Nineteenth-Century Author Mathew Franklin Whittier on the Craft of Writing in General, and on His Own Writing in Particular

By Stephen Sakellarios ©2022 (revised 6/30/23)

My topic will be of little interest to anyone, inside or outside of Academia, as I write this today, in December of 2022. However, someday it will be understood that Mathew Franklin Whittier and his wife Abby Poyen Whittier were the original authors of "A Christmas Carol"; that "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee" proceeded from *Mathew's* pen, not that of Edgar Allan Poe; that the reviews in "The Dial" signed "F.," and those in the New York "Tribune" (from 1844-46) signed with a "star" (single asterisk) were not Margaret Fuller's, but Mathew's; and that at least five poems published by the future Elizabeth Barrett Browning in 1844 were actually his, as well. At that time, people may wish to know what this hidden author had to say about his craft, and about his own work.[1]

I have identified more than 3,000 of Mathew's productions, including several novels. In all of this work references to writing in general, and to his own in particular, are quite scarce. He was not one to toot his own horn; if he did, usually out of sheer frustration, he made sure it was done anonymously. At times, he might warn an imitator or a plagiarist to cease and desist, or at least put posterity on-notice about it, using the occasion to offer instruction. Or, he might wish to make a veiled tribute to his late wife, once again using a discussion of writing style as his excuse. But on a very few occasions, he would address the topic of writing directly. In this paper, I have culled out these rare examples, as only someone deeply familiar with his legacy could do.

Just one caveat before we begin. Mathew remained deeply incognito throughout his 54-year literary career (1825-1879). As a result, he was so brazenly and extensively plagiarized, with his other works being so often misattributed, that it took me 13 years to identify them and disentangle them from these false claims. As a result, I can barely utter a sentence with regard to his legacy, without stumbling into another controversy. To save time, in this paper I will simply state my conclusions as facts. The arguments behind these attributions, with their supporting evidence, are given elsewhere.

We will proceed in roughly chronological order, beginning with an essay entitled "Ideas on Poetry" signed "Trismegistus," in the Feb. 29, 1828 Boston "New-England Galaxy." At this time Mathew is only 15 years old. He begins tongue-in-cheek, as he ironically extolls the virtues of modern poetry:

> This being so completely the millenium of poetry that it may be bought at any bookstore, of the finest quality, for little or nothing, it may be matter of surprize that the reading community should not become cloyed with a superabundance of this dainty literature. Our poets seem to be aware indeed, that the mind of desultory man—studious of change and pleased with novelty, must be indulged; for vanity is of all others, their most striking characteristic. It seems to be a chief study with them, to metamorphose their styles with the changes of fashion, to write on all imaginable subjects in all possible measures and without measure. Hence there are no Epics written in these days,—nothing protracted or voluminous. It would be a mere waste of time and genius,

> (for we have genius without question, or we should not write,) to write any thing longer than an ode or a sonnet.

Immediately after this restrained introduction, however, he launches into a scathing satirical example. For inspiration, he appears to be drawing, at least in part, from the poetical "Sketches" published in Boston the previous year by N.P. Willis:

> This ambition of inventing something new either in the matter or the manner of their verse, will be better understood by an instance. I know a young man of great expectations, who has just commenced his poetical career with a Dream in blank verse three columns long; so true to nature, that you might believe he had caught his fancies in the very act; so insinuating that I could never for the life of me, read so much as the first ten lines without snoring. The public will be glad to learn that his friends have induced him to prepare an octavo volume for the press, of which the following pieces, copied from his table of contents, will constitute a chief part.
>
> *Ode for Muster Day*, written by request, and sung with great applause.
>
> *Anacreontic Serenade.*
>
> *Stanzas*, in heroic measure, on a Mammoth Calf seen at a Cattle Show.
>
> Allegory, in six cantos. *Immortality of the Soul*.
>
> Tragedy, in two acts. *Bloody murder of six militia men*.
>
> Forty pages of *Monologues*, *Epigrams*, and *Acrostics*.
>
> The rear is brought up by
>
> *An Elegy on the death of my great-grandmother, at the age of one hundred and three*. In the measure of Hudibras.

What follows is an ironic list of suggestions for writing poetry which are, in fact, precisely what one should *not* do. I give only the first two items, here:

> 1. In the choice of subjects, every one must be guided in some measure by his own taste, remembering, with our great model of correct judgments, Wordsworth, that the more trifling a subject is, the more credit that writer deserves, who embellishes and elevates it. It is politic also to use such subjects as have already been well handled by classic poets, for their character is established, they will excite pleasant trains of association, and suggest comparisons which we who write so much better, ought not to be too modest to profit by. On this point it is the less necessary to enlarge, because many new ideas may be gathered from the corners of newspapers and magazines, of which it is well known, there is no very alarming scarcity at present.

2. The second requisite is to become familiar with poetical technicalities. There are certain words and phrases in this as in most other branches of study, of true stamp and approved weight, which will be a sure passport to favor, at least with those readers, who admire the school most popular now. Such are—pure, gentle, clustering, feathery, stealthy, sunny, silvery, stilly, and the rest of this fine family, with all their connections among the verbs, nouns, and adverbs. These may be reserved by the poet when he begins business—as stock on hand, to be thrown in at every blank place, and especially at the beginning and end of paragraphs, as counters to tell by. Like the good old story of "Grouse in the gunroom," (which a servant in the play swears, he could not hear his master tell without laughing, because he had laughed at it for twenty years before) these words apply equally to all occasions, and suffer the less by repetition, from being repeated so much. The following sentences will show that the practice obtains even among such as are able to write with elegant simplicity and exquisite pathos. What is human happiness?

> "'Tis to go abroad rejoicing in the joy
> Of beautiful and well-created things;—
> —To see a beauty in the stirring leaf—
> It is to linger on the magic face
> Of human beauty;
> —'Tis to love
> The candences of voices that are tuned
> By majesty and purity of thought;
> To gaze on woman's beauty as a star
> Whose purity and distance make it fair,
> And in the gush of music to be still,
> And feel that it has purified the heart."

The excerpts above (omissions being indicated by dashes) are, indeed, from Willis' "Sketches." Young Mathew's inference is that Willis has created his verses using a "grab bag" of stock words and phrases. Bear in mind that in 1828 Mathew may be only 15, but he is the younger brother of John Greenleaf Whittier, with whom he has no-doubt had many discussions about poetry, and whose direct tutoring he has probably benefited from. He is, in short, a well-qualified critic even in his mid-teens. He has not, however, actually told us how good poetry should be written, excepting a few brief comments advising that it should derive from inspiration and first-hand experience.

We next find Mathew signing with a single asterisk, or "star," in the March 2, 1833 New York "American." This series has been attributed by Homer F. Barnes, in his 1930 Ph.D. dissertation entitled "Charles Fenno Hoffman," to that writer; but I have disproved Hoffman's authorship of the series, despite his having claimed it in private correspondence with his brother.[2] Mathew is reviewing a compilation of stories entitled "Legends of the Library at Lilies, by the Lord and Lady there." Here, we have 20-year-old Mathew Franklin Whittier setting forth his views on story writing:

Story writing, as distinguished from novel writing, we apprehend to be the most difficult of the two. So far as the faculty of invention is concerned—of contriving characters scenes and incidents they are much upon a par: but while a good novel may be completely made up of these materials, and these only, a tale must, like a play, have some particular plot, to the development of which, every incident must tend; while the interest, instead of being sustained as it may be in longer productions, by desultory observations upon a variety of incidental subjects, must hang entirely upon one main adventure. The great charm of good storytelling is to make all the relation so adhere together, that there is no point where the narrator can break off; for a perfect tale cannot, like a novel, be broken up into chapters; but is hardly more susceptible of division than is a sonnet. This species of composition, however, we apprehend, is as yet by no means brought to the degree of perfection of which it is capable. The contributors to periodicals, by whom it is most practised, content themselves generally with striking sketches of particular scenes and events, or else they set a number of incidents in some kind of frame-work, which serves the purpose of binding them together, while it does not necessarily concentrate and determine their interest to one point. Few, like Marmontel or Washington Irving, (in his Dolph Heyleger, and Legend of the Sleepy Hollow,) arrange their materials in such simple symmetry that when all are surveyed together, they present to the mind a natural and perfect figure. A story composed after these models bears the same relation to an ordinary recital as does a poem, in the true sense of the word, to the "fragments" and "sketches" in blank verse now so much in vogue among newspaper and magazine scribblers—things that have neither beginning, middle or end, but like those insipid gelatinous substances which float around the docks at midsummer, may be divided in any part and yet preserve their integral form—"if form it may be called which form has none." Of the ease with which these affairs are manufactured, the reader is probably sufficiently convinced from the over-abundant supply with which our light publications are gutted, while so few finished lyrics, decent odes, or tolerable songs, ever get into print through the same medium. The truth is, that while scholarship is not in particular esteem, it is the fashion of the day for every one to aspire to a reputation for talent; not by putting forth some gem, however small, polished to the uttermost in the workshop of his mind, but by thrusting in our eyes the chippings of some diamond in the rough, which he has stumbled upon without knowing its value or having the art to set it. The eclat of what is called "off-hand talent" is all that is aimed at by these laymen of literature, who generally make a point of telling us that the performances which they have the modesty to think will strike and dazzle our minds, were produced with no effort of theirs. And amusing piece of impertinence of which the literary correspondence of a newspaper affords daily instances; for half of those who address an editor upon subjects requiring most thought and skill in their treatment, will recommend their communications with an assertion that "the observations submitted, &c., were flung off in an idle moment," &c. &c.; as if a want of study, research, and reflection, qualified one particularly for enlightening the public upon questions of a moment. Poetical correspondents, above all others, are given to parading this elegant nonchalance in their literary efforts, and they speak generally of engaging the smiles of the Muses as if these ladies were the most arrant flirts in town, and would look kindly upon whoever wasted a moment's thought upon them. If a thing be too long to call an *impromptu*,—which tells the whole story of their "off-hand talent," in a single word,—

> they are sure to state that it was “the production of an idle moment,” “written with a pencil,” “thrown off to amuse a vacant hour,” or “produced only for their own amusement”—contingencies, which, however interesting they may be to papa when he pats his son on the head for making a ready reply to a question in the multiplication table, convey no very strong recommendation for a crude and slovenly copy of verses. A similar affectation, it is true, is usual among public speakers, when they commence and oratorical infliction of six hours by observing that “they approach the subject unexpectedly,” &c., but then as “shall not there for detain but a few moments,” almost invariably follows, the whole mode of expression may be viewed merely as a *ruse* to enlist attention: and yet how much more impressive and effectual is the style of Burke’s exordiums, for instance, who commences his most famous speeches by declaring that he has for years given his study and reflection to the subject under discussion, and therefore as one speaking advisably, claims a hearing. To this expectation of ready talent, we conceive may be attributed much of that want of body which critics pretend distinguishes the luxuriant literature of our generation from the hardy growth of those which preceded it. Writings are brought into the world “scarce half made up,” and their authors, eager rather to create a sensation than solicitous to add to the enduring stores of knowledge and taste—like one who, without capital, would get a reputation for wealth, give a loose to extravagance of every kind. The result is various. Some flash in the public eye for a season or two, and then, like those short-lived bucks who figure for one summer on the road to Cato’s, and sink the next into sober citizens, are seen no more; while others break down even sooner in the race of renown, by trying to win a cup without any previous training.

We now move to the Feb. 17, 1847 edition of “The Odd Fellow.” Mathew, himself, had been a member of the International Organization of Odd Fellows since 1843, and he wrote occasionally for their newspaper in Boston. The editor, who evidently knew Mathew personally, has consented to run an advertisement for him, seeking an editorial position. It contains a brief, understated clue regarding his literary track record:

> TO PUBLISHERS AND OTHERS.
>
> A “middle-aged” man, of good education—well informed—possessing a good literary taste and qualifications—author of several popular Tales—who has had several years experience as an Editor of a Daily and Weekly Newspaper—having a good *practical* knowledge of the “art preservative of all arts,”—strictly temperate and industrious; wishes to obtain a situation as Editor or assistant Editor of a Literary or General Newspaper; and if desired, would assist in the general management of the establishment. A location West, or South West preferred—but the location not material.
>
> The most satisfactory testimonials will be given. Address the publishers “Onondaga Standard,” Syracuse. N.Y.

Mathew had, in fact, briefly moved to Syracuse, where I found two of his works published in the “Standard.” The editor of “The Odd Fellow” sees fit to add his own comments:

> We know the writer of the above, and most cordially endorse all that he says of himself.—We hope his advertisement will attract the attention of some one who wants an assistant, and that he will secure a permanent and lucrative situation, such a one as his talents, experience and merits justly entitle him to.
>
> Ed. of O.F.

But almost all of Mathew's work, for the past 22 years, had been published *anonymously*. So the only way this editor could possibly know of Mathew's past achievements—including having edited the New York "Constellation" in his late teens, under editor-in-chief Asa Greene—is if Mathew has privately shared these things with him. You will get a sense of the sheer scale of Mathew's euphemizing, here, if you consider that when he says he is the "author of several popular Tales," he was actually one of the original co-authors of "A Christmas Carol."

In the Nov. 10, 1849 "National Era"—the newspaper for which John Greenleaf works as an editor—a poem appears entitled "For in much Wisdom is much Grief." Notwithstanding that it is signed "Incog.," I am certain of Mathew's authorship. The plot has a poor poet gallantly championing the oppressed, and being shunned for his trouble. In his deep despair, he is suddenly visited by a female spirit of light—the inference being that this is Mathew's late wife and soul-mate, Abby—who gives him encouragement. We will see a more casual reference to the first theme, three years hence:

> Hark! how sad are his trembling tones:
> "Have I not lessened Oppression's groans?
> Have I not struggled with main and might
> To crush the wrong and maintain the right?
> Have I not fought with a ready pen
> The thousand foes of my fellow men?
> Loving, and patient, and true the while,
> Well repaid, if a single smile
> Of sweet and genuine sympathy,
> In my darkened corner, was given me?
> World! world! world! how thankest thou?
> Well may an echo-voice answer, 'how?'
> By the chilling gibes, thy sneers, thy hate—
> Even for these had I long to wait:
> By thy heavy frown and thy bitter curse;
> Pointing me on to the gloomy hearse,
> Whispering constantly, from my birth,
> 'Be thou forgotten—thou comberest earth;'
> All my foes, with thy poison fed,
> Hurl their venom upon my head;
> Triumph till even friends disdain
> Ever to love or to trust again."

At about the same time, Mathew will also return *this* theme—a spirit visitation from Abby:

A rich light falls
  On the garret walls,
Flooding the room with its silver streams;
  With angel grace,
  See a starlike face
On the lonely student beams.

A clear mild eye,
  Like the pale, blue sky,
Bendeth on him, till he shrinks with awe;
  So sweet a thing,
  In his journeying,
He never before saw.

Her white robes glitter,
  For heaven fitter
Their purity, than the guilt-stained earth,
  So soft and even;
  Surely in heaven
She had her birth.

From this we see, first of all, the spiritual and artistic power of Mathew's pen, when he is safely anonymous. Secondly, we see the life of a writer ahead of his time, such that the "light shineth in darkness, and the darkness comprehended it not." If he hasn't *told* us what good poetry is, he has certainly *shown* us. It is not created as an artificial assemblage from a pile of stock words. It comes straight from the poet's heart. His technical prowess is simply a means to guide his inspiration onto the paper.

Historians have been misguided into accepting that the writer of a travelogue in the 1849-52 Boston "Weekly Museum," signing "Quails," was an entertainer named Ossian Dodge. In reality this was once again Mathew Franklin Whittier, remaining studiously incognito because of his clandestine activities in support of the Abolitionist movement and the Underground Railroad. This authorship identification has been proved absolutely, but that proof is beyond the scope of this paper.[3] It's important, however, to understand that this question is beyond disputation, because we will be quoting "Quails" several times in this work.

In the Jan. 5, 1850 edition of the "Museum," "Quails" writes in praise of an editor:

> In this thriving little town is published the "Thursday Sketcher," a paper ably conducted by John Wood, Esq., whose forcible and caustic pen fills this weekly visitor to its brim with the good things of life, making it, in fact, (as Mrs. Partington would say,) "a perfect dispeller of the vaccination and tar-boils of life."

Once again, we see Mathew's conviction that satire may be utilized for noble purposes. Very often, one can also discern his own ideals in his praise of others, as we see here with regard to Mr. Wood.

Correspondence was one of Mathew's literary strengths, which he was able to raise to the level of art. In his public letters, he spontaneously revealed his whole heart, as well as his rich humor—and in his travelogues, each reader felt that Mathew was writing directly to him or her. Many writers imitated this style, but Mathew's boyish enthusiasm, as "Quails," was both authentic and infectious. In a rare mood of self-reflection, he writes in the March 30, 1850 edition:

> But what's the use of writing, if we dont write the same as we think? One great reason why "Correspondence," in many instances, is so provokingly unreadable, it is either too high-falutin or studied, in order that it may appear fashionable, or *al la Willis*. Perhaps that looks a little like pride in *Quails*. Well, s'pose'n 'tis! haven't we reason for feeling proud, when we see our letters published by the side of those from the pen of Mrs. H. Marion Stephens. J.W. Hanson and the bewitching "Annie Trifler?" (A very inappropriate *nomme de plume*, by the way, for her truly chaste and exquisite writings; but if it suits her, we cannot but admire her frankness and independence of mind in still retaining it; notwithstanding we agree with Mrs. H.M.S. in her criticism.) When we see our letters published by the side of those from such talent and literary ability, and in the *Museum*, a paper long noted for publishing nothing in the shape of correspondence but that of the highest literary ability, haven't we reason? Yes, that's the question! Haven't we reason to hall up our dickey an extra inch, and, with a few cents worth of Jules' hair dye, turn our old grey hairs a few shades younger?

Mathew, being the younger brother of a famous literary figure, suffered from very poor self-esteem. In reality he was at least as talented as John Greenleaf, but he was treated as a footnote. Where he is mentioned in the historical record at all, he is typically called "the brother of the Poet," sometimes without his name even being given! He was also, of course, raised with the Quaker prohibition against pride. So whenever he asserts his own ability, he does so firstly behind an impenetrable veil of anonymity; and secondly, he immediately belays it with some form of modesty. Here, he has no sooner given advice on how to write correspondence as a genre, than he has deferred to his fellow contributors to the "Museum." The fact is, however, that his own work was far superior, and he knew it. The "Quails" travelogue was written in layers of meaning. On the surface it was entertaining; beneath that, it was a coded account of his abolitionist contacts, probably reporting them to William Lloyd Garrison and other leaders of that movement. Beneath *that*, it was social reform, and encouragement for artists of all types. But at the deepest level, it was either intensely personal, or philosophical. When all these layers are taken into account, the other writers' work pales in comparison.

In 1850, Mathew published a novel entitled "The Mistake of a Lifetime: Or, the Robber of the Rhine Valley," signing with a one-time pseudonym, "Waldo Howard." Apparently, he used an agent, keeping his own identity secret. The agent successfully negotiated with Frederick Gleason, publisher of "Gleason's Pictorial," for the unheard-of sum of $3,000 plus a percentage of the profits. The critics, ignoring the book itself, ridiculed Gleason for having been bamboozled into paying what they assumed was a fledgling writer so much money for his first effort. Finally, in the May 18, 1850 edition of the "Weekly Museum," Mathew protested, in the

ironic character of an ignoramus named “Roldo Blowhard,” by publishing the following notice or “card”:

> **A Kard.**
>
> Deer Cir:—I don’t think mutch of them papers as blow up my last grate rowmants—”The Bobber of the Rind.” I want yew awl to understand that I think yew are “porter-hous kriticks,” and don’t noe but little. I want all of you to understand that I am a gentleman that has a gude rite to maik sum litterari pretencion. Most of mi tyme has been spent in the survis of govomment, it is tru, but I have traviled konsiderable. I hav been to Kuby. The man that rote “Velasco” is down on me i cee; but I roat “The Monument Mountain” yeers after Bryant did. if you don’t stop torkin about my knovelet, i will astonish yew all; for i am Edditur of The Flunky Phlag, a papper that cerkulaits moar larglee than the kombind cirkulation ov all the other pappers in the world. Enny of yew fellers wood of been proud to hav rit “The Mistaik,” but you can’t rite, eny wa.
>
> Yours, in dephiants,
>
> ROLDOW BLOWHARD, ESQ.

There are a number of coded references here, which to interpret would take us too far afield. Suffice it to say that Mathew had pioneered this style of exaggerated misspelling as a boy of 12, in 1825, with a series of letters ostensibly written by an ignorant runaway from Vermont, writing home as “Joe Strickland.” The “Strickland” series appears to have launched this genre of American humor, which depicts Yankee dialect. It has been mistakenly attributed to a New York lottery shop owner named George W. Arnold, because the editor who introduced the first number to the public made that erroneous interpretation (and because Arnold may have played along, it being to his financial advantage). The truth is that young Mathew was, in fact, a runaway, albeit from Haverhill, Mass. It was typical of him, all his life, to write from real life experience, only changing up a few variables so as to disguise his identity.

It was also typical of Mathew’s satire to remain entirely tongue-in-cheek until his final statement—at which time, being now certain he was hidden by jest, he would reveal his true thoughts. Here, translating into ordinary English, he is quite serious when he says, “Any of you fellows would have been proud to have written ‘The Mistake,’ but you can’t write, anyway.”

Mathew, whose ethics were normally quite strict, was so frustrated by this situation that he decided to write his own favorable review under one of his long-time pseudonyms, a “star” or single asterisk, which he had employed off-and-on since 1829. Strictly speaking, I feel it was not so much that he wanted the public to see a favorable review, as that he wanted them to see a *fair and accurate* one. The following appears in the April 17, 1850 edition of “The Odd Fellow”:

> A New Romance.—We have received from the publisher, F. Gleason, Boston, a new and brilliant tale, entitled, ‘*The Mistake of a Lifetime; or, the Robber of the Rhine Valley*.”—It is a story of the mysteries of the shore and the vicissitudes of the sea—

> embracing in its field an almost boundless extent of romance—depicting with a faithful and vivid pen the peculiarities of robber life, piracies upon the high sea, the influences of the gaming table, the power of jealousy, the absorbing interest of mystery, and the power of love and beauty.—The interesting period of the story has enabled the author to produce some delightful specimens of the legends of the Rhine, as well as to give the reader some startling characters among the actors of his tale, taken from life, and the events of every day occurrence. The story opens in a tap-room in London, and the first female character introduced is one of such surpassing loveliness, and under circumstances so peculiar and interesting, that the reader becomes at once absorbed in her history and fate; altogether the work is one of remarkable and intense interest.
>
> But we will not anticipate the pleasure that the readers of the book must realize. Let no one fail to procure "The Mistake of a Lifetime." It is for sale at all the periodical depots and bookstores, at the extraordinary low price of 12-1/2 cents, though gotten up in the very best style of publication. It is destined to find an immense sale, paramount to that of any work published for many years. *

It should come as no surprise to the reader that the "first female character introduced" was inspired by Abby at age 15, when Mathew first began courting her. It is by way of tribute that he includes this mention in his review; and in a particular sense, it is by way of defending her memory that he writes it in the first place.

In the same edition of the "Museum" as contains the card from "Roldo Blowhard," is an unsigned poem entitled "Love's Song." But to understand exactly what this is, we must go back to the previous edition of May 11th. There, "Quails" suddenly closes his typically entertaining travelogue letter on a personal note:

> Taking the cars of the Boston and Providence Railroad from Foxoboro', we came in on a rail, and now that we're once more home, we again have a "poetic pheling," and, strange to say—but perhaps it is on account of our ride—it is in a vein of sadness; but what subject shall we write on? Ah! we have it—our past—roving and lonely—life, so here goes.—
>
> *Alone*, we're ever on our flight,
> With no fair one to love us;
> On barren rocks we've passed the night,
> With only stars above us.
> We've passed through old Gibralter's straits,
> Through gloomy swamps and dry land,
> Through all of the United States,
> *And most part of Rhode Island,*
>
> Oh, dear, oh, dear! we'll never try it again, for our old stub of a gold pen *won't* write poetry, any way we can fix it; but, dear Putnam, *don't* scold, for we *thought* we were in the right mood when we commenced, and if you'll only overlook it *this* once, we'll be *sure* to be in the right trim *next* time, or not attempt it.

Thine, with much feeling,
Quails.

Is he joking, or is he serious? The key is that this is not *exaggeration*—it is *euphemism*. Euphemism on the same order of magnitude as we have just seen with regard to being the "author of several popular Tales." His "vein of sadness" is crushing grief, and the reason, if I'm not mistaken, is that Mathew had proposed to Abby on May Day, 1836. He has, in short, just hit a deeply personal anniversary date. This is no "poetic pheling," and what follows is not, in fact, the poem he wrote. What he *really* wrote was the poem which appears anonymously in the following edition, "Love's Song":

Love's Song.

In my heart an image dwelleth
  Keeping holy vigils there,
And to me it softly whisp'reth
  As the spirits in the air;
Songs of love it ever singeth,
  Words of truth it ever breathes,
And around the soul's pure altar,
  Brightest, fairest flowers it wreaths!

When the world is dark and dreary,
  Clouds and shadows hovering nigh,
And my heart alone and weary
  Seeks for some responsive sigh,
Then, behind the clouds, that image
  Like a rainbow bright appears,
Changing clouds to smiling sunshine,
  Purest joy for gushing tears.

'Tis *thine own* true image, darling,
  Whisp'ring to this heart of mine,
One pure song of deep devotion
  "Thou art mine, and I am thine!"
Nestle safely there, my chosen,
  Sing sweet songs, of love for me,
'Tis thy home, oh! may it ever
  Be a resting-place for thee.

Be my breast thy pillow, dearest,
  Be my heart thy star of love,
Shining ever brightly round thee
  As the glit'ring gems above;
And when Life with Age doth tremble
  'Neath its gathered weight of years,

Oh! may we together slumber,
Free from sorrow, pain, and tears.

Norwich, Conn., May 1*st.*

I think inspired poetry is best presented without commentary, and so we move forward two editions in the "Museum," to May 31st. *Now* we have an extremely rare paragraph of instruction on humorous sketch writing by a true master of the genre, Mathew Franklin Whittier. Before we examine it, however, some background must be given.

Mathew had been writing and publishing clever sketches, taken from real life, since he was a boy. By 1850, he had been working in this genre for a quarter of a century, and he was fully qualified to teach others. In fact, it seems that he would often mentor aspiring writers. More than a few of these, lacking in originality, would imitate his style; and a few, lacking in ethics, would actually steal his unpublished samples. The worst, however, were those of low-minded sensibilities (as, for example, being pro-slavery), who would *distort* Mathew's stories, bending them to their own proclivities. In such cases, Mathew had to leave posterity a clue, so that no-one would imagine *he* had written these monstrosities. I suspect that may have been the case when Mathew saw fit to publicly instruct an author in the art of sketch writing—and publicly expose his identity at the same time. Otherwise, I think he never would have taken that unusual step. Mathew, as "Quails," writes:

> While in Norwich, we made the acquaintance of the poet and journalist who has for the last five or six years been writing over the poetical *nom de plume* of *The Veiled Author*, and contrary to our expectations, we found him a man of much sociability, and yet in the springtime of life. We also here met our old friend, Henry Ruggles, the poet and sketch-writer, and with him made a survey of the town, and concocted plans for sketches which should keep the readers of the *Museum* during the next year on a broad grin with their (the sketches) details.
>
> There are but a few first-rate sketch-writers in America, and perhaps we might safely say in the world; for it requires a man who is not only good at *relating* mirth, but equally as good in *originating*. A sketch, written as it *should* be, should have the effect at the *outset*, of producing a feeling with the reader, if not of despondency, bordering on solemn attention, and as the tale proceeds, and dark clouds break from overhead, the light should steal in so gradually, that the reader unconsciously, as it were, becomes in a state of great nervous anxiety to ascertain what *can* be the result of the plot. The reader should be kept in this state until the *last sentence* of the sketch, and then the truth, or *pith*, (or *glory*, as Crockett was wont to call it) should burst forth with all its brightness, causing the reader to stamp on his hat, jump through a second story window, or, if in the evening, wake up the whole neighborhood with his unearthly screams and yells of delight. That's what we call a sketch of *effect*; and though we can't say positively that we have ever known one of Ruggles' sketches to affect a man *precisely* in the manner stated above, still we *can* say, that his sketches, as a general thing, are well written, and some of them are *tiptop*. He writes over the euphonious *nom de plume* of *One who*

> *Heard of It*; and if he takes offence at *Quails'* "putting him through," and speaking of his ability and fame, we shall reply, that we are one of the *public* "*who heard of it*."

If I am not mistaken, what he means by his conclusion—and remember, Mathew typically unveils himself in the final statement—is that he has heard of Ruggles' plagiarism and re-working of his own stories, and he is putting Ruggles—and the public—on notice. The code lies in the neutral character of the phrase "ability and fame," which sounds superficially like praise. However, if we decode it, he has heard of Ruggles' *poor* ability and *disproportionate* fame. The whole point would be to expose Ruggles as the author of what might otherwise be assumed, by style, to have been Mathew's work, because Mathew didn't want to be associated with it in posterity.

It was my discovery of certain stories in the "Weekly Museum," bearing the signature "One Who Heard of It," which led me to this conclusion. One of them looked, by my sensibilities, as though Mathew had written the opening; but the ending struck me as cruelly racist, and I decided it must have been an amalgam. In any case, even if the above excerpt was Mathew's excuse for sounding a warning, we have the benefit of his instruction on sketch writing.

"Quails" gives us further writing instruction while on tour in Europe, in the Sept. 20, 1851 edition of the "Museum." Visiting the cemetery attached to St. Mungo's Cathedral in Glasgow, he has happened upon a very succinct epitaph which vividly calls his own beloved Abby to mind. He can't mention it in his travelogue on *that* basis, so he must instead praise the writing, itself:

> On a tomb dated 1616, we read the following:—
>
> > "Ye gazers on this trophie of a tomb, send out one grone for want of her whose life once born of earth, and now lyes in earths wombe, lived long a virgin, then a spotless wyfe, here lyes enclosed mans griefe, earths loss, friends paine, religions lampe, virtues light, and heavens gaine."
>
> Among the thousands of epitaphs and inscriptions that we have read on tombs and in books, we recollect none possessing a greater amount of poetry in comparison with the number of words used, than in the above inscription. We have read epitaphs containing from fifty to an hundred lines of finely-written rhyme, but for concise expressions of the tenderest emotions and sublimity of feeling, we do not at present recall one to mind that will equal the above. Writing on this subject, reminds us of a few sentences once used in argument by the late Hugh Blair, D.D., a Professor of Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres. He says:—
>
> > Simplicity and conciseness are never-failing characteristics of the style of a sublime writer. He rests on the majesty of his sentiments, not on the pomp of his expression. The main secret of being sublime is, to say great things in few and plain words; for every superfluous decoration degrades a sublime idea. The mind rises and swells when a lofty description or sentiment is presented to it in its native form. But no sooner does the poet attempt to *spread out* this

> sentiment or description, and to deck it round and round with glittering ornaments, than the mind begins to fall from its high elevation; the transport is over; the beautiful may remain, but the sublime is gone.
>
> We did not intend to dwell thus long on this subject, but an argument having arisen in our party relative to the correctness of the principal comparison in the foregoing epitaph, we have committed our opinion to paper, and are willing to refer its correctness to either Pierpont or Longfellow, both of whom we know to be weekly readers of the *Museum*.

And how, exactly, does "Quails" know that Rev. John Pierpont and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow read the "Museum?" He knows because he is personal friends with them; or rather, as I feel, Rev. Pierpont was a mentor to him, and he was acquainted with Longfellow through his brother, John Greenleaf. Mathew also mentions, elsewhere in the "Quails" travelogue, that he is personal friends with Oliver Wendell Holmes, which goes a long way toward explaining how he could have handed over his and Abby's manuscript of "A Christmas Carol" to Charles Dickens in Boston, in January of 1842. If one carefully compares the redacted portions of Charles Dickens' handwritten draft of the "Carol," with his revisions, one will see that a great many of his changes were simply verbal "fluff"—presumably, a matter of stretching Mathew's original crisp prose to more closely match his own more verbose style.

Mathew also wrote frequently for the Boston-based "Carpet-Bag," a humorous newspaper edited by Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber, creator of the "Mrs. Partington" character. This weekly ran from the spring of 1851 until the spring of 1853, continuing on for some portion of that year as a pocket-sized monthly. The story of Mathew's involvement with the "Carpet-Bag"—and with Shillaber, as a behind-the-scenes collaborator—is complicated and deeply hidden. For example, Mathew wrote all the works—including the spin-offs—associated with the pseudonym "Trismegistus" in this paper. We have seen that he first employed this pseudonym in 1828, for the "New-England Galaxy." But in Shillaber's memoirs, he inexplicably assigned the "Trismegistus" material and spin-offs to one Benjamin Drew, even though I have proved beyond a reasonable doubt that this was an error—intentional or unintentional. At any rate, one of the spin-offs from "Trismegistus" was a reporter who wrote in verse, named "A. Trunk." The name "A. Trunk" was likely a reference to the Atlantic & St. Lawrence Railroad, which ran out of Portland, Maine. This, in turn, identified Mathew as the author, inasmuch as he supported his estranged second wife Jane there, and maintained a flat in that city in order to visit his children. In a four-part series beginning in the Feb. 7, 1852 edition, "A. Trunk" writes of having attended a panorama (scrolling mural) of the Crystal Palace, in which the London World's Fair was held. Mathew had, in fact, attended the previous year when writing as "Quails," but there was a statue he had missed—"The Nymph of Lurleiberg" by Friedrich Wilhelm Engelhard. This statue depicts a young woman seated on a rock in a stream, holding a lyre but not playing it. Her countenance is downcast, and upon being suddenly confronted with a life-sized image of this figure, Mathew is powerfully reminded of Abby, in the two weeks after their eight-month-old daughter Sarah had died (possibly in a fire), and before Abby, herself, succumbed to consumption and a broken heart. At the same time, he feels her spiritual presence contacting and uplifting him (just as he had in the poem, "For in much Wisdom is much Grief"); and that evening, he is visited by her in a dream, just as he has related in "Love's Song."

The following week, as he continues the "A. Trunk" series, he remarks how pleasantly surprised he is that Shillaber actually published the first number:

> Dear Carpet-Bag,—though little vain
> Of such a wild, disjointed strain
> As that last week I meditated,
> The "Nymph of Lurleibergh" is glad
> That she herself was not *trunk*ated,
> As I myself anticipated,
> But left, all lovely, lone and sad,
> To cool her shins upon the rocks,
> With voiceless lute and flowing locks.

Then, being recharged by his spirit contact with Abby, he gets down to business; and in so-doing, tells us *why* he writes:

> And once again I seize the pen
> To teach the erring sons of men,
> And drag a mighty knave to view,
> (The reader need not look so blue,
> I mean not *him*, I mean not *you!*)

While Mathew's advice on how to write is quite scarce, his satirical examples of how *not* to write are relatively frequent. One example, out of many, will suffice. In the July 24, 1852 edition of the "Carpet-Bag," there is a parody of popular "blood and thunder" tales entitled "Battle of Fuddleville," signed "Terrible Horrible Smith, A.S.S., etc." It begins:

> Hark! from yon forest of pines there comes the blast of a bugle! Riding along the gale it calls the veteran warriors and the young to the rescue!
>
> High up on the summit of yon lofty mountain sits the war eagle, fiercely glancing around!
>
> See! it waves its broad wings, it arises in the clouds, and is lost to the sight!
>
> But Captain Dickens saw! He saw that war eagle arise from the summit of that lofty mountain, and vanish in the clouds!
>
> His heart is filled with military fire! Behold him as he mounts his battle steed, and urges him with lightning speed to the forest of pines!
>
> He seizes the bugle from his belt, and blows that blast!

It so happens there had been one earlier sketch bearing this same signature, wherein the story itself was well-written, but the *plot* was the parody. The title is "A Night of Terror: Or, the

Secrets and Mysteries of the Black Art Unfolded." It revolves around the colloquial expression "printer's devil," i.e., a printer's assistant, such that the protagonist has stumbled, in the dark, into a print shop. Hearing so many ominous references to the "devil" and other suggestive terms, he imagines he has fallen into Hell! This one stands as an example of good writing, even while lampooning the genre. The conclusion reads as follows:

> "Bring me that shooting-stick, Dev."
>
> "Now," thought I, "my time has come." I prepared nobly to meet death. "He will shoot me! I resign myself to my fate."
>
> I closed my eyes, and awaited the report. None came. I heard a hammering, and opening my eyes, the black-haired gentleman was driving a nail into the wall. For a long, long time nothing more occurred. At the end of that time, Miseration arose from his seat, put on a hat and overcoat, and approached the door near which I was crouched. I trembled lest he should brush against me, and moved farther off.
>
> "What was that?" he exclaimed. "Proceed this way all hands. Devil, transport hither the sheep's-foot; Jack, take that broom; Mr. Muffle, mind your eye. Bush, seize the wash basin; there are robbers here!"
>
> All was commotion. My hair arose, my blood congealed, my knees quaked; I seized them, lest they should crack together and the concussion be heard. My throbbing head seemed ready to burst; I clapped my hands until it to hold it together, lest, bursting, the report should be heard. I felt an icy hand laid on my shoulder, another on the other; another seized me by this hair; Jack, in his bountiful courage, seized the broom and "stood afar off," and the demon, devil, or what not, seized me by the nose and thus I was dragged along. I knew I was led to destruction. I repeated a prayer; a door was opened; I felt the chilly wind blowing upon me; they bore me to the edge of the precipice, and hurled me with demoniac violence into the abyss! Something swung against me; I seized it; 't was a depending chain; I lowered myself to the end, and felt I was safe! But, oh horror! the thought flashed across my mind; I had left my hat above—it was gone forever. I regained my home "in silence and sadness," impressed with the belief that there was recklessness in the world.
>
> Typo, Jr.
>
> Reader—if you hav' n't guessed it already, the individual was in a printing office, and the strange terms he heard were the technicalities of all such precints.—Eds. C.B.

Mathew prided himself on his originality. With perhaps two exceptions in his entire career,[4] if he gained inspiration from any other writer, he would credit the source as part of his subtitle, or in the introduction. (One of these examples, a poem clearly after one of Coleridge's works, was probably conceived as a parody, such that Mathew felt the source was obvious). There are two instances in which Mathew has specifically bragged on his originality, and we will present them together, out of chronological order, to avoid redundancy. The first occurs in the August 27,

1853 “Waverley Magazine,” in Boston. So far as I know, this is Mathew’s only contribution to this publication. There was an ongoing dispute, in letters to the editor, concerning the possible influence of Thomas Chivers’ poetry on “The Raven.” Mathew, being the real author of that poem (Poe having merely claimed it publicly by slight-of-hand), couldn’t resist chiming in. This he did signing with his “star.” As we have seen, Mathew often wrote in a kind of literary code, especially when exposing his plagiarists for posterity. Regarding the first portion of this letter, which I have fully analyzed elsewhere,[5] we will only summarize. In so many words, Mathew has indicted Edgar Allan Poe has an imitator, and a poor imitator, at that. He says that the commentators writing to the editor have it all wrong—that there is no question of Chivers influencing Poe, because “The Raven” was never Poe’s poem to begin with. Then in the final paragraph, he asserts that *he* was the author, by way of inference. He does this by bragging about his own *originality*. The clear inference is that if the commentators are badly mistaken; if Poe was a rank imitator (and hence could not possibly have written “The Raven”); and if *he* (the “star”), by way of contrast, is extremely original, then he must have been the true author.

Mathew’s closing reads:

> When *I write*, I shall startle the world by writing *without* rule, measure, or style; and for keeping house, I’ve a snug little plan of *my own*. My chairs will be on their sides, the tables and time-piece bottom upwards, my drawer handles inside, my kittens in cages, and my canaries at liberty — in short, you don’t catch me “dying into an echo,” as poor Poe would, if he had lived long enough to; depend upon it, I will prove that I have some *original ideas* and some little ways of my own, or you see, I never should be considered a *genuine Partington*. *

Note that, without the cartoonish misspellings, Mathew is taking very much the same tone as he did in his defense of “The Mistake of a Lifetime.” His reference to being a *genuine Partington* concerns his extensive collaboration with B.P. Shillaber, creator of that character. It so happens that Shillaber allowed Mathew write a sketch featuring Mrs. Partington’s delinquent nephew, Isaac, in the Feb. 14, 1852 “Carpet-Bag.” Entitled “Ike Partington’s Visit to the Country,” it is signed with this same signature, a “star.”

The second reference to Mathew’s originality appears in the July 12, 1862 edition of “Vanity Fair.” Mathew’s long-time fictional character, “Ethan Spike”—the only series Mathew is known for in the present-day scholarly literature, because it is the only one for which he was exposed as the author—writes an open letter to President Lincoln. He is essentially trying to shame Lincoln, through satire, into admitting black soldiers into the Union army; and by inference, into freeing the slaves. He begins:

> I was proper glad to see that Squire Rightman—the Mare of Boston—hed writ a lutter to the President—tellin him not toe be skairt—and not toe believe more’n half what Governor Andrew said in that sarsy lutter of hisn.
>
> I guess the President felt pretty slick when he got the Mare’s lutter—ef he’d bin skairt by the Governor:—as no doubt he wus. Et must hev bin toe his anxious feelins like

balmy-gideon an precious intment toe a stranger in a strange land—or a hart thustin in a water brook.

Et war a two edged so-erd—war the Mare's lutter—"cuttin two ways for sunday"—as we say in the classicks—et tickled Abram, but smoat John between his jints an marrer boans—like wise hip an thy.

Ginerally speakin, I claims to be origenal—wich is toe say Uniquecorn—but the eggzarmple of the Mare has bin two much for me—as you will see by the foregoin—

Hornby June 24, 1862.

Hon. Abrim Linkin Esq,

Deer Sir—The undersigned knowin you must hev bin greatly comforted an consoled by the recent patriotick gushin and aoutbilin sentiments in the lutter of my friend—the moast warshipful and warshipin Mare of Boston—which is likewise the hub of the univarse—takes my pen in hand to say that he or the undersigned—meanin me—is also in high places—being cheerman of the seelickmen of the taoun of Hornby, and beg leave toe report, moreover umbly showeth wot shall herein arter appear.

Just as Mathew had protested the reviews of his 1850 novel, "The Mistake of a Lifetime," he protested one review, in particular, of his 1855 social reform novel, "The Rag-Picker; Or, Bound and Free." This book was briefly and nefariously claimed by George P. Burnham, whose name nonetheless became associated with it in the modern library system. I have addressed this issue elsewhere, as well.[6] Suffice it to say that the very idea of Burnham's authorship is patently absurd, and that he, along with a partner named Francis A. Durivage, had evidently swindled Mathew out of the rights to a vast, unpublished portfolio in early 1848.

Many of the reviews for "The Rag-Picker," which book was published anonymously, were favorable, especially one by Mathew's former supervisor in the Abolitionist movement, William Lloyd Garrison. However, a review in the Boston "Traveller" apparently was not. Mathew saw fit to publish a paid rebuttal, where the "query" at the end is a sure sign of his authorship. Even though the inference is that this was written by the publisher, Mason Brothers, "us" is actually Mathew using the "royal we":

The *Boston Traveller*, speaking of 'THE RAG PICKER," a new work just published by us, says that "the work is but an indifferent tale," &c. Others think differently. *The Puritan Recorder* styles it "a most stirring and pathetic story"—"a most intensely exciting book." The *Boston Atlas* says "it cannot but become a work of no inconsiderable note." It also adds, "As a tale it is replete with incident; its characters are natural and distinctly depicted, and the interest of the narrative is well sustained." The *New York Saturday Evening Post,* after mentioning "The Lamplighter," "The Watchman," and others of the most successful American books, says, "The latest novel of this class, and we may add the most original in its conception, the widest in its scope, the most interesting in its narrative, and the best in its execution, is the handsome

> duodecimo under review." The *Boston Transcript* is of the opinion that "the story is a most exciting one, well and powerfully written." It says further that "it is a remarkable story," and "will be extensively read by that class of persons who delight in 'Uncle Tom's Cabin,' 'Ida May,' and other modern tales of that class" (a somewhat extensive one, by the way). The *New York Evening Post* (edited by Wm. C. Bryant, no mean authority,) says it is "a clever novel," and adds, "The narrative is rapid and spirited, and the dialogue is managed with a good deal of dramatic skill." The *New York Sunday Times* says it "is worked up well, and with a master hand, and overflows with thrilling points and beautiful sentiments."
>
> *Query*—Did the writer of the notice in the *Traveller* read the "Rag Picker," or has he adopted the principle advanced by Sidney Smith, that in order to criticize a book one should not read it?
>
> The RAG PICKER is for sale by Booksellers generally, Price $1,25.

This simply tells us that Mathew was quite aware of the power, quality and influence of his own work. He remained hidden behind a veil of modest anonymity, but at times he became so frustrated that he *had* to speak out.

We can see Mathew's frustration that his work wasn't properly understood, in a letter to his brother dated Feb. 19, 1857. Mathew was active in the Spiritualist movement, being a member and officer, in Portland, Maine of the local Spiritualist association. The group would bring in paid speakers, but when none were scheduled, the members, themselves, would step up to the podium. Mathew had done so four times, but with disappointing results:

> Spiritualism continues on the increase in this city. There are two meetings every Sunday. One at "Piano Forte Hall" on Federal St. and the other at the rooms of the "Mechanic's Institute". At the latter the attendance will average about 400. The officiating clergymen at this house are J.G. Woodman Pres-t York Cumberland Railway. S.B. Beckett one of the correspondents of the Advertiser. Mr. [Blu—-?] & myself. I have preached 4 "sarmints" this winter. Once from the text "There are more things in Heaven & Earth—Horatio—than your philosophy has dreamed of." and at another time my text was "What good will it do? Will it pay?" So far as I can judge, my efforts in this line have not been remarkably edifying, having rather an amusing tendency. One of my parishoners told me the other day "he liked to hear me preach—it was so funny!!" Encouraging wasn't it? Another says my sermons are as good as Dow Jr.'s patent ones. Thus my parochial labors are encouraged—of course they are much lighter for it.

As we have come to expect, Mathew hides the depth of his feelings behind humor. Sadly, the text of these sermons has not, so far as I'm aware, been preserved. Mathew was first and foremost a philosopher; and the two for which he has given titles were clearly on deep subjects. The first would have concerned the inability of man's intellect to encapsulate all of God's creation within its scope, and the tendency for beliefs to become self-limiting. The second would have addressed the topics of *motivation* and *valuation*. When, however, he illustrated these

points with humor, his audience simply remained on the surface layer of the talk and enjoyed the humor for its own sake. This, you will recognize, was his continual frustration as a man ahead of his time, in all of his prose and poetry.

Finally, we come to a series concerning "Mr. Blifkens the Martyr," given in a book entitled "Partingtonian Patchwork" which was published in 1872 by B.P. Shillaber. This book represents a loose collaboration with Mathew, who remained strictly anonymous. Some of the work was in fact authored by Mathew; much of it was written by Shillaber; but this particular series is a strange admixture. It appears to represent stories that Mathew told Shillaber in private, concerning his unfortunate arranged second marriage to Jane Vaughan. One or two of the poems contained within the stories appear to have been written by Mathew; he may, or may not, have also contributed some portions of the text. The "Blifkins" stories were published by Shillaber individually, in the late 1850's, and have been compiled, here, for the 1872 publication. Mathew was married to Jane Vaughan from 1842 (one year after Abby's death) until 1849, when he formally separated from her. This, despite the fact that he had lived separately in New York City from the fall of 1844 until mid-1849, when he lived briefly in Philadelphia, and then began traveling the New England states as a postal inspector. It was during this latter period that he wrote his travelogue as "Quails." However, he returned to Portland in mid-1852, living separately in the area, probably for the purpose of helping to raise his youngest daughter, Ally. Contrary to Mathew's biographer Lloyd W. Griffin, it was only in mid-1857, when Mathew was publicly exposed as the author of the "Ethan Spike" series, that he was blacklisted and hence unable to support the family financially. He did *not*, as Griffin suggested, "abandon his family."

The "Blifkins" series covers many aspects of unhappily married life. Like all of Mathew's humor, it superficially seems to address the minor annoyances experienced by all married couples—but in truth, it chronicles a deeply dysfunctional relationship, in which the browbeating wife evinces a marked lack of disrespect for her husband. In the middle of all this, is a chapter entitled "Blifkins the Author," which begins on page 40. The opening is extremely poignant, inasmuch as what is presented as a comic absurdity was a reality for Mathew, except for the very last line of the paragraph:

> "I am going to write for the press," said Blifkins, as his wife asked him what he had under his arm when he came home one day. He laid upon the table, as he spoke, a half ream of paper, a box of steel pens, a pint bottle of ink, four sheets of blotting-paper, a pot of mucilage, a new inkstand, and a bunch of pen-holders. "I am going to write for the press," he said, "and my name shall hereafter be known as one of its most honored contributors."
> * * *
> "Yes," continued he, "here, in the quiet of my own home, surrounded by sweet domestic influences, will I build me up a fabric of fame, and place the name of Blifkins among the stars."

Interesting that he should put it that way, i.e., "among the stars." As I write this paper, I hadn't noticed this little bit of code. Indeed, he had placed his "star-"signed anonymous work for the1830-34 New York "American," and the 1844-45 New York "Tribune" "among the stars," even though the credit went to Charles F. Hoffman and Margaret Fuller, respectively.

“Blifkins” humorously quotes the comic character, “Artemus Ward,” as follows:

> Artemus Ward says that “every man has his fort.” Blifkins knew this, and wondered what his “fort” [forte] was.

It so happens that in the days when Mathew was contributing heavily to the “Carpet-Bag,” Charles Farrar Browne, creator of “Artemus Ward,” was working as a printer’s apprentice for that newspaper. He got his start, as a humorist, by re-working one of Mathew’s own stories and inserting it, himself, into the April 17, 1852 edition. Mathew was so generous of spirit, that he had forgiven Browne, even though the “Artemus Ward” character was a blatant imitation of Mathew’s “Ethan Spike.” Very likely, Mathew had been mentoring Browne, and found in him an exceptionally able student despite his lack of originality.

Returning to “Blifkins,” the expected happens—there is no peace and quiet at home for an author. Mathew—or Shillaber, if it is he telling the story—concludes it as follows:

> Click! click! click! click!
>
> The sewing-machine in the sewing-room sent up a pleasant note; Mrs. Blifkins and a neighbor were discussing domestic economy in the sitting-room; Mary Jane thrummed the piano in the room below; above, the children “volleyed and thundered;” the little boy was dragging his truckle-cart down stairs; and in the street an alarm of fire made noise enough to drown the crash of the Union when it breaks.
>
> Poor Blifkins seized his hat and rushed out in a condition bordering on despair.
>
> We were in his study a few days since, and as we sat conversing with him he told us his experience, the ambition that had inspired him, and its failure.
>
> “Mr. Blifkins,” said a voice on the stairs, “will you come down and bring up some coal?”
>
> He looked at us sadly, and went out like a lamp poorly trimmed. We lifted a sheet of paper from the floor, and upon looking at the writing found it to be—
>
> > “The Cruise of the Seven Pollies:
> > A Tale of the Sea.
>
> “At the close of a lovely day, &c., &c., &c., he said to the first officer, who leaned listlessly over the rail”—
>
> And that is all that the world will ever know of it.

There is one small clue suggesting that Mathew Franklin Whittier wrote this chapter, and it is the sentence ending “...and in the street an alarm of fire made noise enough to drown the crash of the

Union when it breaks." This would have been written around 1857, before the South had seceded. Shillaber was politically conservative, but Mathew was a Garrisonian Abolitionist. It so happens that Garrison was also a disunionist, whose motto was "No Union with slaveholders." I discovered that Garrison gives Mathew's name, in the Oct. 9, 1857 "Liberator," as an attendee at his upcoming convention, which had been called "to consider the practicability, probability, and expedience of a separation of the Free and Slave States, and to take such other measures as the condition of the times may require." If one of these two men, Shillaber or Mathew, had joked about the "crash of the Union when it breaks," it would definitely have been Mathew.

While I have discovered nothing like a treatise on writing by Mathew Franklin Whittier, these and other snippets make quite clear what his ideals were. The same can be found in his praise of other writers, both historical and contemporary, though we have not explored that avenue in this paper. It's clear enough that he strove for inspired, original work, which would benefit society and expose wrongs, and wrong-doers, to the public sight; and undergirding all his work, including his humor, was deep philosophical insight. Thus, his stories were not merely intended for entertainment—they were *teaching stories*. At the same time, his love for his soul-mate permeated his writing with countless private reminiscences given in disguised references; as well as direct accounts of spirit contact, chiefly through dreams, albeit published in deep anonymity. These were the causes that he and Abby shared, in their marital partnership and literary collaborations—and he would continue to write about them in tribute.

Postscript

In June of 2023, after I had, as I thought, completed this paper, I discovered a full essay which Mathew Franklin Whittier devoted to this very topic, by way of giving advice to aspiring writers. Inasmuch as it would be very difficult to adequately summarize, and since it stands, itself, as an example of writing as well as a tutorial, I will close by presenting it in full. I will only comment, here, on certain autobiographical elements.

While Mathew admonishes his readers to faithfully persevere in various stages of development, he, himself, stepped onto the literary stage fully formed at age 12, publishing sophisticated, original works in the "New-England Galaxy"—a major Boston literary newspaper—in 1825. On the other hand, he had assiduously studied the great European masters of satirical literature; and he presumably had the benefit of tutoring by his brother, John Greenleaf Whittier, older than himself by five years. Very soon, he would be tutored in poetry by his young mentor, Abby Poyen, a child prodigy. Mathew was himself an inspired literary child prodigy—but nonetheless, he studied prodigiously and honed his craft. Thus, in this essay he cautions those who imagine they are geniuses, and who use this self-assessment to short-circuit the process of learning from the great writers of the past, such as Mathew, himself, had passed through. The only place in the essay in which he refers to people like himself, is this one short paragraph:

> It is by no means to be understood or believed, that every body goes through precisely this process, but it is held for certain, that many tolerably good, and even great writers, have gone through something very similar, and in a very similar way.

By inference, if even a few great writers have had to go through this process, then *most* of them

have not. And Mathew was not one of the few who had to go through it—which simply means he was what is commonly termed a "natural."

This essay—signed with his long-time secret signature, a "star" or single asterisk—appeared in the March 6, 1852 Portland "Transcript":

EARLY AUTHORSHIP.

Of all the objects which men pursue, perhaps none which is obtained by so few is still followed after by so many, as is literary distinction Fresh aspirants continually supply the laces of those who are continually turning back, and falling by the way side. Though as the way advances the crowd becomes thinner and thinner, till only a few sturdy wayfarers march along, each by himself, yet at its beginning, all is pushing, pulling, crowding hubbub and confusion.

The young author, before he can properly be called so, that is, before he in any sense deserves the name of an author, has often to go through a tedious initiative. Reference is not here had to that general cultivation and developement of mind, necessary to the able discharge of the duties of any literary calling, but to those studies, labors, and processes which are peculiar to the author. The first motions of the beginner, have indeed as little resemblance to the efforts of the finished writer, as the antics of the child to the labors of the man, yet it is certain that many great authors have taken all, or nearly all, these initiative steps. Instances are too numerous to need citation.

When one first essays to write, he generally does just as he did when he first tried to speak or walk, that is imitate; and his are generally miserable imitations of most miserable originals. However, these things are not to be found fault with. If the baby babbles, it is a sign he may talk well; if he kicks, it is a sign he may excel all men in running.

Hitherto, our author *to be*, has exercised certain faculties which may one day make him a good writer, just enough to prove their existence. His efforts for the most part, have been mere imitations, and very poor at that. But by and by he shows a new phase. While he retains his imitative habits, in respect to the thought, in respect to the expression, he begins to invent. Before, he could not properly be said to study any thing, now he studies style. He falls to devising matchless figures, and to concocting precious sentences. He compounds his periods as carefully as the apothecary puts up his recipe. This time more than any other, is fruitful of oh's, ah's and signs, of doleful complaints about one's own sufferings, and the coldness of the world, of execrable sonnets, indited to Spring, friendship, and the moon. Our friend now gets enamoured of books, full of hard words and fine sentiments, but in which common sense is the most uncommon thing to be met with.

This stage is at length past. Though many stick here, like poor Pliable in the slough of Despond, never see the farther shore, *our* hero at least struggles fairly through. He at length begins to understand how the body is more than raiment, and the thought more

than the expression. Thenceforward he has a double labor to perform. He must at once learn and unlearn, do and undo, demolish and build; what things he before counted gain, he must now be content to throw away. To one who has got thus far, I would take the liberty to say, you have dressed up your puppets very gaily, and have seen them play finely, now get up and break them to pieces. Make this iconoclasm no half-way business. Do not leave any, lest like the gods which the Israelites failed utterly to destroy from among them, it should seduce your taste again to idolatry. Tear off from your style all the gay trumpery with which you have tricked it out, like an Indian dandy, wash away the fantastic painting, pull off every feather, bead, and gaudy rag, and it will stand up naked indeed, but perhaps an Apollo.

When the beginning has once learned to think and originate, and to plainly tell what he thinks, he may be considered as fairly entered on his course.

It is by no means to be understood or believed, that every body goes through precisely this process, but it is held for certain, that many tolerably good, and even great writers, have gone through something very similar, and in a very similar way.

We have now seen our hero fairly through the wicket gate, but the long way is still before him, and it may not be amiss to look forward to that which still remains to him.

Many are the objects for which literary aspirants are seeking. Some seek greatness as a means of usefulness to themselves and others, and some wish to be great that they may be great, and some wish to seem great, for the sake of the seeming. These objects fully carried out, are worthy, the first, of a saint, the second of an idolator, the last of a fool. It would certainly be well if every one, who begins at any profession, would be at the trouble to understand his motives and purposes, as he would be very likely to have better objects, and much more likely to obtain them. All the pomp of assembled Greece, never entered the eye of the Olympic victor, as he rushed forward in his breathless career, for by keeping his eye fixed on the prize at the end of his course, he gave more unerring direction to his efforts, and continually stimulated himself with fresh hopes. And it is likewise true, that by distinctly proposing to ourselves the thing we wish to do, and by steadily regarding it, we shall effect much more, than by living and working at random.

But whatever be the hopes and purposes of those who turn themselves to literary pursuits, comparatively few, as before hinted, ever see them realized and accomplished. there are many reasons for this, some of which may properly be noticed. Many fail because they do not properly understand the nature and extent of their abilities, and exert them the wrong way. Many indeed, undertake to write, who have not sufficient abilities to effect much in any department of literature, but allusion is not now made to such. Many more, with very respectable abilities, are not content to do that for which they are peculiarly fitted. They waste their time and strength in continually striving at what they can never accomplish. Some, for instance, who might write a good essay, will think of nothing smaller than a volume. Some who could write a good biography, will take up with nothing short of history. Some who might report, write items of foreign

intelligence, and the news of the day admirably, utterly fail because they will write nothing but fiction.

A great many more, who might write some kind of prose very well, are obstinately bent on forever spinning miserable verses. These last are particularly at fault. A measure of poetic faculty, which is quite insufficient to make a good poet, may still make an excellent writer of prose.

The ostrich is generally called a silly bird; but she was never known to busy and tire herself by trying to fly, till the horseman was upon her; on the contrary she uses her wings just as they were made to be used, in speeding her course upon the ground, and to such good purpose that she is seldom overtaken.

Now if the wings of our genius be not long enough or strong enough to bear us through the air—let us still be comforted. They will serve to greatly mend our pace when we run upon the ground. If we cannot soar like the eagle, we will run like the ostrich. If we cannot rule in heaven we will excel upon the earth. Many also who have written good verse have written still better prose. if Sir Walter Scott had trusted to his poetry alone, his renown would have been but a fraction of what it now is. The verses of Lamartine are completely eclipsed by his history of the Gidonists and his history of the Restoration. The poems of Macauley are full of nerve, but the make a small part of the usefulness or fame of the most learned historian, and brilliant essayist living.

We have seen our young writer fairly through the wicket gate, but the long way is yet before him—a way in which he will have need of patient care and continual exertion. Those who seek to soften or shorten it, will hardly turn out better than some of the acquaintances of Christian. When there rises up before them some hill difficulty, or when Demus invites them aside to dig in the silver mine, they turn aside, and are no more seen in the way. And though they should seem to be even at the reward they sought, they will still want the proper equipments and credentials, the coat, the armor, and the scroll. Many there are indeed with perhaps somewhat more vanity than sense, who ostentatiously set up their claims to genius and fast writing, and very flippantly discard all the old fashioned doctrine of work. It would be very difficult, no doubt, to convince them that they are in any way mistaken, but time will show whether they have done wisely in forsaking the old course, consecrated by deeds so illustrious, and by names so great.

Because the impetuous harangues of Demides sometimes, as it is said, surpass the orations of his greater friend—because the words of Mirabeau fell upon the convention as the hot tornado falls upon the tropic sea, whose coming and going no man knoweth—because the eloquence of our own Henry, was like a mountain torrent which swells and subsides in an hour-it surely is not safe to discard as folly the wisdom of greater men than these.

A few scattered brilliant exceptions, must not make us forget the great general rule. We must still bear in mind those worn out stories about the pebbles, the under-ground cell,

and the half shaved head of the prince of orators. Let us still remember how Cicero declares, that what time others gave to healthful recreation, seasonable convivialities, and to needful sleep, he devoted to study.—Curran, too, stammering jack Curran, as his schoolmates used to call him, after relating the incidents of his first speech, adds, "so you see it was not born in me." And Webster says of his first declamation, "I went home and wept bitter tears of mortification." We must not be ignorant of the endless labors of Bossuit and Burke, or of the Cyclopian toil that forged and polished those shafts of Sheridan, which shone and smote like the lightning. Nor must we suppose that the best historical and philosophical works have been produced with less pains.

But there may be some, who will admit the justice of these remarks when applied to prose compositions, who will not so readily with respect to poetry. The idea is very generally entertained, that poetry springs more from sudden inspiration, and is produced with less labor and pains taking, than prose. Facts, it is believed, do not go far to confirm this sentiment.

Of the most perfect models of poetry, "those two strange old poems which have come down to us from the remote depths of antiquity," we know scarcely more than what they reveal of themselves, no man certainly knows what mind, or what age produced them. Yet one thing every discriminating scholar knows, that they are the offspring of majestic genius and incredible toil. The Eclogues of Virgil have often been cited. Horace compares his assiduous labors to those of the bee, and we see the honey which he then stored is not yet spent.—We must not forget that the greatest poet now living, is pre-eminent as well for his labors as his talents. While we admire the Paradise Lost and the Vision, we must consider well, with what mighty essay Milton bore himself in the flight of the angels, and with what solemn heed Dante trod amid the burnings of hell. Those far heights which overlook the world, we may be sure of it, are not to be scaled by the listless steps of indolence, or attained by wanton flights of genius.

Scarcely anything will be more to the profit of a young author, than the diligent study of good models. Reading is not study. When we merely read a good essay, oration or poem—we admire it much, but we shall know as little how to write anything in any sort like it, as the man, who having some afternoon wandered through Westminster Abby, would know of the principles of architecture on which the magnificent pile was built. No man can know much about the steam engine, by standing on the upper deck of the vessel, and watching the piston rods play, and the wheels move. If we would make one like it, we must hunt out every tube and valve. So with writing. Few indeed are lucky enough to hit at once upon those principles, by which the great masterpieces are constructed, or to detect at a glance, the secret springs of their power. *

Footnotes:

1) See "An Overview of the True Literary Legacy of Mathew Franklin Whittier," by Stephen Sakellarios © 2022, unpublished paper.

2) See “Disputing an Historical Authorship Attribution for the ‘Star’ in the 1830-33 New York ‘American,’” by Stephen Sakellarios © 2023, unpublished paper.

3) See “Mathew Franklin Whittier in his own words,” by Stephen Sakellarios, © 2012.

4) Mathew probably conceived of one of these, based on a poem by Coleridge, as a parody (although only the ending is in jest), such that he felt the matter was obvious. The second, from which he appears to have taken his central concept, was published anonymously in 1849 but attributed to Fortunatus Cosby in 1882. If that attribution was in error, Mathew may actually have been the author of both poems, inasmuch as he often returned to his own ideas to improve on them. The earlier, anonymous appearance was in a paper which Mathew submitted to frequently, and he did sometimes publish with no signature.

5) See “Evidence that Edgar Allan Poe Stole ‘The Raven’ From Mathew Franklin Whittier,” by Stephen Sakellarios, © 2022, unpublished paper.

6) See “The True Authorship of ‘The Rag-Picker; Or, Bound and Free,” by Stephen Sakellarios, © 2022, published as an “Academic Letter” by Academia.edu.