

## Alphonse Daudet



Born	13 May 1840 Nîmes, France
Died	16 December 1897 (aged 57) Paris, France
Occupation	Novelist, short story writer, playwright, poet
Literary movement	Naturalism

Signature

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Alph. Daudet". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned to the right of the "Signature" label.

**Alphonse Daudet fought in the Franco Prussian War**

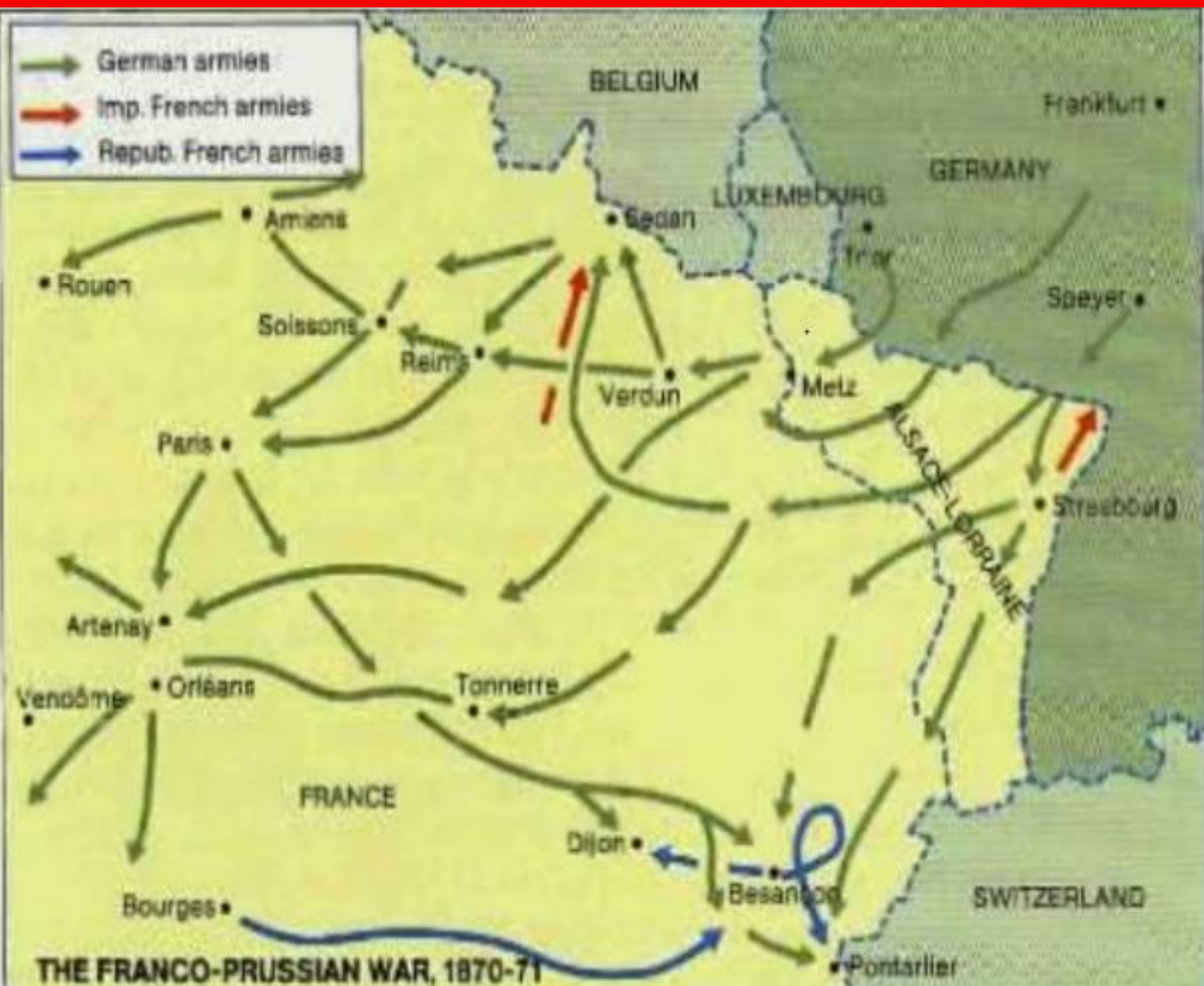
**The prose 'The Last Lesson', written by Alphonse Daudet describes the year 1870 when the Prussian forces under Bismarck attacked and captured France. The French districts of Alsace and Lorraine went into Prussian hands. The new Prussian rulers discontinued the teaching of French in the districts of Alsace and Lorraine.**



## Franco Prussian War (1870-71)









# Saar

River in Europe

4.6 ★★★★★ 552 Google reviews

The Saar is a river in northeastern France and western Germany, and a right tributary of the Moselle. It rises in the Vosges mountains on the border of Alsace and Lorraine and flows northwards into the Moselle near Trier. It has two headstreams, that both start near Mont Donon, the highest peak of the northern Vosges. [Wikipedia](#)

**Length:** 246 km

**Source:** Vosges

**Mouth:** Moselle

**Bridges:** Alte Brücke, Pont de l'amitié, Saarbrücke Mettlach

**Cities:** Saarbrücken, Saarlouis, Merzig, Völklingen, Dillingen,  
[MORE](#)

**Countries:** France, Germany



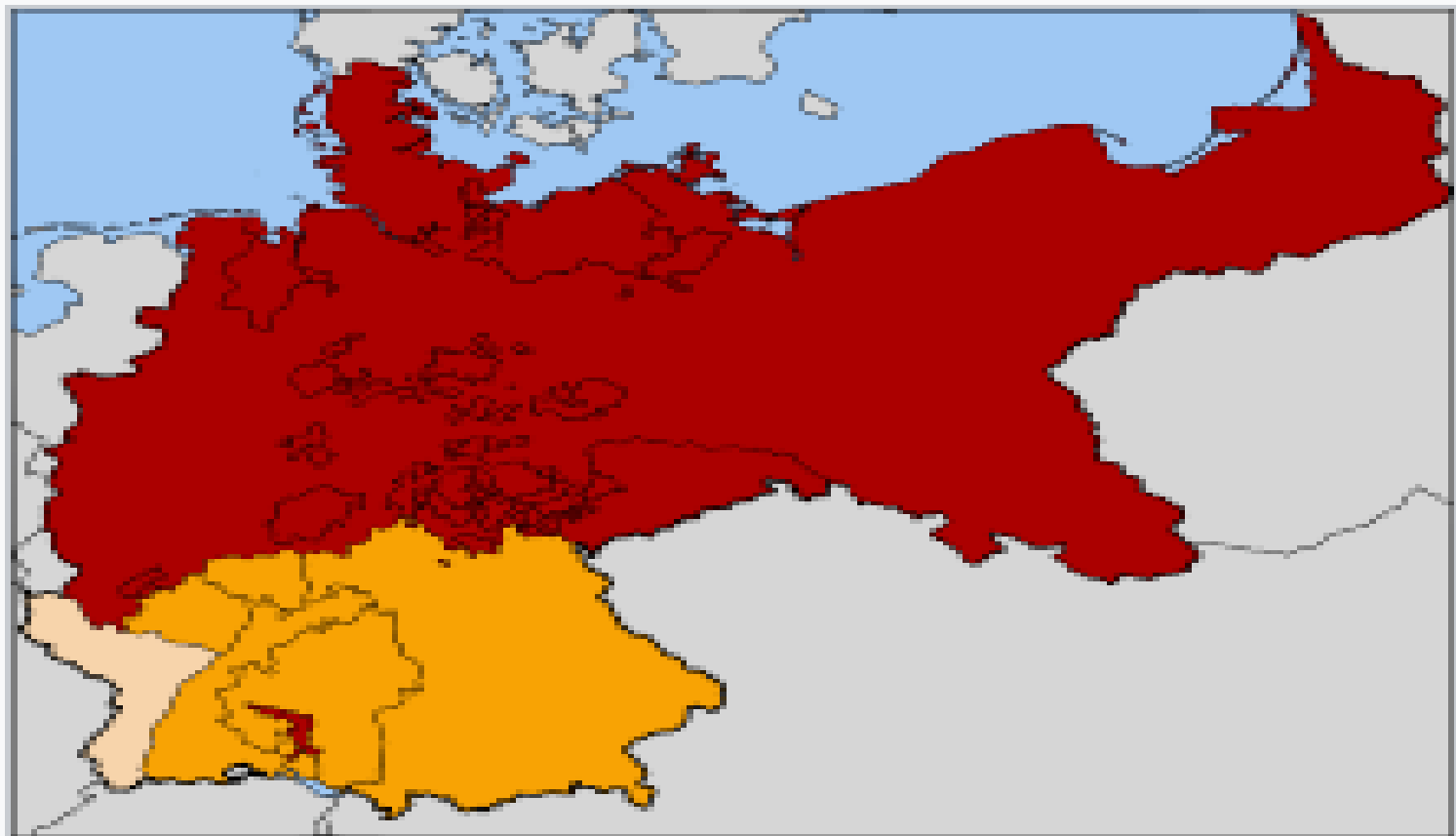


The Franco-Prussian  
War or Franco-German War often  
referred to in France as the **War of**  
**1870** (19 July 1870 – 10 May 1871),  
was a conflict between the Second  
French Empire of Napoleon III and  
the German states of the North  
German Confederation led by  
the Kingdom of Prussia.

# Alsace-Lorraine

The **Imperial Territory of Alsace-Lorraine** was a territory created by the German Empire in 1871 after it annexed most of Alsace and the Moselle department of Lorraine following its victory in the Franco-Prussian War.





Map of the North German Confederation (red), the Southern German States (orange) and Alsace-Lorraine (tan).

# Otto von Bismarck

Prince of Bismarck



Otto Eduard Leopold, Prince of Bismarck, Duke of Lauenburg, known as Otto von Bismarck, was a conservative German statesman who masterminded the unification of Germany in 1871 and served as its first chancellor until 1890, in which capacity he dominated European affairs for two decades. [Wikipedia](#)

**Born:** 1 April 1815, [Schönhausen, Germany](#)

**Died:** 30 July 1898, [Friedrichsruh, Aumühle, Germany](#)

**Prime Minister:** Himself; [Albrecht von Roon](#)

**Nationality:** Prussian, German

**Books:** [Gedanken und Erinnerungen](#), [The Memoirs](#)

## Quotes

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*The great questions of the day will not be settled by means of speeches and majority decisions but by iron and blood.*

*Politics is the art of the possible.*

## Gist of the lesson

- Franz is afraid of going to school as he has not learnt participles.
- He wants to enjoy beauty of nature. The bright sunshine, the birds chirruping in the woods, Prussian soldiers drilling but resisted.
- Bulletin board: all bad news, lost battles, the drafts and orders of the commanding officers: wondered what it could be now  
The changes he noticed in the school.
- Instead of noisy classrooms everything was as quiet as Sunday morning
- The teacher does not scold him and told him very kindly to go to his seat
- The teacher dressed in his Sunday best.
- Villagers occupying the last benches
- To pay tribute to M. Hamel for his 40 yrs of sincere service and also to express their solidarity with France.



- Hamel making the announcement that that would be the last French lesson; realizes that, that was what was put up on the bulletin board.
- Franz realizes that he does not know his own mother tongue
- Regretted why he had not taken his lessons seriously.
- Also realizes the reason why teacher was dressed in his Sunday best and villagers sitting at the back
- Hamel realizes that all three, the children , the parents and he himself are to be blamed for losing respect and regard for the mother tongue.
- Always keep the mother tongue close to your heart as it is the key to the prison of slavery.
- Atmosphere in class: teacher teaching sincerely and patiently, students and others studying with utmost sincerity.
- Franz wonders sarcastically if Prussians could force pigeons to sing in German.

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- Always keep the mother tongue close to your heart as it is the key to the prison of slavery.
- Atmosphere in class: teacher teaching sincerely and patiently, students and others studying with utmost sincerity.
- Franz wonders sarcastically if Prussians could force pigeons to coo in German. Hamel overcome with emotions could not speak and wrote on the black board “Long Live France”.

## **“Will they make them sing in German too, even the pigeons?”(Franz)**

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.

- It points to the limits and ambitions that the rulers can reach.
- Fears and the apprehensions of the ruled
- Agony and helplessness of subjugation
- Belief that choice of language is one's own prerogative, free from all political or social bondage.
- Bondages in the human world.
- Language links culture and society which in turn, unite people and eventually liberate them from political subordination.
- Nature is beyond captivity and boundaries. One could conquer a country, its people but not their soul.



# Key words and phrases from the text

- Pages 2 & 3
- Alsace- a former province of East France between the Rhine river and the Vosges mountains, annexed by Germany along with Lorraine in 1871 after the Franco Prussian war and returned to France in 1919 by Treaty of Versailles.
- Draft - a preliminary version of a piece of writing.
- Bub - an aggressive or rude way of addressing a boy or man.
- Apprentice - trainee
- In unison- in chorus
- Commotion – confusion
- Pages 4 & 5
- Solemn – serious
- Primer – a small book for learners
- Thumbed at the edges - slightly damaged *pinned*
- Mounted – went up to

# Continued....

- Thunderclap - startling/ shocking piece of news
- Wretches- unfortunate, unhappy persons
- Dreadful – terrible
- Reproach – rebuke, admonishment, scolding, reprimand
- page 6
- We all wanted to laugh and cry – solemn occasion
- Angelus – a bell rung for prayers
- Vive La France – Long live France
- **I never saw him look so tall** – Franz was overwhelmed, overpowered with emotions, when he saw Hamel stand up at the sound of the trumpets of the Prussians, so confident, taking pride in his language and country.
- <sup>new found respect</sup> Linguistic chauvinism- Pride in one's language so much so that there is no scope of respecting and accepting the language of others.

“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.”

- The town of Alsace was coming to terms with the fact of being annexed by Prussians.
- M. Hamel, the French teacher was upset with the turn of events.
- He was supposed to stop teaching French from the next day.
- He tried to make his last day in school memorable by dressing in his Sunday suit and tried giving as much as he could to his students.
- He spoke about the French language very highly and felt that they were all to blame for their inefficiency.
- He stressed on the fact that they needed to guard the language and make efforts to keep it alive.
- Especially people who have been enslaved, for them it is their ticket to freedom.
- People can be enslaved but not their mind, not their souls and not their hearts.
- People should hold on to their language by thinking in their language, their thought are theirs and no one can take them away.
- one can be in prison yet be free mentally.
- It was not only Hamel's last lecture but also his best parting advice.



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

- The orders had come from Berlin that French would not be taught in the schools of Alsace and Lorraine as Germans had taken over these districts. Mr Hamel delivered his last lesson to his students and villagers. He said that French language was world's most beautiful, clearest and logical language and therefore it should be guarded by its speakers and should not be forgotten by them. He added that they all were responsible as they were never serious about learning their language and now they would neither be able to speak nor write their language. He reproached himself, the parents and students for this situation. The people in this story suddenly realized how precious their language was to them. It shows people's love for their own culture, tradition and beliefs.

### THE VARIOUS THEMES:

- Theme of procrastination/ postponing things till the very last and then regret when they go out of control.
- Hegemony of the imperial and colonial power and their lust for ruling the **world** influencing culture and identities.
- Linguistic Chauvinism, Language : an asset, more so in times of crisis
- Freedom and patriotism , courage, the importance of education, and the preciousness of one's own language are interrelated themes.
- This story reflects upon the arrogance of the colonizer to forcibly take away the rights of those who are colonized. "The Last Lesson" stresses on the importance of education and the necessity to respect and learn one's own language. Respecting one's own culture and language and others' too.

## THINGS TO REMEMBER

'**Draft**' is a scheme or a written version of a speech or document enforcing compulsory military service for the people of Alsace by joining the Prussian army. 'Lost battles' **are** the wars they have lost against the Prussian army. All these terms highlight the grim atmosphere of the war.

### M Hamel

Earlier – Rude, lazy, not dedicated

Change – Patient, patriotic, a deep love for French, not scolding, understanding

### Franz

Earlier – Lazy, not studious, wandering away from school, never cared about studies

Change – Suddenly started loving French, hated the Prussians, longed to study French

### Classroom

Earlier – Noisy, uncontrollable, chaotic, loud, no learning, no teaching

Change – Calm, silent, greatly attentive

Prussians – Imposed new bans, marched everywhere, disregarded the freedom of the French people, barbaric, unfeeling, insensitive,

Ban – No more French, learn German instead, all French teachers leave the country.

# LINGUISTIC CHAUVINISM

- Linguistic chauvinism means an aggressive and unreasonable belief that your own language is better than all others. This shows an excessive or prejudiced support for one's own language. Sometimes pride in one's own language goes too far and the linguistic enthusiasts can be easily identified by their extreme zeal for the preservation and spread of their language. In their enthusiasm, love and support for their own language, they tend to forget that other languages too have their own merits, long history of art, culture and literature behind them. Instead of bringing unity and winning over others as friends, having excessive pride in one's own language creates ill-will and disintegration.

## M.HAMEL'S CHARACTER

- He has been portrayed through the eyes of a young boy as a very strict teacher who did not spare his ruler as and when required.
- He was very particular about maintaining propriety, so on his last day he was in his best dress .
- He is a hard task master. Students are scared of him.Franz was scared of being admonished and humiliated in front of the whole class as he was late to school. Moreover, he had not prepared participles. On the last day too he gets the class to do exercises on every aspect of the language.
- As French teacher, he is passionate about the French language. He loved French, was proud of the language and took pride in being a French national .
- He was an emotional person, attached to his students , things and village. At the end of the class, he was overwhelmed with feelings.
- At the end of the class, he was overwhelmed with feelings. The news of Alsace annexation shatters him. He reproaches himself for being a little selfish at times.
- The soulful look that he has when he looks around his class and tries to absorb as much as he could indicates his fondness for them. At the sound of the Prussian soldiers, he becomes overwhelmed with emotions and his voice chokes.



## FRANZ'S CHARACTER

- Franz, like the children of his age loves being outdoors, enjoys the sunshine, watching the birds, chasing the butterflies, collecting bird's eggs and sliding on Saar.
- He is conscious of his duties as a student and wishes he had prepared for the class. He doesn't like being <sup>singled</sup> signaled out in the class and wants to impress Hamel by his knowledge of French but when fails, is unable to face him. He blames himself for ignoring his lessons.
- He is an observant, sensitive and innocent boy. He notices all little details on his way to school and is quick to observe the changes in his surroundings.
- He reproaches himself for ignoring his lessons and wonders about the change in the order and its repercussions.
- In his innocence he wonders if pigeons too will coo in German. (The irony of the situation is highlighted)
- He understands the feelings of the old Hauser.
- He empathizes with M. Hamel and understands his helplessness. After learning about the reasons for the changed atmosphere, Franz accepts him with all his faults. He observes M. Hamel's effort to control his emotions.

## Questions for understanding:

- Q1. What was Franz expected to be prepared with for school that day?
- Q2. Why was Franz tempted to play truant from school?
- Q3. What was unusual about the school that Franz noticed when he entered the school?
- Q4. What had been put up on the bulletin-board?
- Q5. What changes did the order from Berlin cause in school that day? Q6. How did Franz's feelings about M Hamel and school change?
- Q7. What reasons did M Hamel give for their lack of interest in learning French?
- Q8. Why doesn't M Hamel want the people to forget French
- Q9. Franz thinks, —Will they make them sing in German, even the pigeons?|| What could this mean?
- Q10. Describe how M Hamel conducted the last lesson.
- Q11. What did M Hamel say about the French language?
- Q12. Why did villagers come to school that day?
- Q13. How did Franz find teaching and learning that day?

# Questions continued

- Q1. How did M Hamel react when Franz failed to recite rule for the participle?
- Q2. What does M Hamel tell about the significance and safeguarding of French language? How does he conclude his last lesson?
- Q3. What impression do you form of M Hamel on the basis of your study of the story —The Last Lesson||?
- Q4. Franz' attitude towards school as well as towards M. Hamel changes when he comes to know about the takeover of his village by Prussians. Do you agree? Discuss with reference to the 'Last Lesson'
- Q6. What is linguistic chauvinism? Is it possible to carry pride in one's language too far?