A REDISCOVERED WORK

IN THE OLD SUN

A NOVEL

HERMANN HESSE

BERSERKER

BOOKS

Hermann Hesse

In the old Sun

(a rediscovered novella by Hermann Hesse)

Table of Contents

In the old Sun

Whenever, in spring or summer or even early autumn, there comes a soft, pleasant day, just warm enough to make it agreeable to loiter in the open air, then the extravagantly crooked path that joins the Allpach road, just before you leave the last high-lying houses of the town, is a charming spot. On the serpentine windings of the path as it goes up the hill the sun always lies warm. The place is sheltered from every wind. A few gnarled old fruit-trees give not indeed fruit but a little shade, and the border of the road, a green strip of smooth surf, entices you in the friendliest way by its soft curves to sit down or to stretch yourself at full length. The white path gleams in the sunlight as it climbs slowly and easily, sending a thin cloud of dust up to greet every farm-wagon or landau or post-chaise; and it gives a view over a steep huddle of dark roofs, broken here and there by the tops of trees, down into the heart of the town—to the market-place, which indeed, seen from here, loses a good deal of its impressiveness, and appears only as a peculiarly fore-shortened rectangle of irregular houses and curiously protruding front steps and cellar doors.

On such mild, sunshiny days the comfortable turf border of this lofty hill-climbing path is always occupied by a small troop of resting men, whose bold, weather-beaten faces do not entirely harmonize with their tame and sluggish gestures, and the youngest of whom is well up in the fifties. They sit or lie at their ease in the warm greenness; they are silent, or carry on short, muttered conversations; they smoke short black pipes, and are continually spitting, with an air of contempt for the world, down the steep slope below them. The few workmen who pass by are sharply observed by them and critically placed; and each, according to the verdict, is greeted with a benevolent nod and “How are you, comrade?” or allowed to pass in disdainful silence.

A stranger who watched the old men lounging there, and inquired in the first street he came to about the odd collection of gray idlers, could learn from any child that they were known as the “Sun-Brothers.” Many such strangers turned to look back once more at the weary group blinking in the sunlight, and wondered how they came to get such a lofty-sounding and poetical name. Some traveling enthusiasts felt a mysterious thrill at the name, and made out of the half-dozen gray loafers the surviving remnants

of an almost extinct and very ancient community of worshippers of the orb of day. But the luminary after which the Sun-Brothers had been named had long ceased to shine in any sky; it was only the sign of a miserable tavern which had vanished several years before. Both sign and fame had disappeared, for the building served later as the city poorhouse, still harboring, indeed, numerous guests who had lived to see the setting of the sun taken down from the sign, and had acquired at its bar the reversion of their present shelter and guardianship.

The small house stood last in the steep lane and in the town, close to this sunny strip of turf. It offered a warped and weary front to the eye, as though it was a considerable effort to stand upright, and had nothing now about it to show how much merriment and cheerful clinking of glasses, joking and laughter it had seen, to say nothing of lively brawls and knife-play. Since the old pink paint of the front had grown pale and peeled off in cracked patches, the ancient abode of vagabonds corresponded accurately in its external appearance to its purpose, which is not always the case with municipal buildings in our day. Plainly and honestly, even eloquently, it gave every one to understand that it was a refuge for those who had made shipwreck of their lives and been left behind in the race, the desperate end of a narrow backwater from which no plans or hidden resources could ever work them out again into the stream of life.

Fortunately, little of the melancholy of such reflections was to be found in the circle of the Sun-Brothers. Rather, they—most of them—went on living after the fashion of their bygone days, puffed up their petty bickerings and fancies and amusements, friendships and jealousies, to the dimensions of weighty events and affairs of state, and took not each other but themselves as seriously as possible. In fact, they behaved as if it was only now, since they had extricated themselves from the noisy streets of the bustling world, that the chase was beginning; they carried on their insignificant affairs with a gravity and a tenacity which for the most part they had never been able to attain in their earlier activities. Like many another small collection of men, although they were ruled on the principles of absolute monarchy by the head of the institution and treated as mere imaginary existences without rights, they believed themselves to be a small republic, in which every free citizen had the same title to rank and position as another and was firmly determined never to allow himself to be too little esteemed, even by a hair’s breadth.

The Sun-Brothers had this too in common with other people, that they experienced the greater part of their destinies and satisfactions, their joys and sorrows, more in imagination than in tangible reality. A humorist might indeed have considered the difference between the life of these wrecks of humanity and that of busy citizens as consisting only in imagination, since both alike carried on their large and small affairs with the same busy gravity, and in the last resort an unfortunate inmate of the poorhouse might possibly not be much worse off in God's eyes than many a great and honored personage. But without going as far as that, it might well be contended that for the easygoing observer of life these Sun-Brothers were no unworthy object of contemplation, since human life, even upon a small stage, always offers an amusing drama and one well worth consideration.

The nearer the time approaches when the present generation will have forgotten the name of the old "Sun" tavern and the Sun-Brothers, and its poor and outcast members will be cared for in other places, the more desirable it is that there should be a history of the old house and its inmates. As a contribution to such a chronicle, these pages will narrate something of the life of the first Sun-Brothers.

In the days when the present young men of Gerbersau were still wearing short breeches or even dresses, and when over the door of the present poorhouse there still swung proudly from the pink facade, at the length of a wrought-iron arm, the tin sun which was its ensign, one day late in autumn Karl Hürlin came back to his native town. He was the son of Hürlin the locksmith in the Senfgasse, who was long since dead. He was a little more than forty, and no one knew him any longer, since he had wandered away as a very young man and had never since been seen in the town. Now, however, he wore a good, neat suit of clothes, a moustache and well-trimmed hair, a silver watch-chain, a stiff hat and a high clean collar. He visited some of the former acquaintances of his family and a few old school friends, and bore himself in general as a man who had gone away and risen in the world, conscious of his value without over-emphasis. Then he went to the town hall, exhibited his papers, and declared that he intended to settle down in the place. After the necessary preliminaries had been accomplished, Herr Hürlin developed a busy and mysterious activity and correspondence, often took little journeys, and bought a piece of ground at the bottom of the valley. He began to build there, on the site of an oil-works that had burned down, a new brick house, a stable and coachhouse near it,

and between the stable and the house a huge brick chimney. In the meantime he was seen now and then in the town taking his glass of an evening. At the beginning he was quiet and dignified, but after he had had a few glasses he would talk loud and emphatically, and made no secret of the fact that he had money enough to live a fine gentleman's life—but that one man was a thick-headed idler and another a genius and a man of business, that he belonged to the latter class and had no idea of sitting down to rest until he was able to write six ciphers after the figures that denoted his wealth.

Business people from whom he asked credit inquired into his history, and found out that up to that time he had never played an important part, but had been employed in various workshops and factories, rising finally to be a foreman. Lately, however, he had fallen into a tidy inheritance; and so people accorded him a certain measure of respect, and a few enterprising men put money also into his business. Soon, then, a moderately large and good-looking factory arose, in which Hürlin proposed to turn out certain rollers and other machinery required in the woolen industry.

Hardly was the place opened when its projector was sued by the same firm for which he had been overseer, on a charge of illegally representing as his own inventions and using some technical secrets which he had acquired there. He came out of the endless litigation without discredit but with heavy costs; he pushed his business with redoubled zeal, lowering his prices somewhat and flooding the country with advertisements. Orders were not lacking, the big chimney smoked night and day, and for a few years Hürlin and his factory flourished, and enjoyed respect and ample credit.

He had attained his ideal and fulfilled his old dream. It was true that in his earlier years he had made more than one attempt to acquire wealth, but it was the almost unexpected inheritance which had set him on his feet and enabled him to carry out his bold plans. Riches had not been his only aim; his warmest desires had all along tended toward the acquisition of a great and commanding position in the world. He would have been in his element as an Indian chief, as a privy councillor, or even as a master-huntsman; but the life of a factory-owner seemed to him both more comfortable and more independent. A cigar in the corner of his mouth and a grave and thoughtful smile upon his face, standing at the window or sitting at his desk to issue all sorts of orders, to sign contracts, to listen to suggestions and requests, to combine the wrinkled brow of the very busy man with an easy, comfortable

manner, to be now unapproachably strict and now good- naturedly condescending, and at all times to feel that he was a leader of men and that much depended on him—this was his gift, which unfortunately had come only too late in life to full exercise. But now he had his desire to the full; he could do as he pleased, set people up or put them down, heave delightful sighs over the burden of wealth, and feel that he was envied by many. All this he enjoyed with a connoisseur's pleasure and with entire absorption; he wallowed in happiness, and felt that fate had at last given him the place that belonged to him.

In the meantime, the rival at whose expense he had grown great, made a new discovery, the introduction of which showed a number of the earlier products to be useless and turned out others much more cheaply. Since Hürlin, for all his self-confidence, was not a genius and understood only the externals of his trade, he descended at first slowly and then with increasing rapidity from his height of success, and finally reached a point where he was unable to conceal from himself that he was beaten. In desperation, he tried some daring financial expedients, through which he involved himself and a number of creditors with him in a complete and unsavory bankruptcy. He fled, but was caught and brought back, tried, and sent to jail; and when after several years he appeared once more in the town it was as a discredited and broken man who could not hope to make a fresh start.

For a while he found humble occupations; but in the sultry days when the storm was gathering he had developed into a secret drinker—and what had then been concealed and little regarded became now a public scandal. Dismissed from a small clerk's place for untrustworthiness, he became an insurance agent, and in this capacity took to visiting all the taverns of the neighborhood. He lost this employment too, and, when an attempt to peddle matches and pencils from house to house also failed to produce an income, he sank to be a charge on the community. In these years he had become suddenly old and wretched; but from the days of his ruined splendor he had retained a certain provision of small arts and an external manner which helped him over some rough places and still produced their effect in the lower class of public-houses. He took with him to these places certain majestic and sweeping gestures and well-sounding habits of speech which had long corresponded to no inner reality, but on the strength of which he still enjoyed a standing among the good-for-nothings of the town.

At that time there was no poorhouse in Gerbersau; but people who were of no use to the community were maintained at a small provision from the town funds here and there in private families as lodgers. Here they were furnished with the absolute necessities of life and employed according to their capacity in small domestic labors. Since, however, all sorts of inconveniences arose from this system, and since no one at all was willing to receive the broken-down manufacturer, who enjoyed the hatred of the whole population, the community saw itself compelled to establish a special house as an asylum. And as at that particular moment the miserable old "Sun" tavern came under the hammer, the town acquired it and placed there as the first inmate, with a manager, Karl Hürlin. Others soon followed him; and they became known as the "Sun-Brothers."

Now Hürlin had long had close relations with the "Sun," since in the course of his decline he had frequented always lower and more wretched places, and finally had made his main headquarters there. He was expected among the daily visitors, and sat in the evenings at the same table with several boon companions who, when their time too came, were to follow him as despised paupers into the very same house. He was really glad to take up his abode there. In the days after the purchase of the property, when carpenters were busy transforming the old place to its new condition, he stood watching them from morning till night.

One mild, sunshiny morning he had arrived there as usual and taken up his position near the main door to watch the workmen at their task inside. One of the floors was broken and had to be relaid, the rickety stairs had to be patched up and provided with a firm balustrade, a couple of thin partitions put in. The town foreman was getting after the workmen, who were simulating great industry, and the school-children were wandering from room to room. All this activity delighted old Hürlin. He looked on with cheerful interest, pretending not to hear the malicious remarks of the workmen; he plunged his hands into the deep pockets of his greasy coat, and twisted his charity trousers, much too long and wide for him, into various spiral forms in which his legs looked like corkscrews. He pulled continually at a chipped clay pipe, which was not lit but still smelt of tobacco. His approaching entry into his new abode, from which he promised himself a new and fairer existence, filled the old drunkard with delighted curiosity and excitement.

While he was watching the laying of the new stairs and silently estimating the quality and probable durability of the thin pine boards, he suddenly felt himself pushed to one side. As he turned in the direction of the street, he saw a workman with a large step-ladder which with great care and many props he was attempting to set up on the sloping surface of the street. Hürlin betook himself to the opposite side of the street, leaned against a stone, and followed the activity of the workman with great attention. The latter had now set up his ladder and made it secure; he climbed it and began to scratch about in the mortar over the main door with a view of taking down the old sign. His efforts filled the ex-manufacturer with interest and also with pain, as he thought of the bygone days, of the many glasses of wine or spirits he had drunk under the now disappearing sign, and of the past in general. He took no little joy in observing that the iron arm was so firmly fixed in the wall that the workman had much trouble in getting it loose. Under the poor old sign there had been so many infernally good times! When the workman began to swear, the old man smiled; when he pulled and pushed and twisted and knocked, when he began to sweat and almost fell off the ladder, the spectator felt no little satisfaction. Finally he went away, and came back in a quarter of an hour with an iron-saw. Hürlin perceived that now it was all over with the venerable ensign. The saw bit shriekingly into the good iron; after a few moments the arm began to droop, and finally fell with a rattle and a clang on the pavement.

Hürlin crossed the street. “I say, Mr. Workman,” he begged humbly, “give me the thing; it’s of no value now.”

“Why? Who are you?” asked the fellow.

“I’m of the same religion,” answered Hürlin entreatingly—“my father was a locksmith too, and I’ve been one in my time. Give it me, won’t you?”

The workman picked up the sign and looked at it. “The arm is still good,” he decided. “For its time it was not a bad piece of work. But if you want the tin thing, that’s no use to anybody …”

He tore away the green tin wreath in which, with long since dimmed and lumpy rays about it, the golden sun had hung, and gave it to him. The old man thanked him and made off with his prize, to hide it in the elder-bushes further up with a strange greed and pleasure in the thought of contemplating it. So, after a lost battle, a paladin might have hidden the insignia of fallen royalty, to preserve them for other days and new glories. When he returned, to recommence his inspection of the carpenters’ work,

the house struck him as changed and desolate because the sun was gone, and in its place over the door there was nothing but an ugly hole in the plaster.

A few days later, without much pomp or ceremony, the opening of the scantily-furnished poorhouse took place. A few beds had been put up; the rest of the furniture was the product of the tavern-keeper's sale, except that a supporter of the scheme had decorated each of the three bedrooms with a Bible text surrounded by wreaths of flowers painted on cardboard. For the position of manager, when it was put up to competition, there had not been many applicants; and the choice had fallen upon Herr Andreas Sauberle, a widowed weaver of good repute, who brought his loom with him and continued to work at his trade—the position was not very remunerative, and he had no desire to become a Sun-Brother himself in his old age.

When old Hürlin had his room assigned to him, he at once began a minute examination of it. He found a window looking on the small courtyard, two doors, a bed, a chest, two chairs, a jar, a broom and duster; further, a shelf in the corner covered with oilcloth, on which stood a glass, a tin basin, a clothesbrush and a New Testament. He felt the stout bedclothes, tried the brush on his hat, held up glass and basin critically to the light, sat down experimentally on both the chairs, and decided that all was satisfactory and in order: Only the impressive text on the wall failed to meet with his approval. He contemplated it for awhile with a scornful expression, read the words, "Little children, love one another," and shook his bushy head discontentedly. Then he pulled the thing down, and with great care hung the old "Sun" sign in its place—the only piece of property he had brought with him to his new dwelling. But just as he did so the manager came in, and ordered him in a tone of rebuke to put back the text. He was going to take the tin sun with him to throw it away, but Karl Hürlin clung to it desperately, insisting with loud outcries on his rights of property, and finally hid the trophy, still growling, under his bed.

The life that began on the following day did not quite correspond to his expectations and at first did not please him at all. He was obliged to rise at seven and go to get his coffee in the weaver's quarters, then make his bed, clean his wash-basin, polish his boots, and generally tidy up the room. At ten o'clock there was a piece of black bread for him, after which began the forced labor which he dreaded. A huge pile of wood had been dumped in the yard, which was all to be sawed and split.

As winter was still a long way off, Hürlin did not hurry himself with the wood. Slowly and carefully he laid a log in position, then he adjusted it with great accuracy, and considered awhile where he should begin to saw it, whether in the middle or on the right or the left. Then he applied the saw with the same care, laid it aside once more, spat on his hands and picked it up again. Now he took three or four strokes, cutting half an inch into the wood, but then drew the saw out again and examined it minutely, turned the screw, set it a little sharper, held it up and blinked at it for awhile, then heaved a deep sigh and rested for a time. Presently he began again and sawed a few inches into the wood; but he grew unbearably warm and stopped to take off his coat. This process he performed slowly and with reflection, and then looked about some time for a clean and safe place to put it. When it was properly bestowed, he began to saw once more—but not for long; the sun had come up over the roof, and shone directly in his face. This necessitated moving the log and the trestle and the saw, each separately, to another place where he could be in the shade. This exertion brought out the perspiration, and he was obliged to look for his handkerchief to wipe his forehead. It was not in his trousers pocket; he remembered having it in his coat, and so he strolled over to where he had put the coat, spread it out carefully, sought and found the colored handkerchief, wiped off the sweat, blew his nose, put the handkerchief away, folded the coat with great attention, and returned to his saw-horse much refreshed. Here he came to the conclusion that he had perhaps set the saw at too sharp an angle, and so he performed a new operation upon it which took some time, and finally, with much grunting, achieved the complete division of the log into two pieces. By this time the midday bells were ringing from the church-tower, so he quickly got into his coat, put the saw away, and went into the house to dinner.

"You're punctual, I'm bound to say that for you," remarked the weaver. The woman brought in the soup, after which there was some cabbage with a slice of bacon, and Hürlin fell to with a will.

After dinner the sawing was supposed to continue, but this he declined with emphasis. "I'm not accustomed to it," he said in an injured tone, and stuck to it. "I'm tired out, and must have a little rest."

The weaver shrugged his shoulders and said "Do as you like—but a man that won't work must'nt expect any supper. At four o'clock there'll be

bread and cider, if you've done your sawing—otherwise nothing more till the soup at night."

Bread and cider, thought Hürlin, and was confronted with a very serious problem. In the end he went out and picked up the saw again; but he shuddered at the thought of working in the hot midday hours, and he let the wood lie where it was. He went out in the street, found a cigar- stump on the pavement, put it in his mouth, and slowly covered the fifty paces to the bend in the road. There he stopped to take breath, sat down by the roadside on the fine warm turf, looked out over the many roofs and down to the market-place, catching a glimpse at the bottom of the valley of his old factory, and dedicated this place as the first of the Sun-Brothers—the place to which afterward so many of his comrades and successors have come to lounge away their summer afternoons, and often mornings and evenings as well.

The gentle, beneficent contemplation of an old age free from cares and troubles, which he had promised himself in the poorhouse, and which that morning had faded under the pressure of hard work like a fair mirage, now returned gradually to him. His heart soothed by the feeling of a pensioner assured for the rest of his days from anxiety, hunger, and homelessness, he sat at his ease on the turf, feeling the pleasing warmth of the sun on his withered skin. He gazed over the scene of his former activities and misfortunes, and waited without impatience till some one should come who would give him a light for his cigar-stump. Shrill hammering from a workshop, the distant ring of the anvil in a smithy, the low rumbling of a far-away wagon came up to his heights with a little dust from the road and thin smoke from chimneys of all sizes, to show him that down in the town people were bravely toiling and sweating, while Karl Hürlin sat peacefully untroubled on his throne at a dignified distance from it all.

About four o'clock he came quietly into the room of the weaver, who was moving his shuttle regularly back and forth. He waited a while to see if there might not, after all, be some bread and cider, but the weaver only laughed at him and sent him away. He returned disappointed to his post of observation, growling to himself; there he put in an hour or more in a sort of half sleep, and then watched the coming of evening to the narrow valley. It was still warm and comfortable up there, but his cheerful mood departed little by little; in spite of his slackness, he began to get horribly bored doing nothing, and his thoughts returned incessantly to the snack that he had

missed. He saw a tall glass full of cider standing in front of him, yellow and sparkling and perfumed with sweet herbs. He imagined how he would have taken it up, the cool round glass, and gulped down a good draught at the first, drinking then more sparingly. He gave an angry sigh as often as he woke from the delightful dream; and his anger went out against the pitiless manager, the weaver, the miserable skinflint, the little stumpy fellow, the oppressor, the seller of his soul, the poisonous Jew. After he had fumed enough at the manager, he began to be sorry for himself and fell into a tearful mood; but finally he made a resolution to work the next day.

He did not see how the valley grew paler and filled with soft shadows, and how the clouds took on a rosy tint; he was blind to the mild, sweet evening colors of the sky and the mysterious blue that came over the distant mountains. He saw nothing but that lost glass of cider, the toil that waited inevitably for him on the morrow, and the hardness of his lot. Those were the kind of thoughts he had been used to having when he had passed a day without getting anything to drink. What it would be like to have a glass of something stronger than cider was a thing he did not even dare to think about.

Stooping and languid, he made his way down to the house at supper-time, and took his seat ill-humoredly at the table. There was soup, bread, and onions, and he ate grimly as long as there was anything on his plate; but there was nothing to drink. After the meal he sat still disconsolately and did not know what to be at. Nothing to drink, nothing to smoke, no one to gossip with! For the weaver was working busily by lamplight, paying no attention to him.

Hürlin sat for a half hour at the empty table, listening to the click of Sauberle's machine and staring at the yellow flame of the hanging lamp, until he sank into an abyss of discontent, self-pity, envy, hatred and malice from which he neither sought nor found any way of escape. At last his silent anger and hopelessness grew too much for him. He raised his fist and brought it down on the table with a bang, rolling out a good German oath.

"Here!" said the weaver, coming over to him. "What's the matter with you? No cursing allowed where I am."

"Well, what in the devil's name am I to do?"

"Oh, you find the evening long? Then go to bed."

"There you are again! People send little children to bed at a certain time —not me!"

"Then I'll get a little work for you."

"Work? You're too free with your tyranny, you old slave-driver!"

"Come, keep cool! But there—there's something for you to read." He put out a couple of volumes from the thinly-furnished shelves that hung on the wall, and went back to his work. Hürlin had no inclination to read, but he took one of the books in his hand and opened it. It was an almanac, and he began to look at the pictures. The first was a fantastically dressed ideal woman's figure depicted as an ornament for the title-page, with bare feet and flowing locks. Hürlin remembered that he had a stump of lead-pencil in his pocket. He took it out, wet it in his mouth, and drew two large round breasts on the woman's bodice, which he continued to emphasize, wetting his pencil again and again, until the paper was almost worn through. Then he turned the page and saw with satisfaction that the impress of his artistic design had gone through several other pages. The next picture on which he came illustrated a fairy-story, and represented a kobold or some malicious spirit with evil eyes, a fierce moustache and a huge open mouth. Eagerly the old man wet his pencil again, and wrote under the monster, in large, legible letters, "This is Weaver Sauberle, the manager."

He was proposing to go through the whole book and deface and defile it all. But the next picture arrested his attention, and he forgot himself in studying it. It represented the explosion of a factory, and consisted of little beyond a huge mass of smoke and fire, around and above which whole or fragmentary human bodies, bricks, plaster, laths, and beams were flying through the air. This interested him, and led him into trying to reconstruct the whole story, and especially to imagine how the victims must have felt at the moment of being hurled into the air. There was a charm and a satisfaction in this for him which held him intent on the picture a long time; with all his egoism, he belonged to the numerous class who find more to think about in other people's fate, especially when it is strikingly illustrated, than in their own.

When he had exercised his imagination sufficiently on this exciting picture, he went on turning over the pages, and presently came to another that arrested him, though in quite a different way. It was a bright and cheerful picture—a pretty arbor, on the outer boughs of which hung a star for a sign. On the star sat, with ruffled neck and open beak, a little bird singing. Inside the arbor was to be seen, about a rough rustic table, a small group of young men, students or roving journeymen, who chatted and drank

a good wine out of cheerful-looking bottles. To one side of the picture was visible a ruined castle raising its towers to heaven, and in the background a fair landscape stretched away, as it might have been the Rhine valley, with a river and boats and distant hills. The revellers were all handsome youths, merry and amiable lads, smooth-faced or with light youthful beards, who were evidently singing over their wine the praises of friendship and love, of the good old Rhine and of God's blue heaven.

At first this engraving reminded the morose and lonely man who looked at it of his own better days, when he, too, could call for a bottle of wine, and of the many glasses of good sound stuff which he had consumed. But by degrees the conviction stole over him that he had never been as happy and gay as these young revellers, even long ago in his light-hearted years of wandering, when he had taken the road as a journeyman-locksmith. The summer gladness in the arbor, the bright, good-humored faces of the young people made him sad and angry. He wondered whether it was all the invention of a painter, idealized and false, or whether there were in reality somewhere such arbors and such merry, carefree youths. Their smiling faces filled him with an envious longing; the more he looked at the picture, the more he felt as though he were looking for a moment through a small window into another world, into a fairer country and the life of freer and more gracious men than he had ever met in his life. He did not know into what strange kingdom he was gazing, nor that his feelings were those of people who read poetry, and get their pleasure in the beauty of the description from the reflection how much smaller and meaner the every-day reality is, passing into a slight, sweet sadness and longing. He did not well understand how to extract the sweetness from this kind of sadness, and so he shut the book, threw it angrily on the table, muttered a forced "Good night," and went up to his room, where the moonlight lay on bed and floor and chest and was reflected in the filled wash-basin. The deep stillness, early as the hour was, the peaceful moonlight, and the emptiness of the room, almost too large for a mere sleeping-chamber, awoke in the rough old fellow a feeling of unbearable loneliness, from which he escaped only after many muttered curses and some time later into the land of slumber.

There followed days in which he sawed wood and enjoyed his afternoon refreshment, alternating with days in which he was idle and did without it. He often sat up there by the roadside, full of poisonous, malicious thoughts, spitting down toward the town with all the bitterness of his unrestrained

heart. The feeling he had hoped for, of being at peace in a safe haven, failed to visit him; instead, he felt himself sold and betrayed, and either made violent scenes with the weaver or brooded secretly in his own heart on the feeling of defeat and disgust and ennui.

Meanwhile the term for which board had been paid for one of the pensioners in private houses expired, and one day there came to the "Sun" as a second guest, the former sailmaker, Lukas Heller.

While business reverses had made a drinker out of Hürlin, it was just the opposite with Heller. Nor had he, like the manufacturer, fallen suddenly from the height of showy riches; he had gone down slowly and steadily, with the necessary pauses and interludes, from an uncommon workman to a common vagabond. His good and energetic wife had been unable to save him; rather, the hopeless struggle had been too much for her, though she seemed much stronger than he, and she had died—while her good-for-nothing husband enjoyed rude health, played the fool for a few more years, and then, after he was ruined and dependent, went lazily on with no apparent diminution of strength toward a ripe old age. Of course his conviction was that he had had bad luck with his wife as well as with the sail-making business, and that his gifts and performances had merited a better fate.

Hürlin had awaited this man's arrival with great eagerness, for he was growing daily more utterly weary of being alone. But when Heller appeared, the ex-manufacturer stood on his dignity and would scarcely have anything to do with him. He even grumbled because Heller's bed was put in the same room with his, although he was secretly glad of it.

After supper, since his comrade seemed disposed to be so grumpy, the sailmaker took a book and began to read. Hürlin sat opposite him and threw occasional glances of suspicious observation at him. Once, when the reader could not help laughing at something amusing, the other was very much tempted to ask him what it was. But as Heller looked up from his book at the same moment, evidently willing to communicate the joke, Hürlin assumed a gloomy expression and pretended to be wholly absorbed in the contemplation of a fly that was crawling across the table.

So they sat the whole evening through. One read, looking up occasionally as if ready for a chat, the other watched him incessantly, only turning his eyes away haughtily when his companion happened to raise his. The manager worked away busily until late. Hürlin's face grew more and

more sour and hostile, although he was really pleased to think he would no longer be alone in his bedroom. When ten o'clock struck, the manager spoke: "Now you might as well be going to bed, you two." Both rose and went upstairs.

While they were slowly and stiffly undressing in the dimly-lighted room, Hürlin thought the time had come to enter on an inquiry into the qualities of the companion in misfortune whom he had so long desired.

"Well, there's two of us now," he remarked, throwing his waistcoat on a chair.

"Yes," said Heller.

"It's a pig-sty, this," the other went on.

"Oh—is it?"

"*Is* it? I ought to know! But now there'll be a little life in it—yes."

"Say," asked Heller, "do you take your shirt off at night or keep it on?"

"In summer I take it off."

So Heller took his shirt off too, and lay down in the creaking bed. Soon he began to snore loudly. But Hürlin's curiosity was not yet exhausted. "Are you asleep, Heller?"

"No."

"There's plenty of time… Tell me, you're a sailmaker, aren't you?"

"I was—a master sailmaker."

"And now—?"

"And now—you must think a lot of me, to ask such silly questions."

"Oh, you needn't be so snippy! You old fool, you may have been a master sailmaker, but that's not so much. I was a manufacturer—I owned a factory, do you understand?"

"You needn't shout at me—I knew that before. And after that, what did you manufacture?"

"What do you mean, after that?"

"You know what I mean—in jail."

Hürlin emitted a bleating laugh. "Oh, I suppose you're one of the pious kind—a psalm-singer, eh?"

"I? That's the last thing! No, I'm not pious—but at the same time I've never been in jail."

"You wouldn't have been at home there. Most of the people there are fine fellows."

"O Lord! Fine fellows of your sort? You're right—I shouldn't have liked it."

"Some people have got to talk, whether they know what they're talking about or not."

"Just what I was thinking."

"Oh, come now, be a good fellow! What made you give up the sailmaking?"

"Oh, don't bother me! The business was all right, but the devil got into it somehow. It was my wife's fault."

"Your wife? Did she drink?"

"That would have been too much. No, I did all the drinking that was done, as is mostly the case, not the wife. But it was her fault just the same."

"Was it? What did she do?"

"Don't ask so many questions!"

"Have you got any childen?"

"One boy—in America."

"Sensible fellow—a man's better off there."

"You'd think so—but he's always writing for money, the rascal! He's married, too. When he went away, I said to him, 'Friedel,' I said, 'good luck to you, and take care of yourself; do whatever you like—but if you marry, there'll be trouble.' Well, now he's got himself into it. Say, were you ever married?"

"No—but you see man can get into trouble even without a wife—don't you think so?"

"That's according to the man. I'd have my own shop today, if it hadn't been for my fool of a wife."

"H'm—!"

"Did you say anything?"

Hürlin was silent, and pretended to be asleep. He had a premonition that if the sailmaker ever got fairly started on the subject of his wife, there would be no end to it.

"Go to sleep, then, stupid!" cried Heller; the other did not allow himself to be drawn, but went on deliberately taking long breaths, until he really fell asleep.

Next morning the sailmaker, who at sixty did not need so much sleep, was the first to wake. He lay for half an hour staring at the white ceiling. Then, although he had seemed so stiff in his movements the day before, he

got out of bed as lightly and gently as a morning breeze, stole over in his bare feet to Hürlin's bed without making a sound, and began to explore the latter's clothes. He searched carefully through them, but found nothing except the stump of a pencil in the waistcoat pocket, which he took out and appropriated. A hole which he discovered in the left stocking of his companion he enlarged with the help of his two thumbs until it was of considerable size. Then he crept quietly back to his warm bed and did not move again until Hürlin was awake and up and had thrown a few drops of water in his face. Then he sprang up nimbly and got into his trousers. He did not, however, hasten to finish his toilette, and when the ex-manufacturer advised him to hurry, he said "Oh, you go on down—I'll be after you in a minute." Hürlin did so, and Heller heaved a sigh of relief. He seized the washbasin and emptied the clean water out of the window—for he had a horror of washing. When he had avoided this distasteful process, he was soon ready to hasten down and get his coffee.

The making of the beds, tidying up the room, and polishing of shoes was attended to after breakfast, of course without undue haste and with plenty of pauses for conversation. The manufacturer found it all much more sociable and pleasant in company than alone; he began to have very friendly feelings toward his housemate, and to congratulate himself on the prospect of a lively and cheerful existence. Even the inevitable work seemed less terrifying than usual, and at the manager's summons he went down to the yard with Heller, not indeed swiftly but with an almost smiling countenance.

In spite of passionate outbursts on the part of the weaver and his constant endeavors to conquer the reluctance of his charge, in the last few weeks the wood-pile had shown very little alteration. It seemed almost as high and wide as ever—as though it had the blessed permanence of the widow's cruse of oil; and the little heap of sawed bits lying in a corner, barely a couple of dozen, looked like the result of a child's play, begun in a whim and as lightly thrown aside.

Now both the old men were to work at it. It was necessary to arrange for a combination, since there was only one saw-horse and one saw. After a few preparatory motions, sighs, and remarks, they conquered their inner reluctance and addressed themselves to their task. And now, unfortunately, Karl Hürlin's glad hopes showed themselves to have been idle dreams, for

the manner of working of the two displayed the essential difference between them.

Each had his own special way of being busy. In both, alongside of the innate overmastering laziness, a remnant of conscience exhorted timidly to work; neither of them really wanted to work, but they wanted to be able to pretend to themselves at least that they were of some use in the world. They strove to attain this result in different ways; and in these two worn-out and useless fellows, whom fate had apparently destined to be brothers, there appeared an unexpected divergence of aptitudes and inclinations.

Hürlin was master of a method by which, though he did next to nothing, he was or seemed continually busy. The simple act of taking hold of a thing had come with him to be a highly developed manœuvre, owing to the way in which he associated with this small action a noticeable *ritardando*. Moreover, he invented and employed, between two simple motions, as between the grasping and applying the saw, a whole series of useless but easy intervening details, and was always concerned in keeping actual work as far as possible from contact with his body by such unnecessary trivialities. Thus he resembled a condemned criminal who devises this and that and the other thing that must be done and cared for and attended to before he goes to suffer the inevitable penalty. And so he contrived to fill the required hours with an incessant activity and to bring to them a pretence of honest toil, without having really accomplished anything that could be called work.

In this characteristic and practical system he had hoped to be understood and supported by Heller, and now found himself disappointed. The sailmaker, in accordance with his inner character, followed an entirely opposite method. He worked himself up by a convulsive decision into a foaming fury, rushed at his work as though he did not care for life, and raged at it until the sweat flowed and the splinters flew. But this only lasted a few minutes; then he was exhausted—but he had appeased his conscience, and rested in motionless collapse until after a certain time the fury came upon him once more, and again he raged and steamed at his task. The results of this fashion of working did not notably surpass those of the manufacturer's.

Under these circumstances each was bound to be an offence and a hindrance to the other. The hasty and violent method of Heller, beginning at the wrong end, revolted the deepest feelings of the manufacturer, while his

steady sluggish appearance of doing something was just as abhorrent to the sailmaker. When the latter fell into one of his furious attacks on the job, Hürlin stepped back a few paces as if alarmed and looked on scornfully as his comrade puffed and panted, retaining, however, just enough breath to reproach Hürlin for his laziness.

"Look at him," he would cry, "look at him, the good-for-nothing loafer! You like that, don't you? to see other people doing your work! Oh yes, the gentleman is a manufacturer. I believe you've been quite capable of sawing away four weeks on the same log!"

Neither the offensiveness nor the truth of these reproaches stirred Hürlin up very much; but he did not let Heller get the better of him. As soon as the sailmaker, wearied out, stopped to rest, he gave him back his accusations, finding a choice variety of ingenious terms of abuse to describe him, and threatening to hammer on his thick head until he should be in condition to mistake the world for a dish of mashed potatoes and the twelve apostles for a band of robbers. It never came, of course, to the execution of these threats; they were merely rhetorical exercises, and neither of the adversaries regarded them in any other light. Now and then they brought charges against each other before the manager; but Sauberle was wise enough to decline to interfere. "You fellows," he said crossly, "are not school-children any longer. I'm not going to mix myself up with such squabbles—and there's an end of it!"

In spite of this, both of them came again, each for himself, to complain to him. Thereupon one clay the manufacturer got no meat for his dinner; and when he defiantly asked for it, the weaver said merely "Don't get so excited, Hürlin; there must be penalties now and then. Heller has told me what you've been saying to him again this morning." The sailmaker was not a little triumphant over this unexpected victory; but at supper the thing was reversed—Heller got no soup; and the two sly dogs realized that they were beaten at their own game. From that time on there was no more tale-bearing.

But between themselves they gave each other no peace. Only now and then, when they crouched side by side on the turf by the roadside and stretched their wrinkled necks to look after the passers by, a temporary soul-brotherhood grew up between them, as they discussed the ways of the world, the weaver, the system of caring for the poor, and the wretchedly thin coffee in their abode, or exchanged their slender stock of ideas—which

with the sailmaker consisted in a conclusive psychology of women, with Hürlin in recollections of his travels and fantastic plans for financial speculations on a grand scale.

"You see, when a fellow gets married—" that was how Heller always began. And Hürlin, when it was his turn, opened with "If I knew anybody who would lend me a thousand marks," or "Once upon a time, when I was down at Solingen." He had worked there for three months many years ago; but it was remarkable how many things had happened to him or come under his notice in Solingen.

When they had talked themselves out, they sucked silently at their usually empty pipes, folded their arms about their thin knees, spat at irregular intervals on the road, and stared past the gnarled old apple-trees down into the town whose outcasts they were, and whom in their folly they held responsible for their misfortunes. Then they became gloomy, sighed, made discouraged gestures with their hands, and realized that they were old and played out. This always lasted until their dejection changed again into malice, which generally took half an hour. Then, as a rule, it was Lukas Heller who opened the ball, at first with some little teasing remark.

"Just look down there!" he would cry, pointing toward the valley.

"What is it?" growled the other.

"You don't need to ask—I know what I see."

"Well, what *do* you see, in the devil's name?"

"I see the cylinder-factory that used to be Hürlin & Schwindelmeier, now Dallas & Co. Rich men they are, I'm told—rich men!"

"Oh, go to the deuce!" growled Hürlin.

"Thank you!"

"Do you want to make me out a swindler?"

"No need to make you one!"

"You dirty old sail-cobbler!"

"Jail-bird!"

"You're an old drunkard!"

"Drunkard yourself! *You've* got no call to abuse decent people!"

"I'll knock in half a dozen of your teeth!"

"And I'll make you walk lame, my fine fellow. Bankrupt!"

Then the fight was on. After exhausting all the terms of abuse usual in the locality, the imagination of both rascals would invent new ones of the

most audacious sort, until this capital too was used up, and the two fighting-cocks would totter back to the house, exhausted and embittered.

Neither had any dearer wish than to get the better of the other and make him feel his superiority; but if Hürlin had the better brain, the sailmaker was the more cunning—and since the weaver took no side, neither could claim a real triumph over the other. Both longed ardently to attain a position of superior consideration in the house; and they employed for this purpose so much energy, caution, thought, and secret obstinacy that with the half of these either of them, if he had put it to use at the right time, might have kept his bark afloat instead of becoming a Sun-Brother.

In the meantime the huge pile of wood in the yard had slowly become smaller. What remained had been left for another time, and other employments had been taken up. Heller sometimes worked by the day in the mayor's garden, and Hürlin was occupied under the manager's supervision in washing salad, picking lentils, shelling beans and the like—tasks in which he was not required to overexert himself, and yet could feel he was being useful. Under these conditions the feud between the two brethren seemed slowly healing, since they never worked together the whole day, and in their leisure hours each had enough to complain of and to report. Each of them imagined, too, that he had been selected for this particular work on account of special aptitudes which gave him a certain superiority over the other. So the summer drew along, until the leaves began to turn brown, and the evenings on which one could do without a light until nine o'clock were no more.

At this time it happened to the manufacturer, as he was sitting alone on the doorstep one afternoon and sleepily contemplating the world, to see a strange young man come down the hill who asked the way to the town hall. Hürlin was civil out of sheer boredom, went a couple of streets with the stranger, answered his questions, and was presented for his trouble with two cigars. He asked the next wagon-driver for a light, lit one of them, and returned to his shady place on the doorstep, where with enthusiastic delight he gave himself up to the pleasure, long unknown, of smoking a good cigar. The last of it he put into his pipe and smoked it until there was nothing left but ashes and a few brown drops. In the evening, when the sailmaker came from the mayor's garden, with, as usual, plenty to relate about the pear-cider and white bread and radishes he had had for his lunch, and how

splendidly they had treated him, Hürlin also recounted his adventure with long-winded eloquence, to Heller's great envy.

"And what have you done with the cigars?" he asked at once with interest.

"Smoked them," said Hürlin, haughtily.

"Both?"

"Yes, you old simpleton, both."

"Both at once?"

"No, you fool, first one and then the other."

"Is that true?"

"Why shouldn't it be true?"

"Well," said the sailmaker, who did not believe the story, quickly, "then I'll tell you something. You're a dumb ox, and a big one at that."

"Am I? And why?"

"If you'd put one by, you'd have had something for tomorrow. Now what have you got?"

This was too much for the manufacturer. With a grin he drew the remaining cigar from his breast-pocket and held it before the eyes of the envious sailmaker, in order to annoy him. "Do you see that? There—I'm not such a God-forsaken idiot as you think I am!"

"Oh, so you've still got one left! Let me look at it."

"Hold on! I don't know—"

"Oh, just to look at it. I'm a judge of whether it's a good one. You'll get it back right away." So Hürlin gave him the cigar. He turned it about in his fingers, held it to his nose and sniffed at it awhile, and said, as he reluctantly gave it back, "There you are—it's miserable cabbage-leaf, the kind you get two for a kreuzer."

Then there arose a discussion as to the goodness and the price of the cigar, which lasted until they went to bed. When they were undressing, Hürlin laid his treasure on his pillow and watched it anxiously. Heller mocked him: "Yes, take it to bed with you! Perhaps it'll have little ones." The manufacturer made no reply; when his companion was in bed, he put the cigar carefully on the windowsill and went to bed too. He stretched himself luxuriously, and before he went to sleep still savored the enjoyment of the afternoon, when he had so proudly blown his smoke out into the sunshine, and when with the fragrance something of his former splendor and consciousness of greatness had returned to him. Just so in the old days,

between his office and his workshop, he had pulled at his long cigar and sent up careless, lordly, captain-of-industry clouds. Then he went to sleep, and while his dreams conjured up the picture of his vanished greatness in all its glory, he stuck up his red and swollen nose into the air with the same proud contempt of the world as in his best days.

In the middle of the night, however, contrary to his custom, he suddenly woke up, and there he saw in the dim light the sailmaker standing at the head of his bed, with a thin hand stretched out toward the cigar on the window-sill.

With a cry of rage he threw himself out of bed and barred the retreat of the malefactor. For a while no words were spoken; the two enemies stood facing each other, breathing hard but not moving, surveying each other with piercing glances of anger, uncertain themselves whether it was fear or excess of surprise that prevented them from having each other by the hair.

"Drop that cigar!" cried Hürlin at last, hoarsely. The sailmaker did not alter his position. "Drop it!" shouted the other, and as Heller still did not move, he hauled off and would undoubtedly have given him a swinging blow if the sailmaker had not ducked in time. In the movement, however, he dropped the cigar, Hürlin tried to grasp it, Heller trod on it with his heel, and with a light crackle it went to pieces. Then the manufacturer gave him a good one in the ribs, and the next thing a fair tussle was on. It was the first time they had come to blows; but their cowardice outweighed even their anger, and no serious damage resulted. Now one advanced a step, now the other; the two naked old men circled about the room without much noise as if they were performing some antique dance, each a hero and neither receiving a blow. This went on until in a favorable moment the manufacturer got his hand on his empty wash-basin. He swung it wildly over his head and brought it down forcibly on the skull of his unarmed foe. It did him no particular harm, but the crash of the tin basin gave out a warlike and resonant sound that rang through the whole house. At once the door opened, admitting the manager in his nightshirt, who stood between scolding and laughing before the duelists.

"You're a pair of precious old rascals," he cried, "knocking each other about without a stitch on you, like a couple of old he-goats! Into bed with you—and if I hear another sound, you'll get something to be thankful for!"

"But he was stealing—" Hürlin began to shout, almost crying with rage and injured dignity, only to be instantly interrupted and ordered to keep

quiet. The he-goats retreated muttering to their beds; the weaver listened a few moments at the door, and when he had gone all was still in the room. By the wash-basin the fragments of the cigar lay on the floor; the pale summer night peeped in at the window, and over the two old rogues in their deadly hatred hung the flower-bedecked text, “Little children, love one another.”

Hürlin extracted at least a minor triumph out of the affair the next day. He steadfastly refused any longer to share the same room with the sailmaker; and after a stubborn resistance the weaver was obliged to give in and assign Heller another room. So the manufacturer once more became a hermit; and glad as he was to be rid of the sailmaker’s company, it preyed on his spirits to such an extent that he realized fully for the first time into what a hopeless *cul de sac* fate had thrust him in his old age.

The poor old man could make no cheerful prognostications. Formerly, however badly things went, he had at least been free; even in his most miserable days he had had a few pennies to spend at the tavern, and could set out on his wanderings again whenever he chose. Now he sat there, stripped of all rights and under discipline, never saw a copper that he could call his own, and had nothing before him in the world except to become older and feebler and, when his time came, to lie down and die.

He began to do what he had never done before—to look up and down from a high point of vantage on the Allpach road, over the town and along the valley; to measure the white high-roads with his eye, and watch the soaring birds and the clouds; to follow longingly with his eye the passing wagons and the pedestrians that went up and down, as a mourning exile from their company, left behind never to join them in their journeys. To pass the evenings, he accustomed himself now to reading; but from the edifying histories of the almanacs and pious periodicals he often raised a distant and depressed eye, feeling that he had nothing in common with such people and events, recalling his young days, Solingen, his factory, the prison, the joyous evenings in the old “Sun,” and coming back always to the thought that now he was alone, hopelessly alone.

Heller, the sailmaker, cast sidelong and malicious glances at him, but after a time attempted to reëstablish intercourse with him. When he met the manufacturer out at their resting-place, he would occasionally put on a friendly expression and greet him with “Fine weather, Hürlin! I think we

shall have a good autumn, don't you?" But Hürlin merely looked at him, nodded wearily, and made no sound.

In spite of all this, some thread would have gradually spun itself to link the two perverse creatures together; out of his very melancholy and disgust, Hürlin would have grasped as for dear life at the first comer, if only to get rid now and then of the wretched feeling of loneliness and emptiness. The manager, who was displeased by the manufacturer's silent moroseness, did what he could also to bring his two charges together. But finally a sort of salvation, if a dubious one, came to all three. During the month of September there came to the house at short intervals two new inmates—two very different ones.

One was called Louis Kellerhals; but this name was not known to anybody in the town, for Louis had borne for decades the appellation of Holdria, whose origin is undiscoverable. When, many years before, he had become a pensioner of the community, he had been placed with a friendly artisan, where he had been well treated and counted as a member of the family. The artisan had now, however, died with unexpected suddenness; and since his protégé could hardly be reckoned as part of the inheritance he left, it was necessary for the poorhouse to receive him. He made his entrance with a well-filled linen bag, a huge blue umbrella, and a green wooden cage, containing a very fat common sparrow. He seemed little upset by his change of quarters; he came in smiling and beaming with cordiality, shook every one heartily by the hand, spoke no word and asked no questions, brimmed over with delight and kindliness when any one spoke to him or looked at him, and even if he had not long been a well-known figure, could not have concealed for a quarter of an hour the fact that he was a harmless and well-meaning imbecile.

The second, who made his appearance about a week later, brought with him not less joyful benevolence, but was not weak in the head; on the contrary, though harmless enough, he was a thoroughly cunning fellow. His name was Stefan Finkenbein; he was a member of the wandering beggars' dynasty of the Finkenbeins, long well known throughout the whole town and neighborhood. Of this complicated family two branches had settled in Gerbersau, counting several dozen members. They were all without exception sharp-witted fellows; yet none of them had ever come to any notable fortune, for it was an inseparable characteristic of their nature to

love to be free as the birds and to rejoice in the humor of having no possessions.

The said Stefan was still below sixty, and enjoyed perfect health. He was rather thin, indeed, and his limbs were delicate; but he was always well and active, and it was something of a mystery how he had been able to foist himself upon the community as a candidate for a place in the poorhouse. There were plenty of people in the town older, more wretched, and even poorer. But from the very foundation of the institution he had been consumed by a desire to enter it; he felt himself a born Sun-Brother, and would and must be one. And now there he was, as smiling and amiable as the excellent Holdria, but with much less extensive baggage—for besides what he wore on his back he brought nothing but a stiff Sunday hat of old-fashioned respectable elegance, well preserved in shape if not in color. He bore himself as a lively social light, accustomed to the world. Since Holdria had already been assigned to Hürlin's room, he was put in with Heller, the sailmaker. He found all his surroundings good and praiseworthy, except that the taciturnity of his companions did not please him. One evening before supper, as all four sat outside the door, he suddenly began: "Say, Mr. Manufacturer, are you always so mournful? You're a regular streamer of crape!"

"Oh, don't bother me!"

"Why, what's the matter with you? Why do we all sit round, anyhow, so solemnly? We could have a drop of something good once in a while, couldn't we?"

Hürlin gave ear for a moment with delight, and his tired eyes glistened; then he shook his head despairingly, he turned his empty pockets inside out, and assumed an expression of suffering.

"Oh, I see—no coin!" cried Finkenbein, laughing. "Good gracious, I always thought one of those manufacturer fellows had something jingling in his purse. But today's my first day here, and it mustn't go dry like this. Come on, all of you—Finkenbein's still got a little capital in his breeches for a time of need."

Both the mourners sprang to their feet at once. They left the weak-minded old fellow sitting where he was, and the three others tottered off at a quick pace toward the "Star," where they were soon sitting on a bench against the wall, each with a glass in front of him. Hürlin, who had not seen the interior of a tavern for weeks and months, was full of joyous

excitement. He breathed in the atmosphere of the place in long draughts, and absorbed his liquor in short, economical, timid sips. Like a man awakening from an evil dream, he felt that he had been restored to life again, and welcomed home by the familiar surroundings. He brought out once more all the half-forgotten free gestures of his old sporting days, banged thunderously on the table, snapped his fingers, spat at ease on the floor and scraped noisily over it with his foot. Even his manner of talking showed a sudden change, and the full-toned words of power that recalled the days when he was a commanding figure rang out from his blue lips with something of the old brutal security.

While the manufacturer thus renewed his youth and sunned himself in the afterglow of his old accomplishments and his bygone happiness, Lukas Heller blinked thoughtfully at his glass and felt that the time had come to repay the proud fellow for all his insults, and especially for the dishonoring blow with the tin wash-basin on that memorable night. He kept quite still and waited watchfully for the right moment.

Meantime Hürlin, as had always been his custom, began with the second glass to listen to the conversation of his neighbors at the next table, to take part in it with nods and grunts and play of expression, and finally to interject an occasional "Oh yes," or "Really?" He felt himself quite restored to the beautiful past; and as the conversation at the adjoining table grew more animated, he turned more and more to face the speakers and, as his old habit was, soon plunged with fire into the clash of conflicting opinions. At first the other men paid no attention to him, but presently one of them, a driver, suddenly cried out, "Lord, it's the manufacturer! What's the matter with you, you old rascal? Be good enough to hold your tongue, or I shall have to tell you something!"

Hürlin turned away, cast down; but the sailmaker gave him a dig in the ribs and murmured eagerly to him, "Don't let that fellow shut you up! You tell *him* something, the smarty!"

This encouragement at once inflamed the sensitiveness of the manufacturer to new self-consciousness. He banged on the table defiantly, moved a little nearer to the speaker, threw bold glances at him, and spoke in his deep chest-tone, "A little more manners, if you please. You don't seem to know how to behave."

Some of the men laughed. The driver answered, still good-humoredly, "Look out for yourself, manufacturer! If you don't shut up, you may get

more than you bargain for."

"I don't have to," said Hürlin with emphatic dignity, once more egged on by a nudge from the sailmaker; "I belong here just as much as you do, and have got as good a right to talk as the next man. So now you know!"

The driver, who had just paid for a round of drinks at his table and so felt entitled to take the leading position, got up and came over, tired of the altercation. "Go back to the poorhouse, where you belong!" he said to Hürlin; then he took him, shrinking in alarm, by the collar, dragged him over to the door, and helped him through it with a kick. The others laughed, and were of the opinion that it served the disturber right. The little incident was closed, and they resumed their important discussion with oaths and shouts.

The sailmaker was happy. He persuaded Finkenbein to order one more little drink, and, recognizing the value of this new associate, he bent all his endeavors to establish friendly relations with him, to which Finkenbein yielded with a quiet smile. He had once undertaken to beg where Hürlin was already at work on the same line, and had been forcibly warned off by him. In spite of this, he bore no grudge against him, and declined to join in the abuse which the sailmaker now poured out upon the absent man. He was better adapted than these who had sunk from happier circumstances to take the world as it came and to tolerate people's little peculiarities.

"That's enough, sailmaker," he said protestingly. "Hürlin's a fool, of course, but by long odds not the worst in the world. I'm glad we've got him to play the fool with up there."

Heller accepted the correction and hastened to adapt himself to this conciliatory tone. It was now time to leave, so they moved along and got home just in time for supper. The table, with five people sitting at it, had now an imposing appearance. At the head sat the weaver; then on one side came the red-cheeked Holdria next to the thin, decayed and miserable-looking Hürlin. Opposite them sat the cunning sailmaker with his scanty hair, and the merry, bright-eyed Finkenbein. The latter entertained the manager successfully and kept him in good humor, from time to time addressing a few jokes to the imbecile, who received them with a flattered grin. When the table had been cleared off and the dishes washed, he drew a pack of cards from his pocket and proposed a game. The weaver was disposed to forbid it, but finally gave in, on condition that the game should only be for love. Finkenbein burst out laughing.

"Of course, Herr Sauberle. What else could it be for? I was born to millions, but they were all swallowed up in the Hürlin stock—excuse me, Mr. Manufacturer!"

They began to play, then, and for awhile the game went along merrily, broken only by numerous jokes from Finkenbein and by an attempt at cheating on the sailmaker's part, discovered and exposed by the same clever person. But then the sailmaker began to feel his oats, and displayed a tendency to make mysterious allusions to the adventure at the "Star." At first Hürlin paid no attention; then he made angry signs to stop him. The sailmaker laughed maliciously, looking at Finkenbein. Hürlin looked up, caught the disagreeable laugh and wink, and suddenly realized that Heller had been the original cause of his ejection and was now making merry at his expense. This struck him to the heart. He made a sour grimace, threw his cards on the table in the middle of a hand, and could not be persuaded to continue the game. Heller saw what was the trouble; he discreetly said nothing, and redoubled his endeavors to place himself on a friendly footing with Finkenbein.

Thus the fat was in the fire again between the two old antagonists; and the discord was all the worse because Hürlin was now convinced that Finkenbein had known of the plot and helped it along. The latter bore himself with unchanged geniality and comradeship; but since Hürlin now always suspected him, and took in bad part his jesting designations as "the Councillor," "Herr von Hürlin," and the like, the Sun-Brotherhood soon split into two parties. The manufacturer had soon grown accustomed to the silly Holdria as a roommate and had made him his friend.

From time to time Finkenbein, who from some hidden source or other had now and then a little money in his pocket, proposed another secret excursion to the tavern. But Hürlin, strong as the temptation was for him, kept a stiff front and never went with them, although it hurt him to think that Heller was thus getting the better of him. Instead, he stayed at home with Holdria, who listened to him with radiant smiles or with large, troubled eyes when he growled and cursed or when he drew fanciful pictures of what he would do if any one lent him a thousand marks.

Lukas Heller, on the other hand, cleverly kept up his relations with Finkenbein. It was true that in the early days he had exposed the new friendship to grave peril. One night, in his characteristic fashion, he had gone through his roommate's clothes, and found thirty pfennigs in them

which he appropriated. The victim of the theft, who was not asleep, watched him calmly through his half-closed eyelids. Next morning he congratulated the sailmaker on his dexterity, paid him high compliments, requested the return of the money, and behaved as though it had all been a good joke. In this way he got Heller completely in his power; and although the latter had in him a good, lively comrade, he could not pour out his complaints against Hürlin to him quite as unrestrainedly as could Hürlin to his ally. And his diatribes against women soon became wearisome to Finkenbein.

"That's all right, sailmaker, that's all right. You're like a hand-organ with only one tune—you haven't any changes. As far as the women are concerned, I dare say you're right. But enough of anything is enough. You ought to get another waltz put in—anything else, you know—otherwise I wouldn't care if some one stole you."

The manufacturer was secure against such declarations. This was well enough, but it did not make him happy. The more patient his auditor was, the deeper he sank in his melancholy. A few times the sovereign light-heartedness of the good-for-nothing Finkenbein infected him for half an hour to the extent of reviving the grand gestures and sententious utterances of his golden days—but his hands had grown stiff, and the words no longer came from his heart. In the last sunshiny days of autumn he sometimes sat under the decaying apple-trees; but he never looked on town and valley now with envy or desire. His glance was far-away and strange, as if all this meant nothing to him and was out of his range. As a matter of fact, it did mean nothing to him, for he was visibly breaking up and had nothing more ahead of him.

His decline came on him very swiftly. It was true that soon after his downfall, in the thirsty days when he first grew well acquainted with the "Sun," he had grown very gray and begun to lose his agility. But he had been able for years to get about and drink many a glass of wine and play the leading part in a conversation in the tavern or on the street. It was only the poorhouse that had really brought him to his knees. When he had rejoiced at his installation there, he had not realized that he was cutting off the best threads of his life. For he had no talent for living without projects and prospects and all sorts of movement and bustle; and it was when he had given in to weariness and hunger and abandoned himself to rest that his real

bankruptcy took place. Now there was nothing left for him but to wait a little while until his life went out.

The fact was that Hürlin had been too long accustomed to tavern life. A gray-haired man cannot break off old habits, even when they are vicious, without damage. His loneliness and his breach with Heller had helped to make him increasingly silent; and when a great talker grows silent, it means that he is well on the road toward the churchyard.

It is a depressing sight when an artist in life, even on a small scale, who has grown old in elegant trifles and ostentation and self-seeking, instead of coming to a sudden end in a fight or as he goes home at night from the tavern, must live on to grow melancholy and end as a dabbler in the sentimental reflections which have always been foreign to him. But since life is incontestably a powerful composer, and thus cannot be accused of senseless caprices, there is nothing for it but to listen to the strains it produces, to admire, and to think the best of it. And after all there is a certain tragic beauty in the thing when such a spirit, that has been spoiled and left raw and then beaten down, rebels at the very end and clamors for its rights, when it flutters its awkward wings and, since nothing else is left, insists on having its fill of bitterness and complaint.

There was much now that came to rub and gnaw at this rude, ill- trained soul; and it became evident that its earlier stubbornness and self-control had rested upon insecure foundations. The manager was the first to realize his condition. To the pastor, on one of his visits, he said with a shrug of his shoulders: “One can’t really help being sorry for Hürlin. Since he’s been looking so down in the mouth, I don’t make him work; but it’s no use—that’s not what’s troubling him. He thinks and studies too much. If I didn’t know his sort too well, I should say it was just his bad conscience, and serve him right. But that’s not all of it. There’s something gnawing at him from inside—and at his age a fellow can’t stand that long. We shall see.” After this the minister sat now and then with Hürlin in his room, near Holdria’s green bird-cage, and talked to him of life and death, and tried to bring some light into his darkness—but in vain. Hürlin listened or not as his mood was, nodded or hummed, but spoke no word and grew constantly stranger. Once in a while one of Finkenbein’s jokes would appeal to him, and he would give a dry laugh or beat on the table and nod approvingly; but immediately afterward he would sink into himself again to listen to the

confused voices that claimed his attention and tormented him without his being able to understand them.

Outwardly he only seemed quieter and more plaintive, and all treated him much as before. The imbecile alone, even if he had not been himself so feeble-minded, was capable of understanding Hürlin's condition and his gradual decline and feeling a certain horror at the sight; for this friendly and peaceful soul had become the manufacturer's constant companion and friend. They sat together by the wooden cage, put their fingers in between the bars for the fat sparrow to peck at, lounged of a morning, now that winter was coming on, by the half warm stove, and looked at each other with as much comprehension as if they had been two sages instead of a pair of poor hopeless fools. You can see at times two wild beasts locked in together looking at each other in just the same way; according to the mood of the observer, their gaze will seem dull, amusing, or terribly moving.

What troubled Hürlin most was the humiliation he had experienced at the "Star" through Heller's instigation. At the very table where he had long sat almost daily, where he had spent his last penny, where he had been a good customer, a friend of the house and a leader in debate, there landlord and guests alike had looked on and laughed when he was kicked out. He had been forced to feel in his own bones that he belonged there no longer, that he did not count, that he had been forgotten and struck off the list and had no longer any shadow of rights.

For any other scurvy trick he would have avenged himself on Heller at the first opportunity. But now he did not even bring out the accustomed words of abuse that sat so easily on his tongue. What could he say to him? He had been entirely right. If he were still the same man as of old, still worth anything, they would not have dared to turn him out of the "Star." He was done for, and might as well pack up and go.

And now he looked forward to contemplate the destined straight and narrow path, an uncounted series of empty, dull, dead days, and at the end of it death—of which he thought sometimes with longing, sometimes with an angry shudder. It was all settled, nailed down and prescribed, unmistakable and inevitable. There was no longer any possibility of falsifying a balance-sheet or forging a paper, of turning himself into a stock-company, or by tortuous paths through bankruptcy sneaking out again into life. He was no longer a firm or a name—only a worn-out old man before whom the abyss of the infinite opened in all its terror, with the grisly

skeleton silently grinning at him to cut off his retreat. Though the manufacturer had been accustomed to many different kinds of circumstances and knew how to find his way about in them, these were different. Now he tried to wave them away with weak gestures of his old arms, now he buried his face in his hands, shut his eyes, and trembled with fear of the unescapable hand which he felt descending to grasp him.

The good-hearted Finkenbein, coming gradually to suspect that all manner of ghosts were closing in upon the manufacturer, sometimes gave him an encouraging word, or clapped him on the shoulder with a consoling laugh. “I say, Mr. Councillor, you oughtn’t to study so much. You’re quite clever enough—in your time you got the best of plenty of rich and clever people, didn’t you? Don’t be cross, millionaire—I don’t mean any harm. It’s just my little joke—man, think of the holy text up over your bed!” And he would spread out his arms with a pastoral dignity, as if in blessing, and recite with unction, “Little children, love one another!”

“Or, wait a bit,” he would say again, “we’ll start a savings-bank, and when it’s full we’ll buy from the town its shabby poorhouse, and take the sign out and make the old ”Sun“ rise again, so as to get some oil into the machine once more. What do you say to that?”

“If we only had five thousand marks—” Hürlin would begin to reckon; but the others would laugh, and he would break off, heave a sigh, and return to his brooding.

When winter had fully come, they saw him getting more silent and restless. He had fallen into the habit of wandering in and out of the room, sometimes grim, sometimes with a look of terror, sometimes with one of watchful cunning. Otherwise he disturbed nobody. Holdria often kept him company, falling into step with him in his incessant wanderings through the room, and answering to the best of his powers the glances, gestures, and sighs of the restless rambler, always fleeing before the evil spirits whom he could not escape because he carried them with him. Since all his life he had loved to play a deceiver’s part and played it with varying luck, now he was condemned to play through to a desperately sad end with his harlequin-like manners. He played miserably and absurdly enough—but at least the role corresponded to himself, and the former poseur now for the first time came on the stage without his mask, not to his advantage. The realization of the infinite and the eternal, the longing for the inexpressible, innate in this soul as in others but neglected and forgotten through a whole lifetime, found

now, when it swelled up, no outlet, and attempted to express itself in grimaces, gestures, and tones of the strangest kind, absurdly and laughably enough. But there was a real power behind it all; and the uncomprehending desire for death was certainly the first great and, in the higher sense, rational movement which this small soul had known for years.

Among the queer performances of a mind off the track was this, that several times a day he crawled under his bed, brought out the old tin sun, and offered it a foolish reverence. Sometimes he carried it solemnly before him like a holy monstrance; sometimes he set it up in front of him and gazed upon it with entranced eyes, sometimes he smote it angrily with his fist, only to take it up tenderly the moment after, caress it and dandle it in his arms before he restored it to its hiding-place. When he began these symbolic farces, he lost what little credit for intelligence remained to him among his housemates, and was put down with his friend Holdria as an absolute imbecile. The sailmaker especially regarded him with undisguised contempt, played tricks upon him and humiliated him whenever he could, and was seriously annoyed that Hürlin seemed to take so little notice of him.

Once he got the tin sun away from him and hid it in another room. When Hürlin went to get it and could not find it, he roamed through the house for a while, looking for it repeatedly in many different places; then he addressed impotent threatening speeches to all the inmates, the weaver not excepted; and when nothing did any good, he sat down at the table, buried his head in his hands, and broke into pitiful sobbing which lasted for half an hour. This was too much for the sympathetic Finkenbein. He gave a mighty box on the ear to the terrified sailmaker, and forced him to restore the concealed treasure.

The tough frame of the manufacturer might have resisted for many more years, in spite of his almost white hair. But the desire for death, though it was working almost unconsciously in him, soon found its way out, and made an end to the ugly tragi-comedy. One night in December it happened that the old man could not sleep. Sitting up in bed, he gave himself to his desolate thoughts, staring at the dark wall, and seemed to himself more forsaken than usual. In this mood of weariness, fear, and hopelessness he finally rose from his bed without knowing too well what he was doing, unfastened his hempen suspenders, and hanged himself with them to the top of the door-jamb. So Holdria found him in the morning, and the imbecile's

cry of horror soon brought the manager. Hürlin's face was just a little bluer than usual, but it was impossible to disfigure it very much.

It was a terrible surprise, but its effect was of short duration. Only Holdria whimpered softly over his bowl of coffee; all the others knew or felt that the manufacturer's end had come at a good time for him, and that there was no real cause for regret or horror. And then no one had loved him.

Of course a few penny-a-liners made haste to investigate the interesting case, and communicated to the readers of their cheap papers, together with the necessary moralizings, the fact that the not unknown bankrupt Karl Hürlin had made a rather suitable end as a suicide in the poorhouse.

When Finkenbein had come as the fourth inmate, there had been some complaints in the town about the way in which the newly-founded institution was rapidly filling. Now one was gone from the number; and though it is true that paupers are usually of robust constitution and reach a good old age, yet it is also true that a hole seldom stays as it is, but seems to eat into the stuff around it. So it was here, at any rate. The colony of good-for-naughts was scarcely founded before consumption seemed to set in and went on working.

For the moment, indeed, the manufacturer seemed to be forgotten, and all went on as before. Lukas Heller took the lead in the little community, so far as Finkenbein would allow him the primacy, made the weaver's life a burden to him, and managed to put off half of the little work he was supposed to do upon the willing Holdria. He was thus comfortable and cheerful; he began to settle down as in a warm nest, and resolved not to worry under these delightful circumstances, but to live many years for his own pleasure and the annoyance of the citizens. Now that Hürlin was gone, he was the eldest of the Sun-Brothers. He made himself quite at home, and had never in his life found himself so much in harmony with his environment, whose secure though not luxurious peace and idleness left him time to stretch himself easily and to contemplate himself as a respectable and not altogether useless member of society—of the town, and of the world as a whole.

It was otherwise with Finkenbein. The ideal picture of a Sun-Brother's life which his lively fancy had painted in such glowing colors was far different from what he had found the reality to be. To be sure, to all appearance he was still the same light-footed jester as of old; he enjoyed his good bed, the warm stove, the solid and sufficient food, and seemed to find

no fault with anything. He continued to bring back from mysterious trips into the town a few small coins for drink and tobacco, in which he generously allowed the sailmaker to share. He was seldom at a loss to know how to pass the time, for he knew every face up and down the road, and was a general favorite—so that at any house or shop door, on bridge or steps, by wagons or push-carts, as well as at the “Star” and the “Lion,” he was able to enjoy a gossip with any one who came along.

In spite of all this, he was not at ease. To begin with, Heller and Holdria were hardly satisfying daily companions for him, who had been used to intercourse with livelier and more rewarding people; and then he found increasingly burdensome the regularity of this life, with its fixed hours for rising, eating, working, and going to bed. Finally, and this was the main point, the life was too good and comfortable for him. He was trained to alternating days of hunger with days of feasting, to sleeping now on linen and now on straw, to being sometimes admired and sometimes browbeaten. He was used to wandering where the spirit moved him, to being afraid of the police, to having little games with the fair sex, and to expecting something new from each new day. He missed this poverty, freedom, movement and continual expectation here; and he soon came to the conclusion that his admission to the house, which he had procured by many stratagems, was not, as he had thought, his master-stroke but a stupid mistake with troublesome and lasting consequences.

If these views led Finkenbein to a somewhat different end from the manufacturer’s, it was because he was in everything of an opposite temperament. Above all, he did not hang his head, nor did he let his thoughts travel ceaselessly over the same empty field of mourning and dissatisfaction, but kept them fresh and lively. He paid little heed to the future, and danced lightly from one day into the next. He captivated the weaver, the simpleton, the sailmaker Heller, the fat sparrow, the whole system on their humorous side, and had retained from his old life the comfortable artist’s habit of never making plans or throwing out anchors for wishes or hopes beyond the situation of the moment. So it proved successful for him now too, since he was assured and provided for the rest of his days, to lead the life of the birds and the flies; and it was a blessing not only to him but to the whole house, whose daily life acquired through his presence a touch of freedom and of elegant hilarity. This was distinctly needed—for Sauberle and Heller had, of their own resources, hardly more

than the good-natured simpleton Holdria to contribute to the cheering and adornment of the monotonous existence.

So the days and weeks flowed along quite tolerably, and if it was not always jolly, at least there were no more quarrels or discords. The manager worked and worried himself thin and weary; the sailmaker greedily enjoyed his cheap comfort; Finkenbein shut one eye and lived on the surface of things; Holdria positively bloomed in eternal peace of mind, and increased daily in amiability, in appetite, and in weight. It would have been an idyllic state of things—but the haggard ghost of the dead manufacturer was hovering about. The hole was destined to grow larger.

And so it came to pass that on a Wednesday in February Lukas Heller had some work to do in the woodshed in the morning; and since he was still unable to work in any other way than by fits and starts and with long pauses, he came and sat down under the archway in a perspiration and developed a cough and a headache. At midday he ate hardly half his usual amount; in the afternoon he stayed by the stove shivering, coughing, and swearing; and by eight in the evening he went to bed. Next morning the doctor was sent for. This time Heller ate nothing at all at dinner; a little later fever set in, and in the night Finkenbein and the manager had to take turns in watching by him. The next thing was that the sailmaker died, recalcitrant, envious, and by no means patient or tranquil; and the town was rid of one more pensioner, which no one regretted.

It was to have better luck still. In March an unusually early spring set in, and things began to grow. From the big mountains to the ditches by the roadside, everything became green and young; the high-road was peopled by precocious chickens, ducks, and traveling journeymen, and birds of every size flitted through the air on joyous wings.

The growing loneliness and stillness of the house had been getting more and more on Finkenbein's nerves. The two deaths seemed to him of evil omen, and he felt more than ever like the last survivor on a sinking ship. Now he took to smoking and leaning out of the window by the hour into the warmth and mild spring feelings. A sort of ferment was in all his limbs and around his still young heart, which felt the call of spring, remembered old days, and began to consider whether there might not be a spring for it too amidst all this universal growing, sprouting and well-being.

One day he brought back from the town not only a packet of tobacco and the latest news, but also, in a worn bit of waxed cloth, two new pieces of paper which were adorned with beautiful flourishes and solemn official blue seals, but which had not been procured at the town-hall. How should such an old, bold traveler not understand the delicate and mysterious art of producing on nicely written documents any desired stamp, either old or new? It is not every one who knows how to do it; it takes skilful fingers and much practice to extract the thin inner skin of a fresh egg and spread it out without a wrinkle, to press on it the stamp of an old certificate of residence and permit to travel, and to transfer it cleanly from the damp skin to a new paper.

One fine day, then, Stefan Finkenbein disappeared without any flourish of trumpets from the town and the district. He took for his journey his tall, stiff hat, and left behind as a sole memento his old woolen cap which was almost falling to pieces. The officials instituted a small and considerate investigation. But since rumors soon came in that he had been seen in a neighboring jurisdiction, alive and happy in a favorite resort of his kind, and since nobody had any interest in bringing him back without necessity, standing in the way of whatever happiness he might find, and continuing to feed him at the town's expense, it was decided to abandon the investigation and allow the free bird, with the best of wishes, to fly wherever he chose. Six weeks later came a postcard from him to the weaver, in which he wrote:

"Honored Herr Sauberle: I am in Bavaria. It is not so warm here. Do you know what I think you'd better do? Take Holdria and his sparrow and show him off for money. We might both travel on that. Then we might hang up Hürlin's sign. Your true friend, Stefan Finkenbein, Doorknob-gilder."

There might have been more trouble in the almost empty nest of fate, but the last Sun-Brother, Holdria, was too innocent and of too sedentary a disposition. Fifteen years have gone by since Heller's death and Finkenbein's disappearance, and the imbecile still dwells, sound and rosy-cheeked, in the former "Sun." For a while he was the only inmate. The numerous personages who were qualified held back discreetly and timidly for some little time; the terrible death of the manufacturer, the swift taking off of the stout sailmaker, and the flight of Finkenbein had gradually shaped themselves into a widely-known theory, and surrounded the dwelling of the imbecile for as much as six months with bloody legends and tales of horror. After this period, however, need and laziness again brought several guests

to the old “Sun,” and since that time Holdria has never been alone. He has seen some curious and tiresome brothers come, share his meals, and die; and at this moment he is the senior of a company of seven, without counting the manager. Any warm, pleasant day you may see the whole company on the turf by the side of the hill-road, smoking their stumpy pipes and with weather-beaten faces and various feelings looking down on the town which in the meantime has grown considerably up and down the valley.

BERSERKER

BOOKS