

## Autobiography In Metre

(Reminiscence of early life and fifty-five years engaged in teaching and other public school work, written by D. P. VanBrackle for those who had been his pupils or who remembered him.)

Ninety years and seven years more  
Is the time of my life, as I have said before.  
In the year 1823, I came this world to see,  
Helpless, and needing a Mother's care,  
I was the last for her to bear  
Healthy and strong and full of vim,  
What a lump of a boy, I must have been.  
My Mother said a comely child was the gift of God,  
If not defiled by being born in sin and shame  
Which is a stain on the child that is not to blame.  
Days, months and years passed hastily on  
I growing stout, as well as strong,  
Building Castles in the air,  
Without foundation or anything there,  
Fighting sin in a world of strife,  
Laying plans for a good long life,  
Anticipation in Hope's fond dreams  
Proves that the World is not what it seems.  
As time passed on, my hopes grew higher,  
My soul grew strong and full of fire,  
The sins of life I tried to scorn  
When I now left the home where I was born,  
A young man sailing on Life's high seas  
Must avoid the rocks if he would be  
Safe from shipwreck in a world of sin  
That the Devil is trying to plunge him in.

Being tired of Jersey, I prepared to leave  
To get an education here, there was no chance for me,  
Leaving my dear old Mother with tears rolling down her cheek,  
A little education and a fortune to seek.  
I left my home in Jersey and traveled to the West  
By steamboat and railroad until I stopped to rest.  
Landing in a town I met a stranger that proved to me a friend  
Who afterwards was accidentally shot  
Thus coming to his end.

"Stranger," said I, "do you know of a situation  
That I can get to work  
For my Board, go to school and get an education?"  
"You are a boy I am looking for, just the one I need  
To do the chores about the house  
And my horse and cow to feed."  
Happy as a lark, as happy as could be,  
I accepted the offer where there was no boy but me.  
Four years I went to school, learning all I could.  
Always doing my duty as everybody should,  
My friend being dead I no longer wished to stay  
Where I had spent four years in a most happy way.  
Returning to my home where I had spent my early years,  
Bright were my prospects, I had nothing to fear.  
Just at the time when I thought I was strong  
Proved to be the weakest, since the day I was born.  
The Castles I had built came down with a crash.  
My hopes were blasted and proved nothing but trash.  
Prostrated I lay suffering with pain,  
The sorrow of Death had taken its aim;  
Fate stepped in and turned it aside  
The mark was missed as God did decide.  
Life is sweet but when wracked with pain  
And health had departed to return not again.  
We can only suffer and patiently wait for Death  
To come and decide our fate.  
Sore and depressed, what could I do?  
Was a question for me as well as for you.  
As all have clothing and food to provide  
Fate decrees, and by it we must abide.  
For we may do our best, and all that we can,  
Events occur and annuls our plans.  
~~We finish our work and do our best.~~  
\*We finally die and then are at rest.  
Convalescent I lay waiting for health to return.  
Knowing that the necessaries of life must be earned  
Physically weak and unable to decide  
How to make a living or needs to provide  
I could not work, perhaps I could preach,  
For that I had no call, perhaps I could teach.  
Reviewing my studies as I lay in bed,  
Often despondent I wished I were dead.  
As time passed on I growing better,  
Fortunately for me, I received an unexpected letter,

Offering me a school if I could accept.  
The salary was small but all I could expect,  
The time soon came when I must decide  
Either to take the school or the offer deny.  
The school was in Bucktown on the Road to Deal,  
Of humble pretensions as all were made to feel.  
The snow having fallen eight inches or more,  
On the back of a Trustee I rode to the door  
Where fifty-five children were waiting for me  
Not thinking a teacher would come on the back of a Trustee.  
Having no bell, I wrapped on the door  
When counting them when passing, fifty and four.  
Strife commenced as to who should it be.  
Seated nearest the stove. 'Twas an effort to see.  
"Hold on boys," I will decide  
The seats you occupy, I will provide.  
All stand up while I take your names,  
Your ages as well, your parents the same."  
There were Wardells, Slocums and Lloyds in plenty  
Their ages ran from five to eight and to twenty  
To remember their names was no easy task.  
For over and again I had them to ask.  
Little girl your name, "Bridget, sir, if you please"  
This I could remember, with the greatest of ease,  
There were Mickees and Kellers and I know not what,  
All mixed up in making a very peculiar lot.  
To organize a school is no easy matter,  
When faces and names are strange, especially the latter.  
Soon they were seated and all were content  
With the seats assigned them and to which they were sent.  
The days of my afflictions seemed never to end,  
Better of one disease, Fate another would send  
Attacked with blindness so I could not see,  
To hear recitations was a puzzle for me.  
So I hid my eyes with glasses, so they could not tell.  
If I were looking at them and they were doing well,  
Thus by deception good order was maintained  
And love for my calling, I was sustained.  
Have I the good fortune ever Heaven to reach,  
May the good Master give me children to teach  
For fifty-five years I can truly say.  
Teaching to me was a pleasing way  
Of earning my bread and needs to supply,  
My salary was small but on it I could rely.  
"Oh, Time turn back in your rapid flight,  
Start me again, in the way that is right.

That my work may have the luster of gold  
And teach on again until ninety years old."  
No, that cannot be, for I would still meet with the storms  
Of life in many and various forms.  
With the waves of life still running high,  
Swept by the winds of a cloud capped sky,  
The time would come when to take in my sail  
And cast out my anchor in a ninety years' gale.  
The old school house has gone to rot.  
A new one is built in the self same spot  
As I pass by the place to memory it is dear,  
Where I spent four long and most pleasant years  
In training the young idea, how and where to shoot,  
In conquering the single and double square root.  
After four years' service in a most satisfactory way  
Another school was offered with much better pay.  
I left my pupils who to me were very dear  
To be absent only for one single year  
When I was recalled to the school "at the pole"  
To teach other pupils as well as the old.  
After three years' service, after three years' stay  
A petition to me was sent  
By the pupils I had left, to return, so I went.  
Where I stayed eight long and most happy years  
For my labor was appreciated as the results did appear  
As I was elected town Superintendent.  
Township Superintendents were nearly all preachers

More efficient, they if they had been Teachers.  
The office was offered to me if I would accept.  
Thinking that a change, would have a good offer,  
Politics were running at high water mark  
My prospects to be elected were then very dark.  
Success to me was doubtful. I did not know why,  
I was assured of my election if I would only try.  
The tickets gave me a majority on the first count.  
The second added one to the former amount.

For four years we were opponents on the school track,<sup>f</sup>  
Beating him at every election, which is a known fact.  
After thirty-five years in other different schools  
Making fifty-five in all and as a general rule,  
A long period of service, in a work that I loved  
Waiting for my reward from my Father above.  
Where are those pupils I most humbly ask  
That I tried to teach, which was no easy task.  
In the grave some lie, but I know not where.  
I too with them, soon will be there.  
Sorry am I now that I ever used the Rod  
To secure obedience and their duty to God.  
Love will subdue the most disobedient child,  
I know it. You can prove it by giving it a trial.  
We are now more enlightened than we used to be  
For the Rod was used in school by the double rule of three.  
The law stepped in and laid the rod aside,  
Teachers as well as pupils by the law must abide  
I have finished my story, though humble it may be.  
Some pupil may remember my riding on the back of a Trustee.

Note: Mr. VanBrackle, affectionately known as "Daddy" VanBrackle, was 96 years old when this paper was given to F. H. Lloyd to publish in his school reminiscences. The manuscript as handed in by Mr. VanBrackle was written in a remarkably clear and bold hand, tho he was nearing the century mark. Mr. VanBrackle, the father of Elwood VanBrackle, station master at Matawan, was within two months of being 100 years old when he died. He is pictured with one of his Matawan classes in the Sept. 12 edition of the Matawan Journal. The Bucktown school, later called Southberg, is at Norwood and Grighton Avenues, Long Branch. The Deal of that period is now called Oakhurst. The school "at the pole" refers to the present uptown section of Long Branch, a liberty pole erected at the site of the present Chattle Memorial Fountain, Norwood Avenue and Broadway.