An Overview of the True Literary Legacy of Mathew Franklin Whittier

By Stephen Sakellarios ©2022 (revised 3/28/23)

Abstract:
This paper provides an overview of the hidden literary legacy of obscure 19th-century American author, Mathew Franklin Whittier. It thus serves as an introduction to work which focuses specifically on some of the more controversial proposed attributions, where the work in question has been assumed to belong to its now-famous plagiarist. This paper puts M.F. Whittier's legacy in a broader and deeper context, such that his authorship of those contested works becomes plausible. For example, if Mathew was, in fact, the author of a boys' Christian moral reform novel in 1863, signed with his own initials, then it is that much more plausible that he could have ghost written a similar novel, in an identical style, for Charles Burdett in 1845. Applying this logic to the famous works in question, if Mathew was writing a social reform novel protesting debtors' prison in 1834, this makes it that much more plausible that he could have co-authored the original of "A Christmas Carol" in 1838-39. But the 1834 attribution is itself contested, as is the 1830 journalistic work it clearly reflects. Therefore, we have a vast tapestry of literary work which is extremely difficult to establish for Mathew's pen, because it was almost all published anonymously, such that one proposed attribution depends on another, and so-on. For this reason, while the strongest evidence is not presented here for lack of space, this overview is absolutely essential to form the groundwork for further explorations.

Mathew Franklin Whittier, younger brother of 19th-century poet John Greenleaf Whittier, is scarcely mentioned in the Whittier legacy. (To distinguish Mathew from his famous brother, we will refer to him as "Mathew" rather than "Whittier.") Mathew's life has been given in only two biographies: a 1941 student thesis by Lloyd W. Griffin, entitled "The Life and Work of Matthew Franklin Whittier,"[1] and a biographical sketch written by Daniel G. Royot for "Encyclopedia of American Humorists."[2] Griffin cites, as Mathew's sole literary production, a series of satirical letters featuring "Ethan Spike" from the fictional Maine town of "Hornby." He also mentions a few other pieces written over the "Spike" signature, which do not concern this character. However, he casts doubt on whether an earlier story featuring the town of "Hornby," written over "Poins," was Mathew's work. Dr. Royot claims only "Ethan Spike" for Mathew's pen. Neither biographer mentions the "versifying" which Mathew is said to have done by some of the John Greenleaf Whittier biographers. Only one example is given in the Whittier legacy: a humorous poem Mathew is said to have written (presumably as a child), in response to his mother's urging to "write something serious." In short, the Whittier legacy, and Mathew's own biographers, would have us believe that none of his poetry—if indeed he wrote any—survives; and, that he published little or nothing else besides "Ethan Spike."

The following is a synopsis of Mathew's literary career as it emerged from the author's research, rather than as it is portrayed by his biographers. All assertions made in this summary have been factually substantiated in other works, but the confirming evidence must be largely omitted here, for lack of space. Mathew deeply buried himself in anonymity from 1825 to 1879, adopting perhaps hundreds of different pseudonyms and refusing even to publicly challenge his plagiarists. Some of those plagiarists—and the work they stole from Mathew—are quite famous, today. However, in order to validate any of these claimed attributions, *another* anonymous work would have to be cited; and to validate that one, *another*, and so-on. His legacy is a vast tapestry. Thus, before the evidence is presented for either his obscure or now-famous work, Mathew must first be introduced. This paper is an overview of the work of an exciting literary dark horse of the Victorian era, who has been credited, up until now, with only one series.

Mathew was born in Haverhill, Mass. on July 18, 1812. He was both precocious and mischievous as a child, having some health issues concerning his stomach, and perhaps insomnia, which would plague him in his adult years. He was, however, the stronger and more able-bodied of the Whittier brothers, and was needed on the family farm. Thus, unlike his older brother, it appears he was denied a much-desired higher education. The arguments around this issue (along with other personal concerns) may have caused him to run away from home at age 12, in 1825. In the spring of that year, he had already been successfully publishing sophisticated work—mostly of a satirical and/or philosophical nature—in the Boston-based literary newspaper, the "New-England Galaxy." Upon running away from home, he lived alternately in Boston and New York City. He wrote for three newspapers—the "New-England Galaxy," under editor Joseph T. Buckingham; the "Berkshire American" in Pittsfield, Mass. under Asa Greene; and the "New York National Advocate" under Mordecai Noah (and later, for Noah's paper, the New York "Enquirer"). It would appear that these editors took young Mathew under their wing and mentored him. Mathew, although only twelve years old, grew to roughly 6'2" as an adult, and may have reached most or all of his height by that age, so that he appeared older than he was.

In lieu of attending college, Mathew educated himself; but he also availed himself of a tutored education at the hands of his future wife Abby Poyen, a child prodigy four years his junior. Abby had received an upper-class European-style education (her father, Joseph Poyen, was a marquis). It appears from various clues that she taught young Mathew French, German, Latin, poetry, and the ancient Greek classics, among other subjects. Much of this tutoring would have been accomplished by correspondence. In July of 1825, just before his 13th birthday, Mathew began publishing—in both the "Advocate" and the "Galaxy"—a series of faux letters from a country bumpkin in the big city who wrote in Yankee dialect with atrocious spelling (and frequent Malapropisms) named "Joe Strickland." This may have been the first instance of this genre in America, appearing four years prior to Seba Smith's "Major Jack Downing." The series was not, as Allen Walker Read opines, written by New York lottery shop owner George W. Arnold as a "puff."[3] It was, rather, written by a child prodigy in satirical literature, who had deeply studied the European masters in this field, and was writing home anonymously, mocking his parents' assessment of his intelligence as well as their concern that he would be morally corrupted by the lures of the city. Thus, "Joe Strickland" is abysmally ignorant, but he easily wins large sums in the lottery.

Though this remains speculative, it appears that Mathew was the original author of at least three stories published in the May, August and October editions, respectively, of the 1826 "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine," signed "By A Modern Pythagorean." The entire series was claimed (and presumably submitted) by Robert Macnish, but in this author's opinion all three were somehow obtained by him in an unpublished state, and plagiarized. The three pieces were titled "The Metempsychosis," "The Man with the Nose," and "The Barber of Gottingen." Mathew would have been 12 years old in May of 1826, turning 13 before the second and third stories were published. There are other works of comparable originality and sophistication identified for Mathew's pen at this age.

In late 1829, Asa Greene moved to New York City, establishing a bookstore and a newspaper called the "Constellation." Mathew followed, and while simultaneously pursuing a mercantile career, wrote for Greene's paper. Within a few months, Greene permitted Mathew to edit the paper, while he presumably concentrated on running his bookstore. The cholera epidemic of 1832 eventually drove Mathew from the city; soon after, the "Constellation" folded. Mathew then turned to writing novels, five of which Greene evidently helped him publish: "A Yankee Among the Nullifiers," "The Life and Adventures of Dr. Dodimus Duckworth," "The Perils of Pearl Street," "Travels in America," and "The Debtors' Prison." "Perils" is said to be the first published account of the financial world of New York City; while "The Debtors' Prison" is a reform novel, aimed at this particular social institution.

These books were completed over the years 1833-34. None are signed, except with pseudonyms; but because Asa Greene is listed as registering some of them—and as scholars knew nothing about Mathew's involvement—the books have erroneously been attributed (along with all of Mathew's work for the "Constellation") to Greene. Among the works which Mathew wrote for the "Constellation," is another series concerning a country bumpkin in the big city named "Enoch Timbertoes." He also frequently—though not exclusively—wrote under the single initial "D." for this paper, as well as authoring the unsigned editorials. Interestingly, the

fictional author/narrator in “Travels in America,” named “George Fibbleton, Esq.” encounters, in rapid succession, Joe Strickland, Enoch Timbertoes, and Major Jack Downing! It is as though Mathew is telling us, “I originated this genre, not Seba Smith. I wrote Joe Strickland and Enoch Timbertoes, and I can write Smith’s ‘Downing’ as well as he can.” (The dialogue between Fibbleton and Downing continues for some pages—far longer than one would normally expect for the cameo appearance of another author’s character.)

In 1834, Greene established the New York “Transcript.” Mathew began writing the Police Office reports; but he did so in a style which makes of each case a moral tale replete with black humor. These were not written by William H. Attree, as suggested by Arthur Lachlan Reed.[4] Attree, a British compositor, does not seem to have had any track record as a writer before being hired for the “Transcript”; whereas by 1834, Mathew had been writing sophisticated work in this ironic style for nine years.

In 1836, Mathew eloped with Abby Poyen to Dover, NH. This was a cotton mill town, and appearing in the Dover “Enquirer” at that time was a series of ten letters attacking the abolitionist stance, signed “Alpha and Beta.” Before marrying Abby, Mathew, as a Quaker, had been an advocate for the colonization solution to slavery, expressing concern that abolitionists would incite blacks to insurrections, which in turn would lead to indiscriminate bloodshed on both sides. However, by 1836 Mathew was strongly in agreement with Abby in support of abolition. Once the series of letters from “Alpha and Beta” concluded, Mathew and Abby launched a 10-part rebuttal, signing as “Kappa, Lambda and Mu.” Their chosen pseudonym was too easily penetrated; and their logic was powerful enough to get them driven from the city, once they were discovered. They escaped to Amesbury Mills, Mass., where Mathew’s family had moved after selling the family farm when Mathew married.

Abby died of “consumption” in March of 1841. She had, however, left a literary legacy of her own, which is beyond the scope of this paper—*except* as concerns one of their collaborations. The author has determined, from clues far too numerous to cite, here, that sometime in 1838—probably after the death of their 11-month-old son, Joseph Poyen Whittier, in August of that year—they began writing a short novel which would eventually be re-worked by Charles Dickens into “A Christmas Carol.” Each of them had written precursor works; these were incorporated into the “Carol.” The logistics of the transfer of the manuscript to Dickens, in brief, are as follows. This was not the first novel they had collaborated on. In the same period that Mathew wrote the five novels for Asa Greene, Abby was working on one of her own, entitled “Chanticleer: A Thanksgiving Story of the Peabody Family.” That Mathew contributed to it, is seen by his opposing views on eating meat, which he rather incongruously tacked on to a sermon given by Abby’s patriarch character at a Thanksgiving service. This book was published anonymously in New York in 1850; by 1856, it was claimed by Mathew’s former editor on “Yankee Doodle Magazine,” Cornelius Mathews. Mathews owed Mathew (M.F. Whittier) money for his contributions to “Yankee Doodle”; likely, Mathew had told him that if he published this book for him in 1850, the debt would be forgiven. But by 1856, Cornelius Mathews was erroneously assumed to be the author, and he took advantage of the situation by placing his name on subsequent reprintings.

Mathew had been personal friends with Oliver Wendell Holmes at least as of his teaching stint at Dartmouth Medical School, which indicates that this friendship existed in 1838 (four years before Charles Dickens first came to America). Holmes was one of the men instrumental in inviting Dickens to Boston. One hundred fifty young Bostonians—mostly authors—were invited to the welcome dinner. It is not only plausible that Mathew would have attended, it is unthinkable that he *wouldn't* have. He admired Dickens, and almost certainly his friend, Holmes, would have arranged a personal introduction. There is, in fact, a record of correspondence between Dickens and Mathew; and it is known that many young American authors presented their manuscripts to Dickens. All that is required, by way of speculation, is that Mathew was among them, handing over the "Christmas Carol" that he and Abby had collaborated on. His intention would have been to give their work, which was intended to spiritually transform Society, to a popular author who would be in a position to disseminate it to the entire world. In a particular sense, Mathew was *using* Dickens as a carrier, to accomplish the dreams of social reform which he and Abby had shared. He would have been doing this in her honor, as a tribute, sacrificing his own public claim to the piece. What he didn't consider, however, was that Dickens was a far more worldly man than Mathew took him for, and in his revisions, would water down the more spiritual elements of the work—something Abby, were she alive, would never have approved of. Again, there is a great deal of objective evidence which is beyond the scope of this paper to present, here.

Mathew wrote a number of poetic tributes to Abby after her death. The earliest ones naturally reflect the torture of fresh grief, and the agony of a faith crisis. The later ones praise Abby's exceptional qualities, or recount their courtship. But it appears that in late 1842, or early 1843, Mathew was in a mood to share his work with various literati, both at home and abroad. He evidently shared some of his unpublished work with Edgar Allan Poe, in a personal meeting; and, he must also have sent other poems to the future Elizabeth Barrett Browning. Barrett published five of Mathew's poems in her 1844 compilation, "Poems": "Lady Geraldine's Courtship," "The Lost Bower," "A Child Asleep," "Wine of Cyprus," and "The Cry of the Children."[5] Mathew, who was once again working and writing in New York City as of the fall of 1844, submitted "The Raven" to the "American Whig Review" under the pseudonym, "—— Quarles," and it was published in their Feb., 1845 (second) edition. Poe, a reviewer for the New York "Evening Mirror," would have obtained an advance copy of the "American Review" in that capacity. Possessing the copy that Mathew had earlier given him, he was able to convince his editor that he was the author, and arranged for it to be printed in the Jan. 29, 1845 edition of the "Mirror,"—effectively scooping Mathew by two days. Poe had made only minor revisions; but when he replaced the phrase "sublunary being" with "living human being" in the ninth stanza, he didn't know that "sublunary" was one of Mathew's favorite words (probably, something he and Abby had privately enjoyed). Mathew used "sublunary," or variations thereof, 23 times throughout the course of his literary career.

There is also evidence that Mathew was the original author of "Annabel Lee," containing, as it does, idiosyncratic autobiographical references to the circumstances of Abby's death. Specifically, Abby was taken by two of her sisters from Portland, Maine to her family home in East Haverhill about a week before she died—and note that these sisters were literally "high born." Very likely, this poem was never intended for publication, being written privately to "Abigail P——." That Poe never published it during his lifetime, despite having a copy since

early 1842, suggests that Mathew must have threatened to expose him if he did so, because the poem was so deeply personal.

Meanwhile, (to further stretch the reader's credulity), Mathew was writing over a printer's asterisk, or "star," for the New York "Tribune" during this period. This body of work has been mistakenly attributed to Margaret Fuller. But Mathew had been using this pseudonym off-and-on since 1829, and continued to use it—for various newspapers—throughout his 50-year career. He had, for example, signed as a "star" for book reviews as early as 1832, in a young man's magazine in Boston called "The Essayist." In that same publication, signing as "Franklin, Jr.," he had favorably reviewed the poetry of Francis Quarles—and he praised Quarles in the "Tribune" as well, not long before the publication of "The Raven."

We have skipped over Mathew's contributions to the Portland (Maine) "Transcript," which began in late 1838. From 1842 to 1845, he primarily wrote as "Poins," which can be definitely proven for Mathew inasmuch as John Greenleaf Whittier refers, in correspondence, to having received a piece with this signature from his brother. Indeed, the "Hornby" story which Griffin questions as Mathew's work was, in fact, his. Furthermore, over this same signature are found adventure stories and poetry. An early "Poins"-signed example of poetry in the same style as those claimed by Barrett and Poe, is seen in the March 11, 1843 "Transcript." Entitled "The Crucifixion," it conveys Mathew's Christian faith, as well as his tendency toward nature mysticism. Royot concluded that Mathew was a "nihilist," based on his interpretation of the "Ethan Spike" series, but he was mistaken in this regard. To establish the style, for comparison purposes, I give the opening stanzas, here:

Over Jordan, vale and mountain,
Silence gathered like a pall,
Stayed the torrent, sealed the fountain,
Boding stillness over all.

On Genassaret's waters playing
Not an idle zephyr roves,
O'er the Mount of Olives straying
Not a breeze the foliage moves.

A poem in this same style appears in the Dec. 27, 1844 edition of the New York "Tribune," only a month before "The Raven" was published in the "American Whig Review." Signed "M.," it is almost certainly Mathew's production. It is entitled "The Might of Words," and the opening stanzas read:

What to man his greatness giveth
  O'er the creeping things and birds,
But the soul that in him liveth
  And the glory of his words?

In his voice were blent the rushing
  Of the storm-winds o'er the seas,

With the fountain's peaceful gushing
And the music of the breeze:

During this period of the mid-1840's, Mathew was also ghost writing for at least two authors: Francis A. Durivage in Boston, and Charles Burdett in New York City. For Durivage, he wrote "Angela; Or, Love and Guilt. A Tale of Boston and its Environs" (1843); "Edith Vernon; Or, Crime and Punishment. A Tragic Story of New England (1845); and "Mike Martin; Or, The Last of the Highwaymen. A Romance of Reality" (1845). For Burdett, he wrote "Never Too Late" (1845) and "Lilla Hart: A Tale of New York" (1846).

Before Mathew left the New York "Tribune," around July of 1846, he had begun publishing his "Ethan Spike" letters in the radical Boston "Chronotype," edited by abolitionist Elizur Wright. He also wrote for that paper under other pseudonyms, including an old pseudonym, "P." or "P.P." (for a childhood nickname, "Peter Pumpkin"), and one-offs like "Clam Chowder," "David Razur" or "Grapho Mania." A frequent series of letters from New York, in 1847, was signed with a barely-disguised variation on his initials, "X.F.W.," and on at least one occasion he signed with his middle name, "Franklin." For one series, a four-part travelogue, he even signed with his full name as "M.F. Whittier." This was one of the very few instances throughout his literary career in which he wrote under his own signature (he had done so with two of the adventure stories and a humorous sketch written for the Portland "Transcript" in the early 1840's). There are also instances of Mathew writing brief lodge reports for his organization, the "Odd Fellows," in their Boston newspaper, "The Odd Fellow," over his accustomed asterisk, as early as April 1, 1846—which means that he *overlapped the use of this signature with his "Tribune" reviews*. He would go on to write lodge reports and reviews over this signature for the "Odd Fellow" for several years.

When Mathew left the "Tribune" in mid-1846, he took a position writing the Police Office reports for the New Orleans "Daily Delta." Signing with his middle initial, "F.," he adopted the same style he had used for the New York "Transcript" ten years earlier. However, it appears that he was also working, in New Orleans, as an undercover operative for the abolitionist movement, probably contacting members of the Underground Railroad, and abolition sympathizers, there. He would do this for two more summers, in 1847 and 1848. In 1847 he wrote this column anonymously; in 1848, his stay was brief. Writing in a heavily obfuscated style, he described a meeting with his Southern colleagues, disguising it as a fishing expedition—but given that the series did not continue, he may have been discovered, fleeing to Boston. There, he published in the "Chronotype" a scathing report of a New Orleans slave auction he had personally witnessed, in two installments, under the pseudonym "Grapho Mania." Some of his pieces written for the "Daily Delta" were reprinted in "The Odd Fellow."

In mid-1848, it appears that Mathew was tricked into signing away the rights to his entire unpublished portfolio of humorous sketches and foreign adventure tales, to Francis Durivage and a wealthy partner, George P. Burnham. Very likely, he hadn't read the fine print of a contract (Griffin indicates that he was exceptionally gullible); he had only intended to continue offering certain pieces, as he had been doing the past few years, and would have wanted to retain control of the process. It's clear that this portfolio included some of his early work going back to 1830, because one sees, in the compilations published by Durivage and his partner, George Burnham,

stories which reflect a racism and use of black dialect that Mathew abandoned when he took up the abolitionist cause in 1836. When I use the term racism, I mean that Mathew reflected common white stereotypes of blacks in these early works, and depicted black dialect in the same spirit of light fun in which he imitated the dialects of Yankees, Irish, Dutch, French, sailors, etc. Nonetheless, even though these stories were whimsical rather than hateful, by today's standards they would be considered racist. By 1849, when Durivage and Burnham began publishing out of this extensive portfolio, Mathew would not have wanted them to see print, lest they reinforce the pro-slavery cause. This, however, becomes strong evidence that the portfolio was published, in bulk, against Mathew's will.

Durivage and Burnham began by submitting Mathew's humorous sketches to the New York "Spirit of the Times" and other newspapers in 1845. From 1845-1848, it appears that Mathew was either selling selected stories (mostly humorous anecdotes) from his portfolio, or ghost writing them. Durivage adopted one of Mathew's favorite colloquialisms, "The Old 'Un," giving Burnham "The Young 'Un." Most of this work from approximately the fall of 1845, was actually written by Mathew. Beginning in 1849, after Durivage had gained control of the entire portfolio, he published a great many of Mathew's foreign adventure stories under his (Durivage's) own name—although a few of these were portioned out to Burnham. They appeared chiefly in the Boston "Flag of Our Union;" later, they were published in "Gleason's Pictorial," which, with the "Flag," was owned by Frederick Gleason. The ruse adopted by these two con-artists, to explain how two different men (and with Burnham having no literary track record!) could write work of such exceptional quality in precisely the same style—in two different genres—was ingenious, if implausible. Burnham posed as the protégé of Durivage.

Mathew, not to be daunted, published a lengthy adventure novel of his own in 1850, entitled "The Mistake of a Lifetime: or, the Robber of the Rhine Valley," adopting the one-off pseudonym of "Waldo Howard." This book first appeared in serial form, being then published as a book. It was extremely popular with the public (if not with critics), and in this case, Mathew obtained a very high payment from Frederick Gleason—$3,000 in 1850 dollars, plus a percentage of sales.[6] This made Mathew wealthy, for a time, and if "success is the best revenge," he had obtained his revenge on Durivage and Burnham. In fact, he appears to have dedicated an entire chapter of "The Mistake" to a lampoon of Durivage, creating a sociopathic Frenchman with a poor command of English.

In March of 1853, Mathew began submitting to "The Knickerbocker" a series of letters from one "P. Pepper Podd," who in turn would send in poems written by his rustic acquaintance, "K.N. Pepper" (i.e., cayenne pepper). Podd's name is reminiscent of Mathew's childhood nickname, "Peter Pumpkin," while "K.N. Pepper" is evocative of his self-description, when a boy, as "some pumpkins!" With a few stylistic changes, "Pepper" is basically "Ethan Spike" in verse, and given that his themes closely parallel Mathew's own (as for example the nature of inspired genius, true love thwarted by a cruel father, and Hiram Powers' sculpture, "The Greek Slave"), there is little question of his authorship. However, in 1856 it appears that Mathew teamed up with a young admirer named James W. Morris (pseudonym "Jacques Maurice") who, presumably, was prepared to bankroll a book entitled "K.N. Pepper, and Other Condiments; Put Up For General Use." The book, copyrighted in 1858 but published in 1859, is a combination of mildly humorous essays in tribute to not only "Pepper," but also to "Spike" (suggesting that

Mathew had revealed to him his authorship of the latter series); along with the poems by "K.N. Pepper" which had appeared in "The Knickerbocker." Mathew's preface, writing as "P. Pepper Podd," makes it quite clear that this is a collaboration between two authors, one of them a junior admirer; however, posterity has somehow concluded that James W. Morris was the author of its entire contents.

In October of 1855, Mathew published yet another book entitled "The Rag-Picker: or, Bound and Free." This unsigned work was a hard-hitting social reform novel, graphically portraying the effects of alcohol abuse, child abuse, debtors' prison (as he had once done in 1834), and—for the last half of this 431-page book—the evils of slavery. William Lloyd Garrison published a glowing review in his newspaper, "The Liberator," relating that he had read the book *in one sitting*, and providing space on the fourth page of two editions for a lengthy excerpt. Reviewers compared it favorably with Dickens' novels, and with Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel, "Uncle Tom's Cabin." However, as no author stepped forward to claim it, two months later George Burnham—who, being wealthy, appears to have purchased a Boston bookseller just for this purpose—claimed authorship in an advertisement in the Boston "Herald." Another Boston paper, the "True Flag," picked up the claim, but it does not seem to have caught on. Nonetheless, Burnham's name has become associated with this book, apparently because these few references were discovered by intrepid biographers and bibliographers—being then penciled into the cover pages of library copies by dutiful librarians. Burnham, however, never had any part in the writing of this book. Note that the man who blithely published Mathew's early racist stories in 1848, is *extremely* unlikely to have been the author of "The Rag-Picker." Furthermore, in 1858 when the leaders of the Temperance movement in Boston protested Burnham's appointment to the position of State Liquor Agent, they cited his book, "History of the Hen Fever," by way of accusing him of fraud, but failed to mention his supposed authorship of the Temperance novel, "The Rag-Picker."[7] This proves that either his claim was unknown, or not taken seriously.

Also in 1855, Francis Durivage—again, on the strength of the work he had stolen from Mathew—obtained an associate editorship with "Ballou's Pictorial," when it changed hands from "Gleason's Pictorial." Immediately, Durivage began publishing yet another of Mathew's novels, presumably taken from his portfolio, entitled "Steel and Gold: or, The Heir of Glenville." This novel, set in the American Revolutionary War, seems to have been one of Mathew's young efforts.

During this entire time, Mathew contributed to the Portland "Transcript" over various signatures, including his "star." When Elizur Wright was forced out of the "Chronotype" in 1850, Mathew brought his "Ethan Spike" character back to the "Transcript" (he had published the very first one in the Jan. 10, 1846 edition of that paper).

We have not touched upon one interesting historical incident, with regard to Mathew's early contributions of "Ethan Spike" to the "Chronotype," and that is James Russell Lowell's *imitation* of "Ethan Spike." Mathew published the first two "Spike" letters in the "Chronotype" on May 20 and 27, 1846. Lowell published his first "Hosea Biglow" letter in the June 17, 1846 edition of the Boston "Courier." Immediately, in the June 19 edition of the "Chronotype," Mathew answered him, by incorporating "Biglow" into an "Ethan Spike" sketch:

> Mr. Rite, Sur:—There's bin great doins up here sence i writ to you before. We'd jest got cooled off about the war, an was comfortably settlin down agin on the blessins of a free government garinteed to us by the declaration of independence—when, last friday we found hand-bills stuck up all over town, settin fourth that a mister Bigelow from Boston or Kerneticut or somers that way, was goin to lectur on slavery at the lower school-house next sabberday evenin.
>
> Afore 10 o'clock that day, the hull town was in an uproar. A publick meetin was held in the arternoon, an such a jam i never seed. We had to put props under the gallerys an even then i thought the old meetinus would go for it, besides the boys in the winders, an some that couldn't come on account of washing sheep. Squire Strout took the cheer and addressed the meetin in fust rate stile.

The problem, here, is that Mathew had created an ignorant pro-slavery character, for the purposes of lampooning this segment of society; whereas, in rank imitation, Lowell had inexplicably created an *ignorant anti-slavery character*. Nonetheless, whether due to Lowell's social status and influence, or the fact that his character was more socially acceptable, Lowell achieved lasting recognition for his imitation, while Mathew achieved only temporary, grass-roots fame.

As indicated earlier, in 1846-47, Mathew was also writing for the first American humor magazine patterned after England's "Punch" and "Cruikshank's Comic Almanack," called "Yankee Doodle," in New York City. Among other contributions (including parodies of Edgar Allan Poe, and of "The Raven"), Mathew wrote a character very similar in style to "Enoch Timbertoes," called "Joshua Greening." The series was titled "Various Attempts to 'See the Elephant,'" the phrase meaning, colloquially, efforts to see the crowning glory of a place, or the "best of the best."

By mid-1848, Mathew was contributing to a newly-launched Boston paper, the "Weekly Museum," with whose editors he was simpatico. Very soon, however, the editorial duties were taken over by a closet conservative, Charles A.V. Putnam, with whom Mathew appears to have had a complicated relationship. Unlike the "Chronotype," where he only had to hide his identity from the readership, here he had to substantially disguise his radical message from his new *editor*, as well. Mathew wrote under a number of pseudonyms for this paper. These included, on rare occasions, the "star," but primarily he wrote as "Joe" and "Quails." "Quails" was the author of a travelogue, as Mathew was traveling through the New England states—apparently, as a postal inspector—having adopted the persona of an elderly gentleman working in some nameless capacity for the government. A rumor developed, originating with another of the paper's contributors, that the "Quails" travelogue was being written by an entertainer named Ossian Dodge. Inasmuch as Mathew failed to step forward to claim the series, the rumor grew, until by the paper's demise in mid-1852, Putnam asserting Dodge's authorship of the series in print. There is irrefutable proof, however, that it was written entirely by Mathew.

Knowing the real author, upon close inspection it is evident that Mathew was actually using this travelogue to report his abolitionist contacts—ostensibly because it was much safer than to

do so through the mails. He may even have been acting as a personal liaison for William Lloyd Garrison, with whom he had had a long association, going back to the newspaper he briefly launched in 1838, the Salisbury "Monitor" (at least two of the articles from the "Monitor" were reprinted in Garrison's paper, "The Liberator," and "Ethan Spike" appeared in it at least five times in subsequent years). It is in his capacity as a liaison that "Quails" would have visited such key figures as the President, Daniel Webster (shortly after the Fugitive Slave Act was signed into law), and, in Paris, Victor Hugo, not to mention fellow-abolitionists and potential donors to the abolitionist cause like Swedish singer Jenny Lind.

"Quails" tells of having a keen interest in obtaining an edition of the Boston "Pathfinder," which contains a biography of Benjamin Penhallow Shillaber's character, "Mrs. Partington," while driving a sleigh through the wilds of Canada. Further research indicated that Mathew had *ghost written* that biography for Shillaber, which is why he was so keen on seeing it in print. Shillaber was editing the "Pathfinder" at this time (a free, advertising-driven paper); but shortly afterwards, he launched a comic magazine similar to "Punch," called the "Carpet-Bag." Mathew was a silent financial partner in the venture, presumably, using the money he had gained from the sale of "The Mistake of a Lifetime," the year before. He was also a prodigious contributor, writing as many as eight pieces, under various pseudonyms, per weekly edition. In fact, it was Mathew, as much as Shillaber, who was setting the tone for this paper. It was also Mathew—not Benjamin Drew, as Shillaber inexplicably asserts in his memoirs—who, writing as "Trismegistus," created the popular spin-offs of "Ensign Jehiel Stebbings" and "Dr. E. Goethe Digg." It so happens Mathew had used the pseudonym "Trismegistus" many years earlier for the "New-England Galaxy," and again, for the New York "Transcript." There is even one instance, a story entitled "The Unbidden Guest," which was published in the April, 1836 edition of "Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine." He had simply brought the pen name out of mothballs, as it were, for the "Carpet-Bag."

On a few occasions, Mathew also used the "star," or single asterisk, for the "Carpet-Bag"—including when writing one of Shillaber's characters, "Ike," the wayward nephew and ward of Mrs. Partington. That piece appears in the Feb. 14, 1852 edition, and is titled, "Ike Partington's Visit to the Country."

Famous humorist Charles Farrar Browne, who worked as a printer's apprentice for the "Carpet-Bag" in 1852, inserted his first effort into the paper without the editor, Shillaber's, knowledge. In actuality, he had stolen and reworked one of Mathew's humorous stories, which itself had previously been stolen by Francis Durivage and published under "The Old 'Un" in "Gleason's Pictorial." *If* young Browne had obtained that story directly from Mathew, instead of from its earlier appearance in "Gleason's," this suggests that Mathew was *mentoring* Browne, and had shared this story with him.[8] There is additional evidence indicating that Mathew would occasionally mentor aspiring authors or poets—some of whom saw fit to take a short-cut on the road to fame, by publishing Mathew's teaching samples as their own.

In the years that followed, Mathew continued to contribute substantially to the Portland "Transcript," and perhaps to other papers occasionally, as well. The above, which brings us up to 1863 (when Griffin believes he stopped publishing) is not an exhaustive account. There are also numerous newspapers which contain a handful of his pieces, like the Portland "Tribune," the

"Cayuga Chief," or the Onondaga "Standard." In 1862-63, after he had obtained a permanent position in the Boston "Custom House," he submitted at least one "K.N. Pepper" poem, and several "Ethan Spike" letters, to the New York "Vanity Fair." One of these letters is an open letter to President Lincoln, chiding him for not permitting black men to fight for the Union, and for his reluctance to free the slaves.

In 1863, Mathew also published a novel for boys entitled "Harrie Lee: The Tempter and the Tempted." Here, he signed openly with his full initials: "M.F.W." The theme is close to Mathew's heart, echoing one of his own worst failings: being adversely influenced by one's peers, and falling in with the wrong crowd. From childhood into adulthood, Mathew had repeatedly ruined his prospects by forming unwise partnerships—as, for example, with Durivage and Burnham. This novel is a precise style match for "Never Too Late," ghost written for Charles Burdett in 1845.

By 1861, although Mathew had long expressed his distaste for the practice of "office seeking," he was forced to take just such a position at the Custom House because of blacklisting. He obtained that position partly on the basis of his brother's recommendation to Charles Sumner.

"Ethan Spike" continues in the Portland "Transcript" after a brief hiatus in 1863, and despite his no-longer being incognito, the series is as radical as ever. For example, the June 11, 1870 edition contains a scathing satire of white supremacy, in the form of a speech given by Spike before the "Hornby Board of Trade"; and the March 14, 1872 contains a lampoon of the Ku Klux Klan, as "Spike" ineptly imitates their tactics while persecuting a black family.

In the May 22, 1869 edition of the "Transcript" comes an "Ethan Spike" letter of particular interest. Here, in-character as "Spike," Mathew seems to protest his exclusion from the Boston literati, and vows revenge. He indicates that he has inside knowledge of their finances, and threatens to expose them! In actuality, he was moonlighting for the publisher Ticknor and Fields, which many of the literati published through, as a bookkeeper. Thus, he really *did* have this inside knowledge (albeit not from peering through their cellar windows). But Mathew has put them—and us—on-notice, that he intends to pay them back for snubbing him.

At John Greenleaf Whittier's 70th birthday celebration in Boston, in 1877, Samuel Clemens read aloud a humorous story which depicts the three guests of honor—Oliver Wendell Holmes, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Ralph Waldo Emerson (or rather, men representing themselves as this trio), stopping at a miner's cabin. They misbehave and generally make fools of themselves, bragging on works which are not actually their own (thus inferring plagiarism). The story is told anecdotally to the narrator's character, who has himself stopped by the same cabin at a later time. This story got Clemens in hot water with the press, as the editors of those papers could clearly see the "bite" of the underlying satire. Clemens, however—and most historians—made light of it, saying that the protest was exaggerated.

But it was not exaggerated. It contained deliberate, targeted satire written by an author in this genre who had far more experience than Clemens did. Mathew—whose name does not appear on the seating chart for his brother's own birthday party, despite the fact that he was a resident of Boston—would have given this story to Clemens, on the sly. Likely, the original had

been set in New England, but Clemens had rewritten it for the West Coast, replacing Mathew's typical Yankee dialect with West Coast slang. However, he inadvertently retained *one* tell-tale clue of Mathew's writing, derived from the dialect that is typically found in "Ethan Spike"—"*on*reasonable," for "*un*reasonable."

The account given by the host and toastmaster, William Dean Howells, tells us that as Clemens was reading the story, the silence "deepened from moment to moment, and was broken only by the hysterical and blood-curdling laughter of a single guest, whose name shall not be handed down to infamy"[9] But it *shall* be—because this was Mathew, whose birthday present to his brother doubled as his mischievous revenge against his now-famous friends. It was he who was the sole person laughing—not *at the story*, per se, but *at the practical joke*. And he was known to be a practical joker.

There are a few clues suggesting that Mathew was—as he had done on other occasions throughout his career—ghost writing for Clemens during this period. No doubt this would have been his final assignment.

The last "Ethan Spike" letter which this author was able to find in the Portland "Transcript" appeared in the June 26, 1875 edition.[10] The last star-signed piece I could find—a eulogy for a young lady named Martha B. Davis—appears in the June 28, 1873 edition. Mathew was also writing reviews of art and literature under the barely-disguised signature of "M.D.W," and the last I found of these appears in the Jan. 3, 1874 edition. This one is a review of the sculpture of John Rogers, and mentions, in particular, Rogers' sculpture depicting Henry Ward Beecher, William Lloyd Garrison, and John Greenleaf Whittier listening to the story of a fugitive slave woman.

Finally, a story of visiting Dungeon Rock Cave in Lynn, Mass., written by Mathew, appears under the signature of his friend and co-worker, Frank Harriman, in the April, 1884 edition of the "Bay State Monthly," almost a year and a half after Mathew's death on Jan. 7, 1883. Given the style and references which appear in this sketch, it is clearly Mathew's work—he simply instructed his friend to publish it after his death, under his own name, and hence collect the royalty payment. Speaking of a family which fruitlessly excavated for two generations into granite rock in search of pirate treasure, he seems to be speaking, symbolically, about his own life:

> The mystery is that there ever lived human beings to undertake such an unpromising work, where such hardship and perseverance were required, and where the folly of any hope of success must have been apparent to an intelligent person every day, from the commencement to the close of the twenty-seven years of servile toil.

From 1836, when Mathew took up the abolitionist cause, to 1863, when he wrote "Spike" for "Vanity Fair," is 27 years. One might think, given the Emancipation Proclamation and the conclusion of the Civil War, that he might have felt he was successful. However, he was a firm advocate of "moral suasion." I think he would have viewed the War as a terrible tragedy—an abject failure of Americans to come together in enlightened brotherhood.

The last trace of Mathew in print, other than Harriman's article and an 1899 retrospective in the Boston "Sunday Herald" by Charles O. Stickney, is a poem written by his beloved first wife, Abby, shortly before *her* death in 1841. Mathew would have requested that it be printed in the Feb. 17, 1883 edition of the Portland "Transcript," where it did indeed appear about a month and a half after his own passing.

Mathew, a child prodigy who was writing sophisticated work for major literary newspapers as of age 12, published well over 2,500 pieces in practically all genres during his 54-year literary career. Almost all of it was published anonymously; and much of the best was claimed for, or directly plagiarized by, other authors. The paradigm shift thus emerges, that rather than this author imaginatively claiming various famous works for Mathew's pen, as it may appear, in reality Mathew's stolen work was of such high quality that it made several plagiarists famous.

Thus, Mathew was the original co-author of "A Christmas Carol"; the real author of "The Raven" and "Annabel Lee"; the real author of almost all the star-signed reviews and essays in the 1844-46 New York "Tribune" (up until the time when Margaret Fuller became the paper's foreign correspondent, writing from Europe, when she retained the signature for herself); the original author of five poems plagiarized by Elizabeth Barrett; the author of the humorous story which Charles Farrar Browne plagiarized to kick-start his literary career; and the original author of the story which, being read aloud at John Greenleaf Whittier's 70th birthday, created such a backlash for Samuel Clemens. I still have not mentioned *all* of Mathew's work; for example, he was the long-time author of the unsigned lyceum reviews appearing in the Portland "Transcript," reporting on talks by such notables as Henry David Thoreau, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Ward Beecher, Charles Farrar Browne, and Samuel Clemens. One of his reviews of Thoreau's talks has been called the best ever written, though of course the author was unknown to that commentator. It is the best, in my opinion, not only because of Mathew's skill as an author, but because they were personal friends, and Mathew was *defending* Thoreau, in the review.

Despite the fact that William Sloan Kennedy, an unofficial Whittier biographer, tells us, concerning the "Ethan Spike" series: "I should not advise anyone to take the trouble to hunt them up. They prove incontestably that but one genius is born in a family," there *were*, in fact, two geniuses in that family. Only, they were of opposite temperaments. John Greenleaf Whittier wrote ballads in a bewitching style; Mathew Franklin Whittier was a satirist, and a humorist—but he was by far the deeper philosopher. John Greenleaf Whittier always signed his own name (with one possible exception); Mathew rarely ever signed with his. John Greenleaf Whittier's work always pleased (unless you happened to be pro-slavery); Mathew's often challenged. Mathew achieved grass-roots fame with the one series for which he was publicly exposed as the author, "Ethan Spike." However, it's doubtful, in my mind, whether most of those fans really understood the depth of the work. Despite the fact that Mathew probably considered "Spike" to be his "literary toy," he embedded a great deal of shrewd observation about mankind in that series, which probably went over the heads of most of his readers. To them, it was slapstick, albeit liberal, humor.

As for the massive body of work which he published anonymously—and that which was plagiarized by other authors—who knows what the impact was on Society? We can gauge something of his and Abby's impact, with "A Christmas Carol"; and of Mathew's impact with

"The Raven," "The Cry of the Children," and the star-signed reviews and essays in the New York "Tribune." But what of the rest? Some of it, in my opinion, was every bit as competently-written. What of "The Mistake of a Lifetime," or "The Rag-Picker?" What of his open letter to President Lincoln? It's almost impossible to assess the whole—but clearly, Mathew's influence was considerable.

Footnotes:

1) Lloyd Wilfred Griffin, *The Life and Works of Matthew Franklin Whittier, A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Honors in English*, College of Arts and Sciences, University of Maine, Orono, May, 1941.

2) Daniel G. Royot, (no title). *Encyclopedia of American Humorists*, edited by Steven H. Gale, 482-484, Garland Publishing, Inc., New York & London, 1988.

3) Allen Walker Read, "The World of Joe Strickland," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 76, No. 302 (Oct.-Dec., 1963): 277-308.

4) Arthur Lachlan Reed, "Asa Greene, New England Publisher, New York Editor and Humorist, 1789-1838," Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Minnesota, March 31, 1854.

5) "A Child Asleep" had been previously published by Barrett as "The Dream," in the 1840 edition of "Finden's Tableaux." "The Cry of the Children" had been previously published in the August, 1843 edition of "Blackwood's Magazine." In the case of the "Tableaux," this suggests that Mathew and Abby, together, had send Barrett a poem written about an incident concerning their infant son, Joseph.

6) Reviewers, assuming that "Waldo Howard" was a young, fledgling author, made fun of Gleason having paid so much for the rights, portraying him as not being able to put the story down, and increasing his offer with every chapter.

7) George Faber Clark, *History of the Temperance Reform in Massachusetts, 1831-1883*, 1888; 95-99.

8) The possibility must be considered that Mathew had verbally related the story to Browne, not mentioning that he had previously written it up as a humorous sketch, nor that Francis Durivage had published it, or (if he didn't know) might have published it. In this case, Browne would have simply based his written account on Mathew's verbal one, with no plagiarism intended. This is unlikely, however, given how blatantly Browne went on to imitate Mathew's "Ethan Spike" style in his own "Artemus Ward" series.

9) Henry Nash Smith, "That Hideous Mistake of Poor Clemens's'," *Harvard Library Bulletin*, Vol. IX, No. 2, Spring 1955.

10) The author subsequently learned of two later ones, published in 1875, 1877 and 1879, respectively, as listed in "Diggio, Haybis Korpus & E Plewrisy Unicorn!", edited by Larry Glatz, 2022.