The Football Accident

'No chance has brought this ill to me;
'Tis God's sweet will, so let it be,
He seeth what I cannot see.

'There is a need—be for each pain,
And He will make it one day plain,
That earthly loss is heavenly gain.'

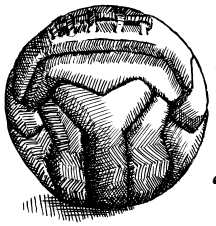
In November, 1882, William Easton Riddell was attending Bellahouston Academy, Glasgow. He was then sixteen years of age, full of life, eager and enthusiastic about everything to which he set his mind.

His ardent temperament, indeed, was the only source of trouble between him and those about him. When interested in anything he was apt to become forgetful of everything else. His food, his sleep, his health, all were forgotten for the time. This disposition to get engrossed in the thing he had in hand at the moment, was sometimes a cause of anxiety and trouble. When

he found an interesting book, for example, he would seek a quiet corner, where he thought he would be sure to have no interruption, and then throw himself on the floor and read on for hours, quite oblivious of all that was going on in the house. Skating, football, cricket, he enjoyed intensely. Boating he went into with great ardour. Part of each summer was spent at Toward (in Argyllshire), and there he always seemed to attain to the height of earthly happiness. His uncle David had boats of various sorts, and his kindness and sympathy with him as well as his great liking for the sea, went far to make Toward the earthly paradise which it was to Willie.

One day in the beginning of November, 1882, I remember well my young son's arrival from school at four o'clock. After his usual very hearty, affectionate greeting, he said brightly, 'Oh, mother,' he said to me, 'do you know your son was nearly killed today?'

'How was that?'



'Well, sit down beside me, and I'll tell you. When I was playing at football...'

'Oh, well,' I interrupted, 'you must not come home

and tell me anything that happens to you at football. You know how I dislike that game. I wish you would give it up.'

'Well, but mother, wait till I tell you how it happened. There was a scramble over the ball in the playground. I fell, and hit my knee on a loose round stone, and a lot of fellows tumbled pell-mell on the top of me — and oh, the pain! I really thought I was killed — killed at football at last, as you have so often prophesied about me! Oh, it was dreadful, Mother! If you had only seen me go hopping around!'

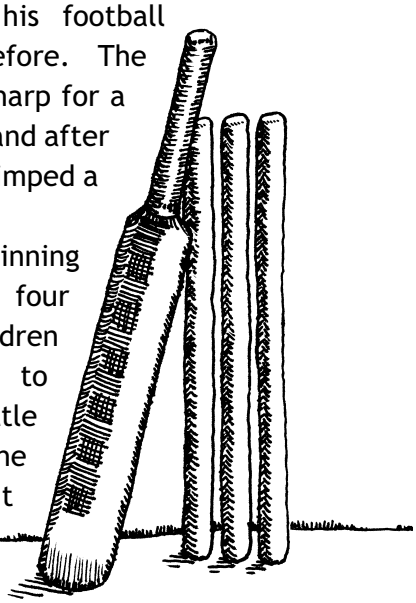
I did not say much. He took my face between his hands, and looked right into my eyes with so much fun, saying 'Mother, be sorry for me! I like to see you look vexed about your nearly-killed boy! You're not looking vexed!'

At that moment a companion passed the window, and just saying hurriedly, 'Oh, there's so-and-so; I want to speak to him,' Willie bounded out of the room, and we saw him run round the side of the house as lightly and nimbly as ever. We who were left so abruptly could not but be amused at the sudden termination to his sad tale, and I said, 'Doesn't he look like a killed boy!'

How little we dreamt that he had then really got his death-blow! There was no mark left by

the accident, but the end of one of the thigh bones had been hurt. Once or twice during the winter he spoke of having growing pains, and I remember him saying, 'I had no idea growing pains were such sore things.' He walked such distances and scampered about so much, and with such delight, that we never gave these remarks a further thought.

In the following April, about the end of the month, when standing talking with some companions after a game of cricket, he accidentally struck with a wicket stump which he had in his hand the same spot which had been hurt at his football six months before. The pain was very sharp for a minute or two, and after that he always limped a little.



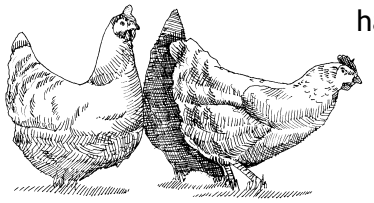
In the beginning of March the four youngest children had been sent to Toward for a little change. At the end of a fortnight we noticed that Ettie, the

youngest still at school, seemed to be pining for the other little ones, and her father took her for two days to Toward. On the next day after going there she was decidedly ill, and could not be brought home. It turned out to be measles, and I went down to nurse her. One after another the five little ones were laid down. In the two youngest, congestion of the lungs followed, and we had almost ceased to look for their recovery. Sophie, three years of age, seemed to be sinking, and a message was sent to Glasgow for the others to come, that we might be all together when she left us. They were all gathered round her bed one afternoon, a tearful, sorrowing group, to take the last look and give the little hand a last kiss. We did not expect her to live above a few minutes; but she was mercifully spared and given back to us, and proved a great joy and comfort to dear Willie in the last part of his journey.

As soon as we saw there was hope of Sophie's restoration, the children all returned to school in Glasgow, that the house might be kept quiet. On the 26th of May, dear Willie was again sent to Toward – this time that he might be cared for by his mother, as his knee was paining him a good deal.

I could scarcely detect any swelling about the knee, but Willie felt sure there was. We got the doctor, and he thought there must be inflammation at the knee joint, and advised rest. At first he was confined to the sofa, but he was continually forgetting to keep the knee still, and would be here and there before he remembered. Then he would make to keep his bed. It continued to swell gradually, and the doctor decided to put it in a starch bandage.

We left Toward on the 28th of June. Willie walked up the long pier at Wemyss Bay. We drove from Paisley, and he was allowed to sit outside the cab. His father helped him up, but at our door he jumped down quite smartly, and took my hand to help me out. When I found fault with him for not waiting to be assisted, he said so cheerily, 'Oh Mother, I didn't jump on my sore leg; I just hopped down on my well one!' He dragged me off at once to see his brood of white chickens before I got off my bonnet; and from his light, happy way that day, it was impossible to think his knee could be very bad.



Willie had become very much attached to the doctor, and taking this into account, along with the fear of having a change of treatment for such a very important part as the knee, we asked him to come up to Hillington and bandage it. He did so, and said Willie must lie still for a month. Just as the bandaging was finished, the dear boy grew very distressed, and almost fainted. It had to be undone and bandaged a second time.

We saw it still distressed him, but he was anxious to bear it if it was the right thing. His father left the house with the doctor, and soon after, Willie almost fainted again. When he recovered, it was to burst into hysterical tears. I proposed to take the bandage off, but he said 'Oh no; perhaps this strange feeling will wear off.' I soothed him and cheered him to the best of my ability, and by-and-by he fell asleep. Gradually he seemed to get accustomed to the pressure, and for a while we awaited the result. After the first two days, Willie was wonderfully happy. Everybody was kind and thoughtful about him, lending him books and coming to see him.

His father left on the 30th June to visit the congregations in the Presbytery of Dingwall, as a deputy from the General Assembly. There

seemed to be no good reason for breaking off this engagement.

A young friend of ours called with a beautiful bouquet of flowers; and knowing that he was to lie for a month, she proposed to send a water bed which she had, and which she thought he would find easier than an ordinary bed. She was leaving next day for the Continent, and so sent it at once, lest, by any chance, we might decide to use it. We were not long in finding out that this was a very special token of our Father God's care. We scarcely realized what a comfort it was to Willie, till one day he was obliged to do without it.

His room became a favourite resort for all the household. Little Sophie scarcely ever left it, and as baby was only five weeks old, she had to be much beside her mother. His room was thus a very bright and cheery place. He seemed to enjoy this new kind of life exceedingly.

I remember saying once, when I brought his little tray with his dinner to him, and he had welcomed it in a happy, sprightly way, 'It's not often that invalids are so glad to see their dinner.'

'Oh, Mother, you must remember that your coming with my tray, and fixing me up in this

style, is one of the pleasantest varieties in my day just now!'

'Yes, Willie, but I think your appetite is very good also – better even than when you were going about.'

His health was really so good that I felt him rather a trying patient.

When I was putting his knee right one day, he was so full of fun and frolic that I said, 'Willie, I feel you quite a tax on my patience; I wish you could be quiet and let me get on more smartly with my work.'

He just gave me a kiss in a petting way, and said, 'Oh yes, mother, I know I am an awful tax on you; and I have just come to the conclusion that when I get well I must 'study for the ministry,' as they say, and try to repay you for all this. I know you would like to see your eldest son a minister! Of course I would be a minister of the old school, always arguing, contradicting, finding fault, but after all, having the Church's real interests at heart. Now, mother, dear, you needn't turn your head away; I see you're laughing. It's quite true. I am serious. I do not see any other way of paying my debt to you, and you'll forget all this when you see your son in a pulpit, Dr. William Riddell, and read his speeches in the papers!'

I had read to him the General Assembly news in May, when he was suffering from inflammation of the eyes. I feared that he was reading too much in bed, and consulted the doctor. He thought two hours' reading in the forenoon and two in the afternoon were quite enough. This was a great deprivation to Willie, but he said to the doctor, 'Oh, well, I'll try and be content with that, if Mother will talk or read to me the rest of the time.'

He questioned me about all sorts of things insisted upon my putting in words my reasons to my opinions on such things as novel-reading, theatre-going, and dancing.

One of these days, when I had not sat much beside him, I brought him something and was leaving the room again, when he said, with a sigh full of mirth, 'Oh, Mother, that you were not so much of the swallow tribe! I do wish you were more of the nightingale! — that you would sit beside your son more, and let him hear your sweet voice oftener and longer. You alight here and give one or two chirps, and then you take your flight to some more summery clime, where there's a wee baby or something of that kind, and I am left out here in the cold. I hear you going 'flitting about from tree to tree,' and always expect that you are going to alight

beside me, when off you are again. Do come just now, mother; I have a hundred things at least I want to talk to you about!'