



NOTES – ALBERT EINSTEIN AT SCHOOL - by Patrick Pringle

Class: XI

Sub: ENGLISH

INTRODUCTION:

The lesson ‘Albert Einstein at School’ is an extract from the biography of Albert Einstein, named ‘The Young Einstein’ by Patrick Pringle. In this lesson, Patrick familiarises the readers with those years of Einstein’s life where he was struggling each day in school and as each day passed, the school diploma felt like a far-fetched dream. It throws light upon a few encounters with his teacher, what he felt about the neighbourhood he lived in and how he had only one good friend, Yuri. The way Albert strategizes to get out of the miserable place (school) and how things turned out in the end, makes the story even more interesting.

SUMMARY:

- Einstein was studying in a German school in Munich. His History teacher Mr Braun asked him in which year Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo by the Prussians. The boy confessed bluntly that he didn’t know the year, and he must have forgotten. The teacher wanted to know if Einstein ever tried to learn.
- Einstein again said with usual honesty that he did not see any point in learning dates. He argued that one can always look up the dates in a book. There was no sense in learning facts which was not the aim of education. The teacher then asked the boy to tell the class his theory of education.
- Albert Einstein told the class that in his opinion it was more important to know the ideas than to learn dates or facts. He would rather like to know why the soldiers tried to kill one another. The teacher shouted that Einstein was a disgrace to the school and he had better ask his father to take him away.
- Albert felt very miserable. It was a bad day. He didn’t feel like going back to that hateful school the following morning. But his father was not likely to take him away until he (Einstein) had taken his diploma.
- Being poor, he was putting up in a room in the poorest part of Munich. He hated that place also because of slum atmosphere. His landlady beat her children regularly. And on weekends she herself was thrashed by her drunk husband.
- Albert was lucky to have a very sincere friend – Yuri. He discussed his problems of schooling as well as lodging with him. He doubted if he would ever pass the exams for the school diploma.
- He discussed his problem with his cousin Elsa when she came to Munich. She advised him to just repeat what he learnt, in the examination. But his problem was that he was not good at learning things by heart.
- She enquired which book he was carrying under his arm. It was a book on Geology, and not a textbook at all. He studied it because he liked the subject. His second interest was music. He played upon his violin regularly until his landlady asked him to stop that noise. She had already enough of howling by the kids.

- Albert told Yuri after six months that he must get away from there. It was absurd that he should waste his father's money. He wished to go to Milan, Italy. He requested Yuri to get him a doctor's certificate that he had a nervous breakdown and he must leave the city.
- Yuri contacted his friend Dr. Ernst Weil, though not a specialist in nervous disorders. He asked Albert to be honest about his intention on meeting the doctor. The doctor agreed to certify that Albert had a nervous breakdown, and he must stay away from school for six months.
- The doctor didn't charge any fee for his service. Six months was a pretty long period. Albert won't be leaving the school, and need be, he could come back to do his diploma.
- Albert planned to take that medical certificate to the head teacher the next day. But Yuri advised him to get a reference in writing from his Mathematics teacher, Mr Koch, first. Mr Koch agreed with Albert that the latter was wasting his time in that class in Munich because he knew much more than even his teacher.
- He gave a certificate that Albert was ready to join some college for the study of higher Mathematics.
- The head teacher sent for Albert and told him that he wanted the boy to leave the school at once. It was a sort of expulsion. The other way was that Albert should go of his own accord. The head teacher's point was that Albert refused to learn, and he was in constant rebellion.
- Albert declared that he was going to leave even otherwise. He walked out of the office and the school where he had spent five miserable years. Yuri saw him off with good wishes and good luck. He hoped that Albert would be happier in Milan.

CHARACTERS:

- **Albert Einstein:** During his schooldays at Munich, he was not interested in the rote learning methods of school education and expressed his frank opinion. Nobody except his maths teacher recognised his genius. In the end he was expelled by the school authorities.
- **Mr Braun:** He was Einstein's history teacher who believes in the rote learning system of education.
- **Yuri:** Yuri was Einstein's only source of comfort, help, and relief in Munich. He was his reliable friend. Yuri was his only friend with whom he shared his sorrows, concerns and worries.
- **Elsa:** She was Einstein's cousin from Berlin whose dad had business in Munich. She advised him that he will eventually succeed if he continues in his school and just repeat the lesson in the examination, as and how it was taught in the class.
- **Dr Ernst Weil:** He was a newly qualified doctor who understands Einstein and helps him by giving the medical certificate which he required.
- **Mr Koch:** He was Einstein's maths teacher who understood his genius and gave him the reference he wanted.
- **Head Teacher:** He is an administrator who simply takes the disciplinary action required by requesting Einstein to leave the school.