eve,<6> Be sinful, yet
accepte my believe.* *faith

And, for that faith is dead withoute werkes, For to worke give me wit and
space, That I be *quit from thennes that most derk is;* *freed from the
most O thou, that art so fair and full of grace, dark place (Hell)* Be
thou mine advocate in that high place, Where as withouten end is sung
Osanne, Thou Christe's mother, daughter dear of Anne.

And of thy light my soul in prison light, That troubled is by the contagion Of
my body, and also by the weight Of earthly lust and false affection; O hav'n
of refuge, O salvation Of them that be in sorrow and distress, Now help, for
to my work I will me dress.

Yet pray I you, that reade what I write, <6> Forgive me that I do no diligence
This ilke* story subtilly t' indite. *same For both have I
the wordes and sentence Of him that at the sainte's reverence The story
wrote, and follow her legend; And pray you that you will my work amend.

First will I you the name of Saint Cecilie Expound, as men may in her story
see. It is to say in English, Heaven's lily,<7> For pure chasteness of virginity;
Or, for she whiteness had of honesty,* *purity And green of
conscience, and of good fame The sweete savour, Lilie was her name.

Or Cecilie is to say, the way of blind;<7> For she example was by good
teaching; Or else Cecilie, as I written find, Is joined by a manner conjoining
Of heaven and Lia, <7> and herein figuring The heaven is set for thought of
holiness, And Lia for her lasting business.

Cecilie may eke be said in this mannere, Wanting of blindness, for her

greate light Of sapience, and for her thewes* clear. *qualities
Or elles, lo, this maiden's name bright Of heaven and Leos <7> comes, for
which by right Men might her well the heaven of people call, Example of
good and wise workes all;

For Leos people in English is to say; And right as men may in the heaven see
The sun and moon, and starres every way, Right so men ghostly,* in this
maiden free, *spiritually Sawen of faith the magnanimity, And eke
the clearness whole of sapience, And sundry workes bright of excellence.

And right so as these philosophers write, That heav'n is swift and round,
and eke burning, Right so was faire Cecilie the white Full swift and busy in
every good working, And round and whole in good persevering, <8> And
burning ever in charity full bright; Now have I you declared *what she
hight.* *why she had her name*

This maiden bright Cecile, as her life saith, Was come of Romans, and of
noble kind, And from her cradle foster'd in the faith Of Christ, and bare his
Gospel in her mind: She never ceased, as I written find, Of her prayere, and
God to love and dread, Beseeching him to keep her maidenhead.

And when this maiden should unto a man Y-wedded be, that was full young
of age, Which that y-called was Valerian, And come was the day of marriage,
She, full devout and humble in her corage,* *heart Under her
robe of gold, that sat full fair, Had next her flesh y-clad her in an hair.*
*garment of hair-cloth

And while the organs made melody, To God alone thus in her heart sang
she; "O Lord, my soul and eke my body gie* *guide
Unwemmed,* lest that I confounded be." *unblemished And,
for his love that died upon the tree, Every second or third day she fast', Aye
bidding* in her orisons full fast. *praying

The night came, and to bedde must she gon With her husband, as it is the
mannere; And privily she said to him anon; "O sweet and well-beloved
spouse dear, There is a counsel,* an'** ye will it hear, *secret **if
Which that right fain I would unto you say, So that ye swear ye will it not
bewray."* *betray

Valerian gan fast unto her swear That for no case nor thing that mighte be,
He never should to none bewrayen her; And then at erst* thus to him saide
she; *for the first time "I have an angel which that loveth me, That
with great love, whether I wake or sleep, Is ready aye my body for to keep;

"And if that he may feelen, *out of dread,* *without doubt* That ye
me touch or love in villainy, He right anon will slay you with the deed, And
in your youthe thus ye shoulde die. And if that ye in cleane love me gie,"*
*guide He will you love as me, for your cleanness, And shew to you his joy
and his brightness."

Valerian, corrected as God wo'ld, Answer'd again, "If I shall truste thee, Let
me that angel see, and him behold; And if that it a very angel be, Then will I
do as thou hast prayed me; And if thou love another man, forsooth Right
with this sword then will I slay you both."

Cecile answer'd anon right in this wise; "If that you list, the angel shall ye
see, So that ye trow* Of Christ, and you baptise; *know Go
forth to Via Appia," quoth she, That from this towne stands but miles three,
And to the poore folkes that there dwell Say them right thus, as that I shall
you tell,

"Tell them, that I, Cecile, you to them sent To shewe you the good Urban the
old, For secret needes,* and for good intent; *business And
when that ye Saint Urban have behold, Tell him the wordes which I to you
told And when that he hath purged you from sin, Then shall ye see that
angel ere ye twin* *depart

Valerian is to the place gone; And, right as he was taught by her learning He
found this holy old Urban anon Among the saintes' burials louting;*
*lying concealed <9> And he anon, withoute tarrying, Did his message, and
when that he it told, Urban for joy his handes gan uphold.

The teares from his eyen let he fall; "Almighty Lord, O Jesus Christ," Quoth
he, "Sower of chaste counsel, herd* of us all; *shepherd The fruit of
thilke* seed of chastity *that That thou hast sown in
Cecile, take to thee Lo, like a busy bee, withoute guile, Thee serveth aye
thine owen thrall* Cicile, *servant

"For thilke spouse, that she took *but now,* *lately* Full like a
fierce lion, she sendeth here, As meek as e'er was any lamb to owe." And
with that word anon there gan appear An old man, clad in white clothes
clear, That had a book with letters of gold in hand, And gan before Valerian
to stand.

Valerian, as dead, fell down for dread, When he him saw; and he up hent*
him tho,** *took **there And on his book right thus he gan to read;

"One Lord, one faith, one God withoute mo', One Christendom, one Father of all also, Aboven all, and over all everywhere." These wordes all with gold y-written were.

When this was read, then said this olde man, "Believ'st thou this or no? say yea or nay." "I believe all this," quoth Valerian, "For soother* thing than this, I dare well say, *truer Under the Heaven no wight thinke may." Then vanish'd the old man, he wist not where And Pope Urban him christened right there.

Valerian went home, and found Cecilie Within his chamber with an angel stand; This angel had of roses and of lily Coronas* two, the which he bare in hand, *crowns And first to Cecile, as I understand, He gave the one, and after gan he take The other to Valerian her make.*
*mate, husband

"With body clean, and with unwemmed* thought, *unspotted, blameless Keep aye well these coronas two," quoth he; "From Paradise to you I have them brought, Nor ever more shall they rotten be, Nor lose their sweet savour, truste me, Nor ever wight shall see them with his eye, But he be chaste, and hate villainy.

"And thou, Valerian, for thou so soon Assented hast to good counsel, also Say what thee list,* and thou shalt have thy boon."** *wish **desire "I have a brother," quoth Valerian tho,* *then "That in this world I love no man so; I pray you that my brother may have grace To know the truth, as I do in this place."

The angel said, "God liketh thy request, And bothe, with the palm of martyrdom, Ye shalle come unto this blissful rest." And, with that word, Tiburce his brother came. And when that he the savour undernome*
*perceived Which that the roses and the lilies cast, Within his heart he gan to wonder fast;

And said; "I wonder, this time of the year, Whence that sweete savour cometh so Of rose and lilies, that I smelle here; For though I had them in mine handes two, The savour might in me no deeper go; The sweete smell, that in my heart I find, Hath changed me all in another kind."

Valerian said, "Two crownes here have we, Snow-white and rose-red, that shine clear, Which that thine eyen have no might to see; And, as thou smellest them through my prayere, So shalt thou see them, leve* brother dear, *beloved If it so be thou wilt withoute sloth Believe aright,

and know the very troth. "

Tiburce answered, "Say'st thou this to me In soothness, or in dreame hear I this?" "In dreames," quoth Valorian, "have we be Unto this time, brother mine, y-wis But now *at erst* in truth our dwelling is." *for the first time* How know'st thou this," quoth Tiburce; "in what wise?" Quoth Valerian, "That shall I thee devise*" *describe

"The angel of God hath me the truth y-taught, Which thou shalt see, if that thou wilt reny*" *renounce The idols, and be clean, and elles nought." [And of the miracle of these crownes tway Saint Ambrose in his preface list to say; Solemnely this noble doctor dear Commendeth it, and saith in this mannere

"The palm of martyrdom for to receive, Saint Cecilie, full filled of God's gift, The world and eke her chamber gan to weive;*" *forsake Witness Tiburce's and Cecilie's shrift,* *confession To which God of his bounty woulde shift Corones two, of flowers well smelling, And made his angel them the crownes bring.

"The maid hath brought these men to bliss above; The world hath wist what it is worth, certain, Devotion of chastity to love."] <10> Then showed him Cecilie all open and plain, That idols all are but a thing in vain, For they be dumb, and thereto* they be deave; ** *therefore **deaf And charged him his idols for to leave.

"Whoso that troweth* not this, a beast he is," *believeth Quoth this Tiburce, "if that I shall not lie." And she gan kiss his breast when she heard this, And was full glad he could the truth espy: "This day I take thee for mine ally."* *chosen friend Saide this blissful faire maiden dear; And after that she said as ye may hear.

"Lo, right so as the love of Christ," quoth she, "Made me thy brother's wife, right in that wise Anon for mine ally here take I thee, Since that thou wilt thine idoles despise. Go with thy brother now and thee baptise, And make thee clean, so that thou may'st behold The angel's face, of which thy brother told."

Tiburce answer'd, and saide, "Brother dear, First tell me whither I shall, and to what man?" "To whom?" quoth he, "come forth with goode cheer, I will thee lead unto the Pope Urban." "To Urban? brother mine Valerian," Quoth then Tiburce; "wilt thou me thither lead? Me thinketh that it were a wondrous deed.

It were full hard by order for to sayn How many wonders Jesus for them wrought, But at the last, to telle short and plain, The sergeants of the town of Rome them sought, And them before Almach the Prefect brought, Which them apposed,* and knew all their intent, *questioned And to th'image of Jupiter them sent.

And said, "Whoso will not do sacrifice, Swap* off his head, this is my sentence here." *strike Anon these martyrs, *that I you devise,* *of whom I tell you* One Maximus, that was an officere Of the prefect's, and his corniculere <13> Them hent,* and when he forth the saintes lad,** *seized **led Himself he wept for pity that he had.

When Maximus had heard the saintes lore,* *doctrine, teaching He got him of the tormentores* leave, *torturers And led them to his house withoute more; And with their preaching, ere that it were eve, They gonnen* from the tormentors to reave,** *began **wrest, root out And from Maxim', and from his folk each one, The false faith, to trow* in God alone. *believe

Cecilia came, when it was waxen night, With priestes, that them christen'd *all in fere;* *in a company* And afterward, when day was waxen light, Cecile them said with a full steadfast cheer,* *mien "Now, Christe's owen knightes lefe* and dear, *beloved Cast all away the workes of darkness, And arme you in armour of brightness.

Ye have forsooth y-done a great battaile, Your course is done, your faith have ye conserved; <14> O to the crown of life that may not fail; The rightful Judge, which that ye have served Shall give it you, as ye have it deserved." And when this thing was said, as I devise,* relate Men led them forth to do the sacrifice.

But when they were unto the place brought To telle shortly the conclusion, They would incense nor sacrifice right nought But on their knees they sette them adown, With humble heart and sad* devotion, *steadfast And loste both their heades in the place; Their soules wente to the King of grace.

This Maximus, that saw this thing betide, With piteous teares told it anon right, That he their soules saw to heaven glide With angels, full of clearness and of light Andt with his word converted many a wight. For which Almachius *did him to-beat* *see note <15>* With whip of lead, till he his life gan lete.* *quit

Cecile him took, and buried him anon By Tiburce and Valerian softly,
Within their burying-place, under the stone. And after this Almachius
hastily Bade his ministers fetchen openly Cecile, so that she might in his
presence Do sacrifice, and Jupiter incense.* *burn incense to

But they, converted at her wise lore,* *teaching Wepte full
sore, and gave full credence Unto her word, and cried more and more;
"Christ, Godde's Son, withoute difference, Is very God, this is all our
sentence,* *opinion That hath so good a servant him to serve
Thus with one voice we trowe,* though we sterve.** *believe **die

Almachius, that heard of this doing, Bade fetch Cecilie, that he might her
see; And alderfirst,* lo, this was his asking; *first of all "What
manner woman arte thou?" quoth he, "I am a gentle woman born," quoth
she. "I aske thee," quoth he, "though it thee grieve, Of thy religion and of thy
believe."

"Ye have begun your question foolishly," Quoth she, "that wouldest two
answers conclude In one demand? ye aske lewedly."*
*ignorantly Almach answer'd to that similitude, "Of whence comes thine
answering so rude?" "Of whence?" quoth she, when that she was freined,*
*asked "Of conscience, and of good faith unfeigned."

Almachius saide; "Takest thou no heed Of my power?" and she him answer'd
this; "Your might," quoth she, "full little is to dread; For every mortal
manne's power is But like a bladder full of wind, y-wis;*
*certainly For with a needle's point, when it is blow', May all the boast of it
be laid fulllow."

"Full wrongfully begunnest thou," quoth he, "And yet in wrong is thy
perseverance. Know'st thou not how our mighty princes free Have thus
commanded and made ordinance, That every Christian wight shall have
penance,* *punishment But if that he his Christendom withsay,*
deny And go all quit, if he will it renay?" *renounce

"Your princes erren, as your nobley* doth," *nobility Quoth then
Cecile, "and with a *wood sentence* *mad judgment* Ye make us
guilty, and it is not sooth.* *true For ye that knowe well our
innocence, Forasmuch as we do aye reverence To Christ, and for we bear a
Christian name, Ye put on us a crime and eke a blame.

"But we that knowe thilke name so For virtuous, we may it not withsay."
Almach answered, "Choose one of these two, Do sacrifice, or Christendom

renay, That thou may'st now escape by that way." At which the holy blissful faire maid Gan for to laugh, and to the judge said;

"O judge, *confused in thy nicety,* *confounded in thy folly*
Wouldest thou that I reny innocence? To make me a wicked wight," quoth she, "Lo, he dissimuleth* here in audience; *dissembles He
stareth and woodeth* in his advertence."** *grows furious**thought To
whom Almachius said, "Unsely* wretch, *unhappy Knowest
thou not how far my might may stretch?"

"Have not our mighty princes to me given Yea bothe power and eke authority To make folk to dien or to liven? Why speakest thou so proudly then to me?" "I speake not but steadfastly," quoth she, Not proudly, for I say, as for my side, We hate deadly* thilke vice of pride. *mortally

"And, if thou dreade not a sooth* to hear, *truth Then will I
shew all openly by right, That thou hast made a full great leasing* here.
*falsehood Thou say'st thy princes have thee given might Both for to slay
and for to quick* a wight, -- *give life to Thou that may'st not but
only life bereave; Thou hast none other power nor no leave.

"But thou may'st say, thy princes have thee maked Minister of death; for if thou speak of mo', Thou liest; for thy power is full naked." "Do away thy boldness," said Almachius tho,* *then "And sacrifice to our
gods, ere thou go. I recke not what wrong that thou me proffer, For I can suffer it as a philosopher.

"But those wronges may I not endure, That thou speak'st of our goddes here," quoth he. Cecile answer'd, "O nice* creature,
*foolish Thou saidest no word, since thou spake to me, That I knew not therewith thy nicety,**folly And that thou wert in *every
manner wise* *every sort of way* A lewed* officer, a vain justice.
*ignorant

"There lacketh nothing to thine outward eye That thou art blind; for thing that we see all That it is stone, that men may well espyen, That ilke* stone a god thou wilt it call. *very, selfsame I rede* thee let thine hand
upon it fall, *advise And taste* it well, and stone thou shalt it find;
*examine, test Since that thou see'st not with thine eye blind.

"It is a shame that the people shall So scorne thee, and laugh at thy folly; For commonly men *wot it well over all,* *know it everywhere* That mighty God is in his heaven high; And these images, well may'st thou espy,

To thee nor to themselves may not profite, For in effect they be not worth a mite."

These wordes and such others saide she, And he wax'd wroth, and bade men should her lead Home to her house; "And in her house," quoth he, "Burn her right in a bath, with flames red." And as he bade, right so was done the deed; For in a bath they gan her faste shetten,* *shut, confine And night and day great fire they under betten.* *kindled, applied

The longe night, and eke a day also, For all the fire, and eke the bathe's heat, She sat all cold, and felt of it no woe, It made her not one droppe for to sweat; But in that bath her life she must lete.* *leave For he, Almachius, with full wick' intent, To slay her in the bath his sonde* sent. *message, order

Three strokes in the neck he smote her tho,* *there The tormentor,* but for no manner chance *executioner He might not smite her faire neck in two: And, for there was that time an ordinance That no man should do man such penance,* *severity, torture The fourthe stroke to smite, soft or sore, This tormentor he durste do no more;

But half dead, with her necke carven* there *gashed He let her lie, and on his way is went. The Christian folk, which that about her were, With sheetes have the blood full fair y-hent; *taken up Three dayes lived she in this torment, And never ceased them the faith to teach, That she had foster'd them, she gan to preach.

And them she gave her mebles* and her thing, *goods And to the Pope Urban betook* them tho;** *commended **then And said, "I aske this of heaven's king, To have respite three dayes and no mo', To recommend to you, ere that I go, These soules, lo; and that *I might do wurch* *cause to be made* Here of mine house perpetually a church."

Saint Urban, with his deacons, privily The body fetch'd, and buried it by night Among his other saintes honestly; Her house the church of Saint Cecilie hight;* *is called Saint Urban hallow'd it, as he well might; In which unto this day, in noble wise, Men do to Christ and to his saint service.