

**GERMAN STYLE: AN
INTRODUCTION
TO THE STUDY
OF GERMAN PROSE**

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German Style: An Introduction to the Study of German Prose by Ludwig Lewisohn

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LUDWIG LEWISOHN

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OF GERMAN PROSE

BY

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1910

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TO CALVIN THOMAS
IN ADMIRATION AND GRATITUDE



Libran. of
Prof. J. W. Winkler
6-18-48

PREFACE

It is not the primary purpose of this volume to exhibit the historical development of German prose, but to offer the advanced student a method of approach to the study of its formal beauty. Style, as Mr. William Watson has happily put it, is the great antiseptic of literature. Hence our study of prose should be, above all else, a study of style, and to sharpen the student's sensitiveness to it, a fundamental aim of every teacher.

From this point of view the field of English prose has been sedulously cultivated; that of German has scarcely been touched. German writers on style hasten — with remarkably few exceptions — to leave their perfunctory treatment of form for a vivid interest in substance; and even the standard histories of German literature are singularly barren on this point. Thus — to cite highly typical instances — Scherer, in summing up Lessing's achievements, calls him "humanist, patriot and enemy of tyrants"; Vogt and Koch assure us that Heine's style is inferior to Börne's in "seriousness of conviction"; König contents himself with calling Lessing's style "incomparable," and even R. M. Meyer has but a passing phrase to expend on Heine's verbal music. Wackernagel alone is a trifle more illuminating. He shows a consciousness, at least, of the fact that the fortunate search for the inevitable word is Heine's chief characteristic, and speaks correctly and well of Lessing's "laconic incisiveness." All these scholars, however, are primarily concerned with the

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historical expression of ethnic ideals, and but little with that intellectual beauty which is the be-all and the end-all of the art of letters.

No further justification is needed for the preparation of this book or for the hope that it will supply the real want of strictly literary attention to the masters of German prose.

With my specific selections the instructed reader may, here and there, have his quarrel. Wieland may be missed, but Wieland's importance is largely relative. Keller, among the moderns, may be thought to claim representation; but Keller is comparatively recent and may still be excluded from a text-book on style at the dictate of its author's taste. Nietzsche, on the other hand, may seem too questionable of substance. But since I am concerned with form alone, it seemed impossible to disregard so marvelous a master of his craft. At all events, if this volume succeeds in bringing the student into intimate contact with Luther's vigorous eloquence, with the keen brightness of Lessing's frugal art, with the large utterance of the elder Göthe, with Heine's impassioned sweetness and severity or Nietzsche's verbal orchestration, its end will have been gained and its usefulness amply vindicated.

L. L.

CONTENTS

	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	ix
I. General Characteristics of German Prose	ix
II. Historical Outline	x
III. The Theory of Style in German Letters	xxiv
 Luther	
<i>Introduction</i>	1
A. Ein Sendschreiben vom Dolmetschen	7
B. An die Rathsherrn aller Städte deutsches Landes, daß sie Christliche Schulen aufrichten und halten sollen	14
C. Ein Brief Luthers an seine Tischgenossen	34
 Lessing	
<i>Introduction</i>	37
A. Aus den Fabeln	43
(1) Der Rangstreit der Tiere	43
(2) Die Geschichte des alten Wolffs	44
B. Die Nachahmung des Schmerzes in der Kunst	48
C. Der Schauspieler und die Moral	59
D. Die französische Tragödie	65
E. Eine Parabel	78
 Goethe	
<i>Introduction</i>	83
A. Die Requien Mignons	89
B. Das Krönungsfest	94
C. Das Ende einer Jugend	105
D. Goethe in Italien	114
(1) Venezianische Bilder	114
(2) Abschied aus Rom	117