

FRANCIE HERRIEGERIE'S SHARGER LADDIE.



FRANCIE'S HOME.

“ Aw dinna think 't oor Willikie 's thrivin', 'oman. He hisna growin' oot o' the bit this towmon'.”

“ Noo, fat sud gar ye say that, Francie? Willikie 's nae sae stoot; but the laddie 'll dee weel aneuch, peer thing, gin it be Gweed's wull.”

“ He has nae wecht ava, Bell; an' aw 'm maist seer 's airmies 's sairer wainish't nor fan I was here last.”

As Francie Herriegerie uttered these words, his rough weather-browned face wore an expression of such deep and tender concern as Bell, his wife, could not behold altogether unmoved. She was a brave-hearted woman, Bell, and like a true wife felt instinctively prompted to assume her full share of the conjugal anxieties. She had had her own uneasy thoughts about Willikie; but then it was only once in three weeks that Francie could by possibility spend a night with his own family under his own roof; and doubtless Francie had cares enough on his mind otherwise; why should the short period of family intercourse be marred by complaining or gloomy words from her? Still, when Francie had touched a chord so tender it would needs vibrate; and as his look was yet an inquiring and unsatisfied look, Bell felt it to be a thing very possible for her to exhibit a culpable amount of weakness at that moment.

Luckily the baby, a thriving little chap of three months old, who lay stretched across her knees, demanded instant attention; and then Bell turned her head to listen—

“Eh, ye waukrife mannie : arena ye sleepin’ yet ?”

The cause of Bell’s query was the subdued sound of a tiny voice in a dark bed closet off the rudely furnished room in which she and her husband sat by the fire, with a small paraffin lamp burning on the mantel-piece. The sound of the tiny voice was accompanied by a slight “hirstling” noise, and then a pale little face peered past the edge of the closet door, and the figure of the waukrife mannie, robed in his shirt alone, could be discerned standing there.

“Foo arena ye comin’ to yer bed, Da ?” asked the tiny voice.

“Eh, Willikie ; but ye sud ’a been sleepin’ ere noo.”

“But I cudna sleep fan Da promis’t to tak’ me in o’ s bosie.”

Francie Herriegerie was merely a rough ploughman, hired by the six months to drive a pair of horses to Mains of Puddleweal ; and doing his daily task in a very matter-of-fact kind of way. Yet Francie Herriegerie had within him a region of feeling which, if fairly surveyed, might have been found to equal, or, it is just possible, transcend that to be discovered within the breast of many a man who would not for a single moment have hesitated to set Francie down as an uncultivated boor ; that is as compared with himself and the people he cared to associate with. It was wonderful now the stretch of compassionate care which Francie would extend to the pair of horses that were under his special charge ; the infinite pains he would take to make the brutes look their very best. As for chastisement they knew of no such thing at Francie’s hands ; or if they did it was a very extreme case, and ere Francie applied the lash, you could perceive the grounds of a full justification of the proceeding either in the

animal's persistent rebellion, or in its conscience-stricken attempts to evade the consequences of a deliberately vicious act. But it was in the bosom of his family only that Francie's human sympathies were fully to be seen; away from the rough daily companionship of his life that at any rate affected to laugh the least approach to tenderness of feeling to scorn.

Ay! but there it was that the difficulties of the situation arose. Francie Herriegerie, the son himself of a crofter in the now extinct hamlet of Housahill, had been a farm-servant in his native locality from his early boyhood upward. At the point in his lifetime where he is introduced to the reader he had been married six years, and the family's history was like this—The first year of married life had ere its close given him his flaxen-haired Jessie, now a little maiden of signal capabilities in the nursing line, as was testified by the fact that her services had begun to be in request by discerning neighbours, who, lacking such efficient aid of their own, were glad to furnish employment for Jessie's vacant time. Next to Jessie came Willikie, at an interval of eighteen months. And when Willikie was nine months old, it so happened that typhus visited the Lane in the small burgh town of Innerebrie, where Francie Herriegerie's residence was. It seized on Jessie first, and next on "the bairn," as Willikie was then styled; but the worst part came when Bell, the mother, was laid down. Jessie had struggled through, and Willikie was in process of struggling through as rapidly as the conditions of the case would allow; for although Innerebrie is a town of scarcely two thousand inhabitants, the Lane, as regards matters sanitary, had attained great maturity in point of stagnancy and filth. But at that point Bell Herriegerie was taken of the fever, and lay stretched on her humble bed for many weeks, fighting the gaunt pestilence with the odds mainly on its side; at times as low down in point of active vital power as well might be,

at other times at the opposite extreme of fevered excitement and delirium ; and while Bell Herriegerie lay thus, the sad burden of the bairn seldom off her mind in her lucid moments, and the same theme frequently finding vent in her wild unconscious utterances, the two poor children were but scantily cared for. A kind neighbour lived "but and ben," whose own family, having reached the estate of early manhood and womanhood, had got dispersed, to marry and shift for themselves, as wont is, leaving the father and mother, now getting frail and stiff with age, unencumbered to earn once again their own means of subsistence. This good woman, to whom the Herriegeries had been known only for a twelvemonth bygone, did what she could for the sick mother and her bairns, without hope of fee or reward. But to perform a mother's part to a couple of children and nurse a fever patient, was no light task.

Ah ! me, when Francie Herriegerie left his home on those late Sunday evenings and tramped three lang Scotch miles to bed in order to be in time to begin duty at five o'clock next morning, at Mains of Puddleweal, no wonder if his heart should sink within him, as he thought of his helpless household ; no wonder that during the long dreary week that elapsed ere he could, per favour of that respectable farmer Mains of Puddleweal, be allowed to go back and see them again for a few hours, the image of his wife, Bell, with pallid face and sunken eyes, of his wee Jessie in her precociously grave way, striving now to aid her sick mother ; and next addressing the "fretting" Willikie, as "my wee lammie"—no wonder that all this should be much present to Francie's mind.

These were two terrible months to him. But even the longest lane has a turning. Bell recovered slowly, and for a long while it seemed not very perfectly : Jessie was quite strong again ; but Willikie—well, it might be the meagreness of the sustenance he had received ; or it might be that he had got too much experience of

sprawling about, outside and in, untended for hours on end, or tended only by arms too feeble to give him the nursing he needed ; or it might be all these combined ; but from that time Willikie had assumed an unthriven look ; wan in colour and pensive in expression ; in short, as it was briefly put in the Lane, " a cryn't thingie."

Francie Herriegerie was, as has been said, honestly attached to his wife ; he loved his bairns, and, I think, his stronger hope was centered in Willikie. Francie had suffered much anxiety of mind, and most of all, because of the enforced absence from his family to which he had been obliged to submit in the circumstances narrated. And, after much pondering, Francie determined to end this state of matters at the term then ensuing.

" Aw 'm nae gyaun to fee this winter 'oman," said Francie.

" Keep me, man ; fat wud ye dee gin ye didna fee ?" asked Bell.

" Try the dargin ; there 's plenty o' orra wark i' the kwintra."

" But ye've never been ees't wi' the pick an' the spaud ; aw doot ye winna tak' weel wi' 't, Francie."

" Aw canna like it waur nor mony ane's deen ; an' I'll win hame at even at ony rate."

" Ye sud think weel about it, man, afore ye gi'e up a steady place, an' tak' yer chance o' broken weather an' that."

" I've thocht about a' that, 'oman ; but fat is 't that a bodie wudna pit up wi' raither nor be aye awa fae you an' the bairns."

Bell was still a little dubious ; but she did not oppose the project. Indeed, she was secretly glad at the thought of one element in the prospective change of circumstances, and that was the hope of her husband getting " hame at even." Though a man of settled habits and strong domestic attachments, Francie during his first

few years of life as a married ploughman had never been able to spend so large a proportion of his time as one night in seven with his wife and family. It had been the wise and humane policy of the men who had razed his native Housahill, and extinguished other seats of cottar life, to make sure that labour-bred paupers should not come into existence on their lands ; and in this they were achieving a certain success, at the trifling cost of ultimately extinguishing not only the native labourer-pauper but the native labourer himself, and obtaining both pauper and labourer of imported origin and deteriorated character.

So Francie Herriegerie left farm service, and brought home his "kist"; and the whip, that formed the emblem of his office as a "horseman." He got himself furnished with a new spade, and a "tramp" to save the sole of his boot while operating as trencher or drainer. The work was not what he had been accustomed to ; he felt it to be somewhat hard and irksome, indeed ; and then he had to sit down day by day on a big stone in the cold December air to eat his modest dinner of oat cakes and cheese, with a drop of small beer to wash it down. Still as such work, which could be got by merely walking a mile and a half out, would enable him to earn fourteen shillings a-week, and admit of his sleeping every night under his own roof, Francie had begun to think it might be at any rate endured for the sake of the contingent advantages. But just then the frost and snow came on ; "all out-door labour was stopped," as the agricultural paragraph writers say ; and oh, what a weary six weeks followed !

Weariness was not the worst of it, however. Francie Herriegerie's weekly revenue was stopped too. The previous time of sickness had fully exhausted his small savings ; and when compelled, as he best could, to get the food required in his home on the credit of the future, Francie felt not a little discouraged. Here was he, the bread-winner, reduced to the position of a mere

bread-eater, the freshness of his appetite simply serving to remind him unpleasantly of the rate at which he was eating himself into the miller's debt.

A winter with much "broken weather" made Francie's "dargin"—distasteful at best—so profitless that next term saw him re-engaged to farm work; and so, at the date when our sketch opens, he had, after one or two changes of master, returned to Mains of Puddleweal to drive a pair of horses for that careful and industrious agriculturist.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAMILY OUTLOOK.

FRANCIE HERRIEGERIE and his wife went to bed, and Willikie was soon in his coveted position, nestling in his father's bosom. Next day being the Sabbath, Francie enjoyed the rare privilege of lying abed till Bell had the breakfast actually on the table, guarding the baby, and hearing Willikie's recital of various small matters interesting to him that were of recent occurrence, and so unknown to his father. And then the laddie was so clever! Why, verily, he had picked up the alphabet at his mother's knee, from the first page of the Shorter Catechism, in almost no time, and now would spell you out a simple lesson right fluently; or, better still, set him to repeat some bit of verse—one of those very homely nursery rhymes he had caught by hearing them from his mother's lips, a snatch of a ballad, a portion of a paraphrase or psalm, learnt in the same way, and the susceptibility to emotional feeling at least in the child would strike you, as well as the premature gravity of expression on his eager little face. And if Francie Herriegerie could not readily put his feelings in words, it was not that feeling did not exist in his breast and feeling too of some strength.

"Lat Da hear yer new psalm, Willikie," said Bell, speaking from the fire-side, during a short break in the prattle going on in the bed; and Willikie seating himself on the pillow, with clasped hands, gave off with a sort of quaint emphasis the whole of the twenty-third psalm, much to his father's delight. And then, as

Francie was now stirring, Willikie trotted away and sat down by the side of the fire till Jessie or his mother should assist him in putting on his clothes.

"Weel," observed Francie at an after stage of that Sabbath day, "it's keerious noo. I cudna 'a never learnt to get screeds o' things upo' my tongue like that laddie."

"Fa, Willikie?" asked Bell. "He has maist mair wut nor an' aul' bodie; but ye see fan creaturs is some weykly i' the body, it's af'en made up to them i' the heid."

"Aw 'm seer he wud bleck mony a bairn twice his age 't's been raiths at the skweel."

"Ay wud 'e;" said Bell promptly, and evidently pleased to find Francie not indisposed now to dwell rather on Willikie's intellectual promise, than on his lack of physical stamina, "but ye ken it's nae the skweel 't'll gi'e nae ane naitral pairts man."

"Na—na," said Francie thoughtfully. "An' we hed ony chance but o' gettin' 'im intill ony kin' o' a berth come time, faur it wud be mair heid wark nor eesin's han'ies at roch lawbour the furth."

"Weel, ye wudna ken. There's aye a Providence. An' the lave's richt weel an' strong noo."

"He mith be a merchan', or onything, gin fowk hed for-speakers to get 'im ta'en in; but that's only for them 't's weel upon't, an' the like o' hiz cudna expeck it—Fat wud ye think o' tryin' to get 'im leern't some licht trade o' some kin'?"

"An' foo sudna we, gin we be a' spar't a fyow years?"

"It's sae ill gettin' ony fittinment; an' ye wudna like to mak' a souter nor a tailor o' 'im?" said Francie, half-inquiringly.

"Hoot man," was the answer, "aw won'er to hear ye speak that gate as gin there war nae ither trades but that. There's Maister Gabriel, the watchmakker, wi' a naitral heich shooder, an' a muckle limp forbye, peer bodie, 't was but an orphan laddie, an' neen to luik

aifter 'im but the frem't fae the time 't he was a gyangrel infant they tell me—fat sud hin'er Willikie to be a watchmakker an' 't war sae?"

The idea had not before dawned on Francie's mind ; but it pleased him immensely. For it was quite clear that Mr. Gabriel, the watchmaker, must at some former time have been also a wee cryn't laddie—as he was cryn't still in his grey middle age—and if he had been a friendless orphan to boot, that was worse than Willikie's case still—yet now had he a fine shop and a flourishing business. Bell saw the pleasing impression that had been made, and she failed not to follow it up with other cheering and comfortable words.

"An' ye ken Jessie 'll seen be worth 'ersel' an' mair, to onbody 't's needin' the like o' 'er to help them."

"But ye wudna speak o' feein' her this lang time—ye've mair need o' 'er to help yersel'. Forbye 't, she wud need some skweelin' yet."

"'Deed, Francie, it was little skweelin' 't ever I got ; an' though Jessie, peer 'oman, hisna hed muckle leasure, for helpin' wi' the bairns an' that, she can read, ye ken, as claer 's onything, an' vreet nae that ill."

Bell, it will be perceived, had both hopefulness and contrivance.

Francie Herriegerie, like a good christian, had gone to the kirk that day, and Jessie by his side. The Rev. Dr. Dryaneuch was a sound and not too lively preacher, who in every several text selected by him contrived to find "three things" demanding attention ; neither more nor less ; which he duly expounded, and then followed up with an application. Francie had listened in a somewhat vague way, it must be confessed, as a man might do who had hardly become alive to anything like a line of connection between the doctrines so baldly and formally enunciated, and the hard, struggling human life he was leading. He had even once or twice nodded, and lapsed into momentary unconsciousness, during which the voice of the preacher went

bumming over him, as the sound of the west wind shaking the branches on an autumn gloaming.

It was with a sense of positive relief that, when the modest dinner of the family was over, Francie heard Bell, his wife, address to Jessie—and not to him—the question where Dr. Dryaneuch's text had been. Truth to say, Francie had completely forgot; and he almost started at the thought when his wife interrogated Jessie, who gave chapter and verse as accurately as Dr. Dryaneuch himself could have done. And possibly this simple incident, and the sincere and homely intercourse that went on while the bairns read their small lessons, and answered the simple questions put by their mother, not only made up to Francie Herriegerie pretty well for the formal sermon, the point of which he had missed, but that they in themselves constituted an informal sermon of a very wholesome and practical sort.

The afternoon passed away only too rapidly; and again Francie took stick in hand to return to Mains of Puddleweal, Bell and the bairns accompanying him to the "heid o' the toon," where they bade good night till next visit.

That night Francie Herriegerie plodded on his solitary way between Innerebrie and his master's farm with, on the whole, a lighter heart than he had expected. Below his arm was a blue check bag, containing his supply of shirts and stockings for the next three weeks, all carefully washed and repaired by Bell, his wife; and Francie felt more and more what an admirable wife she was; a woman verily to lean upon and in whose society there was hopefulness and strength for him in maintaining his part in the battle of life; though, to be sure, the thought *would* come up that outward circumstances made that battle harder to him than it ought to have been. But for this Francie saw no possibility of help. He had already made the one experiment that seemed open to him in the way of attempted change, and the result had been the reverse of satisfactory.

CHAPTER III.

AT MAINS OF PUDDLEWEAL.

THE thought that mainly occupied Francie Herriegerie's mind from the date of his last visit to Innerebrie till his return again to see his family was how he might contrive in time to raise, in the shape of surplus revenue, the sum of three pounds, which it was understood Mr. Gabriel required as apprentice fee for each young man whom he trained to the business of watchmaker. Doubtless, he had long to wait yet until Willikie should be fit for apprenticing—assuming that Mr. Gabriel should prove willing to take him under indenture—yet the subject was one fitted to bulk largely in his mind; and Francie dwelt much, and not altogether un-hopefully, on the prospect that seemed to him, in a general way, open for the advancement in life of his eldest son.

No doubt Francie Herriegerie's castle in the air was a castle of very modest dimensions; yet the process of constructing it gave him, for the time being, a reasonable amount of satisfaction. But, as the months wore on, the hope of its being ultimately realised in his experience did not receive strength from the hard facts of life. Evidently Willikie was not improved nor improving in health. To Francie's anxious gaze as he marked the laddie at each succeeding visit it seemed indeed that things were going the other way. True, Willikie's wonderfully keen mental faculties were as lively as ever, but even his fond mother could not now deny that the poor boy was less and less able to run

about, and got sooner tired of his small amusements. He would now sit by the hearth in his diminutive arm-chair silent and wearied, drawing a long sigh at intervals, and gazing earnestly and patiently at his mother as she moved about the house. And then it came to be that it was only at times he could be a whole day out of bed.

It was now early spring. The darkest time of another dark winter had passed by, during which Francie Herriegerie had been as assiduous in his attention to his home and his family as circumstances would permit. With the re-ascent of the sun in the heavens, certain vaguely defined hopes of some kind of "betterment" that "the lang day" might bring to Willikie, began to float in Francie's mind; for with the primrose peeping out from its mossy bed, the wee early gowan looking up from the green sward that the keen ploughshare was tearing up before him, and the birds beginning to pour forth their cheerful strains from bush and brake; it was hard indeed to think of a bright young life passing into darkness and silence.

It was at this season that Mains of Puddleweal sent his carts on a weekly "vaege" to the burgh of Innerebrie to fetch his supplies of lime, and what not, for the opening season, and carry off the grain he might wish to put to market. To Francie Herriegerie the weekly "vaege" was most welcome, as furnishing prized opportunities of seeing his wife and children. Not that these visits were a recognised part of the programme as arranged by Mains of Puddleweal. His instructions simply were, "Noo, boys, jist lowse only as lang's ye cairry up the lades, an' get in yer puckle shalls—gin ye slack the haims, an' throw aff their collars the beasts'll be throu' wi' their feed, an' ready to tak' road again fanever yer loaden't;" but as Mains sent four carts and two men, (including Francie Herriegerie) to drive, Francie, with the concurrence of his fellow-servant, who undertook the temporary guidance of the whole four horses, was

wont to start off in advance when the return journey had been commenced, and just to the extent to which he managed to outwalk or outrun the horses in the mile of road between the lime depôt and his house might he have the privilege of enjoying the society of home. Whip in hand, and minus his coat, Francie would contrive to distance his companion with the carts considerably ; yet after allowing a little margin to be made up in the way of overtaking the carts after they had passed the end of the Lane, some twenty minutes was about the utmost limit of time to be counted upon. Still these fugitive weekly visits were felt to be cheering and grateful on both sides ; and even the diminutive and sickly Willikie was stirred into somewhat of vivacity, at the thought of his father's returning hebdomadal call. Jessie had carried him out to watch the carts as they passed down on a certain day, and the sight of the handsome well-fed animals, with their glossy skins and shining harness made a deep impression on Willikie's mind, as his frequent references to the subject in the form of queries addressed to his sister testified. Next time when Francie called at his home he was put into a position of some embarrassment when Willikie, looking up in his face in a very earnest fashion, asked—

“Da, wull ever *I* be muckle, an' get a fup like yours?”

“I cudna say, Willikie, man—speer at yer mither,” said Francie, at a loss for a better reply.

“But aw did speer, an' she didna say naething.”

To “say naething” would also have been Francie's desire ; but the question was very directly put, and an answer evidently expected, and he accordingly stammered out something to the effect that Willikie “maybe wud be muckle some day, an' hæ a hantle better an' gran'er things nor a fup.”

“An' wull 't be lang till I grow some better ; 'caus' I wud like to win oot fan I 'm able to gyang, an' Jessie

nae cairryin' me, to see the bonny gowanies, and the sheepies atein the green girse? Divnin ye see them, da, ilka day?"

It was only the case of a rough farm servant and his belongings, yet such words as these would dwell with a painful sharpness in the ears of Francie Herriegerie for days after their utterance. Was it cause of wonder, good reader, that he should be troubled and downcast in such times of lonely musing, when the images of those he loved were very present to him, and their enforced absence became all the more vividly realised?

By and bye the time of "vaeging" was over for a season; and while Willikie's case was evidently getting more critical, Francie's chances of visiting his home were again reduced to the statutory three-weekly round, unless when he chose, as he once or twice did when unusually anxious, to tramp down those three miles from Mains of Puddleweal to Innerebrie after performing his ten hours' task at plough or harrows, and tramp back the same road again before going to sleep. Then came the message from Bell, by the mouth of an itinerating egg dealer of the female sex, whose good offices she had sought, that Willikie was a "gweed hantle waur." In his anxious perplexity under this information, Francie, instinctively searching after a little sympathy, mentioned the matter to mains of Puddleweal, for Mains was not altogether an inhumane man; and Mains offered the remark, "Is that the bairn 't's been sae lang in a dwynin' wye?" Nothing further occurred to him to add on the subject; and his thoughts taking naturally a practical direction, he proceeded to expatiate on the fact, that a very fine mare, of which Francie had charge and of which Francie had never failed to be careful in the highest degree, was closely approaching the time when she would give birth to a foal; and Mains, with the utmost earnestness, enforced on Francie the necessity of the mare being closely attended to at night, even more than by day, till the interesting event should be over.

“Ye’ll need-a be constant about the toon, Francie, oot o’ oors; the beast has a feerious nervish temper, an’ wud hardly lat me, aiven, lay a han’ upon ’er, lat aleen unco fowk; but she kens you, an’ ’t wud be a byous thing to hae ’er mislippen’t. She canna owregae an’ ouk or twa noo at the farrest.”

And so several days and nights passed on, during which Francie Herriegerie had heard no report of Willikie’s state. It may be believed that it gave him not less concern than the trust imposed by Mains of Puddleweal, and to which Francie, as a trustworthy servant, continued unflinchingly faithful.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST OF WILLIKIE.

“An’ the bairnie’s at its rest, than?”

“Ou ay, peer thing; its fecht’s at an en’.”

“Weel, weel; it cud ’a never been naething but an objeckie. Fan was’t no?”

“It wear awa’ the streen i’ the gloamin, jist aboot sindoon.”

“An’ foo’s Bell ’ersel’, peer creatur? She’s hed a weary on-wyte, nicht an’ day, this month an’ mair.”

“Weel, ’oman, she’s won’erfu’, considerin’—the back’s aye fittit for the burden, ye ken.”

“Deed it’s rael true; but she’s a brow sensible deem, Bell, weel-a-wat. Was Francie doon bye ere the cheenge cam’?”

“Eh na, ’oman! Francie hedna won doon for a flie bye-gane; something or ither adee amo’ Mains’s horse-beasts hed keepit ’im fest at the toon oot o’ oors. Aweel, they hed spoken o’ sen’in’ for ’im fan the littlean’s eenies begood to be deith-like—the creaturie was wastit awa’ till a perfeck atomie—but ere onybody cud be rankit oot to gae, Willikie was in a better place. Syne Francie—he hed been o’ the road, peer stock—cam’ in aboot in little mair nor half an ’oor.”

“He wud be sair affeckit no?—he liket the laddikie.”

“Liket ’im! Weel an’ he didna like ’im. Keep me, ’oman, he jist birstet an’ grat like a vera bairn. Aw thoct naething but ’t he wud lift the corpie aifter it was streekit an’ haud it in ’s oxter in spite o’ ’s a’.”

The interlocutors in this case were two of Bell Herrie-

gerie's female neighbours in the Lane—one of them the kindly old woman whose existence has been previously indicated, and on whom Bell had been wont to rely more or less in times of affliction. Their conversation will sufficiently inform the reader of the fact and circumstances of Willikie's death.

Francie Herriegerie's Sharger Laddie was no more of this earth; and Francie felt the stroke with great intensity—an intensity how much aggravated by the circumstances of his position I shall not pretend to say. Clearly there was some ground to allege that it was not the fault of Mains of Puddleweal, taking things as they stood, that Francie Herriegerie had found it impossible to be present by his child's deathbed, or even to have the mournful satisfaction of seeing the feeble life go out; and that now, after a prolonged burst of emotion over his dead little son, he was obliged to leave all the home he had on earth, and return to the farm to attend to the interests of his master, and the comfort of his master's "horse-beasts." For what could Mains do? It was right that his horses should be properly attended to at all times; and when a very valuable mare had just added to his stock a very fine foal, and when the animal at that critical time was always "fashious" in temper to the last degree, it was right and fitting that the man who was paid to attend to the mare, and who alone could do it safely and efficiently, should not be out of the way of duty. If stress be laid on the fact that Mains's sympathies were so closely linked with the welfare of his own live stock, as compared with the life, or as it might happen death, of any of the members of his servant's family, it is simply an illustration of human nature in one of its not very uncommon aspects; and an aspect that is hardly liable as a rule to be reckoned disreputable or depraved.

That Francie Herriegerie should have been separated from his family as he was—as for years he had been compelled to be, like many others of his class—reflected

discredit and even positive guilt somewhere there could be no manner of doubt. But we must not press unfair charges against Mains of Puddleweal, for even he at this time felt and complained of the circumstance. It was Francie's duty to tell him of Willikie's death, and to ask a little needed leave of absence to enable him to attend to matters connected with the child's funeral.

"Ye wudna need-a mak' owre mony traivels o't Francie," said Mains. "It tak's sic a time, ye ken, trailin' hyne awa' sae far."

"But I winna mak' mair nor ae broken day; an' I'm pittin' a man i' my place."

"Still an' on, it disna weel to be oot o' the road owre af'en i' the gloamin' aiven. An' unco fowk ca'in' beasts—I never care't about it. Hooever." And then Mains broke off abruptly, leaving Francie to infer that as matters stood, the fact that little Willikie required to be buried, was just one of those things that could not be helped, and consequently must be submitted to.

On little Willikie's burial day, Francie Herriegerie first put his substitute at the plough a-yoke, and gave him all needful directions for the satisfactory performance of a day's work. He then ascended the trap stair to the somewhat dingy sleeping apartment over the stable, known as the "chaum'er." He lifted his "kist" lid, took out his little-used long Sunday hat, and the best suit of clothes he had; in the drear and dusty obscurity of the place he dressed himself, and then took his solitary way to Innerebrie to seek his own, living and dead. That the heart within Francie Herriegerie should feel lonely and desolate as he trudged on his way will hardly be reckoned matter of wonder; and as he subsequently followed little Willikie's coffin from his house in the muddy Lane at Innerebrie, on that fine spring day, to the quiet kirkyard of his native parish—a distance of four miles—there mingled with the feeling of sorrow and bereavement a sense of alienation and homelessness which, in regard to outward circum-

stances, ought not to have been there, and which added a gratuitous element to the cup of bitterness and grief. Francie's entire thoughts and affections clung to his wife and his now broken family; but alas for the prospect of enjoying the sad luxury of sorrowing in their company! When the little coffin should be placed in its dark abode, and the small burial company broken up, it was to Mains of Puddleweal's service, and not to his wife and family, that he must forthwith betake himself; and then would begin again the old round of the three-weekly visit to Innerebrie—that; nothing else and nothing more. And Francie's heart fell very low at the thought of it all.

Francie Herriegerie possessed a rough honest nature and strong natural affections. He was not, perhaps, a man of keen intellect; nor even a man capable of sustained reflection to definite ends; yet did the thought strike him in a way that was sufficiently real, if more or less crude, that things might be, and ought to be, somehow, different from what he felt and experienced them to be. As the funeral company had climbed up the Kirkton Brae, they had passed near by the site of the old hamlet of Housahill, where he was born and had spent his boy days, now part of a ploughed field without mark of human habitation, and which knew him and his no more; and the sight but deepened the feeling of desolation. He remembered the days of his infancy; and the companions of his boyhood, all gone thence; some to addict themselves to the occupations of city life; some to till the earth in other lands. And for himself, whom circumstances had tied to his native region, this was all the needy lords of the soil saw meet to do for his social and domestic life! While he gave his strength with single-hearted honesty as the laborious and capable tiller of the ground, they denied him the shelter of the humblest home within range of the acres he tilled.

But ere the kirkyard gate had been reached, the

kindly old bellman had gone to the west gable of the kirk. When he saw the funeral approaching, he grasped the bell-rope and tolled the bell for little Willikie, just as if little Willikie had been an old and responsible parishioner. Then when the grave was closed the old man said—

“Ay, Francie, man, an’ that’s the first ’t ye’ve laid here o’ yer nain. Ou, weel, he’s laid neist to yer fader, laddie—ye’ll min’ fat wye the aul’ fowk wus pitt’n doon. Aw b’lieve yer gran’fader lies here tee, though I’m nae jist seer aboot the graif. It’s weel to keep the rinnins o’ the like o’ that i’ yer min’, for my memory’s nae sae gweed as it was ance; an’ this is the hame ’t the lave o’ ye wud lickly like to come till.”

The association of ideas is at times strange enough. To the old bellman it came naturally to speak of the kirkyard as a “hame.” And in this case the thoughts that had been passing through Francie Herriegerie’s mind, and the well-remembered tones of the old bellman, familiar to him from his childhood, at once and forcibly awakened the feeling that in literal truth the old kirkyard was the only place on earth that had a home-like connection to him, and where at last surely nobody would grudge him a place of rest in the bosom of his family. And, with this impression deeply implanted in his mind, the woe-begone mourner returned to the house of the “frem’t,” there to resume his labour, and muse on day by day, in the solitary communings of his own heart, on the blight of all the might-have-been in his family’s future, signified by the decease of his clever little Willikie now sleeping silently with his fathers under the green sod.

And thus endeth the history of Francie Herriegerie’s Sharger Laddie.