

Lessing was not a university professor; he moved in wider literary and artistic circles at Berlin and Hamburg, and at last became librarian at Wolfenbüttel. His influence was not that of an academic teacher; like Leibniz before him, he did not gather around him a circle of pupils. Accordingly criticism with him was not reduced to a teachable method, but remained an original and personal feature of his literary genius. It was especially in his style that he marked an era in German literature.¹ In this respect he resembled Diderot in France, for whom he had the greatest admiration. As for Kant, his academic activity moved in the traditional courses of philosophical teaching, and his peculiar method was made known to the world mainly through his writings. His pupils

¹ Carlyle in his Essay ('Edinburgh Review,' 1827) on the "State of German Literature," being a review of two books on German literature by Franz Horn, says of Lessing: "It is to Lessing that an Englishman would turn with readiest affection. . . . Among all the writers of the eighteenth century, we will not except even Diderot and David Hume, there is not one of a more compact and rigid intellectual structure who more distinctly knows what he is aiming at, or with more gracefulness, vigour, and precision sets it forth to his readers. He thinks with the clearness and piercing sharpness of the most expert logician; but a genial fire pervades him, a wit, a heartiness, a general richness and fineness of nature, to which most logicians are strangers. He is a sceptic in many things, but the noblest of sceptics; a mild, manly, half-careless enthusiasm struggles through his indignant unbelief; he stands before us

like a toilworn but unwearied and heroic champion, earning not the conquest but the battle; as indeed himself admits to us, that 'it is not the finding of truth, but the honest search for it, that profits.'"

In spite of this appreciation of Lessing and of his style, which "will be found precisely such as we of England are accustomed to admire most," Lessing is probably, of all the German Classics, the one who is least known, read, or written about, either in France or England. This is partly owing to the fact that he is characteristically German, having, next to Luther, done more than any other writer to create modern German style, of which he is one of the very few really great representatives, but still more owing to the fact that in all his critical writings he was a pioneer, and that, as such, his views have been either largely developed or superseded by those who followed him.