

Chapter-1. The Last Lesson (Summary). By: Alphone Daudet

Franz started for school very late that morning. He was afraid of being scolded because M. Hamel was to question them on participles, and he did not know the first word about them. He thought of running away and spending the day out of doors. The warm bright day, the chirping birds, and the Prussian soldiers drilling in the open field back of the sawmill were tempting. But he resisted the temptation and hurried off to school.

There was a crowd in front of the bulletin-board near the town-hall. Wachter, the blacksmith asked Franz not to go so fast. He assured the boy that he would get to his school in plenty of time. Usually there was a great bustle when the school began but that day everything was as quiet as Sunday morning.

Through the window Franz saw his classmates, already in their places and M. Hamel walking up and down with his terrible iron ruler under his arm. Franz opened the door and went in. He blushed and was frightened. M. Hamel very kindly asked him to go to his place.

Franz noticed that their teacher had put on his beautiful green coat, his frilled shirt, and the little black silk cap, all embroidered. He wore these only on inspection and prize days. The village people were sitting quietly on the usually empty back benches. Everybody looked sad; and Hauser had brought an old primer.

M. Hamel said that it was the last lesson he would give them. Henceforth, only German was to be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The new master would come the next day. This was their last lesson of French. He wanted them to be very attentive.

Franz felt sorry that he had not learnt his lessons properly. The idea that M. Hamel was going away made the narrator forget all about his ruler and how cranky he was. Now Franz understood why M. Hamel had put on his fine Sunday clothes and why the old men of the village were sitting there. They had come to thank the master for his forty years' faithful service and to show their respect for the country that was theirs no more.

M. Hamel asked Franz to recite, but he stood there silent. The teacher did not scold him. He confessed that his parents and he (the teacher) were at fault. Then he talked of the French language—the most beautiful language in the world—the clearest, the most logical. He asked them to guard it among them and never forget it. Their language was the key to their prison.

Then they had lesson in grammar and writing. The pigeons cooed very low on the roof. Franz thought if they would make even the pigeons sing in German. All the while M. Hamel was sitting motionless in his chair and gazing at one thing or the other. His sister was packing their trunks in the room above as they had to leave the country next day.

After writing, they had a lesson in history, and then the babies chanted their ba, be, bi, bo, bu. Even old Hauser was crying. All at once the church-clock struck twelve and then the midday prayers. At the same moment the trumpets of the Prussians, returning from drill, sounded under the windows. M. Hamel stood up. He wanted to speak but something choked him.

Then he took a piece of chalk and wrote on the blackboard as large as he could "Vive La France!" After this he stopped and leaned his head against the wall. Without a word, he made a gesture with his hand to indicate that the school was dismissed and they might go.

QUESTIONS FROM TEXTBOOK SOLVED

THINK AS YOU READ

Q1. What was Franz expected to be prepared with for school that day?

Ans: That day Franz was expected to be prepared with participles because M. Hamel had said that he would question them on participles. Franz did not know anything about participles.

Q2. What did Franz notice that was unusual about the school that day?

Ans: Usually, when school began, there was a great bustle, which could be heard out in the street. But it was all very still that day. Everything was as quiet as Sunday morning. There was no opening or closing of desks. His classmates were already in their places. The teacher's great ruler instead of rapping on the table, was under M. Hamel's arm.

Q3. What had been put up on the bulletin-board?

Ans: For the last two years all the bad news had come from the bulletin-board. An order had come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The Germans had put up this notice on the bulletin-board.

THINK AS YOU READ

Q1. What changes did the order from Berlin cause in school that day?

Ans: M. Hamel had put on his best dress—his beautiful green coat, his frilled shirt and the little black silk cap, all embroidered. The whole school seemed so strange and solemn. On the back benches that were always empty, the elderly village people were sitting quietly like the kids.

Q2. How did Franz's feelings about M. Hamel and school change?

Ans: Franz came to know that it was the last lesson in French that M. Hamel would give them. From the next day they will be taught only German. Then he felt sorry for not learning his lessons properly. His books, which seemed a nuisance and a burden earlier were now old friends. His feelings about M. Hamel also changed. He forgot all about his ruler and how cranky he was.

UNDERSTANDING THE TEXT

Q1. The people? in this story suddenly realise how1 precious their language is to them.

What shows you this? Why does this happen?

Ans: M. Hamel told the students and villagers that henceforth only German would be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. Those who called themselves Frenchmen would neither be able to speak nor write it. He praised French as the most beautiful, the clearest and most logical language in the world. He said that for the enslaved people, their language was the key to their prison. Then the people realised how precious their language was to them. This shows people's love for their own culture, traditions and country.

Pride in one's language reflects pride in the motherland.

Q2. Franz thinks, "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" What could this mean?(There could be more than one answer.)

Ans: This comment of Franz shows a Frenchman's typical reaction to the imposition of learning German, the language of the conquerors. Being deprived of the learning of mother tongue would mean cutting off all bonds with the motherland. Teaching the pigeons to sing in German indicates how far the Germans would go in their attempts of linguistic chauvinism.

MORE QUESTIONS SOLVED

SHORT ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q1. Why do you think was little Franz afraid of being scolded?

Ans: Franz was afraid of being scolded that day especially because M. Hamel, the teacher, had said that he would question them on participles. Franz frankly admits that he was totally ignorant about the topic. His exact words are: "I did not know the first word about them." Secondly, he had started for school very late that morning.

Q2. "It was all much more tempting than the rule for participles." What did Franz find 'much more tempting'? How did he finally react?

Ans: Franz found that it was a very warm and bright day. The birds were chirping at the edge of woods. The Prussian soldiers were drilling in the open field at the back of sawmill. He could gladly spend life out of doors. However, he had the strength to resist the temptation. Finally, he hurried off to school.

Q3. "What can be the matter now?" says Franz. Why, do you think, did he make this comment?

Ans: There was a bulletin-board near the town-hall. When Franz passed by it, he noticed a crowd there. He did not stop to look at it. He wondered what could be the matter then. For the last two years they had received all the bad news from the bulletin-board—the lost battle, conscription and the orders of the commanding officer.

Q4. Who was Wachter? What did he ask Franz and why? How did Franz react?

Ans: Wachter was a blacksmith. He was reading the latest bulletin. He asked Franz not to go so fast to his school. He added that the little boy would get to his school in plenty of time. Wachter had read the latest bulletin about teaching of German. Franz thought that the blacksmith was making a fun of him. So, he ran to the school and reached there breathless.

Q5. What was the usual scene when Franz's school began in the morning?

Ans: Usually, when the school began, there was a great bustle. The noise could be heard out in the school. Students opened and closed their desks. They repeated the lessons together very loudly. They kept their hands over their ears to understand better. The teacher would go on rapping the table with his great iron ruler.

Q6. How had Franz hoped to get to his desk? What had he to do and why?

Ans: Franz had hoped to get to his desk unseen during the commotion. But that day it was very quiet. So, Franz had to open the door and go in before everybody. He blushed as he was late. He was frightened that

the teacher might rebuke him, but M. Hamel spoke kindly to him that day.

Q7. What three things in school surprised Franz most that day?

Ans: First, M. Hamel, the teacher had put on his fine Sunday clothes—his beautiful green coat, frilled shirt and the little black silk cap, all embroidered. Second, the whole school seemed quite strange and solemn. Thirdly, the village people were sitting quietly like school children on the back benches that usually remained empty.

Q8. Why had the villagers come to school that day? How did they look?

Ans: The villagers had come there to thank M. Hamel for his forty years of faithful service. They also wanted to show their respect to the country that was theirs no more. They were sorry that they had not gone to school more. They were sitting quietly and looked sad.

Q9. "What a thunderclap these words were to me!" Which were the words that shocked and surprised the narrator?

Ans: M. Hamel, the teacher, told the children in a solemn and gentle tone that it was their last French lesson. Henceforth, only German would be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The new master would come the next day. As that was their last French lesson, he wanted them to be very attentive. The teacher's kind gesture and use of soft words shocked and surprised the narrator.

Q10. How did Franz react to the declaration: 'This is your last French lesson'?

Ans: The words appeared startling and unexpected like a thunderclap. He now understood why there was a crowd at the bulletin board, why the village people had come to school, why the teacher was dressed in his Sunday best and why there was sadness and silence in the school.

Q11. What tempted Franz to stay away from school? [Delhi 2014]

Ans: Franz was not prepared for the test on participles. The Prussian soldiers were drilling in the open field at the back of sawmill. The birds were chirping at the edge of woods. These things tempted him. So he hurried off to school.

Q12. Who did M. Hamel blame for neglect of learning on the part of boys like Franz?

Ans: He thought it typical with the people of Alsace. They would put off learning till tomorrow. Parents are not quite anxious to have their children learn. They put them to work on a farm or at the mills in order to have a little more money. The teacher got his flowers watered or gave them a holiday. He too neglected their lessons.

Q13. What did M. Hamel tell them about French language? What did he ask them to do and why?

Ans: M. Hamel told them that French was the most beautiful language in the world. It was the clearest and the most logical language. He asked them to guard it among them and never _ forget it. He gave a reason also. When a people were enslaved, as long as they held fast to their language, they had the key to their prison.

Q14. Why were the elders of the village sitting in the classroom? [All India 2014] **Ans:** M. Hamel was taking the class of last French lesson. That is why elders of the village were sitting in the classroom to attend it. It was done not only to pay respect to M. Hamel but to pay respect to his own language.

Q15. How did Franz and other boys enjoy their lesson in writing?

Ans: That day M. Hamel had new copies for them. The words "France, Alsace, France, Alsace" were

written on them in a beautiful round hand. The boys set to work quietly. The only sound was the scratching of the pens over the paper. Nobody paid any attention to the beetles who flew in.

Q16. How did M. Hamel feel and behave during the last lesson?

Ans: M. Hamel was solemn and gentle. He sat motionless in his chair during the writing lesson. He gazed at one thing or the other. Perhaps he wanted to fix in his mind how everything looked in that little school room. Surely, it must have broken his heart to leave it all after forty years.

Q17. "He had the courage to hear every lesson to the very last." What led Franz to make this remark?

Ans: Franz noticed that M. Hamel was feeling sad on having to leave the place after 40 years and not being allowed to teach French any longer. Yet, he kept control on his emotions. He performed his duties faithfully. He heard every lesson to the last. The school was dismissed only at mid-day prayer time.

Q18. What happened when the lesson in history was over?

Ans: After the lesson in history was over, the babies chanted their ba, be, bi, bo, bu. Old Hauser, who was sitting at the back of the room, had put on his spectacles. He was holding his primer in both hands. He was spelling the letters with the babies.

Q19. "Ah, how well I remember it, that last lesson!" says the narrator. Which scene does he remember more vividly than the others?

Ans: The narrator remembers the scene of old Hauser spelling the letters from the primer with the babies. He too was crying. His voice trembled with emotion. It was so funny to hear him that all of them wanted to laugh and cry at the same time.

Q20. How did M. Hamel behave as the last lesson came to an end?

Ans: M. Hamel stood up in his chair. He looked very pale and tall. He wanted to say some parting words, but something choked him. Then he wrote "Vive La France!" on the blackboard with a piece of chalk. Then he stopped. He leaned his head against the wall. Without a word, he made a gesture to the students with his hand to permit them to go as the school was over.

LONG ANSWER TYPE QUESTIONS

Q1. Why was Franz scared that day? What did he see on his way to school and how did he get to his desk?

Ans: Franz was not good at learning. He would rather take the day off and waste time in searching birds' eggs or going sliding on the Saar. Franz was scared that day because M. Hamel had said that he would question them on participles. Franz did not know anything about participles. He found that the day was warm and bright. The birds were chirping at the edge of the woods. The Prussian soldiers were drilling in the open fields. There was a crowd in front of the bulletin-board near the town-hall. Franz found the school room unusually quiet. So, he had no option but to open the door and go in before everybody. He blushed and was frightened of the teacher. M. Hamel spoke very kindly to him and asked him to go to his place quickly. Franz jumped over the bench and sat down at his desk.

Q2. What order had been received from Berlin that day? What effect did it have on the life at school?

Ans: An order had been received from Berlin that only German would be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. This order had far-reaching effects on the life at school. M. Hamel, who had been teaching French at the village school for the last forty years would deliver his last lesson that day.

It was in honour of the last lesson that M. Hamel, the teacher had put on his best clothes. Old men of the village were sitting quietly at the back of the classroom. They were sad as well as sorry for they had not gone to school more. They had come to thank the master for his forty years of faithful service and to show respect for the country that was theirs no more. The teacher addressed the students in a solemn and gentle tone. He asked them to be attentive and explained everything quite patiently. He appealed to them to preserve French among them. During slavery it would act as key to the prison. He felt so overwhelmed by emotion that he could not bid farewell properly.

Q3. What do you think is the theme of the story 'The Last Lesson'? What is the reason behind its universal appeal?

Ans: The theme of the story 'The Last Lesson' is linguistic chauvinism of the proud conquerors and the pain that is inflicted on the people of a territory by them by taking away the right to study or speak their own language and thus make them aliens in their own land of birth. The story has a sub-theme also. It highlights the attitudes of the students and teachers to learning and teaching.

Though the story is located in a particular village of Alsace district of France which had passed into Prussian hands, it has a universal appeal. It highlights the efforts of the victors to crush their victims—the vanquished people in all possible manner—materially, spiritually, mentally and emotionally. Taking away mother tongue from the people is the harshest punishment. The proper equation between student and teacher, his focused attention, helpful and encouraging attitude and kind treatment can encourage students to learn better.

Q4. Comment on the appropriateness of the title 'The Last Lesson'.

Ans: The story has an appropriate and suggestive title. It is the centre of attention throughout and the whole story revolves around it. The beginning of the story serves as preparation for it. The unusual quietness at school, presence of village elders and the teacher in his Sunday best dress—all point out to the unusual and unique occasion—the last lesson in French in a French village school in a district conquered by the Prussians. While delivering the last lesson, the teacher wants to transmit all his knowledge in one go. He explains everything with patience and the students as well as old villagers listen attentively.

For the narrator it is an unforgettable experience. "Ah, how well I remember it, that last lesson," says he. Old Hauser is crying and his voice trembled with emotion. As the teacher is unable to express His emotions because of choked throat, he ends the lesson by writing 'Vive La France' on the blackboard. He makes a gesture with his hand to indicate that the school is dismissed and students can go home.

Q5. What impression do you form of M. Hamel on the basis of your study of the story 'The Last Lesson'?

Ans: M. Hamel is an experienced teacher who has been teaching in that village school for forty years. He imparts primary education in all subjects. He is a hard task master and students like Franz, who are not good learners, are in great dread of being scolded by him. The latest order of the Prussian conquerors upsets him. He has to leave the place for ever and feels heart broken. He feels sad but exercises self-control. He has the courage to hear every lesson to the last.

His performance during the last lesson is exemplary. He is kind even to a late comer like Franz. He uses a solemn and gentle tone while addressing the students. He has a logical mind and can analyse problems and deduce the reasons responsible for it. The problem for Alsace is that he (the district) puts off learning till tomorrow.

He knows the emotional hold of a language over its users. He is a good communicator and explains everything patiently. Partings are painful and being human, M. Hamel too is no exception. He fails to say goodbye as his throat is choked. On the whole, he is a patriotic gentleman.

