

**LESSING'S FABLES
IN PROSE
AND VERSE**

Published @ 2017 Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd

ISBN 9780649489060

Lessing's Fables in Prose and Verse by Gotthold Ephraim Lessing & E. L. Naftel

Except for use in any review, the reproduction or utilisation of this work in whole or in part in any form by any electronic, mechanical or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including xerography, photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, is forbidden without the permission of the publisher, Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 1576 Collingwood, Victoria 3066 Australia.

All rights reserved.

Edited by Trieste Publishing Pty Ltd.
Cover @ 2017

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out, or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser.

www.triestepublishing.com

GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING & E. L. NAFTEL

**LESSING'S FABLES
IN PROSE
AND VERSE**

LESSING'S FABLES.

With the publisher's approval.

By the same Editor :

Wilhelm Tell, a Drama in Five Acts, by F. von Schiller, with Grammatical and Explanatory Notes. In paper, 9d.

Die deutschen Kleinstädter, a Comedy in Four Acts, by A. von Kotzebue, with Grammatical and Explanatory Notes. In paper, 9d.

N. S. White
Given May 1879

LESSING'S FABLES

IN

PROSE AND VERSE.

EDITED WITH

**Grammatical and Explanatory Notes and a
German-English Vocabulary**

BY

E. L. NAFFTEL,

*One of the Modern Language Examiners to the Oxford and Cambridge Joint
Board, and to the Delegacy of Oxford (Local Examinations);
late German Master of Liverpool College.*

LIBRAIRIE HACHETTE & C^{IE}.

LONDON: 13, KING WILLIAM STREET, CHURCH LANE.

PARIS: 79, BOULEVARD SAINT-GERMAIN.

BOSTON: CARL SCHÖNHOF.

1887.

All Rights Reserved.

✓
Educ T 21849.805.523

HARVARD COLLEGE LIBRARY
FROM THE LIBRARY OF
PROFESSOR HORATIO STEVENS WHITE
JUNE 12, 1936

J. S. LEVIN,

ENGLISH AND FOREIGN STEAM PRINTING WORKS,
75, LEADENHALL STREET, LONDON, E.C.

INTRODUCTION.

GOTTHOLD EPHRAIM LESSING was born at Kamenz, in Pomerania, in 1729; at the age of twelve he was admitted into the free school of Meissen. He left school five years afterwards and prosecuted his studies at the University of Leipzig. His father urged him to enter the church, but his tastes lay in an opposite direction, for he devoted himself to critical and dramatic literature.

Mendelssohn and Nicolai, together with Lessing, formed a literary trio. In 1760, General Tauenzien appointed Lessing to be his secretary, and in 1762 he accompanied the general to the siege of Schweidnitz. Like many other great writers he did not derive much profit from his works, and for a considerable time he was reduced to extreme poverty. At this juncture, he was fortunately taken in hand by Leopold, Duke of Brunswick, and appointed librarian of Wolfenbüttel.

Lessing was more distinguished as a critic than as an author; in his criticisms he spared neither friend nor foe. He first pointed out the reasons of Klopstock's failure as an epic poet, and criticised the fables of Gellert, La Fontaine, and others, in a very caustic style. No class of writer, perhaps, was ever more unmercifully lashed by his caustic pen than were those descriptive poets who attempted to produce with their pen the work that a

p/
painter alone can thoroughly depict. These writers are sharply handled by Lessing in his *Laokoon*, that appeared in 1766.

Lessing may be called a reformer of German prose, and he was, to a very considerable extent, responsible for most of the changes in the general tone of German literature from the simple and natural character of Klopstock's works to the more general and elastic style in the writings of Schiller, Goethe, and other modern authors.

Lessing was sufficiently conceited to imagine that most of his predecessors in fable-writing had more or less failed in their work ; in fact, he indicated with tolerable plainness that, in his own opinion at least, he alone could write fables as they should be written.

Dr. Johnson thus defines a fable : "In its genuine state, a fable is a narrative in which beings irrational and sometimes inanimate are, for the purpose of moral instruction, feigned to act and speak with human interests and passions." Lessing gives a very similar definition of a fable, which must be carefully distinguished from a parable. The difference between a fable and a parable is that in the former the laws of nature are violated, whilst no such violation ever occurs in the latter. The parables of our Lord will serve as a convincing proof of this distinction. A good moral may in most instances be drawn from Lessing's fables ; he was not always original, for he borrowed largely from Æsop and Phædrus. Many of his fables are adaptations of the works of these ancient writers. Some people deny that Æsop ever wrote fables, or even existed ; it is the fashion now-a-days to question many things that were unquestioned some years ago, so perhaps we might more safely say that

Lessing consulted the collection of fables that passes under the name of *Æsop*, and that he generally managed to present some new features whereby to enhance the interest of the fable and to point the moral with greater force. He eschews the custom of many fabulists, who make the fable a mere excuse for a sally of wit, or a piece of satire directed, it may be, against an individual, or perchance, against some fashion or custom of the day. For this we must give Lessing due credit.

The early lyrical works of Lessing evinced no marks of extraordinary merit, but some of his dramatic works were ably written, and proved successful when they were placed on the stage. In 1755 he brought out *Miss Sara Sampson*; this play was English rather than German in its style, and did not meet with much success on the German stage. In 1767, his *Minna von Barnhelm* was first produced, and became at once a popular piece; the dialogue is smart and amusing, and, as the events in the play were taken from the history of the Seven Years' War, it is not a matter for surprise that the drama appealed to the tastes and feelings of the people.

Emilia Galotti was brought out in 1772, but met with little approval at the hands of the public. In 1779—the year following that in which his wife died—he produced *Nathan der Weise*; this work bears traces of deep and mature thought, for it was written when he was getting fairly advanced in years. It is essentially a didactic play, and its chief object is to inculcate the doctrine of religious toleration.

This was the last great work that Lessing wrote, and he died in 1781.