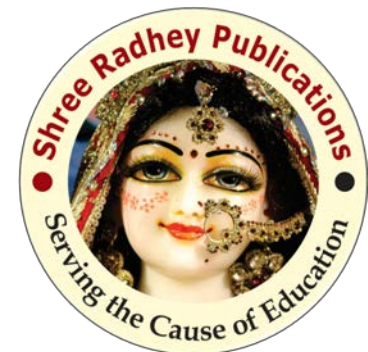


The Last Lesson

— *Alphonse Daudet*

PPTs from the Divine Book
English XII (Core)
By Subhash Dey



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Alphonse Daudet (1840-1897) was a French novelist and short-story writer. The Last Lesson is set in the days of the Franco-Prussian War (1870 - 1871) in which France was defeated by Prussia led by Bismarck. Prussia then consisted of what now are the nations of Germany, Poland and parts of Austria. In this story the French districts of Alsace and Lorraine have passed into Prussian hands. Read the story to find out what effect this had on life at school.



EXPRESSIONS – THEIR MEANING

in great dread of: in immense fear/ anxiety	in unison: in agreement/harmony	counted on: relied on/was sure of
a great bustle: a lot of activity	thumbed at the edges: folded at the corners	reproach ourselves: criticise/blame ourselves



Theme

MAIN THEME: The pain that is inflicted on the people of a territory by its conquerors by taking away their rights of studying or speaking in their own language. This lesson depicts the importance of one's own language for his/her existence. It also brings out Linguistic Chauvinism.

SUB-THEME: Students' and teachers' attitude to teaching and learning and the habit of postponing learning.



Values

- "We don't value something when we have it, but repent when we lose it!"*** Today's youth is involved in violence, bad politics, inter and intra group conflicts. Peace and tranquillity have been lost somewhere. They do not have respect for the nation and our mother tongue at all.
- Patriotism is a noble sentiment based on devotion and unconditional love of people for their country. We have secured freedom but not utilised freedom in its true perspective. The need of the hour is the revival of patriotic spirit among the youth.



Synopsis

Detailed Summary

France was defeated by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). Orders from Berlin came to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. It suddenly awakened the spirit of patriotism and a love for their language in every heart. An atmosphere of regret and deep loss hung in the class.

Changes in school on the last day due to the order from Berlin

Usually, when school began, there was a great bustle, which could be heard out in the street – the opening and closing of desks, lessons repeated loudly and the teacher's great ruler rapping on the table. But now there was unusual calm. The whole school seemed so strange and solemn. The only sound that could be heard was the scratching of the pens on paper. Even the Writing and History lessons were noiseless. M. Hamel had never explained everything with so much patience. All were sitting with seriousness, keen to grasp everything.

The most surprising thing was that the back benches, that were always vacant, were occupied by the village elders—old Hauser with his three-cornered hat, the former postmaster, the former mayor and several others. It was because they felt regret that they had not gone to school more. Secondly, it was their way of thanking M. Hamel for his forty years of faithful service and of showing respect for the country that was theirs no more.

That day M. Hamel had new copies for them, written in a beautiful round hand — France, Alsace, France, Alsace. They looked like little flags floating everywhere in the school-room.

Change in Franz's attitude and feelings about M. Hamel and school

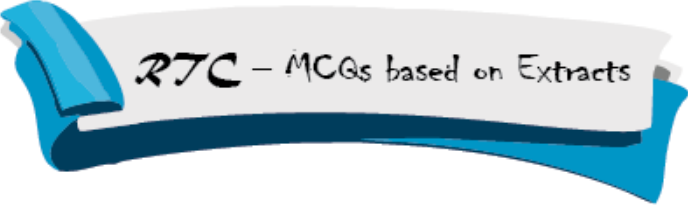
M. Hamel said, “My children, this is your last French lesson. The order has come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine...” These words were a thunderclap to Franz. Franz now understood what they had put up on the bulletin board at the town-hall!

Franz felt regret for not learning his lessons, for seeking birds' eggs, or going sliding on the saar! He felt that he would miss his school. He developed liking for History and Grammar. For him, M. Hamel became a good teacher from a boring one. He was genuinely upset that M. Hamel would leave the country next day.

Additional Points

Extra Shots

- ❖ Franz started for school very late that morning. He was in great dread of a scolding because M. Hamel had said that he would question them on participles, and he did not know the first word about them.
- ❖ Franz thought of running away and spending the day out of doors. It was so warm, so bright! The birds were chirping at the edge of the woods; and in the open field the Prussian soldiers were drilling. It was all much more tempting than the rule for participles. But Franz had the strength to resist the temptation, and hurried off to school.
- ❖ When Franz passed the town hall there was a crowd in front of the bulletin-board. For the last two years all bad news had come from there — the lost battles, the draft, the orders of the commanding officer. Franz wondered what matter could be now.
- ❖ As Franz hurried off to school, the blacksmith, Wachter, who was reading the bulletin, called after him, *“Don’t go so fast, bub; you’ll get to your school in plenty of time!”* Franz thought he was making fun of him.
- ❖ When Franz reached the school, he saw his classmates, already in their places, and M. Hamel walking up and down with his terrible iron ruler under his arm. So Franz was blushed and frightened as he was very late and did not learn the rule for participles.
- ❖ M. Hamel had put on his beautiful green coat, his frilled shirt, and the little black silk cap – all embroidered. He never wore such clothes except on inspection and prize days. It was in honour of the last lesson that he had put on his fine Sunday clothes.
- ❖ After the writing and history lessons, the babies chanted their ba, be, bi, bo, bu. The old Hauser, who had put on his spectacles and, holding his primer in both hands, was trying to spell the letters. He was crying; his voice trembled with emotion. It was so funny to hear him that all wanted to laugh and cry.
- ❖ M. Hamel blamed the parents as they were not anxious enough about the children’s lessons. They preferred to put them to work on a farm or at the mills, so as to have a little more money. M. Hamel blamed himself also. He often sent the children to water his flowers instead of learning their lessons. And when he wanted to go fishing, he just gave them a holiday.



RTC – MCQs based on Extracts

1. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

When I passed the town hall there was a crowd in front of the bulletin-board. For the last two years all our bad news had come from there – the lost battles, the draft, the orders of the commanding officer – and I thought to myself, without stopping, “What can be the matter now?” Then, as I hurried by as fast as I could go, the blacksmith, Wachter, who was there, with his apprentice, reading the bulletin, called after me, “Don’t go so fast, bub; you’ll get to your school in plenty of time!”

- i.** Who was called ‘bub’?
(a) M. Hamel (b) Wachter (c) Franz (d) Old Hauser
- ii.** What did the narrator think when the blacksmith called after him and said, "Don't go so fast, bub; you'll get to your school in plenty of time!"
(a) The school was closed today. (b) It was the last lesson today.
(c) He was making fun of him. (d) None of these
- iii.** Identify the tone in which the speaker said the words , “Don't go so fast, bub; you'll get to your school in plenty of time!”?
(a) Sarcastic (b) Humorous (c) Depressive (d) Cheerful
- iv.** What had been put up on the bulletin-board?
(a) The news of the lost battles
(b) The draft of the commanding officer
(c) The order from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine.
(d) All of these

2. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

Poor man! It was in honour of this last lesson that he had put on his fine Sunday clothes, and now I understood why the old men of the village were sitting there in the back of the room. It was because they were sorry, too, that they had not gone to school more.

- i.** Who was called 'Poor man'?
- (a) Old Hauser (b) Franz (c) M. Hamel (d) Wachter
- ii.** What feelings were expressed by the villagers when they came to attend the last lesson?
- (a) regret for not learning French
(b) thanking their master for his forty years of faithful service
(c) showing their respect for the country that was theirs no more.
(d) All of the above
- iii.** Why did the country belong to them no more?
- (a) Because they were leaving the country. (b) Because Germans had taken over their country.
(c) Because it was destroyed in the war. (d) Because their country was merging with Prussia.
- iv.** M. Hamel says, "...that's the great trouble with Alsace; she puts off _____ till tomorrow.
- (a) time (b) money (c) language (d) learning

3. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

All at once the church-clock struck twelve. Then the Angelus. At the same moment the trumpets of the Prussians, returning from drill, sounded under our windows. M. Hamel stood up, very pale, in his chair. I never saw him look so tall. "My friends," said he, "I—I—" But something choked him. He could not go on. Then he turned to the blackboard, took a piece of chalk, and, bearing on with all his might, he wrote as large as he could — "Vive La France!" Then he stopped and leaned his head against the wall, and, without a word, he made a gesture to us with his hand — "School is dismissed — you may go."

- i.** What does 'Angelus' refer to?
- (a) Sound of church bell ringing. (b) Roman catholic prayer.
(c) Sound of thanks giving. (d) A prayer sung in a group.
- ii.** What does the trumpets of the Prussians imply?
- (a) Igniting patriotic fervour (b) Playing the band to reduce war stress
(c) People of Alsace are now enslaved (d) Prussians cheering up the victory over France
- iii.** Why is M. Hamel pale?
- (a) He feels emotional and heart-broken. (b) He is unwell.
(c) He is annoyed. (d) He doesn't like the sound of the trumpets.
- iv.** "I never saw him look so tall." Why did Franz think that M. Hamel looked so tall?
- (a) M. Hamel had grown physically taller. (b) M. Hamel seemed very confident.
(c) M. Hamel was wearing his fine Sunday clothes. (d) He stood on the chair.

4. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

While I was wondering about it all, M. Hamel mounted his chair, and, in the same grave and gentle tone which he had used to me, said, "My children, this is the last lesson I shall give you. The order has come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The new master comes tomorrow. This is your last French lesson..."

- i.** What was the tone of M. Hamel when he was addressing his students?
- (a) cheerful (b) excited
(c) heart-broken (d) angry
- ii.** The grave and gentle tone in which M. Hamel spoke after getting the order from Berlin was due to:
- (a) his patriotic feeling for his country (b) his love for his mother tongue
(c) the grief of not being able to teach French in future (d) All of these
- iii.** When would M. Hamel leave?
- (a) the same day (b) the next day
(c) after one week (d) after two weeks
- iv.** What did M. Hamel want from the students on the last day of French lesson?
- (a) To give him a farewell. (b) To oppose the order from Berlin.
(c) To be very attentive. (d) To guard their language.

5. Read the extract given below and answer the questions that follow.

What a thunderclap these words were to me! Oh, the wretches; that was what they had put up at the town-hall! My last French lesson! Why, I hardly knew how to write! I should never learn any more! I must stop there, then! Oh, how sorry I was for not learning my lessons, for seeking birds' eggs, or going sliding on the Saar! My books, that had seemed such a nuisance a while ago, so heavy to carry, my grammar, and my history of the saints, were old friends now that I couldn't give up. And M. Hamel, too; the idea that he was going away, that I should never see him again, made me forget all about his ruler and how cranky he was.

- i.** "What a thunderclap these words were to me!". The words were:
- (a) loud and clear. (b) startling and unexpected.
(c) pleasant and welcome. (d) None of these
- ii.** Who are called as 'Wretches'?
- (a) People of France (b) Germans (c) Prussians (d) None of these
- iii.** What regret did Franz have?
- (a) that he could never play in the school. (b) that he did not learn French.
(c) that he would miss his old friends and M. Hamel. (d) None of these
- iv.** What had been put up on the bulletin-board at the town-hall?
- (a) The news of the lost battles
(b) The draft of the commanding officer
(c) The order from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine.
(d) All of these

Answer Key

1. i. (c) ii. (c) iii. (c) iv. (c) 2. i. (c) ii. (d) iii. (b) iv. (d) 3. i. (b) ii. (d) iii. (a) iv. (b)
4. i. (c) ii. (d) iii. (b) iv. (c) 5. i. (b) ii. (a) iii. (b) iv. (c)

- Concluding his last lesson by writing 'Vive La France!' on the blackboard shows that M. Hamel:
 - was overwhelmed with emotions.
 - wanted to distract all attending class that day.
 - was keen on not leaving the country.
 - wanted to teach French participles through it.
- "When a people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison" It is as if they have the key to the prison as long as they:
 - do not lose their language.
 - are attached to their language.
 - quickly learn the conqueror's language.
 - None of these
- Don't go so fast, you will get to your school in plenty of time. You will get to your school:
 - very late.
 - too early.
 - early enough.
 - None of these
- Why did M. Hamel blame himself?
 - for not having taught them enough French
 - for not being strict
 - for often sending them to water his flowers instead of learning their lessons
 - for giving students a holiday when he wanted to go fishing.
- What were the things being taken for granted by the people of Alsace?
 - Teachers of the school
 - Time and school
 - People around
 - Money and power
- Why was Franz shocked to see M. Hamel?
 - Because of his casual dress
 - Because he had a flower in his hand
 - Because he had a notebook
 - All of these
- What do the marching soldiers under the windows represent?
 - The Dawn of Prussia in defeat of French people
 - The defeat of Prussia
 - The victory of French
 - None of these

8. What bad news used to come from the Bulletin Board?
- (a) news of lost battles (b) the draft
(c) orders of commanding officers (d) All of these
9. What does the expression "in great dread of scolding" mean?
- (a) scared of scolding (b) very badly scared of scolding
(c) in the pursuit of (d) None of these
10. Why was Franz reluctant to go to school?
- (a) wanted to enjoy warm Sunlight (b) wanted to see soldiers drill
(c) wanted to enjoy outdoor (d) lesson on participles was not prepared
11. What did Franz find on reaching the school?
- (a) People were dancing (b) Strange people (c) Police patrolling (d) Unusual calm
12. Who occupied the back benches in the class?
- (a) weak students (b) teachers (c) monitors of the class (d) village elders
13. Why was Franz surprised?
- (a) Because of village elders (b) Because of police patrolling
(c) Because of students' behavior (d) Because of M.Hamel's humble and polite behaviour
14. Why was Franz feeling regretful and sad?
- (a) for reaching late (b) for not learning participles
(c) for change of the Government (d) for not learning his mother tongue
15. Whom did M.Hamel blame for not sending students to school?
- (a) Parents (b) Friends (c) Teachers (d) Watchman
16. What did Hauser bring?
- (a) Sweets (b) Children (c) Friends (d) Old Primer
17. What made Franz forget M.Hamel's ruler and crankiness?
- (a) Police Patrolling (b) Strange Quietness (c) Bustle on the streets (d) The idea of his going away

18. What was there in front of the Bulletin Board?
(a) children (b) police (c) hawkers (d) a crowd
19. The expression 'thunderclap' in the lesson means _____.
(a) loud but not clear (b) loud and clear
(c) startling and unexpected (d) unpleasant
20. What did Mr. Hamel bring for his class on his last day in the school?
(a) new pens (b) new notebooks (c) sweets (d) story books
21. Why did M. Hamel call the French language "the most beautiful"?
(a) Because it was the clearest and logical (b) Because it was his native language
(c) Because people were from France (d) None of these
22. Why did the villagers come to meet M. Hamel in the school?
(a) to complain (b) to say goodbye (c) to gossip (d) to show gratitude
23. When people are enslaved, what key do they have to the prison, according to M.Hamel?
(a) their behaviour (b) power (c) aggressiveness (d) mother tongue
24. What changes did the order from Berlin cause in school that day?
(a) hustle-bustle (b) people were happy (c) teachers were sad (d) strange quietness and sadness
25. What changed Franz's feelings about M.Hamel and school?
(a) Police Patrolling (b) Orders from Berlin
(c) Strict words from M. Hamel (d) Old Primer
26. What made Franz and people realize about the preciousness of their mother tongue?
(a) M. Hamel's words (b) School orders
(c) Order from Berlin to teach German only (d) School Principal
27. What does "The Last Lesson" symbolize?
(a) Loss of language and freedom (b) Loss of money and power
(c) Loss of rights (d) None of these

28. Why would M. Hamel not scold little Franz?
- (a) Because Franz must feel bad enough
 - (b) Because Franz could neither speak nor write French.
 - (c) Because Franz was not the worst.
 - (d) Because it was M.Hamel's last French lesson and he regretted that people of Alsace put off learning till tomorrow.
29. Pick the options which best suits to the reasons for which Franz did not want to go to school that day?
- 1. Franz wanted to enjoy the weather.
 - 2. Franz had already been late for school.
 - 3. Franz had not even prepared the topic of participles for which he was going to be tested that day.
 - 4. Franz's mother had asked him to bring some groceries from the market.
- (a) 2 and 3 (b) 2 and 4 (c) 3 and 4 (d) 1 and 4
30. Why did Franz think Wachter was making fun of him?
- (a) Because Franz did not know about the latest news on the bulletin board.
 - (b) Because he was invariably late to school.
 - (c) Because Wachter would often make fun of him.
 - (d) Because Wachter thought Franz hated school.

Answer Key

- | | | | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------|---------|-------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| 1. (a) | 2. (a) | 3. (c) | 4. (c), (d) | 5. (b) | 6. (a) | 7. (b) | 8. (d) | 9. (b) | 10. (d) |
| 11. (d) | 12. (d) | 13. (d) | 14. (d) | 15. (a) | 16. (d) | 17. (d) | 18. (d) | 19. (c) | 20. (b) |
| 21. (a) | 22. (d) | 23. (d) | 24. (d) | 25. (b) | 26. (c) | 27. (a) | 28. (d) | 29. (c) | 30. (a) |

Q.1 What was Franz expected to be prepared with for school that day?

(NCERT)

Ans. Franz was expected to be prepared for a lesson on participles, in grammar that day. He was in great dread of a scolding because M. Hamel, their teacher had said that he would question them on participles, and he did not know the first word about them.

Q.2 What did Franz notice that was unusual about the school that day?

(NCERT)

Ans. Franz noticed that the school was unusually quiet. Usually, there was a great commotion of the opening and closing of desks, of lessons repeated in unison, and the teacher's huge ruler rapping on the table. But on that particular day school was as quiet as on a Sunday morning.

Q.3 What had been put up on the bulletin-board?

(NCERT)

Ans. The bulletin-board displayed the news that an order had come from Berlin to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. The teaching of the French language was discouraged and had to be discontinued. The French districts of Alsace and Lorraine had been taken over by the Prussians.

Q.4 What changes did the order from Berlin cause in school that day?

(NCERT)

Ans. An atmosphere of regret and deep loss hung in the class on that day. The students got new copies with "France, Alsace" written on them, and received their last lesson in French. These copies looked like little flags floating everywhere in the school room. This was in contrast to the usual scene when the school would be buzzing with activity. That day everyone was working very quietly; the only sound that was heard was of the scratching of pens on paper.

Q.5 How did Franz's feelings about M. Hamel and school change?

(NCERT)

Ans. Franz felt regret for not learning his lessons when he realised that he was to receive his last French lesson that day. His books, that had seemed such a bother a while back, seemed precious to him and he felt he could not give them up. He had disliked his teacher, M. Hamel, previously, but he felt sad on that day at the thought of his leaving.

Q.6 What did M. Hamel say to Franz when he was unable to answer a question on participles?

Ans. When Franz was not able to answer the questions on participles and felt embarrassed, M. Hamel did not scold him as he normally would. Rather, he regretted that they had lost the opportunity to learn French and now their language was being taken away from them. He blamed everyone in Alsace for them not learning their mother tongue and putting off learning till tomorrow. He also blamed the parents and himself for not having been more serious about the children's lessons.

Q.7 Franz thinks, "Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?" What could this mean?

Ans. On the roof, the pigeons cooed very low. Franz thought to himself, "*Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?*" This means that the French language was as natural to them as cooing was to the pigeons. It was their mother tongue. It would not be easy to switch to the German language.

Q.8 What did M. Hamel say about the importance of language to the 'enslaved' people?

Ans. M. Hamel reiterated that French language was the most beautiful language in the world. He said it was the clearest and the most logical language, and even more importantly it was their own language! He felt they must guard and hold fast to their language as long as they could. "*When a people are enslaved, as long as they hold fast to their language it is as if they had the key to their prison.*" It means like the key, their language could liberate them.

Q.9 M. Hamel was an ideal teacher. Justify.

Ans. M. Hamel was an ideal teacher. He had selfless dedication towards his teaching profession. He helped in the inception of school. He gave his forty years of faithful service. He felt heart-broken at the thought of leaving the country next day. But he was determined to teach till the very last moment. The thought of his departure, the thought that France was no longer a free country, and the thought of missing his school, his pupils and the village folks made M. Hamel cry.

Q.1 The people in this story suddenly realise how precious their language is to them. What shows you this? Why does this happen?

Ans. France was defeated by Prussia in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). Orders from Berlin came to teach only German in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine. It suddenly awakened the spirit of patriotism and a love for their language in every heart. They realised the value of their language when they were faced with the command to give it up completely. *"We don't value something when we have it, but repent when we lose it!"*

The usual noisy scene at the school was replaced by unusual calm. The whole school seemed so strange and solemn. The earnestness of the students was evident from the fact that each one set to work very quietly. The only sound in the class was the scratching of the pens on paper. Even the village people came and sat quietly in the class, like students. Everybody looked sad. M. Hamel, the French teacher, evoked a feeling of regret in the students. Franz regretted not having listened carefully during his lessons. M. Hamel, who felt heart-broken at the thought of leaving, explained everything with a rare lucidity and with so much patience. It seemed almost as if he wanted to share all his learning before leaving the village.

Q.2 Franz's attitude towards school and M. Hamel changes when he comes to know about the takeover of his village by Prussians. Discuss.

Ans. On his arrival at school, Franz noted an unusual silence. His teacher, M. Hamel was dressed nicely and asked Franz to sit so that he could start his lesson. The teacher made a startling announcement that this would be their last French lesson as the new teacher would be arriving the next day. He reiterated about an order from Berlin that German would be taught in schools of Alsace and Lorraine. Franz was overcome with a feeling of remorse and regretted wasting his time in trivial pursuits. He decided to pay attention to the lesson since school had become very important for him. He began to realize the real worth of his school as well as of the teacher whom they had all taken for granted. Now M. Hamel became a good teacher for him rather than a boring one. For him, the teacher seemed to be a good gentleman who was leaving the village on that day. Thus, there developed a specific liking to study history and grammar in Franz since on that day M. Hamel put all his heart and soul in teaching.

Q.3 Describe the atmosphere that prevailed in the class on the day of the last lesson.

Ans. The order from Berlin had suddenly awakened the spirit of patriotism and a love for their language in every heart. The village elders had assembled in the school to attend M. Hamel's last lesson. Even the back benches, which were always vacant, were occupied. The students and those who had come to attend the class sat with seriousness, keen to grasp everything. Even the writing and history lessons were noiseless and only the scratching of the pens on paper could be heard. M. Hamel, too, was unusually calm and did not scold. He explained everything with patience and even to Franz the lessons seemed so easy. An atmosphere of regret and deep loss hung in the class.

Q.4 Discuss the last moment in the class on the last day of the French lesson.

Ans. The last moments in the class on the last day of the French lesson were evocative of their freedom and their way of life coming to an end. M. Hamel was sitting motionless in his chair and gazing everything in that little school-room. He felt heart-broken at the thought of leaving the country next day. The thought of his departure, the thought that France was no longer a free country, and the thought of missing his school, his pupils and the village folks made M. Hamel cry. Old Hauser, who was sitting at the back of the room wearing his spectacles and holding his primer in both hands, was crying as he spelled the letters. His voice trembled with emotion, so that all of them wanted to laugh and cry.

As the church's clock struck twelve, M. Hamel stood up, very pale, in his chair. He said, "My friends, I-I-." But something choked him. He could not go on. Then he turned to the blackboard, took a piece of chalk, and wrote as large as he could—"Vive La France!" which means "Long Live France". Then he stopped and leaned his head against the wall, and, without a word, he made a gesture to all with his hand — "*School is dismissed, you may go.*"