

BETTY'S LAST WORDS

THERE is a certain stimulus in grief which lends unreal strength to endure, but Nature will be avenged in a physical and emotional reaction, all the more terrible that it is unexpected. Then the full weight of the sorrow presses upon the heart already exhausted, and the sense of loss becomes the more painful because it can be fairly estimated, and the empty place can be more truly measured because it is seen in its relation to the ordinary life.

So it was with Shock. The first sharp stab of grief was over, and now he carried with him the long ache of a wound that would not heal for many a day. His mother had filled a large part of his life. As far back into childhood as his memory could go, there she stood between him and the great world, his sure defence against all evil, his refuge in all sorrow; and as he grew into manhood she made for herself a larger and larger place in his thought and in his life. He well knew how she had toiled and denied herself comforts and endured hardships that he might gain that height of every Scottish mother's ambition for her son, a college education, and he gave her full reward in the love of his heart and the thoughtful devotion of his life. All his interests and occupations, his studies, his

mission work in the Ward, his triumphs on the football field, all he shared with her, and until the last year no one had ever challenged her place of supremacy in his heart. His future was built about his mother. She was to share his work, her home was to be in his manse, she was to be the centre about which his life would swing; and since coming to the West he had built up in imagination a new life structure, in which his mother had her own ancient place. In this new and fascinating work of exploring, organising, and upbuilding he felt sure, too, of his mother's eager sympathy and her wise understanding.

It had been the happiest of all his fancies that his mother should preside over the new home, the opening of which had been attended with such pride and joy. She would be there to live with him every day, watching him go out and waiting for him to come in.

Now all that was gone. As his mind ran along its accustomed grooves every turn of thought smote him with a pang sharp and sudden. She was no longer a part of the plan. All had to be taken down, the parts readjusted, the structure rebuilt. He began to understand the Convener's words, "This is a hard country." It demanded a man's life in all the full, deep meaning of the word; his work, of course of body and brain, but his heart as well, and his heart's treasures.

In the midst of his depression and bewilderment Ike brought him a letter which had lain two weeks at the Fort, and whose date was now some four weeks old. It was from Brown and ran thus:

MY DEAR OLD CHAP:

I do not know how to begin this letter. The terribly sudden and awful calamity that has overtaken us has paralysed my mind, and I can hardly think straight. One thing that stands out before me, wiping out almost every other thought, is that our dear Betty is no more. You cannot imagine it, I know, for though I saw her in her coffin, so sweet and lovely, but oh! so still, I cannot get myself to believe it. The circumstances concerning her death, too, were awfully sad, so sad that it simply goes beyond any words I have to describe them. I will try to be coherent; but, though I shall give you an account of what happened, I cannot begin to convey the impression upon my mind. Well, let me try.

You know Mrs. Fairbanks has been opposed all along to The Don's attentions to Betty, and has tried her best to block him. After you left, the opposition grew more determined. Why, for the life of me, I cannot say. She had apparently made up her mind that The Don must quit. She worked every kind of scheme, but it was no good. That plucky little girl, in her own bright, jolly way, without coming to an open break, would not give back an inch, and The Don kept coming to the house just because Betty insisted. He would have quit long before, poor chap. You know how proud he is.

Well, Mrs. Fairbanks set to work to gain her purpose. She somehow got wind of the kind of life The Don lived in this city years ago. She set enquiries on foot and got hold of the facts pretty well. You know

all about it, so I need not tell you. Poor chap, he had his black spots, sure enough. She furthermore got Lloyd somehow to corroborate her facts. Just how much he looked up for her I don't know, but I tell you I have quit Lloyd. He is a blanked cad. I know I should not write this, and you will hate to read it, but it is the truth. His conduct during the whole business has been damnable! damnable! damnable! I gnash my teeth as I write.

When she had everything ready she sprung her mine. It was in her own house one evening, when Lloyd, The Don, and I were there, and the Fairbanks' new minister, Hooper, a young Trinity man, who has been a close friend of The Don's, I don't know how long, but some years at least. A fine fellow. God bless him, say I, again and again.

The Don and Betty had been going it pretty strong that evening, rather unnecessarily so, I think; and Mrs. Fairbanks got more and more worked up, until she seemed to lose her head. As The Don was saying good night she spoke up and said in that haughty way of hers, "Mr. Balfour, the time has come when we must say good-bye, and I must ask you to discontinue your visits to this house, and your intimacy with my daughter."

Well, we all sat up, I can tell you. The Don went white, and red, and white again. Betty walked over and stood by his side, her eyes all blazing. "Mamma," she cried, "what are you saying against the man I love! Do you mean to——"

"Betty," said her mother in her haughtiest and

coldest and calmest voice, "before you go any further, listen to me. I do not choose that my daughter, pure and unsullied, should give herself to a *roué* and a libertine."

The Don took a step toward her and said: "Mrs. Fairbanks, someone has misled you. What you say is false, absolutely and utterly false." Betty glanced proudly up into his face.

"False!" cried Mrs. Fairbanks. "Then, Mr. Bal-four, you force me to ask, did you not live for some months with a woman on Jarvis Street? Were you not a constant visitor at houses of ill repute for months in this city?"

Poor Don! I can see him yet. His face grew livid, his eyes staring, as he stood there without a word.

"Don," cried Betty, "tell her it is false!" and she lifted her little head proudly. "Tell her it is false, and I don't care who says it is true." Still The Don stood speechless.

"Alas! my poor child," said Mrs. Fairbanks, "he could not say so. I have the proof in my hand." And she pulled a letter out of her pocket. "It is true, and much more—too true. Mr. Lloyd here knows this to be true. Is it not so, Mr. Lloyd? If this is not true, speak." The poor old Don turned his eyes imploringly toward Lloyd, like a man hanging on his last hope, but Lloyd, the beast! mumbled and stuttered something or other. Betty ran to him, caught him by the arm and shook him. "Speak out!" she said. "Say it is all a lie!" The Lloyd said in a thick kind of voice, "I cannot say so."

Betty turned back to The Don, and may God keep me from ever seeing a face like hers again. "Say it isn't true!" she said, putting her hand on his arm; and as he stood still, white and speechless, she gave a kind of cry of fear, and horror, and I don't know what else. "Oh, Don, can this be true—and—you kissed me!"

Then The Don pulled himself together, turned to Mrs. Fairbanks, and began to speak, the words pouring out in a perfect torrent. "Mrs. Fairbanks, you must listen to me. What you say was true of me eight years ago. I came here a mere boy. I fell in with a bad lot—I had plenty of money, and I confess I went bad. That was eight years ago. Then I met your daughters, and came into your home. From that time I have never done a dishonourable thing, my life has been clean. Ever since I touched your daughter's hand my hands have never touched anything unclean. The first day I saw her, eight years ago, I loved her, and since then I have been true in heart and in life to her. For my shameful past God knows I have repented bitterly, bitterly, and have sought forgiveness; and no man lives in this town, or any other, who can point to anything of which I am ashamed to speak here."

Poor Betty! She looked from one to the other in a frightened kind of way, and when The Don had finished his confession she gave a cry the like of which I never heard, "Oh, mother, take me away!" I have heard of hearts being broken. I think hers was broken then.

I tell you we were all in a whirl. The Don fell on

his knees beside her, taking hold of her skirts. "Oh, Betty, won't you forgive me? God have mercy on me! Won't you forgive me? I have done many things of which I am ashamed, but I have never been untrue to you in thought or in deed. Never, never, so help me God!" He clutched the hem of her dress, kissing it over and over again. It was a ghastly sight, I can tell you. Betty shrank from him, drawing her skirts away. "Come away, my daughter," said Mrs. Fairbanks. "There is nothing more to be said."

As she turned away up spake little Hooper. God bless him, the little five-footer, every inch clear grit. "Mrs. Fairbanks, one minute. Pardon me if I say a word. I am this young man's friend, and I am your minister. I have known this man for six years. I have known him intimately. I believe he carries a clean, pure heart, and he has lived a hard-working, honourable life. If he has sinned, he has repented, and God has forgiven him. Should not you?"

Mrs. Fairbanks turned impatiently on him. "Mr. Hooper, forgiveness is one thing, and friendship another."

"No, thank God!" cried the little chap. "No, forgiveness is not one thing and friendship another. Forgiveness means friendship, and welcome, and love, with God and with man." I could have hugged the little man where he stood.

Then Mrs. Fairbanks seemed to lose her head, and she blazed out in a perfect fury. "Do you mean deliberately to say that this man," pointing to The Don,

who was still on his knees, with his face in his hands, "that this man should be received into my house?"

"Mrs. Fairbanks," said Hooper, "is there not a place for the repentant and absolved, even with the saints of God?"

Mrs. Fairbanks lost herself completely. "Mr. Hooper," she cried, "this is outrageous. I tell you, forgiven or not, repentant or not, never will he, or such as he, enter my doors or touch my daughter's hand. Never while I live."

Then Hooper drew himself up. He seemed to me six feet tall. He lifted his hand, and spoke with the kind of solemnity that you expect to come from the altar. "Then listen to me, Mrs. Fairbanks. You say you would not receive him or such as him into your house. You invite me often to your home, and here I constantly meet men who are known in society as rakes and *roués*. You know it, and all society women know it, too. If you cared to take half the trouble you have taken in this case, you could find out all the facts. You are a woman of society, and you know well what I say is true. I have seen you in this room place your daughter in the arms of a man you knew to be a drunkard, and must have suspected was a libertine. These men have the *entrée* to every good family in the city, and though their character is known, they are received everywhere. They have wealth and family connection. Do not attempt to deny it, Mrs. Fairbanks. I know society, and you know it well. If you strike off the names of those men whose lives, not have been in the past, but are to-

day unclean and unworthy, you will have to make a very large blank in your dancing list." Then the little fellow's voice broke right down. "Forgive me if I have spoken harshly. I beseech you, hear me. You are doing a great wrong to my friend, a cruel wrong. I pledge you my name and honour he is a good man, and he is worthy of your daughter. God has covered his sin: why have you dared to uncover it?" And then, in the tone that he uses in reading his prayers, he went on, "In the name of the Saviour of the sinful and lost, I ask you, I entreat you, receive him."

You would think that would have melted the heart of a she-devil, let alone a woman, but that woman stood there, cold, white, and unmoved. "Is that all, Mr. Hooper?" she said. "Then my answer is—never! And as for you, his eloquent advocate, I never wish to see you again. Come, Betty."

As they began to move off The Don, who was still on his knees, looked up and reached out his hands toward the poor girl with a cry that stabbed my heart through and through. "I want your forgiveness, Betty, only your forgiveness." She paused, took a step towards him, then putting her hands over her face she stood still, shuddering. Her mother caught her and drew her away.

The Don rose slowly. He seemed stupefied. He turned toward Hooper, and said in a hoarse kind of whisper: "She's gone! Oh, God, I have lost her!" He felt his way out to the hall like a blind man. Helen put out her hand to stop him, but he went on, never

noticing. She followed him to the hall, weeping bitterly, and crying, "Come back, Don, come back!"

Without waiting to get coat or hat, he rushed out. "Go and get him," Helen cried to us, and we followed him as fast as we could. When I got out he had reached the gate, and was fumbling at the catch. "Hold on, Don, where are you going?" I cried. "To hell! to hell! to hell!" My dear chap, that cry of his made me believe in hell; for, if lost spirits cry when the devils get hold of them, they will cry like that. It was the most unearthly, horrible sound I have ever heard, and may God save me from hearing the like again.

Next day I tried to see Betty, but it was no use, she would see no one. And soon after I heard she was ill, typhoid fever. It had been working on her for some time. There was almost no hope from the very first. She became delirious at once, and in her raving kept calling on The Don for forgiveness. Your mother was a great help to them, relieving the nurse. They all seemed to depend upon her. Of course, I was in and out every day, and brought reports to The Don, who haunted our house day and night. I never saw a fellow suffer like that. He slept hardly any, ate nothing at all, but wandered about the town, spending most of his time at Hooper's when he was not with us.

After the delirium passed Betty asked for me. When I saw her looking so white and thin—you would think you could see through her hands—I tell you it broke me all up. She beckoned me to her, and when I bent over her she whispered: "Find The Don and

bring him." At first her mother refused, saying he should never come with her consent. It was mighty hard, I tell you. But the afternoon of the same day Helen came flying over to tell us that the doctor had said there was only a very slight chance for Betty, and that if her mother persisted in her refusal he would not be responsible for the consequences, that her mother had yielded, and I was to bring The Don. I tell you, I made time down to his rooms, and brought him to the house.

There was no one in the room but the nurse and the doctor when he entered. She was expecting us, and as we entered she opened her eyes and asked, "Is he here?" The nurse beckoned him to approach, and The Don came and knelt at her bed. He was very steady and quiet. She put out her hand and drew him toward her. She was the calmest of us all. "I want you to forgive me, Don," she said, and her voice was wonderfully clear. Poor chap, he went all to pieces for a minute or two and, holding her fingers, kissed them over and over again. "I want you to forgive me, Don," she said again. "I thought I was better than God." The poor fellow could only keep kissing her fingers. "My lips, Don, my lips," and The Don kissed her on the lips twice, murmuring in a broken voice, "My darling, my love, my love."

Then she looked up and smiled that old smile of hers—you remember, so bright and so merry? By Jove, it broke me all up. And she said: "Now we are all right, aren't we?" The doctor came and touched The Don. "No, doctor," she said, "I am

quite quiet. See, I am going to sleep. I want you to stay there, Don. Good-night."

Mrs. Fairbanks and Helen came in. Helen gave The Don her hand, but Mrs. Fairbanks paid no attention to him. Betty opened her eyes, saw her mother and smiled. "Dear mother," she said, "see, there's Don." Mrs. Fairbanks hesitated slightly, then reached out her hand across the bed. "Thank you, dear mother," Betty said. "You must be good to him." Then after a little while she said dreamily, like a tired child: "God forgives us all, and we must forgive." She let her eyes rest on The Don's face. "Good-night, Don, dear," she said, "I am going to sleep."

That was her last word, Shock. Just think of it—Betty's last word. I cannot realise it at all.

I wish my story ended there, but it does not. For a time we sat there, the doctor hoping that a turn for the better had come, but in about an hour the nurse noticed a change, and called him. He came quickly, felt her pulse, injected something or other into her arm. She opened her eyes. You remember how she would open those lovely brown eyes of hers when anything surprised her. Well, she opened them just that way, smiled brightly on one and then another, let her eyes rest on The Don, gave a little sigh and closed them, and they never opened again. "She is gone," the doctor said, and we all crowded near. "Yes, she is gone," he said again.

Then The Don stood up, and putting out his hand to Mrs. Fairbanks, said: "Mrs. Fairbanks, I want

to thank you for allowing me to come." But she drew herself away from him, refusing to touch his hand, and motioning him off.

Poor chap! He turned back to the bed, kneeled down, touched the soft brown hair with his hands, kissed the fingers again, and then without a word went out. If anyone can tell me what that woman's heart is made of, I would like to know.

The day of the funeral The Don brought me a little bunch of lilies of the valley, saying, "It is for her." I gave them to Helen, and I saw them afterwards in the hands that lay folded across her breast.

I have not seen him since, but Hooper tells me he said he was going out to you. I hope to Heaven he will not go bad. I don't think he will. Of course, he feels very bitterly about Lloyd and Mrs. Fairbanks.

Now, that is all my story. It makes a great difference to all our set here, but I will tell you what I have told no living soul, and that is, that the world will never be the same to me again. I am not much given to sentiment, as you know, and nobody ever suspected it. I do not think she did herself. But I loved that little girl better than my life, and I would have given my soul for her any day.

I know you will feel this terribly. How often I have wished that you could have been with us. The best I could do was to send you this wretched, incoherent scrawl.

Your friend as ever,

BROWN.

P. S.—Do you know anything about the British-American Gold and Silver Mining Company, or something like that? There is a chap here, manager or director, or something. Ambberg, I think his name is. He speaks as if he knew you, or knew something about you. He is a great friend of the Fairbanks. Lots of money, and that sort of thing. I did not like the way he spoke about you. I felt like giving him a smack. Do you know him, or anything about the company?

Your mother has not been very well since Betty's death. I think she found the strain pretty heavy. She has caught a little cold, I am afraid. B.

Brown's letter did for Shock what nothing else could have done: it turned his mind away from himself and his sorrow. Not that he was in any danger of morbid brooding over his loss, or of falling into that last and most deplorable of all human weaknesses, self-pity, but grief turns the heart in upon itself, and tends to mar the fine bloom of an unselfish spirit.

As he finished reading Brown's letter Shock's heart was filled with love and pity for his friend. "Poor fellow!" he said. "I wonder where he is now. His is a hard lot indeed." And as he read the letter over and over his pity for his friend deepened, for he realised that in his cup of sorrow there had mingled the gall of remorse and the bitterness of hate.

In another week two other letters came, each profoundly affecting Shock and his life. One was from Helen, giving a full account of his mother's illness

and death, telling how beautifully the Superintendent had taken part in the funeral service, and preserving for her son those last precious messages of love and gratitude, of faith and hope, which become the immortal treasures of the bereaved heart. As he read Helen's letter Shock caught a glimpse of the glory of that departing. Heaven came about him, and the eternal things, that by reason of the nearness of the material world too often become shadowy, took on a reality that never quite left him. Where his mother was henceforth real things must be.

The letter closed with a few precious sentences of love and sympathy from Helen, but in these Shock, reading with his heart in his eyes, and longing for more than he could rightly find in them, thought he could detect a kind of reserve, a reserve which he could not interpret, and he laid down the letter with painful uncertainty. Was her love more than she cared to tell, or was it less than she knew he would desire?

From Helen's letter Shock turned to Mrs. Fairbanks' and read:

MY DEAR MR. MACGREGOR:

We all deeply sympathise with you in your great loss, as I know you will with us in our grief. We can hardly speak of it yet. It is so new and so terribly sudden that we have not been able fully to realise it.

My great comfort in this terrible sorrow is my daughter Helen. Mr. Lloyd, too, has proved himself a true friend. Indeed, I do not know what we should have done without him. We are more and more com-

ing to lean upon him. You will not have heard yet that we have been so greatly attracted by Mr. Lloyd's preaching, and influenced by our regard for him personally, that we have taken sittings in the Park Church.

Helen, I am glad to say, is beginning to take an interest in the church and its work, and as time goes on I think her interest will grow. I should be glad indeed that it should be so, for our relations with Mr. Lloyd are very close; and, in fact, I may tell you what is yet a secret, that he has intimated to me his desire to make Helen his wife. Helen is very favourably disposed to him, and all our circle of friends would rejoice in this as an ideal marriage. Mr. Lloyd belongs to her own set in society, is a gentleman of culture and high character, and in every way suitable. As for myself, in my loneliness I could not endure the thought of losing my only daughter, at all, and her marriage would be a great blow to me were it not that her home is to be so close at hand.

There is one thing, however, about which Helen is sensitive. She cannot rid herself of a feeling that she is in a manner bound to you on account of her foolish and impetuous words, uttered under the excitement of your departure; but I am sure you would never think of holding her because of those words, uttered in a moment of great feeling, and I also feel sure that you would not in any way interfere with her happiness, or do anything that would hinder the consummation of a marriage so eminently suitable in every way.

We hear of you and of your work occasionally. It

must be a terrible country, and a very depressing life. The loneliness and isolation must be well-nigh overwhelming. I am sure you have all our sympathy. I suppose work of this kind must be done, and it is a good thing that there are men of such rugged strength and such courage as you have, who seem to be fitted for this kind of work.

Now, my dear Mr. Macgregor, in your answer I think that a few words of assurance to Helen on the points I have suggested would be greatly appreciated, and would do much to remove difficulties that now stand in the way of her happiness and mine.

Yours very sincerely,

E. FAIRBANKS.

It was then that Shock drank to the dregs his full cup of bitter sorrow. The contrasts suggested by Mrs. Fairbanks' letter stood out vividly before him. He thought of Helen's beautiful home, where she was surrounded with all the luxuries of a cultured life; he thought of her circle of friends, of the life work to which, as Lloyd's wife, she would be permitted to take up; he thought, too, of her mother's claim upon her. And then he looked about upon his bare room, with its log walls, its utter absence of everything that suggested refinement; he thought of the terrible isolation that in these days had become so depressing even to himself; he thought of all the long hours of weary yearning for the sight and touch of all that he held dear, and for the sake of the girl to whom he had given his heart's love in all its unsullied purity and in

all its virgin freshness he made his decision. He took up his cross, and though his heart bled he pressed his lips upon it.

His letter to Mrs. Fairbanks was brief and clear.

"I thank you for your sympathy," he wrote, "and I grieve with you in your great sorrow.

"In regard to what you write concerning Miss Helen, you have made yourself perfectly clear, and I wish to repeat now what I said on the morning of my leaving home: that Miss Helen is to consider herself in no sense bound to me. She is perfectly free, as free as if she had not spoken. I fully realise the possibility of mistaking one's feelings under the stress of such emotional excitement. The sphere of work opening out before her is one in every way suited to her, and one in which she will find full scope for her splendid powers of heart and mind, and I shall be glad to know that her happiness is assured. At the same time, truth demands that I should say that my feelings toward her have not changed, nor will they ever change; and, while I cannot ask her to share a life such as mine, I shall never cease to love her."

In Shock's preaching, and in his visitation of his people, a new spirit made itself felt. There was no less energy, but there was an added sweetness, and a deeper sympathy. He had entered upon the way of the Cross, and the bruising of his heart distilled all its tenderness in word and deed. His preaching was marked by a new power, a new intensity; and when,

after the evening service, they gathered about the organ to spend an hour in singing their favourite hymns, then most of all they were conscious of the change in him. The closer they drew toward him the more tender did they find his heart to be.

The loneliness of the days that followed was to Shock unspeakable. There was no one to whom he could unburden himself. His face began to show the marks of the suffering within. Instead of the ruddy, full, round, almost boyish appearance, it became thin and hard, and cut with deep lines.

The doctor, who now made his home in Loon Lake, became anxious about his friend, but he was too experienced and too skilled a physician to be deceived as to the cause of Shock's changed appearance.

"It is not sickness of the body," he remarked to Ike, who was talking it over with him, "but of the mind, and that, my friend, is the most difficult to treat."

"Well," said Ike, "when I hear him speak in meetin', and see him git on one of them smiles of his, I come purty nigh makin' a fool of myself. I guess I'll have to quit goin' to church."

"No, I do not think you will quit, Ike, my boy," said the doctor. "You have become thoroughly well inoculated. You could not, if you tried."

"Well, I surmise it would be difficult, but I wish somethin' would happen."

THE DON'S RECOVERY

IKE had his wish; for, when one day his business took him to the Fort, the stage brought a stranger asking the way to Mr. Macgregor's house, and immediately Ike undertook to convoy him thither.

It was The Don.

Shock's shout of welcome did Ike good, but the meeting between the two men no one saw. After the first warm greeting Shock began to be aware of a great change in his friend. He was as a man whose heart has been chilled to the core, cold, hard, irresponsible. Toward Shock himself The Don was unchanged in affection and admiration, but toward all the world he was a different man from the one Shock had known in college days.

In Shock's work he was mildly interested, but toward all that stood for religion he cherished a feeling of bitterness amounting to hatred. True, out of respect he attended Shock's services, but he remained unmoved through all; so that, after the first joy in his friend's companionship, the change in him brought Shock a feeling of pain, and he longed to help him.

"We will have to get him to work," he said to the doctor, to whom he had confided The Don's history in