

[Rev.] E.S. Mathews (1812-?)

From *The Autobiography of the Rev. E. Mathews* (1867)

‘To William Wells Brown, The American Fugitive Slave’ (1855)

Edward Mathews lived a transatlantic life. Born in Oxford, England, Mathews signaled his religious commitment early on by memorizing New Testament passages while still a youthful Sunday School student. Joining the Baptist Church in adolescence, he soon signed on as part-time pastor. After emigration to the US, he worked at a church in New York City; studied at a theological seminary in Hamilton, NY; traveled as a missionary to Wisconsin Territory in 1838; and immersed himself there in abolitionist activism where settlers were bringing slaves despite its being supposedly ‘free’ by law (‘Abolitionist’, passim).

In succeeding years, Mathews gave rousing pro-abolition lectures, traveling in the Midwest and New England. He then took on the challenge of preaching in the South as an agent of the American Baptist Free Mission Society. Violently assaulted by a mob in Kentucky, he became a named ‘character’ in an episode that Harriet Beecher Stowe presented in her *Key to Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. Mathews and Stowe would later meet in person when both found themselves in London during her celebrity tour in response to the huge popularity of *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. (Mathews, *Anti-Slavery Labours*, 4).

In 1851, Mathews was contracted by the Baptist society to carry his anti-slavery lecturing skills back to Great Britain. His autobiography, from which the excerpt below is taken, includes anecdotes documenting many interpersonal connections of the transatlantic anti-slavery network. One such link brought him together with William Wells Brown, who, as noted in Mathews’s *Anti-Slavery Labours in England*, chaired the London gathering where the returned British cleric

launched his new lecture career (3). Mathews, in turn, saluted Brown with a poem in the fugitive slave's honor ('To William Wells Brown', printed below) at an event in Bristol - an occasion which Brown later recorded in his 1855 *The American Fugitive in Europe* (Brown 33-34).

See a speech by William Wells Brown in the 'Abolition and Aftermath' section of the print anthology of Transatlantic Anglophone Literatures, 1776-1920.

From *The Autobiography of the Rev. E. Mathews* (1867)

The committee of the Free Missionary Society now requested me to visit England, and enlist, as far as possible, the sympathies of religious bodies in the work of emancipation. This was regarded as an important aid to the cause; the committee knew also that I desired to see my friends after so narrow an escape with my life. I gladly accepted the appointment, visiting Boston before sailing

Calling on Mr. Garrison we conversed on the principles of peace among other topics. I was in favour of sending a policeman after a man who should steal a horse; and approved of physical force to sustain the law. Mr. Garrison thought that this might lead to the destruction of life, and as that was sacred, he could not regard me as being a thorough non-resistant.

In June I left New York in a fine ship, the "New World". . . .

My labours commenced by addressing a public meeting on the 1st of August, 1851, at the Hall of Commerce, London, in connection with George Thompson and other friends of the slave.¹

¹ William Wells Brown offers a multi-page account of the August 1851 event in *American Fugitive*, affirming that he 'was chosen chairman of the meeting,' and reprinting his own address

In Bristol, September 4th, at a meeting held at the Broadmead Rooms . . . a resolution was moved . . . to urge the British churches to disfellowship the slaveholding, and encourage the Anti-slavery churches of America.

At this meeting I gave an account of my labours in America, and showed the importance of its churches being separated from slavery.

The lectures I have given since number more than one thousand

My belief is, that had the Americans when the rebellion began, sent to England twenty of its most able and devoted Anti-slavery lecturers, to go through the towns lecturing, with maps, explaining the whole question of slavery and its connection with the rebellion, not a single vessel would have left Liverpool to prey upon the peaceful unarmed merchant vessels of the United States.

‘To William Wells Brown, The American Fugitive Slave’ (1855)²

Brother, farewell to thee!

His blessing on thee rest

Who hates all slavery

And helps the poor oppressed.

as it appeared in ‘the *Morning Advertiser*’(217). He reports on Mathews’s presentation as following his own, describing his abolitionist colleague as ‘recently returned from the United States, where he had been maltreated on account of his fidelity of the cause of freedom’ (221).

² Brown’s *American Fugitive* memoir (1855, when the poem was published) gives an 1850 date for the ‘soiree’ at which the lyric was recited in his honor, a timing at odds with Mathews’s 1851 arrival back in England (33).

Go forth with power to break
The bitter, galling yoke;
Go forth 'mongst strong and weak,
The aid of all invoke.

O, thou wilt have much woe,
Tossed on a sea of strife,
Hunted by many a foe
Eager to take thy life.

Perchance thou'lt have to brook
The taunts of bond and free,
The cold, disdainful look
Of men—less men than thee.

We feel thy soul will rise
Superior to it all;
For thou hast heard the cries,
And drained the cup of gall.

Thine eyes have wept the tears
Which tyrants taught to flow,

While craven scorn and sneers
Fell with the shameful blow.

And now that thou art come
To Freedom's blessed land,
Thou broodest on thy home
And Slavery's hateful brand.

Thou thinkest thou canst hear
Three million voices call;
They raise to thee their prayer,—
Haste, help to break their thrall!

Say, wilt thou have, thy steps to guard,
Some powerful spell or charm?
Then listen to thy sister's word,
Nor fear thou hurt or harm.

When shines the North Star, cold and bright,
Cheer thou thy heart, lift up thy head!
Feel, as thou look'st upon its light,
That blessings on its beams are shed!

For rich, and poor, and bond, and free,
Will also gaze and pray for thee.

Source text:

Mathews, Rev. E. *The Autobiography of the Rev. E. Mathews, The 'Father Dickson', of Mrs. Stowe's 'Dred'* (London: Houlston and Wright; New York: American Baptist Free Mission Society, [1867]).

Mathews, 'To William Wells Brown, The American Fugitive Slave', In William Wells Brown, *The American Fugitive in Europe: Sketches of Places and People Abroad: A Memoir of the Author* (Boston: John Jewett, 1855).

References:

'An Abolitionist in Territorial Wisconsin: The Journal of Reverend Edward Mathews', *Wisconsin Magazine of History* 52.1-4 (October 1968-July 1969), 3-18, 117-31, 248-62, 330-43.
Mathews, Rev. Edward. *Anti-Slavery Labours in England of the Rev. Edward Mathews, Agent of the Baptist Free Mission Society* (Bristol: Thomas Mathews, [1855]).