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**A Brief Encounter Between Friedrich Muench,  
German-American Rationalist in Missouri, and  
Theodore Parker, New England Transcendentalist**

In the early decades of the nineteenth century, certain strains of German idealism profoundly influenced philosophical and religious thinking in America. Originating in Kantian transcendental philosophy, this idealism rejected both materialism, which viewed mind as an extension of matter, and Lockean sensationalism that derived ideas from external experience.

This adapted American idealism affirmed two classes of ideas independent of, and transcending external experience. In the cognitive realm, they included a priori rules in the understanding that served to conceptualize and organize the flux of sensory representations. In the practical realm of society and individual behavior, they included innate ideas revealed through reason—the ideas of God, freedom and immortality. These latter provided practical grounds for religious faith, moral duty and responsibility.<sup>1</sup>

Two early nineteenth-century American groups based their religious and moral philosophy on this idealist doctrine: German-American religious Rationalists on the Missouri frontier and New England Transcendentalists. These two groups were not only separated geographically, but also differed in national origin and cultural backgrounds.

Many liberally-inclined and educated German immigrants, fleeing from political and religious oppression in their native land, brought this idealism with them to their new homeland. Blended with social and political Enlightenment ideology, this philosophy flourished for a time in America under the banner of religious Rationalism. These Rationalists rejected religious dogma, creeds, rituals, and supernatural revelation as irrelevant to true Christian belief. In America, they especially opposed

the authoritarian, hierarchical organization of the Evangelical Lutheran and Catholic churches—the same state churches in Germany linked with autocratic regimes. Rationalists equally scorned the excesses of "enthusiasm," or bigotry, often characteristic of American protestant-evangelical denominations. Because their idealism posited a spiritual equality for all human beings, Rationalists opposed slavery and other forms of human oppression. They were vigorous advocates of American democratic practice and ideology.<sup>2</sup>

Missouri River valley towns and farms just west of St. Louis formed a major "western" regional center for German-American religious Rationalists. One of the leading advocates for this frontier Rationalism was Friedrich Muench (1799-1881). After emigrating to America in 1834, Muench settled on a farm near Dutzow, Warren County, Missouri, about sixty miles west of St. Louis. He was a viticulturist, sometimes preacher, educator of youth, politician, and from the beginning, a prolific essayist well-known to German-Americans under the pseudonym "Far West."<sup>3</sup>

This same German idealism also found fertile ground in New England, transmitted in large part through writings of English and French interpreters. In this region the doctrine became known as Transcendentalism. Transcendentalists found the Puritan-Calvinist dogmas of human depravity, divine election and predestination incompatible with the idealistic doctrine of human rights equality. Like Rationalists, Transcendentalists campaigned for human rights—the emancipation of slaves, the elevation of women and economically oppressed groups. Theodore Parker (1810-60), radical Unitarian minister in Boston, a contemporary of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Amos Bronson Alcott and others in the New England Transcendental circle, was preeminent in both his preaching and writing for promoting this idealism through religious and social reforms.<sup>4</sup>

Despite the ideological affinity between early Missouri-frontier Rationalists and New England Transcendentalists, history has so far recorded little contact between individuals in these two groups at the time. This separateness contrasts with contacts developed during the mid-1860s between a St. Louis idealist group—the St. Louis Philosophic Society—and the New England Transcendentalists. Founded in 1866, the St. Louis group was established to study German idealist philosophy from Kant to Hegel. Both Ralph Waldo Emerson and Bronson Alcott met with the group in 1866 and 1867 on their western speaking tours. Later, William T. Harris, a leading figure in the St. Louis group, traveled east to lecture at the Concord School.<sup>5</sup>

The earlier separateness between religious Rationalists and Transcendentalists resulted partly because Muench and his Rationalist colleagues wrote almost exclusively in German for German-American newspapers and periodicals. Moreover, Missouri Rationalists, especially Muench, often lived in isolated frontier areas accessible only by river boat

and rugged overland travel. No railroad existed west of St. Louis at that time.

However, historical records do reveal at least one exception to the earlier regional and language-based barriers between the two groups. Friedrich Muench and Theodore Parker engaged in a brief correspondence beginning in 1846. Five letters survive from this exchange: four by Muench, one by Parker. Muench's letters reveal that despite his isolation, he was informed about the ferment in religious thinking in New England.<sup>6</sup>

In Muench's opening letter of this exchange, he mentions "Dr. Follen," a personal friend. Since Follen, before his early death in 1840, may have played a role in informing Muench about the New England Transcendentalists, a few words need to be said about the relationship between the two men.

Karl Follen (1794-1840) and his brother Paul (1799-1844), had been close to Muench in Germany during their university days at Gießen. Paul had married Muench's sister, Marie, and was co-leader with Muench of the Gießen Emigration Society when that group came to America in 1834. Later Muench and Paul's family were farm neighbors near Dutzow.

Karl, the older brother, came to America in 1824, a decade before Muench. He settled in Boston and taught German language and literature at Harvard. During these same years Karl Follen prepared to enter the Unitarian ministry. He was a close friend and admirer of William Ellery Channing, influential Unitarian minister and Transcendental forerunner. As a member of Channing's study circle, Follen came into social and intellectual contact with other Bostonians who later developed Transcendental views. This included Theodore Parker. Although Muench's letters show he had been in correspondence with Karl Follen, none of these exchanges seem to have survived.<sup>7</sup>

Some features of Muench's letters, as they have come down to us, need a brief note. The neat English longhand shown in the copies is probably Muench's own handwriting.<sup>8</sup> Underlining of words and phrases, as well as variations in spelling, including Muench's name, are given as they appeared in the copies. Finally, although Muench's farm was located outside the tiny settlement of Dutzow, his letter-heading address always gives Marthasville, the closest village post office a few miles west of Dutzow. All the letters reproduced below contain only minor editorial deletions.

From Frederic Münch,

Marthasville, Warren County, Missouri  
Sept. 23, 1846

Rev. Theo. Parker:

Although an entire stranger to you, I take the liberty of addressing myself to you, in a cause which, I presume, is as well yours as mine, the cause of religious enlightening. Being an adopted citizen of this country, I take a lively interest in its progress in all respects. With peculiar attention I have been watching all appearances in the religious department, very often with no little sorrow. What has cheered me was this: while the rest of the religious denominations of this country seemed to be in a sort of dead stagnation, in the Unitarian Church, I met with several noble characters striving to keep up with the spirit of the time, and do away with antiquated prejudices. With no design to undervalue others, I mention the name of Dr. Follen, (a friend of my youth, and a near relative of mine). The principle of freest investigation so strongly urged by him, must needs ultimately lead to the full truth. I hailed with admiration the most ingenious fruits of his intellectual exertion, without, however, subscribing to all his views: I thought he ought to have gone one step farther and rid himself and his church of all remaining notions of supernaturalness.<sup>[9]</sup>

Lately I was informed that it is you who is about to establish what I have long been looking for: a new school of Unitarian creed, which cannot be materially different from German Rationalism. The latter I consider as the only religious system of consistency, of such universal character as to be able to unite all the various branches of the Christian church, being the only genuine and primitive Christianity, that is, being in strict harmony with the dictates of enlightened Reason.

Now I have to tell you who I am, and what the subject of this letter is. Having been a student of German theology ever since my early youth, and a protestant preacher for many years, I established myself here as a farmer—about 12 years ago. I was, however, soon called upon by my countrymen to serve as their preacher again, and free of all restraint, I preached rational Christianity. At the same time, I devoted all my hours of leisure to the study of the English language, as also of American Divinity.

Latterly, I became the co-editor of a German religious paper, the 'Lichtfreund' (Friend of Light) printed at Hermann, Mo. (a paper which, by the way, I wish would be read by all Americans conversant in our language.)<sup>[10]</sup> I flatter myself to have done something in my sphere of action, for the religious emancipation of a portion of my fellow citizens. But I could not

content myself with only being an apostle of freedom to those of my own tongue, while I can see the evils of Sectarism augment every day amongst my American brethren. I therefore resolved upon making public my ideas on Religion and Christianity, in a manner intelligible to all, and commenced with publishing a pamphlet in German, using the plainest language possible.<sup>[11]</sup> Meanwhile I was busily employed to compose a similar little work in English which, however, I found myself under the necessity of altering, emending, enlarging and writing over again several times, in order to give it all possible perfection.

My idea was to have it printed in one of our western Cities. But here I met with serious difficulties. Booksellers generally would not have anything to do with the whole concern, from fear to offend their orthodox customers, and myself being secluded in the country and being no business man, could do but very little for the propagation of the book. Besides, some friends of mine, better acquainted with these things, assure me that such works must proceed from the East, to get a wide circulation, and there is no place better suited than your city.

Now my polite request on you is to inform me, if there be any suitable man in Boston, willing to under take the publication of my little work and on what conditions. The title is: "On Religion and Christianity, Orthodoxy and Rationalism, an appeal to the common sense of all who like truth better than error. . . ." <sup>[12]</sup>

I design to give an abstract of modern German Theology to my readers together with my individual views on the most important subjects of human knowledge. . . .

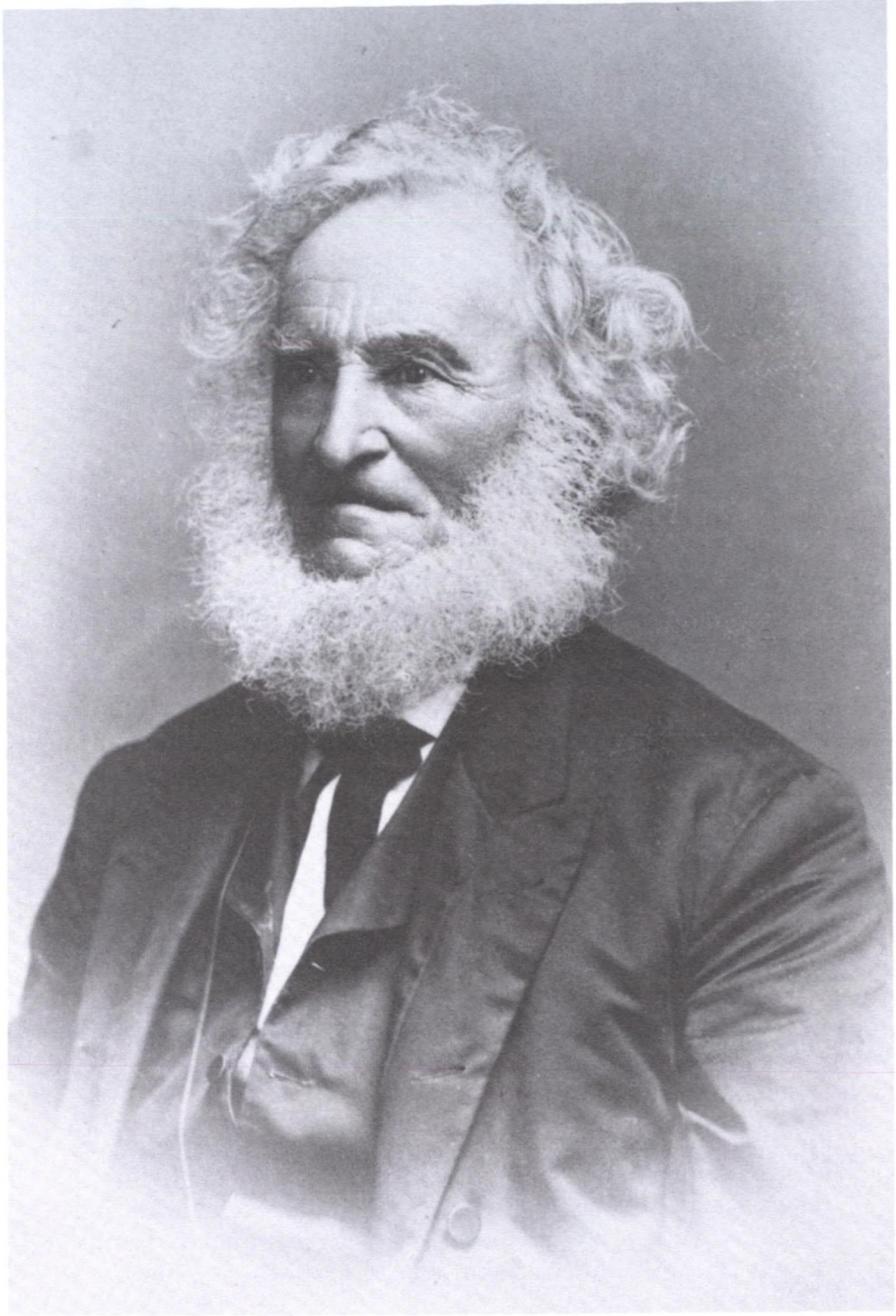
This is rather a preliminary inquiry, for I would not risk the manuscript or expenses of sending it so far, without some hope of attaining my object.

I must beg you to excuse the liberty taken. I would not consider myself justified in putting you to so much trouble, if only my private interest were concerned. But in this, my own interest is rather that of all friends of truth, in the cause of religion and to their fellow men's spiritual deliverance and welfare.—At any rate it makes me happy to have an opportunity of getting into communication with a man whom I heard so highly spoken of.

Accept, Sir, the assurance of my highest regard,

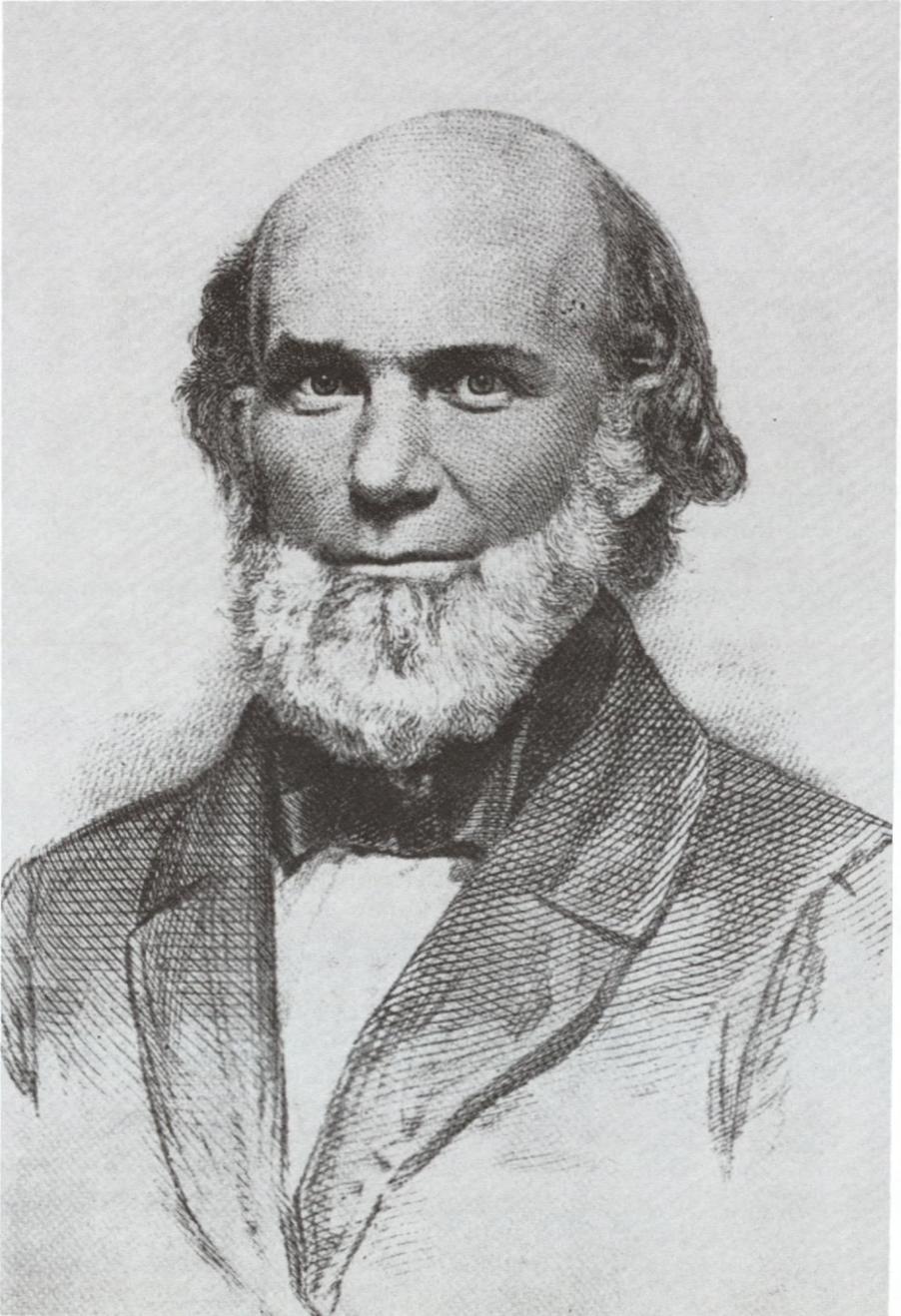
Yours most truly,

Frederick Munch.



Courtesy Missouri State Historical Society.

Friedrich Münch



Courtesy Little, Brown and Company.

Theodore Parker

Two weeks later Parker wrote in reply:

West Roxbury, Oct. 12, 1846

Rev. Friederich Münch.

Dear Sir,—Your letter of Sept. 23 has just come to hand. I thank you for the frankness with which you speak about religious and theological matters, and rejoice most heartily in your desires and efforts to restore rational Christianity, which is the only real Christianity. I shall be happy to serve you in any way that is possible. I think your book had better be published at Boston. If you will send me the manuscript, I will do all in my power to find a publisher, and make no doubt that I shall succeed: if I cannot, I will return it to you without cost. But I think the book would sell better, and sooner find a circle of readers, if you should write a little account of yourself, telling where you were born, educated, etc. . . . I think you need not hesitate to send the manuscript by mail. The postmaster will tell you how to send it with the least expense. Then, if there be any profit from the sale, I will take charge of it and send the money to you. . . .

I knew Dr. Follen very well. His wife is a relative of my wife. She has long been my parishioner, neighbor, and friend. I saw some of Dr. Follen's relatives—a brother at Zurich, and a sister at Berne—a few years ago, and prize them highly.<sup>[13]</sup>

I rejoice to find that you are laboring in the great field of rational Christianity, and welcome you as a brother. I have myself written a little book on that theme.<sup>[14]</sup> If you were not so distant, I would send it to you: as it is, I send only a couple of sermons, which will show you my Standpunct and that of the church which I have gathered together in Boston.<sup>[15]</sup> The Unitarians as a body have done a great work already: they have fought against the old Orthodoxy (so called), against total depravity, the eternal damnation of men, and the like.

Some things I think they have done wrong: much they have failed to do. Now a new Richtung begins to show itself; but it finds small favor with the mass of Unitarian clergy, though much with the people. This new tendency, I think, is to do much good. It aims at ABSOLUTE RELIGION, the Christianity of Christ; takes the Bible as a helper, not as master. I know none in Germany who exactly represent this tendency. De Wette, perhaps, comes the nearest to it; but he keeps back a

good deal, I fear, and does not speak out clearly.<sup>[16]</sup> A merciless warfare is waged by the Philisterei of the old party on the new school; but it is fought with very dull weapons, though poisoned ones.

When you write, address me, if you please, at West Roxbury, Mass, near Boston.

Believe me truly your friend,  
Theo. Parker.

Muench's response, a month later, mentions the St. Louis Unitarian preacher, "Mr. Elliot." William G. Eliot [correct spelling] had come from Boston to St. Louis in 1834 and started a Unitarian service. Recommended by Karl Follen, Muench had found Eliot's views "too narrow." It is likely that Eliot shared Follen's more orthodox Unitarianism, including "supernaturalism," which Muench criticized in his first letter.<sup>17</sup>

Warren Co. Missouri, Nov. 12, 1846

Dear Sir,

Your esteemed letter of Oct. 12, has given me great satisfaction. Frankness and confidence belong to my very nature: but in these I was so often disappointed, that not without some fear of being so again, I addressed myself to you.

By what I conclude from your letter and also your interesting pamphlets, I entertain not the least doubt that we are united in our views and tendency, although we may have arrived at the same ends by different ways, yet driven by a kindred spirit. You are the first of the sons of the new world, with whom I find myself in this agreeable harmony.

Of all the German Rationalists, none is more explicit, consistent and thorough than Roehr in his classical work Briefe ueber den Rationalismus.<sup>[18]</sup> De Wette inclines rather to mystical notions.

In my opinion, Theology must hereafter go hand in hand with Philosophy. By the latter I understand chiefly mental philosophy, which develops to the observer all those wonderful faculties that make man an intellectual and moral being and constitute his connection with the invisible world, showing that all true religious ideas are innate instead of being—as Superstition has too long asserted—infused from without. Sound Philosophy will at the same time disarm Orthodoxy of its blunt weapons, and discover the hollowness of Materialism, against both of which the friends of mankind should combat with indefatigable zeal.

Some time ago, I made a trial to get into a professional connection with the Unitarian preacher at St. Louis, Mr. Elliot (probably known to you) whom Dr. Follen had formerly recommended to me. But I found his views rather too narrow, and he seemed disinclined to continue our intercourse.

Hereby you receive my manuscript—by a friend of mine at Jefferson City, in whose hands it has been for better than a year, which circumstance prevents me from giving it a last review: the desired biographical account is added. It is my wish and request upon you that, before the printing is commenced, you go through the whole, full liberty being given to you to strike out what you think superfluous, and alter such expression as may be found less proper or clear. If I had your book at hand, I might perhaps be induced to strike out in mine, what may have been said by you already. But let the truth be said twice and more:—it will yet be hard enough to make people like or understand it.

Perhaps you will perceive as I progressed in writing, I at the same time improved in my English style. Upon the whole it is a matter of great difficulty to express to our own satisfaction our ideas in a language other than that, in which we had so long been used to think.

I leave it entirely with you, to settle conditions with the printer or bookseller; all I desire is to have a reasonable number of copies (in proportion to the number printed) sent free to me in St. Louis—the more the better. When printed the little book must be sent to the principal places of our Union. I hope for a considerable sale in the West.

Time demands that the friends of rational Christianity, of whom there are thousands among my countrymen in this land, should unite as one party (not as a new sect) regardless of the difference of language, in order to form one strong phalanx against the pretensions of the so-called orthodox churches. Our common aim is to establish what you call absolute Religion (universal, rational, or natural religion)—Christ being considered as the great teacher of Rationality: as our Model-man (beau-ideal of moral perfection) our glorified friend and brother. . . .

What do you think about establishing a periodical religious paper in English, devoted to the principles of Rational Christianity?—another Friend of Light? I have longed to see some such paper started.—I would have tried it myself, but could find no one to assist me. I am still willing to offer what little I can do,—and many of my countrymen in N. York.

Philadelphia, Cincinnati [sic] would cheerfully aid in such an undertaking.

Respecting our political views we may perhaps differ, owing to the difference of our point of view, but that is no matter. I detest war as much as you do, but as a last resort it may—even in our century—sometimes be inevitable, and I don't know if we could with propriety avoid the present Mexican war. The annexation of Texas is in this section of the country considered by no one as a scheme to extend Slavery, but as the means of enlarging the area of freedom and civilization. Be that as it may, it is at any rate a correct maxim, that our public measures should more and more be adapted to sound (absolute) or Christian moral principles. But alas! looking at the low standards of the moral, religious and political state of the vast plurality of men, can the present generation justly boast of being considered more than at best half barbarians?

I would be highly glad to have an opportunity of getting personally acquainted with you, but cannot possibly leave my home. I hope, however, to keep up some sort of communication with you. My heart is full. I have a thousand things which I long to speak out to such as understand me.

You will oblige me by an answer at your leisure. I remain truly respectfully,

Your sincere friend,  
Frederic Munch.

Muench's reference coupling "differences of our point of view" with the Mexican War indicates he was familiar with Parker's "War" sermon preached in summer 1846. In it Parker spoke of the "iniquitous war" against Mexico.<sup>19</sup> The sermon was probably one of those Parker mentioned sending to Muench in his October 1846 letter.

Muench's *Treatise on Religion and Christianity* was published in Boston sometime in 1847. The chapter headings show some variation from those Muench listed in his September 1846 letter. In the published version, the chapter on Rationalism had expanded to two chapters. Either Parker himself made some editorial changes as Muench requested, or suggested changes to Muench in correspondence no longer extant.

Muench added the autobiographical sketch requested by Parker. It is the only one he ever wrote in English.<sup>20</sup> Since the *Treatise* is not easily found today, the sketch appears here in an appendix.

In his *Treatise*, Muench set forth the "fundamental articles of genuine German Rationalism." These included the "inborn truths" revealed by reason: the conception of a Supreme Being, a future life, and an obligation to moral behavior. Other articles rejected miracles and biblical

revelation, asserted that religious creeds and rites were historically ephemeral, and affirmed that Christ, although exceptional, was human. Finally, Muench stated his "first principle" of Rationalism: "All men have a right and it is their duty, to think for themselves, and live according to their own candid convictions."<sup>21</sup>

Muench's Rationalist articles closely corresponded with Parker's own religious views set forth in his famous and controversial 1842 sermon, "Discourse on the Transient and Permanent in Christianity." On that occasion, Parker repudiated some cherished beliefs of orthodox Unitarianism. Like Muench, he rejected revelation and miracles, the belief in Christ as "Lord." For Parker, historical creeds and traditional rituals were only transient aspects of Christianity. The permanent consisted in truths of morality, the intuitive perception of God, and the words of Jesus as distinct from his personal authority.

Parker's sermon was included in his *Critical and Miscellaneous Writings*, published 1843.<sup>22</sup> Muench mentions this publication in his next letter. From his remarks about their "united views," Muench may already have been familiar with Parker's "Discourse" sermon through pamphlets Parker sent earlier.

One essay in the *Miscellaneous Writings* focused on "Strauß's Life of Jesus." Had Muench read it, he would have been impressed with Parker's knowledge and enthusiasm for contemporary German Bible criticism. David Friedrich Strauß and other German Bible scholars treated the Bible as any other ancient book, making use of historical, philological and literary techniques in analyzing the text. In Strauß's case, allegorical and mythical interpretations played a major role in his analysis. The results of this Bible criticism tended to undermine grounds for regarding the Bible as a revealed, "inerrant" account. Parker himself contributed to this new view of the Bible in America. He translated De Wette, whom Parker characterized in his preface as standing "at the head of the liberal school of German critics."<sup>23</sup>

Muench's next extant letter, written following the publication of the *Treatise*, mentions a prior letter from Parker, now missing.

Marthasville, Warren Co., Dec. 29, 1847

Dear Sir:

I am glad to learn by your last esteemed letter that my little German pamphlet has been satisfactory to you. I never doubted but that I am better qualified to express my thoughts in my native language, than in one which I have so late applied to. Besides, the "Treatise on Rationalism," was properly calculated for the wants of the Western people, the only portion of our American population that I am acquainted with. The little work will probably sell better here, than as yet it did at so distant a

place as Boston, where as you observe, people can hardly be made to believe in my existence. Circumstances (the illiberality of the Western press) compelled me to turn my view to the East.

So diffident was I of my own capacity, that I repeatedly tried to induce several men, fully competent (for instance the Unitarian preacher of St. Louis, Mr. Elliot) to unite with me in the publication of some such work, but never succeeded. Perhaps I would now be better prepared to write the same book, than I was 2 or 3 years ago.

It is still my impression, that a periodical religious paper, edited under the auspices of a liberal and learned Northeastern man like you, and aided by as many of the enlightened writers of the country—Americans and Germans—as would be willing to contribute thereto, must turn out to be as well and profitable as the most important literary enterprise of our time. All different shades of opinions are already represented in this country by periodicals in the English tongue: The Rational creed alone, it seems, cannot enjoy the same just advantage.

I see your 'Miscellaneous Writings' advertised in the American Almanac, and would be glad to get those of them which I do not already—by your kindness—possess.

You would bestow a great favor on me—who do not so frequently see English handwriting—by writing a little more distinctly: it took me many hours to decypher your letter.

Yours in esteem and friendship,  
Frederic Munch

The final extant letter in the Muench-Parker correspondence shows a twenty-month hiatus.

Marthasville, Warren Co., Mo., Aug. 18, 1849

Dear Sir,

On the first Sunday of this month, I have delivered before a congregation of German Rationalists, a sermon "On the day of fasting, humiliation and prayer, set apart by President Taylor," and frankly expressed my opinions of the impropriety of this practice, as being contradictory to the advanced spirit of the age, and particularly to all known notions of the Supreme Being. That sermon was received with more than common approbation. . . . Perhaps it would do some good to have that sermon translated into English and printed.

The translating I would not like to do myself, since I am well aware, that my ideas will lose a part of their force by being

rendered in a language not entirely familiar to the writer. I am willing to transcribe the sermon legibly in English letters, and transmit it to you, if you would do or provide for, the translating and publishing. If you should not agree with my proposal—from whatever reason it may be—it is unnecessary to trouble yourself with an answer. My only object, is to do what I think to be my obligation towards my fellow men, while I have already more than enough to do to provide for a family of eight.

With high regard, yours most truly,  
Frederic Munch.

There is no evidence that Parker followed up on the translation and publication ideas mentioned in Muench's last two letters. Perhaps Parker judged he had done enough by helping Muench get his *Treatise* published. In any case, Parker's own increasingly busy career and growing reputation made it unlikely he had time for such gratuitous responsibilities. With his installation as pastor of the Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society in Boston, Parker became an immensely popular preacher. Beyond church duties, Parker lectured extensively, wrote voluminously, and carried on a large correspondence. During the same period, he became deeply involved in opposing slavery and promoting other social and humanitarian reforms.<sup>24</sup>

Had he time or inclination, Parker could have encouraged Muench to contribute to Parker's own journal, *The Massachusetts Quarterly Review*, published from 1847 to 1850, or to the *Harbinger*, published, beginning in 1845, by fellow Transcendentalist George Ripley.<sup>25</sup> Parker does not seem to have suggested these possibilities to Muench.

Given Muench's eagerness to bring the "Rationalist creed" before the larger English-speaking audience through his *Treatise* and other publishing ideas broached to Parker, it seems paradoxical that in subsequent years Muench published so little in English. Perhaps he was discouraged by lack of public response in the East to his work. Muench wrote in his "Preface" to the *Treatise*: "It will depend on the reception this first essay shall meet with, whether I shall resolve to continue at some future time." Perhaps Muench was disappointed by Parker's apparent lack of response to his proposals for future joint publications in English.

Despite his reservations about his ability to put his ideas into English, Muench's command of his adopted language shows favorably in the *Treatise* itself, in his exchanges with Parker, and in other known communications where he used English. However, in the latter instances, most of the articles and correspondence focus on the practical subject of viticulture.<sup>26</sup>

Other than the range of material mentioned above, Muench's future use of English in his literary career consisted, as far as is known, of a

translation in the 1850s of a German book, and in the 1870s, articles he described in his autobiography as relating to "scientific and practical questions in many German and English papers." He did not specify the particular English papers.<sup>27</sup>

In the 1850s and until his death in 1881, Muench continued to write extensively in German. In addition to many newspaper articles, his output included philosophical articles for a variety of periodicals, prize essays, five short novels, and several books, published both here and in Germany.<sup>28</sup>

With Muench's prolific mind, his desire to explore complex ideas and issues, it is not surprising that he chose to use his native German as the most efficient and surest way to express his thoughts with clarity. Even in the years beginning 1866 when the St. Louis Hegelian group published the *Journal of Speculative Philosophy*, which reached an influential English-speaking public, Muench never wrote for this journal.<sup>29</sup> The journal's concern with German idealism, with "deepening speculative insight," would seem to have presented Muench an ideal reason and opportunity to write for this audience.<sup>30</sup>

What wider reputation Muench might have gained during his lifetime if he had written more in English is moot. In recent times, his literary work has been largely overlooked by historians of nineteenth-century German-Americana. The language barrier has probably contributed to his neglect. Only a few translations of his writings, and/or commentary on his historical role during this period have appeared.<sup>31</sup> This situation limits an assessment of his wide-ranging talents and varied contributions to his own era.

Many of the issues and questions, both philosophical and religious, which Muench addressed in the nineteenth century, are still relevant to our late twentieth-century culture with its peculiar mix of science, materialism, burgeoning fundamental religion, and quasi-religious cults. Further selective translation and evaluation of Muench's literary output, especially his philosophical essays, could reawaken awareness of ongoing concerns which link Friedrich Muench's time with our own.<sup>32</sup>

Iowa City, Iowa

## Appendix

The following "Biographical Sketch" appeared at the beginning of Muench's *Treatise*:

## Biographical Sketch of the Author.

I was born on the 25th of June, 1799, in a village of the Grand Dukedom of Hesse Darmstadt, where my father had employment as a Lutheran minister. He was a man of great simplicity, genuine piety, more than common learning, and universally esteemed. With a small income he yet reared up seven children. Being strongly attached to his calling and his duties, he wished his three sons, of whom I am the second, to follow the same vocation, and they did so; my elder brother is established as a minister in Germany, my younger brother is living near me.

By my father I was educated and instructed till my fifteenth year; I then frequented for two years the college at Darmstadt. At the age of seventeen, I was matriculated as a student of divinity at the University of Gießen. It was my good luck, that while there I formed an intimate association with a select number of friends, most of them older and more mature than myself, amongst whom Charles Follen and his brothers were perhaps the most prominent, and this event decided the moral, political, and scientific source of my whole future life. Thus secured from follies, too common amongst men of my age, my mind was early, too early, directed to the most serious objects. It was the condition of our beloved Fatherland that occupied our youthful minds; we hoped to be able, and therefore prepared ourselves, to aid in the deliverance of our oppressed people, and anticipated this glorious result by inspired patriotic songs. In the mean time I applied myself most sedulously to my professional studies,—and before I had reached the age of twenty, was honorably graduated, examined, ordained, and installed as assistant-minister in my native village. I was restored to the same tranquil and secluded country-life, yea, the very scenes, to which by early impressions I had been so much attached.

My official duties leaving half of my time idle, and myself being well aware that I had been compelled to finish my studies rather in too much hurry, I went through the whole of them anew and with a more manly application. I read the old classics again, and devoted myself to the study of natural and philosophical sciences; studied Kant, Fries, Jacobi, Herder, and others; tried myself sometimes in poetical essays, and on the whole spent my time more usefully than young men in my situation commonly do.

In such pursuits I felt happy, though one cloud darkened the serenity of my mind; it was disappointed hope. How many times did I repeat Schiller's immortal words, "Die Ideale sind zerronnen." Ideal Hopes are rent asunder! Real life corresponded little to the ideal dreams I had indulged in former years; my dear parent country still remained in disgraceful subjugation. Many of my friends, too forward in their zeal, sighed in dungeons or were already expatriated, and the systematic

coercion on the part of our crowned little despots became every day more intolerable.

Respecting my theological views, I must remark that, although bred by my father in the orthodox Lutheran creed, when I commenced thinking for myself, I found myself drawn to the New School, that is to the Rational view of Christianity, as it had lately been established by the most prominent teachers of theology in my country; I have been confirmed therein by all my subsequent studies.

After my father's death, I succeeded to his employment, married, and was happy in the circle of my beloved. Nor must it be thought that I was spared the trials of life. I have experienced its darkest hours, yet not despaired.

The year 1830 revived the hopes and energy of the German Patriots; the era of freedom seemed at length to dawn upon old Europe. Its rulers began to tremble. Soon, however, they re-collected their strength; confirmed their power anew, oppressed and persecuted the liberal party more systematically than ever before, and all hopes for the better vanished at last. Under such circumstances, it appeared unreasonable to me and some of my friends to bind our desire of living under a republican government, any longer to our native soil. A resolution was taken to dissolve for ever all ties which bound us to the old world, and seek the accomplishment of our youthful ideas in the other hemisphere. A number of respectable families joined with us; the late well-known Paul Follenius and myself were chosen the leaders, and in 1834 we sailed, about 500 strong, in two vessels over the Atlantic, looking for a place of asylum in the far West. Our idea was to settle and live together here as a German colony, in order to escape the feeling of being strangers in the land of our adoption; but this was found impracticable, and we scattered.

I pass over many new trials I had to undergo, and only observe that I am living in Warren County, Mo., being occupied at the same time as a farmer, teacher, preacher, and coeditor of a German religious paper, the "Lichtfreund," printed at Hermann in this State. In all that I consider essential, I have found what I have so long been seeking for, though there is probably no place in this world, where man's life may pass without trials and disappointment.

Warren County, Missouri, November, 1846.

Frederick Munch.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Transcendentalism in New England* (New York: Harper, 1959). Originally published in 1876, this book, in its opening chapter, provides a good overview of German idealism from a perspective of that time.

<sup>2</sup> Siegmur Muehl, "Eduard Mühl: Missouri Editor, Religious Free-Thinker and Fighter for Human Rights," *Missouri Historical Review* 81 (October 1986): 18-36; and "Hermann's 'Free Men': 1850s German-American Religious Rationalism," *Missouri Historical Review* 85 (July 1991): 361-80.

<sup>3</sup> Gerd A. Petermann, "Friends of Light (*Lichtfreunde*): Friedrich Muench and Paul Follenius, and the Rise of German-American Rationalism on the Missouri Frontier," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 23 (1988): 119-39.

<sup>4</sup> Frothingham, *Transcendentalism*. Frothingham provides a near-contemporary view of Transcendentalism, and individuals involved in the movement. He was himself a Unitarian minister. Early in his career he had been a disciple of Theodore Parker. For a more recent perspective, see Alexander Kern, "The Rise of Transcendentalism, 1815-1860," in *Transitions in American History*, Harry H. Clark, ed. (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1953), 245-314.

<sup>5</sup> Cleon Forbes, "The St. Louis School of Thought," *Missouri Historical Review* 25 (October 1930): 83-101; continued in subsequent issues as "Part II," 25 (January 1931): 189-305; "Part III," 25 (April 1931): 461-74; "Part IV," 25 (July 1931): 609-22; "Part V," 26 (October 1931): 68-77; Ralph L. Rusk, ed., *The Letters of Ralph Waldo Emerson* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1939), 5:415; Henry A. Pochmann, *New England Transcendentalism and St. Louis Hegelianism: Phases in the History of American Idealism* (Philadelphia: Carl Schurz Memorial Foundation, 1948).

<sup>6</sup> Muench's letters, in the collection of the Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, MA, are "from a letterbook of Theodore Parker." Parker's letter to Muench is reproduced in Octavius Brooks Frothingham, *Theodore Parker: A Biography* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1874), 255.

<sup>7</sup> For more information on Karl Follen see Elizabeth Cabot Follen, *The Works of Karl Follen*, vols. 1-5 (Boston: Hillard Gray, 1841): *Follen Briefe*, Herman Haupt, ed. (publication data missing, 1914); the latter source is available through the Louisiana State University Library, Baton Rouge; Friedrich Muench, "Das Leben von Dr. Karl Follen," in *Gesammelte Schriften von Friedrich Muench* (St. Louis: C. Witter, 1902); George W. Spindler, "Karl Follen: A Biographical Study" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois, 1916).

<sup>8</sup> In 1865, some twenty years after the Parker letters, Muench wrote in English to Governor Fletcher of Missouri. This letter, now in the Capitol Archives File (#458-14486), Jefferson City, MO, displays handwriting very similar to that in Muench's letters to Parker. Acknowledgments are due to Linda Walker Stevens, Hermann, MO, for sharing this information.

<sup>9</sup> As a student of William Ellery Channing, Follen likely imbibed Channing's belief in revelation and miracles which was the more conservative Unitarian view at the time. Channing's 1821 lecture, "The Evidences of Revealed Religion," set forth his views on this subject. *William Ellery Channing, Unitarian Christianity and other Essays*, Irving H. Bartlett, ed. (Indianapolis: Bobs Merrill, 1957).

<sup>10</sup> Siegmur Muehl, "The Lichtfreund Press: German-American Newspaper Publishing on the Missouri Frontier," *Yearbook of German-American Studies* 26 (1991): 185-202.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Muench, *Ueber Religion und Christenthum* (Hermann, MO: Lichtfreund Press, 1845); A second edition appeared by the same press in 1847. See Muehl, "The Lichtfreund Press," 193.

<sup>12</sup> Muench's letter continued with a list of chapter heads: "Introduction—First principle—the Bible, and how to read it.—the Old Testament in particular.—the New Testament and its writers.—the genuine doctrine of Christ.—Jesus Christ.—Christianity degenerated.—the Reformation.—Rationalism.—on Revelation.—on Miracles.—the holy Ghost.—What is religion.—on Providence.—on sin, its nature, origin and consequences.—on English and American theology.—final remarks."

<sup>13</sup> August Adolf Follen (1794-1855), Karl Follen's older brother, fled Germany to Switzerland because of his liberal views. For a time he taught German language and literature in Aarau. Later he made his home in Zürich. The sister's name was Luisa Follen

Vogt. *Deutsch-Amerikanisches Conversations Lexicon* (New York: German Cyclopedia Publishing Co., 1871), 4:288; *Follen Briefe*, 15, n. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Probably a reference to Parker's *Critical and Miscellaneous Writings*, published 1843. See n. 22.

<sup>15</sup> In January 1846 Parker left his village church in West Roxbury and became minister at the newly organized Twenty-Eighth Congregational Society in Boston. Henry Steele Commager, *Theodore Parker: An Anthology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1960), 83.

<sup>16</sup> Wilhelm Martin De Wette (1780-1849), professor of ethics and theology at Basel, was known for his Bible criticism. Parker translated and published one of his major works in 1843. See n. 23.

<sup>17</sup> William Eliot became chancellor of Washington University in St. Louis and among other distinctions was T. S. Eliot's great-grandfather. William and Howard Conrad, "Unitarianism," *Encyclopedia of the Story of St. Louis* (St. Louis: The Southern History Company, 1899), 4:2341-42. See also T. S. Matthews, *The Great Tom* (New York: Harper, 1973), 3-5.

<sup>18</sup> Johann Friedrich Roehr (1777-1848), head minister at Weimar, was an advocate of Rationalism.

<sup>19</sup> "War," *Sins and Safeguards of Society by Theodore Parker, Centenary Edition*, ed. Samuel B. Stewart (Boston: American Unitarian Association, 1907), 316. The editor's "Notes" (p. 386) report this sermon was published in pamphlet form in 1846. Walter Kamphoefner notes that most New England intellectuals had Whig leanings and were opposed to the Mexican war, whereas Muench remained Democratic until he joined the Republican party in the mid-1850s (personal communication).

<sup>20</sup> Later in life, Muench wrote a longer autobiography in German, "Aus dem Leben von Friedrich Muench," *Gesammelte Schriften von Friedrich Muench* (St. Louis: C. Witter, 1902), 107-25. Portions of this have been translated by William G. Bek in, "The Followers of Duden," *Missouri Historical Review* 18 (April 1924): 415-37, and 19 (October 1924): 114-29. See also Julius T. Muench, "Friedrich Muench," *Missouri Historical Society Collections* 3 (April 1908): 132-44. Written by one of Muench's sons, Julius based his account mainly on the father's autobiography cited above.

<sup>21</sup> Friedrich Muench, *A Treatise on Religion and Christianity, Orthodoxy and Rationalism* (Boston: B. H. Greene, 1847), 38-39.

<sup>22</sup> Theodore Parker, *Critical and Miscellaneous Writings* (Boston: James Munroe, and London: John Greene, 1843).

<sup>23</sup> "Translator's Preface," *A Critical and Historical Introduction to the Canonical Scriptures of the Old Testament from the German of Wilhelm Martin Leberecht De Wette*, 2 vols., trans., Theodore Parker (Boston: R. Leighton, 1859). Parker's translation was first published in 1843.

<sup>24</sup> Commager, *Theodore Parker*, 99, 123, 271, *passim*.

<sup>25</sup> Perry Miller, *The Transcendentalists: An Anthology* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1950), 414, 469.

<sup>26</sup> Muench's letter to Thomas Ewbank, Commissioner of Patents, *Report of the Commissioner of Patents for 1851*, "Senate Document 118" (Washington, DC: Robert Armstrong, Printer, 1852), 452-54. *The Grape Culturist* 1 (1869) and volume 2 (1870) contain several Muench articles and letters in English. The writer wishes to thank Linda Walker Stevens, Hermann, MO, for sharing this information.

<sup>27</sup> Muench, "Aus dem Leben," 121-25. At the request of Heinrich Boernstein, editor of the *St. Louis Anzeiger des Westens*, Muench translated Boernstein's *Die Geheimnisse von St. Louis* into English with the title *Secrets of St. Louis*, probably in 1852. This translation now exists in a modern edition, *The Mysteries of St. Louis: A Novel*, ed. Steven Rowan and Elizabeth Sims (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing Co., 1990).

<sup>28</sup> Muench, "Aus dem Leben," 120-25; Bibliographies of Muench's work are included in William G. Bek, "The Followers of Duden," *Missouri Historical Review* 19 (January 1925): 338-42; Heinrich Rattermann, ed., "Friedrich Muench," *Der Deutsche Pionier* 14 (March 1883):

462-64. The latter periodical, volumes 1-18 (1869-87), is in the serials collection at the University of Illinois Library, Urbana, IL. An extensive search by the present writer failed to turn up any extant copies of Muench's short novels.

<sup>29</sup> William T. Harris, ed., "To the Reader," *Journal of Speculative Philosophy* 1 (1867): 1; Henry A. Pochmann, *German Culture in America* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957), 227-80; William and Howard Conrad, "Speculative Philosophy, St. Louis Movement," *Encyclopedia of the Story of St. Louis*, 4:2108-10.

<sup>30</sup> There is some evidence that Muench, though an idealist, was not sympathetic with Hegelian views. In 1857, he made some brief critical observations on Hegelian principles. Writing under his pseudonym, "Far West," he complained of Hegel's use of the term rational as applied to nature. Muench stated: "The word rational cannot be employed with regard to natural occurrences, but used exclusively in the thinking and acting of free human beings." He objected to the Hegelian view equating cause and effect. According to Muench, cause and effect are always separated in conscious experience, that "it is impossible to make understandable the unity of the two." As for the Hegelian principle that: "Being is Nothing and Nothing is Being." Muench observed: "How can an ordinarily endowed human being comprehend that! I myself have been reduced to despair concerning it for the longest time." Quotes from "Kurze Bemerkungen, Saetze von Hegel betreffend," *Atlantis* 7 (September 1857): 184-86 [translated by author].

<sup>31</sup> Petermann, "Friends of Light" (see n. 2); Steven Rowan and James Neal Primm, eds., *Germans for a Free Missouri: Translations from the St. Louis Radical Press, 1857-1862* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983); Heinrich Rattermann, "A Visit with Friedrich Muench (Far West)," *Der Deutsche Pionier* 7 (April 1875): 53-59, trans. Siegmar Muehl, in *Freethought History* 6, ed. Fred Whitehead (Kansas City, KS, 1993), n.p.; Friedrich Muench, "A Report Concerning Ozark Grape Vines," trans. Siegmar Muehl, to appear in *Missouri Magazine*.

<sup>32</sup> The mind-matter controversy, the subject of many of Muench's philosophical essays, is still very much alive and unresolved in our own times. See review of John Searle's, *The Rediscovery of the Mind* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) by Thomas Nagel, *The New York Review of Books* 11 (4 March 1993): 37-41.