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The Last Lesson

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Prose

This lesson is set in the days of France-Prussian war. France was ruled by Bismarck. Prussia then consisted of what now are the nations of Germany, Poland, and parts of Austria. The Prussians defeated the French and the districts of Alsace and Lorraine fell into the hands of the Prussians. The oppressors not only wanted the territory but dominated over the language and culture of the Germans, thus to take away their identity. Read the lesson to find out what impact this had on life at school.

I started for school very late that morning and was in great dread of a scolding, especially because M. Hamel had said that he would question us on participles, and I did not know the first word about them. For a moment I 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 back of the sawmill the Prussian soldiers were drilling.

It was all much more tempting than the rule for participles, but I had the strength to resist, and hurried off to school.

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?”

