

great persecutions. Rome, mistress of the entire world, was trying to extinguish with blood the fire which Christ had brought on earth. But after three hundred years of fruitless efforts, the inextinguishable fire kept burning on.

When compared with this mysterious fire, every other died away ; it weakened every other love, and gave young girls the courage to despise the delights of this world, in order to fly to torments and to death.

Agnes belonged to a rich and noble family. Her enticing beauty won the favour of the Prefect's son, who offered her the most magnificent jewels, at the same time begging her to accept him for her spouse.

"Another possesses my heart and my faith," she answered, refusing the presents. "Do not flatter yourself with the hope that you will ever be His rival."

The young Roman, mystified, believed her to be in love with some other great lord; and such a dark and violent jealousy took possession of him that he fell sick.

The Prefect, touched by his son's great grief, went himself to Agnes and begged of her to change her mind.

"I am the Prefect of Rome," said he; "before me, every one must bend. Therefore no matter how illustrious the origin of your betrothed may be, he should resign in favour of my son."

The father met the same refusal as his son, and witnessed the same ecstasies. Greatly surprised, he expressed a wish to know the name of one who inspired such an extraordinary love.

"My Lord," said one of those who accompanied him, "be certain that this young girl is a Christian: the Crucified One has bewitched her...."

The Prefect left her, glad to have a means of revenge in his power, and the next day he summoned Agnes before him.

"Young girl," said he, "the Christians, by their witchcraft, have troubled your young mind. They have misled your heart. I wish to tear you away from this miserable superstition, unworthy of your birth."

"I will have you conducted to our great goddess, and if you persist in preserving your virginity, you may offer her sacrifices and take care of the sacred fire which