

***GOTTHOLD
EPHRAIM
LESSING***



***MINNA
VON BARNHELM***

Gotthold Ephraim Lessing

Minna Von Barnhelm

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Contact: DigiCat@okpublishing.info



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or, THE SOLDIER'S FORTUNE

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

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Gotthold Ephraim Lessing was born at Kamenz, Germany, January 22, 1729, the son of a Lutheran minister. He was educated at Meissen and Leipzig, and began writing for the stage before he was twenty. In 1748 he went to Berlin, where he met Voltaire and for a time was powerfully influenced by him. The most important product of this period was his tragedy of "Miss Sara Samson," a modern version of the story of Medea, which began the vogue of the sentimental middle-class play in Germany. After a second sojourn in Leipzig (1755-1758), during which he wrote criticism, lyrics, and fables, Lessing returned to Berlin and began to publish his "Literary Letters," making himself by the vigor and candor of his criticism a real force in contemporary literature. From Berlin he went to Breslau, where he made the first sketches of two of his greatest works, "Laocoon" and "Minna von Barnhelm," both of which were issued after his return to the Prussian capital. Failing in his effort to be appointed Director of the Royal Library by Frederick the Great, Lessing went to Hamburg in 1767 as critic of a new national theatre, and in connection with this enterprise he issued twice a week the "Hamburgische Dramaturgie," the two volumes of which are a rich mine of dramatic criticism and theory.

His next residence was at Wolfenbittel, where he had charge of the ducal library from 1770 till his death in 1781. Here he wrote his tragedy of "Emilia Galotti," founded on the story of Virginia, and engaged for a time in violent

religious controversies, one important outcome of which was his "Education of the Human Race." On being ordered by the Brunswick authorities to give up controversial writing, he found expression for his views in his play "Nathan the Wise," his last great production.

The importance of Lessing's masterpiece in comedy, "Minna von Barnhelm," is difficult to exaggerate. It was the beginning of German national drama; and by the patriotic interest of its historical background, by its sympathetic treatment of the German soldier and the German woman, and by its happy blending of the amusing and the pathetic, it won a place in the national heart from which no succeeding comedy has been able to dislodge it.

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DRAMATIS PERSONAE

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MAJOR VON TELLHEIM, a discharged officer.

MINNA VON BARNHELM.

COUNT VON BRUCHSAL, her uncle.

FRANZISKA, her lady's maid.

JUST, servant to the Major.

PAUL WERNER, an old Sergeant of the Major's.

The LANDLORD of an Inn.

A LADY.

An ORDERLY.

RICCAUT DE LA MARLINIERE.

The scene alternates between the Parlour of an Inn, and a Room adjoining it.

ACT I.

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SCENE I.

Just

JUST (sitting in a corner, and talking while asleep).

Rogue of a landlord! You treat us so? On, comrade! hit hard!

(He strikes with his fist, and wakes through the exertion).

Ha! there he is again! I cannot shut an eye without fighting with him.

I wish he got but half the blows. Why, it is morning! I must just look

for my poor master at once; if I can help it, he shall not set foot in

the cursed house again. I wonder where he has passed the night?

SCENE II.

Landlord, Just

LAND.

Good-morning, Herr Just; good-morning! What, up so early!
Or shall I
say—up so late?

JUST.

Say which you please.

LAND.

I say only—good-morning! and that deserves, I suppose,
that Herr Just
should answer, "Many thanks."

JUST.

Many thanks.

LAND.

One is peevish, if one can't have one's proper rest. What will
you bet
the Major has not returned home, and you have been
keeping watch for
him?

JUST.

How the man can guess everything!

LAND.

I surmise, I surmise.

JUST. (turns round to go).

Your servant!

LAND. (stops him).
Not so, Herr Just!

JUST.
Very well, then, not your servant!

LAND.
What, Herr Just, I do hope you are not still angry about
yesterday's
affair! Who would keep his anger over night?

JUST.
I; and over a good many nights.

LAND.
Is that like a Christian?

JUST.
As much so as to turn an honourable man who cannot pay
to a day, out
of doors, into the street.

LAND.
Fie! who would be so wicked?

JUST.
A Christian innkeeper.—My master! such a man! such an
officer!

LAND.
I thrust him from the house into the streets? I have far too
much
respect for an officer to do that, and far too much pity for a
discharged one! I was obliged to have another room
prepared for him.

Think no more about it, Herr Just.

(Calls)

—Hullo! I will make it good in another way.

(A lad comes.)

Bring a glass; Herr Just will have a drop; something good.

JUST.

Do not trouble yourself, Mr. Landlord. May the drop turn to poison,
which... But I will not swear; I have not yet breakfasted.

LAND. (to the lad, who brings a bottle of spirits and a glass).
Give it here; go! Now, Herr Just; something quite excellent;
strong,
delicious, and wholesome.

(Fills, and holds it out to him.)

That can set an over-taxed stomach to rights again!

JUST.

I hardly ought!—And yet why should I let my health suffer
on account
of his incivility?

(Takes it, and drinks.)

LAND.

May it do you good, Herr Just!

JUST. (giving the glass back).

Not bad! But, Landlord, you are nevertheless an ill-
mannered brute!

LAND.

Not so, not so!... Come, another glass; one cannot stand
upon one
leg.

JUST. (after drinking).

I must say so much—it is good, very good! Made at home, Landlord?

LAND.

At home, indeed! True Dantzig, real double distilled!

JUST.

Look ye, Landlord; if I could play the hypocrite, I would do so for such stuff as that; but I cannot, so it must out.—You are an ill-mannered brute all the same.

LAND.

Nobody in my life ever told me that before... But another glass, Herr Just; three is the lucky number!

JUST.

With all my heart!—

(Drinks).

Good stuff indeed, capital! But truth is good also, and indeed, Landlord, you are an ill-mannered brute all the same!

LAND.

If I was, do you think I should let you say so?

JUST.

Oh! yes; a brute seldom has spirit.

LAND.

One more, Herr Just: a four-stranded rope is the strongest.

JUST.

No, enough is as good as a feast! And what good will it do you,

Landlord? I shall stick to my text till the last drop in the bottle.

Shame, Landlord, to have such good Dantzic, and such bad manners! To

turn out of his room, in his absence—a man like my master, who has

lodged at your house above a year; from whom you have had already so

many shining thalers; who never owed a heller in his life—because he

let payment run for a couple of months, and because he does not spend

quite so much as he used.

LAND.

But suppose I really wanted the room and saw beforehand that the Major

would willingly have given it up if we could only have waited some

time for his return! Should I let strange gentlefolk like them drive

away again from my door! Should I wilfully send such a prize into the

clutches of another innkeeper? Besides, I don't believe they could

have got a lodging elsewhere. The inns are all now quite full. Could

such a young, beautiful, amiable lady remain in the street? Your

master is much too gallant for that. And what does he lose by the

change? Have not I given him another room?

JUST.

By the pigeon-house at the back, with a view between a neighbour's chimneys.

LAND.

The view was uncommonly fine, before the confounded neighbour obstructed it. The room is otherwise very nice, and is papered!!!!!!

JUST.

Has been!

LAND.

No, one side is so still. And the little room adjoining, what is the matter with that? It has a chimney which, perhaps, smokes somewhat in the winter!!!!!!

JUST.

But does very nicely in the summer. I believe, Landlord, you are mocking us into the bargain!

LAND.

Come, come; Herr Just, Herr Just!!!!!!

JUST.

Don't make Herr Just's head hot!!!!!!

LAND.

I make his head hot? It is the Dantzic does that.

JUST.

An officer, like my master! Or do you think that a discharged

officer,
is not an officer who may break your neck for you? Why
were you all,
you Landlords, so civil during the war? Why was every
officer an
honourable man then and every soldier a worthy, brave
fellow? Does
this bit of a peace make you so bumptious?

LAND.
What makes you fly out so, Herr Just!

JUST.
I will fly out.

SCENE III.
Major von Tellheim, Landlord, Just

MAJ. T. (entering).
Just!

JUST. (supposing the Landlord is still speaking).
Just? Are we so intimate?

MAJ. T.
Just!

JUST.
I thought I was "Herr Just" with you.

LAND. (seeing the Major).
Hist! hist! Herr Just, Herr Just, look round; your master!!!!

MAJ. T.
Just, I think you are quarreling! What did I tell you?

LAND.

Quarrel, your honour? God forbid! Would your most humble servant dare to quarrel with one who has the honour of being in your service?

JUST.

If I could but give him a good whack on that cringing cat's back of his!

LAND.

It is true Herr Just speaks up for his master, and rather warmly; but in that he is right. I esteem him so much the more: I like him for it.

JUST.

I should like to knock his teeth out for him!

LAND.

It is only a pity that he puts himself in a passion for nothing. For I feel quite sure that your honour is not displeased with me in this matter, since—necessity—made it necessary!!!!

MAJ. T.

More than enough, sir! I am in your debt; you turn out my room in my absence. You must be paid, I must seek a lodging elsewhere. Very natural.

LAND.

Elsewhere? You are going to quit, honoured sir? Oh, unfortunate

stricken man that I am. No, never! Sooner shall the lady give up the apartments again. The Major cannot and will not let her have his room. It is his; she must go; I cannot help it. I will go, honoured sir!!!!!!

MAJ. T.
My friend, do not make two foolish strokes instead of one. The lady must retain possession of the room!!!!!!

LAND.
And your honour could suppose that from distrust, from fear of not being paid, I... As if I did not know that your honour could pay me as soon as you pleased. The sealed purse... five hundred thalers in louis d'ors marked on it—which your honour had in your writing-desk ... is in good keeping.

MAJ. T.
I trust so; as the rest of my property. Just shall take them into his keeping, when he has paid your bill!!!!!!

LAND.
Really, I was quite alarmed when I found the purse. I always considered your honour a methodical and prudent man, who never got quite out of money... but still, had I supposed there was ready money in the desk!!!!!!

MAJ. T.

You would have treated me rather more civilly. I understand you. Go, sir; leave me. I wish to speak with my servant.

LAND.

But, honoured sir!!!!!!

MAJ. T.

Come, Just; he does not wish to permit me to give my orders to you in his house.

LAND.

I am going, honoured sir! My whole house is at your service.
(Exit.)

SCENE IV.

Major Von Tellheim, Just

JUST. (stamping with his foot and spitting after the Landlord).

Ugh!

MAJ. T.

What is the matter?

JUST.

I am choking with rage.

MAJ. T.

That is as bad as from plethora.

JUST.

And for you sir, I hardly know you any longer. May I die before your eyes, if you do not encourage this malicious, unfeeling

wretch. In
spite of gallows, axe, and torture I could... yes, I could have
throttled him with these hands, and torn him to pieces with
these
teeth!

MAJ. T.
You wild beast!

JUST.
Better a wild beast than such a man!

MAJ. T.
But what is it that you want?

JUST.
I want you to perceive how much he insults you.

MAJ. T.
And then!!!!!!

JUST.
To take your revenge... No, the fellow is beneath your
notice!

MAJ. T.
But to commission you to avenge me? That was my
intention from the
first. He should not have seen me again, but have received
the amount
of his bill from your hands. I know that you can throw down
a handful
of money with a tolerably contemptuous mien.

JUST.
Oh! a pretty sort of revenge!

MAJ. T.

Which, however, we must defer. I have not one heller of ready money, and I know not where to raise any.

JUST.

No money! What is that purse then with five hundred thalers' worth of louis d'ors, which the Landlord found in your desk?

MAJ. T.

That is money given into my charge.

JUST.

Not the hundred pistoles which your old sergeant brought you four or five weeks back?

MAJ. T.

The same. Paul Werner's; right.

JUST.

And you have not used them yet? Yet, sir, you may do what you please with them. I will answer for it that!!!!

MAJ. T.

Indeed!

JUST.

Werner heard from me, how they had treated your claims upon the War Office. He heard!!!!

MAJ. T.