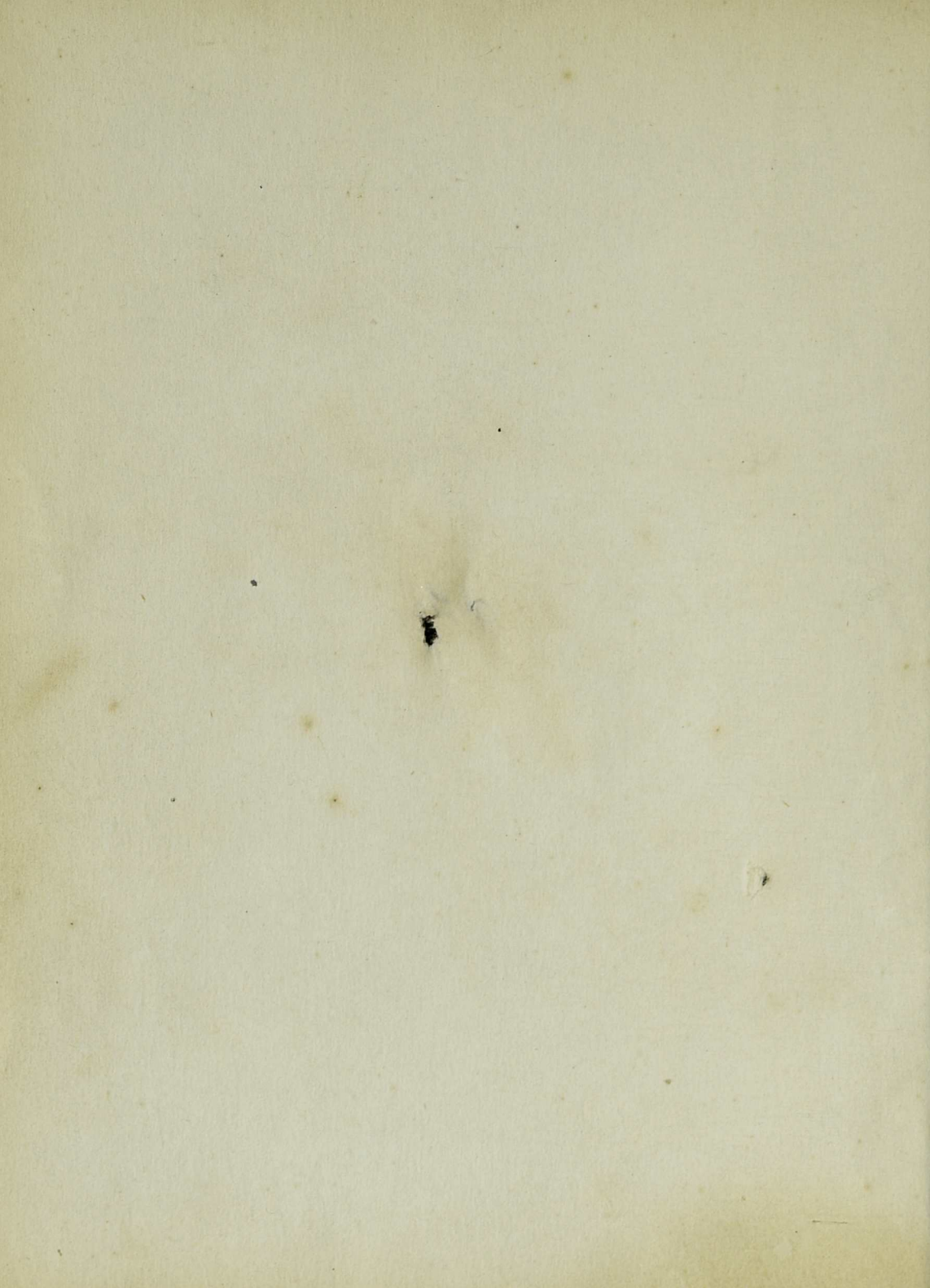


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H. WEIR D.D.

THE  
BEREAVED FAMILY.

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## THE BEREAVED FAMILY.

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THE man whom you see in this picture in so much trouble, with the children in foreign dresses clinging round him, is called a Pole, because the name of the country in which he lived is Poland. I will tell you why he is in so much trouble, but before I do so, I shall be obliged to say a few words about Poland. You have seen Poland in the map of Europe. It lies between Russia and Austria, and Prussia. Now more than fifty years ago, there was a sad war going on in those parts. All the people in the surrounding countries made war upon Poland, and tried to conquer it, that they might divide it amongst them, and make slaves of the inhabitants. But the Poles are very brave, and love their own country very dearly, and preferred making their own laws, and living in freedom.



So they fought very hard for their lives and liberty, and did not give up their country, whilst there was the least chance of their being able to defend her. So the war went on for a long time, and sometimes the Poles conquered, and drove their enemies away for a while, but there always came back a fresh army (for there are a great many more men in Russia than in Poland,) and first one town was taken, and then another, till at last the Poles found it was of no use to try to get rid of their cruel enemies. So they were obliged to consent to be conquered, and to obey the laws made by the Russians, and to see their dear Poland divided amongst other countries. But before they consented to this, there was, as I said above, a dreadful struggle, and thousands of men, who had left their homes to fight, were miserably killed in battle, or still more miserably taken prisoners. And of those who were taken prisoners, some were put to death, and some were condemned to work underground in mines, digging for metals, and some were sent to Siberia, a cold country, where the sun scarcely ever shines, and where every thing is pinched with frost and snow. And some, and this was the worst of all, were obliged to enter as sol-



diers into the Russian army, and to fight with it against their own dear Poland—to fight against their own people, perhaps even against their own friends and relations. So there was great lamentation and mourning in Poland—for of those men who were killed or taken prisoners, each had a home, and some one to be sorry for his loss, and hundreds of wives were made widows, and thousands of children orphans. Now when the Russians got possession of any town, they used very often to put the women and children to death, as well as the old men who could not fight, besides stealing all their property. So it was no wonder that the brave Poles fought as hard as they could, when they knew what might be the fate of their wives and children if they were conquered. Now there is in Poland a great city called Warsaw, and it was there that the man lived, whom I am going to tell you about.

His name was Basil, and he was once very rich and very powerful in Poland, and what was much better, he was a good man. He tried to do his duty to God and to men, and though in the times in which he lived, it was often very difficult to know exactly what it was his duty to do—as for instance, it was hard to think it

could be his duty to go out and fight against the lives of other men, although he knew his family was in danger of being killed if he did not ; yet, when he felt in difficulty, he used to do the only thing that could help him under such circumstances, he used to pray to God to teach him what was right, and to give him strength to do it.

Basil had a wife whom he loved very dearly, and four children, two girls and two boys, and it was very hard to him to leave them when he went out to fight in the Polish army against his enemies. But he used to pray very earnestly before he left them that they might be taken care of whilst he was away ; and you may be sure that the children, and their mother also, prayed with all their hearts, that the dear father and husband might be preserved in the dreadful battle, and brought safely back to them. One of the children was a little baby only one year old, and you do not see him in this picture. Only three of the children that you see really belonged to Basil. The eldest boy, whose hand is over his eyes, was not their brother, and I will tell you how he came to be amongst them.

Once, when a great many Poles had been killed in



a battle with the Russians, the generals had some difficulty to collect a sufficient number to make up their army again ; so they sent out into the far country to ask a number of people called Kurpiaki to come and help fight. Now these people live in the forests, and eat the game which they kill there ; birds and beasts, which they shoot with guns ; and they are so skilful in shooting, that they always hit whatever they aim at. This is because they have so much practice, and have been used to handle guns from their early childhood, for even the little boys go out with their fathers, and feel quite ashamed if they cannot bring down a bird for dinner, or a wild cat, whose skin will make a warm fur cap for the little baby at home. So a great number of Kurpiaki came to Warsaw, and amongst them was a boy of only 12 years old.

The General was quite amused at the idea of having such a little soldier in his army, and thought he would have some fun with the boy ; so he spoke jokingly to him before all his men, and said, “ Well my boy, so you wish to be a soldier, but you must first show me that you can use a soldier’s arms you know. Here is a gun, can you

fire it ? A mark shall be set up 200 paces off, and you shall shoot three times. If you can strike it you shall be rewarded with three ducats ; but if you miss, you must be sent home again as too young for service. The boy, whose name was Paulus, was very much grieved by these words, for though he was not afraid of missing the mark, he did not like to have any difficulty put in the way of his fighting for his country. He asked to be allowed to use his own gun, and taking aim at the mark, while all the people crowded round to watch his proceedings, he fired. His ball pierced the very middle of the mark. Again and again he fired with the same success, then turning to the General, whilst every body around was lost in wonder at the skill of so young a lad, he said, “ Now, Sir, the reward you promised is mine, and I may do what I like with it. Keep it then, to give to those who join your ranks for *money*. All I want is to serve my country, and now I have proved myself able, I may join any regiment I please.”

The soldiers all shouted with joy to hear the brave boy's words, and Basil, who stood near the General, and listened to all that passed, took Paulus into the



regiment of which he was Colonel, and when he went home Paulus went with him, and lived with his own children, who soon loved him like a brother.

One day, being at home with his wife and children, Basil began to talk to them, as he often did, of what they must do in case he should be killed in battle. He told his wife that she must try to escape with the children to France or Switzerland, or even England, if she could get so far. He hoped she would have money enough with her to live upon for a long time in a humble way, and to bring up the children until they were old enough to earn their own bread. But his poor wife Clara answered, that if he was taken away, she thought that she should very soon die of grief. Then Basil told her that for the sake of the baby she would be still wanted on the earth, and that he hoped she would be willing to live on, and do her duty towards it, until God was pleased to re-unite them in Heaven. Clara then threw her arms round her dear husband's neck, and told him that she would do all he wished, and that whatever sacrifice she might be called upon to make in the way of duty, she would pray for strength to do it—so that his last moments might not be made unhappy

by anxiety about his family. Then Basil asked his children one by one if they would always try to be very obedient to their mother, loving to each other, and faithful to the word of God, and they promised him that they would endeavour so to be.

“But then, papa,” they cried, “you will not leave us yet?”

“Not yet, I trust, my darlings,” he replied; “but as there is no knowing how soon this trial may come upon us, let us all feel that our path is clear before us.”

After this last conversation, the children never felt quite happy. Although at times they played about, yet they would more often creep sadly together, and talk about the dreadful chance of papa’s dying, until in an agony of tears they would run to beg him never to go out and fight again.

Basil longed to be able to remove his wife and children from the neighbourhood of the city, where they could not help hearing all that went on about the war, and where they would really have been in great danger if the enemy conquered; but they begged him so earnestly not to send them away, that he consented to



father's cottage, and seated himself in silence by the lady's side, listening to all the directions she gave him for preserving the safety of the dear ones left behind. So they journeyed on, and the little Louis, who was not old enough to be in trouble because he was leaving home, was delighted with all he saw, and could not understand why mamma cried. At last on the borders of a thick forest they found the hunter's cottage, and though he himself was away with the army, yet his wife, Paulus' mother, warmly welcomed the poor lady and her little babe.

"But where are your other children, madam?" she asked, "surely they are not left behind, alone, without father or mother to take care of them."

"My good woman," said Clara, "it was their father's wish that I should bring this infant to your cottage, and remain in safety with him. He did not wish all his children to be a burden on you, but has provided faithful servants to take care of them, and he cannot think that any one will be so cruel as to take advantage of their unprotected situation, to injure such young and harmless creatures. But it never was my intention to leave them for more than a few days, I could not do it, and now having seen my little Louis safe under your

roof, I do not see why I should not at once return to watch over those who are in more danger.

"Ah madam!" said the old woman, "you had better stay here, and let Paulus bring them to you. Here is plenty of room for all, and in this lonesome place no one will be likely to come near us. You do not know the cruelty of those soldiers. The helplessness and harmlessness of those dear children, will, in no degree preserve them from the brutal vengeance of the Russians. Go my boy," she added to Paulus, "hasten back to the city, and bring with you all the sweet children who have been such dear brothers and sisters to you."

But the good woman's words had so terrified Clara, that she insisted on going back to Warsaw at once, and snatching her darlings from the danger that threatened them. And nothing but the wails of little Louis, and the earnest entreaties of Paulus that he might undertake the journey alone, could dissuade her.

"I have nothing to fear," said the brave boy, "I have been in danger before now, but you, dear madam, would die of terror if any of those fierce soldiers were to attack us."

Clara, who had sunk exhausted with fatigue and



anxiety upon a seat, answered him hastily, that she would remain, if only he would instantly go back for her other children. Then Paulus bade his mother farewell, and again set out for Warsaw.

Now you will think that the children who were left behind, must have been very wretched when they found themselves alone, with only a few old servants to guard them in case of danger. And so they were, but they were not cowards—they did not give way to miserable fear. Nor were they selfish enough to say, each one, “Oh! why did not mamma take me with her to the safe cottage, away from this terrible battle?” But they knew that all had been done according to their dear father’s directions, and that he was too wise and kind not to have arranged everything for the best. So they tried to be calm, and to comfort one another with the hope of their dear father’s speedy return, and gathering round their eldest sister’s knee, they prayed fervently to God for help.

Poor children, perhaps they scarcely knew quite how dreadful was the danger from which they sought deliverance; for although they had heard a great deal of the horrors of war, and seen the sad wounds of many who had been in battle, yet they had no idea

that the safe house in which they lived, could be beaten down, and they themselves driven out in the streets to die, as so many in those days did, by the cruel hands of savage soldiers. But these things are too terrible to think of, although they have often happened even to little children, and it will not be wonderful that Basil's daughters and little son did not imagine anything more shocking than papa's coming home at last wounded, like the poor men they had seen carried by after an engagement in the neighbourhood. So they sat sadly waiting hour after hour through the long night, listening to the distant sound of the battle. But the tumult grew louder and louder, and when morning dawned, troops of foreign-looking soldiers were seen crowding into the streets.

The terrified children watched in silence from the windows, when to their unspeakable delight, Paulus was seen hurrying to the house. "All is lost," he cried, as he entered, "the Russians are in possession of the city."

"Take us to mamma, dear Paulus," said the children.

"That is no longer possible," answered the boy.

"We must now stay here [till either your father



brings his men to save us, or we are put to death by the enemy."

Every face was pale at these words, but before any one had time to answer, Basil, covered with dust, burst violently into the room. His children flew into his arms. "Papa, papa, we are saved."

"Where is your mother and the child?" he asked hurriedly, pressing his darlings to his heart.

"They are safe, Sir," answered Paulus, "yesterday so soon as the sound of cannon was heard, I accompanied her to my mother's cottage."

"God bless you," my young friend, said Basil. "I thank Him that she is safe. When I am gone, for there is now small chance of my escape, take these children to her with my faithful love, and bid her live for their sake."

Scarcely had Basil uttered these words, when several Russian soldiers, who had been in search of him, rushed into the room. No scream was heard, but with all the bitterness of approaching and final bereavement, his children pressed into his arms. Paulus covered his face with his hands, unable to bear the sight of this last agony. So passed a few silent moments, during

which even the brutal soldiers stood hesitating to advance. But these were quickly over, and after a brief struggle to free him from the feeble arms that held him with such desperate grasp, Basil was torn from his children and his home, never to behold them more. I know not what became of him, whether he was cruelly killed, or sent to toil in the freezing deserts of Siberia, or left to perish miserably in some dark and lonely dungeon, where the remembrance of his bereaved family would be his only companion—but this I know, that his wife and children never saw him more.

Many, many days and weeks passed on before it was possible for Paulus to escape from the city with his young friends, and they saw sights of horror during that time, while the unhappy place was being pillaged by the soldiers, that haunted them even when they were old men and women, and made them so thankful their dear mother was away, that they never thought of longing for her comforting presence. At last Paulus' father, who had by disguising himself contrived to escape from being killed, found them out, and one by one conveyed them all safely to his own cottage, where they found their dear mother almost dead through the



anxiety she had endured on their account and that of their dear father. The dreadful news of the city being taken had reached her, and she never expected to see either husband or children again. Judge then of her thankfulness when she clasped them once more in safety to her heart. This joy enabled her to bear with greater fortitude the heavy tidings of her husband's fate, and for a long time she vainly hoped he might yet rejoin them. But when all prospect of this was over, she left Poland with her children, and settled in a lovely valley in Switzerland, where she brought them up in the paths of virtue, which their dear father had so loved, and taught them to love and cherish his memory.

Paulus and his father and mother, when all chance of liberty was lost for Poland, followed this bereaved family, and settled near them ; and here, though the memory of their sufferings and exile, and of Basil's loss clouded all their days, yet they learned to be very thankful for the good they still possessed, and to feel tenderly for all who were in sorrow, having been themselves so heavily afflicted.

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