Fabiola or The Church of the Catacombs

by Cardinal Nicholas Patrick Wiseman (1802-1865)

This historical novel is set in Rome in the early 4th century AD, during the
time of the cruel persecution of Christians under the Emperor Diocletian. The
heroine of the book is Fabiola, a young pagan beauty from a noble Roman
family. Fabiola seems to have everything, including a superior education in
the philosophers, yet under the surface, she is not content with her life. One
day, in a fit of rage, she attacks and wounds her slave girl Syra, who is a
secret Christian. The proud, spoiled Roman girl is humbled by Syra’s
humility, maturity and devotion to her in this situation, and a slow
transformation begins. Woven into this fictitious story are a number of
martyrdom accounts of real-life Christian saints, including Saint Agnes,
Saint Tarcisius and Saint Sebastian.

Cardinal Wiseman wrote Fabiola in part as an answer to the vigorously anti-
Catholic book Hypatia by Charles Kingsley. The novel was mainly aimed at
the embattled Catholic minority in England, who had recently emerged from
a half-illegal status. (Wikipedia)

Total running time: 13:29:26
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Cover design by Kathryn Delaney
Cover Illustration: John William Godward,
A Roman Matron, 1905