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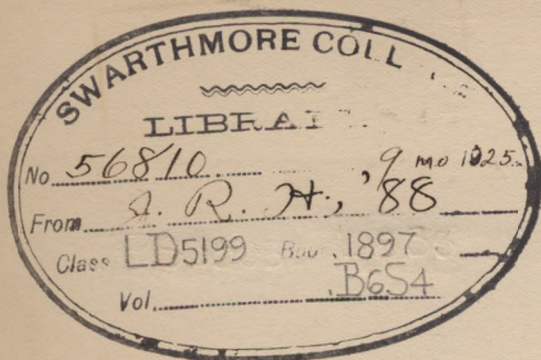
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SCHOOLKILL RIVER ANTHOLOGY

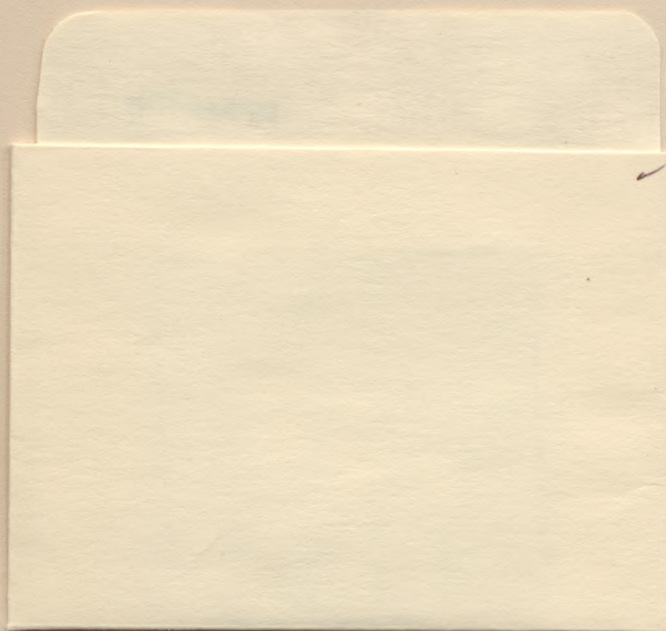
BLAIR


"Hark! From the tombs a doleful sound."

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Blair, Francis Grant, 1864-
Schoolkill River anthology :
a graveyard review of
educational fads, follies
and fallacies ..





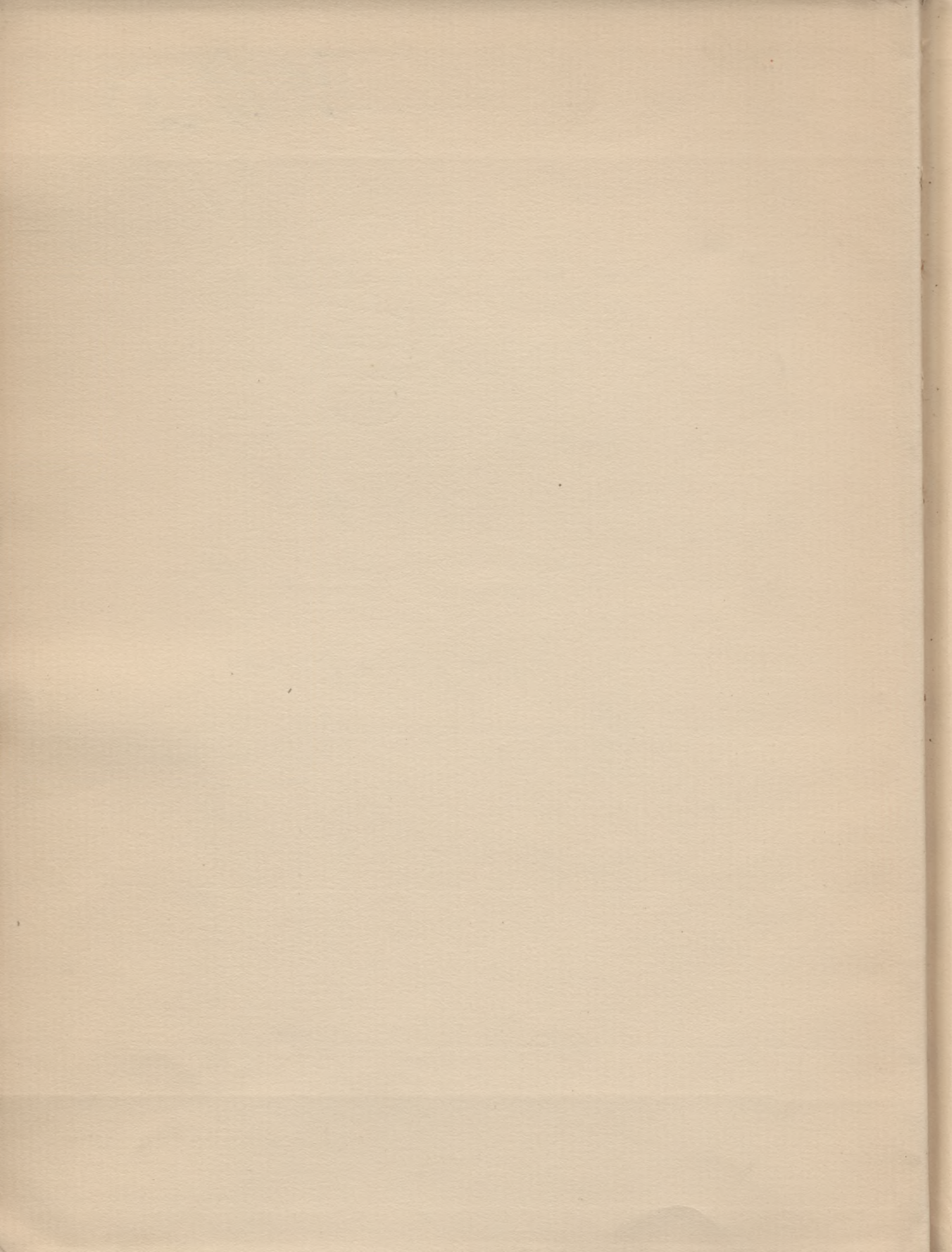
To my friend John Russell Hayes

Who has helped me to see "the light
that never was on sea or land"

I send this list of four.

Frank Grant Blair

Nov. 2, 1920.



SCHOOLKILL RIVER ANTHOLOGY

A GRAVEYARD REVIEW

— OF —

Educational Fads, Follies and Fallacies

— BY —

FRANCIS G. BLAIR (*Swarthmore, '97*)

Superintendent of Public Instruction State of Illinois



SYRACUSE, N. Y.

C. W. BARDEEN

1920

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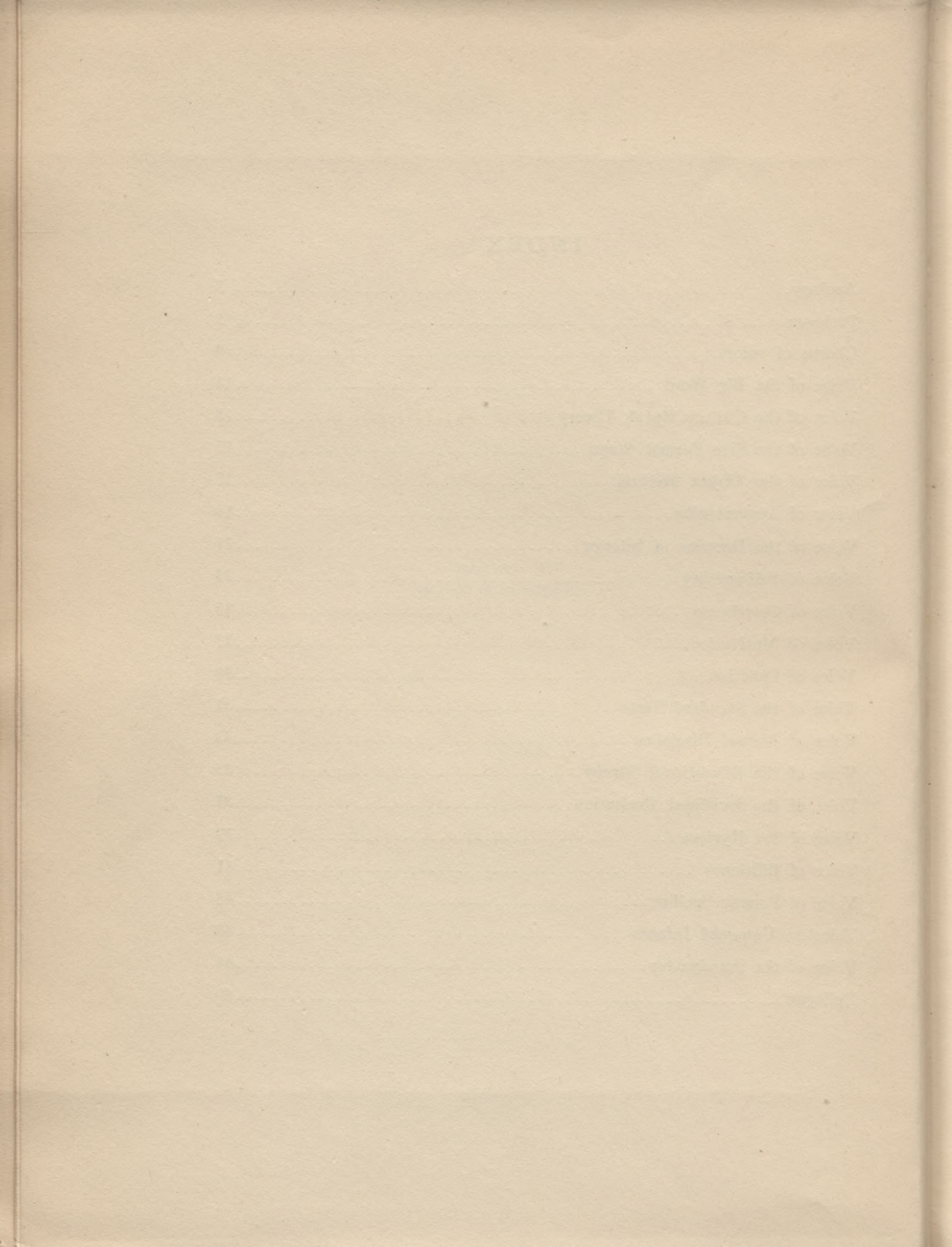
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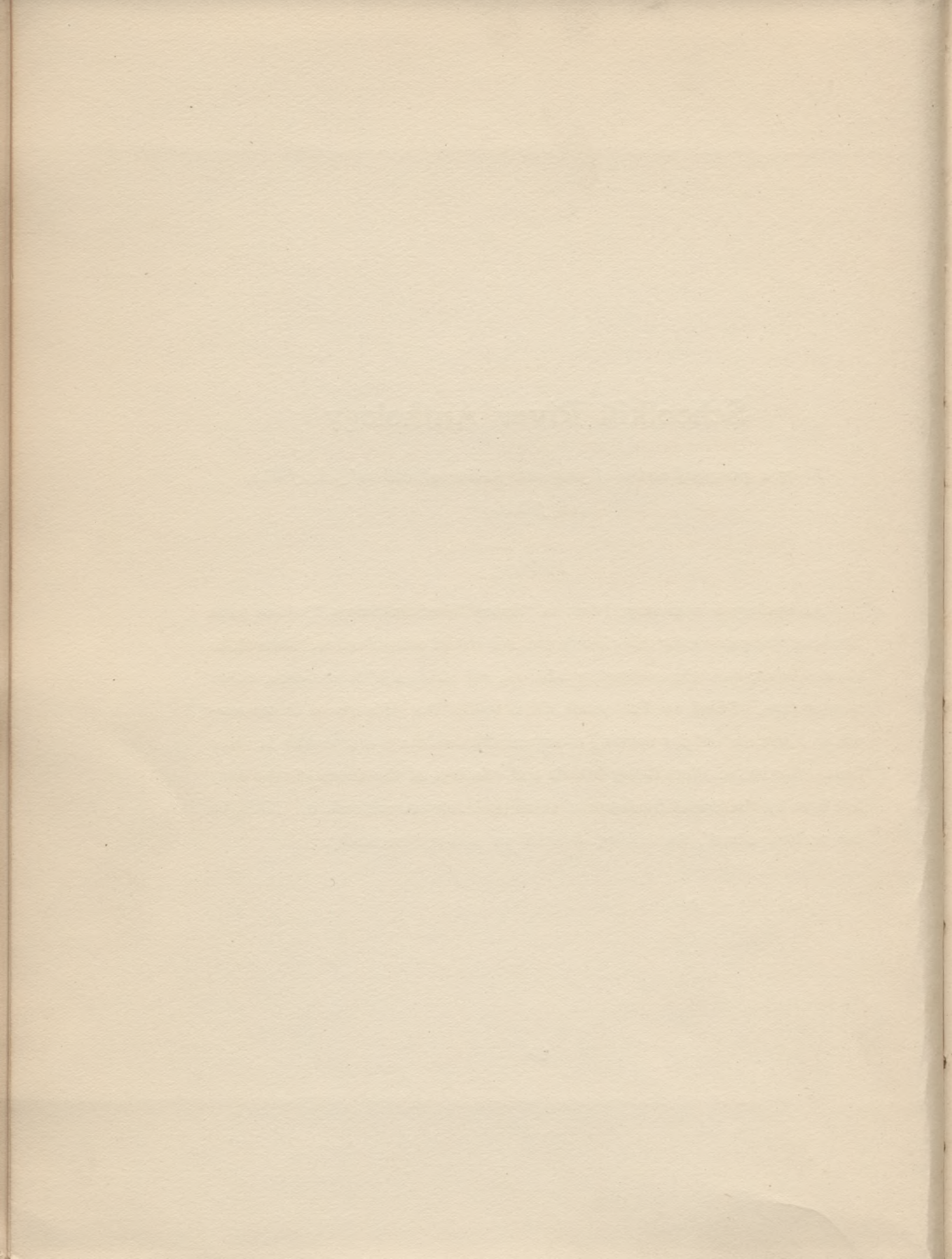


Schoolkill River Anthology

*Being a graveyard review of past and passing educational fads, follies,
and fallacies*

Apology

An apology is necessary: First, to "Spoon River Anthology," whose form furnished the pattern for this clown's coat cut out of colored calico. Second, to those somber, humorless educators who can not abide a little nonsense, either now or then. Third, to that power which could "the giftie gie us to see ourselves as ithers see us" for seeming to assume that such a power resides in these lines. Fourth, to those living friends and relatives of the deceased who may feel hurt by the brutal frankness of these post mortem confessions. Fifth, to the author, ourself, for having deemed an apology necessary.



Prologue

Whether good or ill the spell that drew me on

I knew not nor cared to know,

Treading as one asleep, neither willing to go

Nor yet to stay my feet,

Passed I beneath the arch that bends above

The gateway to the pedagogic dead.

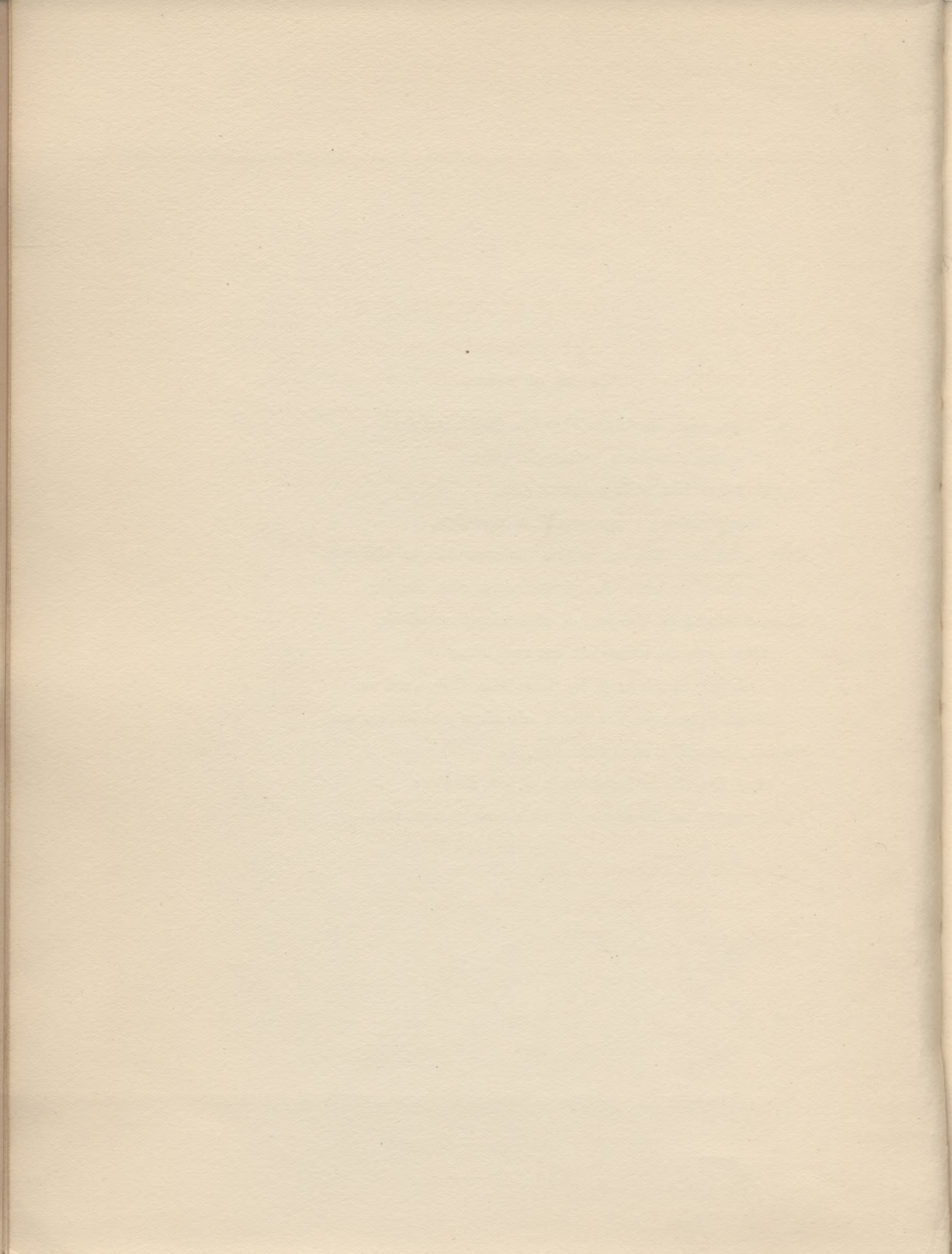
But, strange as was the mood that witchéd me forth,

Far stranger still the wraithlike words which tongueless marble
Whispered with chilling breath into my ears.

For here no ornate slab, chiseled deep by lying hands,
Held high false eulogies above the speechless dead,
But rather vibrant chords were they through which the restless souls
Made vocal their own true epitaphs.

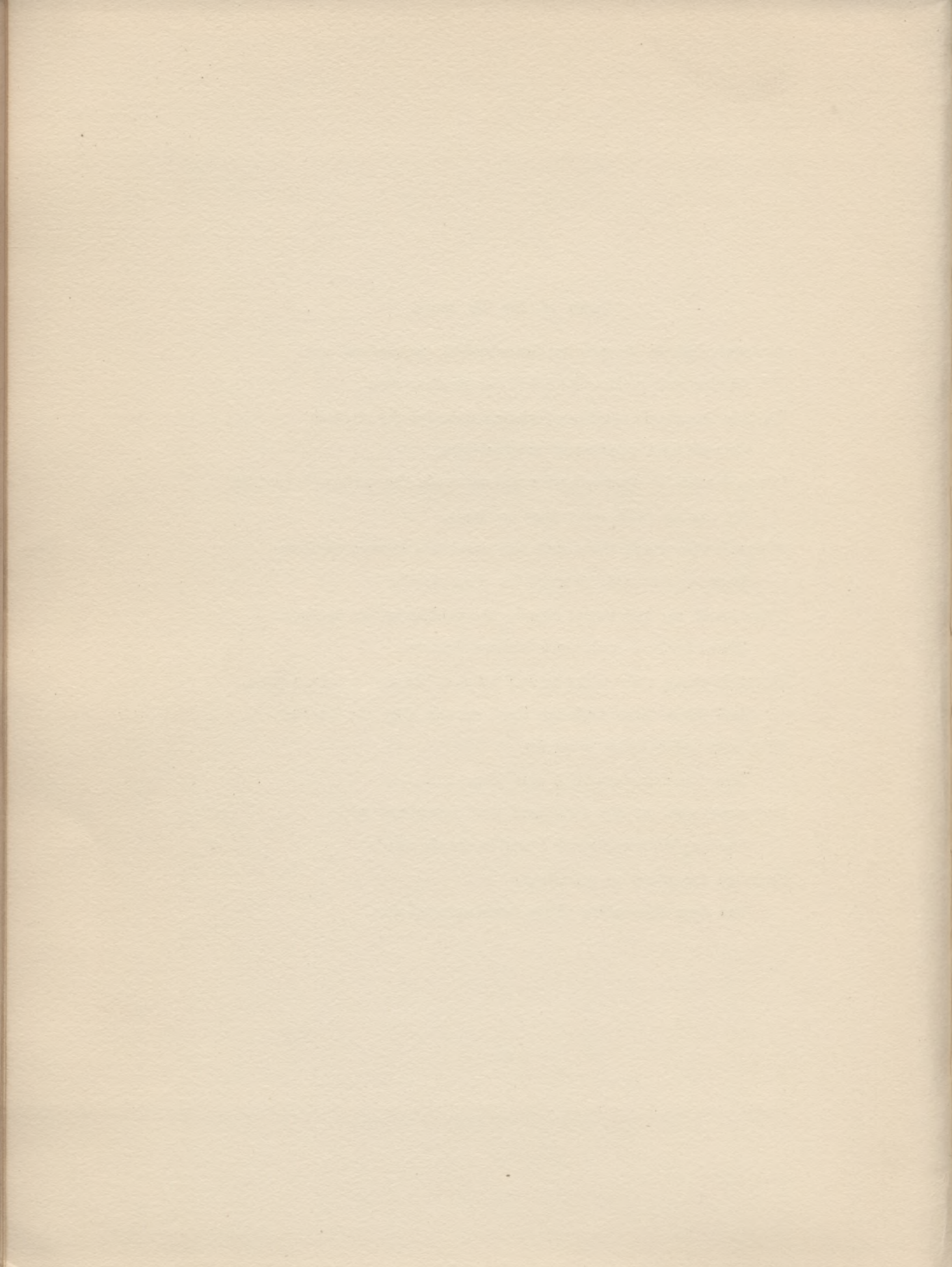
Chorus of voices

List, O ye, who, maddened by the flutish magic
Of some new-born pedagogic piper,
Would follow him with amorous glee,
Vainly seeking a new world, a new sign,
Only to be lost, like us, in this the mountain of oblivion.
Hearken ye unto the ghosts of us who, having
Danced our fill to the jazz of educational novelties,
Like outworn strumpets are cast away
Into this vale of shadows, by those who vilely used us.
Hear, O hear ye, the rueful tale of us who have come
To this, the end of our garish day,
And like the tethered souls of lost illusions
Vainly regret our former as much as our present state.



Voice of the big word

Stranger. behold in me the disembodied, penumbral soul
Of that evil genius which led vainglorious men
To hide the simple verities of education under the shadow
Of vast and ponderous terminologies.
'Twas I who by muddying its waters made the pedagogic puddle
By the roadside seem deep to them.
'Twas I who made them call the mountain stream shallow
Because, forsooth, through its clear depths
They could see and count clearly the pebbles at its bottom.
'Twas I whose spell made learned doctors
Count it cheap and vulgar to call a hoe a hoe and a rake a rake,
And filled them with the fond conceit that the finding
Of a new polysyllabic synonym
Was the discovery of a new idea.
But now, alas, to my awakened and repentant soul
The longitudinal words I bred in simple minds
Seem all too short to pronounce
The deep damnation of my unextenuated sins.



Voice of the culture epoch theory

Though here and now I lie in deep obscurity

But yesterday I sat aloft in the seats of the mighty,
A pedagogic crown upon my head,

An imperious scepter in my hand.

Now, alas, uncrowned I weep in solitude

While those whom I exalted and knighted,

By the magic of my wand,

Are gone awhoring after other harlots .

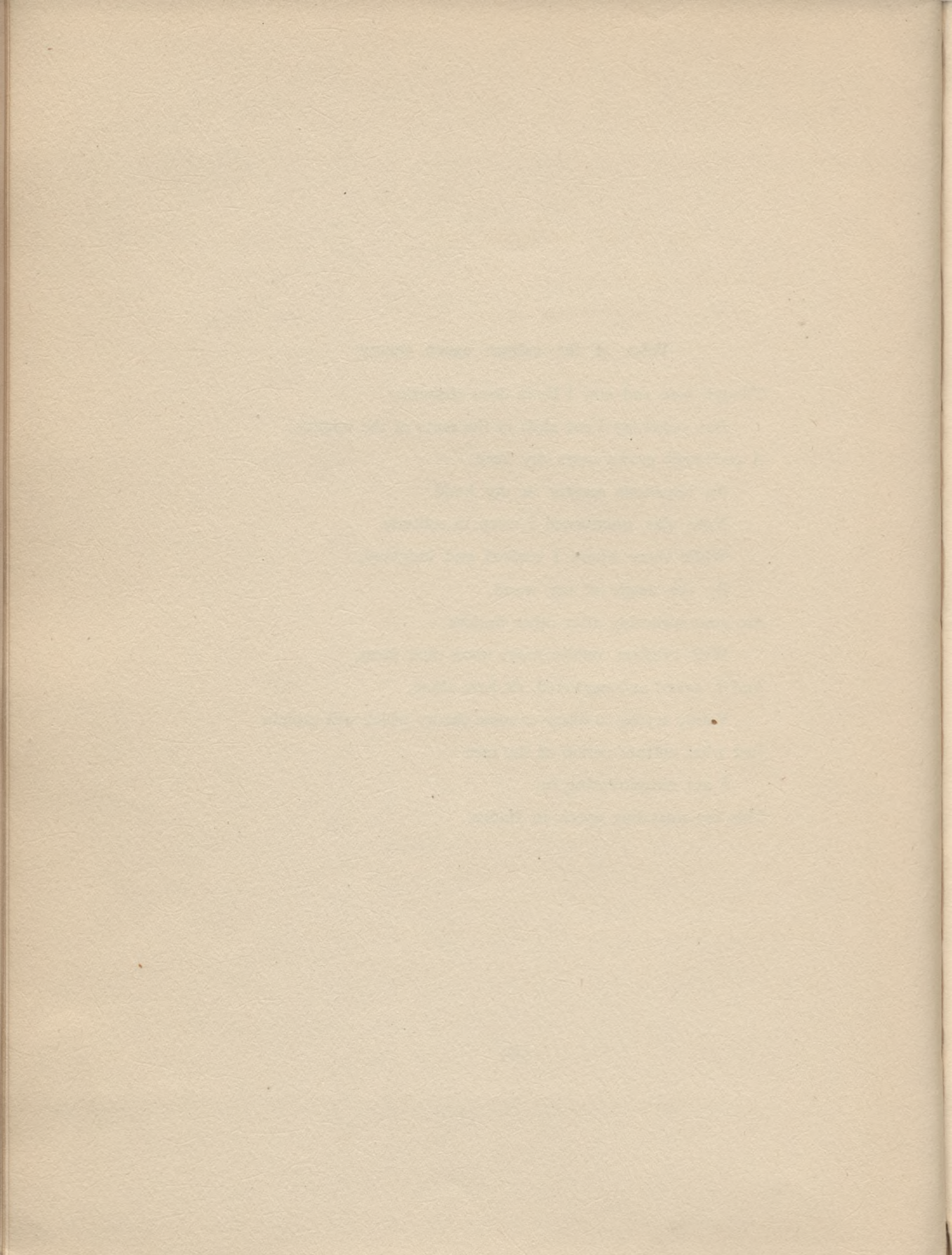
With brighter, redder rouge upon their faces,

And I, naked and neglected, sit here alone,

Vainly trying to discover some theory which will explain
Just what culture period of the race

I am recapitulating in

This my unending epoch in Hades.



Voice of the five formal steps

O, ye earthly visitants, listen to the story of my labored

And painful birth, my tread-mill routine life,

And my final translation to this the junk heap

Of educational importations.

I was born upon alien soil and was not natural enough

To become fully naturalized in a free country.

I was the first informal step in the Pan-German

Invasion of America. I was the step-brother of the goose-step

And possessed all his airy grace and freedom.

I represented the same ponderous, stilted attempt to apply

The results of science to the processes of pedagogy

Which were tried upon the battle fields,

With such disastrous results, by my Vaterland.

While my five formal steps were long enough

To bring me to this distant and dread abode,

They were neither long nor sprightly enough to

Translate me, or any one else,

Into the life of a free and an imaginative people.

So out of the schoolroom into this morgue of formal things

Stepped my five formal German goose-steps,

Leaving American education to its Yankee Doodle Doo spirit

And its hop, skip and jump methods of instruction.

Voice of the object method

I was the voice of one crying in the wilderness,
"Prepare ye the way for the realities of life and nature,
To enter into the school program, now all too full
Of empty words and meaningless abstractions."
It was I who breathed upon the dry bones of the course of study
The vitalizing breath of Francis Bacon and Jean Rousseau,
Sending through the mummified body of the old education
A thrill of new blood and new life.
Upon the pedagogic table set only with plates and knives and forks—
Whereat hungry children were forced to sit, going through the motions
Of stupid, deadening formalities—
I placed the first real bread and butter and meat.
It was I who led the vanguard of that valiant army
That first assaulted the strongholds of etymology, syntax and prosody,
And I might have lived to see the fruits of complete victory
In laboratories, work shops, playgrounds and excursions
Had not my zealous followers erected my name
Into a narrow bookish cult,
Forcing me, in order to save the spirit of my life,
To lose the killing name of it
In the obscurity of this grave.

Voice of apperception

Of all the Herbartian brands of Teutonic tonics

I brought the greatest stimulus to the sick body
Of American educational thought and practice.

But, soon becoming exhausted by over work and over use,
And, like all physicians, being unable to heal myself,

I fell into the hands of your pedagogical quack doctors
Whose minute inspections and deadly dissections

So reduced and weakened my "apperceptive mass" that
I was unable to assimilate the nourishment of new ideas;
And at last, smothered and bound in their paper and card-board
Bandages, like a dried mummy, I was laid away

In this mausoleum, where the old and new bodies
Of the victims of too much dogmatic doctoring

Are loosely bound together by my apperceptive bonds.

Voice of the doctrine of interest

Who, that knew me in my glory day,
Could, by any chance, discover my former in my present self?
Then I was Cinderella at the ball with prince and page
Alike doing me homage and service.
Now, like her, ~~was~~^{all} stripped, I sit alone
In these the ashes of my discontent.
Then I was the rising sun in whose many colored flame
All the learned doctors lit their little torches
And went forth to fill the erstwhile gloomy schoolrooms
With only light and laughter.
And *heraus mit* all strenuous work and high endeavor,—
Without conscious effort all would-be-learners
Were carried across the *pons asinorum*,
Neither touching their feet nor stretching a muscle.
But what woe was mine when intellectual dyspepsia and soul *ennui*
Rendered the children incapable of being interested *in being interested*.
Then a plague fell on teacher and taught,
And, without conscious effort I, the high priest
Of many sided interest, passed into
This uninteresting, *innocuous desuetude*.

Voice of self-activity

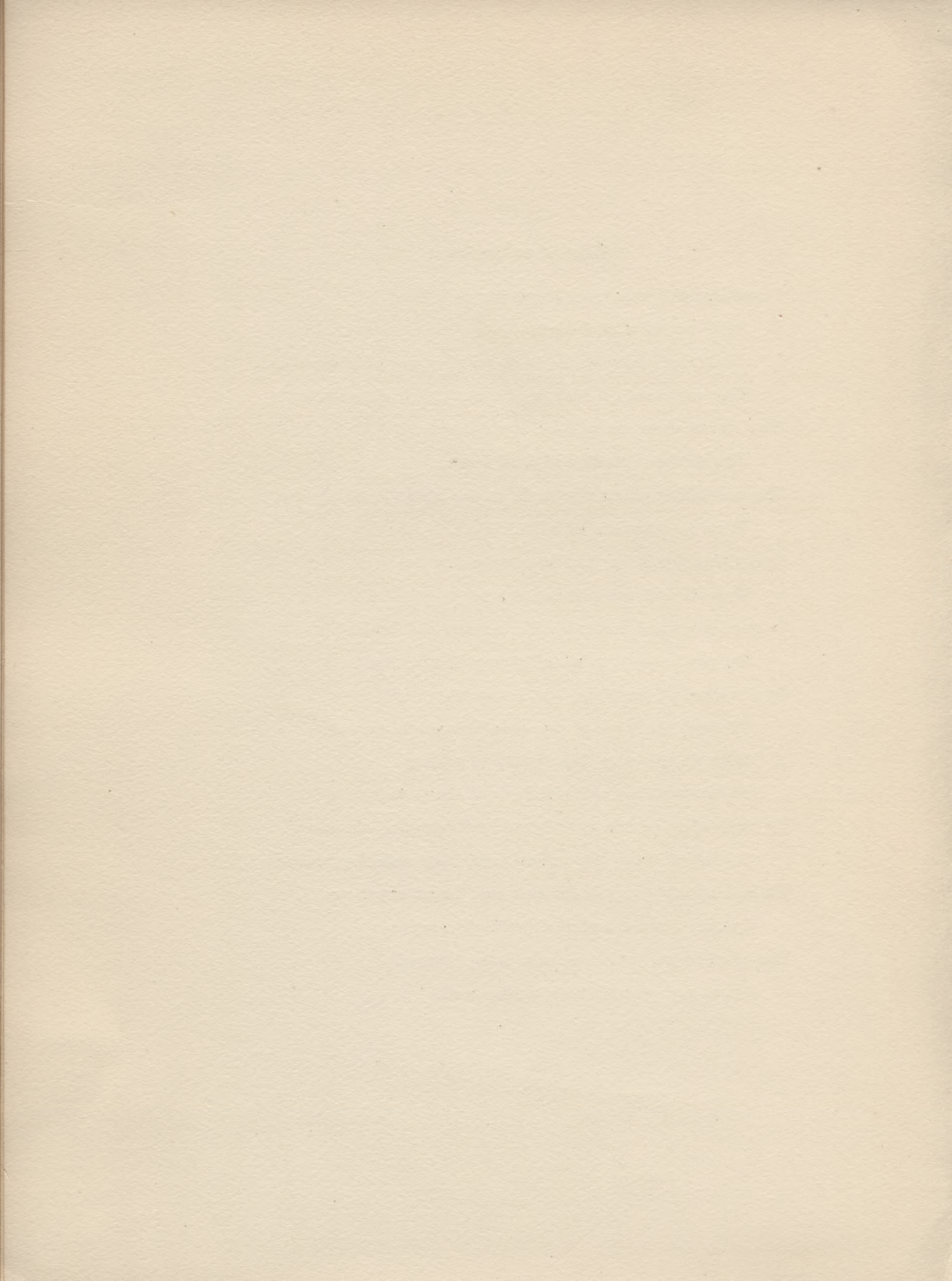
Pause, O mortal, and hear the lamentations
Of the inactive soul of self-activity,
Who, with limp and listless sail, rests motionless
In these, the doldrums of the dead.
Who, looking upon me in this state of pepleless passivity
Could realize that I was once
The angel child of MATER PEDAGOGICA;
The prize wiggle-tail in the educational rain barrel;
The flea that made the lazy dogmas of education
Scratch themselves with a new energy;
The tack on the dunce's stool, the hungry cootie in his cap;
The itch on the body of public instruction
That set everybody to scratching his own or another's back?
I caused more of a stir in the dead, dull schoolroom
Than a whole flock of Mary's lambs.
But, alack and alas, I went too far,—
I aroused the self-activity of a wise old schoolmaster
Who kicked me out of the schoolroom door
Into this back alley of self-effacement
Where with folded hands I am condemned
To sit and watch daily the ceaseless self-activity
Of a thousand beheaded hens.

Voice of correlation

I was conceived in a department store, born in a zoological garden,
And died in a curiosity shop.
My life was Platonic and promiscuous—I was forced into all sorts
Of relations, with all sorts of things, in all sorts of ways.
No wonder I went to pieces. Like the chameleon on the Scotch plaid
Trying to be all things at all times I ceased to be
Any particular thing at any particular time.
Like Dido's bull hide, cut into such fine strips
And stretched over such a vast territory my presence
Was hardly noticeable at any time or in any place.
Even what God had put asunder I tried to join together.
'Twas these many maladjustments which brought on the malady
Which laid me in this malodorous graveyard of malcontents
And maledictions. However, this is not my first or worst burial place.
I have been buried a thousand times in dull lectures and books,
But this is the only grave that any one
Has shown any interest in visiting,
Although none of my numerous
Correlations have ever honored me with a call.

Voice of motivation

Unmotivated I was born, unmotivated I lived,
And unmotivated I died.
I had nothing whatever to do in bringing any of them about.
The very name I bear, and the which I abominate,
Was thrust upon me without my consent.
The clothes I wore and food I ate,
The one failing as utterly to fit as the other to satisfy me,
Were no selections of mine.
Everything I was, or had been or would be
Was all laid out and set down
In ponderous and imponderable lectures and books
By gentlemen who added to my humiliation
By insisting, all the while, that I was doing it all
Through the urge of my own homemade motives.
If I have, in any way, been guilty of adding
To the vexation and weariness of the pedagogic spirit
By motivating certain toplofty and self-imposing educators
To inflict upon the patient and long suffering teachers
Their intolerably stupid lectures and books about me,
I richly deserve and shall willingly receive
The punishment which is now being heaped
Upon my unmotivated sinless soul.



Voice of function

Behold in me the natural son of my sire, the Big Word,
Upon whose death I became the ranking favorite
With his bereft and adoring followers.

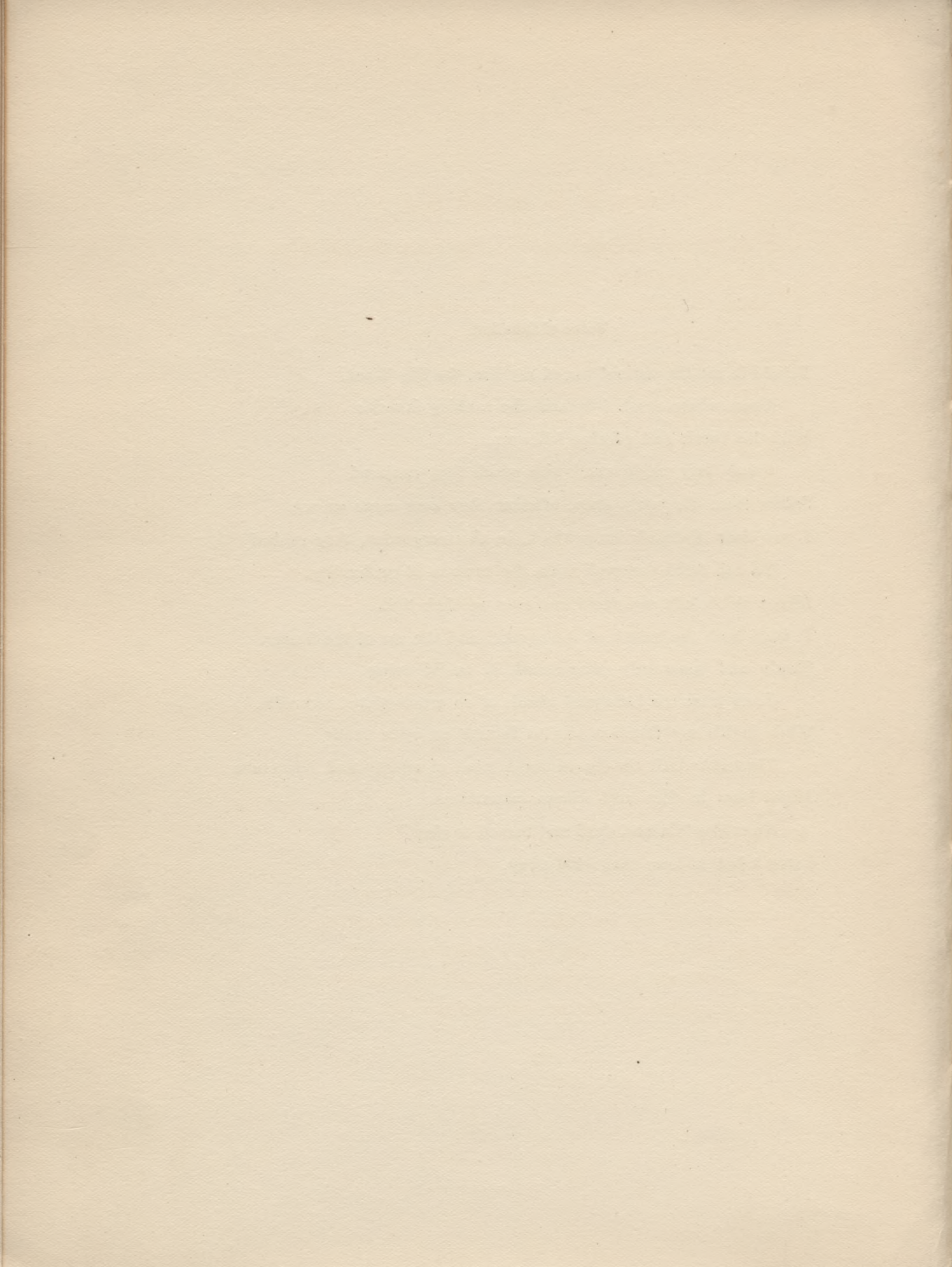
I was their magic wand with which they conjured
Spirits from the vasty deep, whether they ever came or not.
I was their Aladdin's lamp which, in all emergencies, they rubbed
To call forth the genii from the caverns of profundity.

Like a shibboleth my name was ever on their lips.
It filled both the mouth of the speaker and the ear of the hearer.
Slowly and sonorously pronounced, it would wring

Tears from the lachrymal glands of an armor-plated crocodile.
While in life my function was to furnish an open vent

Through which the fervid south wind of educational buncombe
Might blow in deep and solemn intonations,

Now, like "Caesar, dead and turned to clay,"
I stop a hole to keep that wind away.



Voice of the standard tests

I am the Solomon Frankenstein who after many sleepless nights,

In the laboratories of my print shops,

Recreated the collective, composite, average child,

And demonstrated a thousand ways of dissecting him

By means of quartiles, medians and graphs.

I am the chap who developed a scientific method

For compounding a sufficiently large number of errors

So as to derive from them a general, average truth.

I am the Doctrinaire Scientifique who invented

The pedagogic stethoscope for measuring

The systole and diastole of the ventricles of a child's brain;

The X-ray for revealing the figments in a girl's imagination;

The smoked glass for observing and measuring accurately

The sun spots on the solar system of a boy's soul.

But, chiefly, I am noted as the creator of all those progressive educators

Who by using my published, copyrighted standards and tests

And working to death all of the teachers, pupils and janitors in the district

Have succeeded in getting together, with a hay rake,

Enough stuff out of which to concoct a report or a book

On the strength of which they have progressed to another position,

Leaving others to clean up the mess and bury the dead.

I might have been living today had not some impossible devil

Asked me why I did not invent a test for measuring

The efficiency of my own tests. That was the fatal thrust

That ran me through. And here I stand testing the

Patience of all who come hither by repeating unceasingly

"A tester in testing his own tests detested himself."



Voice of formal discipline

Stranger, the slab which rears itself before you

Marks what was to have been my grave.

But I am not here. 'Tis true that learned surgeons, after placing

Me upon their table, chloroforming and cutting me to pieces,

Pronounced me utterly and hopelessly dead.

But my wiser nurses placed into the coffin for burial

Only those warts and protuberances cut from my body—

Which I was all the better to be without—

Bound together my better parts and nursed me back

To a more complete, a more robust, a more potent life.

Therefore, if you would see me as I am,

Go forth into the schoolrooms where the teachers,

Under my name or under another, are teaching every subject

So as to fix in the minds and hearts of their children

Ideals and sentiments and habits of work and play

Which fit them to enter more fully, more successfully

Into the ever changing world of thought and endeavor.

Voice of the educational survey

I was the twin brother of Standard Tests
But possessed a refinement of deviltry
Peculiar to my own impersonality.
I created or destroyed men with a hidden hand.
I was a hired Hessian employed to do a kind of work
Which my employer could not with safety or self-respect do for himself.
I was a salable proxy, a purchasable alibi.
I could furnish evidence to distinguish or damn
A man according to the direction of my employer.
But like every absentee devil I did much good in spite of myself,
And this, no doubt, accounts for my securing burial
Where, stranger, I should be quite happy if, like yourself,
I could go about this unearthly place *incognito*
Surveying its ghostly inhabitants in their discontent
And, like you, returning a lying report of the same.

Voice of the socialized recitation

Had I possessed a little more or a little less
Of what my name suggests
I might have filled a long felt want
Rather than this cold unsocial grave.
But I found it as hard to try to be what I was not
As it was not to be what I was.
By artificial means one can make
Real ice or real sunshine
But no refinement of technique can make a substitute
Bear any resemblance to the real social spirit.
Of course, I could beget what we called team work,
But not all of the team worked at any one time
And none of them worked all of the time.
Individual failures and individual successes were always present.
I never could decide just how much of the individual load
The group could carry without robbing that one of his chance
To work out his own salvation with fear and trembling.
But while I could not live on in an artificial atmosphere,
I am not dead. I shall rise again when the hearts
Of teachers and pupils are filled with the true spirit
Of cooperation, service, and community effort,—
Then, I, the sociological recitation, will return as a true and natural part
Of the true and natural life of the school.

Voice of sex hygiene

I am the unsexed spirit of a once prepotent
But prurient pedagogical Pandora.
By means, unnecessary here to relate, I came to know
The contents of the secret box which the human race
Had kept sealed ever since the first bold adventurer ate
The forbidden fruit of the tree of knowledge.
I believed that all the ills mortal man had fallen heir to
Were the direct results of the sealing of that box.
"Lift the lid" became my slogan and battle cry.
I preached the first crusade for recovering that lost light and knowledge
From the stubborn guards of the unholy Prophet of a false modesty.
But, like the crusaders of old, our cause suffered more
From its friends than from its foes.
Those who rallied to our standard soon disclosed
An alarmingly thorough knowledge of all the box contained,
And a plague fell upon them, filling them with a morbid desire
To spend all their time in talking and thinking about the secrets.
But the real cause of the rout of our crusaders and my death
Was our failure to find a way of lifting the lid to let out
The guardian angels of proper light and knowledge without
At the same time turning loose unnumbered imps and devils of mischief.
And, before breathing my last breath, came there unto me
A voice as from the skies saying,
"O ye foolish seekers after the hidden secrets of life,
Consider the birds of the air and the beasts of the field,
How they live and move and have their being,
But beware that ye shall not with covered heads,
With sandaled feet and soiled hands,
Enter and profane the holy of holies of true modesty."

Voice of efficiency

Approach boldly, thou living man, and in me

Behold one who once, like thyself,
Was strong and full of self-conscious self-sufficiency,
Before whose virile mind and will all obstacles vanished away;
In whose skillful hands old things were made new,
Chaos changed into forms of order and regularity,
All waste in organization of men, motion and material turned to gain.

Time and space and matter shaped themselves at my touch
Into forms of beauty and loveliness and utility.

By my magic, cities, states and nations were melted down
And out of their flux and flow, through remoulding, recasting,
Recreating, I brought forth the perfect, the ideal.

My slogan "Economy and Efficiency" was blazoned on the sky
And trumpeted from the mountain tops.

All this and more was I, but now so inert and helpless I lie
That even the crickets in the grass above my grave revile me.

Wouldst thou know, O man, the cause of my inglorious end?
Not like Lucifer was I cast by imperial arms from my high estate,—

Such a fate were glory and honor to a valiant soul,—
But my undoing, my decline and fall, were wrought

By means too shameful, too ignoble for public utterance.
Therefore, draw nigh that I, in deep humility, may whisper in thine ear

The cursed cause of my deep degradation.

Like the son of the great Napoleon

I was hugged and kissed and loved to death.

Fawning and flattery filled me with consummate conceit
Until I simply blew up and my fragments fell into

This tomb of helpless, hopeless inefficiency.

Voice of fonetic spelling

My spell of life was short and full of disconsonant troubles.
While I seemed to have several sires, the only dam ever mentioned
In my connection did not spell her name in such a way
As to indicate any blood relationship.
I was laid upon the door step of every educational association
In this country. But however much I might scream and kick
And threaten, I could not get myself adopted.
To be sure, several persons under suspicion of my paternity
Have, from time to time, taken me in and tried to give me respectability.
But after a lingering illness, with just one bad spell after another,
I was pronounced fully and sufficiently dead by a qualified
Coroner's jury. But some of my unreconcilables are still trying
To preserve my body by artificial means, although the neighbors are
Complaining bitterly about putrid odors. And it is this
Protracted and protracting attempt to pulmotor life
Into my lifeless body that accounts for this my empty grave.
But while I was stupid enough in some ways
I knew when I was dead and instead of waiting around
While my enemies reviled and mocked at my remains
I hastened hither to repent me of my literal and spiritual sins
Only to find my just punishment chiseled deeply
Above my reformed h-e-d
Declaring me phonetically d-e-d.

Voiceless unnamed infants

Now, conducted by the caretaker of this dormitory of sleepless dead,

I came to a quiet but roomy portion, completely
Filled with unnumbered, nameless graves.

These were the repositories of those educational prematurities
Which, by the administering of the twilight sleep, are procured
By the thousands in the lying-inwards of our schools of education.
Most of them were still born; and a pedagogical infant

That can not talk and make a big noise *instantly*
Meets an early death and an unnamed grave.

Beyond these in a new addition I beheld new dug

But unfilled graves, marked by various legends, such as:
"Adolescent child," "Revitalized School," "Projects," etc.

And up out of an unfinished grave came the hardened
Irreverent voice of a grave digger contending with his mate:

"With land and labor comin' so valuable, why don't some guy
Start a crematory for disposin' of these bloomin' stiff's."

Voice of the stand-patter

Reaching, now, the outskirts of the vale, there fell upon my ears
These bewailments of a repentant but lost soul:

"Stranger, you have done me an undeserved honor in seeking me
In this unfrequented part of the field of the dead.

I was the hard boiled egg in the educational incubator,
And, never having felt the thrill of nascent life within myself,
I resented all manifestations of it in others.

I interpreted every new movement as a personal assault upon myself,
And failed in my blind prejudice to distinguish the true
From the false in the ceaseless struggle of educational thought
To adjust itself to changing conditions and new demands.

I suffered greater mortification over the successes of others
Than over my own miserable failures and shortcomings.

Had I sought wisely to absorb into myself the new spirit,
I should have continued to live and that more abundantly,
But blind, unreasoned conservatism has no place

In the educational system of a thinking, growing people.
Therefore, the best contribution I could make towards progress
Was to get out of the way and take my fixed place
In this the terminal station of all stationary things
Where I can stand pat forever and forever.

Epilogue

Wearied now under the burden and gloom of my ghostly anthology,
Sought I to depart ere others should engage me,
But just outside the confines of the shadow
There rose before me a being in form both human and divine.
Simple and natural in act and in word,
It thus with friendly grace, and dignity bespoke me:
"Some call me the Guardian Angel of education;
Others salute me as Sanity or Common Sense.
In the mad rush of ideas along the highway of educational progress,
It is my duty and privilege to guard the millions of school children,
Passing that way, from hurt and harm.
Quietly, but steadfastly, I stand in the midst of the onrushing throng
Holding before the contending, conflicting forces
That old but ever new admonition and warning:
'Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones
Which believe in me
It were better that a mill stone were hanged about his neck
And that he were drowned in the depths of the sea!'"

