Karl graduated from the Friedrichstadt Teacher College in Dresden on May 20, 1848. We have seen the events that took place in Germany between his graduation and 1854 that left him dissatisfied with the direction of the German educational system and skeptical about religion in general. While he was facing this transformation, the first Mormons he would meet were centrally engaged in the challenges of the new church over an ocean and a continent away. By October 1855, the lives of Franklin D. Richards, John Van Cott, Daniel Tyler, William Budge, William Kimball, and Karl G. Maeser would converge in a profound way. These would be the key figures in Karl’s conversion to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. They represent an interesting cross section of Church members at the time. A quick glimpse at the experiences these men had between 1848 and their introduction to Maeser in 1855 provides valuable insights into the context of the Church that Karl would eventually join. It will also illustrate the sacrifices these and other missionaries made to bring the message of the Restoration to the Maesers.
Bringing these missionaries to Europe, however, would not be enough; Latter-day Saint missionaries would not be permitted to enter Saxony for several more decades. Karl’s introduction to Mormonism, therefore, needed to come from a most unusual “missionary,” one who had no intention of converting him to such a strange church.

**Early Missionary Work in Europe**

In spite of and during persecution, trials, and afflictions, Mormons believed that it was their solemn duty to share their message with the world. Missionary work had been an inherent part of Mormonism since the Church was organized in 1830. The first missionary to England left in 1837, and from that point the growth of the Church in Great Britain was phenomenal. It is estimated that by 1851 there were thirty-three thousand members in the UK and only twelve thousand in Utah.

**Franklin D. Richards** would play a major role in both the growth of the Church in Europe as well as the emigration of Mormons from Europe to Salt Lake. He also became one of the most important missionaries and a lifelong friend to Maeser. He would eventually serve as president of the European missions and would actually perform Karl’s baptism in 1855.

In May 1848, while Maeser was graduating from the Teacher College, Franklin D. Richards and his brother Samuel were just disembarking the steamboat *Mustang* at Winter Quarters, Nebraska. They were returning from their missions to Great Britain with 146 Mormon emigrants. Franklin’s wife, Jane, was at Winter Quarters and had already moved into her wagon in preparation for joining the trek to the Salt Lake Valley. He rushed to greet her and met her in the street. He wrote that she looked so despondent that he did not recognize her “till I came directly up to her, took her into my arms & kissed her, yes it was her as she looked, and as she felt, solitary & alone in her feelings.”

Driven from their home in Nauvoo two years earlier, Franklin and Jane (then pregnant) had barely crossed the Mississippi River with their two-year-old daughter, Wealthy, when Franklin was called by Brigham Young to leave his family in their wagon in Iowa and serve yet another
mission (his fifth). Actually, he was called to complete the mission he had begun much earlier when he and a number of brethren, including Brigham Young, had been informed that the Prophet Joseph Smith had been shot and killed by a mob. Those early missionaries decided that they should return to Nauvoo, Illinois.

Unfortunately, the persecution of the Saints continued until they were forced to leave Nauvoo. A large number left in February of 1846 with hopes of finding a place of refuge somewhere in the Rocky Mountains. In late February, the Mississippi River had frozen over, making the crossing
much easier but hardly making life in a wagon more bearable. Franklin and his family waited until May so that they could assist in the arrangements for others to leave the city, help complete the temple and do as much work as possible in it, and deal with Jane’s delicate physical condition. Leaving his family in Iowa under such desperate circumstances was difficult. Upon his arrival in Liverpool on October 14, he wrote, “How happy I should be if I knew that my dear Jane and the family were well & happy.” He then continued with a prayer “that I may accomplish the work which is before me to do in this country to the honor & glory of thy great name, promote the salvation of thy people in thy Kingdom, & the establishment of Zion in the earth.”

While Franklin was sharing the message of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ in the British Isles, Jane and the main body of the Church were moving westward. Because of rain and poor trails, the exodus across Iowa had been far more strenuous than anticipated, so the Saints stopped at a spot on the banks of the Missouri River, near present-day Omaha, to wait out the Midwestern winter. This trek was especially difficult, not only because a number of men were serving missions but also because more than five hundred of the Church’s most physically able men had been asked to join a battalion for the US Army. This group of men, known as the Mormon Battalion, traveled from Iowa to San Diego, California. During the trek across Iowa, while Franklin was away, Jane’s baby boy was born prematurely and died shortly after birth. Not long thereafter their little girl, Wealthy, also died before reaching Winter Quarters. About facing these trials alone, Jane wrote, “I only lived because I could not die.”

Life at Winter Quarters had been miserable. Nearly five thousand people had been forced to cram themselves into seven hundred log cabins and thirty-eight sod houses. Hardly prepared for rugged pioneer life, the settlers commonly faced scurvy, consumption, starvation, and fevers. It is estimated that nearly six hundred Mormon men, women, and children died between 1846 and 1848. Franklin and Jane arrived in the Salt Lake Valley in 1848 and spent their first winter in their wagon. In February 1849, Franklin was called to be a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, a leading body of the Church, and at the general conference
of the Church in October it was announced that several of the brethren were called again to leave their families to serve foreign missions. Franklin was to return to England as the president of the Church in Europe. “The baptisms in the British Mission during these two years from the summer of 1850 to the close of spring in 1852, aggregated about 16,000.” Richards returned to Salt Lake in August 1852, only to be called to leave his family yet again and return to Liverpool in January 1854, where he would remain until July 1856.

John Van Cott was one of those who spent the winter 1847–48 in Salt Lake facing the dangers of starvation, exposure, and disease. Van Cott would later receive Maeser’s first inquiry letter regarding Mormonism in July 1855 while he is serving as the president of the Scandinavian Mission. During the Mormon Battalion march, he was assigned to be the bishop for the families in the battalion and later traveled to Utah in the Daniel Spencer company, which arrived in October 1847. When Karl was graduating in the spring of 1848, John was facing the army of crickets bent on destroying the pioneers’ young crops. Van Cott was the first marshal of Salt Lake City and served until he was called to leave his family and serve a mission to England in 1852. When Willard Snow, the president of the Scandinavian Mission, unexpectedly died in August 1853, John was called to replace him. John arrived in Copenhagen in September without a knowledge of any of the languages of his mission. He spent most of December and January accompanying the emigrating Saints from the mission to England, and he returned to Copenhagen on February 10, 1854.

Daniel Tyler, another important figure in Karl’s conversion, later became the mission president in Switzerland who responds to Maeser’s first questions regarding Mormonism. Tyler was baptized in 1833 and knew the Prophet Joseph well. He had experienced the persecution of the Church in Missouri and Nauvoo and also enlisted in the Mormon Battalion in July of 1846 and wrote a book about his experiences. By the time Karl was
graduating, Daniel had honorably completed his tour of duty, rising to the rank of fourth sergeant, and traveled by foot from California to Winter Quarters to be reunited with his family as they were preparing to leave for Salt Lake in 1849.\(^8\)

Barely settled in Salt Lake, during the April conference of the Church in 1853, Tyler was called to leave his family in the desert territory to serve a mission to Europe. Because of high water, he was not able to leave until the middle of June and did not arrive in England until October. On July 14, 1854, he was called to preside over the Swiss-German-Italian and French Missions, though he spoke none of the languages and was not yet familiar with the cultures or customs. He began his labors in October and served until November 1855 when he returned to England because of poor health. In the thirteen months he served on the continent, nearly all of his missionaries were persecuted and ordered to leave Switzerland.

In January 1856, Tyler sailed to return home and was called to be counselor of the ill-fated Martin handcart company, where, in spite of his best effort, he had to witness scenes that “would melt a heart of stone.”\(^9\)

William Budge was another important player in this history because he was the first Mormon missionary to meet Karl. In 1848, Budge, a few months younger than Maeser, was baptized in Scotland. Almost immediately he was called to serve as a local missionary. In late August 1854, he was called to serve in the Swiss-German-Italian Mission under Daniel Tyler. He arrived in October
and was assigned to a small branch in Weiningen, a town not far from Zürich. When he arrived, he wrote that he found the sound of German to be harsh but hoped that he would get used to it. Over the next seven months he was arrested or detained over thirteen times in addition to being beaten, threatened, and banished. Out of concern for his safety, President Tyler released Budge in April 1855 to complete his mission in England. Tyler wrote in his journal of his disappointment that the German-speaking Saints were now left to the help of only local missionaries, none of whom had been members for more than one year.

William Henry Kimball was the oldest son of Heber C. Kimball. He had been the driver of Joseph Smith’s carriage and distinguished himself as a soldier in the Nauvoo Legion and Utah Territorial Militia, rising eventually to the rank of lieutenant general in 1857. In the early 1850s he was involved in the conflicts with the Indians in Provo and Springville. His life was spared during one skirmish when the bullet that would have struck him in the midsection lodged in the saddle horn of his horse. When Maeser graduated in 1848, Kimball was just about to leave Winter Quarters for Salt Lake. In April 1854, Kimball was called to serve a mission in England. Twenty-eight years old, he left two wives, one who was pregnant, and six children. Assigned to serve in London, Franklin D. Richards invited him to be his companion when traveling to the continent for safety purposes. He was released in 1856, returning with Richards. Three days after his arrival in Salt Lake City he left again to help in the rescue of the Willie and Martin Handcart companies. These were the missionaries who made the first contact with the Maesers. They each came to Europe believing that God had called them to serve in spite of the sacrifices it would require of them and their families.
They traveled “without purse or scrip,” relying on the generosity of people along the way for food and shelter.

**Early Missionary Attempts in Germany**

The early success of missionary work in Great Britain was not replicated in Germany. In a letter to Joseph Smith in 1840, Orson Hyde prophesied, “There is great work to be done in Germany, as manifested to us by the Spirit.” However, attempts to bring the message of Mormonism to Germany were difficult and slow. A new convert from England, James Howard, moved to Hamburg in 1840 to work in a foundry. Before leaving, Brigham Young, who was serving as the president of the British Mission, instructed him to be a missionary. But Howard wrote, “As soon as I saw what sort of place it was I dropped [sic] my preaching directly. I durst not pretend to say anything about religion to them. Tell Brother Brigham Young how things are and that I am too weak a creature to do anything with them in Hamburg.”

In 1841 Orson Hyde began studying German, and in 1842 he spent seven months in Regensburg. By December 1842, enough German-speaking members in America had joined the Church that a German ward was formed in Nauvoo, with Daniel Carn serving as the bishop. Between the intensity of persecution at home, the martyrdom of the Prophet Joseph, and the violence of revolution in Germany, little missionary activity was attempted in Germany until the 1850s, and then it was met with severe persecution from both the citizens and the reactionary German state governments. In 1851, Daniel Carn was sent to help with the first German translation of the Book of Mormon, which John Taylor supervised. The translation was published in 1852, and in April of that same year, Carn was assigned to be the first mission president in Germany. Despite this progress, missionary work in the fractured states of Germany met fierce opposition. The Reaktion was in full swing, and the German governments viewed foreigners with the greatest suspicion. Carn was arrested and banished several times. Orson Spencer, who had found such great success as a missionary in England, attempted to present a copy of the Book of Mormon to King Friedrich Wilhelm IV...
of Prussia, but he was met by bayoneted guards and banished. Carn was forced to appear before German officials eight times before he was given the “choice of a $16 fine, eight days in jail, fifty stripes, or leaving [Hamburg].”

He chose to retreat to Denmark. In 1853 Jacob Secrist had been assigned to Saxony, but he was arrested before he could reach his destination, so he was forced to return to Hamburg. He was then assigned to serve in Switzerland, where he met further persecution. He was imprisoned and then forced to march to France on foot, part of the time chained to a convicted thief. He then concluded his mission in Liverpool. Though he survived the persecution of his mission, he died of cholera in Nebraska on July 2, 1855, during his return trip to Salt Lake.

In September 1854, Franklin D. Richards, as president of the Church in Europe, traveled to Europe to help Church members emigrate from Denmark and Hamburg, where a branch with thirty members had been
formed. He hoped that Elders Riser and Nielsen could spread “the knowledge of the truth among the extensive German population of that city . . . and also pave the way for Elders Spencer and Riser to effectually send the Gospel into Prussia and other German States.”22 Foreigners were treated with the greatest suspicion by the German authorities, so the hope was to strengthen the branch so that local missionaries, who were allowed slightly more liberty, could carry the message further. Even this plan faced great opposition. Richards continued, “The Hamburg Police have forbidden more than three of the Saints to be seen together, except members of a single family.” Apparently four of the brethren from the branch attempted to preach and were “condemned to fourteen days’ imprisonment each.”23

German Journalistic Interest in America and the Mormons

While Mormons were viewed with suspicion and prejudice in Germany, Germans showed great interest in America. After the revolution in 1848 failed, thousands looked to the new land of promise as a place to seek their fortunes, and those who remained in Germany were deeply interested in the travels and experiences of their countrymen. A number of authors wrote journalistic travelogues describing America and its potential. For example, Karl Wander (1803–79), who had been so instrumental in establishing the Allgemeine Deutsche Lehrerverein (the United German Teachers’ Association), fled Germany in 1849 after he was fired from his teaching position. Declared to be an “agitator and seducer of insurrection and rebellion,” he had become embittered by the teachers’ unwillingness to support revolution as the means of obtaining their objectives.

Wander immigrated to America in 1850 but was disillusioned by what he found, and he returned within the year. In 1852 he published a book specifically for those interested in immigrating. His report of Utah and the Mormons was short—he suggested that barely one-twentieth of the desert territory was inhabitable, but in less than four years the Mormons had transformed a narrow stretch of one valley with “gardens, farms and beautiful white houses, like a paradise.” They had built “mills and factories,
schools and universities, streets and bridges” for thirty thousand inhabitants. “Nevertheless,” he warned, “because of the great distance and even more because of its communistic and fanatical religious state it would not be recommended for German settlement.”24 Karl never mentioned this particular work, but he was likely aware of it.25

Karl was even more likely to have been aware of or even to have attended a lecture presented in December 1853 at the Dresden Teachers’ Association by August Lansky, editor of the Sächsische Schulzeitung. Only two months later, Karl presented his lecture on teaching geography in the Volksschule at the same association meeting. Lansky’s address about Salt Lake and the Mormons was reprinted, in full, in the Sächsische Schulzeitung26 and reported in the national association news as “a detailed depiction of the views, establishments and fate of this strange sect.”27 Lansky’s published lecture was a twenty-eight-page report of the conflicting literature regarding the “Mormons” or “Mormonites.” The Stansbury report had just been published and translated into German.28 It gave a detailed description of the Utah Territory, its climate, and its characteristics by what seemed to be a fairly objective, non-Mormon team of government surveyors. Lansky summarized their description of the territory and then turned to the beliefs of the strange religion.

Lansky noted that most previous publications had been severely critical of the little-known sect. For example, he claimed that Christian Wilhelm Niedner,29 editor of the Zeitschrift für historische Theologie, called Mormons “sham socialists” who followed the supposed revelations of a “sleazy salesman,” Joe Smith.30 Claiming that the sect had become a serious menace in areas like Norway, Lansky proposed that another publication argued that it had rightfully been denied religious freedom. Lansky cited a book by Hermann Wimmer entitled Die Kirche und Schule in Nordamerika (The Church and School in North America), claiming that “from his youth on, Smith was a ne’er-do-well.”31 Smith had allegedly stolen the manuscript of Solomon Spaulding, made a few changes, and concocted a story of finding ancient records on “silver plates” that contained “divine revelation.”32 Lansky noted that Heinrich Guericke’s Handbuche der Kirchengeschichte33 (Manual of Church History) took the same position
but added that it cannot be denied that Joseph Smith really believed that he had been “an instrument of God to procure a new gospel, the seer of divine history, and the friend and confidant of angels and archangels.” Lansky continued by arguing that Smith was obviously gifted, courageous, and dedicated. If ultimately he were a fraud, it would be difficult to find someone with similar aspirations who had been treated with greater ferocity. From his earliest claims to the day of his murder by a mob, Smith had been hounded, persecuted, and mocked. Dragged from jail to jail, he had been arrested “forty times” on trumped-up charges, and yet he continued his work. Lansky noted that Smith’s demise had not ended his influence.34

Lansky then described how the Church had grown from six members to over a hundred thousand while experiencing severe persecution. They had left New York and settled in Kirkland, Ohio, then Missouri, where they were driven out, and then they had established Nauvoo, a remarkable city in Illinois. Finally, they were driven to the desert of Utah. They were renowned for their hard work and thriftiness. Lansky noted that the Stansbury report claimed that in general the Mormons had been falsely
portrayed in the media. Stansbury had come with preconceived opinions, expecting them to be jealous, quarrelsome, and petty, but had instead found them to be peaceful, harmonious, and even cheerful. He praised their faith and diligence, and he even recognized the respectability of Brigham Young, “a man of clear, sound sense, fully alive to the responsibilities of the station he occupies . . . indefatigable in devising ways and means for their moral, mental and physical elevation.” The people were always “fair and upright”35 with those passing through their city.

During the year that the Stansbury group had spent among the Mormons, not a single instance of fraud or extortion had occurred. They were peaceful, orderly, diligent, and well organized—hardly the licentious, rebellious traitors that Stansbury had expected to meet. The only peculiarities of the people were their religious tenets, their theocracy, and their domestic relations.36 Lansky continued documenting the accomplishments of this strange people in developing an orderly society in a remote desert. He concluded his lecture by expressing his hope that in his enthusiastic interest in the story of the Mormons he hadn’t bored his audience.37 In his own report, Maeser does not mention this lecture, but if he were not in attendance when it was given, as a member of the association, he would have received the written copy of it. It set the stage for a reader to know that there were conflicting reports regarding this religious group and that not all of them were negative.

Other German authors wrote about Utah and Mormonism from as early as 1843,38 though none spoke positively about the doctrine. Karl Andree edited a magazine on American relations called Das Westland. In 1851, in his report on the Fourth of July celebration in Salt Lake City, he said of the people that their “flair is as amazing as their hard-work and energy.”39 In 1852, Carl Ludwig Fleischmann published Wegweiser und Ratgeber, a guide of the United States that included a longer description of Mormonism,40 which included the sentence, “It is hardly conceivable how thousands could have been misled by such fraud.”41 Citing John A. Clark’s Gleanings by the Way (Philadelphia: Simon, 1842) and Henry Brown’s History of Illinois (New York: J. Winchester, 1844), Fleischmann attempts to explain how an ignorant farmer established a system of robbery and
deceit to “suck the milk of the Gentiles.” The *Atlantische Studien* (Atlantic Studies) of 1853 included three articles by Germans in America: “Von Utah,” “Utah und die Mormonen,” and “Amerikaner und Mormonen.” These articles stressed the accomplishments of the Mormons in Illinois and Utah. One declared of Salt Lake City, “It would be hard to imagine something more beautiful than the setting of this extraordinary city and its surroundings.” Another visitor to Salt Lake in 1852 reported in this magazine how hard it would be to get a clear picture when the prejudices, assumptions, and suspicions between Mormons and “Gentiles” were so strong. He then attempted to describe how the people from so many parts of the US and Europe could dwell harmoniously with each other. The second volume records another author’s visit to Nauvoo in August 1847. He saw the temple (“one of the grandest buildings in the United States”), the brick buildings, the council house, and countless deserted homes with quarter-acre gardens and a sense of order, cleanliness, and creative use of the natural resources of the area. At the same time, he found only hatred and bitterness expressed by the people of Illinois, so he was left with the question, “What was and is the basis of this hatred?” He concluded that it was the secrecy surrounding Mormon worship and life.

**Karl’s Quest for Spiritual Nourishment**

Karl does not mention any of these potential sources as influential in his introduction to Mormonism. In his only published account of his conversion story (1899), he described that the enthusiasm for Protestant belief that he had demonstrated as a young apprentice in Bohemia had eroded by the time he was teaching at the Budich Institute. Under the oppressive policies of the church and state, he had become disillusioned with religion. Reinhard quoted his father (without offering the source) as follows: “I craved for spiritual nourishment. I realized with terror the great unfathomable void that stretched out around me. In those dark hours, I felt that I had a right to ask God for a knowledge of the truth; from the depths of my soul, I cried, ‘Oh, God, if there be a God, make Thyself known to me.’” In his 1899 account, Maeser continued:
In that dark period of my life, when I was searching for a foothold among the political, social, philosophical, and religious opinions of the world, my attention was called to a pamphlet on the “Mormons,” written by a man named Busch. The author wrote in a spirit of opposition to that strange people, but his very illogical deductions and sarcastic invectives aroused my curiosity, and an irresistible desire to know more about the subject of the author’s animadversion caused me to make persistent inquiries concerning it.  

Other authors, including those who heard Karl orally explain his conversion, have described this “pamphlet” in a variety of terms. Karl’s lifelong friend Edward Schoenfeld suggested that, as a child, Karl had come across a “pictorial description of a driven, wandering people, with prophets in their midst, with hidden records on tablets buried in the hills, with angels watching these records.”  

Schoenfeld also suggested that a stranger said in 1853 (this date is most likely inaccurate) that Karl had encountered some Mormons in Denmark, after which they made inquiries until they made contact with John Van Cott.  

Karl’s granddaughter Mabel Maeser Tanner claimed that he came across a Mormon tract in 1853.  

In 1926, James Talmage wrote:

He had undertaken to prepare a lecture or thesis on the distinctive characteristics of the many and varied churches of the day. By a fortuitous coincidence, during the time of his research he came across a newspaper story relating to the Latter-day Saints, depicting them in a very unfavorable light, even misrepresenting them by such epithets as fanatical, un-Christianlike, dishonest and immoral generally. But the writer of that article, which was intended to be calumnious and derogatory, told also of the wonderful growth and development of these strange people in the valleys of the Rocky Mountains, of the growing commonwealth they had planted in the desert, of their achievements in agriculture and the industrial arts.
Karl’s son Reinhard adopted the Schoenfeld account:

While in this state of mind, there came into his possession a scrap of paper, a pictorial illustration of some of the persecutions of the Mormon people, presumably those in Missouri, which left an indelible impression upon his just and liberal mind. Was this in answer to his soul’s yearning? But he had long to wait before any other information came to him concerning this peculiar people.\(^5\)

**The Writings of Julius Herman Moritz Busch**

Julius Herman Moritz Busch was Maeser’s most unusual “missionary” because he had no intention of converting anyone to Mormonism. Maeser recounted his conversion story to a group of German tourists in Salt Lake City in 1872 in which he described the central role Busch played. This account was retold in a famous German magazine, *Die Gartenlaube*: “I was a teacher at a Volk school in Neustadt-Dresden and belonged to an association in whose circle regular lectures on popular academic topics were sponsored. My turn came and I chose the theme ‘Mormon doctrine,’ as it was critically reviewed through the lectures of the book by Moritz Busch.”\(^5\)

Not much older than Karl, Busch was also from Saxony.\(^5\) After completing his experience at the Gymnasium, he chose the more prestigious university route, studying theology at the University of Leipzig. He became a journalist and was best known for his not-always-friendly insights into the intimate details of the life of Otto von Bismarck (*Bismarck: Some Secret Pages of History*). This “Boswell of
Bismarck” had an eye for detail but was often criticized for his caustic conclusions. Nevertheless, as the *London Times* put it, “Dr. Busch’s ponderous verbiage and far-fetched antitheses do not detract from the value of the information which he has to give.”

In 1849, Busch came to Dresden and participated in the revolution. In the face of the Reaktion that followed, he joined the Forty-Eighters who immigrated to the United States in 1851. He traveled in the States for a year and then returned, publishing a two-volume description of his experience titled *Travels between the Hudson and the Mississippi* (*Wanderungen zwischen Hudson und Mississippi*) in 1854. During his travels, he stumbled upon the city—by then the nearly deserted city—of Nauvoo and apparently became deeply interested in the strange story of the Mormons. He dedicated the first eighty-two pages of the second volume to the Mormon story. It began, “Among the miracles that a European traveler in the American West may stumble upon . . . almost nothing is more astounding than the origin and development of Mormonism.” It continued, “The religious soap bubbles blown from the pipe of an uneducated farm boy in 1830 . . . have miraculously born a well-ordered theocratic commonwealth in the far west.” But he then calls Mormons “the prisoners of delusion” and attributes the Church’s growth to the “triumphal march of superstition.” He says that the Church’s rise in such short time is unparalleled in the “pseudo-religions of history.”

Despite such negative explanations, Busch described Joseph Smith’s First Vision in such detail that even the faithful would applaud it, and he spoke with admiration for the dedication and endurance of the early Church members: “They have flourished in spite of the most violent heartless persecutions that our century has allowed in religious things.” He described skirmishes with the Indians, battles with crickets, and progress in establishing cities and growing crops, while yet maintaining that Mormonism was “the most monstrous anomaly of our age.”

His chapters on Mormonism were remarkably short on doctrine for someone with a doctorate in theology. Busch concluded, “Mormonism is in fact a birth of Yankeeism with all the dark sides and a few of the virtues of a paternal nature. In the religious realm, it has grown into a caricature
of orthodox protestant literalism and on the other side the wrenching of catholic doctrine from tradition and priesthood, mixed with chiliastic fantasizing, a lump of Shaker catechism, some doctrine taken from the Baptists and above all combined with a good portion of fanaticism and phariseeism.”

It is highly unlikely that Karl would have referred to this two-volume, nearly eight-hundred-page work as a pamphlet. A far more likely candidate for Karl’s description of the catalyst that led to his conversion would be Busch’s 1855 book, exclusively about Mormonism—Die Mormonen: Ihr Staat, ihr Prophet und ihr Glaube (The Mormons: Their State, Their Prophet, Their Faith). As a soft-cover work of 158 pages, it is more appropriately referred to as a pamphlet, though it hardly fits the modern interpretation. It was included in the first twenty-seven-volume series of Carl Berendt Lorck’s Eisenbahn Bibliotek (Railroad Library). This would suggest that Karl’s investigation of the Church was much more condensed than some have supposed.

Because Die Mormonen has not yet been published in English and because it played such an important role in Karl’s conversion, it deserves a much more thorough review. Die Mormonen included much of what was explained in the Wandlungen, but Busch went into greater detail about the doctrine behind the story. He claimed that only in America could an “inconspicuous blister swell into a mighty cathedral in which fanatics or frauds proclaim a completely new religion.” According to Busch, Mormonism was a “hollow nut planted in the humus of the transatlantic world, which from a first glance seems to have miraculously grown into a giant tree and produced fruits that are not entirely all rotten.” He claimed the duped “saints” of the “Latter-days” were seduced by Joseph Smith, “the personified genius of Yankeeism,” who had “great knowledge of human nature, admirable endurance, extraordinarily keen insight and unbelievable freshness in his choice of methods, and in his naïveté often coupled with deep moral depravity and absolutely comical ignorance.”

Busch contrasted Joseph Smith’s account of translating golden plates into the Book of Mormon with the idea that Sidney Rigdon had stolen the manuscript of Solomon Spaulding. He reviewed the formation of the
Cover of Moritz Busch’s Die Mormonen, 1855. Courtesy of LTPSC.
Church, its growth in Ohio, the settlement in Missouri and the troubles that brewed there, the building of the temple and the revelations Joseph claimed, the slaughtering of “defenseless and innocent Mormons” at Haun’s Mill, and “the Miracle City Nauvoo & its temple.” He described the martyrdom of Joseph and Hyrum and the “unutterable suffering” of the Saints upon their expulsion from Nauvoo. There was a brief account of the Mormon Battalion, the conditions at Winter Quarters, and the settlement of the Salt Lake Valley. With almost unbelievable detail, Busch described Utah’s climate, terrain, Indian relations, the layout of the cities, the type and amount of crops grown, expansion of the territory, plans to establish a university, and the irrigation system. Die Mormonen introduced Karl to the settlements from Box Elder Creek in the north to Ogden, Salt Lake City, Manti, Tooele, Fillmore, Parowan, and “another quaint town at the foot of the Timpanogos mountain” (Provo).

Busch described the remarkable growth of the Church, especially among the ignorant, oppressed, superstitious, and uneducated. He warned his readers of the tactics used by these street preachers who were “obsessed with unbelievable industry” and “plundered” the hearts of the poor by promising a land of milk and honey with the help of a “Perpetual Welfare Fund.” He argued that they pretended to spiritual gifts of healing, prophecy, and speaking in tongues, but they shied away from anyone with an education.

Busch dedicated four chapters of his book to the doctrines of the Church, suggesting it was a difficult task because the doctrines of this “chameleon’s religion” kept changing: “From year to year new ingredients have been thrown into the dough, from which the presidency bake the bread of life for their believers.” He translated accurately the Articles of Faith but called them “a bouquet from this garden of whims and nonsense.” Proceeding then in his “overview of this desert of brain-spinning,” he addressed the War in Heaven, life as a probationary state, the gift of tongues, baptism, the sacrament, baptism for the dead, temple worship, priesthood organization, and, of course, plural marriage (translating section 132 of the Doctrine and Covenants), but calling it a “document dictated from shameful hypocrisy.”
In spite of Busch’s intention to dissuade others from the Church, his style of journalism stirred Karl’s curiosity. Busch prided himself in careful detail, but combined the detail with grandiose, overstated, and often sarcastic conclusions. With remarkable detail and thoroughness, Dr. Busch had introduced Karl to his future. Though couched in caustic sarcasm, Busch’s work gave Karl an overview of the doctrines, policies, and practices of the Church that he would defend for the rest of his life. Busch warned of the harshness of the climate and rugged terrain that Karl would have to face by joining this hated sect. He described the personalities of some of the leaders who would become Karl’s closest friends. He even introduced Karl to the young church’s ambitious dreams of establishing its own educational system, which Karl would one day be a big part of.

This book ignited an unquenchable fire in young Karl. James Talmage, who heard Karl recount his story numerous times, noted that though Busch intended to be calumnious and derogatory, [he] told also of the wonderful growth and development of these strange people in the valleys of the Rocky Mountains, of the growing commonwealth they had planted in the desert, of their achievements in agriculture and the industrial arts. With the analytical vision of a trained reasoner, and, moreover, with the open and unbiased mind of an honest man, a lover of the truth, Karl G. Maeser saw the inconsistency of these contradictory assertions. “I knew,” he has said to me many times, “that no people could develop and thrive as the facts showed the Latter-day Saints to have done, and at the same time be of degraded nature and base ideals.”

Earlier in the book, Busch had praised the Mormon interest in education, though he was quick to point out that the most knowledgeable of their leaders were admittedly only “amateurishly self-educated.” They supposed that they could establish a university where even mining and farming would be taught side by side with the Greek classics and astronomy. Busch scoffed at the idea that mining and farming could ever be worthy of university status. While this emphasis on practical training demonstrated
their ignorance of a university preparation, their belief that all should be given an education (even adults) showed a correct understanding of the importance of learning and culture. But lest it sound too positive, Busch sarcastically added, “If elsewhere they wanted to develop a ruling priestcraft that holds its subjects in darkness and ignorance, they should pursue entirely different politics.” He noted that Mormons claimed that women were to be educated the same as men, but they were still viewed as subservient “mothers in Zion” and valued only for bearing children, “a philosophy for field mice and rabbits, not for humans.” Surely, greater emphasis on education would backfire because, Busch assumed, an educated people would reject the message of Mormonism. “Out of confidence in their previous success, they seem to have no idea that they will be educating an enemy that sooner or later will overthrow their entire house of cards.”

Considering the Other Side

Karl had been drawn to this little book about the Mormons, newly published, to be used as an illustration in his lecture for the Saxon Teachers’ Association regarding the teaching of history, but his native curiosity, his profound discernment, and his love of truth did not allow him the detached distance that Lansky and virtually every other scholar at the time exercised. We don’t have the details of Karl’s actual lecture, but this anti-Mormon book torched a fire in his soul.

The ideas of these strange people who were derided by the press, banned by the political authorities, and ridiculed by the scholars of the time struck a chord in this educator’s heart that could not be silenced. The lecture Maeser gave was far more than a list of suggested techniques for teachers of history; it became a moral imperative for him to learn more and to face the practical consequences of his learning. The contrast between the detailed facts and the arrogant, sarcastic conclusions of a learned colleague forced him to conclude, in the words of Heber J. Grant, that “the man who wrote this article is a liar” and that he must discover the truth for himself.

Later, when Karl was seeking a motto in 1868 for Der Stern, the new Church magazine he was going to publish in Switzerland, he decided on
the common Latin phrase used in the *Sächsische Schulzeitung*,

—“The other side must also be heard.” He summarized his reason for this choice in the first issue: “To the present, criticism has played a particularly prevalent role toward our people, their origin, their history, their faith and their efforts. Without examination or investigation, this type has rejected our doctrine, derided our elders and persecuted our people based only on the one-sided testimony of our enemies. . . . With this motto, we appeal to your sense of justice and to foster from you a correct and fair judgment.”

He was asking no more from future investigators than he had demonstrated in his own life.

**Notes**

1. Maeser selected this well-known Latin phrase to be the theme of *Der Stern*, the magazine he founded as the mission president in Germany. See Karl Maeser, “Audiatur et altera pars,” *Der Stern*, January, 1, 1869, 9. This phrase was also used as the title of an article in the *Sächsische Schulzeitung*; see, for example, June 12, 1853, 385.

2. Winter Quarters was a makeshift city where the Mormons stayed until they could find a more permanent place to settle.

3. Franklin D. Richards journals, 1844–1899, vol. 8, Richards family collection, 1837–1961, MS 1215, reel 1, box 1, vol. 8, CHL.

4. On that occasion he wrote:

    O God, extend thine arms of love
    Around the partner of my heart
    Since Thou hast spoken from above
    And called me with my all to part.

    Franklin D. Richards journals, vol. 1, 1844 May 21–July 22, June 1, 1844, reel 1, box 1, vol. 1.

5. Franklin D. Richards, journals, vol. 6, 1846 September 21–December 22, October 14, 1846.


8. Tyler had left those that remained in California, including Samuel Brannan, another Mormon, who was advertising the discovery of gold as a way to attract customers to his store in May of 1848. That advertisement touched off what has been called the Gold Rush of 1849. Tyler had walked from Nauvoo to San Diego and back to Winter Quarters to help his family join the trek with the Willard Richards Company under the direction of Amasa Lyman to Salt Lake, arriving on October 18. See Daniel Tyler autobiographical sketch, MS 3363, item 3, CHL.

9. Tyler autobiographical sketch, 47. The Edward Martin handcart company did not leave Florence, Nebraska, until August 25, far too late in the season. When they were caught in an October blizzard on the plains of Wyoming, at least 145 members out of the original 576 died of starvation, frostbite, or sickness.


11. Daniel Tyler Papers, 1816–1906, missionary journals, June 22, 1853, to November 17, 1855, 39–40, MSS SC 481, folder 2, LTPSC.


14. Franklin D. Richards, journal, October 11, 1855, CHL.


19. See, for example, “Letter from J. P. Dykes,” *Deseret News*, April 17, 1852, 1, and “German Mission,” May 28, 1853, 2.


25. Maeser joined the teachers’ association that Wander started and lectured on geography for the association in 1854.


29. Christian Wilhelm Niedner (1797–1865) was a church historian and theologian from Saxony. He was a professor of theology at the University of Leipzig and is best known for his book _Geschichte der christlichen Kirche_ (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1846).


33. He was citing Heinrich Ernst Ferdinand Guericke _Handbuch der Kirchengeschichte_, seventeenth edition (Leipzig: Gebauer, 1850), 3:726.


38. See _Das Ausland_, January 1843, 69; see also _Berliner Literarische Zeitung_, June 1844, 827.


41. Fleischmann, “Gebiet Utah,” 464; translation of the German in this chapter by A. LeGrand Richards.


44. “Utah und die Mormonen,” in _Atlantische Studien_, 1:206–12.

46. R. Maeser, Karl G. Maeser: A Biography by His Son (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University, 1928), 17. This may have been an excerpt from Maeser’s journal, which is currently unlocatable.


49. Van Cott was not in Copenhagen until February 1854.

50. Mabel Maeser Tanner, “My Grandfather: Karl G. Maeser,” MSS SC 2905, LTPSC.

51. R. Maeser, Karl G. Maeser, 17–18. This account claimed that he had to wait until 1853, but the next chapter will show that his first contact was in 1855.

52. Moritz Lindeman, “Ein sächsischer Schulmeister im Mormonenlande” Die Gartenlaube, no. 49 (1873), 794–6. In March of 1856, a report was given regarding the fourteen lectures given in the previous year to the Saxon Teachers’ Association. It mentions that Teacher Maeser gave an excellent presentation on the principles of teaching history to the association. See “Bericht über die Wirksamkeit des Pädagogischen Vereins zu Dresden auf das Jahr 1855,” Sächsische Schulzeitung, March 16, 1856, 163. No specific date was given for it, but the previous paragraph described the lecture presented in May, so it would be logical that Maeser’s presentation was in June 1855. This would be consistent with the dates of his initial contact with the Church. Other presenters that year included Lansky and Reinicke. Reinicke was Maeser’s teacher at the Teacher College, see chapter 1.


55. See “Moritz Busch Is Dead,” New York Times, November 17, 1899. When he was traveling with Bismarck, Busch was accused of being a “boot-lick,” “a pitiful figure of the chronicler of his doings, standing in hushed adoration at his elbow, laughing at his rude speeches, and admiring his coarse personality in every way. He assures us that never did more than an hour elapse before he jotted down a memorandum.” (Review of Bismarck in the Franco-German War, 1870–1871, by Moritz Busch, New York Times, March 16, 1879, 8). On the other hand, after the publication of Busch’s diary following Bismarck’s death, the family expressed outrage at the betrayal of confidence given him, saying that it was “full of glaring errors and misrepresentations” and that “it does grave injury to the memory of Herr Busch’s benefactor.” “Bismarck Family Indignant,” New York Times, October 16, 1898, 13.


62. The red cover identifies it as one of Lorck’s *Eisenbahnbücher*. This was a series of books for travelers. It included a wide range of subjects. By 1860 it included thirty-seven books.


64. Moritz Busch, *Die Mormonen: Ihr Prophet, ihr Staat, und ihr Glaube* (The Mormons: Their Prophet, Their State, and Their Faith) (Leipzig: Carl B. Lorck Verlag, 1855), 2; translation by A. LeGrand Richards.


68. Busch sarcastically called Salt Lake “the new Jerusalem in the West.” Busch, *Die Mormonen*, 36.


71. Busch, *Die Mormonen*, 64.


74. “The prophets and apostles avoid speaking with people who have a superior education. When required to, they complain about the learned sophists who do not have the spirit of God and therefore can’t grasp; when they don’t know how to answer, they go silent.” Busch, *Die Mormonen*, 61.


76. Busch, *Die Mormonen*, 73.

77. Busch, *Die Mormonen*, 78.


82. Busch, Die Mormonen, 153.

83. Busch, Die Mormonen, 69. I find it delightfully ironic that perhaps the only person ever deeply affected by Busch’s sarcastic criticisms of Mormon educational aspirations was Karl G. Maeser.


85. Heber J. Grant, in Conference Report, April 1911, 22.

86. See, for example, “Audiatur et altera pars!” Sächsische Schulzeitung, June 12, 1853, 385.