

Flaming

Chapter 1 THE LAST LESSON

Remaining EXPLANATION

11. I jumped over the bench and sat down at my desk. Not till then, when I had got a little over my fright, did I see that our teacher had on his beautiful green coat, his frilled shirt, and the little black silk cap, all embroidered, that he never wore except on inspection and prize days.

Explanation:

Franz hurried to his seat. After some time when he overcame the scare and became comfortable, he noticed that their teacher had worn his best embroidered that day. The teacher normally wore it on occasions like inspection and prize distribution days. Franz wondered if that day was a normal day, then what could be the reason for M. Hamel to wear his special dress.

12. Besides, the whole school seemed so strange and solemn. But the thing that surprised me most was to see, on the back benches that were always empty, the village people sitting quietly like ourselves; old Hauser, with his three-cornered hat, the former mayor, the former postmaster, and several others besides.

Explanation:

Franz felt that the atmosphere in the school was unusual and serious. To add to it, the last benches of the class room were occupied by the senior village men – Hauser, who was wearing his three-cornered hat, the retired mayor, postmaster, etc.

13. Everybody looked sad; and Hauser had brought an old primer, thumbed at the edges, and he held it open on his knees with his great spectacles lying across the pages

Explanation:

They all looked sad. Hauser had brought his reader which was old and torn. He had opened it, kept it on his knees and had placed his spectacles on it

14. 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 want you to be very attentive."

Explanation:

Franz was confused and could not figure out what was happening that day. Just then M. Hamel told them that it was their last lesson in French as the Prussians in Berlin had ordered that French language would no longer be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine and that

German language be taught instead. The German teacher would arrive the next day and as this was the last lesson in French, he wanted them to pay attention.

15. What a thunderclap these words were to me! Oh, the wretches; that was what they had put up at the town-hall!

Explanation

Franz was shocked to know that he could not learn French any longer and now he knew the latest news that had been put up at the bulletin board of the town hall.

16. 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.

Explanation

Franz regretted for not being serious towards studies and for wasting his time in hunting bird's eggs and playing in the Saar river.

17. 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.

Explanation

Till now Franz considered his books to be an unwanted burden but suddenly, he starts considering them to be his best friends whom he could never leave. The writer wants to show the change in Franz's attitude towards study after hearing the news that he could not learn French any longer.

18. 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.

Explanation

The news that their teacher M Hamel was leaving also had a similar impact on him. Franz did not want him to go away. He no longer thought the teacher to be short – tempered and strict.

19. 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.

Explanation

Now Franz knew that M Hamel was wearing his best dress in honour of this last lesson. He also realized that the village men had come to pay respect and thank M Hamel for his service of forty years in that school.

20. It was because they were sorry, too, that they had not gone to school more. It was their way of thanking our master for his forty years of faithful service and of showing their respect for the country that was theirs no more.

Explanation

The village men had come to the class as they were also repenting for not have studied well in their childhood. They had come to thank their teacher for his forty years of service as a teacher of French. Also, they wanted to show respect to their country and were sad as their mother tongue – French would no longer be taught to them.

21. While I was thinking of all this, I heard my name called.

Explanation

The teacher calls out to Franz as it his turn to recite the topic of participles.

22. It was my turn to recite. What would I not have given to be able to say that dreadful rule for the participle all through, very loud and clear, and without one mistake?

Explanation

As the news had impacted Franz, he was eager to study and so, he was desperate to show his eagerness. He wanted to be able to recite the topic in one go and without any mistake and please his teacher. His desperation is reflected in his willingness to give away all that he had in return for reciting the lesson well.

23. But I got mixed upon the first words and stood there, holding on to my desk, my heart beating, and not daring to look up.

Explanation

As Franz did not know the lesson, he got confused and stood quietly. His heart was beating fast as he was ashamed of himself and did not have the courage to face his teacher.

24. I heard M. Hamel say to me, "I won't scold you, little Franz; you must feel bad enough. See how it is! Every day we have said to ourselves, 'Bah! I've plenty of time. I'll learn it tomorrow.' And now you see where we've come out.

Explanation

M. Hamel said to Franz that he would not scold him as now he had realized his mistake. Everyday Franz told himself that he would study the next day and now the opportunity to study had ended and he knew nothing.

25. Ah, that's the great trouble with Alsace; she puts off learning till tomorrow. Now those fellows out there will have the right to say to you, 'How is it; you pretend to be Frenchmen, and

yet you can neither speak nor write your own language?’ But you are not the worst, poor little Franz. We’ve all a great deal to reproach ourselves with.”

Explanation

M Hamel says that all the people of Alsace were to be blamed as no one was serious towards learning. He tells the class that the enemies (Prussians) would laugh at them and say that they only show to be Frenchmen as they can neither speak nor write their own language. He says that Franz should not feel guilty as everyone is at fault.

26. Your parents were not anxious enough to have you learn. They preferred to put you to work on a farm or at the mills, so as to have a little more money. And I? I’ve been to blame also. Have I not often sent you to water my flowers instead of learning your lessons? And when I wanted to go fishing, did I not just give you a holiday?”

Explanation

Hamel says that Franz’s parents were not interested in getting him educated. They wanted him to work at a farm or a mill and earn some money. He says that as a teacher, he was also not interested in teaching them. He would send them to his home to water the plants. Sometimes, he would declare a holiday and go for fishing.

27. Then, from one thing to another, M. Hamel went on to talk of the French language, saying that it was the most beautiful language in the world — the clearest, the most logical; that we must guard it among us and never forget it, because 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.

Explanation

M. Hamel praises their mother tongue – French language as being the most beautiful, clearest and most logical language in the world. He tells the class to guard their language as it is the only way to free oneself from the prison of slavery. If a person knows his mother tongue well, no one can enslave him. Knowing the mother tongue well as a language is a tool to fight domination.

28. Then he opened a grammar and read us our lesson. I was amazed to see how well I understood it. All he said seemed so easy, so easy! I think, too, that I had never listened so carefully, and that he had never explained everything with so much patience. It seemed almost as if the poor man wanted to give us all he knew before going away, and to put it all into our heads at one stroke.

Explanation

The teacher took a lesson in grammar. That day Franz was surprised that he understood the lesson with ease. He felt that he had been attentive, and that M. Hamel also explained the lesson with a lot of patience. Franz felt that the teacher wanted to give them all the knowledge he had before leaving

29. After the grammar, we had a lesson in writing. That day M. Hamel had new copies for us, written in a beautiful round hand — France, Alsace, France, Alsace.

Explanation

After Grammar, they had a lesson in writing. M. Hamel gave the class new notebooks with “France, Alsace, France, Alsace” beautifully written on them

30. They looked like little flags floating everywhere in the school-room, hung from the rod at the top of our desks. You ought to have seen how everyone set to work, and how quiet it was! The only sound was the scratching of the pens over the paper.

Explanation

Franz felt that here was an air of patriotism in the class. The notebooks were like flags of France that were floating all around. The entire class was busy writing and the only sound that could be heard was that of the pen writing on the paper.

31. Once some beetles flew in; but nobody paid any attention to them, not even the littlest ones, who worked right on tracing their fish-hooks, as if that was French, too.

Explanation

Once some mosquitoes flew into the class, but no one panicked as everyone was busy writing. The writer considers the pigeons sitting on the roof of the class to be students as well and says that even the pigeons were busy scratching the roof with their claws and it seemed that they were also busy writing the task of French language.

32. On the roof the pigeons cooed very low, and I thought to myself, “Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?”

Explanation

The ‘coo’ sound of the pigeons could be heard in the class and Franz wondered that would the Prussians force the pigeons also to change their language and coo in German. The writer wants to say that language comes naturally to a being and it cannot be forced upon anyone – be it the pigeons or the French men.

33. Whenever I looked up from my writing I saw M. Hamel sitting motionless in his chair and gazing first at one thing, then at another, as if he wanted to fix in his mind just how everything looked in that little school-room.

Explanation

In between writing, Franz looked at M. Hamel who sat still and stared at the different things in the classroom in succession as if he wanted to memorize the appearance of everything before leaving.

34. Fancy! For forty years he had been there in the same place, with his garden outside the window and his class in front of him, just like that.

Only the desks and benches had been worn smooth; the walnut-trees in the garden were taller, and the hopvine that he had planted himself twined about the windows to the roof.

Explanation

M. Hamel had been teaching at that same place for the last forty years. The only changes were that the desks in the classroom had worn out due to use over the years, the walnut trees in the garden outside had grown taller, the hopvine on the outer wall of the school building had climbed up to the roof.

35. How it must have broken his heart to leave it all, poor man; to hear his sister moving about in the room above, packing their trunks! For they must leave the country next day.

Explanation

Franz feels that the teacher must be heartbroken to be sent away from a place where he had spent forty years of his life. The noises of his sister packing and moving their luggage could be heard from the room upstairs as they had to leave the next day.

36. But he had the courage to hear every lesson to the very last. After the writing, we had a lesson in history, and then the babies chanted their ba, be bi, bo, bu.

Explanation

M. Hamel remained composed and heard the lesson from the entire class. After the writing task, there was a lesson of history followed by phonetics where they recited the sounds of alphabets. Franz referred to the class as "babies" because although they were grown up, they were reciting the lesson of phonetics which is usually done by younger children. So, he calls himself and his class to be 'babies'.

37. Down there at the back of the room old Hauser had put on his spectacles and, holding his primer in both hands, spelled the letters with them.

You could see that he, too, was crying; his voice trembled with emotion, and it was so funny to hear him that we all wanted to laugh and cry. Ah, how well I remember it, that last lesson!

Explanation

Hauser had put on his spectacles and holding the primer in both his hands, recited the letters with the class. He was crying, his voice trembled as he spoke. Franz had mixed feelings – he found it funny to see how an old man like Hauser was crying and trembling and on the other hand, he also felt emotional like Hauser did. Franz could never forget this last lesson.

38. All at once the church-clock struck twelve. Then the Angelus.

Explanation

Just then the clock at the church struck twelve and the prayer song begun.

39. 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.

Explanation

At the same moment the sound of the trumpets played by the Prussian soldiers who were returning from the drill was heard. M. Hamel's face became dull and colourless as the time had come for the class to get over. He stood straight and motionless and Franz says that he had never appeared to be so tall.

40. "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!"

Explanation

M. Hamel began to speak but could not continue as he was overpowered by his emotions. He took a piece of chalk and wrote the words "Vive La France" meaning 'Long Live France' on the blackboard as large as he could.

41. 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."

Explanation

Then he stopped writing, bent towards the wall and without speaking anything signalled the class to leave as the class was over.

Completed!