

Christians paid idolatrous worship. The pagan priests are there, with censers, ready for those who would offer incense. In a corner burns the fire near the statue of Vesta, to which Agnes is to be asked to pay homage. The court-room is filled with the enemies of the Christian name. If they were not brutalized by pagan superstition and bigotry, the youth and beauty of this fair child would move them all to sympathy. She has, indeed, some friends and admirers in the crowd, but they are cowed by her arrest. The mere charge of Christianity against any one meant a threat of confiscation of goods, and death. The accused Christian was shunned as if he had a contagious disease. Besides, interference would have been useless, for the Roman law against Christianity was as inexorable as fate. In the centre stands Agnes, like an angel just descended from the skies, her eyes clear and lustrous as twin stars on a frosty night, her cheeks flushed with the bloom of virginal innocence; like opening roses, her lips parted in prayer, and her two hands — so tiny that no fetters could be found small enough to bind them — her two hands, like two fair lilies, clasped together in supplication, not to the earthly judge, whom she did not dread, but to the Supreme judge,