

Annie Matheson

(1853 - 16 March 1924)

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BOOKS: *The Religion of Humanity and Other Poems* (London: Percival, 1890);
Love's Music, and Other Poems (London: Sampson Low, Marston, 1894);
Love Triumphant, and Other New Poems (London: Innes, 1898);
Selected Poems Old and New (London: Frowde, 1899); republished as *Roses, Loaves, and Old Rhymes* (London: Frowde, 1911; revised and enlarged edition, London: Oxford University Press, 1918);
Snowflakes and Snowdrops. Christmas Rhymes and Valentine Verses for Schoolroom and Nursery (London: Johnson, 1900);
By Divers Paths: The Note-Book of Seven Wayfarers (London: Gay & Hancock, 1909);
The Story of a Brave Child: A Child's Life of Joan of Arc (London: Nelson, 1910);
Leaves of Prose . . . With Two Studies by May Sinclair (London: Swift, 1912);
Florence Nightingale: A Biography (London: Nelson, 1913);
Maytime Songs (London: M. Goschen, 1913);
A Plain Friend (Elizabeth Fry) (London: British Periodicals, 1920);
Our Hero of the Golden Heart. . . . With Biography and Portrait of D. O. Barnett (London: British Periodicals, 1920);
Hal's book for children of all ages . . . (London, 1921).

OTHER: Dinah M. Craik, *John Halifax, Gentleman*, introduction by Matheson (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1900);
George Eliot, *Scenes of Clerical Life*, introduction by Matheson (London: Dent, 1903);
Eliot, *Adam Bede*, introduction by Matheson (London: Dent, 1903);
Eliot, *Silas Marner: The Weaver of Raveloe*, introduction by Matheson (London: Dent, 1903);
Songs of Love and Praise for Home Singing, edited by Matheson (London: Dent, 1907);
Sayings from the Saints, collected by Matheson (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1908);



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A Day Book for Girls, Chosen and Arranged from the Works of Many Poets and Prose Writers (London: Frowde, 1911);
A Little Book of Courage, compiled by Matheson (London: Gay & Hancock, 1913).

Annie Matheson wrote four volumes of well-received meditative and lyric poetry that appeared in the 1890s, two collections of essays and poems published in 1909 and 1912, and a final retrospective collection of poetry in 1918. She also contributed many essays to contemporary periodicals.

including *The Athenaeum*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Macmillan's Magazine*, and *The Guardian*, and published several biographies for young people. An egalitarian feminist, Matheson wrote poetry in which she explored ecumenical approaches to ethics and spiritual experience, and with her prose she supported reformist schemes for the alleviation of poverty and social injustice.

The frontispieces to *Selected Poems Old and New* (1899) and *Roses, Loaves, and Old Rhymes* (1911) show a slender woman wearing a jacket and cropped hair, but relatively little is known about Matheson's life. She was born in 1853 in Blackheath (now in southeast London), the daughter of Elizabeth Cripps and the Reverend James Matheson, a Congregationalist minister, and her first home was in Oswestry, Shropshire, where she began writing poetry as a girl. She remarks obliquely in her introduction to *Selected Poems Old and New*:

having nothing else to give, I might in gratitude have entwined the names of London, my birthplace; Oswestry, my first home; Nottingham, always kind to me for my father's sake; New York, Knutsford and Manchester, that long ago helped me to my only years of comparative leisure; and Oxford, the giver of more than can be written.

In her introduction to *The Religion of Humanity and Other Poems* (1890), her first volume, Matheson comments that she had "found a home in the Church," presumably the Church of England, for she refers to "those of us who are Anglicans" in *Leaves of Prose* (1912). She also mentions "brothers and sisters" in "Words and Ways of Children," an essay from *Leaves of Prose*, and dedicates *A Plain Friend* (1920) to "My Brother William Brooklyn Matheson / Tiratahi, Rangomai, New Zealand, 1920." At the time of her death in 1924 at seventy-one, she lived at Honey-suckle Cottage, Maybury Hill, Woking (in Surrey, southwest of London). The writer of her obituary in *The Times* (London) remarked that "her work . . . reflected the fine ardour of her mind, a detachment from materialism, and a childlike confidence of spirit. These qualities, together with a certain charming waywardness of which she herself was usually the first to see the humorous results, won her many friends, by whom she is held in a lasting and tender regard."

Matheson was thirty-seven when she dedicated *The Religion of Humanity and Other Poems* to "My Father and Mother." In her introduction she presents the book as an effort to accommodate readers who sought "fellowship in their search after the ancient answer to the ancient problems" in broadly ethical and ecumenical terms. She also rebuts views that dismiss the validity of theological poetry: "I cannot but hope that heresy and orthodoxy are not so far apart as men suppose, and

that schism is in many instances not so much a fact as a misunderstanding."

In the title ode Matheson argues for the deist view that those who act well toward their fellow human beings exhibit a true faith, whatever their formal beliefs. "Sacred" events, by contrast, are hollow if they have no application to present-day life, and the rigid and censorious fall prey to hypocrisy, or even worse:

the unholy greed
Of those ill-fathered Pharisees who take
His awful Human Name
On their smooth lips, and make
In the clear shining of the Morning Star
A little selfish glitter; quick to feed
Their vanity on others' sin and need
And bitter shame,
While on the unthinking crowd, of hope forelorn,
Descends a load too heavy to be borne,
Which they, who cast it on them from afar,
Spurn under foot, nor touch with finger-tips,
Clutching at heaven for themselves, and then
Damning the souls of half their fellow-men.
Christ save us from the hell of such a heaven!

Matheson enlivens these echoes of Matthew Arnold's weary cadences in "A Summer Night" with translations from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe and Heinrich Heine, and vigorous poetic denunciations of the poverty that surrounded her. One such denunciation—"A Song for Women," later reprinted by the Women's Protective and Provident League in leaflet form—became one of her best-known works.

Within a dreary narrow room
That looks upon a noisome street,
Half fainting with the stifling heat
A starving girl works out her doom.
*Yet not the less in God's sweet air
The little birds sing free of care,
And hawthorns blossom everywhere.*
.....
With envy of the folk who die,
Who may at last their leisure take,
Whose longed-for sleep none roughly wake,
Tired hands the restless needle ply.
*But far and wide in meadows green
The golden buttercups are seen,
And reddening sorrel nods between.*

Modernist ironies emerge from Matheson's stark juxtapositions of the suffocating sweatshop with the emblematic, almost Pre-Raphaelite beauties of "God's sweet air."

Matheson achieves other forms of heightened introspection in the enforced concision of the twenty-five sonnets in *The Religion of Humanity*, which

"THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY"

AND OTHER POEMS

BY
ANNIE MATHESON

"They know that never joy illumed my brow,
Unfaded with hope that thou wouldst free
This world from its dark slavery,
That thou O awful LOVELINESS,
Wouldst give what'er these words cannot express."
SHELLEY.

BY
PUBLISHED BY
PERCIVAL & CO.
KING STREET, COVENT GARDEN
London
1890

Title page for Matheson's first volume of poetry

include homages to people and antecedents she admired, such as Omar Khayyám, William Wordsworth, Thomas Carlyle, Robert Browning, and George Eliot. In "An Meine Freundin" she also expresses a quasi-Rossettian sense of spiritual union with a fellow voyager and "sister soul":

Sweet recognition, when the soul looks out
Just for an instant from the unveiled eyes,
And love in either heart grows rich and wise,
Too glad for fear, too absolute for doubt!
As a ship in mid-ocean tossed about,
Suddenly sighting with a glad surprise
Another toiler under the same skies
To the same port, puts all her signals out,
So, when thy life my life's horizon crossed,
A fellow-voyager to the far shore
Toward which I sailed, but one more strong and brave,
Whose courage had won much my faltering lost;—

Our hearts joined company, through wind and wave
And stress of weather, kin for evermore.

In *Love's Music, and Other Poems* (1894), wryly dedicated "To My Publishers, Past and Present . . .," Matheson comments on religious conventions. In "Pastor Ignotus, His Plea for Cremation," for example, a dramatic monologue in the manner of Robert Browning's "Abt Vogler," the "unknown" pastor denounces "Christian" burial:

What! Do this last disservice?—God forbid!
Let poison lurk beneath my coffin lid
To work its direful mischief year by year,
About the human world I hold so dear,
And so dishonour me when I am dead?

Nay! when the Master calls, let cleansing fire
Set free the body of my soul's desire,
As golden corn uplifts its shining head
From husk that's slowly burned in earthy bed,
Like to the golden grain and yet unlike!

In some of Matheson's best poems, brief haiku-like lyrics hover between song and tonal meditations. Death comes gently, for example, in "The Snow":

As noiseless as the deepest love I fall,
As mute and tender and divinely pure;
When sunshine comes, I hide away from all
In roots that make the coming blossoms sure.

For many a man who must as outcast fare,
Having no roof, and bidden still move on,
I make a bed where he will lose his care.

In a collection of reviews included at the end of *Love's Music, and Other Poems*, a writer for *The Saturday Review* considered Matheson's "gifts . . . more clearly proclaimed in the briefer poems," and another critic, writing for *The Westminster Review*, found "Some of the love songs and . . . translations, from Heine and Goethe especially . . . worthy of note." A reviewer for *The Literary World* praised *Love's Music* for its "moving impulse of earnestness" and *The St. James's Gazette* found the poems "philosophical and humanitarian."

Matheson prefaced her next book, *Love Triumphant, and Other New Poems* (1898), with an etching of G. F. Watts's painting *Love Triumphant* and inscribed it "to the sorrowful, the downtrodden, the oppressed, and above all, to that religious community whose sufferings are a blot upon our unchristian Christianity . . .":

I am a Jew
Son of the race to whom the Eternal gave,
Not the poor blessings of a slave,

But the fierce chastisement of sons,
 The elect to pain, the few,
 Chosen and blotted out His world to save
 In sunless darkness like to Ajalon's!
 Others, by their false gods,
 Are beaten with rods,
 But we, who once the sacred mountain trod—
 The kinsmen of the Everlasting God,
 Are smitten and scourged, and lashed with scorpions!
 ("Jew to Gentile")

Matheson's artistic interests also reemerge in *Love Triumphant, and Other New Poems*. "Love Triumphant" is also the title of a sketch by Edward Burne-Jones, and Matheson drafted a sonnet in commemoration of Watts, one on the stoic death of the artist Frederick Leighton, and another on Leighton's painting, *Elisha Raising the Son of the Shunammite*. She also evokes *When Adam Delved and Eve Span*, Burne-Jones's beautifully crafted frontispiece for William Morris's *A Dream of John Ball* (1892), in "Labour," a terza-rima ballad:

It is not labour makes a man a slave;
 Gyves cannot bind a spirit pure and brave;
 But some have bought their freedom with a grave. . . .

More conspicuously conventional objects of Matheson's memorials include Alfred Tennyson, Robert Browning, William Gladstone ("The Great Commoner"), and the queen ("The Year of Rejoicing"). Rather remarkably, she also wrote muckraking poetic denunciations of lethal factory pollution ("Lead-Poisoning. A Dramatic Fragment"), inadequate sewage ("London Water"), and general bourgeois indifference ("Against Social Carelessness"):

Could we but know how black our murders are,
 By help ungiven, courageous deeds undone,—
 If, 'twixt the rising and the setting sun,
 Our lives were doomed to watch them, near and far,
 Those countless souls and bodies that we mar,
 Locked up in prisons where our gauds are spun. . . .

In "The Priest's Ballad," one of her more explicitly moralistic poems, a beautiful and much-praised woman of means is turned away from heaven, "for the sake of your sister, seven days dead." When she protests that she has no sister, the Gatekeeper scornfully reminds her:

. . . beautiful work for your dainty wear
 Your sister fashioned; . . . can you dare
 To whisper to God the cost? . . .

"Such things are hidden"—his sad lip curled—
 "From women like you through all the world—
 She is Mary Magdalen's guest."

Sent back "to the dark town," the woman seeks "my sister, that she may plead / For the woman who let her die. . . ."

Matheson pays more or less explicit homage to Robert Browning in the poems she characterizes as "dramatic lyrics" ("To 'Carissima,'" "Jew to Gentile," "From the Battle-Field," "The Speculative Monk," "A Musician," and "Meeting and Parting"), but two of the compositions are Debussy-like lyric reveries. In "The Mist" she writes:

The sun and the dew were so far apart,
 The world would have said they could never have met,
 But the sun looked down with a burning heart
 When the earth with the crystal dew was wet;
 So the dew went up in a golden mist—
 And they kist,
 Till the dew came back at the close of day,
 In a robe of the colour of amethyst,—
 And a crown of pearls on the green earth lay,
 Like tears of hope and of wild regret
 That told of an unforgotten tryst,
 Ere the sun had set.

In "To M. A. M.," an elegy, she writes:

We miss thee, miss thee, miss thee; ah, and yet
 At moments when some tender long-sought boon
 Falls at our feet, then in the solemn noon
 Of joy's great sunlight, like an amulet,
 To wear in secret against worldly fret,
 The quick thought comes that we shall meet thee soon,
 Where we shall need no light of sun nor moon,
 And where the love shall neither rise nor set;
 Then swifter, sweeter, nearer, comes belief
 That Love perchance through thee has wrought the gift.

Latent tensions between Matheson's sententious and lyric muses emerged rather ironically in two reviews of *Love Triumphant*. The *Athenaeum* critic believed the volume's author had "a virile mind; she is an Amazon, inspired with a fine fighting enthusiasm for humanitarian causes, and she wields her verse like a sword or spear." The writer's equally enthusiastic colleague at the *St. James Gazette*, however, found her "not one of those women poets who strive to write as men; she has the characteristics of her sex, and is before all things gentle, sympathetic, humane." *The Jewish Chronicle* reviewer felt no such cognitive dissonance: "Jew to Gentile" was spoken by "a liberal soul, as liberal in fact as Miss Matheson herself."

In the preface to *Selected Poems* the slender woman—who looks much younger than forty-six on its frontispiece—calls again for confessional tolerance: "Our faith stands self-condemned if it go not down into the very depths of the social order and of the

LOVE TRIUMPHANT

And Other New Poems

BY
ANNIE MATHESON

AUTHOR OF
"LOVE'S MUSIC," "THE RELIGION OF HUMANITY," AND OTHER POEMS

LONDON
A. D. INNES & COMPANY
LIMITED
1898

Title page for Matheson's third book of poems

individual lot, with a vital and re-forming power. For do we not believe that Christianity is deeper and wider than any number of ceremonies and opinions?"

Matheson added several new poems and a section of "Earliest Poems (Published Before 1880)" to her selections for this volume, along with two political sonnets on the Dreyfus case. She also included more of her "Christmas songs" in a second printing the next year, newly introduced by Charles Harold Herford, a friend and professor of literature at Manchester University, who praised her as "the familiar poet-friend of a wide circle," and a practitioner of "the catholicity of the mystic, not of the eclectic; that which reads everywhere the symbols of Divine Love. . . . No apostle of Positivism has shown a deeper reverence for humanity, no apostle of the Labour Church a profounder sympathy with toil."

Matheson published her own tribute to the "wide circle" a decade later, in *By Divers Paths: The Note-Book of Seven Wayfarers* (1909), an unusual collection of monthly prose and verse meditations. Her "wayfarers" include Herford, Charles Clement Cotterill, Maude Egerton King, Greville Matheson Macdonald, May Sinclair, and Eleanor Tyrell as well as herself, and an explanation for the book's format appears in its preface (signed "Annie Matheson, Maybury, Woking"):

[My friends] have at my request, wreathed [my book] about with their beautiful things; for which purpose I have withdrawn rather more than a third of my own pages, in addition to what I had already rejected as too controversial, or elaborate, or heavy. I am encircled now by their more scholarly and piquant leaves—petals that I trust may fashion my boss of tiny things into something that will claim distant kinship with that small yellow-centered flower that grows by the wayside and looks toward the sun.

Her friends' "scholarly and piquant leaves" include a meditation on "Dawn" by Cotterill, author of *Human Justice for Those at the Bottom* (1907); historical and literary place descriptions by Herford; travel narratives by Tyrell, author of children's books; allegories by the antivivisectionist Macdonald, also the author of *The Ethics of Revolt* (1907), and poems by Sinclair and King, author of *My Book of Songs and Sonnets* (1893). Fourteen more poems and twenty-seven essays comprise Matheson's own contribution to the volume—its "boss of tiny things."

In the traditions of Charles Lamb and Walter Pater, among others, Matheson's prose essays range from whimsical descriptions of cats ("Three White Princesses") to lyrical descriptions of nature and appreciative commentaries on the works of Tennyson, Burne-Jones, Walt Whitman, and Elizabeth and Robert Browning. A personal reflection appears in "Birds," for example, one of the essays for July:

the window of the room where I slept was wide open and a lamp burning. Perhaps the light had beckoned through the darkness to some homeless little brother that had lost his way. How gladly would I have soothed and comforted the eager, fluttering heart, stroked the soft brown plumage, and mothered the tiny quivering body. But fear stood between us as a dividing angel. The terror of the bird terrified me also, the shirring and swishing of the small wings made music of revolt and anguish, and the swift, violent movements were so blindly bewildering that it seemed, the next instant, they would beat into my face and buffet my eyes. How the vexed soul came there, or whither it vanished, will always remain a mystery; for, while I slipped out of the door to ask

counsel of my more knowledgeable neighbour, the tiny wanderer fled through the window. But a symbol there seemed to be of many a human crisis in which some stormy spirit, communicating its passion to another with a stress of inexplicable moral whirlwind, may find the only kindness in a noiseless flight and silent farewell. . . .

In other essays Matheson's gentle cadences and observant sympathies can arrest the reader's attention in unexpected ways. In "Ghosts," for example, an essay for November, she touches lightly on revenants and the elusive suggestions of transcendence they evoke:

Yet is there food for laughter and for humour, grim or delicate, in our own errant and philistine misuse of the word which marks this higher kinship. That lovely radiant flame within the lamp, that half-veiled vital presence which brings a flash of loveliness to the plainest face, that quickening force of personality which thrills us to the finger-tips—where in the whole sentient universe is there anything more divinely real? Yet the word which names this radiant and throbbing mystery, this ghost that is in man and woman, and that, for aught we know, may step to and fro unseen through the doorways of what men call death—this . . . heir of the undying secret—has lent his royal title to a mere scarecrow peg for grave-clothes, a grotesque . . . simulacrum, a chilly and dissolving shade, a degraded drudge of a word that frightens children and walks in darkness.

In her forty-one essays and ten poems for *Leaves of Prose . . . With Two Studies by May Sinclair* (1912), Matheson returned to her social-critical preoccupations, conjoining reformist ends and literary means in mildly unorthodox ways. In "Sordello at the East End," for example, she finds traces of Browning's poem in the foundation of University Settlement houses, and she seeks antecedents in "Philosophy, Poetry and the Labour Party" of the "desired intercourse between labour and academic knowledge" in works of Whitman, Percy Bysshe Shelley, Elizabeth Barrett Browning, and George Meredith.

In other essays she praises "those hard-working enthusiasts who . . . are doing their best to save the glories of tree and moorland from the hand of the artificial spoiler" ("A Fragment"), and finds such democratic ideals expressed in Christina Rossetti's "Royal Princess" (1863), Dante Gabriel Rossetti's "Burden of Nineveh" (1856), William Morris's *Earthly Paradise* (1868–1870), and Robert Browning's *The Ring and the Book*, as well as Dinah Craik's popular account of the inner life of a tanner in *John Halifax, Gentleman*. Something akin to her beloved

Whitman's egalitarianism clearly animated Matheson's ardent conviction that "I have had the high honour of living in the closest intercourse with labouring people, and I know that their lives, which in pathos are ever on the edge of tragedy, often breathe the very spirit of the deepest poetry."

Other essays include a rather unusual study of "The Children in George Eliot's Stories," some introductions Matheson had written for 1903 Dent editions of Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life*, *Silas Marner*, and *Adam Bede*, and appreciations of the poetry of Walter Scott ("The Lady of the Lake," one of Matheson's childhood favorites); Arthur Hugh Clough ("Thrysis in a London Square" and "Forgotten Books V. A Pastoral"); and Elizabeth Barrett Browning ("Memorial to Mrs. Browning," "A Flower for Mrs. Browning's Grave," and "Mrs. Browning as a Social Reformer"). Anticipating the tastes of another fin de siècle, Matheson also finds much to praise in Christina Rossetti's use of symbolism:

the sense of sweet surprise and inevitableness in her cadences, . . . with . . . that just economy of language and metaphor characteristic of what is final and unfathomable in feeling . . . make her appeal . . . wider and more varied . . . while for melody and passion . . . it would not be easy to find a lyricist beside whom one need fear to name her. . . .

A rare glimpse into her personal life appears in Matheson's description of her early desires to write ("Words and Ways of Children"):

there came over her a dumb, passionate desire to embody in these hieroglyphic signs, . . . though she was quite unable to express it in spoken words, some record of a lovely pastoral vision which was haunting her. . . . she can still see in imagination the long, somewhat bare upper room, with its three little white beds, where there came to her the desperate impulse to dash down in lines and circles what she was too shy to express in audible speech, and what, indeed, altogether transcended such possibilities of language as were within her reach. And this shyness was mixed with a scarcely defined belief that this peaceful other-world vision . . . might possibly gain credence if it could only get itself embodied in written symbols; and then how surprised the elders would be who . . . had no idea of the secret treasure which was locked within her memory!

One of the poems Matheson interspersed among the volume's prose essays expresses a recurrent plea for children living in the city to have access to the healing powers of nature ("In Early Autumn"):

At summer dawn, that makes the world anew
 In primal loveliness of Eden's birth,
 And bathes the blossoms with the heavenly dew
 That gives a daily childhood to the earth,
*When beauty pierces like a beckoning cry,
 Oh, let the children share the earth and sky!*

The essays and poems of *Leaves of Prose* were Matheson's last literary criticisms, ethical musings, and lyric verse.

Moved in her last years by her obvious fondness for children (and perhaps also by publishers' selective readiness to offer such work to women), Matheson turned to the drafting of carefully researched biographies for the young, and her first two subjects, Joan of Arc and Florence Nightingale, reflect her lifelong interest in the actuating power of religious faith.

Matheson addresses her preface to *The Story of a Brave Child: A Child's Life of Joan of Arc* (1910) "To those older people who give this book to the children for whom it was written," and expresses her aim "to stir the imagination of some who in after years will more fully understand" its ideas. She studied original sources and documents with care and drew on them for testimonies and dialogues. She also sketched a plausible social context for Joan's "voices," explaining clearly the issues of succession at stake in the siege of Orleans, and commenting at some length on Joan's peasant childhood and the brutalities and ironies of war. Matheson effectively softened and abbreviated Jeanne d'Arc's betrayal and execution, but she provided in *The Story of a Brave Child* a surprisingly clear, sober, and even harrowing account of a woman-warrior who was *unique en son genre*.

Florence Nightingale: A Biography (1913), Matheson's 374-page historical and scholarly labor of love, appeared five years before Lytton Strachey's scathing portrait of Nightingale's obsessions in *Eminent Victorians* (1918). Matheson summarizes some of the achievements of Nightingale's life in an introductory chapter, and comments pointedly that good children's literature should not be "without interest to people of my generation." Well aware of Nightingale's less attractive traits, she focuses primarily on her motivations and accomplishments, and provides a measured account of Nightingale's tutelage at Kaiserswerth, her campaign to improve sanitation in India, and her efforts to establish public-health nurses for the British poor. She also gave attention to the lives and efforts of Nightingale's collaborators, and interviewed several who were still alive.

In a new edition of *Roses, Leaves, and Old Rhymes* (1918) Matheson reprinted most of the contents of

Selected Poems but added to them four new poems from her volumes of prose and fourteen "Songs of the People and Sonnets of the Great War." Despite her praise for "the unadorned directness which should characterize songs of the people," World War I blunted Matheson's internationalist and populist ardor, as it did that of many others.

One of her sonnets denounces Irish abstention, for example ("To Ireland, by an English Heretic"), and others praise the involvement of "Courageous, gentle, generous India" ("To India"), or depicts the war as a holy crusade ("To Arms," "Send Us More Men," "For God and Right," "To a Mother Whose Son Fell Fighting for His Country on a Foreign Field"). Only the two sonnets she devotes to "A League of Nations" express tentative hopes for better things:

Such hell of slaughter must not ever again
 Defile our earth; demoniac sin, withstood,
 Like some old dragon shall be, fangless, bound;
 Nor will their death and wounds be counted vain
 Whose warfare wrought the world's new Brotherhood.

In the last years of her life Matheson edited a series of "Rose and Dragon" biographies for the young and wrote two of them: *Our Hero of the Golden Heart*, a life of Canon Denis Oliver Barnett, and *A Plain Friend*, a biography of Elizabeth Fry.

Matheson's brief but persuasive account in *A Plain Friend* of the ambience of the heroine's Quaker girlhood includes a selection of letters and testimonies from those who knew her, and sketches briefly Fry's efforts to reform conditions at Newgate and the campaigns that followed. In its preface Matheson also recommends "that enchanting volume," William Butler Yeats's *The Secret Rose*, and expresses renewed reformist hopes "that even as obscure runlets feed mighty rivers—[the biographies] may play their part in . . . drawing into closer sympathy of mutual understanding, the different orders of society; restoring to rightful honour the claims alike of manual labour and handicraft and of a really international and popular art."

Lady Elizabeth Balfour, a seasoned advocate of women's suffrage, also added an accompanying foreword to the volume, in which she encourages readers to emulate Fry's challenge to "the barbarous and brutal cruelty that was tolerated in the prisons of that day," and asks rhetorically whether there are not "similar inconsistencies in our own day? . . . is not our prison system nearly as defective? What of the cruelty of solitary confinement, of the orthodox

attitude of the gaoler to the prisoner, of the mental vacuity of prison life. . . ?"

An intriguing list of "titles in preparation" for Matheson's series also appeared in the endpapers for *A Plain Friend*. The list includes projected volumes by Matheson herself on "Lincoln's Citizenship," "Comrade Citizens (Florence Nightingale and Lord Herbert)," and "Heroes of Mines and Railways" (with Bertram Pickard), as well as biographies of Thomas More, Henry Fawcett, and the Indian poet "Madame Naidu," and more general studies of "Back to the Land," "The Power of Co-operation," "William Morris and Handicrafts," and "The People's Part in the World-Music." The range of subjects is impressive, especially when one considers again that Matheson conceived the "Rose and Dragon" as a series of volumes for children, but the project apparently died with her in 1924.

During her lifetime Annie Matheson's poetry, songs, meditative compilations, and children's books

found many readers, but there is no extant collection of her later poetry, and no biographical account or memoir of her has survived. She was an accomplished poet, essayist, and author of meditative prose, and a careful historical biographer of exemplary lives. Her didactic poetry was vigorous, her lyrics evoked a peaceful spirit, and her personal blend of contemplative aestheticism and Fabian social democracy gave artistic expression to the reformist hopes and ideals of her time.

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