

ENGLISH



THE LAST LESSON

~Summary~

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Franz is Reluctant to go to School

Franz started for school very late that morning. His French teacher, M Hamel, had announced that he would question the class on participles. Poor Franz did not know even a single word about them and was afraid of a scolding from his teacher.

It was a bright sunny day and for a moment Franz thought of running away and spending the day outside. The chirping of birds and the marching of the Prussian soldiers was much more tempting than the rules of participles. However, Franz was able to fight the temptation and hurried off to school.

On his way to school, Franz passed the town hall and noticed a crowd in front of the bulletin board. For the past two years, all the bad news had come from it and Franz thought about what the matter was this time. As he was hurrying past, Wachter, the blacksmith, called out to him and said that there was plenty of time to reach the school. Franz thought that he was making fun of him and reached the school panting.

M Hamel's Strange Behaviour

When Franz reached the school, he was very surprised to find that everything was quiet. Usually, when the school began, there would be a great commotion and activity. Franz had often counted on the commotion to get to his desk unnoticed. But, that day everything was as quiet as it was on a Sunday morning. Franz noticed that all of his classmates were already in their seats and M Hamel was walking up and down with his iron ruler under his arm.

He had to open the door and reach his seat in front of everybody. He was blushing and was very frightened. What surprised and confused him more was that, instead of scolding him, M Hamel spoke very kindly to him and told him to take his seat.

Franz Notices Many Unusual Things at School

After Franz had calmed down, he noticed that M Hamel was wearing a special attire, which he wore only on special occasions. The whole school was so strange and a seriousness prevailed in

the atmosphere. But what surprised and confused him most was to see the village people sitting quietly on the back benches. They all looked very sad.

The Order from Berlin

Franz was still wondering as he observed the changes around him, when M Hamel mounted on his chair and made the dreadful announcement. He told the class that it was their last French lesson.

The order had come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine and he would be leaving the school the next day. These words were a shock to little Franz. Now he remembered the gathering at the town hall. Franz was totally shocked by the sudden turn of events. He regretted not having learnt his lessons when there was still time.

Now, he will never be able to learn them. He had wasted his precious time away from the class, engaging himself in useless activities like seeking bird's eggs, going sliding on the Sarr river and so on. His books, which were a nuisance to him, suddenly felt like old friends. His feelings for his teacher too started changing.

The thought that M Hamel was going away and Franz would never see him again, made him forget all about how cranky M Hamel was. Franz was feeling very sorry for him. It was in honour of his 'last lesson' that he had put on his fine clothes, and the village people had gathered there to express their gratitude towards him, and to show their respect for their country and their language.

M Hamel Criticises Himself and the People of Alsace

While Franz was thinking of all this, he heard his name called out; it was his turn to recite. He would have given anything to be just able to say the rule loud and clearly. But unfortunately, he got mixed up on the first words. He was ashamed and stood holding his desk. M Hamel said that he would not scold him. He criticised the people of Alsace for their habit of putting off learning for some time in the future. He blamed their parents for not taking interest in their studies. He also blamed himself for this. Often, he sent the students to water his plants or gave them a holiday when he had wanted to go fishing.

Importance of Mother Tongue

M Hamel then talked about the French language. He called it the most beautiful, the clearest and the most logical language in the world. He wanted the people of France to reassure their language. According to him, whenever the people of a particular nation are enslaved, as long as they are attached to their language, it is as if they have the key to their prison.

The Last Lesson

M Hamel opened a grammar book and taught them their last lesson. Franz was amazed to see how well he understood everything. Franz thought that probably he never paid much attention in the class and that M Hamel had never explained everything with so much patience. After that they had a lesson in writing.

M Hamel had brought new copies for them that day. Everyone was immersed in their work. Even the little children sitting in the class were tracing their fish hooks, as if that was French too.

The Final Good Bye

All this while, M Hamel sat motionless in his chair. Franz thought that M Hamel wanted to imprint this classroom scene in his mind. For 40 years, he had given his faithful service to the school and now his sister was packing their stuff. All this must have been really heart breaking for him. Finally, they had a lesson in history.

Everybody became emotional towards the end; some even started crying, but M Hamel had the courage and patience to hear every lesson to the last. Finally, as the church-clock struck twelve, M Hamel stood up. It was very evident that he had become emotional too. He tried to speak, but choked.

Conclusion of the Last Lesson

The Last Lesson summary reflects on the importance of one's language for any race and why it is crucial to safeguard it.