

Mrs. Vernaker stepped to his chair, and looking over his shoulder the following paragraph met her eyes:

'Messrs. Waldron, Weston and Co. have announced definitely that "The Uncreated Universe," by Vernaker, will be ready for sale on Wednesday morning. The history of this book is somewhat peculiar, as it was on the eve of publication more than a year ago, but was withdrawn owing to the conversion of the author to Catholicism. The publishers, however, now state that all difficulties have been smoothed over, and that the copyright has been purchased by them. Many people are still incredulous on this point, and more than one well-known personage in the world of literature, former friends of the author, have informed us that there must be some mistake, as the manuscript was destroyed a considerable time ago. However we await developments.'

'Am I mad?' cried Vernaker, putting his hand to his brow. 'Oh! God grant that I am dreaming! It cannot be. They would not dare.'

'Waldron, Weston, and Co.,' faltered Constance Vernaker; 'that was the signature on the cheque.'

Her husband turned upon her almost like a stag at bay. 'Cheque? What cheque?' he asked harshly.

'The £500 in payment for your novel,' she replied, frightened by his vehemence.

'Good God!' he almost shouted, springing from his chair. 'Do not say the money came from them!'

'That was the name on the cheque,' replied his wife, with a horrible suspicion of the truth flashing over her mind.

'And did they say it was for my novel?' he asked, breathlessly.

'No, the man did not mention any name, but of course I thought he came about the book you had just sent up,' replied Constance.

'Great heavens! I see it all,' cried Vernaker, throwing himself in anguish upon the couch. 'That cur Weston kept a copy of the book, and now—Merciful Creator! What have I not done? I have sold the book, signed an agreement for it to be published—and I—I shall be branded for all posterity as a second Judas. They will say I have sold my God for gold.'

A moment later he sprang up, all his weakness forgotten, the light of a great resolve shining in his eyes. His wife had fallen down beside the couch, weeping as if his heart would break. He raised her tenderly.

'Oh, my husband,' she cried, 'it is I who have done this. I was so eager, so delighted at the news. I lost no time in inquiry, and persuaded you to sign. Can you ever forgive me for the awful wrong I have done?'

'Nay, darling,' he said, comfortingly. 'It was not likely you would know, how could you be on your guard against a cunning fiend like Weston. But this is no time for idle repining. I will not lose a moment in seeing Weston, and if I cannot turn him from his purpose, I will instruct some bookseller to buy up as many of the books as he can with the money we have left. There is no time to lose, as they will be ready to-morrow. I will also write to all the newspapers for the sake of the clearance of my character, and after that I must leave the matter to God.'

Mrs. Vernaker looked at her husband aghast.

'But, my darling, it will kill you,' she said piteously.

He smiled at her wearily.

'If God so wills,' he replied.

'If you must go, I will go too,' she cried.

In vain he protested. A fond woman is hard to turn from her purpose; so an hour later, after he had been properly wrapped up, found them both ensconced in a cab on their way to Caxton House square. It was getting late before they arrived, but all was bustle in the office. The clerks exchanged looks as Vernaker entered and sent in his name. The commissioner returned almost immediately.

'Mr. Weston's very sorry, sir, but he's too busy to see you.'

'But I must see him, and will see him,' cried Vernaker, all his anger rising as he spoke. 'Will you be good enough to tell him' he continued, raising his voice loud enough to be heard all over the office, 'that unless he sees me instantly I will horsewhip him publicly in the streets the next time I meet him.'

The commissioner returned rather dubiously with his message, while the clerks grinned with delight, and remarked to one another that they would take care to be present when the horsewhipping came off. The sergeant soon reappeared.

'It's no good, sir,' he said, smiling, 'the moment I gave him your message he slipped out the back way, so I don't think you'll see him to-night.'

It was evident the whole office was in sympathy with Vernaker.

'Thank you, I expected as much,' he rejoined.

That night, as Thibault Vernaker prepared for bed, he knelt down, and with the whole force of his being he prayed that God would prevent the impending wrong to mankind.

CHAPTER V.

Gilbert Weston sat in his little office attached to the printing works late that night. The men were working overtime, for he had determined that 'The Uncreated Universe' should be out next morning, if he kept them up till dawn. In his hand he held Vernaker's letter. Somehow it affected him strangely. There was a solemn warning note in it which preyed on his coward mind.

'Bah!' he said at last with empty bravado, 'leave the matter in whose hands you will, friend Vernaker, your book will be issued to-morrow!'

It was strange how tired he felt. 'Up too late the last night or two—must keep earlier hours in future.' What was he thinking about? Ah, yes, that note.

'Hang the thing,' and he threw it carelessly aside.

'Wonder what hour that was striking in the distance. Strange how far away it sounded,' and in another moment or two Gilbert Weston was fast asleep. But not for long. He awoke suddenly—a

sensation of suffocation almost stunning him. Great heavens! What had happened? The whole place was full of choking smoke and blinding flames. He staggered out, almost maddened by the agonising pain in his eyes. The works were completely alight—great masses of printed paper sending up foul clouds of suffocating smoke. Not a soul to be seen, only outside he could hear clearly through the roar of the flames the shout of a great multitude.

'My God, help me! help me!' he cried in agony.

He rushed to one of the broken windows, but was driven back by the inroad of devouring flames. The stairs! No, it was too late! With a crash they had disappeared. Was there no help? Must he perish?

'Mercy! mercy!' cried the wretch, and then, as he made a last effort to reach one of the windows, a great column of black smoke hurled itself at him. It was choking him—killing him—he could not breathe. Then a strange sensation of peace stole over him, and after that—nothingness.

Next morning Thibault Vernaker was awakened by his wife earlier than usual. Her face was blanched and her hand trembled visibly as she held out a morning paper.

'Listen to this, darling,' she said, and read as follows:

'A disastrous fire occurred in the small hours of the morning at the printing works of Messrs. Waldron, Weston and Co. It appears that a large number of the hands were working late in order to get out a new book the first thing in the morning. Quite suddenly, about one o'clock, the foreman of the packing room, where most of the work was proceeding, discovered flames issuing from the type-composing room, beyond which is an office used by Mr. Weston. Work was immediately stopped and efforts made to reach Mr. Weston, but the fire was gaining so rapidly that in the end it was all the men could do to escape themselves. Ten or 12 engines and manuals were soon on the spot, but the fire burnt with such fierceness that the efforts of the brigade were practically futile. On learning of Mr. Weston's position, however, two firemen gallantly succeeded in bringing him out alive, having found him on the floor in an unconscious condition. The fire burnt itself out about five o'clock, having involved the whole of the works and offices. The conflagration, which Mr. Weston thinks must have been caused by a letter he threw down rather carelessly, near the fire, has caused damage to the extent of close upon £100,000, the most valuable part of this being in copyrights. One loss, which will be much felt, is Mr. Vernaker's "Uncreated Universe," about which our readers will notice a letter from the author in another column. Strangely enough, Mr. Vernaker has attained his object, as we understand that in consequence of the fire there is now not a single copy of his work, even in manuscript, extant. Mr. Weston must be congratulated on having escaped with his life, since we understand he had fallen asleep in his office, and only awoke when the fire had made considerable headway.'

When Constance had finished reading this, Vernaker was silent for a moment.

'God is good,' he said at length, reverently. 'He has guarded His own.'

'Here is another letter,' said his wife.

He read it and handed it over to her.

'From Marston and Ward, to say they have accepted my novel,' was all he said.

But God, looking down upon the scene, read it aright, and the gratitude of two honest hearts rose up before Him as the sweetest incense.—*Catholic Herald.*

People We Hear About.

Sir Francis Pankett, whose promotion from the Ministry at Brussels to that of Vienna is just officially announced, belongs to that branch of the great Irish family of which the Earl of Fingall is the present head. They are all Catholics, and Sir Francis entered the diplomatic service after leaving the Catholic College at Oscott in 1857, when he was only 20.

By the way, although the Earl of Hopetoun's eldest son was two years old when his father became Governor of Victoria in 1859, several of the younger children of the house of Hope are natives of Victoria. Lady Hopetoun has the merit of being Irish, for she is a daughter of Lord Ventry, an Irish representative Peer, whose ancestral estate of Burnham is in County Kerry. His family name is Eveleigh-de-Moleyns, and he was once Colonel of the 4th Battalion of the Munster Fusiliers. He married a daughter of Sir John Blake, a well-known Irish baronet, and he owns 93,700 acres in Ireland and elsewhere in the United Kingdom, so that he is a considerable landlord.

One of the very first decrees signed by the young King Victor Emmanuel III, (writes a Rome correspondent) has an interesting story attached to it. In 1865 a man named Gaetano Scinto was sentenced to death by the Criminal Court of Trapani for murder, but the sentence was afterwards commuted into one of hard labor for life. In spite of the repeated petitions addressed to the authorities by the convict's children and friends, who were all convinced of his innocence, the unfortunate Scinto has been in prison for the last 34 years, six of which were passed in solitary confinement. A short time ago a priest made an affidavit before the Assizes of Trapani to the effect that a man on his deathbed had acknowledged himself guilty of the crime for which an innocent man had suffered such a horrible martyrdom, and that he wished this to be known. No time was lost in communicating this important declaration to the 'Guardasigilli' or Minister of Justice, who at once submitted the facts of the case to the King. Needless to say that Victor Emmanuel ordered the immediate liberation of the poor victim.