

THREE STUDIES IN GERMAN CULTURE IN PENNSYLVANIA

by

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I

THE MANUSCRIPTS OF CHARLES C. MORE

As America approaches its Bicentennial Celebration, major attention will be focused upon southeastern Pennsylvania, the area in colonial times which gave thousands of Germans a haven in the New World. Our German-American forefathers who settled there came mostly from the Upper Rhine, the Palatinate, and Switzerland.¹ They were the first to transplant a German culture to the New World and adapt it to a new environment.

From these beginnings in colonial days a Pennsylvania-German tradition developed which has successfully withstood attempts to submerge it into the English-language mainstream of American life. Despite the characteristic American distrust of things not cloaked in the American-English language and the American tendency to equate uniformity of language with patriotism, this segment of German-American culture remains with us.

Standard German was the language used in most German-American newspapers, official documents, etc., however, a distinct Pennsylvania-German idiom, comprised basically of southwestern German dialect features, slowly emerged over several decades. Although initially only a spoken language, it appeared in printed form by the middle of the nineteenth century and has since experienced common usage.²

The development of Pennsylvania-German into a literary language undoubtedly received a major impetus from the

amazing success of dialect writers in Germany such as Johann Peter Hebel, Berthold Auerbach, Fritz Reuter, and Klaus Groth. Pennsylvania-German is still popular, and the study of its literature, past and present, offers important insights into our German-American heritage.³

Charles C. More, one of the major Pennsylvania-German writers of the present century, has demonstrated masterfully the heights this literature can attain.⁴ The richness and the descriptiveness of the language pervades his short stories (which comprise the major portion of his work) as well as his novels and poetry. While always remaining in the simple vernacular of the dialect, he successfully made the utmost artistic demands upon it.

More was born in Allentown on February 8, 1849 (cf. the records of Zion's Reformed Church) and died there on February 26, 1940. His father's family (original spelling: Mohr) came from the Palatinate to Macungie in Lehigh County in 1730; his mother's grandparents emigrated from Switzerland to the Lehigh Valley in 1771. More's great-grandfather, Reverend Abraham Blumer, served as minister to Zion's Reformed Church in Allentown for thirty-three years.⁵ More was educated in Allentown's public schools and the Lutheran Academy.⁶ From 1865 to about 1872 he resided in Berlin, Geneva, and London where he studied and taught languages. During his second stay in Europe (1876 to 1886) he was employed as a clerk and interpreter at the American Legation in Berlin. These were among the most enriching years for the development of his literary abilities. He enjoyed the acquaintance of America's Minister to Prussia, Bayard Taylor, a well known journalist, lecturer, and author of the day, who, besides writing many novels and poems, gained recognition for his translation of Goethe's *Faust*. Also among More's close friends were various German men of letters, including such proponents of dialect writing as Gustav Freytag and Berthold Auerbach. Shortly after his return to the United States, More joined the editorial staff of the *Friedensbote* and the *Weltbote*

in Allentown, two of the most renowned papers of Pennsylvania's once flourishing German language newspress.⁷ From 1902 to 1920, More was employed by the Victor Talking Machine Company in Camden, New Jersey, as a translator. In 1925 he returned to Allentown to live out the last years of his retirement.

During his period as a journalist in Allentown, More began writing literary works in Pennsylvania-German, several of which appeared in the *Friedensbote*. The *Pennsylvania-German Magazine* in 1907, 1908, and 1910 carried some of his short stories; several were printed in *Lewendische Stimme aus Pennsylvani* (Stuttgart and New York, 1929) edited by Heinz Kloss. More's masterpiece is *Die Kutztown Mail* (also written as: *Mael*) which relates the last days of an elderly German woman in Lehigh County who had spent years searching for her betrothed: "Es waar im Jahr 1858, as die Maeg in en glee Blockhaus gezogge iss, as vun der Union Kaerrich iwwer die Schtross g'schtanne hot. Sellemols hot noch en scheener Busch um sell Heisel g'schtanne un der Weg noch Kutztown iss zwische der Kaerrich un sellem Busch varbeigange — wie heit noch."

Very little is known about the background of this woman. The man who had carried her belongings to Allentown knew only that she was a German immigrant:

Wann's waahr iss, as es en
schtarki Frau nemmt, far
ihr Maul zu halte, waar
die Maeg ewwe en arrick
schtarki Frau. Die Nachbere
hen's aa g'schwind genug
ausg'funne. Sie hot sich
net meh mit ihne
abgewwe, as sie graad
gemisst hot, un far sell
hen die Leit sie juscht
'die alt Maeg' g'heese, un
wann sie bissig
sei hen welle, dann hen sie
'die alt deitsch Maeg' g'satt.

She seemed to live in a world of her own — with few interests save for that of her dedication to the care of a church cemetery.

Die Maeg waar's liebscht allee
mit ihre gedanke. Wann sie
net im Busch g'hockt hot
un hot gelese un gedraamt,
dann waar sie im Kaerrichhof
un hot an de graewer rum
g'schafft — un aa gedraamt,
odder iwwer die Leit g'scholte
as ihre Dode vergesse un,
vernachlessige. 'S iss arrick', hot
sie als far sich hiegebrummt,
'wie's hergeht uf de Welt! Do
heile die Menschen un dowe,
wann ebber schtaerbt, un de
meh as sie heile, de g'schwinder
weschen die Draene 's Aadenke
aus em Sinn — graad wie'n
schtarm, de wieschter as er
dobt, de g'schwinder iss er
vorbei! Des do sinn awwer
nau mei Dode, un ich vergess
sie net, awwer Blumme blans
ich ihne, un ich mach den
Kaerrichhof so schee, as es
en Freed iss zu schtaerwe
un do begraawe sei; un
wann ich dann aa mei
Ruh find', dann geh ich
zu ihne schlofe, un dann
bliehen die Blumme aa
far mich; un ebbes secht
mer, dann falie aa vun
de Bletter uf sei Graab!'

Her life was filled with melancholy reminiscences of a lost love whose picture she faithfully wore close to her heart. The boisterous arrival of the mail coach from Kutztown, driven by Ignatius Martin, was an annoyance which constantly encroached upon her world. Martin realized how much his

noise disturbed the woman yet as a practical joker he could not refrain from his antics:

Der Dreier hot dann juscht
noch lauder geblose un mit
de geeschel gegnallt. Er
waar schunscht kee iwweler
Kerl, juscht er hot die Leit
gaern geneckt . . . Mer hot's
ihm glei aag'sehne, as er
net immer en Maildreier
waar — mer hot's awwer
aa glei g'sehne, as er vor
seinere Zeit alt warre
iss — wie bei de Maeg aa.

When in the company of others his joviality abounded: "Waar er awwer allee, dann hot er oft der Kopp henke losse un hot Seifzer ausg'schosse as en arrig schwer Haerz verrote hen. Alsemol hot er aa en glee Pikter vum me scheene junge Maedel aus de Bruscht gezogge un hot's lang un wehmietig aagegucht, dann awwer g'schwind werschteckt un hot aag'fange zu singe odder zu peife, as wie wann er sich faerrichde daet, draurig zu sei."

One afternoon, after being particularly harassed by the noise of the mail coach driver, the old woman grew quite tired and sat down on a bench in the garden: "Ebbes wie'n Newel iss ihr vor die Aage kumme un sit hot gemeent, es daet en Hand aus em Newel kumme, un daet ihr Pikters vor die Aage hewe — Pikters aus ihre Vergangeheet." She saw scenes from her childhood in Germany with a young boy as a play-mate, she saw her betrothal years later, to the same companion, now a student, and she relived his sad departure from her and Germany after the Revolution of 1848, in which he had taken an active part, collapsed. She also was forced to leave her homeland and became determined to find her beloved. Constantly his countenance was before her and guided her even in these last moments when her head sank to her breast and she gave up her earthly existence:

"Es iss als dunkler warre,
 un 's letscht hot sie juscht
 meh en Schatte vun sich
 g'sehne uf sellere Schtross ...
 dann iss die weiss Hand
 aus dem Newel kumme
 un hot ihr's G'sicht
 g'schtreichelt un die
 Runzele vun de Schtaern
 un de Backe, un der
 verzweifelte, wehmietige
 Blick aus de Aage genumme,
 as der Kummer un en
 unerfilltes Verlange dart
 hie gedhu hen g'hat ...
 Un die Nacht iss nidderg'sunke
 un alles waar schtill — sell
 waar der Dod!

When the coach again appeared and the driver filled the
 air with his uproar she did not react. Amazement grasped
 the driver who consequently stopped and asked one of his
 passengers, a medical doctor, to see if everything was in
 order. They discovered that the old woman was dead. When
 they carried her into the house, the picture of her beloved
 became exposed; on the dresser, they found a bundle of letters
 written in German. These were given the driver to be read.
 The first one he opened contained the betrothal announce-
 ment:

Ignatius Michael Martin
 und
 Margaretha Johanna Reitz
 Verlobte
 Freiburg in Baden, den 17ten September
 1847

Stunned he could only mutter: Barmhaerziger Gott, find' ich
 meine Gretel so!" Overcome with grief Ignatz too departed
 this world. The letters revealed the story of their love and
 the long fruitless search and the purchase of a grave plot

where the old woman hoped to find rest and where she was convinced Ignatius would one day find her: "Uf ee Babier hot sie g'schriwwe, ihre Ignatz daet sie gans gewiss uf sellem Kaerrichhof finne un dann dacten sie doch noch im Graab zammekumme, far sell well sie der Kaerrichhof recht schee eirichte, as er aa sehne kennt, as sie immer in ihn gedenkt hett... Sie hen die Zwee newich nanner begraawe, un so hot die Maeg doch recht g'hat, wie sie gebrophezeit hot. 'Dann fallen vun de Bletter aa uf sei Graab.'"

The purity and simplicity of language achieved by Charles C. More is a lasting tribute to him as an artist and to Pennsylvania-German as a dialect rich in expressive creative possibilities. Recognition for his literary achievements came finally in 1931 from the German Academy in Munich which awarded him its silver medal and its diploma; Muhlenberg College granted him the honorary degree of Doctor of Letters in 1933.

The themes of More's works are varied, ranging from jovial pastorals to contemplation of man's existence.

An der Lecha haw ich g'sotza
 Un in die Wella g'schaut,
 Um mich rum hen Vogel g'sunga
 Un Neschter sich gebaut.
 Ihra Schatta wie die Wolka
 Sin g'schwumma uf der Krick,
 Dann in weiter Fern verschwunna;
 Doch ihr Lied, des blieb zurick.

— — —

Wie werd es dann mit mir mol geh,
 Wann ich ah nimme bin?
 Wann ich muss heemwärts wandra
 Ins Schattaland weithin?
 Werd ah mei Bild so schwewa
 Dann versinka aus'm Blick?
 Der Dood, der dann mei Schmerz fartnemmt,
 Losst er mei Lied zurick?

(From: "Die Schatta uf der Krick")

More apparently circulated various manuscripts among friends and colleagues and did not systematically gather them. The personal collection of his writings can be found at Muhlenberg College; this researcher is embarking upon a project of editing these manuscripts many of which have never been published. Holdings exist in two different groupings; the first, organized in twenty-two durable folders, contains the following:

Der Butzdeiwel. Wie de Sylwester Melling die Schtoori als verzeht hott. (a typewritten copy; 188 pages)

Der Butzdeiwel; Manuscript B; corrected copy; cxv, cxxv, cxxvii duplicate numbering; 127 pages by roman numerals, 133 pages by actual count (handwritten)

Der Butzdeiwel; Manuscript C; first draft; September 16, 1907 (handwritten)

Der Butzdeiwel; Manuscript D; incomplete with notes and suggestions (handwritten)

Der Galjeschtrick; Manuscript A; unfinished; January 18, 1907; 30 pages (handwritten)

Der Galjeschtrick; Manuscript B; unfinished; 12½ pages (handwritten)

Der Galjeschtrick; Manuscript C; notes and suggestions (handwritten)

Der Geschweier; Manuscript A; followed by notes and suggestions and pages crossed out; approximately 150 pages (handwritten)

Der Geschweier; Manuscript B; unfinished pages unnumbered (handwritten)

Der Geschweier; Manuscript C; beginnings and various notes and suggestions (handwritten)

Die Hex-Bobb; Manuscript A; unfinished (handwritten); the reverse side of the pages carry *Der Butzegwel. Wie der Sylwester Melling die Schtori verzeht hatt*; approximately 30 pages, most typed, some handwritten.

Die Hex-Bobb; Manuscript B; various notes; two letters found with manuscript; curious is the name Cagliostro, a charlatan in Europe during the 18th century, which appears in the corner of the reverse side of one of the pages (handwritten)

Die Lein Fens; Manuscript A; correction sheets inserted at various points; 214 pages (typewritten)

Die Lein Fens; Manuscript B; complete but not last corrected copy; 137 pages (handwritten)

Die Lein Fenz (sic); Manuscript C; finished and corrected copy 229 sheets, though several pages lost (handwritten)

Die Lein Fens; Manuscript D; finished and corrected copy; notes and suggestions throughout (handwritten)

Menschefresser; miscellaneous sheets with notes on the *Menschefresser* (handwritten)

Ne Gemee uff Gricke; unfinished and to be revised; two loose sheets (handwritten)

Die Poschtmeeschdern with seven episodes; also four sheets of notes (typewritten); also three tablets with a rough draft of story (handwritten)

Verrechelte Rechler; rough draft; approximately 300 pages (handwritten)

Die Uffaerschtehung; incomplete manuscript; pages 11 to 35 and 41 to 46; missing are pages 1 to 10; page 43 duplicate

Die Verrechelte Rechler; Manuscript B; 115 pages (typewritten)

The second grouping contains the following materials:

- A. Seven unbound tablets and several loose sheets; aphorisms (handwritten)
- B. Seven unbound tablets and several loose sheets; aphorisms (handwritten)
- C. Seven tablets of aphorisms; the short story *Die Insomnia-Kjur. Wie der Peter Pisator Angler sie darrich gemacht hott.* (handwritten)
- D. *Der Butzdeiwel*; original manuscript; in fair condition (handwritten)
- E. *Die Menschefresser*; three manuscripts (handwritten)
- F. *Der Jungscht Dak*; novel manuscript; plus several pages of a revised copy (handwritten)
- G. *Die Verreckelte Recheler* in two tablets; plus many loose pages of another draft (handwritten)
- H. Miscellaneous pages from various works; condition fair (handwritten)
- I. Miscellaneous manuscripts; *Altfrankische Leit*; *Ein darrichgefallner Bauer*; *Wiescht Mann von der Flett*; plus various loose sheets; loose sheets from *Menschefresser*; loose sheets from *Kutztown Meel* and *Die Weiwerfeind*;

*Wie der Bennewell Kodus Holzgiesser gschtarwe is;
En abgezweigter Schtammbaum; various loose sheets*
J. *Familje-Ehr* two manuscript fragments, one written as
Familjeehr

The completion of such a project will demand considerable time and this researcher would be greatly indebted for any information which might lead to the discovery of other manuscripts, letters, or materials relating to Charles C. More.

NOTES

¹See A. B. Faust, *The German Element in the United States*, Vol. I (New York, 1927); R. B. Strassburger, *Pennsylvania-German Pioneers: A Publication of the Original Lists of Arrivals in the Port of Philadelphia from 1727 to 1808* (Norristown, Pa. 1934).

²Various Pa. German grammars exist, e.g.: A. F. Buffington and Preston A. Barba, *A Pennsylvania German Grammar* (Allentown, 1954); J. William Frey, *A Simple Grammar of Pennsylvania Dutch* (Clinton, S. C. 1942). See also C. R. Beam, *Abridged Pennsylvania German Dictionary* (Kaiserslauten, Germany, 1970).

³See G. G. Gilbert, editor, *The German Language in America* (Austin, Texas, 1971), p. 115. "Two regional groups have been especially important in this regard: The Pennsylvania Germans and the Texas Germans. In the case of the Pennsylvanians it is chiefly a question of their impressive dialect literature, which is unfortunately more praised than read." Cf. also H. H. Reichard, *Pennsylvania-German Dialect Writings and their Writers* (Lancaster, Pa. 1918); E. F. Robacker, *Pennsylvania German Literature* (Philadelphia, 1943).

⁴See Earl F. Robacker, *Pennsylvania German Literature*, p. 135.

⁵See C. R. Roberts, *History of Lehigh Country* (Allentown, 1914), vol. II, pp. 118-119. It was at this church that the Liberty Bell and the bells of Christ Church were hidden during the Revolutionary War.

⁶See S. E. Ochsenford, *Muhlenberg College. A Quarter-Centennial Memorial Volume* (Allentown, Pa., 1892). The Lutheran Academy was the predecessor of Muhlenberg College (founded in 1867).

⁷See Karl J. R. Arndt and May E. Olson, *German-American Newspapers and Periodicals 1732-1955 History and Bibliography* (Heidelberg, Germany 1961), pp. 503, 508.