

‘Shoo, [Scribbler], Don’t Bother Me!’<sup>1</sup>

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**I. OPENING NOTE: A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE MANY EDITIONS OF *TRUTH, A GIFT FOR SCRIBBLERS, SECOND EDITION, WITH ADDITIONS AND EMENDATIONS***

In 1832, the Bostonian publishing company, B. B. Mussey, and a printer, Leonard W. Kimball, released the second and final edition of *Truth, a Gift for Scribblers, Second Edition, with Additions and Emendations* by William Joseph Snelling (“William Joseph Snelling”). The second edition of *Truth*, however, more aptly describes a preceding publication, another second edition that Snelling scrapped soon after printing. After writing and printing the first edition of *Truth* in 1831 with the help of Stephen Foster, an edition marked *Second Edition* and *Printed for the Author* appeared briefly in Boston during the later months of the same year before being superseded by the 1832 *Second Edition, with Additions and Emendations* (Flanagan 376, 389). Fortunately for Snelling, the offending second edition of 1831 avoided public scrutiny as the volume remained in only a few, private hands, including the printer’s and his own. Thus, while Snelling transcribed three copies of *Truth*, he considered the first, *Second Edition*’s print job “so badly executed that [he] was obliged to suppress it” and declared the second *Second Edition, with Additions and Emendations* to be the genuine and only succeeding version to *Truth*’s first edition (Snelling 8). Other than a removed “page of errata,” little information pertaining to differences between the first *Second Edition* and the second edition *with Additions and Emendations* survives (Flanagan 389).

No pertinent details regarding the physical qualities of either the first or second edition(s) exist within Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections’ records. Still, what scholarly reports exist, based on other surviving copies of the first and second editions, support an indication suggested by the book’s subtitle, *Second Edition, with Additions and Emendations*,

that Snelling includes more material in the final rendition of *Truth* than he provides for the earlier editions. Whereas a duodecimo-sized book contained the first edition in fifty-two pages, including pages i-vi of the “Preface,” the book’s stature grew to octavo-sized with the private publication of the scrapped, second edition (Flanagan 389). Aside from modifications as to whose full names Snelling omitted or included in the second edition compared to the first edition’s extensive employment of abbreviations, the second edition, *Printed for the Author*, contained few enough changes so not to veer from the first edition’s length. The second edition available to the public, however, underwent substantial alterations. First, the pages shrunk to octodecimo-size. Second, *Additions and Emendations* increased the number of pages to seventy-two, including i-v of the “Preface.” In total, the final edition integrated the “Prefaces” to the first and second editions alongside a newly-minted “Prologue” by Snelling.

*i. SHOOTING UP A 200-YEAR-OLD TEXT WITH X-RAYS*

Although *Truth* addresses “Scribblers” in its title, discerning whom Snelling considered to be the book’s audience proves difficult due to a lack of publishing house records and cost books. Little information on the book’s physical qualities exist aside from first-hand observations (see Appendix E). Nineteenth-century authors considered B. B. Mussey an “extremely obscure publisher,” and the only bibliography containing *Truth* lists an ellipsis in the place of the book’s price (Petersen; Roorbach 550). An inquiry into *Truth*’s material composition (see Appendix A), thus, helps provide educated guesses as to how many copies were made, at what price, and what combination of human- and machine-labor the printing process required. Similarly, elemental analysis allows for more sophisticated deduction regarding what demographic could afford to read his writing: the general public or newspaper editors and “Scribblers?”

A deep irony emerges between *Truth*'s content and form in the examination of the elemental composition of *Truth*'s paper, printer's ink, and front cover through x-ray fluorescence (XRF) testing: a non-invasive procedure for determining the chemical makeup of irreplaceable materials. Snelling's book proclaims to give the valuable "[g]ift" of "Truth" with a capital "T" to wretched "Scribblers," however, he wraps his gift in shoddy, common trappings. The relatively cheap make of the book suggests that Snelling appealed to the same public audience that produced the "Scribblers" he criticized. While railing against the American public's poetic tastes and preferences as depicted in the news, Snelling utilized low-quality materials worth of "Scribblers[']s" low-quality writing. To demonstrate and defend the "Tr[ue]" values founding American literature, *Truth* takes on a material medium befitting Snelling's general public, whom he deemed nearly incapable of understanding and appreciating the value of his work.

## **II. PART ONE: LITERARY AND AUTHORIAL CONTEXT**

The *Second Edition, with Additions and Emendations*, of Snelling's *Truth, a Gift for Scribblers* offers a glimpse into how one author harnessed satirical poetry as a means to critique contemporary writers. Detractors of his book noted that Snelling wrote with an air of "personal animosity," yet Snelling denied these claims on the basis that "[he had] no quarrels with, or personal dislike to, any individual of the scribbling race" (Snelling iv). Largely, Snelling refrained from "attack[ing] [any authors] in a personal manner, who [had] not themselves offended in the same sort" (Snelling iv). Through his employment as an editor, however, Snelling operated within the same social sphere as many of those authors whom he criticized. Snelling's best defense against accusations of subjectivity and ill-intentions grounded upon the objectivity of his criticisms. Thus, he strove to maintain independent standards when judging literature generated by familiar writers.

i. *THE HOLE WILLIAM J. SENLLING CRAWLED OUT OF*

Born to Colonel Josiah Snelling and Elizabeth Beth in 1804, William J. Snelling grew up in New England, and received his education in Massachusetts (“William Joseph Snelling”). Snelling enlisted in the U.S. Military Academy at West Point, however, he relocated to his father’s post at Fort Snelling, named after Colonel Snelling, in Mississippi after facing difficulties with an instructor (C, B. F. 125; “Josiah Snelling;” Shirey). Here, Snelling spent substantial time with the Dakota Indians and local trappers, and married his first wife, Prairie du Chien, who died less than a year later (“William Joseph Snelling”). Snelling moved to Boston following his father’s death, and “engaged in hack work for a while, most often under the pseudonym Solomon Bell” (“William Joseph Snelling”). After writing *Truth, a Gift for Scribblers* Snelling submitted work to and edited work submitted to various newspapers, including the *New-England Galaxy* and the *Boston Herald* (C, B. F. 125; “William Joseph Snelling”). The “heartfelt energy” with which he wrote dealt such “a blow in every word” that Snelling’s friends felt “apprehensive for his personal safety” at times (C, B. F. 125). Snelling’s writing reflected his strong, combined sense of “prejudice” against those authors whom he deemed inexperienced with the subjects their writings explored and encapsulated his driving “purpose” to eliminate the publication of such pieces (C, B. F. 125). His bold writing mirrored his lifestyle, and Snelling’s persistence led those of his time to label him an “altogether wild and adventurous” person (C, B. F. 125; “William Joseph Snelling”).

While Snelling “never took advantage of an opponent,” his mantra that “few plants worth cultivating are so delicate as to be incapable of bearing wind and sun” directed him to rip apart poetry and poets alike to “vindicate [America] and the Nine [Muses]” (C, B. F. 125; Snelling v, 17). Modern literary critiques reflect on Snelling’s writing with consideration not dissimilar to

nineteenth-century Bostonians, describing the author as “guilty of excessive egoism” and dependent on “violence” for his only “arsenal” (Flanagan 392). Posterity supposedly reveals weaknesses in Snelling’s argument against mediocre works, considering “the majority of the poets assailed therein were such mediocrities” (Flanagan 392). Still, the passage of time supports Snelling’s selection of authors that he singled out for their virtues. Readers are more likely familiar with William Cullen Bryant’s name and poems, which Snelling praised, than with a majority of the authors whose works Snelling decried: Alanzo Lewis, Ebenezer Bailey, and William Bourn Oliver Peabody, among others.

### **III. PART TWO: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERARY INSPIRATION WITHIN THE TITLE PAGE**

#### *i. Y’ALL ARE A BUNCH OF ~~WANKERS~~ SCRIBBLERS*

The title of Snelling’s book, *Truth, a Gift for Scribblers*, (see Appendix B) speaks to the relationship shared between “[t]ruth,” “[s]cribblers,” and the author, primarily via the words’ placement (Snelling i). “Truth,” holds the top fifth of the page entirely to itself, which emphasizes the work’s prioritization of “Truth” above all else. Additionally, the selection of “Scribbler” imparts a sense of necessity on behalf of whomever intends to give the “[g]ift” of “Truth.” The famished condition of the “[g]ift[’s]” recipients, “[s]cribblers,” calls out for someone’s aid in bestowing “Truth” unto the masses. Still, the *Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* report of the first known usage and definition of “scribbler” in 1556 suggests that “[s]cribblers” do not wait passively for “Truth[’s]” to arrive rather they “[write] hastily” (“Scribbler, n.1.”). Their “careless[ness]” threatens to harm “Truth” before it can bestow its good graces on the “petty author[s].” Consequently, tragedy and deprivation mar “Scribblers[’s]” already “worth[less]” writing (Kastan; “Scribbler, n.1.”).



By speaking to Snelling's direct voice, the use of "[s]cribbler" also relates the author to his audience. Snelling's early career included "[scribbling]" for newspapers not dissimilar in profession to the authors his book denounces. Perhaps, like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Snelling worried that a "damned mob of scribbling women" would run his pen out of business (Frederick 231). This detail led nineteenth-century critics for the *New England Magazine*, *American Monthly Review*, and the *Boston Literary Magazine* to debate whether Snelling's voice took on satirical tone or qualified *Truth, a Gift for Scribblers* as libel. Either the book's design prods dedicated, albeit inexperienced writers to recognize the poor quality of their work through thickly-laid satire, or the author's crass voice reveals the book to be nothing more than arrogantly-written criticism by a poet whose writing betrays him as an unsuccessful judge of quality (Pflieger).

ii. 'SATURA TOTA NOSTRA EST'

Truth raised issues of perception regarding whether the satire showcased valid literary criticism or existed as an exercise to depravity. Two quotations on the title page propose that defining satire as a genre remains as problematic a task in Snelling's time as it was in the second- and first-century life of the Roman poet, Decimus Iūnius Iuvenālis, and in the time of eighteenth-century English poet, Alexander Pope (see Appendix B). *Satura* takes on connotations of "variety" and separation from other relatively "order[ed]" genres through the Latin root for "abundance" (Peck). While authors practising *satura* dutifully saturated their writing with a "promiscuity, without order," they retained standards amongst themselves (Peck, "Scriblerus Club"). Classically, writers coined *satura* in part as a push for social reform ("Satire"). Authorial purpose separated criticisms made in the name of satire from tasteless jabs. Consider the following translation of a quotation in dactylic hexameter from Iuvenālis' *Satira VIII* (lines 163-

165): “Some defender of his faults will tell me, ‘Even we did like this when we were young?’ Perhaps. But you since ceased nurturing your wanderings/errors and let them drop” (Pearse, Snelling). Iuvenālis states that those who “let [*sic*] drop” their youthful “wanderings” condemn their exploration as “errors” made without purpose, which an adult mind could later conceive of as a measure of validation for electing to amble. Iuvenālis continues to “[nurture] [his] wanderings,” and establishes meaning behind initial reactions in the process. Quintilianus proudly declares that “satire...is wholly” of Roman origin because the invention of the genre speaks to the Romans’ ability underlie crass language with a sense of refinement (Quintilianus).

Still, Snelling’s readers interpreted his rude language as a fault in his approach rather than a shocking exposé of satirical talent. A column released in May 1832 “advise[d] Snelling to go to school to Horace and Juvenal [Iuvenālis] and to remember that vulgarity [is] hardly a fit substitute for genuine wit” (*American Monthly Review* 408; Flanagan 391). Alexander Pope, the author of the title page’s second quotation, however, embraced “vulgarity” to “ridicule pretentious erudition and scholarly jargon” (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Commonly assuming the pseudonym, Martinus Scriblerus, Pope pushed against works promoting low-quality “smarts[,]” which took but “a fool” to see through the author’s wit (Pope; Snelling). While others “th[ought]” satire to be “cruel,” Pope understood that “[n]o creature...smarts as a fool” (Pope; Snelling). Combined, *Truth*’s inclusion of quotations by Iuvenālis and Pope works to vindicate Snelling’s coarse writing-style as a legitimate method for approaching literary criticism. The quotations also support Snelling’s implicit argument, and sometimes direct claim, that he wrote *Truth* out of a genuine concern for American literature rather than from a place of personal, misdirected misgivings. Snelling relies on Iuvenālis and Pope to frame his argument on the first page, so readers feel confident in turning to read another page.

#### IV. PART THREE: PLAYING PIN THE TAIL ON THE JACKASS IN THE PROLOGUE

i. *FOR THE LOVE OF ALL THAT IS HOLY, ROLL OVER*

*Truth's* "Prologue" reproduces an imagined, dramatic dialogue between two *dramatis personae*, Snelling and a "[f]riend," to reveal how Snelling perceived the task of refining American literature: a civic duty. To assemble a more thorough filter capable of sifting through mounds of lower-quality works, Snelling advocated for prospective writers to join their literary criticisms with his own. The employment of a private setting, "[t]he author's garret," to house a publicly-rendered conversation, "Prologue," demonstrates Snelling's belief that the matter of fine-tuning America's literary tastes required individuals to consider the wellbeing of the community to be a personal affair (see Appendix C). The nameless "[f]riend" featured in the Prologue begs "[his] meddling friend [Snelling]" to reconsider "mak[ing] head alone...[a]gainst a host of foes" and asks Snelling: "If fools will still be fools, why need you care" (Snelling 9)? Snelling responds with an assertion that "[a] public grief is ev'ry man's affair" and thus reframes the problem presented by his friend (Snelling 9). He cares about the state of American literature and so should others. A more appropriate response to the problem, therefore, entails others' participation as critics rather than scaling back the vitriol contained in Snelling's criticisms.

While detractors of Snelling's criticisms decried his work for making *ad hominem* arguments, Snelling understood this widely shared belief to be the result of a dearth of equally serious critics' voices. He lamented prospective peers' inactivity, especially for the possibility that one of their pens might better serve the task of cleansing America's newspapers of low-quality writing:

Author.  
I wish, indeed, some abler hand than mine

Would vindicate our country and the Nine [Muses];  
But since none offers, since I stand alone,  
Coragio! Be the thankless task my own.

Friend.

Well, since the voice of friendship not avails,  
Go!—*via! pande vela*<sup>5</sup>—spread your sails! (Snelling 17)

The fictional Snelling present in *Truth*'s prologue held onto a deeply-rooted notion of honor, and he thought it his duty to protect the public from “[enduring]” a “deplorable epidemic” at the pens of “vermin” and “poetasters” (Snelling iii-v; Flanagan 393). Only the bitter medicine of “caustic reproof” and time could restore people’s sensibilities (Snelling iv). If “a regular physician” could not be found, then “a country practitioner may” and must “be allowed to prescribe his nostrum” (Snelling iv). Although Snelling “wish[ed]” another critic might “vindicate our country [America],” the absence of an “abler hand” forced Snelling to resort to taking up his own pen to thwart against what he perceived to be the one of the world’s more egregious injustices: subpar literature (C, B. F. 125). Far from impeding Snelling’s personal efforts to rail against popular print, “stand[ing] alone” “vindicate[d]” Snelling’s sense of “purpose” in addressing an otherwise “thankless task [on his] own” (C, B. F. 125). Hence the defeated exit of Snelling’s friend, who proclaims “Go! [Snelling]—*via! pande vela*” “since the voice of friendship [does] not [avail] [you],” bears little note to Snelling as he seeks not friends, but writers-in-arms. The author’s final statement, “Coragio,” a derivative of the Italian word for “courage” corroborates this notion by suggesting that Snelling relies on himself for “encouragement” (Dyce). Once Snelling diagnosed America’s literary ailment, he wasted no time in applying balms of his own design. Snelling refused to ignore the “epidemic” of low-quality literature; however, he “wish[ed]” a more sophisticated method for purging the “vermin” might appear (Flanagan 393).

ii. *THOSE WHO WOULD SHOVEL DIRT UPON HIM*

The vast majority of the writers whom Snelling criticized disapproved of being labeled “vermin” (Flanagan 393). Still, Snelling found further motivation in stamping the stubbornness out of untalented authors’ rebukes by highlighting faults in their objections. One objection, penned by an author known only by his initials, W. A. C., appears in a newspaper<sup>6</sup> clipping pasted to the back cover of *Truth* (see Appendix D). W. A. C. draws attention to Snelling’s “morbid nature and Bohemianism” to explain that “when [the public] can see no good reason for...[Snelling] assaulting his fellows...we have no other feeling than pity and contempt for the wit who thus violates the law of good breeding and morality” (Snelling). While W. A. C.’s criticism appeared after *Truth*’s publication, Snelling responded to countless, analogous rebuttals by mirroring his disparagers’ concerns of “good breeding.” Snelling metaphorized critics’ implicit arguments about social class and class properties by identifying writers such as W. A. C. as belonging to “*this* Americo-Arcadian\* *breed*/ [which] [n]eed no such spur to make them show their speed” (Snelling 15, added emphasis). The asterisk directs readers to a footnote: “\*Arcadia was famous for its jack-asses” (Snelling 15). Whereas critics lashed out at Snelling by labeling his convention-breaking critiques as “morbid [in] nature and [Bohemian],” Snelling retorted that their “nature” and judgment amounted to common “jack-ass[ery]...spur[red]” to “speed” by his whip-crack criticism.

Snelling flings back the dirt shoveled upon him by his critics’ hooves by attacking the herd mentality underlying the same writers’ original works. The pieces Snelling lambastes in *Truth* blend with ensuing criticisms of the book in that both lack skillful penmanship. Tasked with the difficult job of herding a drove of “ass[es],” Snelling wonders:

Howbeit, shall I the scale of fools explore?  
The best deserves the whip, the worst no more.

Shall one to praise or pardon make pretence  
Because he digs the grave of Common Sense  
But five feet deep, while others sink to ten? (Snelling 15-16)

Deeming the business of deciding whose work retains the title of lowest-quality to be impossible, Snelling approaches the “poetasters” *en masse*. “Fools” cannot appreciate politeness. Therefore, Snelling forgoes such formalities and utilizes the “whip” as his instrument of instruction. Each author “deserves” the “whip[’s]” undivided attention. Regardless of how deep those who “[dig] the grave of Common Sense” reach, each lacks sound “[s]ense” in practical matters, including within the discussion of literature. Rather than feign “pretence” and “praise” or “pardon” writers to calibrate “the scale of fools,” Snelling elects to “explore” scribblers’ overlapping errors in their collective monstrosity. He considers any other rendition of “the scale” an inaccurate depiction of the reality of the fools’ low-quality literary contributions. “[J]ack-asses” race to trample Snelling, but he skillfully avoids the stampede by throwing a single stick of dynamite onto a nearby rock face. The avalanche swallows the herd as Snelling’s deflections drown out scribblers’ condemnations.

## **V. PART FOUR: “SHOOT THE MESSENGER,” CHEER ON THE PREFACES**

### *i. TIS NOTHING BUT A SCRATCH*

Snelling held scribblers responsible for their works’ shortcomings in the prologue to the first edition (see Appendix C). Even when facing the inevitable prospect of incurring authors’ and perhaps the public’s scorn as well, Snelling preferred that scribblers write and send nothing to the newspapers if their works proved unable to meet higher literary standards (Snelling iv). “At last,” Snelling writes, “the evil...ephemera” generated by “would-be poets[’s]...violent panegyrics...fly[ing] on wings more waxy than even those of Icarus...has become intolerable” (Snelling iii). Managing merely to scribble out “ephemera,” writers failed to write poems that

could provide an audience with long-lived enjoyment. These authors were bereft of the skills necessary to write eloquently, however, they also lacked the foresight to protect printing presses from familiarizing the public with their works. The public's tastes merited similar scorn, according to Snelling, for preferring "acrobats and charlatans to legitimate actors [and writers]" (Flanagan 380). Consequently, literary standards suffered from a barrage of shared offenses: the creation and dissemination of low-quality literature developed and fed into the public's misguided tastes.

The circulation of low-quality literature cut away at Snelling. The prologue to *Truth's* first edition recounts that passerby's commentary on so-called "first-rate" poems, what he coined scribblers' "violent panegyrics," bugged Snelling's daily travels (Snelling iii-iv). Citing Lord George Gordon Byron, Snelling reminds readers of *Truth* that "an author's works...are public property" and "he who purchases may judge" (Snelling iv). While Snelling acknowledged the dual nature of Lord Byron's statement, but "heartily" incurred any repercussions of his mission to "if possible, [sic] make others write better" (Snelling iv). Furthermore, Snelling took "pleasure [in] performing" the same "service" he tasked "would-be poets" with: "sometimes endur[ing] severe, but just criticism, for the good of the community" (Snelling v). Considering he believed "plants worth cultivating" should be capable of withstanding "wind and sun," Snelling toiled to ensure that *Truth* could withstand criticism (Snelling v). Validating the employment of satire as an effective method for delivering literary critiques required Snelling to anticipate another author looking through "[house] of glass" and throwing rocks against how he argued on behalf of his "object[ive:]" to eliminate low-quality writing (Snelling iv).

The preface to the second edition (see Appendix C) utilizes the third person to uphold and defend Snelling's guiding purpose for writing *Truth* and opens with a hard rejection of all of

the criticisms facing the first edition publication: “[n]othing is farther from [the author’s intention] than to offer aught like apology for any part of the contents of his first edition” (Snelling 7). To the contrary, Snelling considered his position facing the “expense” of his detractors as he saw it as the “privilege of the beaten to rail” (Snelling 7). Naturally, “some imputations” should “burden [him]” (Snelling 7-8). Snelling’s firm stance, however, did not translate into deafness. The closing lines of the preface to the second edition demonstrate substantial attention to detail in orchestrating the final product of *Truth* put forth to the public. When Snelling observed the potential for valid criticisms, such as ones likely to stem from the typos present in the first, *Second Edition* (i.e., the edition without Additions and Emendations), he “felt obliged to suppress it” and issued an “apology for the delay” (Snelling 8). While Snelling never quarreled with scribblers, he understood their animosity (Snelling 7). Moreover, in understanding writers’ right to counter criticism, Snelling accepted whatever attacks *Truth* prompted as par for the course (Snelling 7). The same reasoning that goaded Snelling into polishing the *Second Edition with Additions and Emendations* for publication rather than keeping the book as a primarily privately-held text demanded that he permit the scribblers their speech.

## **VI. CLOSING NOTE: A SAVIOR GREATER THAN ALL OF OUR SINS**

### **i. A THANKLESS TASK: SUFFERING FOR SOCIETAL BETTERMENT**

*Truth, a Gift for Scribblers* in totality merits attention. The bold intentionality characteristic of Snelling’s writing vexed some of his contemporaries and caused those who fancied themselves poets to inspect the artistic value of their works as they sought to defend themselves against *Truth*[’s] onslaught. A few fellows applauded Snelling’s efforts to trim literary weeds: pieces conceived without conviction and/or written without skill. Snelling viewed his work as essential to the betterment of American literature. A heightened awareness of



America's position on the global, literary stage motivated Snelling to protect American literature's future from a plague of scribbling writers. His efforts did not go unnoticed by foreign readers. British Captain Frederick Marryat noted the following of Snelling's *Truth* after visiting America in 1837:

During my residence in the United States, a little work made its appearance...it was the production of an American...He wrote the very best satirical poem I ever read by an American, full of force, and remarkable for energetic versification; but intemperance, the prevalent vice of America, had induced him to beggary and wretchedness. (Captain Marryat 282; Flanagan 391)

Bostonians and foreigners alike struggled to reach a resolution regarding the true intention driving Snelling's book. Captain Marryat identified the book distinctly as "the production of an American." Yet, he thought Snelling's *Truth* distorted literary ideals in a comparable manner to how "intemperance...induced [Snelling] to beggary and wretchedness." The "very best satirical poem[']s...energetic versification" turned crass merited recognition as "the [most] prevalent vice of America" in Captain Marryat's journal, whereas overwrought poetry went undiscussed.

The "little work made" ripples, some of which spurred storms. Still, the content and form of his book suggest that "[Snelling] has been burthened with some imputations" unjustly (Snelling 7). Snelling's poems propose qualifications that poetry must meet to generate meaning enough to validate its existence; foremost, do no harm to up-and-coming American literary traditions. An understanding of this ideological premise helps examine the proportionality of the responses of Snelling's critics with regards to his own criticisms and *vice versa*. Upon the release of *Truth* to the public, those whose work Snelling reviewed felt justified in seeking out faults in Snelling's writing. Finding few errors, however, detractors restored to name-calling. By coining Snelling's nickname, "Smelling [Snelling]," decriers stooped to slander. Thus, a good number of their criticisms concerning Snelling morphed into exactly what they accused *Truth* of

forwarding: retaliatory responses based on intimate slights. Mudslinging replaced judicious criticism.

Meaningful progress rarely results from such unvirtuous conduct, so Snelling moved to give a disproportionate response in his book's second edition. Instead of lengthening his fault-finding analyses of various works, he reaffirmed his position by adding not only another preface but a prologue detailing his uncomfortable position in heading the scathing undertaking of weeding through low-quality literature. The act of removing abbreviations of authors' names only to replace them with full names addresses Snelling's criticizers as if to remind them to act like adults not like poets, whose elusive genius evades description. Additionally, the weight of their own resistance, amounted in poorly-written objections, indulged Snelling's original criticisms by showcasing the consistency of their lack of skill. Consequently, *Truth's* featured authors fell subject to a good deal of criticism in front of the public, who finally saw Scribblers for what they were: parading "poetasters." While the authors Snelling criticized labored to produce work worthy of the public's praise, *Truth* guaranteed to memorialize their works' shortcomings. Uninventive responses lacking critical thinking further solidified the mediocrity of the authors referenced by Snelling.

Snelling boldly challenged authors but also the public audience and literary constructs that shaped them. Still, Snelling never achieved notoriety outside of his own period, and no one reshaped *Truth* into another edition or generated a new volume. The author who riled so many contemporaries faded into obscurity, but the quality of his writing should not be determined in isolation by only its longevity. Emerson's lecture "on the 'Poetry of the Times'" supports this notion, stating: "the first man who called another an ass was a poet" (Rubin 105). *Truth* exemplifies Snelling's talent for sighting an "ass" a mile away. Perhaps, the "[t]ruth" behind his

argument succeeded on an order of magnitude strong enough not only to dispel “poetasters,” but to knock out the foundations of his argument’s necessity. Snelling critiqued others’ writing so effectively, that once he destroyed their names, no one saw a reason for remembering his. Once Snelling quelled the pandemic, we forgot low-quality poetry blighted nineteenth-century literature.

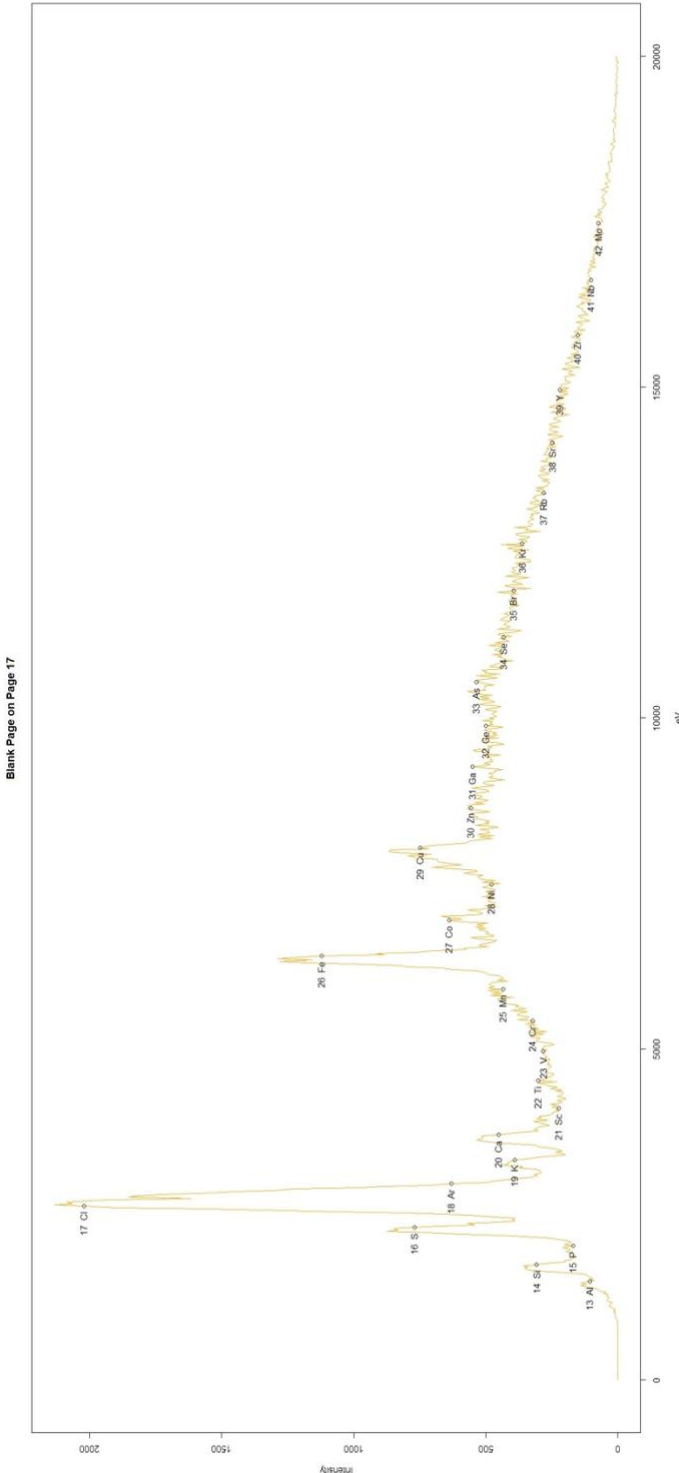
## Notes

1. The paper title plays on the song “Shoo, Fly, Don’t Bother Me!,” attributed to Bishop, a nineteenth-century American composer.
2. See chapter one of Quintilianus, especially line ninety-three, for the original Latin, meaning, “Satire, at least, is wholly our own,” which triumphs satire as a Roman genre distinct from Greek literary traditions.
3. In Gilliam’s film, King Arthur hacks off the Black Knight’s limbs for not joining his crusade and for blocking a crossing. Upon receiving mortal wounds, the knight declares: “‘Tis but a scratch.”
4. For the purposes of this paper, references to “America” denote the United States of America, which comprised twenty-four states in 1832.
5. Latin for, “Journey! Unwrap the sails.”
6. For nineteenth-century newspaper reviews of all editions of *Truth*, see Pflieger.
7. The author bases her analysis on interviews with Grafakos and Malliakas, using charts generated by Evenson. Given the singular nature of the XRF testing, the author would need to perform additional testing across numerous pages to verify the results.

## Appendix

**Appendix A:** Analysis of spectra<sup>7</sup> gathered via x-ray fluorescence, rotated 90° left for legibility

*Blank Paper on Page Seventeen*



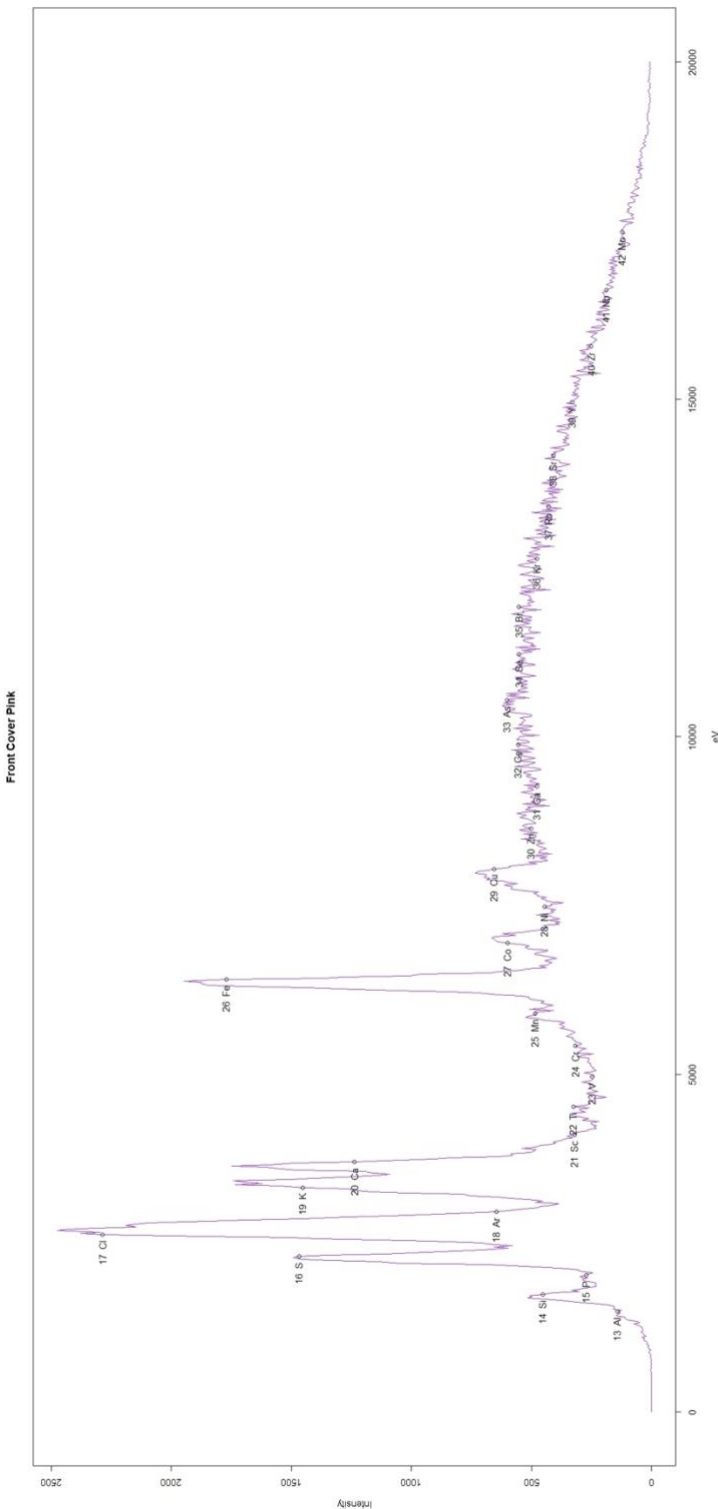
### Elemental Composition

Testing detected the presence of Silicon, Sulfur, Potassium, Calcium, Iron, Cobalt, and Copper.

### Brief Synopsis of Results

XRF testing of a blank space on page seventeen provides a lay-of-the-land survey of the book's physical characteristics. The presence of Cobalt and Copper suggest that metal impurities tainted the paper's iron-based inks. Calcium could originate from hard water used in the manufacturing process, or as a constant part of the organic material (plant matter) used to produce the paper. The amount of Iron contained in the blank page, while not able to discern whether the book is man- or machine-made, shows that the screens for paper printer were most likely metal (Grafakas). If the printer wanted to avoid variations in the paper's pulp, he strove to use the cleanest water possible for stamper beating and washing to form sheets (Barrett). Silicon likely indicates contamination by sand (Grafakas).

## Front Cover



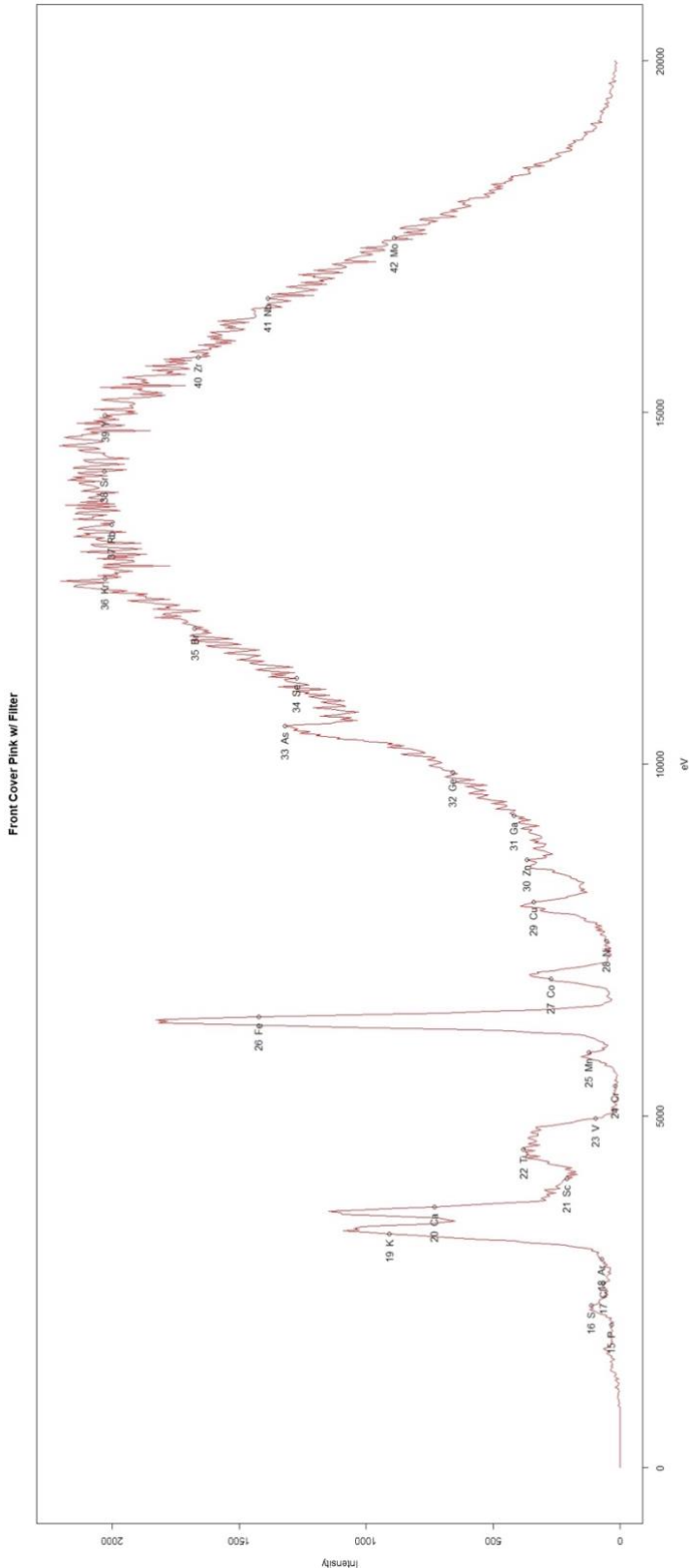
## Elemental Composition

Testing detected the presence of Iron, Cobalt, Copper, Manganese, and Phosphorus. Additionally, testing indicated a large amount of Potassium, Calcium, Silicon, and Sulfur.

## Brief Synopsis of Results

XRF testing resulted in two spectra of *Truth's* cover: one without a filter, the other with a filter to optimize the “peak to background ratio for elements of interest” (“Amptek Mini-X”). The presence of Potassium and Cobalt alongside Sulfur suggests that the cover owes its yellowish color to unpurified Potassium Cobaltinitrite salt, which is insoluble in water. Here, the presence of Sulfur likely takes the form of a Sulfate ion. Sulfate has no color on its own, however, metals that form salts with it can (Evenson). The peak marked “Chlorine” originates from Rhodium in the instrument. When a filter is used to remove the Rhodium radiation, no “Chlorine” peak is observed (Evenson).

*N.B.* Many of the samples shared elements. Therefore, while certain elements are described alongside each graph, their properties can be understood to be active in each sample in which they are listed. Substantive changes to the element’s quality are noted under each sample’s “Elemental Composition.”



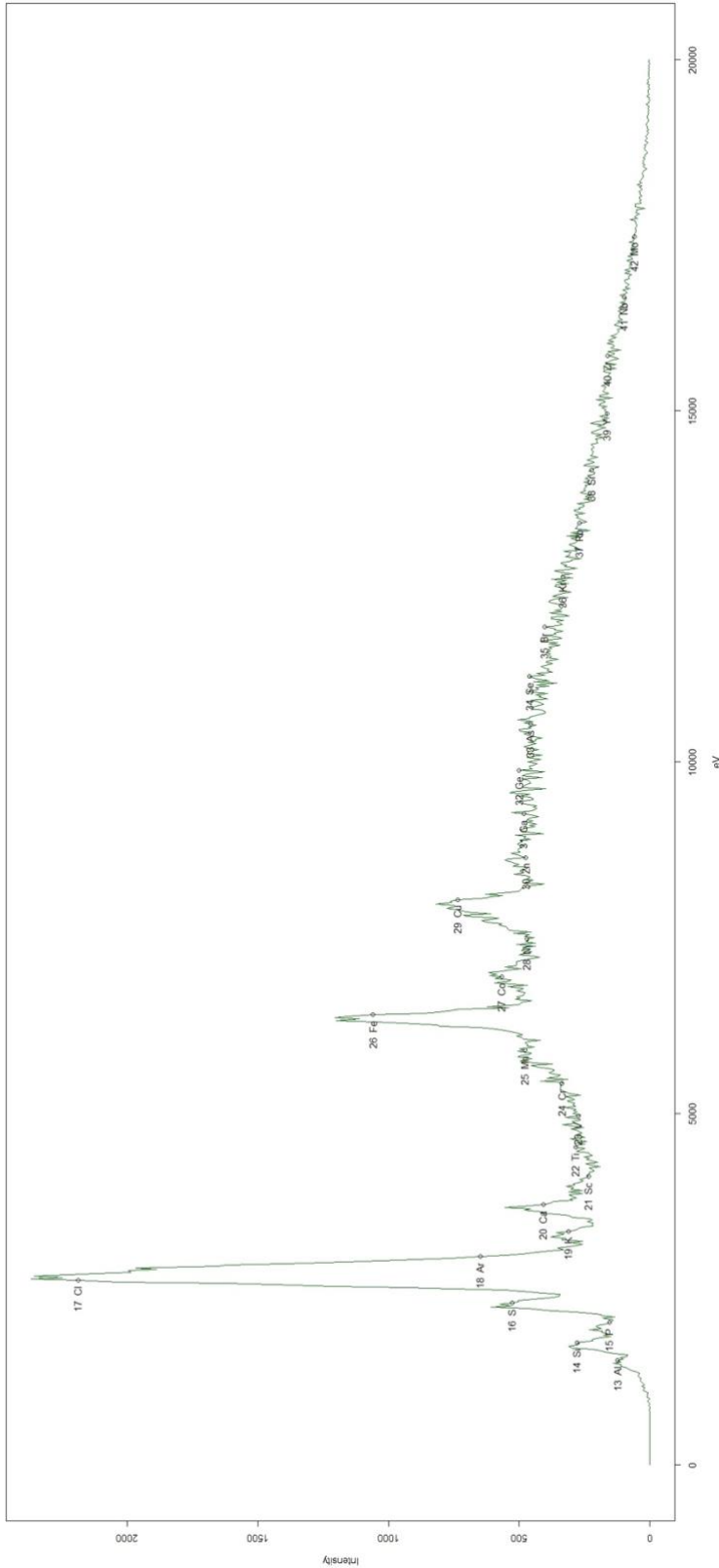
### Elemental Composition

Testing detected the presence of Sulfur, Potassium, Calcium, Iron, Manganese, Cobalt, and Copper. Additionally, testing found Zinc, Titanium, and Arsenic in the sample.

### Brief Synopsis of Results

The exaggerated presence of Titanium arises from the type of filter applied during XRF testing. This filter allows the instrument to hone in on various metals, which explains why Iron's peak increases. The presence of Arsenic, which is harmful to humans in solid forms, suggests that the public was not yet aware of this element's poisonous properties (Grafakas). The source of Iron used to make the ink was likely adulterated with other metals. This would explain the presence of Manganese, Cobalt, and Copper in lower concentrations than the Iron, however, it is also possible that they were used for pigmentation (Evenson). The book or ink could have been contaminated with Manganese as an impurity in Iron Sulfate, which could have been introduced during the printing process (Barrett; Grafakas). Here, Zinc Oxide may act as a whitening agent.

*N.B.* The rule of thumb for interpreting XRF spectra: the height of the peak should be at least three times the width of the peak at its thickest point. With this in mind, a majority of the peaks following the spike in Iron should be considered radiation originating from the instrument, not the sample.



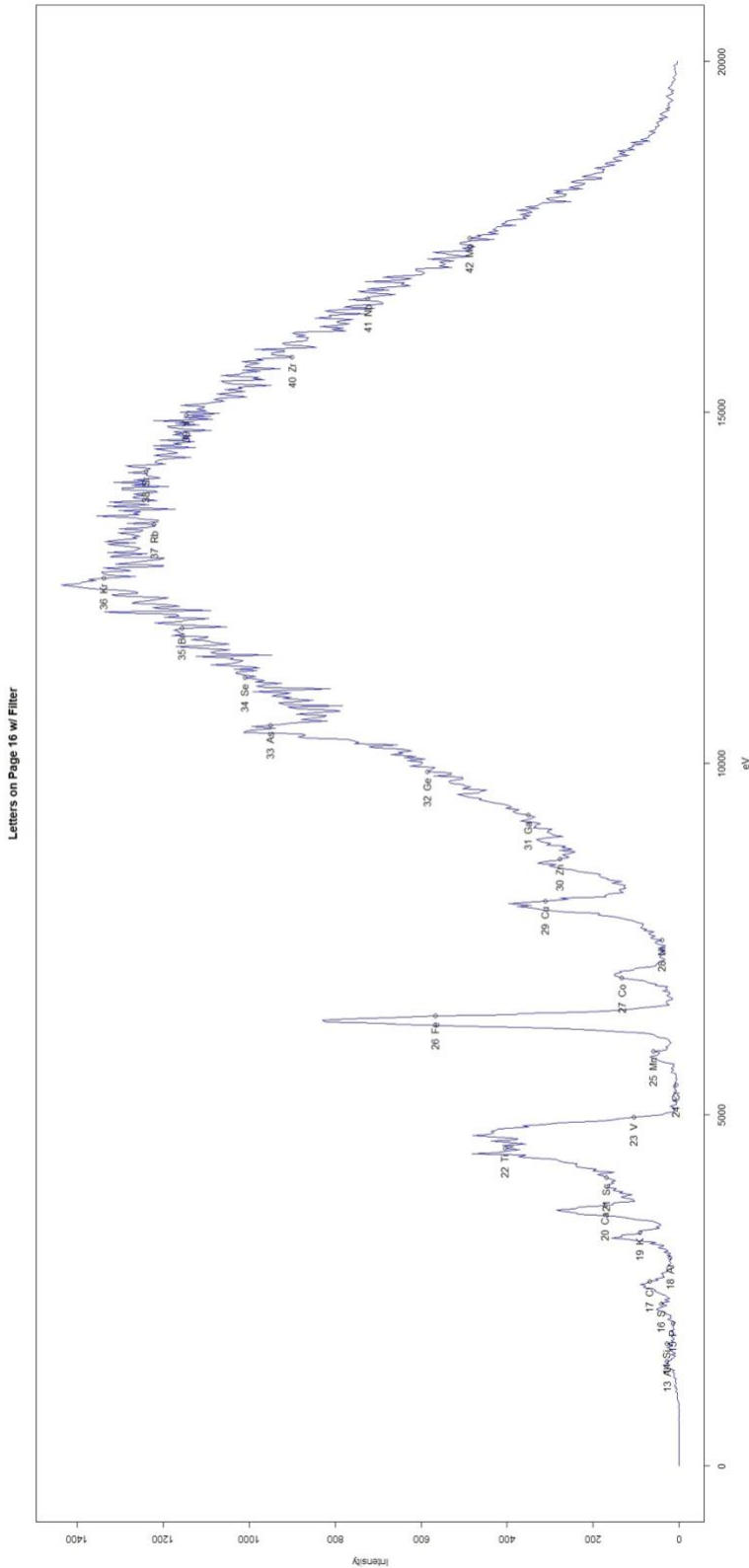
### Elemental Composition

Testing detected the presence of Aluminum, Silicon, Sulfur, Chlorine, Calcium, Potassium, Iron, Cobalt, and Copper.

### Brief Synopsis of Results

Here, Iron and Sulfur likely take the form of an Iron Sulphate, which nineteenth century printers used to stabilize ink and to allow for more pronounced colors. Small amounts of Iron could be placed in lower-quality inks to generate the appearance of more permanent inks. Tannic acid gathered from vegetable-sources mixed well with Iron Sulphate, and both are incredibly common in iron gall ink. Manganese occurs as a byproduct of printing (Barrett; Grafakas).





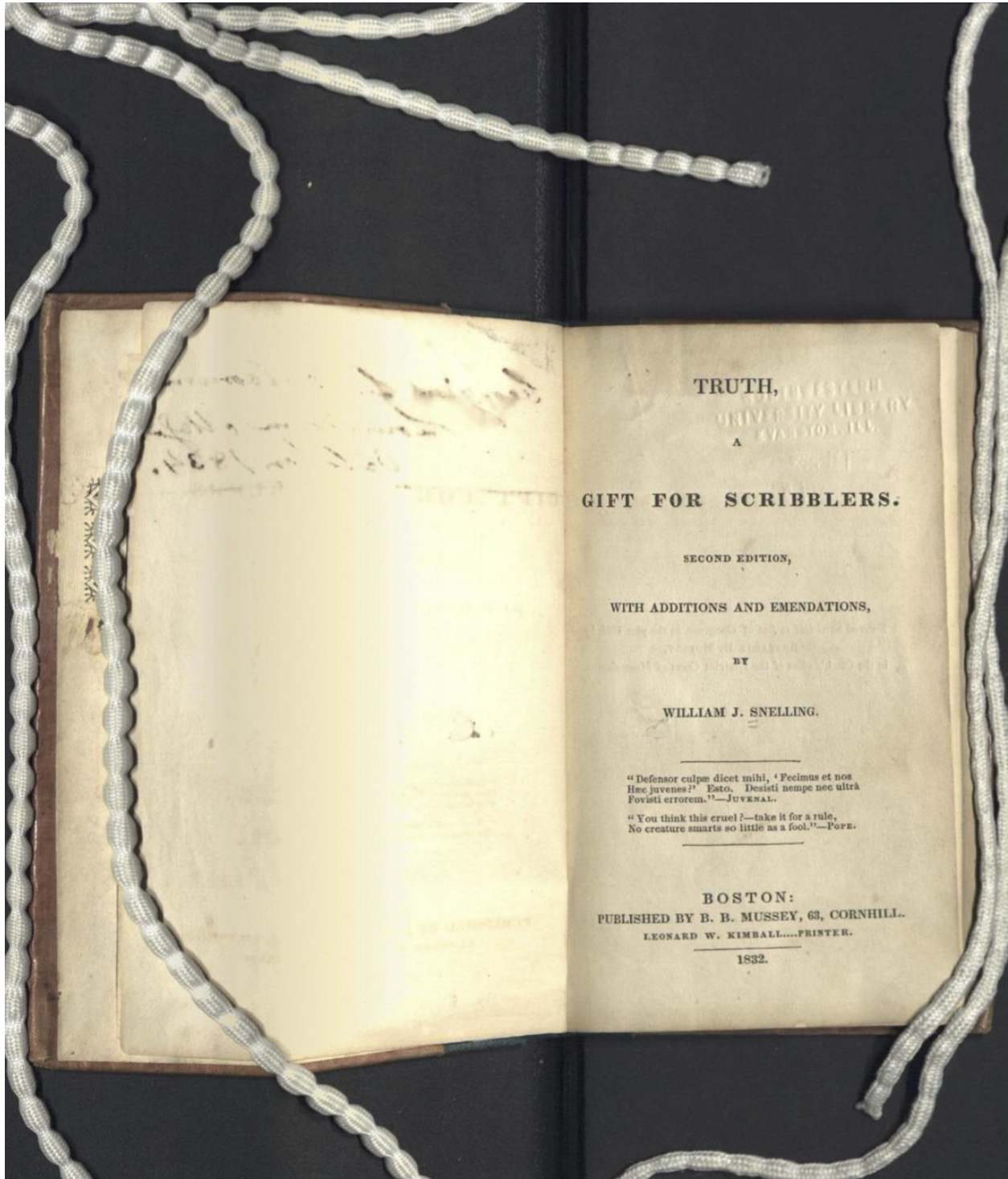
### Elemental Composition

Testing detected the presence of Chlorine, Potassium Calcium, Manganese, Iron, Cobalt, Copper, Zinc, and Arsenic.

### Brief Synopsis of Results

While heavy in Iron, iron gall ink frequently included a blend of Copper, Cobalt, and Zinc to prevent deterioration of the text over time (Grafakas). More questions than answers arise if the filter is not responsible for the presence of Titanium in the sample. The form of the Titanium and Iron effects the appearance of the ink. In the form of anatase, Titanium Dioxide mixes with Iron Dioxide and Alumina to give inks an iridescent shine. Conversely, “Titanium white” pigment may also be found in the form of a varnish. The opacity of the inks (and pages if present) depends largely on the form of these elements.

**Appendix B:** Title Page of Northwestern University Special Collections' copy of *Truth, a Gift for Scribblers, Second Edition, with Additions and Emendations* by William J. Snelling



**Appendix C:** Scans of the prefaces to the first and second edition and the prologue of Northwestern University Special Collections' copy of *Truth, a Gift for Scribblers, Second Edition, with Additions and Emendations* by William J. Snelling



I have no quarrels with, or personal dislike to, any individual of the scribbling race. I wish they could write better; I wish they would give more time and attention to their productions; or, I wish they would not write at all. The conductors of newspapers have been in the habit, in almost all instances, of flattering our young aspirants. These must now hear the language of truth; for I verily believe that the itch of rhyme has withdrawn more persons from the useful pursuits of life than the doctrine of rotation in office, which is a bold word; and I therefore consider it my bounden duty to sacrifice some of these young cocks of Bantam to Esculapius, in hopes of retrieving the sanity of the rest.

I attack none in a *personal* manner, who have not themselves offended in the same sort. To these I say, "Those who live in houses of glass should not throw stones." True, you have thrown none at me; but you have at others, and I take it upon me to punish your repeated breaches of the peace in a summary manner. "What is sauce for gosse is sauce for gander also." May the castigation produce amendment, to the extent that you shall never be scurrilous again. Though some of you be incorrigible, such may be made useful by way of examples.

With respect to the propriety of serving up authors, some of whom are respectable as private individuals, for the public amusement, I can do no better than quote some sentiments of Byron, in which I heartily concur.

'An author's works,' he says, 'are public property; he who purchases may judge, and publish his opinion if he pleases: my object is, if possible, to make others write better.'

Again;—'No one can wish more than the author, that some known and able writer had undertaken their exposure; but in the absence of the regular physician, a country practitioner may, in cases of absolute necessity, be allowed to prescribe his nostrum, to prevent the extension of so deplorable an epidemic, provided there be no quackery in his treatment of the malady.'

I have been told that caustic reproof may blight the hopes of a young and sensitive poet, and stop him short in the beginning

of his career. In some very few instances this may have happened. The laws of the land, too, and much more often, operate hardly on individuals; but this consideration is no argument against their beneficial influence, and is not suffered to obstruct the course of justice. By a parity of reasoning, a poet must sometimes endure severe, but just criticism, for the good of the community. Moreover, I believe that few plants worth cultivating are so delicate as to be incapable of bearing wind and sun.

Wherever I have found ability at all above mediocrity, I have acknowledged it, though obscured by a thousand blots. Where talent does not exist, the literary hopes of the writer ought to be blasted, even for his own welfare; and it will give me pleasure to perform the service.



## PREFACE

### TO THE SECOND EDITION.

NOTHING is farther from the intention of the author of 'Truth' than to offer aught like apology for any part of the contents of his first edition. He could not condescend to deprecate the enmity of his maligners, even did he hold them in less contempt than he does. He has had abuse enough to satisfy a moderate appetite already, and he expects more. It is the privilege of the beaten to rail, and he is perfectly willing that those who consider themselves aggrieved by him, or their friends, should exercise it at his expense. However, he has been burthened with some imputations, which respect for public opinion impels him to rebut. It has been said that he wrote to revenge himself on the critics, that he resented some slight with which his own writings had been received, and that he was actuated by vanity, ill-nature and personal animosity.

The truth is, he had no acquaintance with any of the subjects of his criticism: he had never any quarrel with any one of them, and could not therefore have been prompted by hatred. He dissected poets with as much good nature as he ever dissected a goose.

He had no reason to complain of criticism: none of his works had ever been noticed by the press with less than decided appro-

## PREFACE.

bation. He had no slight to avenge. If he be vain, the critics have made him so.

A new edition of "Truth" was printed some time since, but was so badly executed that the author was obliged to suppress it. He hopes the statement of this fact will be a sufficient apology for the delay.

## PROLOGUE.

## SCENE, THE AUTHOR'S GARRET.

*Dramatis Persona.....The Author and a Friend.*

FRIEND.

What! bent to write?

AUTHOR.

Ay, more; to print again.

FRIEND.

Can neither love nor fear your mood restrain?  
Will you, a man to wealth, to fame unknown,  
Against a host of foes make head alone?  
An insect swarm infests the land, 'tis true;  
But pray, my meddling friend, what's that to you?  
If fools will still be fools, why need you care?

AUTHOR.

A public grief is ev'ry man's affair.  
If in my neighbor's corn a swine I see,  
Shall I stand idle?—it concerns not me?—

Not so; my biting whip-lash shall not spare  
To teach him that I'll have no grunting there.  
And shall those swine, two-legged though they be,  
That mar our country's music, 'scape scot-free?

FRIEND.

To carry out your swinish trope, my friend,  
Your two-legg'd swine is apt to turn and rend:  
Then, swine on four legs, though a stiff-neck'd race,  
May, being soundly beaten, learn their place;  
But that no upright porker ever will—  
You preach to blocks—you over-rate your skill.  
No task so hard was ever set at school,  
As of his folly to convince a fool.

AUTHOR.

I care no more than does the Pope of Rome,  
How lofty each in his own eyes may loom:  
Let Paulding still persist, let Mellen fill  
The Token's page with dribblings from his quill;  
I hope not their reform—with him who buys,  
As well as him who writes, my business lies;  
If these are bent to palm upon the land,  
Help'd by th' accomplice press, their "notes" of hand,  
I'll nail them fast to some oft open'd door,  
Inscrib'd, "worth just my weight in rags—no more."

FRIEND.

Who thanks you, if the public good you prize  
Above your own?—Know, Quixote, he who tries  
To prove his neighbor's judgment faulty, gains  
Contempt and hatred only for his pains:  
Take Butler's word, a pleasure quite as sweet  
Is felt in being cheated as to cheat.

AUTHOR.

If neither thanks nor praise the world afford,  
Well-doing is, to me, its own reward.

FRIEND.

Be not so ultra-patriotic, think  
What cruel guerdon pays your waste of ink:  
Webb's\* trusty cudgel, Whittier's paring-knife,  
Clark's mad-dog slaver, may assail your life:  
Think, Willis, woman's likeness and her foe,  
Stands, both hands full of filth, in act to throw,

\*I have known this valiant soldier and acute critic long, and there has been small pleasure in the acquaintance. He is the identical "Senior Editor" who left the management of the New York Courier and Inquirer with the avowed intention of doing a deed of arms at Washington. He was frightened out of his purpose, however, and almost out of his wits, by the apparition of a pistol with "a mahogany stock and barrel of about four inches." Said pistol was pointed at his person by a ghost. I can pardon Mr. Webb's virulence, but not his insolence in pretending to offer me advice.

Behind his dull file-leader Clapp,\* you stand  
The mark of all the boobies in the land;

\* Clapp is the editor of a hebdomadal sheet, which, from its enormity, has been aptly termed "The Weekly Acre of Trash." It is but justice to admit that the editor and paper are worthy of each other. The said Weekly Acre was the organ through which Master Willis gave the public a characteristic epigram. That the author and publisher may be sure of the infamy they courted, here it is:

Oh Smelling Joseph! Thou art like a cur,  
(I'm told thou once didst live by hunting fur)  
Of bigger dogs thou smell'st, and in sooth,  
Of one extreme, perhaps, canst tell the "Truth;"  
'Tis a wise thrift, and shows thou know'st thy powers,  
To leave thy "North West Tales" and take to smelling  
ours!"

I hate to be in debt, and therefore entreat Mr. Willis to accept the three following epigrams, and consider his favor six times requited:—

- 1st. I liv'd by hunting fur thou say'st—so let it be—  
But tell me, Natty, had I hunted thee,  
Had not my time been thrown away, young sir?  
And eke my powder!—puppies have no fur.
- 2nd. Our tails?—thou own'st, then, to a tail—  
I've scann'd thee o'er and o'er;  
But though I guess'd thy species right  
I was not sure before.
- 3rd. Our savages, authentic travelers say,  
To natural fools religious honors pay—  
Had'st thou been born a wigwam's smoke and dirt in,  
Nat, thine apotheosis had been certain.

And though the marksmen boast nor skill nor wit,  
Some random shot may haply reach you yet.

## AUTHOR.

Rail, Clark, Webb, Willis—'tis your only way  
To get a hearer—thick skinn'd Whittier, bray:  
One's heels, the other's poor attempts to bite,  
My pity, not my wrath or fears excite.  
What care I that they flatter or condemn?  
They rail at me—I gaily laugh at them.  
When curs from ev'ry dunghill bay the moon,  
Who ever heeds the key-note of the tune?

## FRIEND.

A granite mansion stands in Lev'rett-street,  
Where Massachusetts lodgings gives, and meat,  
And free of charge, to him whose tongue or pen  
Denies the merits of his fellow men.  
Beware the law of libel.

## AUTHOR.

Faith, not I;  
The law and Mr. Badlam I defy.  
I call'd John Neal a madman, Willis half  
A man, and Finn a dunce, and Lunt a calf:  
If that be construed into grave offence,  
Our courts admit the truth in evidence;



Shall one to praise or pardon make pretence  
 Because he digs the grave of Common Sense  
 But five feet deep, while others sink to ten?  
 Grant it—and see him go to work again.  
 No, this Americo-Arcadian\* breed  
 Need no such spur to make them show their speed.  
 'Tis perilous to compliment a dunce;  
 'Twere better knock him on the head at once.

Alonzo Lewis makes this problem clear;  
 I gave him six scant lines of praise last year,  
 And mark the consequence—his hand he mends,  
 And works, for very life, to show his friends  
 His firm resolve the world's contempt to brave,  
 And bear the name of blockhead to his grave.

## FRIEND.

Who takes another man to task, should be  
 From all the failings that he censures free.  
 Are you thus faultless? did you never scrawl  
 A verse you'd give a finger to recall?  
 Or give our bards just reason to condemn,  
 And do by you as you have done by them?

## AUTHOR.

No doubt—no doubt—then let my verses be  
 Damn'd as they merit? prithee spare not me:

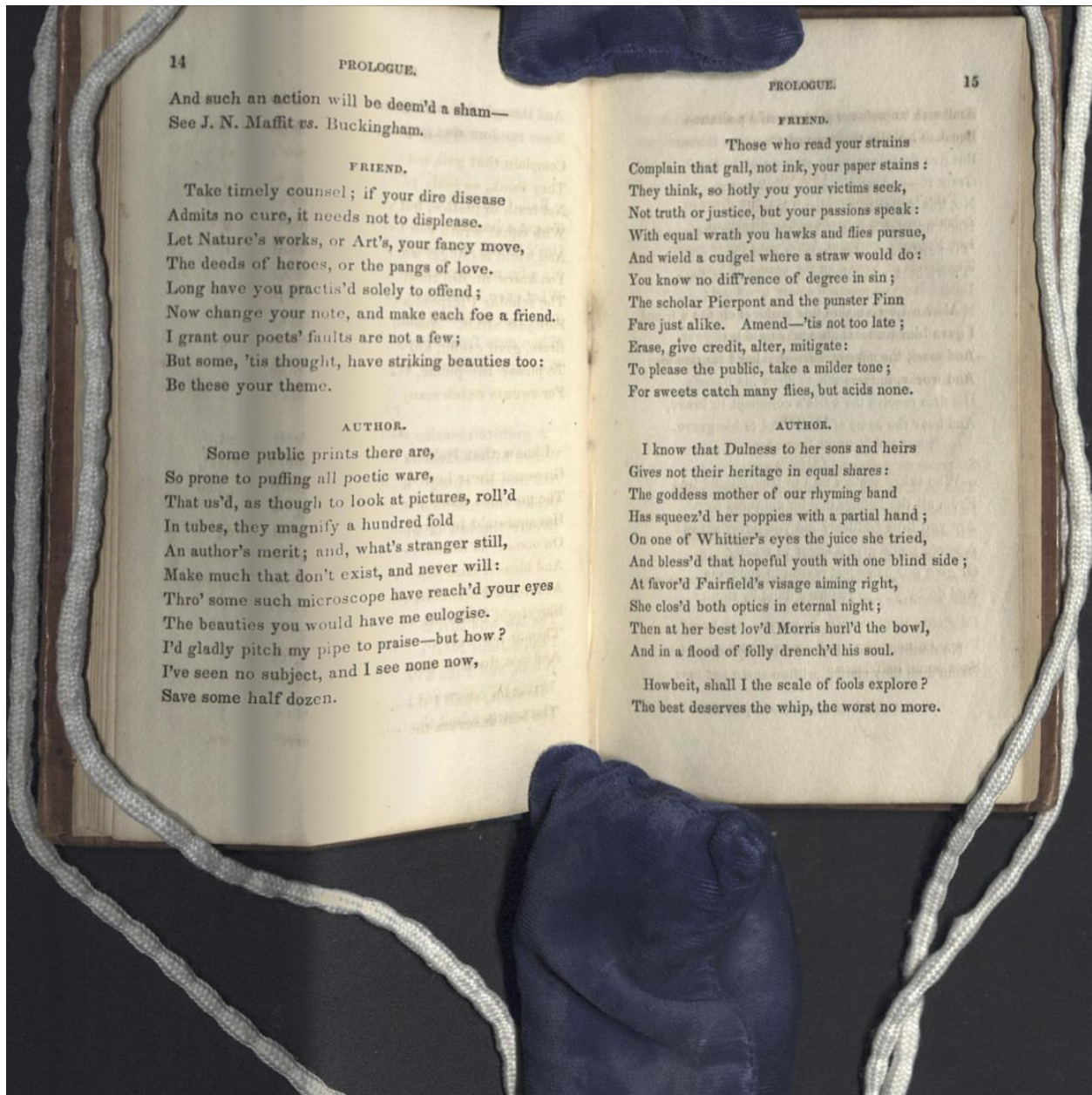
\* Arcadia was famous for its jack-asses.

Lay on; I'm ready; let the buffet fall;  
 Come Blanche, come Sweetheart, "little dogs and all!"  
 Take all my trash, with strictest rigor try it;  
 I'll weigh your censure well, and profit by it.

But though my house be glass, my arm has bone  
 And nerve sufficient to propel a stone  
 As well as his that's better lodg'd, my eye  
 As well my neighbor's windows can espy.  
 I wish, indeed, some abler hand than mine  
 Would vindicate our country and the Nine;  
 But since none offers, since I stand alone,  
 Coragio! be the thankless task my own.

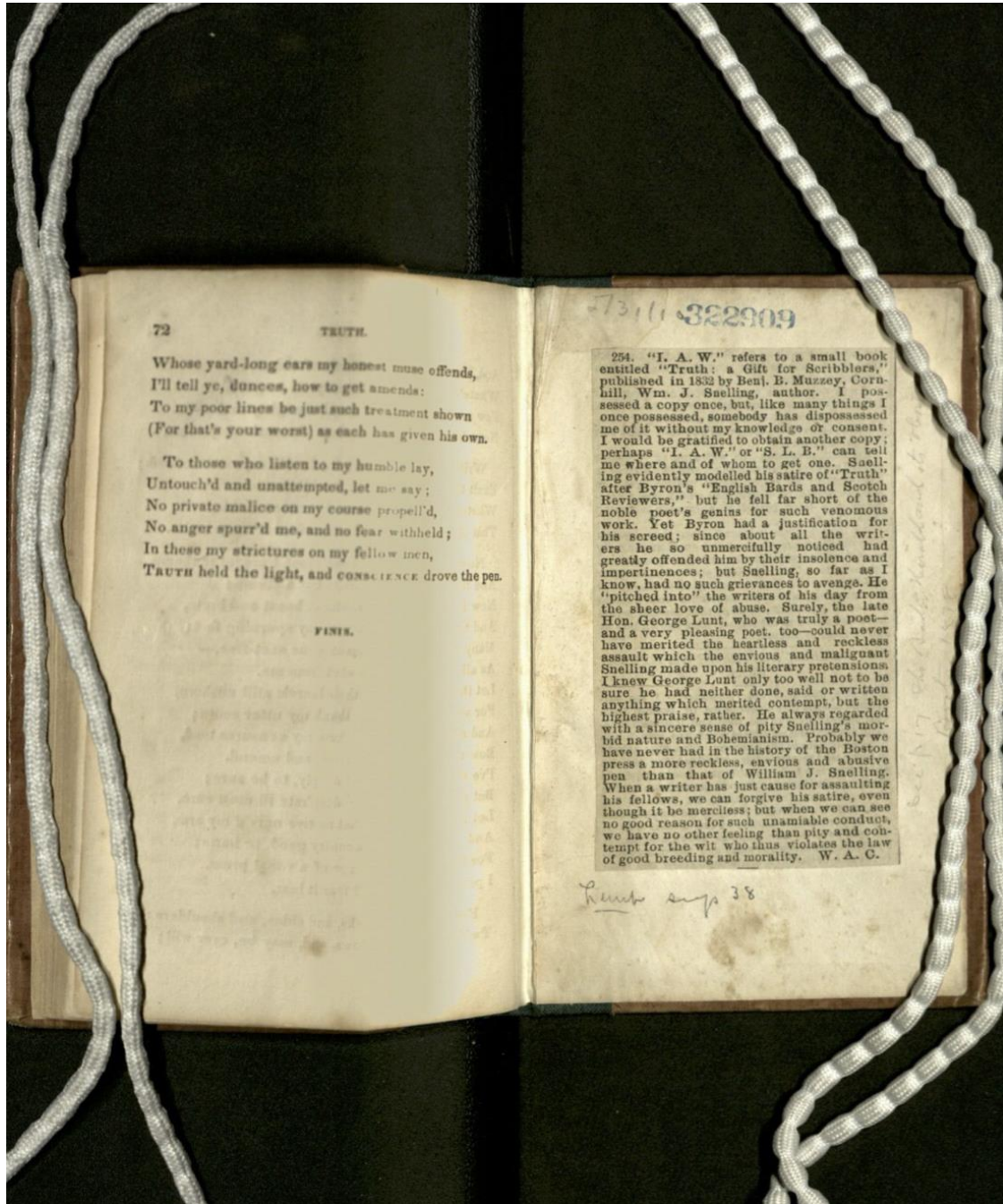
## FRIEND.

Well, since the voice of friendship not avails,  
 Go!—*via!* *pande vela*—spread your sails!



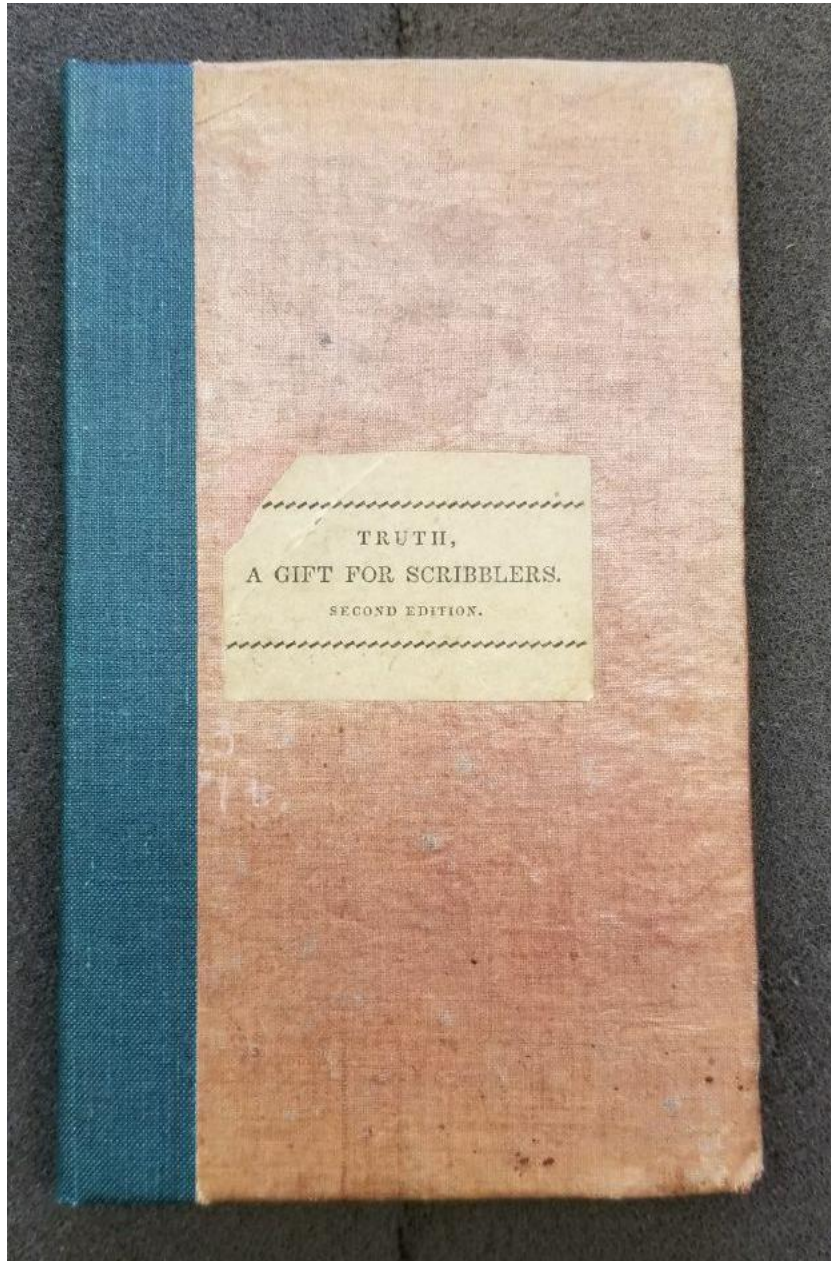
*N.B.* Complete scans of various editions are available online through HaitiTrust, including the University of Michigan Library's *Trust, A Gift for Scribblers, Second Edition, with Additions and Emendations*.

**Appendix D:** Back cover of Northwestern University Special Collections' copy of *Truth, a Gift for Scribblers, Second Edition, with Additions and Emendations* by William J. Snelling, containing a newspaper clipping



**Appendix E:** Front and back cover of *Truth* as well as side-views

While the spine piece indicates Northwestern's copy of *Truth* was rebound prior to acquisition, light fading on the cover suggests the starched linen material is original to the 1832 edition.

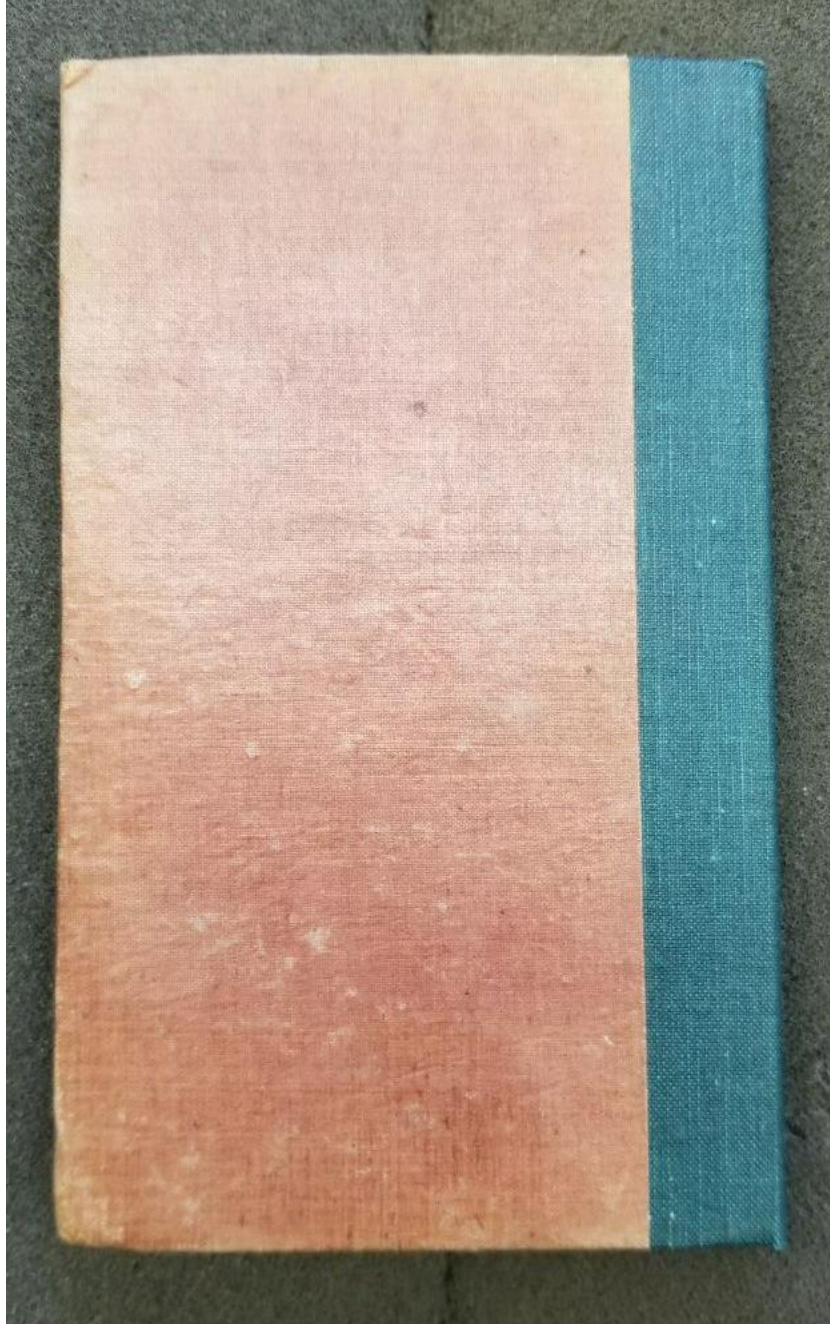




A close-up image shows that the green binding's linen and lacquer are relatively intact compared to rest of the yellowing cover.



An examination of the underside of the *Truth* reveals wear along the spine of the book. Fragments of glue and unidentified material extending beyond the book's pages support the notion that the book was rebound.



The varnish covering the linen back-cover bubbles with age, and the pigment fades with age. Books that utilized higher-quality materials show fewer signs of weathering overtime.

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