

Auf mein Geschrei eilte das ganze Haus zusammen, jedermann bedauerte mich.

Albert Schweitzer, *Aus meiner Kindheit und Jugendzeit*

Our suggested translation would be: Hearing my crying the whole family hastened to me, everyone sympathized with me.

The preposition “auf” here is no doubt an interesting one, because it has several meanings. The most ordinary meanings are equivalent to “on”, “up”, “towards” or “at”, which have the bearing on directions or locations. In this sentence the “auf” tells about a reaction meaning “in response to” which, when considered a little further, also implies a latent direction, a direction which is determined by the thing behind “auf”, that is to say, a direction from which my crying came.

“Das ganze Haus” has nothing to do with the house. It replaces the more obvious expression: everyone in the house or everyone of the family. A perfect example of using a singular noun to describe something collective.