

Tender Heart High School, Sec-33B, Chandigarh

Class:X 25.11.24 The Last Lesson

Subject: English Literature

Story in Detail

The story begins on a beautiful day in a village in the 19 century Alsace region of France . A young schoolboy Franz, is in a hurry to go to his school. He is scared because he has not learned the lesson, on participles, that was assigned by his stern teacher, M. Hamel. He resists the temptation to bunk school and roam outdoors where Prussian soldiers are drilling.

Franz passes the town hall and sees a crowd gathered around the bulletin board. Franz thinks that something must be wrong. He is aware that the bulletin board was used by the Prussian forces to give their commands to the French villagers of Alsace. But Franz does not have time to stop and find out. He rushed and finally reaches his school. He is surprised to find an unusual silence with no commotion that normally marks the beginning of the day at school. Franz, through the window, sees his teacher pacing up and down with his ruler under his arm and his classmates are at their seats in the class room. To his surprise, instead of reprimanding Franz for being late to school, his teacher speaks to him kindly and simply asks him to take his seat. Franz notices that his teacher is wearing a beautiful green coat, a shirt with frills and an embroidered black silk cap-clothes which he usually wears on special occasions. To his surprise he sees many villagers including old Hauser, the former Mayor, the former postmaster and many others sitting at the back benches of the class room. As he tries to make sense of it M. Hamel makes a shocking announcement: he tells them that it will be their last French lesson as the teaching of French has been banned, under orders from the Prussian authorities and they will have to study German instead.

Franz, is shocked to hear this. He realises that this must have been the news that he would have to stop learning his own language-which he has hardly begun that had been posted on the bulletin-board outside the town hall. The knowledge to learn-gives him a new understanding about his language. He regrets the time he spent procrastinating learning the language. The moment that Franz has dreaded arrives: he is called upon by his teacher to recite the grammatical rules he was meant to learn. Franz stumbles and stammers. Instead of scolding him, his teacher lectures the gathered crowd on the evils of neglecting their education. It is this neglect, he says, that now enables the Prussia invaders to question the villagers' French identity. 'How can the villagers claim to be French', he

says, 'when they do not even know their own language?' He tells them that they had plenty of time to learn. But it is a problem of Alsace that it leaves everything for tomorrow. M. Hamel goes on to describe the beauty of the French language, telling the class that they must guard it carefully, as it is the key to their freedom. He explains the grammar lesson to the class. Franz now finds himself listening more attentively than ever. For the lesson in writing, M. Hamel makes the class write the words "France, Alsace" repeatedly in an attempt to make them learn it by heart. Everyone in the room applies themselves to the exercise with diligence and concentration. The cooing of the pigeons on the roof makes Franz wonder whether the Germans will make the birds too sing in German. The church-bell strikes twelve, and the sound of trumpets of the Prussian soldiers mark the end of their drilling exercises. It also signals the end of the last lesson. M. Hamel is fraught with grief. He is unable to speak so he turns to the blackboard and writes in large letters, 'Vive La France!', meaning 'Long Live France.' With a gesture of his hand, he dismisses the class.

Last page