THE WEAVERS
by Gerhart Hauptmann

INTRODUCTION

I

Gerhart Hauptmann, the most distinguished of modern German dramatists, was born in the Silesian village of Obersalzbrunn on November 15, 1862. By descent he springs immediately from the common people of his native province to whose life he has so often given the graveness of tragedy and the permanence of literature. His grandfather, Ehrenfried, felt in his own person the bitter fate of the Silesian weavers and only through energy and good fortune was enabled to change his trade to that of a waiter. By 1824 he was an independent inn-keeper and was followed in the same business by the poet's father, Robert Hauptmann. The latter, a man of solid and not uncultivated understanding, married Marie Straehler, daughter of one of the fervent Moravian households of Silesia, and had become, when his sons Carl and Gerhart were born, the proprietor of a well-known and prosperous hotel, _Zur Preussischen Krone_.

From the village-school of Obersalzbrunn, where he was but an idle pupil, Gerhart was sent in 1874 to the _Realschule_ at Breslau. Here, in the company of his older brothers, Carl and Georg, the lad remained for nearly four years, having impressed his teachers most strongly, it appears, by a lack of attention. For this reason, but also perhaps because his father, injured by competitors and by a change in local conditions, had lost his independence, Gerhart was withdrawn from school in 1878. He was next to become a farmer and, to this end, was placed in the pious family of an uncle. Gradually, however, artistic impulses began to disengage themselves--he had long modelled in a desultory way--and in October, 1880, at the advice of his maturer brother Carl Hauptmann proceeded to Breslau and was enrolled as a student in the Royal College of Art.

The value of this restless shifting in his early years is apparent. For the discontent that marked his unquiet youth made for a firm retention of impressions. Observation, in the saying of Balzac, springs from suffering, and Hauptmann saw the Silesian country-folk and the artists of Breslau with an almost morbid exactness of vision. Actual conflict sharpened his insight. Three weeks after entering the art-school he received a disciplinary warning and early in 1881 he was rusticated for eleven weeks. Nevertheless he remained in Breslau until April, 1882, when he joined his brother Carl and became a special student at the University of Jena. Here he heard lectures by Liebmann, Eucken and Haeckel. But the academic life did not hold him long. Scarcely a year passed and Hauptmann is found at Hamburg, the guest of his future parents-in-law and his brother's. Thence he set out on an Italian journey, travelling by way of Spain and the South of France to Genoa, and visiting Naples, Capri and Rome. Although his delight in these places was diminished by his keen social consciousness, he returned to Italy the following year (1884) and, for a time, had a sculptor's studio in Rome. Overtaken here by typhoid fever, he was nursed back to health by his future wife, Marie Thienemann, and returned to Germany to gather strength at the Thienemann country house.

So far, sculpture had held him primarily; it was now that the poetic impulse asserted itself. Seeking a synthesis of these tendencies in a third art, Hauptmann determined, for a time, to adopt the calling of an actor. To this end he went to Berlin. Here, however, the interest in literature soon grew to dominate every other and, in 1885, the year of his marriage to Fraulein Thienemann, he published his first work: _Promethidenlos_.

The poem is romantic and amorphous and gives but the faintest promise of the masterly handling of verse to be found in _The Sunken Bell_ and _Henry of Aue_. Its interest resides solely in its confirmation of the facts of Hauptmann's development. For the hero of _Promethidenlos_ vacillates between poetry and sculpture, but is able to give himself freely to neither art because of his overwhelming sense of social injustice and human suffering. And this, in brief, was the state of Hauptmann's mind when, in the autumn of 1885, he settled with his young wife in the Berlin suburb of Erkner.

The years of his residence here are memorable and have already become the subject of study and investigation. And rightly so; for during this time there took place that impact of the many obscure tendencies of the age upon the most sensitive and gifted of German minds from which sprang the naturalistic movement. That movement dominated literature for a few years. Then, in Hauptmann's own temper and in his own work, arose a vigorous idealistic reaction which, blending with the severe technique and incorruptible observation of naturalism, went far toward producing--for a second time--a new vision and a new art. The conditions amid which this development originated are essential to a full understanding of Hauptmann's work.

II

At the end of the Franco-Prussian war, united Germany looked forward to a literary movement commensurate with her new greatness. That movement did not appear. It was forgotten that men in the maturity of their years and powers could not suddenly change character and method and that the rise of a new generation was needed. So soon, however, as the first members of that generation became articulate, a bitter and almost merciless warfare arose in literature and in the drama. The brothers Heinrich and Julius Hart, vigorous in both critical and creative activity, asserted as early as 1882 that German literature was then, at its best, the faint imitation of an outworn classicism, and the German drama a transference of the basest French models. It is easy to see to-day that their view was partisan and narrow. Neither Wilbrandt and Heyse, on the one hand, nor Lindau and L'Arronge, on the other, represented the whole literary activity of the empire. It is equally easy, however, to understand their impatience with a literature which, upon the whole, lacked any breath of greatness, and handled the stuff of human life with so little freshness, incisiveness and truth.

What direction was the new literature to take? The decisive influence was, almost necessarily, that of the naturalistic writers of France. For the tendencies of these men coincided with Germany's growing interest in science and growing rejection of traditional religion and philosophy. Tolstoi, Ibsen and Strindberg each contributed his share to the movement. But all the young critics of the eighties fought the battles of Zola with him and repeated, sometimes word for word, the memorable creed of French naturalism formulated long before by the Goncourt brothers: "The modern--everything for the artist is there: in the sensation, the intuition of the contemporary, of this spectacle of life with which one rubs elbows!" Such, with whatever later developments, was the central doctrine of young Germany in the eighties; such the belief that gradually expressed itself in a number of definite organisations and publications.

The most noteworthy of these, prior to the founding of the _Freie Buehne_, were the magazine _Die Gesellschaft_ (1885), edited by Michael Conrad, the most ardent of German Zolaists, and the society _Durch_ (1886), in which the revolutionary spirits of Berlin united to promulgate the art canons of the future. "Literature and criticism," Conrad declared, must first of all be "liberated from the tyranny of the conventional young lady:" the programme of _Durch_ announced that the poet must give creative embodiment to the life of the present, that he shall show us human beings of flesh and blood and depict their passions with implacable fidelity; that the ideal of art was no longer the Antique, but the Modern. Nor was there wanting creative activity in the spirit of these views. Franzos and Kretzer, to name but a few, originated the modern realistic novel in Germany, and Liliencron brought back vigour and concreteness to the lyric.

Into the tense atmosphere of this literary battle Hauptmann was cast when he took up his residence at Erkner. The house he occupied was the last in the village, half buried in woods and with far prospects over the heaths and deep green, melancholy waters of Brandenburg. Hither came, among many others, the brothers Hart, the novelist Kretzer, Wilhelm Boelsche, the inexhaustible prophet of the new science and the new art, and finally, the founder of German naturalism as distinguished from that of France--Arno Holz, The efforts of all these men harmonised with Hauptmann's mood. Naturalistic art goes for its subject matter to the forgotten and disinherited of the earth, and it was with these that Hauptmann was primarily concerned. He read Darwin and Karl Marx, Saint-Simon and Zola. He was absorbed not by any problem of art but by the being and fate of humanity itself.

Under these influences and governed by such thoughts, he began his career as a man of letters anew. But his progress was slow and uncertain. In 1887 he published in Conrad's _Gesellschaft_ an episodic story, _Bahnwaerter Thiel_, weak in narrative technique and obviously inspired by Zola. Even the sudden expansion of human characters into demonic symbols of their ruling passions is imitated. The medium clearly irked him and gave him no opportunity for personal expression. For many months his activity was tentative and fruitless. Early in 1889, however, Arno Holz, known until then only by a volume of brave and resonant verse, visited Erkner and brought with him his theory of "consistent naturalism" as illustrated by _Papa Hamlet_ and _Die Familie Selicke_, sketches and a drama in manuscript. This meeting gave Hauptmann one of those illuminating technical hints which every creative artist knows. It brought him an immediate method such as neither Tolstoi nor Dostoievsky had been able to bring, and decided him for naturalism and for the drama. He had found himself at last. During a visit to his parents he gave himself up to intense labour and returned to Berlin in the spring of 1889 with his first drama, _Before Dawn_, completed.

The play might have waited indefinitely for performance, had not Otto Brahm and Paul Schlenther, both critical thinkers of some significance, founded the free stage society (_Freie Buehne_) earlier in the same year. It was the aim of this society to give at least eight annual performances in the city of Berlin which should be wholly free from the influence of the censor and from the pressure of economic needs. The greater number of the first series of performances had already been prepared for by a selection of foreign plays--Tolstoi, Goncourt, Ibsen, Bjoernsen, Strindberg--when, at the last moment, a young German dramatist presented himself and succeeded in having his play accepted. Thus the society, long since dead, had the good fortune of fulfilling

the function for which it was created: it launched the naturalistic movement; it cradled the modern drama of Germany.

The first performance of _Before Dawn_ (Oct. 20, 1889) was tumultuous. It recalled the famous _Hernani_ battle of French romanticism. But the victory of Hauptmann was not long in doubt. With his third play he conquered the national stage of which he has since been, with whatever variations of immediate success, the undisputed master.

III

The "consistent naturalism" of Holz and his collaborator Johannes Schlaf is the technical foundation of Hauptmann's work. He has long transcended its narrow theory and the shallow positivism on which it was based. It discarded verse and he has written great verse; it banished the past from art and he has gone to legend and history for his subjects; it forbade the use of symbols and he has, at times, made an approach to his meaning unnecessarily difficult. But Hauptmann has never quite abandoned the practice of that form of art which resulted from the theories of Holz. From history and poetry he has always returned to the naturalistic drama. _Rose Bernd_ follows _Henry of Aue_, and _Griselda_ immediately preceded _The Rats_. Nor is this all. The methods of naturalism have followed him into the domains of poetry and of the past. His verse is scrupulously devoid of rhetoric; the psychology of his historic plays is sober and human. Hence it is clear that an analysis of the consistent naturalism of German literature is, with whatever modifications, an analysis of Hauptmann's work in its totality. Like nearly all the greater dramatists he had his forerunners and his prophets: he proceeds from a school of art and thought which, even in transcending, he illustrates.

The consistent naturalists, then, aimed not to found a new art but, in any traditional sense, to abandon it. They desired to reduce the conventions of technique to a minimum and to eliminate the writer's personality even where Zola had admitted its necessary presence--in the choice of subject and in form. For style, the very religion of the French naturalistic masters, there was held to be no place, since there was to be, in this new literature, neither direct exposition, however impersonal, nor narrative. In other words, none of the means of representation were to be used by which art achieves the illusion of life; since art, in fact, was no longer to create the illusion of reality, but to _be_ reality. The founders of the school would have admitted that the French had done much by the elimination of intrigue and a liberal choice of theme. They would still have seen--and rightly according to their premises--creative vision and not truth even in the oppressive pathology of _Germinie Lacerteux_ and the morbid brutalities of _La Terre_. The opinion of Flaubert that any subject suffices, if the treatment be excellent, was modified into: there must be neither intentional choice of theme nor stylistic treatment. For style supposes rearrangement, personal vision, unjust selection of detail, and literature must be an exact rendition of the actual.

Stated so baldly the doctrine of consistent naturalism verges on the absurd. Eliminate selection of detail and personal vision, and art becomes not only coextensive with life, but shares its confusion and its apparent purposelessness. It loses all interpretative power and ceases to be art. Practically, however, the doctrine led to a very definite form--the naturalistic drama. For, if all indirect treatment of life be discarded, nothing is left but the recording of speech and, if possible, of speech actually overheard. The juxtaposition of such blocks of scrupulously rendered conversation constitutes, in fact, the earliest experiments of Arno Holz. Under the creative energy of Hauptmann, however, the form at once grew into drama, but a drama which sought to rely as little as possible upon the traditional devices of dramaturgic technique. There was to be no implication of plot, no culmination of the resulting struggle in effective scenes, no superior articulateness on the part of the characters. A succession of simple scenes was to present a section of life without rearrangement or heightening. There could be no artistic beginning, for life comes shadowy from life; there could be no artistic ending, for the play of life ends only in eternity.

The development of the drama in such a direction had, of course, been foreshadowed. The plays of Ibsen's middle period tend to a simpler rendering of life, and the cold intellect of Strindberg had rejected the "symmetrical dialogue" of the French drama in order "to let the brains of men work unhindered." But Hauptmann carries the same methods extraordinarily far and achieves a poignant verisimilitude that rivals the pity and terror of the most memorable drama of the past.

These methods lead, naturally, to the exclusion of several devices. Thus Hauptmann, like Ibsen and Shaw, avoids the division of acts into scenes. The coming and going of characters has the unobtrusiveness but seldom violated in life, and the inevitable artifices are held within rigid bounds. In some of his earlier dramas he also observed the unities of time and place, and throughout his work practices a close economy in these respects. It goes without saying that he rejects the monologue, the unnatural reading of letters, the _raisonneur_ or commenting and providential character, the lightly motivised confession--all the devices, in brief, by which the conventional playwright blandly transports information across the footlights, or unravels the artificial knot which he has tied.

In dialogue, the medium of the drama, Hauptmann shows the highest originality and power. Beside the speech of his characters all other dramatic speech, that of Ibsen, of Tolstoi in _The Power of Darkness_, or of Pinero,

seems conscious and unhuman. Nor is that power a mere control of dialect. Johannes Vockerat and Michael Kramer, Dr. Scholz and Professor Crampton speak with a human raciness and native truth not surpassed by the weavers or peasants of Silesia. Hauptmann has heard the inflections of the human voice, the faltering and fugitive eloquence of the living word not only with his ear but with his soul.

External devices necessarily contribute to this effect. Thus Hauptmann renders all dialect with phonetic accuracy and correct differentiation. In _Before Dawn_, Hoffmann, Loth, Dr. Schimmelpfennig and Helen speak normal High German; all the other characters speak Silesian except the imported footman Edward, who uses the Berlin dialect. In _The Beaver Coat_ the various gradations of that dialect are scrupulously set down, from the impudent vulgarity of Leontine and Adelaide, to the occasional consonantal slips of Wehrhahn. The egregious Mrs. Wolff, in the same play, cannot deny her Silesian origin. Far finer shades of character are indicated by the amiable elisions of Mrs. Vockerat Senior in _Lonely Lives_, the recurrent crassness of Mrs. Scholz in _The Reconciliation_, and the solemn reiterations of Michael Kramer. Nor must it be thought that such characterisation has anything in common with the set phrases of Dickens. From the richness and variety of German colloquial speech, from the deep brooding of the German soul over the common things and the enduring emotions of life, Hauptmann has caught the authentic accents that change dramatic dialogue into the speech of man.

IV

In the structure of his drama Hauptmann met and solved an even more difficult problem than in the character of his dialogue. The whole tradition of structural technique rests upon a more or less arbitrary rearrangement of life. _Othello_, the noblest of tragedies, no less than the most trivial French farce, depends for the continuity of its mere action on an improbable artifice. Desdemona's handkerchief may almost be taken to symbolise that element in the drama which Hauptmann studiously denies himself. And he does so by reason of his more intimate contact with the normal truth of things. In life, for instance, the conflict of will with will, the passionate crises of human existence are but rarely concentrated into a brief space of time or culminate in a highly salient situation. Long and wearing attrition, and crises that are seen to have been such only in the retrospect of calmer years are the rule. In so telling a bit of dramatic writing as the final scene in Augier's _Le gendre de M. Poirier_ the material of life has been dissected into mere shreds and these have been rewoven into a pattern as little akin to reality as the flowers and birds of a Persian rug. Instead of such effective rearrangement Hauptmann contents himself with the austere simplicity of that succession of action which observation really affords. He shapes his material as little as possible. The intrusion of a new force into a given setting, as in _Lonely Lives_, is as violent an interference with the sober course of things as he admits. From his noblest successes, _The Weavers_, _Drayman Henschel_, _Michael Kramer_, the artifice of complication is wholly absent.

It follows that his fables are simple and devoid of plot, that comedy and tragedy must inhere in character and that conflict must grow from the clash of character with environment or of character with character in its totality. In other words: since the adventurous and unwonted are rigidly excluded, dramatic complication can but rarely, with Hauptmann, proceed from action. For the life of man is woven of "little, nameless, unremembered acts" which possess no significance except as they illustrate character and thus, link by link, forge that fate which is identical with character. The constant and bitter conflict in the world does not arise from pointed and opposed notions of honour and duty held at some rare climacteric moment, but from the far more tragic grinding of a hostile environment upon man or of the imprisonment of alien souls in the cage of some social bondage.

These two motives, appearing sometimes singly, sometimes blended, are fundamental to Hauptmann's work. In _The Reconciliation_ an unnatural marriage has brought discord and depravity upon earth; in _Lonely Lives_ a seeker after truth is throttled by a murky world; in _The Weavers_ the whole organization of society drives men to tragic despair; in _Colleague Crampton_ a cold blooded woman all but destroys the gentle-hearted painter; in _The Beaver Coat_ the motive is ironically inverted and a base shrewdness triumphs over the stupid social machine; in _Rose Bernd_ traditional righteousness hounds a pure spirit out of life; and in _Gabriel Schilling's Flight_, his latest play, Hauptmann returns to a favourite motive: woman, strong through the narrowness and intensity of her elemental aims, destroying man, the thinker and dreamer, whose will, dissipated in a hundred ideal purposes, goes under in the unequal struggle.

The fable and structure of _Michael Kramer_ illustrate Hauptmann's typical themes and methods well. The whole of the first act is exposition. It is not, however, the exposition of antecedent actions or events, but wholly of character. The conditions of the play are entirely static. Kramer's greatness of soul broods over the whole act. Mrs. Kramer, the narrow-minded, nagging wife, and Arnold, the homely, wretched boy with a spark of genius, quail under it. Michaline, the brave, whole-hearted girl, stands among these, pitying and comprehending all. In the second act one of Arnold's sordid and piteous mistakes comes to light. An inn-keeper's daughter complains to Kramer of his

son's grotesque and annoyingly expressed passion for her. Kramer takes his son to task and, in one of the noblest scenes in the modern drama, wrestles with the boy's soul. In the third act the inn is shown. Its rowdy, semi-educated habitues deride Arnold with coarse gibes. He cannot tear himself away. Madly sensitive and conscious of his final superiority over a world that crushes him by its merely brutal advantages, he is goaded to self-destruction. In the last act, in the presence of his dead son, Michael Kramer cries out after some reconciliation with the silent universe. The play is done and nothing has happened. The only action is Arnold's suicide and that action has no dramatic value. The significance of the play lies in the unequal marriage between Kramer and his wife, in Arnold's character--in the fact that such things _are_, and that in our outlook upon the whole of life we must reckon with them.

Hauptmann's simple management of a pregnant fable may be admirably observed, finally, by comparing _Lonely Lives_ and _Rosmersholm_. Hauptmann was undoubtedly indebted to Ibsen for his problem and for the main elements of the story: a modern thinker is overcome by the orthodox and conservative world in which he lives. And that world conquers largely because he cannot be united to the woman who is his inspiration and his strength. In handling this fable two difficult questions were to be answered by the craftsman: by what means does the hostile environment crush the protagonist? Why cannot he take the saving hand that is held out to him? Ibsen practically shirks the answer to the first question. For it is not the bitter zealot Kroll, despite his newspaper war and his scandal-mongering, who breaks Rosmer's strength. It is fate, fate in the dark and ancient sense. "The dead cling to Rosmersholm"--that is the keynote of the play. The answer to the second question is interwoven with an attempt to rationalise the fatality that broods over Rosmersholm. The dead cling to it because a subtle and nameless wrong has been committed against them. And that sin has been committed by the woman who could save Rosmer. At the end of the second act Rebecca refuses to be his wife. The reason for that refusal, dimly prefigured, absorbs his thoughts, and through two acts of consummate dramaturgic suspense the sombre history is gradually unfolded. And no vague phrases concerning the ennobling of humanity can conceal the central fact: the play derives its power from a traditional plot and a conventional if sound motive--crime and its discovery, sin and its retribution.

In _Lonely Lives_ the two questions apparently treated in _Rosmersholm_ are answered, not in the terms of effective dramaturgy, but of life itself. Johannes Vockerat lives in the midst of the world that must undo him--subtly irritated by all to which his heart clings. Out of that world he has grown and he cannot liberate himself from it. His good wife and his admirable parents are bound to the conventional in no base or fanatical sense. He dare scarcely tell them that their preoccupations, that their very love, slay the ideal in his soul. And so the pitiless attrition goes on. There is no action: there is being. The struggle is rooted in the deep divisions of men's souls, not in unwonted crime or plotting. And Anna Mahr, the free woman of a freer world, parts from Johannes because she recognises their human unfitness to take up the burden of tragic sorrow which any union between them must create. The time for such things has not come, and may never come. Thus Johannes is left desolate, powerless to face the unendurable emptiness and decay that lie before him, destroyed by the conflicting loyalties to personal and ideal ends which are fundamental to the life of creative thought.

V

Drama, then, which relies so little upon external action, but finds action rather in "every inner conflict of passions, every consequence of diverging thoughts," must stress the obscurest expression of such passions and such thoughts. Since its fables, furthermore, are to arise from the immediate data of life, it must equally emphasise the significant factor of those common things amid which man passes his struggle. And so the naturalistic drama was forced to introduce elements of narrative and exposition usually held alien to the _genre_. Briefly, it has dealt largely and powerfully with atmosphere, environment and gesture; it has expanded and refined the stage-direction beyond all precedent and made of it an important element in dramatic art.

The playwrights of the middle of the last century who made an effort to lead the drama back to reality, knew nothing of this element. Augier does not even suspect its existence; in Robertson it is a matter of "properties" and "business." Any appearance of this kind Hauptmann avoids. The play is not to remind us of the stage, but of life. A difference in vision and method difficult to estimate divides Robertson's direction: "Sam. (astonished L. corner)" from Hauptmann's "Mrs. John rises mechanically and cuts a slice from a loaf of bread, as though under the influence of suggestion." Robertson indicates the conventionalised gesture of life; Hauptmann its moral and spiritual density.

The descriptive stage direction, effectively used by Ibsen, is further expanded by Hauptmann. But it remains impersonal and never becomes direct comment or even argument as in Shaw. It is used not only to suggest the scene but, above all, its atmosphere, its mood. Through it Hauptmann shows his keen sense of the interaction of man and his world and of the high moral expressiveness of common things. To define the mood more clearly he indicates the hour and the weather. The action of _Rose Bernd_ opens on a bright Sunday morning in May, that of _Drayman Henschel_ during a bleak February dawn. The desperate souls in _The Reconciliation_ meet on a snow-swept Christmas Eve; the sun has just set over the lake in which Johannes

Vockerat finds final peace. In these indications Hauptmann rarely aims at either irony or symbolism. He is guided by a sense for the probabilities of life which he expresses through such interactions between the moods of man and nature as experience seems to offer. Only in _The Maidens of the Mount_ has the suave autumnal weather a deeper meaning, for it was clearly Hauptmann's purpose in this play

"To build a shadowy isle of bliss Midmost the beating of the steely sea."

Hauptmann has also become increasingly exacting in demanding that the actor simulate the personal appearance of his characters as they arose in his imagination. In his earlier plays the descriptions of men and women are at times brief; in _The Rats_ even minor figures are visualised with remarkable completeness. Pastor Spitta, for instance, is thus introduced: "Sixty years old. A village parson, somewhat 'countrified.' One might equally well take him to be a surveyor or a landowner in a small way. He is of vigorous appearance--short-necked, well-nourished, with a squat, broad face like Luther's. He wears a slouch hat, spectacles, and carries a cane and a coat over his arm. His clumsy boots and the state of his other garments show that they have long been accustomed to wind and weather." Such directions obviously tax the mimetic art of the stage to the very verge of its power. Thus, by the precision of his directions both for the scenery and the persons of each play, and by unmistakable indications of gesture and expression at all decisive moments of dramatic action, Hauptmann has placed within narrow limits the activity of both stage manager and actor. He alone is the creator of his drama, and no alien factitiousness is allowed to obscure its final aim--the creation of living men.

VI

In the third act of Hauptmann's latest naturalistic play, _The Rats_ (1911), the ex-stage manager Hassenrenter is drawn by his pupil, young Spitta, into an argument on the nature of tragedy. "Of the heights of humanity you know nothing," Hassenrenter hotly declares. "You asserted the other day that in certain circumstances a barber or a scrubwoman could as fitly be the subject of tragedy as Lady Macbeth or King Lear." And Spitta reaffirms his heresy in the sentence: "Before art as before the law all men are equal." From this doctrine Hauptmann has never departed, although his interpretation of it has not been fanatical. Throughout his work, however, there is a careful disregard of several classes of his countrymen: the nobility, the bureaucracy (with the notable exception of Wehrhahn in _The Beaver Coat_), the capitalists. He has devoted himself in his prose plays to the life of the common people, of the middle classes, and of creative thinkers.

The delineation of all these characters has two constant qualities: objectivity and justice. The author has not merged the sharp outlines of humanity into the background of his own idiosyncrasy. Ibsen's characters speak and act as though they had suddenly stepped from another world and were still haunted by a breath of their strange doom; the people of Shaw are often eloquent exponents of a theory of character and society which would never have entered their minds. Hauptmann's men and women are themselves. No trick of speech, no lurking similarity of thought unites them. The nearer any two of them tend to approach a recognisable type, the more magnificently is the individuality of each vindicated. The elderly middle-class woman, harassed by ignoble cares ignobly borne, driven by a lack of fortitude into querulousness, and into injustice by the selfishness of her affections, is illustrated both in Mrs. Scholz and Mrs. Kramer. But, in the former, bodily suffering and nervous terror have slackened the moral fibre, and this abnormality speaks in every word and gesture. Mrs. Kramer is simply average, with the tenacity and the corroding power of the average.

Another noteworthy group is that of the three Lutheran clergymen: Kolin in _Lonely Lives_, Kittelhaus in _The Weavers_, and Spitta in _The Rats_. Kolin has the utter sincerity which can afford to be trivial and not cease to be lovable; Kittelhaus is the conscious time-server whose opinions might be anything; Spitta struggles for his official convictions, half blinded by the allurements of a world which it is his duty to denounce. Each is wholly himself; no hint of critical irony defaces his character; and thus each is able, implicitly, to put his case with the power inherent in the genuinely and recognisably human. From the same class of temperaments--one that he does not love--Hauptmann has had the justice to draw two characters of basic importance in _Lonely Lives_. The elder Vockerats are excessively limited in their outlook upon life. It is, indeed, in its time and place, an impossible outlook. These two people have nothing to recommend them save their goodness, but it is a goodness so keenly felt, so radiantly human, that the conflict of the play is deepened and complicated by the question whether the real tragedy be not the pain felt by these kindly hearts, rather than the destruction of their more arduous son.

All these may be said to be minor characters. Some of them are, in that they scarcely affect the fable involved. But in no other sense are there minor figures in Hauptmann's plays. A few lines suffice, and a human being stands squarely upon the living earth, with all his mortal perplexities in his words and voice. Such characters are the tutor Weinhold in _The Weavers_, the painter Lachmann in _Michael Kramer_, Dr. Boxer in _The Conflagration_ and Dr. Schimmelpfennig in _Before Dawn_.

In his artists and thinkers Hauptmann has illustrated the excessive nervousness of the age. Michael Kramer rises above it; Johannes Vockerat and Gabriel Schilling succumb. And beside these men there usually arises the sharply realised figure of the destroying woman--innocent and helpless in Kaethe Vockerat, trivial and obtuse in Alwine Lachmann, or impelled by a devouring sexual egotism in Eveline Schilling and Hanna Elias.

Hauptmann's creative power culminates, however, as he approaches the common folk. These are of two kinds: the Berlin populace and the Silesian peasants. The world of the former in all its shrewdness, impudence and varied lusts he has set down with quiet and cruel exactness in _The Beaver Coat_ and _The Conflagration_. Mrs. Wolff, the protagonist of both plays, rises into a figure of epic breadth--a sordid and finally almost tragic embodiment of worldliness and cunning. When he approaches the peasants of his own countryside his touch is less hard, his method not quite so remorseless. And thus, perhaps, it comes about that in the face of these characters the art of criticism can only set down a confirmatory: "They are!" Old Deans in _The Heart of Midlothian_, Tulliver and the Dodson sisters in _The Mill on the Floss_ illustrate the nature of Hauptmann's incomparable projection of simple men and women. Here, in Dryden's phrase, is God's plenty: the morose pathos of Beipst (_Before Dawn_); the vanity and faithfulness of Friebe (_The Reconciliation_); the sad fatalism of Hauffe (_Drayman Henschel_); the instinctive kindliness of the nurse and the humorous fortitude of Mrs. Lehmann (_Lonely Lives_); the vulgar good nature of Liese Baensch (_Michael Kramer_); the trivial despair of Pauline and the primitive passion of Mrs. John (_The Rats_); the massive greatness of old Hilse's rock-like patience and the sudden impassioned protest of Luise (_The Weavers_); the deep trouble of Henschel's simple soul and the hunted purity of Rose Bernd--these qualities and these characters transcend the convincingness of mere art. Like the rain drenched mould, the black trees against the sky, the noise of the earth's waters, they are among the abiding elements of a native and familiar world.

VII

Such, then, is the naturalistic drama of Hauptmann. By employing the real speech of man, by emphasising being rather than action, by creating the very atmosphere and gesture of life, it succeeds in presenting characters whose vital truth achieves the intellectual beauty and moral energy of great art.

Early in his career, however, an older impulse stirred in Hauptmann. He remembered that he was a poet. Pledged to naturalism by personal loyalty and public combat he broke through its self-set limitations tentatively and invented for that purpose the dream-technique of _The Assumption of Hannele_(1893). Pure imagination was outlawed in those years and verse was a pet aversion of the consistent naturalists. Hence both were transferred to the world of dreams which has an unquestionable reality, however subjective, but in which the will cannot govern the shaping faculties of the soul. The letter of the naturalistic law was adhered to, though Hannele's visions have a richness and sweetness, the verses of the angels a winsomeness and majesty which transcend any possible dream of the poor peasant child, The external encouragement which the attempt met was great, for with it Hauptmann conquered the Royal Playhouse in Berlin.

Three years later he openly vindicated the possibility of the modern poetic drama by writing _The Sunken Bell_, his most far-reaching success both on the stage and in the study. In it appears for the first time the disciplinary effect of naturalism upon literature in its loftiest mood. The blank verse is the best in the German drama, the only German blank verse, in truth, that satisfies an ear trained on the graver and more flexible harmony of English; the lyrical portions are of sufficient if inferior beauty. But there is no trace of the pseudo-heroic psychology of the romantic play. The interpretation of life is thoroughly poetic, but it is based on fact. The characters have tangible reality; they have the idiosyncrasies of men. The pastor is profoundly true, and so is Magda, though the interpretative power of poetry raises both into the realm of the enduringly significant. Similarly Heinrich is himself, but also the creative worker of all time. Driven by his ideal from the warm hearthstones of men, he falters upon that frosty height: seeking to realise impersonal aims and rising to a hardy rapture, he is broken in strength at last by the "still, sad music of humanity."

Except for the half humorous and not wholly successful interlude of _Schluck and Jau_, Hauptmann neglected the poetic drama until 1902, when he presented on the boards of the famous _Burgtheater_ at Vienna, _Henry of Aue_. There is little doubt but that this play will ultimately rank as the most satisfying poetic drama of its time. Less derivative and uncertain in quality than the plays of Stephen Phillips, less fantastic and externally brilliant than those of Rostand, it has a soundness of subject matter, a serene nobility of mood, a solidity of verse technique above the reach of either the French or the English poet. Hauptmann chose as his subject the legend known for nearly seven hundred years through the beautiful Middle High German poem of Hartmann von der Aue--the legend of that great knight and lord who was smitten with leprosy, and whom, according to the mediaeval belief, a pure maiden desired to heal through the shedding of her blood. But God, before the sacrifice could be consummated, cleansed the knight's body and permitted to him and the maiden a united temporal happiness. This story Hauptmann takes exactly as he finds it. But the characters are made to live with a new life. The stark

mediaeval conventions are broken and the old legend becomes living truth. The maiden is changed from an infant saint fleeing a vale of tears into a girl in whom the first sweet passions of life blend into an exaltation half sexual and half religious, but pure with the purity of a great flame. The miracle too remains, but it is the miracle of love that subdues the despairing heart, that reconciles man to his universe, and that slays the imperiousness of self. Thus Henry, firmly individualised as he is, becomes in some sense, like all the greater protagonists of the drama, the spirit of man confronting eternal and recurrent problems. The minor figures--Gottfried, Brigitte, Ottacker--have the homely and delightful truth that is the gift of naturalism to modern, literature.

Hauptman's next play was a naturalistic tragedy, one of the best in that order, _Rose Bernd._ Then followed, from 1905 to 1910, a series of plays in which he let the creative imagination range over time and space. In _Elga_ he tells the story of an old sorrow by means of the dream-technique of _Hannele;_ in _And Pippa Dances,_ he lets the flame of life and love flicker its iridescent glory before man and super-man, savage and artist; in _The Maidens of the Mount_ he celebrates the dream of life which is life's dearest part; in _Charlemagne's Hostage_ and in _Griselda_ he returns to the interpretation and humanising of history and legend.

The last of these plays is the most characteristic and important. It takes up the old story of patient Grizzel which the Clerk of Oxford told Chaucer's pilgrims on the way to Canterbury. But a new motive animates the fable. Not to try her patience, not to edify womankind, does the count rob Griselda of her child. His burning and exclusive love is jealous of the pangs and triumphs of her motherhood in which he has no share. It is passion desiring the utter absorption of its object that gives rise to the tragic element of the story. But over the whole drama there plays a blithe and living air in which, once more, authentic human beings are seen with their smiling or earnest faces.

A stern and militant naturalistic drama, _The Rats_ (1911), and yet another play of the undoing of the artist through the woman, _Gabriel Schilling's Flight_ (1912), close, for the present, the tale of Hauptmann's dramatic works.

VIII

These works, viewed in their totality, take on a higher significance than resides in the literary power of any one of them. Hauptmann's career began in the years when the natural sciences, not content with their proper triumphs, threatened to engulf art, philosophy and religion; in the years when a keen and tender social consciousness, brooding over the temporal welfare of man, lost sight of his eternal good. And so Hauptmann begins by illustrating the laws of heredity and pleading, through a creative medium, for social justice. The tacit assumptions of these early plays are stringently positivistic: body and soul are the obverse and reverse of a single substance; earth is the boundary of man's hopes.

With _The Assumption of Hannele_ a change comes over the spirit of his work. A thin, faint voice vibrates in that play--the voice of a soul yearning for a warmer ideal. But the rigorous teachers of Hauptmann's youth had graven their influence upon him, and the new faith announced by Heinrich in _The Sunken Bell_ is still a kind of scientific paganism. In _Michael Kramer_ (1900), however, he has definitely conquered the positivistic denial of the overwhelming reality of the ultimate problems. For it is after some solution of these that the great heart of Kramer cries out. In _Henry of Aue_ the universe, no longer a harsh and monstrous mechanism, irradiates the human soul with the spirit of its own divinity. These utterances are, to be sure, dramatic and objective. But the author chooses his subject, determines the spirit of its treatment and thus speaks unmistakably.

Nor is directer utterance lacking, "The Green Gleam," Hauptmann writes in the delicately modelled prose of his _Griechischer Fruehling_, "the Green Gleam, which mariners assert to have witnessed at times, appears at the last moment before the sun dips below the horizon.... The ancients must have known the Green Gleam.... I do not know whether that be true, but I feel a longing within me to behold it. I can imagine some Pure Fool, whose life consisted but in seeking it over lands and seas, in order to perish at last in the radiance of that strange and splendid light. Are we not all, perhaps, upon a similar quest? Are we not beings who have exhausted the realm of the senses and are athirst for other delights for both our senses and our souls?" The author of _Before Dawn_ has gone a long journey in the land of the spirit to the writing of these words, and of still others in _Gabriel Schilling's Flight_: "Behind this visible world another is hidden, so near at times that one might knock at its gate...." But it is the journey which man himself has gone upon during the intervening years.

Thus Hauptmann's work has not only created a new technique of the drama; it has not only added unforgettable figures to the world of the imagination: it has also mirrored and interpreted the intellectual history of its time. His art sums up an epoch--an epoch full of knowledge and the restraints of knowledge, still prone, so often, before the mechanical in life and thought; but throughout all its immedicable scepticism full of strange yearnings and visited by flickering dreams; and even in its darkest years and days still stretching out hands in love of a farther shore. Once more the great artist, his vision fixed primarily upon his art, has most powerfully interpreted man to his own mind.

LUDWIG LEWISOHN.

_I DEDICATE THIS DRAMA TO MY FATHER
ROBERT HAUPTMANN.

You, dear father, know what feelings lead me to dedicate this work to you, and I am not called upon to analyse them here.

Your stories of my grandfather, who in his young days sat at the loom, a poor weaver like those here depicted, contained the germ of my drama. Whether it possesses the vigour of life or is rotten at the core, it is the best, "so poor a man as Hamlet is" can offer.

Your
GERHART_

COMPLETE LIST OF CHARACTERS

DREISSIGER, _fustian manufacturer._
MRS. DREISSIGER.
PFEIFER, _manager in DREISSIGER'S employment._
NEUMANN, _cashier in DREISSIGER'S employment._
AN APPRENTICE _in DREISSIGER'S employment._
JOHN, _coachman in DREISSIGER'S employment._
A MAID _in DREISSIGER'S employment._
WEINHOLD, _tutor to DREISSIGER'S sons._
PASTOR KITTELHAUS.
MRS. KITTELHAUS.
HEIDE, _Police Superintendent._
KUTSCHE, _policeman._
WELZEL, _publican._
MRS. WELZEL.
ANNA WELZEL.
WIEGAND, _joiner._
A COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER.
A PEASANT.
A FORESTER.
SCHMIDT, _surgeon._
HORNIG, _rag dealer._
WITTIG, _smith._

WEAVERS.

BECKER.
MORITZ JAEGER.
OLD BAUMERT.
MOTHER BAUMERT.
BERTHA BAUMERT
EMMA BAUMERT
FRITZ, EMMA'S _son (four years old)._
AUGUST BAUMERT.
OLD ANSORGE.
MRS. HEINRICH.
OLD HILSE.
MOTHER HILSE.
GOTTLIEB HILSE.
LUISE, GOTTLIEB'S _wife._
MIELCHEN, _their daughter (six years old)._
REIMANN, _weaver._
HELEN, _weaver._
A WEAVER'S WIFE.
A number of weavers, young and old, of both sexes.

The action passes in the Forties, at Kaschbach, Peterswaldau and Langenbielau, in the Eulengebirge.

THE FIRST ACT

A large whitewashed room on the ground floor of DREISSIGER'S house at Peterswaldau, where the weavers deliver their finished webs and the fustian is stored. To the left are uncurtained windows, in the back mall there is a glass door, and to the right another glass door, through which weavers, male and female, and children, are passing in and out. All three walls are lined with shelves for the storing of the fustian. Against the right wall stands a long bench, on which a number of weavers have already spread out their cloth. In the order of arrival each presents his piece to be examined by PFEIFER, DREISSIGER'S manager, who stands, with compass and magnifying-glass, behind a large table, on which the web to be inspected is laid. When PFEIFER has satisfied himself, the weaver lays the fustian on the scale, and an office apprentice tests its weight. The same boy stores the accepted pieces on the shelves. PFEIFER calls out the payment due in each case to NEUMANN, the cashier, who is seated at a small table.

_It is a sultry day towards the end of May. The clock is on the stroke of twelve. Most of the waiting work-people have the air of standing before the bar of justice, in torturing expectation of a decision that means life or death to them. They are marked too by the anxious timidity characteristic of the receiver of charity, who has suffered many humiliations,

and, conscious that he is barely tolerated, has acquired the habit of self-effacement. Add to this a rigid expression on every face that tells of constant, fruitless brooding. There is a general resemblance among the men. They have something about them of the dwarf, something of the schoolmaster. The majority are flat-breasted, short-minded, sallow, and poor looking--creatures of the loom, their knees bent with much silting. At a, first glance the women show fewer typical traits. They look over-driven, worried, reckless, whereas the men still make some show of a pitiful self-respect; and their clothes are ragged, while the men's are patched and mended. Some of the young girls are not without a certain charm, consisting in a wax-like pallor, a slender figure, and large, projecting, melancholy eyes._

NEUMANN

[_Counting out money._] Comes to one and seven-pence halfpenny.

WEAVER'S WIFE

[_About thirty, emaciated, takes up the money with trembling fingers._] Thank you, sir.

NEUMANN

[_Seeing that she does not move on._] Well, something wrong this time, too?

WEAVER'S WIFE

[_Agitated, imploringly._] Do you think I might have a few pence in advance, sir? I need it that bad.

NEUMANN

And I need a few pounds. If it was only a question of needing it--! [_Already occupied in counting out another weaver's money, gruffly._] It's Mr. Dreissiger who settles about pay in advance.

WEAVER'S WIFE

Couldn't I speak to Mr. Dreissiger himself, then, sir?

PFEIFER

[_Now manager, formerly weaver. The type is unmistakable, only he is well fed, well dressed, clean shaven; also takes snuff copiously. He calls out roughly._] Mr. Dreissiger would have enough to do if he had to attend to every trifle himself. That's what we are here for. [_He measures, and then examines through the magnifying-glass._] Mercy on us! what a draught! [_Puts a thick muffler round his neck._] Shut the door, whoever comes in.

APPRENTICE

[_Loudly to PFEIFER._] You might as well talk to stocks and stones.

PFEIFER

That's done!--Weigh! [_The weaver places his web on the scales._] If you only understood your business a little better! Full of lumps again.... I hardly need to look at the cloth to see them. Call yourself a weaver, and "draw as long a bow" as you've done there!

BECKER has entered. A young, exceptionally powerfully-built weaver; offhand, almost bold in manner. PFEIFER, NEUMANN, and the APPRENTICE exchange looks of mutual understanding as he comes in.

BECKER

Devil take it! This is a sweatin' job, and no mistake.

FIRST WEAVER

[_In a low voice._] This blazin' heat means rain.

[_OLD BAUMERT forces his way in at the glass door on the right, through which the crowd of weavers can be seen, standing shoulder to shoulder, waiting their turn. The old man stumbles forward and lays his bundle on the bench, beside BECKER'S. He sits down by it, and wipes the sweat from his face._

OLD BAUMERT

A man has a right to a rest after that.

BECKER

Rest's better than money.

OLD BAUMERT

Yes, but we _needs_ the money too. Good mornin' to you, Becker!

BECKER

Mornin', father Baumert! Goodness knows how long we'll have to stand here again.

FIRST WEAVER

That don't matter. What's to hinder a weaver waitin' for an hour, or for a day? What else is he there for?

PFEIFER

Silence there! We can't hear our own voices.

BECKER

[_In a low voice._] This is one of his bad days.

PFEIFER

[_To the weaver standing before him._] How often have I told you that you must bring cleaner cloth? What sort of mess is this? Knots, and straw, and all kinds of dirt.

REIMANN

It's for want of a new picker, sir.

APPRENTICE

[_Has weighed the piece._] Short weight, too.

PFEIFER

I never saw such weavers. I hate to give out the yarn to them. It was another story in my day! I'd have caught it finely from my master for work like

that. The business was carried on in different style then. A man had to know his trade--that's the last thing that's thought of nowadays. Reimann, one shilling.

REIMANN

But there's always a pound allowed for waste.

PFEIFER

I've no time. Next man!--What have you to show?

HEIBER

[_Lays his web on the table. While PFEIFER is examining it, he goes close up to him; eagerly in a low tone._] Beg pardon, Mr. Pfeifer, but I wanted to ask you, sir, if you would perhaps be so very kind an' do me the favour an' not take my advance money off this week's pay.

PFEIFER

[_Measuring and examining the texture; jeeringly._] Well! What next, I wonder? This looks very much as if half the weft had stuck to the bobbins again.

HEIBER

[_Continues._] I'll be sure to make it all right next week, sir. But this last week I've had to put in two days' work on the estate. And my missus is ill in bed....

PFEIFER

[_Giving the web to be weighed._] Another piece of real slop-work. [_Already examining a new web._] What a selvage! Here it's broad, there it's narrow; here it's drawn in by the wefts goodness knows how tight, and there it's torn out again by the temples. And hardly seventy threads weft to the inch. What's come of the rest? Do you call this honest work? I never saw anything like it.

[_HEIBER, repressing tears, stands humiliated and helpless._

BECKER

[_In a low voice to BAUMERT._] To please that brute you'd have to pay for extra yarn out o' your own pocket.

WEAVER'S WIFE

[_Who has remained standing near the cashier's table, from time to time looking round appealingly, takes courage and once more turns imploringly to the cashier._] I don't know what's to come o' me, sir, if you won't give me a little advance this time ... O Lord, O Lord!

PFEIFER

[_Calls across._] It's no good whining, or dragging the Lord's name into the matter. You're not so anxious about Him at other times. You look after your husband and see that he's not to be found so often lounging in the public-house. We can give no pay in advance. We have to account for every penny. It's not our money. People that are industrious, and understand their work, and do it in the fear of God, never need their pay in advance. So now you know.

NEUMANN

If a Bielau weaver got four times as much pay, he would squander it four times over and be in debt into the bargain.

WEAVER'S WIFE

[_In a loud voice, as if appealing to the general sense of justice._] No one can't call me idle, but I'm not fit now for what I once was. I've twice had a miscarriage. And as to John, he's but a poor creature. He's been to the shepherd at Zerlau, but he couldn't do him no good, and ... you can't do more than you've strength for.... We works as hard as ever we can. This many a week I've been at it till far on into the night. An' we'll keep our heads above water right enough if I can just get a bit o' strength into me. But you must have pity on us, Mr. Pfeifer, sir. [_Eagerly, coaxingly._] You'll please be so very kind as to let me have a few pence on the next job, sir?

PFEIFER

[_Paying no attention._] Fiedler, one and twopence.

WEAVER'S WIFE

Only a few pence, to buy bread with. We can't get no more credit. We've a lot o' little ones.

NEUMANN

[_Half aside to the APPRENTICE, in a serio-comic-tone._] "Every year brings a child to the linen-weaver's wife, heigh-ho, heigh-ho, heigh."

APPRENTICE

[_Takes up the rhyme, half singing._] "And the little brat it's blind the first weeks of its life, heigh-ho, heigh-ho, heigh."

REIMANN

[_Not touching the money which the cashier has counted out to him._] We've always got one and fourpence for the web.

PFEIFER

[_Calls across._] If our terms don't suit you, Reimann, you have only to say so. There's no scarcity of weavers--especially of your sort. For full weight we give full pay.

REIMANN

How anything can be wrong with the weight o' this...!

PFEIFER

You bring a piece of fustian with no faults in it, and there will be no fault in the pay.

REIMANN

It's clean impossible that there's too many knots in this web.

PFEIFER

[_Examining._] If you want to live well, then be sure you weave well.

HEIBER

[_Has remained standing near PFEIFER, so as to seize on any favourable opportunity. He laughs at PFEIFER'S little witticism, then steps forward and again addresses him._] I wanted to ask you, sir, if you would perhaps have the great kindness not to take my advance of sixpence off to-day's pay? My missus has been bedridden since February, She can't do a hand's turn for me, an' I've to pay a bobbin girl. An' so ...

PFEIFER

[_Takes a pinch of snuff._] Heiber do you think I have no one to attend to but you? The others must have their turn.

REIMANN

As the warp was given me I took it home and fastened it to the beam. I can't bring back no better yarn than I gets.

PFEIFER

If you're not satisfied, you need come for no more. There are plenty ready to tramp the soles off their shoes to get it.

NEUMANN

[_To REIMANN._] Don't you want your money?

REIMANN

I can't bring myself to take such pay.

NEUMANN

[_Paying no further attention to REIMANN._] Heiber, one shilling. Deduct sixpence for pay it advance. Leaves sixpence.

HEIBER

[_Goes up to the table, looks at the money, stands shaking his head as if unable to believe his eyes, then slowly takes it up._] Well, I never!--[_Sighing._] Oh dear, oh dear!

OLD BAUMERT

[_Looking into HEIBER'S face._] Yes, Franz, that's so! There's matter enough for sighing.

HEIBER

[_Speaking with difficulty._] I've a girl lyin' sick at home too, an' she needs a bottle of medicine.

OLD BAUMERT

What's wrong with her?

HEIBER

Well, you see, she's always been a sickly bit of a thing. I don't know ... I needn't mind tellin' you--she brought her trouble with her. It's in her blood, and it breaks out here, there, and everywhere.

OLD BAUMERT

It's always the way. Let folks be poor, and one trouble comes to them on the top of another. There's no help for it and there's no end to it.

HEIBER

What are you carryin' in that cloth, fatter. Baumert?

OLD BAUMERT

We haven't so much as a bite in the house, and so I've had the little dog killed. There's not much on him, for the poor beast was half starved. A nice little dog he was! I couldn't kill him myself. I hadn't the heart to do it.

PFEIFER

[_Has inspected BECKER'S web and calls._] Becker, one and threepence.

BECKER

That's what you might give to a beggar; it's not pay.

PFEIFER

Every one who has been attended to must clear out. We haven't room to turn round in.

BECKER

[_To those standing near, without lowering his voice._] It's a beggarly pittance, nothing else. A man works his treadle from early morning till late at night, an' when he's bent over his loom for days an' days, tired to death every evening, sick with the dust and the heat, he finds he's made a beggarly one and threepence!

PFEIFER

No impudence allowed here.

BECKER

If you think I'll hold my tongue for your tellin', you're much mistaken.

PFEIFER

[_Exclaims._] We'll see about that! [_Rushes to the glass door and calls into the office._] Mr. Dreissiger, Mr. Dreissiger, will you be good enough to come here?

Enter DREISSIGER. About forty, full-bodied, asthmatic. Looks severe.

DREISSIGER

What is it, Pfeifer?

PFEIFER

[_Spitefully._] Becker says he won't be told to hold his tongue.

DREISSIGER

[_Draws himself up, throws back his head, stares at BECKER; his nostrils tremble._] Oh, indeed!--Becker. [_To PFEIFER.] Is he the man?...

[_The clerks nod._

BECKER

[_Insolently._] Yes, Mr. Dreissiger, yes! [_Pointing to himself._] This is the man. [_Pointing to DREISSIGER._] And that's a man too!

DREISSIGER

[_Angrily._] Fellow, how dare you?

PFEIFER

He's too well off. He'll go dancing on the ice once too often, though.

BECKER

[_Recklessly._] You shut up, you Jack-in-the-box. Your mother must have gone dancing once too often with Satan to have got such a devil for a son.

DREISSIGER

[_Now in a violent passion, roars._] Hold your tongue this moment, sir, or ...

[_He trembles and takes a fere steps forward._

BECKER

[_Holding his ground steadily._] I'm not deaf. My hearing's quite good yet.

DREISSIGER

[_Controls himself, asks in an apparently cool business tone._] Was this fellow not one of the pack...?

PFEIFER

He's a Bielau weaver. When there's any mischief going, they're sure to be in it.

DREISSIGER

[_Trembling._] Well, I give you all warning: if the same thing happens again as last night--a troop of half-drunken cubs marching past my windows singing that low song ...

BECKER

Is it "Bloody Justice" you mean?

DREISSIGER

You know well enough what I mean. I tell you that if I hear it again I'll get hold of one of you, and--mind, I'm not joking--before the justice he shall go. And if I can find out who it was that made up that vile doggerel ...

BECKER

It's a grand song, that's what it is!

DREISSIGER

Another word and I send for the police on the spot, without more ado. I'll make short work with you young fellows. I've got the better of very different men before now.

BECKER

I believe you there. A real thoroughbred manufacturer will get the better of two or three hundred weavers in the time it takes you to turn round--swallow 'em up, and not leave as much as a bone. He's got four stomachs like a cow, and teeth like a wolf. That's nothing to him at all!

DREISSIGER

[_To his clerks._] That man gets no more work from us.

BECKER

It's all the same to me whether I starve at my loom or by the roadside.

DREISSIGER

Out you go, then, this moment!

BECKER

[_Determinedly._] Not without my pay.

DREISSIGER

How much is owing to the fellow, Neumann?

NEUMANN

One and threepence.

DREISSIGER

[_Takes the money hurriedly ont of the cashier's hand, and flings it on the table, so that some of the coins roll off on to the floor._] There you are, then; and now, out of my sight with you!

BECKER

Not without my pay.

DREISSIGER

Don't you see it lying there? If you don't take it and go ... It's exactly twelve now ... The dyers are coming out for their dinner ...

BECKER

I gets my pay into my hand--here--that's where!

[_Points with the fingers of his right hand at the palm of his left._

DREISSIGER

[_To the APPRENTICE._] Pick up the money, Tilgner.

[_The APPRENTICE lifts the money and puts it into BECKER'S hand._

BECKER

Everything in proper order.

[_Deliberately takes an old purse out of his pocket and puts the money into it._

DREISSIGER

[_As BECKER still does not move away._] Well? Do you want me to come and help you?

[_Signs of agitation are observable among the crowd of weavers. A long, loud sigh is heard, and then a fall. General interest is at once diverted to this new event._

DREISSIGER

What's the matter there?

CHORUS OF WEAVERS AND WOMEN

"Some one's fainted."--"It's a little sickly boy."--"Is it a fit, or what?"

DREISSIGER

What do you say? Fainted?

[_He goes nearer._

OLD WEAVER

There he lies, any way.

[_They make room. A boy of about eight is seen lying on the floor as if dead._

DREISSIGER

Does any one know the boy?

OLD WEAVER

He's not from our village.

OLD BAUMERT

He's like one of weaver Heinrich's boys. [_Looks at him more closely._] Yes, that's Heinrich's little Philip.

DREISSIGER

Where do they live?

OLD BAUMERT

Up near us in Kaschbach, sir. He goes round playin' music in the evenings, and all day he's at the loom. They've nine children an' a tenth a coming.

CHORUS OF WEAVERS AND WOMEN

"They're terrible put to it."--"The rain comes through their roof."--"The woman hasn't two shirts among the nine."

OLD BAUMERT

[_Taking the boy by the arm._] Now then, lad, what's wrong with you? Wake up, lad.

DREISSIGER

Some of you help me, and we'll get him up. It's disgraceful to send a sickly child this distance. Bring some water, Pfeifer.

WOMAN

[_Helping to lift the boy._] Sure you're not goin' to be foolish and die, lad!

DREISSIGER

Brandy, Pfeifer, brandy will be better.

BECKER

[_Forgotten by all, has stood looking on. With his hand on the door-latch, he now calls loudly and tauntingly._] Give him something to eat, an' he'll soon be all right.

[_Goes out._

DREISSIGER

That fellow will come to a bad end.--Take him under the arm, Neumann. Easy now, easy; we'll get him into my room. What?

NEUMANN

He said something, Mr. Dreissiger. His lips are moving.

DREISSIGER

What--what is it, boy?

BOY

[_Whispers._] I'm h-hungry.

WOMAN

I think he says--

DREISSIGER

We'll find out. Don't stop. Let us get him into my room. He can lie on the sofa there, We'll hear what the doctor says.

DREISSIGER, NEUMANN, and the woman lead the boy into the office. The weavers begin to behave like school-children when their master has left the classroom. They stretch themselves, whisper, move from one foot to the other, and in the course of a few moments are conversing loudly.

OLD BAUMERT

I believe as how Becker was right.

CHORUS OF WEAVERS AND WOMEN

"He did say something like that."--"It's nothin' new here to fall down from hunger."--"God knows what's to come of 'em in winter if this cuttin' down o' wages goes on."--"An' this year the potatoes aren't no good at all."--"Things'll get worse and worse till we're all done for together."

OLD BAUMERT

The best thing a man could do would be to put a rope round his neck and hang hisself on his own loom, like weaver Nentwich. [_To another old weaver._] Here, take a pinch. I was at Neurode yesterday. My brother-in-law, he works in the snuff factory there, and he give me a grain or two. Have you anything good in your kerchief?

OLD WEAVER

Only a little pearl barley. I was coming along behind Ulbrich the miller's cart, and there was a slit in one of the sacks. I can tell you we'll be glad of it.

OLD BAUMERT

There's twenty-two mills in Peterswaldau, but of all they grind, there's never nothin' comes our way.

OLD WEAVER

We must keep up heart. There's always somethin' comes to help us on again.

HEIBER

Yes, when we're hungry, we can pray to all the saints to help us, and if that don't fill our bellies we can put a pebble in our mouths and suck it. Eh, Baumert?

Re-enter DREISSIGER, PFEIFER, AND NEUMANN.

DREISSIGER

It was nothing serious. The boy is all right again. [_Walks about excitedly, panting._] But all the same it's a disgrace. The child's so weak that a puff of wind would blow him over. How people, how any parents can be so thoughtless is what passes my comprehension. Loading him with two heavy pieces of fustian to carry six good miles! No one would believe it that hadn't seen it. It simply means that I shall have to make a rule that no goods brought by children will be taken over. [_He walks up and down silently for a few moments._] I sincerely trust such a thing will not occur again.--Who gets all the blame for it? Why, of course the manufacturer. It's entirely our fault. If some poor little fellow sticks in the snow in winter and goes to sleep, a special correspondent arrives post-haste, and in two days we have a blood-curdling story served up in all the papers. Is any blame laid on the father, the parents, that send such a child?--Not a bit of it. How should they be to blame? It's all the manufacturer's fault--he's made the scapegoat. They flatter the weaver, and give the manufacturer nothing but abuse--he's a cruel man, with a heart like a stone, a dangerous fellow, at whose calves every cur of a journalist may take a bite. He lives on the fat of the land, and pays the poor weavers starvation wages. In the flow of his eloquence the writer forgets to mention that such a man has his cares too and his sleepless nights; that he runs risks of which the workman never dreams; that he is often driven distracted by all the calculations he has to make, and all the different things he has to take into account; that he has to struggle for his very life against competition; and that no day passes without some annoyance or some loss. And think of the manufacturer's responsibilities, think of the numbers that depend on him, that look to him for their daily bread. No, No! none of you need wish yourselves in my shoes--you would soon have enough of it. [_After a moment's reflection._] You all saw how that fellow, that scoundrel Becker, behaved. Now he'll go and spread about all sorts of tales of my hard-heartedness, of how my weavers are turned off for a mere trifle, without a moment's notice. Is that true? Am I so very unmerciful?

CHORUS OF VOICES

No, sir.

DREISSIGER

It doesn't seem to me that I am. And yet these ne'er-do-wells come round singing low songs about us manufacturers--prating about hunger, with enough in their pockets to pay for quarts of bad brandy. If they would like to know what want is, let them go and ask the linen-weavers: they can tell something about it. But you here, you fustian-weavers, have every reason to thank God that things are no worse than they are. And I put it to all the old, industrious weavers present: Is a good workman able to gain a living in my employment, or is he not?

MANY VOICES

Yes, sir; he is, sir.

DREISSIGER

There now! You see! Of course such a fellow as that Becker can't. I advise you to keep these young lads in check. If there's much more of this sort of thing, I'll shut up shop--give up the business altogether, and then you can shift for yourselves, get work where you like--perhaps Mr. Becker will provide it.

FIRST WEAVER'S WIFE

[_Has come close to DREISSIGER, and removes a little dust from his coat with creeping servility._] You've been an' rubbed agin something, sir.

DREISSIGER

Business is as bad as it can be just now, you know that yourselves. Instead of making money, I am losing it every day. If, in spite of this, I take care that my weavers are kept in work, I look for some little gratitude from them. I have thousands of pieces of cloth in stock, and don't know if I'll ever be able to sell them. Well, now, I've heard how many weavers hereabouts are out of work, and--I'll leave Pfeifer to give the particulars--but this much I'll tell you, just to show you my good will.... I can't deal out charity all round; I'm not rich enough for that; but I can give the people who are out of work the chance of earning at any rate a little. It's a great business risk I run by doing it, but that's my affair. I say to myself: Better that a man should work for a bite of bread than that, he should starve altogether, Am I not right?

CHORUS OF VOICES

Yes, yes, sir.

DREISSIGER

And therefore I am ready to give employment to two hundred more weavers. Pfeifer will tell you on what conditions.

[_He turns to go._

FIRST WEAVER'S WIFE

[_Comes between him and the door, speaks hurriedly, eagerly, imploringly._] Oh, if you please, sir, will you let me ask you if you'll be so good ... I've been twice laid up for ...

DREISSIGER

[_Hastily._] Speak to Pfeifer, good woman. I'm too late as it is.

[_Passes on, leaving her standing._

REIMANN

[_Stops him again. In an injured, complaining tone._] I have a complaint to make, if you please, sir. Mr. Pfeifer refuses to ... I've always got one and two-pence for a web ...

DREISSIGER

[_Interrupts him._] Mr. Pfeifer's my manager. There he is. Apply to him.

HEIBER

[_Detaining DREISSIGER; hurriedly and confusedly._] O sir, I wanted to ask if you would p'r'aps, if I might p'r'aps ... if Mr. Pfeifer might ... might ...

DREISSIGER

What is it you want?

HEIBER

That advance pay I had last time, sir; I thought p'r'aps you would kindly ...

DREISSIGER

I have no idea what you are talking about.

HEIBER

I'm awful hard up, sir, because ...

DREISSIGER

These are things Pfeifer must look into--I really have not the time. Arrange the matter with Pfeifer.

[_He escapes into the office._

[_The supplicants look helplessly at one another, sigh, and take their places again among the others._

PFEIFER

[_Resuming his task of inspection._] Well, Annie, let as see what yours is like.

OLD BAUMERT

How much is we to get for the web, then, Mr. Pfeifer?

PFEIFER

One shilling a web.

OLD BAUMERT

Has it come to that!

[_Excited whispering and murmuring among the weavers._

END OF THE FIRST ACT

THE SECOND ACT

A small room in the house of WILHELM ANSORGE, weaver and cottager in the village of Kaschbach, in the Eulengebirge.

In this room, which does not measure six feet from the dilapidated wooden floor to the smoke-blackened rafters, sit four people. Two young girls, EMMA and BERTHA BAUMERT, are working at their looms; MOTHER BAUMERT, a decrepit old woman, sits on a stool beside the bed, with a winding-wheel in front of her; her idiot son AUGUST sits on a foot-stool, also winding. He is twenty, has a small body and head, and long, spider-like legs and arms.

Faint, rosy evening light makes its way through two small windows in the right wall, which have their broken panes pasted over with paper or stuffed with straw. It lights up the flaxen hair of the girls, which falls loose on their slender white necks and thin bare shoulders, and their coarse chemises. These, with a short petticoat of the roughest linen, form their whole attire. The warm glow falls on the old woman's face, neck, and breast--a face worn away to a skeleton, with shrivelled skin and sunken eyes, red and watery with smoke, dust, and working by lamplight--a long goitre neck, wrinkled and sinewy--a hollow breast covered with faded, ragged shawls.

Part of the right wall is also lighted up, with stove, stove-bench, bedstead, and one or two gaudily coloured sacred prints. On the stove rail rags are hanging to dry, and behind the stove is a collection of worthless lumber. On the bench stand some old pots and cooking utensils, and potato parings are laid out on it, on paper, to dry. Hanks of yarn and reels hang from the rafters; baskets of bobbins stand beside the looms. In the back wall there is a low door without fastening. Beside it a bundle of willow wands is set up against the wall, and beyond them lie some damaged quarter-bushel baskets.

The room is full of sound--the rhythmic thud of the looms, shaking floor and walls, the click and rattle of the shuttles passing back and forward, and the steady whirr of the winding-wheels, like the hum of gigantic bees.

MOTHER BAUMERT

[_In a querulous, feeble voice, as the girls stop weaving and bend over their webs._] Got to make knots again already, have you?

EMMA

[_The elder of the two girls, about twenty-two, tying a broken thread_] It's the plagueyest web, this!

BERTHA

[_Fifteen._] Yes, it's real bad yarn they've given us this time.

EMMA

What can have happened to father? He's been away since nine.

MOTHER BAUMERT

That he has! yes. Where in the wide world c'n he be?

BERTHA

Don't you worry yourself, mother.

MOTHER BAUMERT

I can't help it, Bertha lass.

[_EMMA begins to weave again._

BERTHA

Stop a minute, Emma!

EMMA

What is it!

BERTHA

I thought I heard some one.

EMMA

It'll be Ansorge comin' home.

Enter FRITZ, a little, barefooted, ragged boy of four.

FRITZ

[_Whimpering._] I'm hungry, mother.

EMMA

Wait, Fritzel, wait a bit! Gran'father'll be here very soon, an' he's bringin' bread along with him, an' coffee too.

FRITZ

But I'm awful hungry, mother.

EMMA

Be a good boy now, Fritz. Listen to what I'm tellin' you. He'll be here this minute. He's bringin' nice bread an' nice corn-coffee; an' when we stops workin' mother'll take the tater peelin's and carry them to the farmer, and the farmer'll give her a drop o' good buttermilk for her little boy.

FRITZ

Where's grandfather gone?

EMMA

To the manufacturer, Fritz, with a web.

FRITZ

To the manufacturer?

EMMA

Yes, yes, Fritz, down to Dreissiger's at Peterswaldau.

FRITZ

Is it there he gets the bread?

EMMA

Yes; Dreissiger gives him money, and then he buys the bread.

FRITZ

Does he give him a heap of money?

EMMA

[_Impatiently._] Oh, stop that chatter, boy.

[_She and BERTHA go on weaving for a time, and then both stop again._

BERTHA

August, go and ask Ansorge if he'll give us a light.

[_AUGUST goes out accompanied by FRITZ._

MOTHER BAUMERT

[_Overcome by her childish apprehension, whimpers._] Emma! Bertha! where c'n the man be stay-in'?

BERTHA

Maybe he looked in to see Hauffe.

MOTHER BAUMERT

[_Crying._] What if he's sittin' drinkin' in the public-house?

EMMA

Don't cry, mother! You know well enough father's not the man to do that.

MOTHER BAUMERT

[_Half distracted by a multitude of gloomy forebodings._] What ... what ... what's to become of us if he don't come home? if he drinks the money, an' don't bring us nothin' at all? There's not so much as a handful o' salt in the house--not a bite o' bread, nor a bit o' wood for the fire.

BERTHA

Wait a bit, mother! It's moonlight just now. We'll take August with us and go into the wood and get some sticks.

MOTHER BAUMERT

Yes, an' be caught by the forester.

ANSORGE, an old weaver of gigantic stature, who has to bend down to get into the room, puts his head and shoulders in at the door. Long, unkempt hair and beard.

ANSORGE

What's wanted?

BERTHA

Light, if you please.

ANSORGE

[_In a muffled voice, as if speaking' in a sick-room._] There's good daylight yet.

MOTHER BAUMERT

Is we to sit in the dark next?

ANSORGE

I've to do the same mayself.

[_Goes out._

BERTHA

It's easy to see that he's a miser.

EMMA

Well, there's nothin' for it but to sit an' wait his pleasure.

Enter MRS. HEINRICH, a woman of thirty, heavy with child; an expression of torturing anxiety and apprehension on her worn face.

MRS. HEINRICH

Good evenin' t'you all.

MOTHER BAUMERT

Well, Jenny, and what's your news?

MRS. HEINRICH

[_Who limps._] I've got a piece o' glass into my foot.

BERTHA

Come an' sit down, then, an' I'll see if I c'n get it out.

[_MRS. HEINRICH seats herself, BERTHA kneels down, in front of her, and examines her foot._

MOTHER BAUMERT

How are ye all at home, Jenny?

MRS. HEINRICH

[_Breaks out despairingly._] Things is in a terrible way with us!

[_She struggles in vain, against a rush of tears; then weeps silently._

MOTHER BAUMERT

The best thing as could happen to the likes o' us, Jenny, would be if God had pity on us an' took us away out o' this weary world.

MRS. HEINRICH

[_No longer able to control herself, screams, still crying._] My children's starvin'. [_Sobs and moans._] I don't know what to do no more! I c'n work till I drops--I'm more dead'n alive--things don't get different! There's nine hungry mouths to fill! We got a bit o' bread last night, but it wasn't enough even for the two smallest ones. Who was I to give it to, eh? They all cried; Me, me, mother! give it to me!... An' if it's like this while I'm still on my feet, what'll it be when I've to take to bed? Our few taters was washed away. We haven't a thing to put in our mouths.

BERTHA

[_Has removed the bit of glass and washed the wound._] We'll put a rag round it. Emma, see if you can find one.

MOTHER BAUMERT

We're no better off'n you, Jenny.

MRS. HEINRICH

You has your girls, any way. You've a husband as c'n work. Mine was taken with one o' his fits last week again--so bad that I didn't know what to do with him, and was half out o' my mind with fright. And when he's had a turn like that, he can't stir out o' bed under a week.

MOTHER BAUMERT

Mine's no better. He's goin' to pieces, too. He's breathin's bad now as well as his back. An' there's not a farthin' nor a farthin's worth in the house. If he don't bring a few pence with him today, I don't know what we're to do.

EMMA

It's the truth she's tellin' you, Jenny. We had to let father take the little dog with him to-day, to have him killed, that we might get a bite into our stomachs again!

MRS. HEINRICH

Haven't you got as much as a handful o' flour to spare?

MOTHER BAUMERT

An' that we haven't, Jenny. There's not as much as a grain o' salt in the house.

MRS. HEINRICH

Well, then, I don't know ... [_Rises, stands still, brooding._] I don't know what'll be the end o' this! It's more'n I c'n bear. [_Screams in rage and despair._] I'd be contented if it was nothin' but pigs' food!--But I can't go home again empty-handed--that I can't. God forgive me, I see no other way out of it.

[_She limps quickly out._

MOTHER BAUMERT

[_Calls after her in a warning voice._] Jenny, Jenny! don't you be doin' anything foolish, now!

BERTHA

She'll do herself no harm, mother. You needn't be afraid.

EMMA

That's the way she always goes on.

[_Seats herself at the loom and weaves for a few seconds._

AUGUST enters, carrying a tallow candle, and lighting his father, OLD BAUMERT, who follows close behind him, staggering under a heavy bundle of yarn.

MOTHER BAUMERT

Oh, father, where have you been all this long time? Where have you been?

OLD BAUMERT

Come now, mother, don't fall on a man like that. Give me time to get my breath first. An' look who I've brought with me.

MORITZ JAEGER comes stooping in at the low door. Reserve soldier, newly discharged. Middle height, rosy-cheeked, military carriage. His cap on the side of his head, hussar fashion, whole clothes and shoes, a clean shirt without collar. Draws himself up and salutes.

JAEGER

[_In a hearty voice._] Good-evenin', auntie Baumert!

MOTHER BAUMERT

Well, well now! and to think you've got back! An' you've not forgotten us? Take a chair, then, lad.

EMMA

[_Wiping a wooden chair with her apron, and pushing it towards MORITZ._] An' so you've come to see what poor folks is like again, Moritz?

JAEGER

I say, Emma, is it true that you've got a boy nearly old enough to be a soldier? Where did you get hold o' him, eh?

[_BERTHA, having taken the small supply of provisions which her father has brought, puts meat into a saucepan, and shoves it into the oven, while AUGUST lights the fire._

BERTHA

You knew weaver Finger, didn't you?

MOTHER BAUMERT

We had him here in the house with us. He was ready enough to marry her; but he was too far gone in consumption; he was as good as a dead man. It didn't happen for want o' warnin' from me. But do you think she would listen? Not she. Now he's dead an' forgotten long ago, an' she's left with the boy to provide for as best she can. But now tell us how you've been gettin' on, Moritz.

OLD BAUMERT

You've only to look at him, mother, to know that. He's had luck. It'll be about as much as he can do to speak to the likes o' us. He's got clothes like a prince, an' a silver watch, an' thirty shillings in his pocket into the bargain.

JAEGER

[_Stretching himself consequentially, a knowing smile on his face._] I can't complain, I didn't get on so badly in the regiment.

OLD BAUMERT

He was the major's own servant. Just listen to him--he speaks like a gentleman.

JAEGER

I've got so accustomed to it that I can't help it.

MOTHER BAUMERT

Well, now, to think that such a good-for-nothin' as you was should have come to be a rich man. For there wasn't nothin' to be made of you. You would never sit still to wind more than a hank of yarn at a time, that you wouldn't. Off you went to your tomtit boxes an' your robin redbreast snares--they was all you cared about. Isn't it the truth I'm telling?

JAEGER

Yes, yes, auntie, it's true enough. It wasn't only redbreasts. I went after swallows too.

EMMA

Though we were always tellin' you that swallows was poison.

JAEGER

What did I care?--But how have you all been gettin' on, auntie Baumert?

MOTHER BAUMERT

Oh, badly, lad, badly these last four years. I've had the rheumatics--just look at them hands. An' it's more than likely as I've had a stroke o' some kind too, I'm that helpless. I can hardly move a limb, an' nobody knows the pains I suffers.

OLD BAUMERT

She's in a bad way, she is. She'll not hold out long.

BERTHA

We've to dress her in the mornin' an' undress her at night, an' to feed her like a baby.

MOTHER BAUMERT

[_Speaking in a complaining, tearful voice._] Not a thing c'n I do for myself. It's far worse than bein' ill. For it's not only a burden to myself I am, but to every one else. Often and often do I pray to God to take me. For oh! mine's a weary life. I don't know ... p'r'aps they think ... but I'm one that's been a hard worker all my days. An' I've always been able to do my turn too; but now, all at once, [_she vainly attempts to rise_] I can't do nothin'.--I've a good husband an' good children, but to have to sit here and see them...! Look at the girls! There's hardly any blood left in them--faces the colour of a sheet. But on they must work at these weary looms whether they earn enough to keep

theirselves or not. What sort o' life is it they lead? Their feet never off the treadle from year's end to year's end. An' with it all they can't scrape together as much as'll buy them clothes that they can let theirselves be seen in; never a step can they go to church, to hear a word o' comfort. They're liker scarecrows than young girls of fifteen and twenty.

BERTHA

[_At the stove._] It's beginnin' to smoke again!

OLD BAUMERT

There now; look at that smoke. And we can't do nothin' for it. The whole stove's goin' to pieces. We must let it fall, and swallow the soot. We're coughin' already, one worse than the other. We may cough till we choke, or till we cough our lungs up--nobody cares.

JAEGER

But this here is Ansorge's business; he must see to the stove.

BERTHA

He'll see us out o' the house first; he has plenty against us without that.

MOTHER BAUMERT

We've only been in his way this long time past.

OLD BAUMERT

One word of a complaint an' out we go. He's had no rent from us this last half-year.

MOTHER BAUMERT

A well-off man like him needn't be so hard.

OLD BAUMERT

He's no better off than we is, mother. He's hard put to it too, for all he holds his tongue about it.

MOTHER BAUMERT

He's got his house.

OLD BAUMERT

What are you talkin' about, mother? Not one stone in the wall is the man's own.

JAEGER

[_Has seated himself, and taken a short pipe with gay tassels out of one coat-pocket, and a quart bottle of brandy out of another._] Things can't go on like this. I'm dumfoundered when I see the life the people live here. The very dogs in the towns live better.

OLD BAUMERT

[_Eagerly._] That's what I says! Eh? eh? You know it too! But if you say that here, they'll tell you that it's only bad times.

Enter ANSORGE, an earthenware pan with soup in one hand, in the other a half-finished quarter-bushel basket.

ANSORGE

Glad to see you again, Moritz!

JAEGER

Thank you, father Ansorge--same to you!

ANSORGE

[_Shoving his pan into the oven._] Why, lad you look like a duke!

OLD BAUMERT

Show him your watch, Moritz. An' he's got a new suit of clothes, an' thirty shillings cash.

ANSORGE

[_Shaking his head._] Is that so? Well, well!

EMMA

[_Puts the potato-parings into a bag._] I must be off; I'll maybe get a drop o' buttermilk for these.

[_Goes out._

JAEGER

[_The others hanging intently and devoutly on his words._] You know how you all used to be down on me. It was always: Wait, Moritz, till your soldierin' time comes--you'll catch it then. But you see how well I've got on. At the end o' the first half-year I had my good conduct stripes. You've got to be willin'--that's where the secret lies. I brushed the sergeant's boots; I groomed his horse; I fetched his beer. I was as sharp as a needle. Always ready, accoutrements clean and shinin'--first at stables, first at roll-call, first in the saddle. An' when the bugle sounded to the assault--why, then, blood and thunder, and ride to the devil with you!! I was as keen as a pointer. Says I to myself: There's no help for it now, my boy, it's got to be done; and I set my mind to it and did it. Till at last the major said before the whole squadron: There's a hussar now that shows you what a hussar should be!

[_Silence. He lights his pipe._

ANSORGE

[_Shaking his head._] Well, well, well! You had luck with you, Moritz!

[_Sits down on the floor, with his willow twigs beside him, and continues mending the basket, which he holds between his legs._

OLD BAUMERT

Let's hope you've brought some of it to us.--Are we to have a drop to drink your health in?

JAEGER

Of course you are, father Baumert. And when this bottle's done, we'll send for more.

[_He flings a coin on the table._

ANSORGE

[_Open mouthed with amusement._] Oh my! Oh my! What goings on to be sure! Roast meat frizzlin' in the oven! A bottle o' brandy on the table! [_He drinks out of the bottle._] Here's to you, Moritz!--Well, well, well!

[_The bottle circulates freely after this._

OLD BAUMERT

If we could any way have a bit o' meat on Sundays and holidays, instead o' never seein' the sight of it from year's end to year's end! Now we'll have to wait till another poor little dog finds its way into the house like this one did four weeks gone by--an' that's not likely to happen soon again.

ANSORGE

Have you killed the little dog?

OLD BAUMERT

We had to do that or starve.

ANSORGE

Well, well! That's so!

MOTHER BAUMERT

A nice, kind little beast he was, too!

JAEGER

Are you as keen as ever on roast dog hereabouts?

OLD BAUMERT

Lord, if we could only get enough of it!

MOTHER BAUMERT

A nice little bit o' meat like that does you a lot o' good.

OLD BAUMERT

Have you lost the taste for it, Moritz? Stay with us a bit, and it'll soon come back to you.

ANSORGE

[_Sniffing._] Yes, yes! That will be a tasty bite--what a good smell it has!

OLD BAUMERT

[_Sniffing._] Fine as spice, you might say.

ANSORGE

Come, then, Moritz, tell us your opinion, you that's been out and seen the world. Is things at all like to improve for us weavers, eh?

JAEGER

They would need to.

ANSORGE

We're in an awful state here. It's not livin' an' it's not dyin'. A man fights to the bitter end, but he's bound to be beat at last--to be left without a roof over his head, you may say without ground under his feet. As long as he can work at the loom he can earn some sort o poor, miserable livin'. But it's many a day since I've been able to get that sort o' job. Now I tries to put a bite into my mouth with this here basket-mak-in'. I sits at it late into the night, and by the time I tumbles into bed I've earned three-halfpence. I puts it to you as knows things, if a man can live on that, when everything's so dear? Nine shillin' goes in one lump for house tax, three shillin' for land tax, nine shillin' for mortgage interest--that makes one pound one. I may reckon my year's earnin' at just double that money, and that leaves me twenty-one shillin' for a whole year's food, an' fire, an' clothes, an' shoes; and I've got to keep up some sort of a place to live in. An' there's odds an' ends. Is it a wonder if I'm behindhand with my interest payments?

OLD BAUMERT

Some one would need to go to Berlin an' tell the King how hard put to it we are.

JAEGER

Little good that would do, father Baumert. There's been plenty written about it in the news-papers. But the rich people, they can turn and twist things round ... as cunning as the devil himself.

OLD BAUMERT

[_Shaking his head._] To think they've no more sense than that in Berlin.

ANSORGE

And is it really true, Moritz? Is there no law to help us? If a man hasn't been able to scrape together enough to pay his mortgage interest, though he's worked the very skin off his hands, must his house be taken from him? The peasant that's lent the money on it, he wants his rights--what else can you look for from him? But what's to be the end of it all, I don't know.--If I'm put out o' the house ... [_In a voice choked by tears._] I was born here, and here my father sat at his loom for more than forty year. Many was the time he said to mother: Mother, when I'm gone, keep hold o' the house. I've worked hard for it. Every nail means a night's weavin', every plank a year's dry bread. A man would think that ...

JAEGER

They're just as like to take the last bite out of your mouth--that's what they are.

ANSORGE

Well, well, well! I would rather be carried out than have to walk out now in my old days. Who minds dyin'? My father, he was glad to die. At the very end he got frightened, but I crept into bed beside him, an' he quieted

down again. Think of it; I was a lad of thirteen then. I was tired and fell asleep beside him--I knew no better--and when I woke he was quite cold.

MOTHER BAUMERT

[_After a pause._] Give Ansorge his soup out o' the oven, Bertha.

BERTHA

Here, father Ansorge, it'll do you good.

ANSORGE

[_Eating and shedding tears._] Well, well, well!

[_OLD BAUMERT has begun to eat the meat out of the saucepan._

MOTHER BAUMERT

Father, father, can't you have patience an' let Bertha serve it up properly?

OLD BAUMERT

[_Chewing._] It's two years now since I took the sacrament. I went straight after that an' sold my Sunday coat, an' we bought a good bit o' pork, an' since then never a mouthful of meat has passed my lips till to-night.

JAEGER

_We_ don't need no meat! The manufacturers eats it for us. It's the fat o' the land _they_ lives on. Whoever don't believe that has only to go down to Bielau and Peterswaldau. He'll see fine things there--palace upon palace, with towers and iron railings and plate-glass windows. Who do they all belong to? Why, of course, the manufacturers! No signs of bad times there! Baked and boiled and fried--horses and carriages and governesses--they've money to pay for all that and goodness knows how much more. They're swelled out to burstin' with pride and good livin'.

ANSORGE

Things was different in my young days. Then the manufacturers let the weaver have his share. Now they keeps everything to theirselves. An' would you like to know what's at the bottom of it all? It's that the fine folks nowadays believes neither in God nor devil. What do they care about commandments or punishments? And so they steals our last scrap o' bread, an' leaves us no chance of earnin' the barest living. For it's their fault. If our manufacturers was good men, there would be no bad times for us.

JAEGER

Listen, then, and I'll read you something that will please you. [_He takes one or two loose papers from his pocket._] I say, August, run and fetch another quart from the public-house. Eh, boy, do you laugh all day long?

MOTHER BAUMERT

No one knows why, but our August's always happy--grins an' laughs, come what may. Off with you then, quick! [_Exit AUGUST with the empty brandy-bottle._] You've got something good now, eh, father?

OLD BAUMERT

[_Still chewing; his spirits are rising from the effect of food and drink._] Moritz, you're the very man we want. You can read an' write. You understand the weavin' trade, and you've a heart to feel for the poor weavers' sufferin's. You should stand up for us here.

JAEGER

I'd do that quick enough! There's nothing I'd like better than to give the manufacturers round here a bit of a fright--dogs that they are! I'm an easy-goin' fellow, but let me once get worked up into a real rage, and I'll take Dreissiger in the one hand and Dittrich in the other, and knock their heads together till the sparks fly out o' their eyes.--If we could only arrange all to join together, we'd soon give the manufacturers a proper lesson ... we wouldn't need no King an' no Government ... all we'd have to do would be to say: We wants this and that, and we don't want the other thing. There would be a change of days then. As soon as they see that there's some pluck in us, they'll cave in. I know the rascals; they're a pack o' cowardly hounds.

MOTHER BAUMERT

There's some truth in what you say. I'm not a bad woman. I've always been the one to say as how there must be rich folks as well as poor. But when things come to such a pass as this ...

JAEGER

The devil may take them all, for what I care. It would be no more than they deserves.

[_OLD BAUMERT has quietly gone out._

BERTHA

Where's father?

MOTHER BAUMERT

I don't know where he can have gone.

BERTHA

Do you think he's not been able to stomach the meat, with not gettin' none for so long?

MOTHER BAUMERT

[_In distress, crying._] There now, there! He's not even able to keep it down when he's got it. Up it comes again, the only bite o' good food as he's tasted this many a day.

Re-enter OLD BAUMERT, crying with rage.

OLD BAUMERT

It's no good! I'm too far gone! Now that I've at last got hold of somethin' with a taste in it, my stomach won't keep it.

[_He sits down on the bench by the stove crying._

JAEGER

[_With a sudden violent ebullition of rage._] An' yet there's people not far from here, justices they call themselves too, over-fed brutes, that have nothing to do all the year round but invent new ways of wastin' their time. An' these people say that the weavers would be quite well off if only they wasn't so lazy.

ANSORGE

The men as says that are no men at all, they're monsters.

JAEGER

Never mind, father Ansorge; we're makin' the place hot for 'em. Becker and I have been and given Dreissiger a piece of our mind, and before we came away we sang him "Bloody Justice."

ANSORGE

Good Lord! Is that the song?

JAEGER

Yes; I have it here.

ANSORGE

They calls it Dreissiger's song, don't they?

JAEGER

I'll read it to you,

MOTHER BAUMERT

Who wrote it?

JAEGER

That's what nobody knows. Now listen.

[_He reads, hesitating like a schoolboy, with incorrect accentuation, but unmistakably strong feeling. Despair, suffering, rage, hatred, thirst for revenge, all find utterance._

The justice to us weavers dealt Is bloody, cruel, and hateful; Our life's one torture, long drawn out: For Lynch law we'd be grateful.

Stretched on the rack day after day, Hearts sick and bodies aching, Our heavy sighs their witness bear To spirit slowly breaking.

[_The words of the song make a strong impression on OLD BAUMERT. Deeply agitated, he struggles against the temptation to interrupt JAEGER. At last he can keep quiet no longer._

OLD BAUMERT [_To his wife, half laughing, half crying, stammering._] Stretched on the rack day after day. Whoever wrote that, mother, wrote the truth. You can bear witness ... eh, how does it go? "Our heavy sighs their witness bear" ... What's the rest?

JAEGER

"To spirit slowly breaking."

OLD BAUMERT

You know the way we sigh, mother, day and night, sleepin' and wakin'.

[_ANSORGE had stopped working, and cowers on the floor, strongly agitated. MOTHER BAUMERT and BERTHA wipe their eyes frequently during the course of the reading._

JAEGER

[_Continues to read._]

The Dreissigers true hangmen are, Servants no whit behind them; Masters and men with one accord Set on the poor to grind them.

You villains all, you brood of hell ...

OLD BAUMERT

[_Trembling with rage, stamping on the floor._] Yes, brood of hell!!!

JAEGER

[_Reads._]

You fiends in fashion human, A curse will fall on all like you, Who prey on man and woman.

ANSORGE

Yes, yes, a curse upon them!

OLD BAUMERT

[_Clenching his fist, threateningly._] You prey on man and woman.

JAEGER

[_Reads._]

The suppliant knows he asks in vain, Vain every word that's spoken. "If not content, then go and starve-- Our rules cannot be broken."

OLD BAUMERT

What is it? "The suppliant knows he asks in vain"? Every word of it's true ... every word ... as true as the Bible. He knows he asks in vain.

ANSORGE

Yes, yes! It's all no good.

JAEGER

[_Reads._]

Then think of all our woe and want, O ye who hear this ditty! Our struggle vain for daily bread Hard hearts would move to pity.

But pity's what _you've_ never known, You'd take both skin and clothing, You cannibals, whose cruel deeds Fill all good men with loathing.

OLD BAUMERT

[_Jumps up, beside himself with excitement._] Both skin and clothing. It's true, it's all true! Here I stands, Robert Baumert, master-weaver of

Kaschbach. Who can bring up anything against me?... I've been an honest, hard-workin' man all my life long, an' look at me now! What have I to show for it? Look at me! See what they've made of me! Stretched on the rack day after day, [_He holds out his arms._] Feel that! Skin and bone! "You villains all, you brood of hell!!"

[_He sinks down on a chair, weeping with rage and despair._

ANSORGE

[_Flings his basket from him into a corner, rises, his whole body trembling with rage, gasps._] An' the time's come now for a change, I say. We'll stand it no longer! We'll stand it no longer! Come what may!

END OF THE SECOND ACT

THE THIRD ACT

The common-room of the principal public-house in Peterswaldau. A large room with a raftered roof supported by a central wooden pillar, round which a table runs. In the back mall, a little to the right of the pillar, is the entrance-door, through the opening of which the spacious lobby or outer room is seen, with barrels and brewing utensils. To the right of this door, in the corner, is the bar--a high wooden counter with receptacles for beer-mugs, glasses, etc.; a cupboard with rows of brandy and liqueur bottles on the wall behind, and between counter and cupboard a narrow space for the barkeeper. In front of the bar stands a table with a gay-coloured cover, a pretty lamp hanging above it, and several cane chairs placed around it. Not far off, in the right wall, is a door with the inscription: Bar Parlour. Nearer the front on the same side an old eight-day clock stands ticking. At the back, to the left of the entrance-door, is a table with bottles and glasses, and beyond this, in the corner, is the great tile-oven. In the left wall there are three small windows. Below them runs a long bench; and in front of each stands a large oblong wooden table, with the end towards the wall. There are benches with backs along the sides of these tables, and at the end of each facing the window stands a wooden chair. The walls are washed blue and decorated with advertisements, coloured prints and oleographs, among the latter a portrait of Frederick William IV.

WELZEL, the publican, a good-natured giant, upwards of fifty, stands behind the counter, letting beer run from a barrel into a glass.

MRS. WELZEL is ironing by the stove. She is a handsome, tidily dressed woman in her thirty-fifth year.

ANNA WELZEL, a good-looking girl of seventeen, with a quantity of beautiful, fair, reddish hair, sits, neatly dressed, with her embroidery, at the table with the coloured cover. She looks up from her work for a moment and listens, as the sound of a funeral hymn sung by school-children is heard in the distance.

WIEGAND, the joiner, in his working clothes, is sitting at the same table, with a glass of Bavarian beer before him. His face shows that he understands what the world requires of a man if he is to attain his ends--namely, craftiness, swiftness, and relentless pushing forward.

A COMMERCIAL TRAVELLER is seated at the pillar-table, vigorously masticating a beef-steak. He is of middle height, stout and thriving-looking, inclined to jocosity, lively, and impudent. He is dressed in the fashion of the day, and his portmanteau, pattern-case, umbrella, overcoat, and travelling rug lie on chairs beside him.

WELZEL

[_Carrying a glass of beer to the TRAVELLER, but addressing WIEGAND._] The devil's broke loose in Peterswaldau to-day.

WIEGAND

[_In a sharp, shrill voice._] That's because it's delivery day at Dreissiger's.

MRS. WELZEL

But they don't generally make such an awful row.

WIEGAND

It's may be because of the two hundred new weavers that he's going to take on.

MRS. WELZEL

[_At her ironing._] Yes, yes, that'll be it. If he wants two hundred, six hundred's sure to have come. There's no lack of _them_.

WIEGAND

No, they'll last. There's no fear of their dying out, let them be ever so badly off. They bring more children into the world than we know what to do with. [_The strains of the funeral hymn are suddenly heard more distinctly._] There's a funeral to-day too. Weaver Nentwich is dead, you know.

WELZEL

He's been long enough about it. He's been goin' about like a livin' ghost this many a long day.

WIEGAND

You never saw such a little coffin, Welzel; it was the tiniest, miserablest little thing I ever glued together. And what a corpse! It didn't weigh ninety pounds.

TRAVELLER

[_His mouth full._] What I don't understand's this.... Take up whatever paper you like and you'll find the most heartrending accounts of the destitution among the weavers. You get the impression that three-quarters of

the people in this neighbourhood are starving. Then you come and see a funeral like what's going on just now. I met it as I came into the village. Brass band, schoolmaster, school children, pastor, and such a procession behind them that you would think it was the Emperor of China that was getting buried. If the people have money to spend on this sort of thing, well...! [_He takes a drink of beer; puts down the glass; suddenly and jocosely._] What do you say to it, Miss? Don't you agree with me?

[ANNA _gives an embarrassed laugh, and goes on working busily._

TRAVELLER

Now, I'll take a bet that these are slippers for papa.

WELZEL

You're wrong, then; I wouldn't put such things on my feet.

TRAVELLER

You don't say so! Now, I would give half of what I'm worth if these slippers were for me.

MRS. WELZEL

Oh, he don't know nothing about such things.

WIEGAND

[_Has coughed once or twice, moved his chair, and prepared himself to speak._] You were sayin', sir, that you wondered to see such a funeral as this. I tell you, and Mrs. Welzel here will bear me out, that it's quite a small funeral.

TRAVELLER

But, my good man ... what a monstrous lot of money it must cost! Where does all that come from?

WIEGAND

If you'll excuse me for saying so, sir, there's a deal of foolishness among the poorer working people hereabouts. They have a kind of inordinate idea, if I may say so, of the respect an' duty an' honour they're bound to show to such as is taken from their midst. And when it comes to be a case of parents, then there's no bounds whatever to their superstitiousness. The children and the nearest family scrapes together every farthing they can call their own, an' what's still wanting, that they borrow from some rich man. They run themselves into debt over head and ears; they're owing money to the pastor, to the sexton, and to all concerned. Then there's the victuals, an' the drink, an' such like. No, sir, I'm far from speaking against dutifulness to parents; but it's too much when it goes the length of the mourners having to bear the weight of it for the rest of their lives.

TRAVELLER

But surely the pastor might reason them out of such foolishness.

WIEGAND

Begging your pardon, sir, but I must mention that every little place hereabouts has its church an' its reverend pastor to support. These honourable gentlemen has their advantages from big funerals. The larger the attendance is, the larger the offertory is bound to be. Whoever knows the circumstances connected with the working classes here, sir, will assure you that the pastors are strong against quiet funerals.

Enter HORNIG, the rag dealer, a little bandy-legged old man, with a strap round his chest.

HORNIG

Good-mornin', ladies and gentlemen! A glass o' schnapps, if you please, Mr. Welzel. Has the young mistress anything for me to-day? I've got beautiful ribbons in my cart, Miss Anna, an' tapes, an' garters, an' the very best of pins an' hairpins an' hooks an' eyes. An' all in exchange for a few rags. [_In a changed voice._] An'out of them rags fine white paper's to be made, for your sweetheart to write you a letter on.

ANNA

Thank you, but I've nothing to do with sweethearts.

MRS. WELZEL

[_Putting a bolt into her iron._] No, she's not that kind. She'll not hear of marrying.

TRAVELLER

[_Jumps up, affecting delighted surprise, goes forward to ANNA'S table, and holds out his hand to her across it._] That's sensible, Miss. You and I think alike in this matter. Give me your hand on it. We'll both remain single.

ANNA

[_Blushing scarlet, gives him her hand._] But you are married already!

TRAVELLER

Not a bit of it. I only pretend to be. You think so because I wear a ring. I only have it on my finger to protect my charms against shameless attacks. I'm not afraid of you, though. [_He puts the ring into his pocket._] But tell me, truly, Miss, are you quite determined never, never, never, to marry?

ANNA

[_Shakes her head._] Oh, get along with you!

MRS. WELZEL

You may trust her to remain single unless something very extra good turns up.

TRAVELLER

And why shouldn't it? I know of a rich Silesian proprietor who married his mother's lady's maid. And there's Dreissiger, the rich

manufacturer, his wife is an innkeeper's daughter too, and not half so pretty as you, Miss, though she rides in her carriage now, with servants in livery. And why not? [_He marches about, stretching himself, and stamping his feet._] Let me have a cup of coffee, please.

Enter ANSORGE and OLD BAUMERT, each with a bundle. They seat themselves meekly and silently beside HORNIG, at the front table to the left.

WELZEL

How are you, father Ansorge? Glad to see you once again.

HORNIG

Yes, it's not often as you crawl down from that smoky old nest.

ANSORGE

[_Visibly embarrassed, mumbles._] I've been fetchin' myself a web again.

BAUMER

He's goin' to work at a shilling the web.

ANSORGE

I wouldn't ha' done it, but there's no more to be made now by basket-weaving'.

WIEGAND

It's always better than nothin'. He does it only to give you employment. I know Dreissiger very well. When I was up there takin' out his double windows last week we were talkin' about it, him and me. It's out of pity that he does it.

ANSORGE

Well, well, well! That may be so.

WELZEL

[_Setting a glass of schnapps on the table before each of the weavers._] Here you are, then. I say, Ansorge, how long is it since you had a shave? The gentleman over there would like to know.

TRAVELLER

[_Calls across._] Now, Mr. Welzel, you know I didn't say that. I was only struck by the venerable appearance of the master-weaver. It isn't often one sees such a gigantic figure.

ANSORGE

[_Scratching his head, embarrassed._] Well, well!

TRAVELLER

Such specimens of primitive strength are rare nowadays. We're all rubbed smooth by civilisation ... but I can still take pleasure in nature untampered with.... These bushy eyebrows! That tangled length of beard!

HORNIG

Let me tell you, sir, that them people haven't the money to pay a barber, and as to a razor for themselves, that's altogether beyond them. What grows, grows. They haven't nothing to throw away on their outsides.

TRAVELLER

My good friend, you surely don't imagine that I would ... [_Aside to WELZEL._] Do you think I might offer the hairy one a glass of beer?

WELZEL

No, no; you mustn't do that. He wouldn't take it. He's got some queer ideas in that head o' his.

TRAVELLER

All right, then, I won't. With your permission, Miss. [_He seats himself at ANNA'S table._] I declare, Miss, that I've not been able to take my eyes off your hair since I came in--such glossy softness, such a splendid quantity! [_Ecstatically kisses his finger-tips._] And what a colour!... like ripe wheat. Come to Berlin with that hair and you'll create no end of a sensation. On my honour, with hair like that you may go to Court.... [_Leans back, looking at it._] Glorious, simply glorious!

WIEGAND

They've given her a fine name because of it.

TRAVELLER

And what may that be?

ANNA

[_Laughing quietly to herself._] Oh, don't listen to that!

HORNIG

The chestnut filly, isn't it?

WELZEL

Come now, we've had enough o' this. I'm not goin' to have the girl's head turned altogether. She's had a-plenty of silly notions put into it already. She'll hear of nothing under a count today, and to-morrow it'll be a prince.

MRS. WELZEL

Don't abuse the girl, father. There's no harm in wantin' to rise in the world. It's as well that people don't all think as you do, or nobody would get on at all. If Dreissiger's grandfather had been of your way of thinkin', they would be poor weavers still. And now they're rollin' in wealth. An' look at old Tromtra. He was nothing but a weaver, too, and now he owns twelve estates, an' he's been made a nobleman into the bargain.

WIEGAND

Yes, Welzel, you must look at the thing fairly. Your wife's in the right this time. I can answer for that. I'd never be where I am, with seven workmen under me, if I had thought like you.

HORNIG

Yes, you understand the way to get on; that your worst enemy must allow. Before the weaver has taken to bed, you're gettin' his coffin ready.

WIEGAND

A man must stick to his business if he's to get on.

HORNIG

No fear of you for that. You know before the doctor when death's on the way to knock at a weaver's door.

WIEGAND

[_Attempting to laugh, suddenly furious._] And you know better'n the police where the thieves are among the weavers, that keep back two or three bobbins full every week. It's rags you ask for but you don't say No, if there's a little yarn among them.

HORNIG

An' your corn grows in the churchyard. The more that are bedded on the sawdust, the better for you. When you see the rows o' little children's graves, you pats yourself on the belly and says you: This has been a good year; the little brats have fallen like cockchafers off the trees. I can allow myself a quart extra in the week again.

WIEGAND

And supposin' this is all true, it still don't make me a receiver of stolen goods.

HORNIG

No; perhaps the worst you do is to send in an account twice to the rich fustian manufacturers, or to help yourself to a plank or two at Dreissiger's when there's building goin' on and the moon happens not to be shinin'.

WIEGAND

[_Turning his back._] Talk to any one you like, but not to me. [_Then suddenly._] Hornig the liar!

HORNIG

Wiegand the coffin-jobber!

WIEGAND

[_To the rest of the company._] He knows charms for bewitching cattle.

HORNIG

If you don't look out, I'll try one of 'em on you.

[_WIEGAND turns pale._

MRS. WELZEL

[_Had gone out; now returns with the TRAVELLER'S coffee; in the act of putting it on the table._] Perhaps you would rather have it in the parlour, sir?

TRAVELLER

Most certainly not! [_With a languishing look at ANNA._] I could sit here till I die.

Enter a YOUNG FORESTER and a PEASANT, the latter carrying a whip. They wish the others "Good Morning," _and remain standing at the counter._

PEASANT

Two brandies, if you please.

WELZEL

Good-morning to you, gentlemen.

[_He pours out their beverage; the two touch glasses, take a mouthful, and then set the glasses down on the counter._

TRAVELLER

[_To FORESTER._] Come far this morning, sir?

FORESTER

From Steinseiffersdorf--that's a good step.

Two old WEAVERS enter, and seat themselves beside ANSORGE, BAUMERT, and HORNIG.

TRAVELLER

Excuse me asking, but are you in Count Hochheim's service?

FORESTER

No. I'm in Count Keil's.

TRAVELLER

Yes, yes, of course--that was what I meant. One gets confused here among all the counts and barons and other gentlemen. It would take a giant's memory to remember them all. Why do you carry an axe, if I may ask?

FORESTER

I've just taken this one from a man who was stealing wood.

OLD BAUMERT

Yes, their lordships are mighty strict with us about a few sticks for the fire.

TRAVELLER

You must allow that if every one were to help himself to what he wanted ...

OLD BAUMERT

By your leave, sir, but there's a difference made here as elsewhere between the big an' the little thieves. There's some here as deals in stolen wood wholesale, and grows rich on it. But if a poor weaver ...

FIRST OLD WEAVER

[_Interrupts BAUMERT._] We're forbid to take a single branch; but their lordships, they take the very skin off of us--we've assurance money to

pay, an' spinning-money, an' charges in kind--we must go here an' go there, an' do so an' so much field work, all willy-nilly.

ANSORGE

That's just how it is--what the manufacturer leaves us, their lordships takes from us.

SECOND OLD WEAVER

[_Has taken a seat at the next table._] I've said it to his lordship hisself. By your leave, my lord, says I, it's not possible for me to work on the estate so many days this year. I comes right out with it. For why--my own bit of ground, my lord, it's been next to carried away by the rains. I've to work night and day if I'm to live at all. For oh, what a flood that was...! There I stood an' wrung my hands, an' watched the good soil come pourin' down the hill, into the very house! And all that dear, fine seed!... I could do nothin' but roar an' cry until I couldn't see out o' my eyes for a week. And then I had to start an' wheel eighty heavy barrow-loads of earth up that hill, till my back was all but broken.

PEASANT

[_Roughly._] You weavers here make such an awful outcry. As if we hadn't all to put up with what Heaven sends us. An' if you _are_ badly off just now, whose fault is it but your own? What did you do when trade was good? Drank an' squandered all you made. If you had saved a bit then, you'd have it to fall back on now when times is bad, and not need to be goin' stealin' yarn and wood.

FIRST YOUNG WEAVER

[_Standing with several comrades in the lobby or outer room, calls in at the door._] What's a peasant but a peasant, though he lies in bed till nine?

FIRST OLD WEAVER

The peasant an' the count, it's the same story with 'em both. Says the peasant when a weaver wants a house: I'll give you a little bit of a hole to live in, an' you'll pay me so much rent in money, an' the rest of it you'll make up by helpin' me to get in my hay an' my corn--and if that don't please you, why, then you may go elsewhere. He tries another, and to the second he says the same as to the first.

BAUMERT

[_Angrily._] The weaver's like a bone that every dog takes a gnaw at.

PEASANT

[_Furious._] You starvin' curs, you're no good for anything. Can you yoke a plough? Can you draw a straight furrow or throw a bundle of sheaves on to a cart. You're fit for nothing but to idle about an' go after the women. A pack of scoundrelly ne'er-do-wells!

[_He has paid and now goes out._

[_The FORESTER follows, laughing. WELZEL, the joiner, and MRS. WELZEL laugh aloud; the TRAVELLER laughs to himself. Then there is a moment's silence._

HORNIG

A peasant like that's as stupid as his own ox. As if I didn't know all about the distress in the villages round here. Sad sights I've seen! Four and five lyin' naked on one sack of straw.

TRAVELLER

[_In a mildly remonstrative tone._] Allow me to remark, my good man, that there's a great difference of opinion as to the amount of distress here in the Eulengebirge. If you can read....

HORNIG

I can read straight off, as well as you. An' I know what I've seen with my own eyes. It would be queer if a man that's travelled the country with a pack on his back these forty years an' more didn't know something about it. There was the Fullers, now. You saw the children scrapin' about among the dung-heaps with the peasants' geese. The people up there died naked, on the bare stone floors. In their sore need they ate the stinking weavers' glue. Hunger carried 'em off by the hundred.

TRAVELLER

You must be aware, since you are able to read, that strict investigation has been made by the Government, and that....

HORNIG

Yes, yes, we all know what that means. They send a gentleman that knows all about it already better nor if he had seen it, an' he goes about a bit in the village where the brook flows broad an' the best houses is. He don't want to dirty his shinin' boots. Thinks he to hisself: All the rest'll be the same as this. An' so he steps into his carriage, an' drives away home again, an' then writes to Berlin that there's no distress in the place at all. If he had but taken the trouble to go higher up into a village like that, to where the stream comes in, or across the stream on to the narrow side--or, better still, if he'd gone up to the little out-o'-the-way hovels on the hill above, some of 'em that black an' tumble-down as it would be the waste of a good match to set fire to 'em--it's another kind o' report he'd have sent to Berlin. They should ha' come to me, these government gentlemen that wouldn't believe there was no distress here. I would ha' shown 'em something. I'd have opened their eyes for 'em in some of these starvation holes.

[_The strains of the Weavers' Song are heard, sung outside._

WELZEL

There they are, roaring at that devil's song again.

WIEGAND

They're turning the whole place upside down.

MRS. WELZEL

You'd think there was something in the air.

JAEGER and BECKER arm in arm, at the head of a troop of young weavers, march noisily through the outer room and enter the bar.

JAEGER

Halt! To your places!

[_The new arrivals sit down at the various tables, and begin to talk to other weavers already seated there._

HORNIG

[_Calls out to BECKER._] What's up now, Becker, that you've got together a crowd like this?

BECKER

[_Significantly._] Who knows but something may be goin' to happen? Eh, Moritz?

HORNIG

Come, come, lads. Don't you be a-gettin' of yourselves into mischief.

BECKER

Blood's flowed already. Would you like to see it?

[_He pulls up his sleeve and shows bleeding tattoo-marks on the upper part of his arm. Many of the other young weavers do the same._

BECKER

We've been at barber Schmidt's gettin' ourselves vaccinated.

HORNIG

Now the thing's explained. Little wonder there's such an uproar in the place, with a band of young rapscallions like you paradin' round.

JAEGER

[_Consequentially, in a loud voice._] You may bring two quarts at once, Welzel! I pay. Perhaps you think I haven't got the needful. You're wrong, then. If we wanted we could sit an' drink your best brandy an' swill coffee till to-morrow morning with any bagman in the land.

[_Laughter among the young weavers._

TRAVELLER

[_Affecting comic surprise._] Is the young gentleman kind enough to take notice of me?

[_Host, hostess, and their daughter, WIEGAND, and the TRAVELLER all laugh._

JAEGER

If the cap fits, wear it.

TRAVELLER

Your affairs seem to be in a thriving condition, young man, if I may be allowed to say so.

JAEGER

I can't complain. I'm a traveller in made-up goods. I go shares with the manufacturers. The nearer starvation the weaver is, the better I fare. His want butters my bread.

BECKER

Well done, Moritz! You gave it him that time. Here's to you!

[_WELZEL has brought the corn-brandy. On his way back to the counter he stops, turns round slowly, and stands, an embodiment of phlegmatic strength, facing the weavers._

WELZEL

[_Calmly but emphatically._] You let the gentleman alone. He's done you no harm.

YOUNG WEAVERS

And we're doing him no harm.

[_MRS. WELZEL has exchanged a few words with the TRAVELLER. She takes the cup with the remains of his coffee and carries it into the parlour. The TRAVELLER follows her amidst the laughter of the weavers._

YOUNG WEAVERS

[_Singing._] "The Dreissigers the hangmen are, Servants no whit behind them."

WELZEL

Hush-sh! Sing that song anywhere else you like, but not in my house.

FIRST OLD WEAVER

He's quite right. Stop that singin', lads.

BECKER

[_Roars._] But we must march past Dreissiger's, boys, and let him hear it ones more.

WIEGAND

You'd better take care--you may march once too often!

[_Laughter and cries of_ Ho, ho!

WITTIG has entered; a grey-haired old smith, bareheaded, with leather apron and wooden shoes, sooty from the smithy. He is standing at the counter waiting for his schnapps.

WITTIG

Let 'em go on with their doin's. The dogs as barks most, bites least.

OLD WEAVERS

Wittig, Wittig!

WITTIG

Here he is. What do you want with him?

OLD WEAVERS

"It's Wittig!"--"Wittig, Wittig!"--"Come here, Wittig."--"Sit beside us, Wittig."

WITTIG

Do you think I would sit beside a set of rascals like you?

JAEGER

Come and take a glass with us.

WITTIG

Keep your brandy to yourselves. I pay for my own drink. [_Takes his glass and sits down beside BAUMERT and ANSORGE. Clapping the latter on the stomach._] What's the weavers' food so nice? Sauerkraut and roasted lice!

OLD BAUMERT

[_Drunk with excitement._] But what would you say now if they'd made up their minds as how they would put up with it no longer.

WITTIG

[_With pretended astonishment, staring open-mouthed at the old weaver._] Heinerle! you don't mean to tell me that that's you? [_Laughs immoderately._] O Lord, O Lord! I could laugh myself to death. Old Baumert risin' in rebellion! We'll have the tailors at it next, and then there'll be a rebellion among the baa-lambs, and the rats and the mice. Damn it all, but we'll see some sport.

[_He nearly splits with laughter._

OLD BAUMERT

You needn't go on like that, Wittig. I'm the same man I've always been. I still say 'twould be better if things could be put right peaceably.

WITTIG

Rot! How could it be done peaceably? Did they do it peaceably in France? Did Robespeer tickle the rich men's palms? No! It was: Away with them, every one! To the gilyoteen with 'em! Allongs onfong! You've got your work before you. The geese'll not fly ready roasted into your mouths.

OLD BAUMERT

If I could make even half a livin' ...

FIRST OLD WEAVER

The water's up to our chins now, Wittig.

SECOND OLD WEAVER

We're afraid to go home. It's all the same whether we works or whether we lies abed; it's starvation both ways.

FIRST OLD WEAVER

A man's like to go mad at home.

OLD ANSORGE

I've come to that pass now that I don't care how things goes.

OLD WEAVERS

[_With increasing excitement._] "We've no peace anywhere."--"We've no spirit left to work."--"Up with us in Steenkunzendorf you can see a weaver sittin' by the stream washin' hisself the whole day long, naked as God made him. It's driven him clean out of his mind."

THIRD OLD WEAVER

[_Moved by the spirit, stands up and begins to "speak with tongues," stretching out his hand threateningly._] Judgement is at hand! Have no dealings with the rich and the great! Judgement is at hand! The Lord God of Sabaoth ...

[_Some of the weavers laugh. He is pulled down on to his seat._

WELZEL

That's a chap that can't stand a single glass--he gets wild at once.

THIRD OLD WEAVER

[_Jumps up again._] But they--they believe not in God, not in hell, not in heaven. They mock at religion....

FIRST OLD WEAVER

Come, come now, that's enough!

BECKER

You let him do his little bit o' preaching. There's many a one would be the better for takin' it to heart.

VOICES

[_In excited confusion._] "Let him alone!" "Let him speak!"

THIRD OLD WEAVER

[_Raising his voice._] But hell is opened, saith the Lord; its jaws are gaping wide, to swallow up all those that oppress the afflicted and pervert judgement in the cause of the poor. [_Wild excitement._]

THIRD OLD WEAVER

[_Suddenly declaiming schoolboy fashion._]

When one has thought upon it well, It's still more difficult to tell
Why they the linen-weaver's work despise.

BECKER

But we're fustian-weavers, man.

[_Laughter._

HORNIG

The linen-weavers is ever so much worse off than you. They're wanderin' about among the hills like ghosts. You people here have still got the pluck left in you to kick up a row.

WITTIG

Do you suppose the worst's over here? It won't be long till the manufacturers drain away that little bit of strength they still has left in their bodies.

BECKER

You know what he said: It will come to the weavers workin' for a bite of bread.

[_Uproar._

SEVERAL OLD AND YOUNG WEAVERS

Who said that?

BECKER

Dreissiger said it.

A YOUNG WEAVER

The damned rascal should be hung up by the heels.

JAEGER

Look here, Wittig. You've always jawed such a lot about the French Revolution, and a good deal too about your own doings. A time may be coming, and that before long, when every one will have a chance to show whether he's a braggart or a true man.

WITTIG

[_Flaring up angrily._] Say another word if you dare! Has you heard the whistle o' bullets? Has you done outpost duty in an enemy's country?

JAEGER

You needn't get angry about it. We're comrades. I meant no harm.

WITTIG

None of your comradeship for me, you impudent young fool.

Enter KUTSCHE, the policeman.

SEVERAL VOICES

Hush--sh! Police!

[_This calling goes on for some time, till at last there is complete silence, amidst which KUTSCHE takes his place at the central pillar table._

KUTSCHE

A small brandy, please.

[_Again complete silence._]

WITTIG

I suppose you've come to see if we're all behavin' ourselves, Kutsche?

KUTSCHE

[_Paying no attention to WITTIG._] Good-morning, Mr. Wiegand.

WIEGAND

[_Still in the corner in front of the counter._] Good morning t'you.

KUTSCHE

How's trade?

WIEGAND

Thank you, much as usual.

BECKER

The chief constable's sent him to see if we're spoilin' our stomach on these big wages we're gettin'.

[_Laughter._

JAEGER

I say, Welzel, you will tell him how we've been feastin' on roast pork an' sauce an' dumplings and sauerkraut, and now we're sittin' at our champagne wine.

[_Laughter._

WELZEL.

The world's upside down with them to-day.

KUTSCHE

An' even if you had the champagne wine and the roast meat, you wouldn't be satisfied. I've to get on without champagne wine as well as you.

BECKER

[_Referring to KUTSCHE'S nose._] He waters his beet-root with brandy and gin. An' it thrives on it too.

[_Laughter._

WITTIG

A p'liceman like that has a hard life. Now it's a starving beggar boy he has to lock up, then it's a pretty weaver girl he has to lead astray; then he has to get roarin' drunk an' beat his wife till she goes screamin' to the neighbours for help; and there's the ridin' about on horseback and the lyin' in bed till nine--nay, faith, but it's no easy job!

KUTSCHE

Jaw away; you'll jaw a rope round your neck in time. It's long been known what sort of a fellow you are. The magistrates knows all about that rebellious tongue o' yours, I know who'll drink wife and child into the poorhouse an' himself into gaol before long, who it is that'll go on agitatin' and agitatin' till he brings down judgment on himself and all concerned.

WITTIG

[_Laughs bitterly._] It's true enough--no one knows what'll be the end of it. You may be right yet. [_Bursts out in fury._] But if it does come to that, I know who I've got to thank for it, who it is that's blabbed to the manufacturers an' all the gentlemen round, an' blackened my character to that extent that they never give me a hand's turn of work to do--an' set the peasants an' the millers against me, so that I'm often a whole week without a horse to shoe or a wheel to put a tyre on. I know who's done it. I once pulled the damned brute off his horse, because he was givin' a little stupid boy the most

awful flogging for stealin' a few unripe pears. But I tell you this, Kutsche, and you know me--if you get me put into prison, you may make your own will. If I hears as much as a whisper of it. I'll take the first thing as comes handy, whether it's a horseshoe or a hammer, a wheel-spoke or a pail; I'll get hold of you if I've to drag you out of bed from beside your wife, and I'll beat in your brains, as sure as my name's Wittig.

[_He has jumped up and is going to rush at KUTSCHE._]

OLD AND YOUNG WEAVERS

[_Holding him back._] Wittig, Wittig! Don't lose your head!

KUTSCHE

[_Has risen involuntarily, his face pale. He backs towards the door while speaking. The nearer the door the higher his courage rises. He speaks the last words on the threshold, and then instantly disappears._] What are you goin' on at me about? I didn't meddle with you. I came to say somethin' to the weavers. My business is with them an' not with you, and I've done nothing to you. But I've this to say to you weavers: The superintendent of police herewith forbids the singing of that song--Dreissiger's song, or whatever it is you calls it. And if the yelling of it on the streets isn't stopped at once, he'll provide you with plenty of time and leisure for goin' on with it in gaol. You may sing there, on bread an' water, to your hearts' content.

[_Goes out._

WITTIG

[_Roars after him._] He's no right to forbid, it--not if we was to roar till the windows shook an' they could hear us at Reichenbach--not if we sang till the manufacturers' houses tumbled about their ears an' all the superintendents' helmets danced on the top of their heads. It's nobody's business but our own.

[_BECKER has in the meantime got up, made a signal for singing, and now leads off, the others joining in._

The justice to us weavers dealt Is bloody, cruel, and hateful; Our life's one torture, long drawn out; For Lynch law we'd be grateful.

[_WELZEL attempts to quiet them, but they pay no attention to him. WIEGAND puts his hands to his ears and rushes off. During the singing of the next stanza the weavers rise and form, into procession behind BECKER and WITTIG, who have given pantomimic signs for a general break-up._

Stretched on the rack, day after day, Hearts sick and bodies aching, Our heavy sighs their witness bear To spirit slowly breaking.

[_Most of the weavers sing the following stanza, out on the street, only a few young fellows, who are paying, being still in the bar. At the conclusion of the stanza no one is left in the room except WELZEL and his wife and daughter, HORNIG, and OLD BAUMERT._

You villains all, you brood of hell, You fiends in fashion human, A curse will fall on all like you Who prey on man and woman.

WELZEL

[_Phlegmatically collecting the glasses._] Their backs are up to-day, an' no mistake.

HORNIG

[_To OLD BAUMERT, who is preparing to go._] What in the name of Heaven are they up to, Baumert?

BAUMERT

They're goin' to Dreissiger's to make him add something on to the pay.

WELZEL

And are you joining in these foolish goings on?

OLD BAUMERT

I've no choice, Welzel. The young men may an' the old men must.

[_Goes out rather shamefacedly._

HORNIG

It'll not surprise me if this ends badly.

WELZEL

To think that even old fellows like him are goin' right off their heads!

HORNIG

We all set our hearts on something!

END OF THE THIRD ACT

THE FOURTH ACT

_Peterswaldau.--Private room of DREISSIGER, _the fustian manufacturer--luxuriously furnished in the chilly taste of the first half of this century. Ceiling, doors, and stove are white, and the wall paper, with its small, straight-lined floral pattern, is dull and cold in tone. The furniture is mahogany, richly-carved, and upholstered in red. On the right, between two windows with crimson damask curtains, stands the writing-table, a high bureau with falling flap. Directly opposite to this is the sofa, with the strong-box; beside it; in front of the sofa a table, with chairs and easy-chairs arranged about it. Against the back wall is a gun-rack. All three walls are decorated with bad pictures in gilt frames. Above the sofa is a mirror with a heavily gilt rococo frame. On the left an ordinary door leads into the hall. An open folding door at the back shows the drawing-room, over-furnished in the same style of comfortless ostentation. Two ladies, MRS. DREISSIGER and MRS. KITTELHAUS, the Pastor's wife, are seen in the

drawing-room, looking at pictures. PASTOR KITTELHAUS is there too, engaged in conversation with WEINHOLD, the tutor, a theological graduate._

KITTELHAUS

[_A kindly little elderly man, enters the front room, smoking and chatting familiarly with the tutor, who is also smoking; he looks round and shakes his head in surprise at finding the room empty._] You are young, Mr. Weinhold, which explains everything. At your age we old fellows held--well, I won't say the same opinions--but certainly opinions of the same tendency. And there's something fine about youth--youth with its grand ideals. But unfortunately, Mr. Weinhold, they don't last; they are as fleeting as April sunshine. Wait till you are my age. When a man has said his say from the pulpit for thirty years--fifty-two times every year, not including saints' days--he has inevitably calmed down. Think of me, Mr. Weinhold, when you come to that pass.

WEINHOLD

[_Nineteen, pale, thin, tall, with lanky fair hair; restless and nervous in his movements._] With all due respect, Mr. Kittelhaus.... I can't think ... people have such different natures.

KITTELHAUS

My dear Mr. Weinhold, however restless-minded and unsettled, a man may be--[_in a tone of reproof_]--and you are a case in point--however violently and wantonly he may attack the existing order of things, he calms down in the end. I grant you, certainly, that among our professional brethren individuals are to be found, who, at a fairly advanced age, still play youthful pranks. One preaches against the drink evil and founds temperance societies, another publishes appeals which undoubtedly read most effectively. But what good do they do? The distress among the weavers, where it does exist, is in no way lessened--but the peace of society is undermined. No, no; one feels inclined in such cases to say: Cobbler, stick to your last; don't take to caring for the belly, you who have the care of souls. Preach the pure Word of God, and leave all else to Him who provides shelter and food for the birds, and clothes the lilies of the field.--But I should like to know where our good host, Mr. Dreissiger, has suddenly disappeared to.

[_MRS. DREISSIGER, followed by MRS. KITTELHAUS, now comes forward. She is a pretty woman of thirty, of a healthy, florid type. A certain discrepancy is noticeable between her deportment and way of expressing herself and her rich, elegant toilette._]

MRS. DREISSIGER

That's what I want to know too, Mr. Kittelhaus. But it's what William always does. No sooner does a thing come into his head than off he goes and leaves me in the lurch. I've said enough about it, but it does no good.

KITTELHAUS

It's always the way with business men, my dear Mrs. Dreissiger.

WEINHOLD

I'm almost certain that something has happened downstairs.

DREISSIGER enters, hot and excited.

DREISSIGER

Well, Rosa, is coffee served?

MRS. DREISSIGER

[_Sulkily._] Fancy your needing to run away again!

DREISSIGER

[_Carelessly._] Ah! these are things you don't understand.

KITTELHAUS

Excuse me--has anything happened to annoy you, Mr. Dreissiger?

DREISSIGER

Never a day passes without that, my dear sir. I am accustomed to it. What about that coffee, Rosa?

[_MRS. DREISSIGER goes ill-humouredly and gives one or two violent tugs at the broad embroidered bell-pull._

DREISSIGER

I wish you had been downstairs just now, Mr. Weinhold. You'd have gained a little experience. Besides.... But now let us have our game of whist.

KITTELHAUS

By all means, sir. Shake off the dust and burden of the day, Mr. Dreissiger; forget it in our company.

DREISSIGER

[_Has gone to the window, pushed aside a curtain, and is looking out. Involuntarily._] Vile rabble!! Come here. Rosa! [_She goes to the window._] Look ... that tall red-haired fellow there!...

KITTELHAUS

That's the man they call Red Becker.

DREISSIGER

Is he the man that insulted you the day before yesterday? You remember what you told me--when John was helping you into the carriage?

MRS. DREISSIGER

[_Pouting, drawls._] I'm sure I don't know.

DREISSIGER

Come now, drop that offended air! I must know. I am thoroughly tired of their impudence. If he's the man, I mean to have him arrested. [_The strains of the Weavers' Song are heard._] Listen to that! Just listen!

KITTELHAUS

[_Highly incensed._] Is there to be no end to this nuisance? I must acknowledge now that it is time for the police to interfere. Permit me. [_He goes forward to the window._] See, see, Mr. Weinhold! These are not only young people. There are numbers of steady-going old weavers among them, men whom I have known for years and looked upon as most deserving and God-fearing. There they are, taking part in this unheard-of mischief, trampling God's law under foot. Do you mean to tell me that you still defend these people?

WEINHOLD

Certainly not, Mr. Kittelhaus. That is, sir ... _cum grano salis_. For after all, they are hungry and they are ignorant. They are giving expression to their dissatisfaction in the only way they understand. I don't expect that such people....

MRS. KITTELHAUS

[_Short, thin, faded, more like an old maid than a married woman._] Mr. Weinhold, Mr. Weinhold, how can you?

DREISSIGER

Mr. Weinhold, I am sorry to be obliged to.... I didn't bring you into my house to give me lectures on philanthropy, and I must request that you will confine yourself to the education of my boys, and leave my other affairs entirely to me--entirely! Do you understand?

WEINHOLD

[_Stands for a moment rigid and deathly pale, then bows, with a strained smile. In a low voice._] Certainly, of course I understand. I have seen this coming. It is my wish too.

[_Goes out._

DREISSIGER

[_Rudely._] As soon as possible then, please. We require the room.

MRS. DREISSIGER

William, William!

DREISSIGER

Have you lost your senses, Rosa, that you're taking the part of a man who defends a low, blackguardly libel like that song?

MRS. DREISSIGER

But, William, he didn't defend it.

DREISSIGER

Mr. Kittelhaus, did he defend it or did he not?

KITTELHAUS

His youth must be his excuse, Mr. Dreissiger.

MRS. KITTELHAUS

I can't understand it. The young man comes of such a good, respectable family. His father held a public appointment for forty years, without a breath on his reputation. His mother was overjoyed at his getting this good situation here. And now ... he himself shows so little appreciation of it.

PFEIFER

[_Suddenly opens the door leading from the hall and shouts in._] Mr. Dreissiger, Mr. Dreissiger! they've got him! Will you come, please? They've caught one of 'em.

DREISSIGER

[_Hastily._] Has some one gone for the police?

PFEIFER

The superintendent's on his way upstairs.

DREISSIGER

[_At the door._] Glad to see you, sir. We want you here.

[_KITTELHAUS makes signs to the ladies that it will be better for them to retire. He, his wife, and MRS. DREISSIGER disappear into the drawing-room._

DREISSIGER

[_Exasperated, to the POLICE SUPERINTENDENT, who has now entered._] I have at last had one of the ringleaders seized by my dyers. I could stand it no longer--their insolence was beyond all bounds--quite unbearable. I have visitors in my house, and these blackguards dare to.... They insult my wife whenever she shows herself; my boys' lives are not safe. My visitors run the risk of being jostled and cuffed. Is it possible that in a well-ordered community incessant public insult offered to unoffending people like myself and my family should pass unpunished? If so ... then ... then I must confess that I have other ideas of law and order.

SUPERINTENDENT

[_A man of fifty, middle height, corpulent, full-blooded. He wears cavalry uniform with a long sword and spurs._] No, no, Mr. Dreissiger ... certainly not! I am entirely at your disposal. Make your mind easy on the subject. Dispose of me as you will. What you have done is quite right. I am delighted that you have had one of the ringleaders arrested. I am very glad indeed that a day of reckoning has come. There are a few disturbers of the peace here whom I have long had my eye on.

DREISSIGER

Yes, one or two raw lads, lazy vagabonds, that shirk every kind of work, and lead a life of low dissipation, hanging about the public-houses until they've sent their last half-penny down their throats. But I'm determined to put a stop to the trade of these professional blackguards once and for all. It's in the public interest to do so, not only my private interest.

SUPERINTENDENT

Of course it is! Most undoubtedly, Mr. Dreissiger! No one can possibly blame you. And everything that lies in my power....

DREISSIGER

The cat-o'-nine tails is what should be taken to the beggarly pack.

SUPERINTENDENT

You're right, quite right. We must institute an example.

KUTSCHE, the policeman, enters and salutes. The door is open, and the sound of heavy steps stumbling up the stair is heard.

KUTSCHE

I have to inform you, sir, that we have arrested a man.

DREISSIGER

[_To SUPERINTENDENT._] Do you wish to see the fellow?

SUPERINTENDENT

Certainly, most certainly. We must begin by having a look at him at close quarters. Oblige me, Mr. Dreissiger, by not speaking to him at present. I'll see to it that you get complete satisfaction, or my name's not Heide.

DREISSIGER

That's not enough for me, though. He goes before the magistrates. My mind's made up.

JAEGER is led in by five dyers, who have come straight from their work--faces, hands, and clothes stained with dye. The prisoner, his cap set jauntily on the side of his head, presents an appearance of impudent gaiety; he is excited by the brandy he has just drunk.

JAEGER

Hounds that you are!--Call yourselves working men!--Pretend to be comrades! Before I would do such a thing as lay hands on a mate, I'd see my hand rot off my arm!

[_At a sign from the SUPERINTENDENT KUTSCHE orders the dyers to let go their victim. JAEGER straightens himself up, quite free and easy. Both doors are guarded._

SUPERINTENDENT

[_Shouts to JAEGER._] Off with your cap, lout! [_JAEGER takes it off, but very slowly, still with an impudent grin on his face._] What's your name?

JAEGER

What's yours? I'm not your swineherd.

[_Great excitement is produced among the audience by this reply._

DREISSIGER

This is too much of a good thing.

SUPERINTENDENT

[_Changes colour, is on the point of breaking out furiously, but controls his rage._] We'll see about this afterwards.--Once more, what's your name? [_Receiving no answer, furiously._] If you don't answer at once, fellow, I'll have you flogged on the spot.

JAEGER

[_Perfectly cheerful, not showing by so much as the twitch of an eyelid that he has heard the SUPERINTENDENT'S angry words, calls over the heads of those around him to a pretty servant girl, who has brought in the coffee and is standing open-mouthed with astonishment at the unexpected sight._] Hillo, Emmy, do you belong to this company now? The sooner you find your way out of it, then, the better. A wind may begin to blow here, an' blow everything away overnight.

[_The girl stares at JAEGER, and as soon as she comprehends that it is to her he is speaking, blushes with shame, covers her eyes with her hands, and rushes out, leaving the coffee things in confusion on the table. Renewed excitement among those present._

SUPERINTENDENT

[_Half beside himself, to DREISSIGER._] Never in all my long service ... a case of such shameless effrontery.... [_JAEGER spits on the floor._

DREISSIGER

You're not in a stable, fellow! Do you understand?

SUPERINTENDENT

My patience is at an end now. For the last time: What's your name?

KITTELHAUS who has been peering out at the partly opened drawing-room door, listening to what has been going on, can no longer refrain from coming forward to interfere. He is trembling with excitement.

KITTELHAUS

His name is Jaeger, sir. Moritz ... is it not? Moritz Jaeger. [_To JAEGER._] And, Jaeger, you know me.

JAEGER

[_Seriously._] You are Pastor Kittelhaus.

KITTELHAUS

Yes, I am your pastor, Jaeger! It was I who received you, a babe in swaddling clothes, into the Church of Christ. From my hands you took for the

first time the body of the Lord. Do you remember that, and how I toiled and strove to bring God's Word home to your heart? Is this your gratitude?

JAEGER

[_Like a scolded schoolboy. In a surly voice._] I paid my half-crown like the rest.

KITTELHAUS

Money, money.... Do you imagine that the miserable little bit of money.... Such utter nonsense! I'd much rather you kept your money. Be a good man, be a Christian! Think of what you promised. Keep God's law. Money, money...!

JAEGER

I'm a Quaker now, sir. I don't believe in nothing.

KITTELHAUS

Quaker! What are you talking about? Try to behave yourself, and don't use words you don't understand. Quaker, indeed! They are good Christian people, and not heathens like you.

SUPERINTENDENT

Mr. Kittelhaus, I must ask you.... [_He comes between the Pastor and JAEGER._] Kutsche! tie his hands!

[_Wild yelling outside:_ "Jaeger. Jaeger! come out!"

DREISSIGER

[_Like the others, slightly startled, goes instinctively to the window._] What's the meaning of this next?

SUPERINTENDENT

Oh, I understand well enough. It means that they want to have the blackguard out among them again. But we're not going to oblige them. Kutsche, you have your orders. He goes to the lock-up.

KUTSCHE

[_With the rope in his hand, hesitating._] By your leave, sir, but it'll not be an easy job. There's a confounded big crowd out there--a pack of raging devils. They've got Becker with them, and the smith....

KITTELHAUS

Allow me one more word!--So as not to rouse still worse feeling, would it not be better if we tried to arrange things peaceably? Perhaps Jaeger will give his word to go with us quietly, or....

SUPERINTENDENT

Quite impossible! Think of my responsibility. I couldn't allow such a thing. Come, Kutsche! lose no more time.

JAEGER

[_Putting his hands together, and holding them, out._] Tight, tight, as tight as ever you can! It's not for long.

[_KUTSCHE, assisted by the workmen, ties his hands._

SUPERINTENDENT

Now off with you, march! [_To DREISSIGER._] If you feel anxious, let six of the weavers go with them. They can walk on each side of him, I'll ride in front, and Kutsche will bring up the rear. Whoever blocks the way will be cut down.

[_Cries from below:_ "Cock-a-doodle-doo-oo-oo! Bow, wow, wow!"

SUPERINTENDENT

[_With a threatening gesture in the direction of the window._] You rascals, I'll cock-a-doodle-doo and bow-wow you! Forward! March!

[_He marches out first, with drawn sword; the others, with JAEGER, follow._

JAEGER

[_Shouts as he goes._] An' Mrs. Dreissiger there may play the lady as proud as she likes, but for all that she's no better than us. Many a hundred times she's served my father with a halfpenny-worth of schnapps. Left wheel--march!

[_Exit laughing._

DREISSIGER

[_ After a pause, with apparent calmness._] Well, Mr. Kittelhaus, shall we have our game now? I think there will be no further Interruption. [_He lights a cigar, giving short laughs as he does so; when it is lighted, bursts into a regular fit of laughing._] I'm beginning now to think the whole thing very funny. That fellow! [_Still laughing nervously._] It really is too comical: first came the dispute at dinner with Weinhold--five minutes after that he takes leave--off to the other end of the world; then this affair crops up--and now we'll proceed with our whist.

KITTELHAUS

Yes, but ... [_Roaring is heard outside._] Yes, but ... that's a terrible uproar they're making outside.

DREISSIGER

All we have to do is to go into the other room; it won't disturb us in the least there.

KITTELHAUS

[_Shaking his head._] I wish I knew what has come over these people. In so far I must agree with Mr. Weinhold, or at least till quite lately I was of his opinion, that the weavers were a patient, humble, easily-led class. Was it not your idea of them, too, Mr. Dreissiger?

DREISSIGER

Most certainly that is what they used to be--patient, easily managed, well-behaved and orderly people. They were that as long as these so-called humanitarians let them alone. But for ever so long now they've had the awful misery of their condition held up to them. Think of all the societies and associations for the alleviation of the distress among the weavers. At last the weaver believes in it himself, and his head's turned. Some of them had better come and turn it back again, for now he's fairly set a-going there's no end to his complaining. This doesn't please him, and that doesn't please him. He must have everything of the best.

A loud roar of "Hurrah!" _is heard from, the crowd._

KITTELHAUS

So that with all their humanitarianism they have only succeeded in almost literally turning lambs over night into wolves.

DREISSIGER

I won't say that, sir. When you take time to think of the matter coolly, it's possible that some good may come of it yet. Such occurrences as this will not pass unnoticed by those in authority, and may lead them to see that things can't be allowed to go on as they are doing--that means must be taken to prevent the utter ruin of our home industries.

KITTELHAUS

Possibly. But what is the cause, then, of this terrible falling off of trade?

DREISSIGER

Our best markets have been closed to us by the heavy import duties foreign countries have laid on our goods. At home the competition is a struggle of life and death, for we have no protection, none whatever.

PFEIFER

[_Staggers in, pale and breathless._] Mr. Dreissiger, Mr. Dreissiger!

DREISSIGER

[_In the act of walking into the drawing-room, turns round, annoyed._] Well, Pfeifer, what now?

PFEIFER

Oh, sir! Oh, sir!... It's worse than ever!

DREISSIGER

What are they up to next?

KITTELHAUS

You're really alarming us--what is it?

PFEIFER

[_Still confused._] I never saw the like. Good Lord--The superintendent himself ... they'll catch it for this yet.

DREISSIGER

What's the matter with you, in the devil's name? Is any one's neck broken?

PFEIFER

[_Almost crying with fear, screams._] They've set Moritz Jaeger free--they've thrashed the superintendent and driven him away--they've thrashed the policeman and sent him off too--without his helmet ... his sword broken ... Oh dear, oh dear!

DREISSIGER

I think you've gone crazy, Pfeifer.

KITTELHAUS

This is actual riot.

PFEIFER

[_Sitting on a chair, his whole body trembling._] It's turning serious, Mr. Dreissiger! Mr. Dreissiger, it's serious now!

DREISSIGER

Well, if that's all the police ...

PFEIFER

Mr. Dreissiger, it's serious now!

DREISSIGER

Damn it all, Pfeifer, will you hold your tongue?

MRS. DREISSIGER

[_Coming out of the drawing-room with MRS. KITTELHAUS._] This is really too bad, William. Our whole pleasant evening's being spoiled. Here's Mrs. Kittelhaus saying that she'd better go home.

KITTELHAUS

You mustn't take it amiss, dear Mrs. Dreissiger, but perhaps, under the circumstances, it _would_ be better ...

MRS. DREISSIGER

But, William, why in the world don't you go out and put a stop to it?

DREISSIGER

You go and see if you can do it. Try! Go and speak to them! [_Standing in front of the pastor, abruptly._] Am I such a tyrant? Am I a cruel master?

Enter JOHN the coachman.

JOHN

If you please, m'm, I've put to the horses. Mr. Weinhold's put Georgie and Charlie into the carriage. If it comes to the worst, we're ready to be off.

MRS. DREISSIGER

If what comes to the worst?

JOHN

I'm sure I don't know, m'm. But I'm thinkin' this way: The crowd's gettin' bigger and bigger, an' they've sent the superintendent an' the p'liceman to the right-about.

PFEIFER

It's gettin' serious now, Mr. Dreissiger! It's serious!

MRS. DREISSIGER

[_With increasing alarm._] What's going to happen?--What do the people want?--They're never going to attack us, John?

JOHN

There's some rascally hounds among 'em, ma'am.

PFEIFER

It's serious now! serious!

DREISSIGER

Hold your tongue, fool!--Are the doors barred?

KITTELHAUS

I ask you as a favour, Mr. Dreissiger ... as a favour ... I am determined to ... I ask you as a favour ... [_To JOHN._] What demands are the people making?

JOHN

[_Awkwardly._] It's higher wages they're after, the blackguards.

KITTELHAUS

Good, good!--I shall go out and do my duty. I shall speak seriously to these people.

JOHN

Oh sir, please sir, don't do any such thing. Words is quite useless.

KITTELHAUS

One little favour, Mr. Dreissiger. May I ask you to post men behind the door, and to have it closed at once after me?

MRS. KITTELHAUS

O Joseph, Joseph! you're not really going out?

KITTELHAUS

I am. Indeed I am. I know what I'm doing. Don't be afraid. God will protect me.

[_MRS. KITTELHAUS presses his hand, draws back, and wipes tears from her eyes._

KITTELHAUS

[_While the dull murmur of a great, excited crowd is heard uninterruptedly outside._] I'll go ... I'll go out as if I were simply on my way home. I shall see if my sacred office ... if the people have not sufficient respect for me left to ... I shall try ... [_He takes his hat and stick._] Forward, then, in God's name!

[_Goes out accompanied by DREISSIGER, PFEIFER and JOHN._

MRS. KITTELHAUS

Oh, dear Mrs. Dreissiger! [_She bursts into tears and embraces her._] I do trust nothing will happen to him.

MRS. DREISSIGER

[_Absently._] I don't know how it is, Mrs. Kittelhaus, but I ... I can't tell you how I feel. I didn't think such a thing was possible. It's ... it's as if it was a sin to be rich. If I had been told about all this beforehand, Mrs. Kittelhaus, I don't know but what I would rather have been left in my own humble position.

MRS. KITTELHAUS

There are troubles and disappointments in every condition of life, Mrs. Dreissiger.

MRS. DREISSIGER

True, true, I can well believe that. And suppose we have more than other people ... goodness me! we didn't steal it. It's been honestly got, every penny of it. It's not possible that the people can be goin' to attack us! If trade's bad, that's not William's fault, is it?

[_A tumult of roaring is heard outside. While the two women stand gazing at each other, pale and startled, DREISSIGER rushes in._

DREISSIGER

Quick, Rosa--put on something, and get into the carriage. I'll be after you this moment.

[_He rushes to the strong-box, and takes out papers and various articles of value._

Enter JOHN.

JOHN

We're ready to start. But come quickly, before they gets round to the back door.

MRS. DREISSIGER

[_In a transport of fear, throwing her arms around JOHN'S neck._] John, John, dear, good John! Save us, John. Save my boys! Oh, what is to become of us?

DREISSIGER

Rosa, try to keep your head. Let John go.

JOHN

Yes, yes, ma'am! Don't you be frightened. Our good horses'll soon leave them all behind; an' whoever doesn't get out of the way'll be driven over.

MRS. KITTELHAUS

[_In helpless anxiety._] But my husband ... my husband? But, Mr. Dreissiger, my husband?

DREISSIGER

He's in safety now, Mrs. Kittelhaus. Don't alarm yourself; he's all right.

MRS. KITTELHAUS

Something dreadful has happened to him. I know it. You needn't try to keep it from me.

DREISSIGER

You mustn't take it to heart--they'll be sorry for it yet. I know exactly whose fault it was. Such an unspeakable, shameful outrage will not go unpunished. A community laying hands on its own pastor and maltreating him--abominable! Mad dogs they are--raging brutes--and they'll be treated as such. [_To his wife who still stands petrified._] Go, Rosa, go quickly! [_Heavy blows at the lower door are heard._] Don't you hear? They've gone stark mad! [_The clatter of window-panes being smashed on the ground-floor is heard._] They've gone crazy. There's nothing for it but to get away as fast as we can.

[_Cries of_ "Pfeifer, come out!"--"We want Pfeifer!"--"Pfeifer, come out!" _are heard._

MRS. DREISSIGER

Pfeifer, Pfeifer, they want Pfeifer!

PFEIFER

[_Dashes in._] Mr. Dreissiger, there are people at the back gate already, and the house door won't hold much longer. The smith's battering at it like a maniac with a stable pail.

[_The cry sounds louder and clearer_: "Pfeifer! Pfeifer! Pfeifer! come out!" _MRS. DREISSIGER rushes off as if pursued. MRS. KITTELHAUS follows. PFEIFER listens, and changes colour as he hears what the cry is. A perfect panic of fear seizes him; he weeps, entreats, whimpers, writhes, all at the same moment. He overwhelms DREISSIGER with childish caresses, strokes his cheeks and arms, kisses his hands, and at last, like a drowning man, throws his arms round him and prevents him moving._

PFEIFER

Dear, good, kind Mr. Dreissiger, don't leave me behind. I've always served you faithfully. I've always treated the people well. I couldn't give 'em more wages than the fixed rate. Don't leave me here--they'll do for me! If they finds me, they'll kill me. O God! O God! My wife, my children!

DREISSIGER

[_Making his way out, vainly endeavouring to free himself from PFEIFER'S clutch._] Can't you let me go, fellow? It'll be all right; it'll be all right.

For a few seconds the room is empty. Windows are shattered in the drawing-room. A loud crash resounds through the house, followed by a roaring "Hurrah!" _For an instant there is silence. Then gentle, cautious steps are heard on the stair, then timid, hushed ejaculations_: "To the left!"--"Up with you!"--"Hush!"--"Slow, slow!"--"Don't shove like that!"--"It's a wedding we're goin' to!"--"Stop that crowdin'!"--"You go first!"--"No, you go!"

Young weavers and weaver girls appear at the door leading from the hall, not daring to enter, but each trying to shove the other in. In the course of a few moments their timidity is overcome, and the poor, thin, ragged or patched figures, many of them sickly-looking, disperse themselves through DREISSIGER'S room and the drawing-room, first gazing timidly and curiously at everything, then beginning to touch things. Girls sit down on the sofas, whole groups admire themselves in the mirrors, men stand up on chairs, examine the pictures and take them down. There is a steady influx of miserable-looking creatures from the hall.

FIRST OLD WEAVER

[_Entering._] No, no, this is carryin' it too far. They've started smashin' things downstairs. There's no sense nor reason in that. There'll be a bad end to it. No man in his wits would do that. I'll keep clear of such goings on.

JAEGER, BECKER, WITTIG carrying a wooden pail, BAUMERT, and a number of other old and young weavers, rush in as if in pursuit of something, shouting hoarsely.

JAEGER

Where has he gone?

BECKER

Where's the cruel brute?

BAUMERT

If we can eat grass he may eat sawdust.

WITTIG

We'll hang him when we catch him.

FIRST YOUNG WEAVER

We'll take him by the legs and fling him out at the window, on to the stones. He'll never get up again.

SECOND YOUNG WEAVER

[_Enters._] He's off!

ALL

Who?

SECOND YOUNG WEAVER

Dreissiger.

BECKER

Pfeifer too?

VOICES

Let's get hold o' Pfeifer! Look for Pfeifer!

BAUMERT

Yes, yes! Pfeifer! Tell him there's a weaver here for him to starve.

[_Laughter._

JAEGER

If we can't lay hands on that brute Dreissiger himself ... we'll make him poor!

BAUMERT

As poor as a church mouse ... we'll see to that!

[_All, bent on the work of destruction, rush towards the drawing-room door._

BECKER

[_Who is leading, turns round and stops the others._] Halt! Listen to me! This is nothing but a beginnin'. When we're done here, we'll go straight to Bielau, to Dittrich's, where the steam power-looms is. The whole mischief's done by them factories.

OLD ANSORGE

[_Enters from hall. Takes a few steps, then stops and looks round, scarcely believing his eyes; shakes his head, taps his forehead._] Who am I? Weaver Anton Ansorge. Has he gone mad, Old Ansorge? My head's goin' round like a humming-top, sure enough. What's he doin' here. He'll do whatever he's a mind to. Where is Ansorge? [_He taps his forehead repeatedly._] Something's wrong! I'm not answerable! I'm off my head! Off with you, off with you, rioters that you are! Heads off, legs off, hands off! If you takes my house, I takes your house. Forward, forward!

[_Goes yelling into the drawing-room, followed by a yelling, laughing mob._

END OF THE FOURTH ACT

FIFTH ACT

Langen-Bielau,--OLD WEAVER HILSE'S workroom. On the left a small window, in front of which stands the loom. On the right a bed, with a table pushed close to it. Stove, with stove-bench, in the right-hand corner. Family worship is going on. HILSE, his old, blind, and almost deaf wife, his son GOTTLIEB, and LUISE, GOTTLIEB'S wife, are sitting at the table, on the bed and wooden stools. A winding-wheel and bobbins on the floor between table and loom. Old spinning, weaving, and winding implements are disposed of on the smoky rafters; hanks of yarn are hanging down. There is much useless lumber in the low narrow room. The door, which is in the back wall, and leads into the big outer passage, or entry-room of the house, stands open. Through another open door on the opposite side of the passage, a second, in most respects similar weaver's room is seen. The large passage, or entry-room of the house, is paved with stone, has damaged plaster, and a tumble-down wooden stair-case leading to the attics; a washing-tub on a stool is partly visible; linen of the most miserable description and poor household utensils lie about untidily. The light falls from the left into all three apartments.

OLD HILSE is a bearded man of strong build, but bent and wasted with age, toil, sickness, and hardship. He is an old soldier, and has lost an arm. His nose is sharp, his complexion ashen-grey, and he shakes; he is nothing but skin and bone, and has the deep-set, sore weaver's eyes.

OLD HILSE

[_Stands up, as do his son and daughter-in-law; prays._] O Lord, we know not how to be thankful enough to Thee, for that Thou hast spared us this night again in Thy goodness ... an' hast had pity on us ... an' hast suffered us to take no harm. Thou art the All-merciful, an' we are poor, sinful children of men--that bad that we are not worthy to be trampled under Thy feet. Yet Thou art our loving Father, an' Thou will look upon us an' accept us for the sake of Thy dear Son, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. "Jesus' blood and righteousness, Our covering is and glorious dress." An' if we're sometimes too sore cast down under Thy chastening--when the fire of Thy purification burns too ragin' hot--oh, lay it not to our charge; forgive us our sin. Give us patience, heavenly Father, that after all these sufferin's we may be made partakers of Thy eternal blessedness. Amen.

MOTHER HILSE

[_Who has been bending forward, trying hard to hear._] What a beautiful prayer you do say, father!

[_LUISE goes off to the washtub, GOTTLIEB to the room on the other side of the passage._

OLD HILSE

Where's the little lass?

LUISE

She's gone to Peterswaldau, to Dreissiger's. She finished all she had to wind last night.

OLD HILSE

[_Speaking very loud._] You'd like the wheel now, mother, eh?

MOTHER HILSE

Yes, father, I'm quite ready.

OLD HILSE

[_Setting it down before her._] I wish I could do the work for you.

MOTHER HILSE

An' what would be the good o' that, father? There would I be, sittin' not knowin' what to do.

OLD HILSE

I'll give your fingers a wipe, then, so that they'll not grease the yarn.

[_He wipes her hands with a rag._

LUISE

[_At her tub._] If there's grease on her hands, it's not from what she's eaten.

OLD HILSE

If we've no butter, we can eat dry bread--when we've no bread, we can eat potatoes--when there's no potatoes left, we can eat bran.

LUISE

[_Saucily._] An' when that's all eaten, we'll do as the Wenglers did--we'll find out where the skinner's buried some stinking old horse, an' we'll dig it up an' live for a week or two on rotten carrion--how nice that'll be!

GOTTLIEB

[_From the other room._] There you are, lettin' that tongue of yours run away with you again.

OLD HILSE

You should think twice, lass, before you talk that godless way. [_He goes to his loom, calls._] Can you give me a hand, Gottlieb?--there's a few threads to pull through.

LUISE

[_From her tub._] Gottlieb, you're wanted to help father.

[_GOTTLIEB comes in, and he and his father set themselves to the troublesome task of "drawing and slaying," that is, pulling the strands of the warp through the "heddles" and "reed" of the loom. They have hardly begun to do this when HORNIG appears in the outer room._

HORNIG

[_At the door._] Good luck to your work!

HILSE AND HIS SON

Thank you, Hornig.

OLD HILSE

I say, Hornig, when do you take your sleep? You're on your rounds all day, an' on watch all night.

HORNIG

Sleep's gone from me nowadays.

LUISE

Glad to see you, Hornig!

OLD HILSE

An' what's the news?

HORNIG

It's queer news this mornin'. The weavers at Peterswaldau has taken the law into their own hands, an' chased Dreissiger an' his whole family out of the place.

LUISE

[_Perceptibly agitated._] Hornig's at his lies again.

HORNIG

No, missus, not this time, not to-day.--I've some beautiful pinafores in my cart,--No, it's God's truth I'm tellin' you. They've sent him to the right-about. He came down to Reichenbach last night, but, Lord love you! they daren't take him in there, for fear of the weavers--off he had to go again, all the way to Schweidnitz.

OLD HILSE

[_Has been carefully lifting threads of the web and approaching them to the holes, through which, from the other side, GOTTLIEB pushes a wire hook, with which he catches them and draws them through._] It's about time you were stoppin' now, Hornig!

HORNIG

It's as sure as I'm a livin' man. Every child in the place'll soon tell you the same story.

OLD HILSE

Either your wits are a-wool-gatherin' or mine are.

HORNIG

Not mine. What I'm tellin' you's as true as the Bible. I wouldn't believe it myself if I hadn't stood there an' seen it with my own eyes--as I see you now, Gottlieb. They've wrecked his house from the cellar to the roof. The good china came flyin' out at the garret windows, rattlin' down the roof. God only knows how many pieces of fustian are lying soakin' in the river! The water can't get away for them--it's running over the banks, the colour of washin'-blue with all the indigo they've poured out at the windows. Clouds of sky-blue dust was flyin' along. Oh, it's a terrible destruction they've worked! And it's not only the house ... it's the dye-works too ... an' the stores! They've broken the stair rails, they've torn up the fine flooring--smashed the lookin'-glasses--cut an' hacked an' torn an' smashed the sofas an' the chairs.--It's awful--it's worse than war.

OLD HILSE

An' you would have me believe that my fellow weavers did all that?

[_He shakes his head incredulously._

[_Other tenants of the house have collected at the door and are listening eagerly._

HORNIG

Who else, I'd like to know? I could put names to every one of 'em. It was me took the sheriff through the house, an' I spoke to a whole lot of 'em, an' they answered me back--quite friendly like. They did their business with little noise, but my word! they did it well. The sheriff spoke to 'em, and they answered him mannerly, as they always do. But there wasn't no stoppin' of them. They hacked on at the beautiful furniture as if they was workin' for wages.

OLD HILSE

You took the sheriff through the house?

HORNIG

An' what would I be frightened of? Every one knows me. I'm always turnin' up, like a bad penny. But no one has anything agin' me. They're all glad to see me. Yes, I went the rounds with him, as sure as my name's Hornig. An' you may believe me or not as you like, but my heart's sore yet from the sight--an' I could see by the sheriff's face that he felt queer enough too. For why? Not a livin' word did we hear--they was doin' their work and holdin' their tongues. It was a solemn an' a woeful sight to see the poor starvin' creatures for once in a way takin' their revenge.

LUISE

[_With irrepressible excitement, trembling, wiping her eyes with her apron._] An' right they are! It's only what should be!

VOICES AMONG THE CROWD AT THE DOOR

"There's some of the same sort here."--"There's one no farther away than across the river."--"He's got four horses in his stable an' six carriages, an' he starves his weavers to keep 'em."

OLD HILSE

[_Still incredulous._] What was it set them off?

HORNIG

Who knows? who knows? One says this, another says that.

OLD HILSE

What do they say?

HORNIG

The story as most of 'em tells is that it began with Dreissiger sayin' that if the weavers was hungry they might eat grass. But I don't rightly know.

[_Excitement at the door, as one person repeats this to the other, with signs of indignation._

OLD HILSE

Well now, Hornig--if you was to say to me: Father Hilse, says you, you'll die to-morrow, I would answer back: That may be--an' why not? You might even go to the length of saying: You'll have a visit to-morrow from the King of Prussia. But to tell me that weavers, men like me an' my son, have done such things as that--never! I'll never in this world believe it.

MIELCHEN

[_A pretty girl of seven, with long, loose flaxen hair, carrying a basket on her arm, comes running in, holding out a silver spoon to her mother._] Mammy, mammy! look what I've got! An' you're to buy me a new frock with it.

LUISE

What d'you come tearing in like that for, girl? [_With increased excitement and curiosity._] An' what's that you've got hold of now? You've been runnin' yourself out o' breath, an' there--if the bobbins aren't in her basket yet? What's all this about?

OLD HILSE

Mielchen, where did that spoon come from?

LUISE

She found it, maybe.

HORNIG

It's worth its seven or eight shillin's at least.

OLD HILSE

[_In distressed excitement._] Off with you, lass--out of the house this moment--unless you want a lickin'! Take that spoon back where you got it from. Out you go! Do you want to make thieves of us all, eh? I'll soon drive that out o' you.

[_He looks round for something to beat her with._

MIELCHEN

[_Clinging to her mother's skirts, crying._] No, grandfather, no! don't lick me! We--we _did_ find it. All the other bob--bobbin ... girls has ... has some too.

LUISE

[_Half frightened, half excited._] I was right, you see. She found it. Where did you find it, Mielchen?

MIELCHEN

[_Sobbing._] At--at Peterswal--dau. We--we found them in front of--in front of Drei--Dreissiger's house.

OLD HILSE

This is worse an' worse! Get off with you this moment, unless you want me to help you.

MOTHER HILSE

What's all the to-do about?

HORNIG

I'll tell you what, father Hilse. The best way'll be for Gottlieb to put on his coat an' take the spoon to the police-office.

OLD HILSE

Gottlieb, put on year coat.

GOTTLIEB

[_Pulling it on, eagerly._] Yes, an' I'll go right in to the office an' say they're not to blame us for it, for how c'n a child like that understand about it? an' I brought the spoon back at once. Stop your crying now, Mielchen!

[_The crying child is taken into the opposite room by her mother, who shuts her in and comes back._

HORNIG

I believe it's worth as much as nine shillin's.

GOTTLIEB

Give us a cloth to wrap it in, Luise, so that it'll take no harm. To think of the thing bein' worth all that money!

[_Tears come into his eyes while he is wrapping up the spoon._

LUISE

If it was only ours, we could live on it for many a day.

OLD HILSE

Hurry up, now! Look sharp! As quick as ever you can. A fine state o' matters, this! Get that devil's spoon out o' the house.

[_GOTTLIEB goes off with the spoon._

HORNIG

I must be off now too.

[_He goes, is seen talking to the people in the entry-room before he leaves the house._

SURGEON SCHMIDT

[_A jerky little ball of a man, with a red, knowing face, comes into the entry-room._] Good-morning, all! These are fine goings on! Take care! take care! [_Threatening with his finger._] You're a sly lot--that's what you are. [_At HILSE'S door without coming in._] Morning, father Hilse. [_To a woman in the outer room._] And how are the pains, mother? Better, eh? Well, well. And how's all with you, father Hilse? [_Enters._] Why the deuce! what's the matter with mother?

LUISE

It's the eye veins, sir--they've dried up, so as she can't see at all now.

SURGEON SCHMIDT

That's from the dust and weaving by candlelight. Will you tell me what it means that all Peterswaldau's on the way here? I set off on my rounds this morning as usual, thinking no harm; but it wasn't long till I had my eyes opened. Strange doings these! What in the devil's name has taken possession of them, Hilse? They're like a pack of raging wolves. Riot--why, it's revolution! they're getting refractory--plundering and laying waste right and left ... Mielchen! where's Mielchen? [_MIELCHEN, her face red with crying, is pushed in by her mother._] Here, Mielchen, put your hand into my coat pocket. [_MIELCHEN does so._] The ginger-bread nuts are for you. Not all at once, though, you baggage! And a song first! The fox jumped up on a ... come, now ... The fox jumped up ... on a moonlight ... Mind, I've heard what you did. You called the sparrows on the churchyard hedge a nasty name, and they're gone and told the pastor. Did any one ever hear the like? Fifteen hundred of them agog--men, women, and children. [_Distant bells are heard._] That's at Reichenbach-- alarm-bells! Fifteen hundred people! Uncomfortably like the world coming to an end!

OLD HILSE

An' is it true that they're on their way to Bielau?

SURGEON SCHMIDT

That's just what I'm telling you, I've driven through the middle of the whole crowd. What I'd have liked to do would have been to get down and give each of them a pill there and then. They were following on each other's heels like misery itself, and their singing was more than enough to turn a man's stomach. I was nearly sick, and Frederick was shaking on the box like an old woman. We had to take a stiff glass at the first opportunity. I wouldn't be a manufacturer, not though I could drive my carriage and pair. [_Distant singing._] Listen to that! It's for all the world as if they were beating at some broken old boiler. We'll have them here in five minutes, friends. Good-bye! Don't you be foolish. The troops will be upon them in no time. Keep your wits about you. The Peterswaldau people have lost theirs. [_Bells ring close at hand._] Good gracious! There are our bells ringing too! Every one's going mad.

[_He goes upstairs._

GOTTLIEB

[_Comes back. In the entry-room, out of breath._] I've seen 'em, I've seen 'em! [_To a woman._] They're here, auntie, they're here! [_At the door._] They're here, father, they're here! They've got bean-poles, an' ox-goads, an' axes. They're standin' outside the upper Dittrich's kickin' up an awful row. I think he's payin' 'em money. O Lord! whatever's goin' to happen? What a crowd! Oh, you never saw such a crowd! Dash it all--if once they makes a rush, our manufacturers'll be hard put to it.

OLD HILSE

What have you been runnin' like that for? You'll go racin' till you bring on your old trouble, and then we'll have you on your back again, strugglin' for breath.

GOTTLIEB

[_Almost joyously excited._] I had to run, or they would ha' caught me an' kept me. They was all roarin' to me to join 'em. Father Baumert was there too, and says he to me: You come an' get your sixpence with the rest--you're a poor starvin' weaver too. An' I was to tell you, father, from him, that you was to come an' help to pay out the manufacturers for their grindin' of us down. [_Passionately._] Other times is comin', he says. There's goin' to be a change of days for us weavers. An' we're all to come an' help to bring it about. We're to have our half-pound o' meat on Sundays, and now and again on a holiday sausage with our cabbage. Yes, things is to be quite different, by what he tells me.

OLD HILSE

[_With repressed indignation._] An' that man calls hisself your godfather! and he bids you take part in such works o' wickedness? Have nothing to do with them, Gottlieb. They've let themselves be tempted by Satan, an' it's his works they're doin'.

LUISE

[_No longer able to restrain her passionate excitement, vehemently._] Yes, Gottlieb, get into the chimney corner, an' take a spoon in your hand, an' a dish o' skim milk on your knee, an' pat on a petticoat an' say your prayers, and then father'll be pleased with you. And _he_ sets up to be a man!

[_Laughter from the people in the entry-room._

OLD HILSE

[_Quivering with suppressed rage._] An' you set up to be a good wife, 'eh? You calls yourself a mother, an' let your evil tongue run away with you like that? You think yourself fit to teach your girl, you that would egg on your husband to crime an' wickedness?

LUISE

[_Has lost all control of herself._] You an' your piety an' religion--did they serve to keep the life in my poor children? In rags an' dirt they lay, all the four--it didn't as much as keep 'em dry. Yes! I sets up to be a mother, that's what I do--an' if you'd like to know it, that's why I'd send all the manufacturers to hell--because I'm a mother!--Not one of the four could I keep in life! It was cryin' more than breathin' with me from the time each poor little thing came into the world till death took pity on it. The devil a bit you cared! You sat there prayin' and singin', and let me run about till my feet bled, tryin' to get one little drop o' skim milk. How many hundred nights has I lain an' racked my head to think what I could do to cheat the churchyard of my little one? What harm has a baby like that done that it must come to such a miserable end--eh? An' over there at Dittrich's they're bathed in wine an' washed in milk. No! you may talk as you like, but if they begins here, ten horses won't hold me back. An' what's more--if there's a rush on Dittrich's, you'll see me in the forefront of it--an' pity the man as tries to prevent me--I've stood it long enough, so now you know it.

OLD HILSE

You're a lost soul--there's no help for you.

LUISE

[_Frenzied._] It's you that there's no help for! Tatter-breeched scarecrows--that's what you are--an' not men at all. Whey-faced gutter-scrapers that take to your heels at the sound of a child's rattle. Fellows that says "thank you" to the man as gives you a hidin'. They've not left that much blood in you as that you can turn red in the face. You should have the whip taken to you, an' a little pluck flogged into your rotten bones.

[_She goes out quickly._

[_Embarrassed pause._]

MOTHER HILSE

What's the matter with Liesl, father?

OLD HILSE

Nothin', mother! What should be the matter with her?

MOTHER HILSE

Father, is it only me that's thinkin' it, or is the bells ringin'?

OLD HILSE

It'll be a funeral, mother.

MOTHER HILSE

An' I've got to sit waitin' here yet. Why must I be so long a-dyin', father? [_Pause._]

OLD HILSE

[_Leaves his work, holds himself up straight; solemnly._] Gottlieb!--you heard all your wife said to us. Look here, Gottlieb! [_He bares his breast._] Here they cut out a bullet as big as a thimble. The King knows where I lost my arm. It wasn't the mice as ate it. [_He walks up and down._] Before that wife of yours was ever thought of, I had spilled my blood by the quart for King an' country. So let her call what names she likes--an' welcome! It does me no harm--Frightened? Me frightened? What would I be frightened of, will you tell me that? Of the few soldiers, maybe, that'll be comin' after the rioters? Good gracious me! That would be a lot to be frightened at! No, no, lad; I may be a bit stiff in the back, but there's some strength left in the old bones; I've got the stuff in me yet to make a stand against a few rubbishin' bay'nets.--An' if it

came to the worst! Willin', willin' would I be to say good-bye to this weary world. Death'd be welcome--welcomer to me to-day than to-morrow. For what is it we leave behind? That old bundle of aches an' pains we call our body, the care an' the oppression we call by the name o' life. We may be glad to get away from it,--But there's something to come after, Gottlieb!--an' if we've done ourselves out o' that too--why, then it's all over with us!

GOTTLIEB

Who knows what's to come after? Nobody's seen it.

OLD HILSE

Gottlieb! don't you be throwin' doubts on the one comfort us poor people have. Why has I sat here an' worked my treadle like a slave this forty year an' more?--sat still an' looked on at him over yonder livin' in pride an' wastefulness--why? Because I have a better hope, something as supports me in all my troubles. [_Points out at the window._] You have your good things in this world--I'll have mine in the next. That's been my thought. An' I'm that certain of it--I'd let myself be torn to pieces. Have we not His promise? There's a Day of Judgment comin'; but it's not us as are the judges--no: Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.

[_A cry of_ "Weavers, come out!" _is heard outside the window._

OLD HILSE

Do what you will for me. [_He seats himself at his loom._] I stay here.

GOTTLIEB

[_After a short struggle._] I'm going to work too--come what may.

[_Goes out._

[_The Weavers' Song is heard, sung by hundreds of voices quite close at hand; it sounds like a dull, monotonous wail._

INMATES OF THE HOUSE

[_In the entry-room._] "Oh, mercy on us! there they come swarmin' like ants!"--"Where can all these weavers be from?"--"Don't shove like that, I want to see too."--"Look at that great maypole of a woman leadin' on in front!"--"Gracious! they're comin' thicker an' thicker."

HORNIG

[_Comes into the entry-room from outside._] There's a theayter play for you now! That's what you don't see every day. But you should go up to the other Dittrich's an' look what they've done there. It's been no half work. He's got no house now, nor no factory, nor no wine-cellar, nor nothin'. They're drinkin' out o' the bottles--not so much as takin' the time to get out the corks. One, two, three, an' off with the neck, an' no matter whether they cuts their mouths or not. There's some of 'em runnin' about bleedin' like stuck pigs.--Now they're goin' to do for Dittrich here.

[_The singing has stopped._

INMATES OF THE HOUSE

There's nothin' so very wicked like about them.

HORNIG

You wait a bit! you'll soon see! All they're doin' just now is makin' up their minds where they'll begin. Look, they're inspectin' the palace from every side. Do you see that little stout man there, him with the stable pail? That's the smith from Peterswaldau--an' a dangerous little chap he is. He batters in the thickest doors as if they were made o' pie-crust. If a manufacturer was to fall into his hands it would be all over with him!

HOUSE INMATES

"That was a crack!"--"There went a stone through the window!"--"There's old Dittrich, shakin' with fright."--"He's hangin' out a board."--"Hangin' out a board?"--"What's written on it?"--"Can't you read?"--"It'd be a bad job for me if I couldn't read!"--"Well, read it, then!"--"'You--shall have--full--satis-fac-tion! You--you shall have full satisfaction.'"

HORNIG

He might ha' spared hisself the trouble--_that_ won't help him. It's something else they've set their minds on here. It's the factories. They're goin' to smash up the power-looms. For it's them that is ruinin' the hand-loom weaver. Even a blind man might see that. No! the good folks knows what they're after, an' no sheriff an' no p'lice superintendent'll bring them to reason--much less a bit of a board. Him as has seen 'em at work already knows what's comin'.

HOUSE INMATES

"Did any one ever see such a crowd!"--"What can _these_ be wantin'?"--[_Hastily._] "They're crossin' the bridge!"--[_Anxiously._] "They're never comin' over on this side, are they?"--[_In excitement and terror._] "It's to us they're comin'! They're comin' to us! They're comin' to fetch the weavers out o' their houses!"

[_General flight. The entry-room is empty. A crowd of dirty, dusty rioters rush in, their faces scarlet with brandy, and excitement; tattered, untidy-looking, as if they had been up all night. With the shout:_ "Weavers, come out!" _they disperse themselves through the house. BECKER and several other young weavers, armed with cudgels and poles, come into OLD HILSE'S room. When they see the old man at his loom they start, and cool down a little._

BECKER

Come, father Hilse, stop that. Leave your work to them as wants to work. There's no need now for you to be doin' yourself harm. You'll be well taken care of.

FIRST YOUNG WEAVER

You'll never need to go hungry to bed again.

SECOND YOUNG WEAVER

The weaver's goin' to have a roof over his head an' a shirt on his back once more.

OLD HILSE

An' what's the devil sendin' you to do now, with your poles an' axes?

BECKER

These are what we're goin' to break on Dittrich's back.

SECOND YOUNG WEAVER

We'll heat 'em red hot an' stick 'em down the manufacturers' throats, so as they'll feel for once what burnin' hunger tastes like.

THIRD YOUNG WEAVER

Come along, father Hilse! We'll give no quarter.

SECOND YOUNG WEAVER

No one had mercy on us--neither God nor man. Now we're standin' up for our rights ourselves.

OLD BAUMERT enters, somewhat shaky on the legs, a newly killed cock under his arm.

OLD BAUMERT

[_Stretching out his arms._] My brothers--we're all brothers! Come to my arms, brothers!

[_Laughter._

OLD HILSE

And that's the state you're in, Willem?

OLD BAUMERT

Gustav, is it you? My poor starvin' friend. Come to my arms, Gustav!

OLD HILSE

[_Mutters._] Let me alone.

OLD BAUMERT

I'll tell you what, Gustav. It's nothin' but luck that's wanted. You look at me. What do I look like? Luck's what's wanted. Don't I look like a lord? [_Pats his stomach._] Guess what's in there! There's food fit for a prince in that belly. When luck's with him a man gets roast hare to eat an' champagne wine to drink.--I'll tell you all something: We've made a big mistake--we must help ourselves.

ALL

[_Speaking at once._] We must help ourselves, hurrah!

OLD BAUMERT

As soon as we gets the first good bite inside us we're different men. Damn it all! but you feels the power comin' into you till you're like an ox, an' that wild with strength that you hit out right an' left without as much as takin' time to look. Dash it, but it's grand!

JAEGER

[_At the door, armed with an old cavalry sword._] We've made one or two first-rate attacks.

BECKER

We knows how to set about it now. One, two, three, an' we're inside the house. Then, at it like lightnin'--bang, crack, shiver! till the sparks are flyin' as if it was a smithy.

FIRST YOUNG WEAVER

It wouldn't be half bad to light a bit o' fire.

SECOND YOUNG WEAVER

Let's march to Reichenbach an' burn the rich folks' houses over their heads!

JAEGER

That would be nothin' but butterin' their bread, Think of all the insurance money they'd get.

[_Laughter._

BECKER

No, from here we'll go to Freiburg, to Tromtra's.

JAEGER

What would you say to givin' all them as holds Government appointments a lesson? I've read somewhere as how all our troubles come from them birocrats, as they calls them.

SECOND YOUNG WEAVER

Before long we'll go to Breslau, for more an' more'll be joinin' us.

OLD BAUMERT

[_To HILSE._] Won't you take a drop, Gustav?

OLD HILSE

I never touches it.

OLD BAUMERT

That was in the old world; we're in a new world to-day, Gustav.

FIRST YOUNG WEAVER

Christmas comes but once a year.

[_Laughter._

OLD HILSE

[_Impatiently._] What is it you want in my house, you limbs of Satan?

OLD BAUMERT

[_A little intimidated, coaxingly._] I was bringin' you a chicken, Gustav. I thought it would make a drop o' soup for mother.

OLD HILSE

[_Embarrassed, almost friendly._] Well, you can tell mother yourself.

MOTHER HILSE

[_Who has been making efforts to hear, her hand at her ear, motions them off._] Let me alone. I don't want no chicken soup.

OLD HILSE

That's right, mother. An' I want none, an' least of all that sort. An' let me say this much to you, Baumert: The devil stands on his head for joy when he hears the old ones jabberin' and talkin' as if they was infants. An' to you all I say--to every one of you: Me and you, we've got nothing to do with each other. It's not with my will that you're here. In law an' justice you've no right to be in my house.

A VOICE

Him that's not with us is against us.

JAEGER

[_Roughly and threateningly._] You're on the wrong track, old chap, I'd have you remember that we're not thieves.

A VOICE

We're hungry men, that's all.

FIRST YOUNG WEAVER

We wants to _live_--that's all. An' so we've cut the rope we was hung up with.

JAEGER

And we was in our right! [_Holding his fist in front of the old man's face_.] Say another word, and I'll give you one between the eyes.

BECKER

Come, now, Jaeger, be quiet. Let the old man alone.--What we say to ourselves, father Hilse, is this: Better dead than begin the old life again.

OLD HILSE

Have I not lived that life for sixty years an' more?

BECKER

That doesn't help us--there's _got_ to be a change.

OLD HILSE

On the Judgment Day.

BECKER

What they'll not give us willingly we're goin' to take by force.

OLD HILSE

By force. [_Laughs._] You may as well go an' dig your graves at once. They'll not be long showin' you where the force lies. Wait a bit, lad!

JAEGER

Is it the soldiers you're meanin'? We've been soldiers too. We'll soon do for a company or two of 'em.

OLD HILSE

With your tongues, maybe. But supposin' you did--for two that you'd beat off, ten'll come back.

VOICES

[_Call through the window._] The soldiers are comin! Look out!

[_General, sudden silence. For a moment a faint sound of fifes and drums is heard; in the ensuing silence a short, involuntary exclamation:_ "The devil! I'm off!" _followed by general laughter._

BECKER

Who was that? Who speaks of runnin' away?

JAEGER

Which of you is it that's afraid of a few paltry helmets? You have me to command you, and I've been in the trade. I knows their tricks.

OLD HILSE

An' what are you goin' to shoot with? Your sticks, eh?

FIRST YOUNG WEAVER

Never mind that old chap; he's wrong in the upper storey.

SECOND YOUNG WEAVER

Yes, he's a bit off his head.

GOTTLIEB

[_Has made his way unnoticed among the rioters; catches hold of the speaker._] Would you give your impudence to an old man like him?

SECOND YOUNG WEAVER

Let me alone. 'Twasn't anything bad I said.

OLD HILSE

[_Interfering._] Let him jaw, Gottlieb. What. would you be meddlin' with him for? He'll soon see who it is that's been off his head to-day, him or me.

BECKER

Are you comin', Gottlieb?

OLD HILSE

No, he's goin' to do no such thing.

LUISE

[_Comes into the entry-room, calls._] What are you puttin' off your time with prayin' hypocrites like them for? Come quick to where you're wanted! Quick! Father Baumert, run all you can! The major's speakin' to the crowd from horseback. They're to go home. If you don't hurry up, it'll be all over.

JAEGER

[_As he goes out._] That's a brave husband o' yours.

LUISE

Where is he? I've got no husband!

[_Some of the people in the entry-room sing_:

Once on a time a man so small, Heigh-ho, heigh! Set his heart on a wife so tall, Heigh diddle-di-dum-di!

WITTIG, THE SMITH

[_Comes downstairs, still carrying the stable pail; stops on his way through the entry-room._] Come On! all of you that is not cowardly scoundrels!--hurrah!

[_He dashes out, followed by LUISE, JAEGER, and others, all shouting_ "Hurrah!"

BECKER

Good-bye, then, father Hilse; well see each other again.

[_Is going._

OLD HILSE

I doubt that. I've not five years to live, and that'll be the soonest you'll get out.

BECKER

[_Stops, not understanding._] Out o' what, father Hilse?

OLD HILSE

Out o' prison--where else?

BECKER

[_Laughs wildly._] Do you think I'd mind that? There's bread to be had there anyhow!

[_Goes out._

OLD BAUMERT

[_Has been cowering on a low stool, painfully beating his brains; he now gets up._] It's true, Gustav, as I've had a drop too much. But for all that I knows what I'm about. You think one way in this here matter; I think another. I say Becker's right: even if it ends in chains an' ropes--we'll be better off in prison than at home. You're cared for there, an' you don't need to starve. I wouldn't have joined 'em, Gustav, if I could ha' let it be; but once in a lifetime a man's got to show what he feels. [_Goes slowly towards the door._] Good-bye, Gustav. If anything happens, mind you put in a word for me in your prayers.

[_Goes out._

[_The rioters are now all gone. The entry-room, gradually fills again with curious onlookers from the different rooms of the house. OLD HILSE knots at his web. GOTTLIEB has taken an axe from behind the stove and is unconsciously feeling its edge. He and the old man are silently agitated. The hum and roar of a great crowd penetrate into the room._

MOTHER HILSE

The very boards is shakin', father--what's goin' on? What's goin' to happen to us?

[_Pause._]

OLD HILSE

Gottlieb!

GOTTLIEB

What is it?

OLD HILSE

Let that axe alone.

GOTTLIEB

Who's to split the wood, then?

[_He leans the axe against the stove._

[_Pause._]

MOTHER HILSE

Gottlieb, you listen, to what father says to you.

[_Some one sings outside the window:_

Our little man does all that he can, Heigh-ho, heigh! At home he cleans the pots an' the pan, Heigh-diddle-di-dum-di!

[_Passes on._

GOTTLIEB

[_Jumps up, shakes his clenched fist at the window._] Beast! Don't drive me crazy!

[_A volley of musketry is heard._

MOTHER HILSE

[_Starts and trembles._] Good Lord! Is that thunder again?

OLD HILSE

[_Instinctively folding his hands._] Oh, our Father in heaven! defend the poor weavers, protect my poor brothers.

[_A short pause ensues._

OLD HILSE

[_To himself, painfully agitated._] There's blood flowin' now.

GOTTLIEB

[_Had started up and grasped the axe when the shooting was heard; deathly pale, almost beside himself with excitement._] An' am I to lie to heel like a dog still?

A GIRL

[_Calls from the entry-room._] Father Hilse, father Hilse! get away from the window. A bullet's just flown in at ours upstairs.

[_Disappears._

MIELCHEN

[_Puts her head in at the window, laughing._] Gran'father, gran'father, they've shot with their guns. Two or three's been knocked down, an' one of 'em's turnin' round and round like a top, an' one's twistin' hisself like a sparrow when its head's bein' pulled of. An' oh, if you saw all the blood that came pourin'--!

[_Disappears._

A WEAVER'S WIFE

Yes, there's two or three'll never get up again.

AN OLD WEAVER

[_In the entry-room._] Look out! They're goin' to make a rush on the soldiers.

A SECOND WEAVER

[_Wildly._] Look, look, look at the women! skirts up, an' spittin' in the soldiers' faces already!

A WEAVER'S WIFE

[_Calls in._] Gottlieb, look at your wife. She's more pluck in her than you. She's jumpin' about in front o' the bay'nets as if she was dancin' to music.

[_Four men carry a wounded rioter through the entry-room. Silence, which is broken by some one saying in a distinct voice,_ "It's weaver Ulbrich." _Once more silence for a few seconds, when the same voice is heard again:_ "It's all over with him; he's got a bullet in his ear." _The men are heard climbing the wooden stair. Sudden shouting outside:_ "Hurrah, hurrah!"

VOICES IN THE ENTRY-ROOM

"Where did they get the stones from?"--"Yes, it's time you were off!"--"From the new road."--"Ta-ta, soldiers!"--"It's rainin' paving-stones."

[_Shrieks of terror and loud roaring outside, taken up by those in the entry-room. There is a cry of fear, and the house door is shut with a bang._

VOICES IN THE ENTRY-ROOM

"They're loadin' again."--"They'll fire another volley this minute."--"Father Hilse, get away from that window."

GOTTLIEB

[_Clutches the axe._] What! is we mad dogs? Is we to eat powder an' shot now instead o' bread? [_Hesitating an instant to the old man._] Would you have me sit here an' see my wife shot? Never! [_As he rushes out._] Look out! I'm coming!

OLD HILSE

Gottlieb, Gottlieb!

MOTHER HILSE

Where's Gottlieb gone?

OLD HILSE

He's gone to the devil.

VOICES FROM THE ENTRY-ROOM

Go away from the window, father Hilse.

OLD HILSE

Not I! Not if you all goes crazy together! [_To MOTHER HILSE, with rapt excitement._] My heavenly Father has placed me here. Isn't that so, mother? Here we'll sit, an' do our bounden duty--ay, though the snow was to go on fire.

[_He begins to weave._

[_Rattle of another volley. OLD HILSE, mortally wounded, starts to his feet and then falls forward over the loom. At the same moment loud shouting of_ "Hurrah!" _is heard. The people who till now have been standing in the entry-room dash out, joining in the cry. The old woman repeatedly asks:_ "Father, father, what's wrong with you?" _The continued shouting dies away gradually in the distance. MIELCHEN comes rushing in._

MIELCHEN

Gran'father, gran'father, they're drivin' the soldiers out o' the village; they've got into Dittrich's house, an' they're doin' what they did at Dreissiger's. Gran'father! [_The child grows frightened, notices that something has happened, puts her finger in her mouth, and goes up cautiously to the dead man._] Gran'father!

MOTHER HILSE

Come now, father, can't you say something? You're frightenin' me.

THE END