Франк Ведекинд

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The Awakening of Spring: A Tragedy of Childhood:

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Frank Wedekind
The Awakening of Spring: A Tragedy of Childhood

A PROEM FOR PRUDES

That it is a fatal error to bring up children, either boys or girls, in ignorance of their sexual nature is the thesis of Frank Wedekind's drama "Frühlings Erwachen." From its title one might suppose it a peaceful little idyl of the youth of the year. No idea a could be more mistaken. It is a tragedy of frightful import, and its action is concerned with the development of natural instincts in the adolescent of both sexes.

The playwright has attacked his theme with European frankness; but of plot, in the usual acceptance of the term, there is little. Instead of the coherent drama of conventional type, Wedekind has given us a series of loosely connected scenes illuminative of character—scenes which surely have profound significance for all occupied in the training of the young. He sets before us a group of school children, lads and lassies just past the age of puberty, and shows logically that death and degradation may be their lot as the outcome of parental reticence. They are not vicious children, but little ones such as we meet

every day, imaginative beings living in a world of youthful ideals and speculating about the mysteries which surround them. Wendla, sent to her grave by the abortive administered with the connivance of her affectionate but mistaken mother, is a most lovable creature, while Melchior, the father of her unborn child, is a high type of boy whose downfall is due to a philosophic temperament, which leads him to inquire into the nature of life and to impart his knowledge to others; a temperament which, under proper guidance, would make him a useful, intelligent man. It is Melchior's very excellence of character which proves his undoing. That he should be imprisoned as a moral degenerate only serves to illustrate the stupidity of his parents and teachers. As for the suicide of Moritz, the imaginative youth who kills himself because he has failed in his examinations, that is another crime for which the dramatist makes false educational methods responsible.

A grim vein of humor is exhibited now and then, as when we are introduced to the conference room in which the members of a gymnasium faculty, met to consider the regulation of their pupils' morals, sit beneath the portraits of Pestalozzi and J. J. Rousseau disputing with considerable acrimony about the opening and shutting of a window. The exchange of unpleasant personalities is interrupted only by the entrance of the accused student, to whose defense the faculty refuses to listen, having marked the boy for expulsion prior to the formal farce of his trial.

Wedekind has been accused of depicting his adults as too

ignorant and too indifferent to the needs of the younger generation. But most of us will have to admit that the majority of his scenes and characters seem very true to life.

"Frühlings Erwachen" may not be pleasant reading exactly, but there is no forgetting it after one has perused it; there is an elemental strength about it which grips the intellect. As a play it stands unique in the annals of dramatic art. That it has succeeded in attracting much attention abroad is shown by the fact that this drama in book form has gone through twenty-six editions in its original version and has been translated into several European tongues, Russian included, while stage performances of the work have been given in France as well as in Germany.

The Teutonic grimness of the work puzzled the Parisians, who are not used to having philosophy thrust at them over the footlights; but in Germany "Frühlings Erwachen" proved much more successful. In Berlin, indeed, it has become part of the regular stock of plays acted at "Das Neue Theater," where it is said to be certain of drawing a crowded audience. That the play is radically different from anything given on the American stage is undoubtedly true. It must be remembered, however, that the Continental European playwright regards the stage as a medium of instruction, as well as a place of amusement. The dictum of the Swedish dramatist, August Strindberg, that the playwright should be a lay priest preaching on vital topics of the day in a way to make them intelligible to mediocre intellects, is not appreciated in this country as it should be; but once admit the kinship

of dramatist and priest, and the position taken by Wedekind in writing “Frühlings Erwachen” becomes self-evident. There should be no question concerning the importance of his topic, nor should it be forgotten that the evident lesson he seeks to inculcate is one now preached by numerous ethical teachers. In order to estimate the relationship of this play toward modern thought in Germany, it must be understood that Wedekind's tragedy is merely one of the documents in a paper war which has resulted at last in having the physiology of sex taught in many German schools. The fact that Wedekind's dialogue is frank to a remarkable degree only makes his preachment more effective: “One does not cure the pest with attar of roses,” as St. Augustine remarked.

Conditions in this country are not so very different from those depicted in this play, and evidence is not lacking that gradually, very gradually, we are beginning to realize that ignorance and innocence are not synonymous; that an evil is not palliated by ignoring its existence; the Podsnappian wave of the hand has not disappeared entirely, but it is not quite as fashionable as of yore. All things considered, the moment seems appropriate for the publication, of “Frühlings Erwachen” in an English version. The translation given in this volume follows the German original as closely as the translator can reconcile the nature of the two languages.

Considered as a work of literature, “Frühlings Erwachen” is remarkable as one of the few realistic studies of adolescence.

Its deceptive simplicity is the hall mark of that supreme literary ability which knows how to conceal art by art. Dealing with adolescence, an unformed period of human life, it is necessarily without the climaxes we expect in dramas in which the characters are adult, and the gruesome scene in the churchyard with which the play closes—a scene with such peculiar symbolism could spring only from a Teutonic imagination—leaves much unended.

It is interesting to note, by the way, that Wedekind himself appears as the Masked Man when "Frühlings Erwachen" is given in Berlin, a fact which gives this scene somewhat the nature of a *parabasis*.

Frank Wedekind's name is just beginning to be heard in America. In Germany he has been recognized for some time as one of the leaders in the new art of the theatre. Naturally enough, his plays are too outspoken in their realism to appeal to all his fellow-countrymen. But, if certain Germans reject this mental pabulum, others become intoxicated by it, and, waxing enthusiastic with a flow of language almost bacchic, hail Wedekind as the forerunner of a new drama—as a power destined to infuse fresh strength into the German stage. "With this drink in its body," writes one admirer, "the public will never more endure lyrical lemonade, nor the dregs of dramatic penury."

Again, these enthusiasts compare Wedekind's work to that of the pre-Shakesperian dramatists, or even to that of the Bard of Avon himself, both of which comparisons are difficult to grasp

by an English-speaking student of the British drama.

Wedekind, it is true, has a habit of using the news of the day as material for plays, just as the old English dramatists did when they wrote "domestic tragedies." He has a fondness, moreover, for gruesome situations such as we can imagine appealing to the melancholy genius of Webster; but of the childlike simplicity which marks much of the Elizabethan drama there is not a particle.

Certainly there is no trace of the gentle romanticism which one finds in some of the other modern German realists. Gerhart Hauptmann can turn from the grim task of dramatizing starvation, as he does in "Die Weber," to indulge in the naïve Christian symbolism of "Hannele," or the mythological poetry of "Die Versunkene Glocke." Even the iconoclast Strindberg writes romantically at times, and gives us something resembling Maeterlinck; but when Wedekind departs from pure realism his fancy creates a Gothic nightmare of horrors, peopled with such terrifying creatures as the headless suicide wandering amid the graves.

Wedekind's kinship to the dramatists of the "domestic tragedies" is shown clearly in the tragedy "Musik," which deals with a phase of music study only too common in Germany. It is asserted that of the thousands of students of music in that country not one in a hundred amounts to anything artistically, while of those who master their art not one in a thousand is capable of profiting financially by it. It is this condition of affairs which

gives additional importance to this recent work of Wedekind.

"Musik" is described by the author as a depiction of morals in four pictures ("Sittengemälde in vier Bildern"), to each of which he has given a separate title, a method which enables him to indulge in his trick of applying a pretty, inoffensive name to a tragic subject, as he does in picture two of this series, which he calls "Behind Swedish Curtains," and which represents the interior of a jail. The curtains to which the playwright refers are the iron bars of the prison.

The central character in "Musik," Klara Huhnerwadel, is a neurotic girl, whose mad love for her singing teacher has entangled her in the meshes of the legal net drawn to catch Madame Fischer, a notorious character in real life, who actively engaged the attention of the German police authorities not long ago. At the instigation of her lover, Josef Reissner, and with money supplied by Else Reissner, Josef's wife, Klara flees to Antwerp, only to find existence insupportable there, and to return to a life in jail which drives her to the edge of insanity. Released from imprisonment, she continues her relationship with her teacher until their association becomes public scandal, and then takes refuge in the country, intending to devote her life to her illegitimate child. The child dies, however, and there descends upon Klara what Wedekind describes as "the curse of the ridiculous." In an outburst of frightful anguish she is filled with "a nameless loathing of the horrible fate of being racked to death by bursts of sneering laughter," and raves in hysteria by the

bedside of her dead baby.

Upon this final picture Wedekind has expended his full power of biting irony. Josef Reissner, the cause of Klara's misfortune, is thanked by her mother for all he has done for her, while Franz Lindekuh, a literary man, whose rôle in the play has been that of a good Samaritan, is accused as the author of her disgrace. During previous tribulations Reissner has assured Klara repeatedly that her suffering would develop her artistic temperament and result in bringing her fame as a singer. At the end, when Klara, after undergoing imprisonment, exile, poverty, public disgrace and the loss of her beloved child, finds herself bereft of even Reissner's regard, she is led away in a stupor from her miserable attic. It is then, in reply to a wish of the physician that she will suffer from no lasting mental disturbance, that Lindekuh preludes the fall of the curtain by the caustic remark: "She'll be able to sing a song."

Here, truly, is a tragedy! There can be no doubt but what Wedekind has handled it in a powerful fashion. He sounds the tragic note upon the first rising of the curtain, a note which grows in intensity until the auditor wonders if it is possible for it to reach higher–and yet it swells.

"Frühlings Erwachen" is the best known of the Wedekind dramas and the most original in its treatment. It has peculiarities, however, which make it somewhat difficult to give as a stage performance. To see what this German playwright can do on more conservative lines, and to appreciate his mastership of the conventional technique of the stage, one must turn to the dramas

of modern life in which he handles such subjects as socialism, woman's emancipation, naturalism and divorce; frequently, it must be confessed, in a way which Americans refuse to tolerate upon the stage, despite their fondness for the same sort of information when supplied by the newspapers.

Selecting his characters from all classes of life, Wedekind brings to their making the knowledge of life as the police reporter sees it plus the science of a skilled psychologist. There is something sardonic about his art. He does not appear to sympathize with any of his characters, but to stand outside of life making note of the foibles and failures of his fellow-creatures. His irony appears in the most tragic places, and his dialogue, wrought with a cunning which requires strict attention on the part of the auditor if its subtleties would be grasped, serves Wedekind as an instrument for dissecting souls which he wields quite regardless of the mess he may make in the operating room.

None knows better how to show the peculiarities of a neurotic woman, or to betray a man's weakness by a few short sentences. The demonstration is direct and thorough, and we watch it fascinated, as we might the work of a skilled vivisectionist. When the job is finished we feel convinced that Wedekind's personages are real, although many of them are not the kind we enjoy meeting in actual life. We do meet them daily, nevertheless, tolerating them chiefly by our own polite habit of ascribing imaginary virtues to those that possess them not.

Take that curious comedy, “Der Marquis von Keith,” as an

example of Wedekind's skill as a psychologist. “Comedy” the author names it himself, but he might just as well have called it a tragic farce, so thoroughly has he mingled the laughable with the tragic. The protagonist of this peculiar play (the underlying tone of which has been likened musically to a Dies Irae written by Offenbach) is the illegitimate son of a teacher of mathematics and a gypsy trull, an adventurer who keeps on the shady side of the law, and who, despite his practical view of life in general, is an idealist in several particulars. His title of Marquis von Keith is merely a *nom de guerre*, and his attempts to obtain a fortune involve methods which the world acclaims as evidences of wonderful financial ability, or stigmatizes as the practices of a sharper, according to their success or failure. Resourceful, energetic, unhampered by vain regrets or restrictions of conventional morals, wasting not a moment upon a scheme which has proved unprofitable, von Keith is a forceful personage who manages to pass in Munich as a wealthy American, even when his pockets are empty and the sheriff is at the door. His own view of life is embodied in his definition of sin as “the mythological symbol for bad business,” and his accompanying explanation that good business can be conducted only by a person accepted by the existing order of society.

In other words, von Keith is a hypocrite for revenue only, but never is deceived concerning his own personality.

The play deals with von Keith's scheme to build an amusement

hall, to be known as “The Fairy Palace.” He applies himself so sedulously that his plans are on the eve of realization, when suddenly he finds himself ousted from the management of his own enterprise by the very men he has interested in it.

Now all this is comedy, of course, but Wedekind is not to be deprived of his predelection for the minor key. He introduces the tragic tone in this instance right in the final scene, when von Keith is confronted by the dead body of his common-law wife, Molly Griefinger. In some respects this episode resembles a travesty upon the final act of Sudermann's “Sodoms Ende;” but it is characteristic of Wedekind that he makes Molly kill herself because she fears von Keith's success will estrange her from her husband, and that her suicide is followed directly by the failure of von Keith's well-laid plans, just as they seemed about to mature.

It is characteristic, also, that the crowd which denounces von Keith as the cause of Molly's death, and which threatens to do him bodily harm, is composed of tradesmen whose initial cause of discontent is to be found in the promoter's failure to pay his bills.

Wedekind's certainty of touch is as much in evidence in his handling of his minor characters as it is in the portrayal of von Keith. There is Molly, whose little bourgeois soul fears the great world, shrinks from her husband's acquaintances, and dreads to take its place among the wealthy classes; Simba, the artist's model, who is astonished at anybody pitying her as a victim of civilization when she can get drunk on champagne; Casimir, the

wealthy merchant; and the Bohemian painter Saranieff, with his friend Zamrjaki, the composer. As an antithesis to von Keith we are introduced to Ernst Scholz, a weakling whose soul is torn by internal strife, until its owner is at peace neither with himself nor the world. Scholz wastes his time seeking a reason for his own existence and in longing to become a useful member of society; von Keith scorns to bother his brain with such trifles, boldly proclaiming the Nietzschean doctrine that the only way to be useful to others is to help one's self as much as possible, and asserting that he would rather gather cigar stumps in the café gutters than live in slothful peace in the country. There is no doubt about von Keith being a rogue, in the conventional acceptance of the term, but his enthusiasm appeals to us and we feel for him in his undoing at the end of the play.

In “Die Junge Welt” Wedekind shows us the laughable attempts of a party of young girls to live a life of celibacy in pursuance of a resolution taken in boarding school. It is an amusing comedy, and contains, among other interesting personages, a literary man, who nearly drives his wife to divorce by his habit of jotting down notes of her emotions, even when he is kissing her.

An opportunity to comment upon the German *lese majesty* is not neglected by Wedekind in the romantic drama, “So ist das Leben,” a dignified and carefully wrought work, partly in verse, which deals with the tribulations of a deposed monarch in his own country. This exiled king becomes tramp, tailor and strolling

player, to end eventually as court jester of the very man who has taken his place on the throne.

"Der Kammersänger," three scenes from the life of a popular tenor, is little more than a dramatic sketch. "Der Erdgeist" and "Die Büchse der Pandora," two plays which constitute an integral whole, deal with a lady who embraces Mrs. Warren's profession. These, with "Der Leibestrank" and "Oaha," two farces, with traces of real psychology, round out the total of Wedekind's dramatic works. In addition, he has indulged in verse-making and written a number of short stories somewhat in the manner of De Maupassant.

One may feel at times that Wedekind's art would gain by the exercise of more restraint, but there is no denying it is a great relief from "lyric lemonade."

An attempt to explain symbolism is usually a dangerous matter. If a failure, it makes the one who essays the task ridiculous. If successful, it cheapens the value of the symbolism; symbolism being a kind of an overtone to verbal reasoning, to which it bears much the same relationship as music does to poetry. In spite of this double danger, the translator ventures to close this review with a guess at the personality of the Masked Man who plays such an important part in the final scene of "Frühlings Erwachen" and to whom the author has dedicated the play. To the translator, then, this mysterious personage is none other than Life, Life in its reality, not Life as seen through the fogged glasses of Melchior's pedagogues or the purblind eyes of

the unfortunate mother who sends her daughter to an untimely grave.

FRANCIS J. ZIEGLER.

June, 1909.

ACT I

SCENE FIRST

A Dwelling Room

Wendla

Why have you made my dress so long, Mother?

Frau Bergmann

You are fourteen years old to-day.

Wendla

Had I known you were going to make my dress so long, I would rather not have been fourteen.

Frau Bergmann

The dress is not too long, Wendla. What do you want? Can I help it that my child is two inches taller every spring? As a grown-up maiden you cannot go about in short dresses.

Wendla

At any rate, my short dress becomes me better than this nightgown.—Let me wear it again, Mother, only through this summer. This penitential robe will fit me just as well whether I am fifteen or fourteen. Let's put it aside until my next birthday, now I should only tear the flounces.

Frau Bergmann

I don't know what to say. I want to take special care of you just now, child. Other girls are hardy and plump at your age. You are the contrary.–Who knows what you will be when the others have developed?

Wendla

Who knows—possibly I shall not be at all.

Frau Bergmann

Child, child, how do such thoughts come to you!

Wendla

Don't, dear Mother, don't be sad.

Frau Bergmann

(Kissing her.)

My own darling!

Wendla

They come to me at night when I can't sleep. I am not made sad by them, and I believe that I sleep better after them. Is it sinful, Mother, to have such thoughts?

Frau Bergmann

Go hang the long dress up in the closet. Put on your short dress again, in God's name!—I will put another depth of ruffles on it.

Wendla

(Hanging the dress in the closet.)

No, I would rather be twenty at once–!

Frau Bergmann

If only you are not too cold!–The dress was long enough for you in its time, but–

Wendla

Now, when summer is coming?–Mother, when one is a child, one doesn't catch diphtheria in one's knees! Who would be so cowardly. At my age one doesn't freeze—least of all in the legs. Would it be any better for me to be too warm, Mother? Give thanks to God if some day your darling doesn't tear out

the sleeves and come to you at twilight without her shoes and stockings!—If I wore my long dress I should dress like an elfin queen under it.—Don't scold, Mother! Nobody sees it any more.

SCENE SECOND

Sunday Evening

Melchior

This is too tiresome for me. I won't do anything more with it.

Otto

Then we others can stop, too!–Have you the work, Melchior?

Melchior

Keep right on playing!

Moritz

Where are you going?

Melchior

For a walk.

George

But it's growing dark!

Robert

Have you the work already?

Melchior

Why shouldn't I go walking in the dark?

Ernest

Central America!–Louis the Fifteenth!–Sixty verses of Homer!–Seven equations!

Melchior

Damn the work!

George

If only Latin composition didn't come to-morrow!

Moritz

One can't think of anything without a task intervening.

Otto

I'm going home.

George

I, too, to work.

Ernest

I, too, I too.

Robert

Good-night, Melchior.

Melchior

Sleep well! (*All withdraw save Moritz and Melchior.*) I'd like to know why we really are on earth!

Moritz

I'd rather be a cab-horse than go to school!–Why do we go to school?–We go to school so that somebody can examine us!–And why do they examine us?–In order that we may fail. Seven must fail, because the upper classroom will hold only sixty.–I feel so queer since Christmas.–The devil take me, if it were not for Papa, I'd pack my bundle and go to Altoona to-day!

Melchior

Let's talk of something else–

(They go for a walk.)

Moritz

Do you see that black cat there with its tail sticking up?

Melchior

Do you believe in omens?

Moritz

I don't know exactly. They come down to us. They don't matter.

Melchior

I believe that is the Charybdis on which one runs when one steers clear of the Scylla of religious folly.–Let's sit down under this beech tree. The cool wind blows over the mountains. Now I should like to be a young dryad up there in the wood to cradle myself in the topmost branches and be rocked the livelong night.

Moritz

Unbutton your vest, Melchior.

Melchior

Ha!–How clothes make one puff up!

Moritz

God knows, it's growing so dark that one can't see one's hand before one's eyes. Where are you?–Do you believe, Melchior, that the feeling of shame in man is only a product of his education?

Melchior

I was thinking over that for the first time the day before yesterday. It seems to me deeply rooted in human nature. Only think, you must appear entirely clothed before your best friend. You wouldn't do so if he didn't do the same thing.–Therefore, it's more or less of a fashion.

Moritz

I have often thought that if I have children, boys and girls, I will let them occupy the same room; let them sleep together in the same bed, if possible; let them help each other dress and undress night and morning. In hot weather, the boys as well as the girls, should wear nothing all day long but a short white woolen tunic with a girdle.–It seems to me that if they grew up that way they would be easier in mind than we are under the present regulations.

Melchior

I believe so decidedly, Moritz!–The only question is, suppose the girls have children, what then?

Moritz

How could they have children?

Melchior

In that respect I believe in instinct. I believe, for example, that if one brought up a male and a female cat together, and kept both

separated from the outside world–that is, left them entirely to their own devices–that, sooner or later, the she cat would become pregnant, even if she, and the tom cat as well, had nobody to open their eyes by example.

Moritz

That might happen with animals–

Melchior

I believe the same of human beings. I assure you, Moritz, if your boys sleep in the same bed with the girls, and the first emotion of manhood comes unexpectedly to them—I should like to wager with anyone–

Moritz

You may be right—but after all–

Melchior

And when your girls reached the same age it would be the same with them! Not that the girls exactly—one can't judge that the same, certainly—at any rate, it is supposable—and then their

curiosity must not be left out of account.

Moritz

A question, by the way–

Melchior

Well?

Moritz

But you will answer?

Melchior

Naturally!

Moritz

Truly?!

Melchior

My hand on it.–Now, Moritz?

Moritz

Have you written your composition yet??

Melchior

Speak right out from your heart!–Nobody sees or hears us here.

Moritz

Of course, my children will have to work all day long in yard or garden, or find their amusement in games which are combined with physical exercise. They must ride, do gymnastics, climb, and, above all things, must not sleep as soft as we do. We are weakened frightfully.–I believe one would not dream if one slept harder.

Melchior

From now until fall I shall sleep only in my hammock. I have shoved my bed back of the stove. It is a folding one. Last winter I dreamed once that I flogged our Lolo until he couldn't move a limb. That was the most gruesome thing I ever dreamed.–Why do you look at me so strangely?

Moritz

Have you experienced it yet?

Melchior

What?

Moritz

How do you say it?

Melchior

Manhood's emotion?

Moritz

M—'hm.

Melchior

Certainly!

Moritz

I also –

Melchior

I've known that for a long while!–Almost for a year.

Moritz

I was startled as if by lightning.

Melchior

Did you dream?

Moritz

Only for a little while—of legs in light blue tights, that strode over the teacher's desk—to be correct, I thought they wanted to go over it. I only saw them for an instant.

Melchior

George Zirschnitz dreamed of his mother.

Moritz

Did he tell you that?

Melchior

Out there on the gallow's road.

Moritz

If you only knew what I have endured since that night!

Melchior

Qualms of conscience?

Moritz

Qualms of conscience??–The anguish of death!

Melchior

Good Lord–

Moritz

I thought I was incurable. I believed I was suffering from an inward hurt.–Finally I became calm enough to begin to jot down the recollections of my life. Yes, yes, dear Melchior, the last three weeks have been a Gethsemane for me.

Melchior

I was more or less prepared for it when it came. I felt a little ashamed of myself.–But that was all.

Moritz

And yet you are a whole year younger than I am.

Melchior

I wouldn't bother about that, Moritz. All my experience shows that the appearance of this phantom belongs to no particular age. You know that big Lämmermeier with the straw-colored hair and the hooked nose. He is three years older than I am. Little Hans Rilow says Lämmermeier dreams now only of tarts and apricot preserves.

Moritz

But, I ask you, how can Hans Rilow know that?

Melchior

He asked him.

Moritz

He asked him?–I didn't dare ask anybody.

Melchior

But you asked me.

Moritz

God knows, yes!–Possibly Hans, too, has made his will.–Truly they play a remarkable game with us. And we're expected to give thanks for it. I don't remember to have had any longing for this kind of excitement. Why didn't they let me sleep peacefully until all was still again. My dear parents might have had a hundred better children. I came here, I don't know how, and must be responsible because I didn't stay away.–Haven't you often wondered, Melchior, by what means we were brought into this whirl?

Melchior

Don't you know that yet either, Moritz?

Moritz

How should I know it? I see how the hens lay eggs, and hear that Mamma had to carry me under her heart. But is that

enough?–I remember, too, when I was a five year old child, to have been embarrassed when anyone turned up the décolleté queen of hearts. This feeling has disappeared. At the same time, I can hardly talk with a girl to-day without thinking of something indecent, and—I swear to you, Melchior—I don't know what.

Melchior

I will tell you everything. I have gotten it partly from books, partly from illustrations, partly from observations of nature. You will be surprised; it made me an atheist. I told it to George Zirschnitz! George Zirschnitz wanted to tell it to Hans Rilow, but Hans Rilow had learned it all from his governess when he was a child.

Moritz

I have gone through Meyer's Little Encyclopedia from A to Z. Words—nothing but words and words! Not a single plain explanation. Oh, this feeling of shame!–What good to me is an encyclopedia that won't answer me concerning the most important question in life?

Melchior

Did you ever see two dogs running together about the streets?

Moritz

No!–Don't tell me anything to-day, Melchior. I have Central America and Louis the Fifteenth before me. And then the sixty verses of Homer, the seven equations and the Latin composition.–I would fail in all of them again to-morrow. To drudge successfully I must be as stupid as an ox.

Melchior

Come with me to my room. In three-quarters of an hour I will have the Homer, the equations and two compositions. I will put one or two harmless errors in yours, and the thing is done. Mamma will make lemonade for us again, and we can chat comfortably about propagation.

Moritz

I can't–I can't chat comfortably about propagation! If you want to do me a favor, give me your information in writing. Write me

out what you know. Write it as briefly and clearly as possible, and put it between my books to-morrow during recess. I will carry it home without knowing that I have it. I will find it unexpectedly. I cannot but help going over it with tired eyes–in case it is hard to explain, you can use a marginal diagram or so.

Melchior

You are like a girl.–Nevertheless, as you wish. It will be a very interesting task for me.–One question, Moritz?

Moritz

Hm?

Melchior

Did you ever see a girl?

Moritz

Yes!

Melchior

All of her?

Moritz

Certainly!

Melchior

So have I!–Then we won't need any illustrations.

Moritz

During the Schützenfest in Leilich's anatomical museum! If it had leaked out I should have been hunted out of school.–Beautiful as the light of day, and–oh, so true to nature!

Melchior

I was at Frankfurt with Mamma last summer–Are you going already, Moritz?

Moritz

I must work.–Good-night.

Melchior

'Till we meet again.

SCENE THIRD

Thea, Wendla and Martha come along the street arm in arm

Martha

How the water gets into one's shoes!

Wendla

How the wind blows against one's cheeks!

Thea

How one's heart thumps!

Wendla

Let's go out there to the bridge. Ilse says the stream is full of bushes and trees. The boys have built a raft. Melchi Gabor was

almost drowned yesterday.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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