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THE MONTESSORI SYSTEM
OF
CHILD CULTURE

A REPORT BY
MISS CLARA E. CRAIG



PRESENTED TO THE

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

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State of Rhode Island

BOARD OF EDUCATION

INTRODUCTION TO REPORT

One of the functions of a state department of education is to gather and disseminate educational information. In truth, though other duties and wider responsibility have been committed to this division of the people's government in school law and administration, state offices of education were established primarily to investigate and make known educational conditions, activities and results. Such service, as a necessary condition of public knowledge and educational improvement, includes not only regular surveys of a state's entire educational enterprise, but also special studies of successful practices and important movements in education, both within and without the state. Educational progress in a state, depending upon popular support and coöperation, as well as upon the professional knowledge and technical skill of teachers, is promoted by a constant enlightenment of the public mind on important educational movements and successful educational experience elsewhere. The Board of Education has long recognized the responsibility of the department as a depository of educational information and has sought a knowledge and true evaluation of significant educational activities elsewhere, especially those adaptable to our own aims, conditions and needs. For this reason the Board could hardly neglect a study of the remarkable work of Dr. Maria Montessori in Italy.

The early approval of trained teachers and professional students showed clearly that the Montessori system of child culture deserves the consideration of all those who have charge of the school education of children. The real and widespread interest awakened in America and other countries and the astonishing attention accorded to popular expositions of the system were followed by hurried attempts to establish "Montessori schools," sometimes without adequate knowledge of aims, methods and principles involved or full appreciation of their adaptability to our conditions and needs.

When the unprofessional exploitation of even sound educational ideas breed vague, mistaken or false notions, as too often happens, it is incumbent on those responsible for the conduct of public schools

to guard against premature changes, or the introduction of misinterpreted principles and misapplied methods, as well as to seek promising means of real improvement. Both the claims of over-zealous advocates, who have praised the Montessori system inordinately, and the representations of less informed critics, who have condemned it unreservedly, have disclosed our real need for more authentic information regarding its theories and methods. To obtain, therefore, a more intimate knowledge of the work of Dr. Montessori and to determine how far and in what way the application of her methods might improve Rhode Island schools, the Board of Education, after due consideration, resolved to send a representative to Rome to make a close study of this system of child training.

One consideration that prompted the Board to take this action was the belief that in the training of teachers the Rhode Island Normal School, and through the Normal School the public schools of the State, might profit from a true knowledge of Montessori principles and practise. To perform the desired service, the Board appointed, near the close of the year of 1912, Miss Clara E. Craig, Supervisor of the Training Department of the Normal School. Miss Craig has accomplished her mission with characteristic discretion and efficiency, and in her report has presented the results of her study of the Montessori system. Her report is candid and discriminating, and will prove, it is believed, of helpful value to the teachers and school officers of Rhode Island. The recommendation of Miss Craig that the merits of the Montessori method be tested in the Rhode Island Normal School has been adopted by the Board; and such experimentation is being carried out under her direction, with a view to the application of Montessori ideas and practices in Rhode Island schools, so far as is feasible. Since her return from Rome, Miss Craig has given several public addresses and is now giving a course of lectures in the Normal School, from the results of her study.

Without question the Montessori system is a living movement, which is stimulating educational ideals and endeavor throughout the world. Our teachers may not wisely ignore its meaning and influence. They should, at least, avoid an unprofessional attitude of prejudice and misapprehensions of its principles and practice. Surely all may derive inspiration and guidance from the enthusiasm, the patience, the humanity of Dr. Montessori.

WALTER E. RANGER

Secretary of the Board of Education

REPORT

To the State Board of Education, State of Rhode Island:

GENTLEMEN:—I submit hereby my report of examination into the Montessori system of child culture. My observations were made and recorded in Rome, Italy, where, acting as the official representative of your honorable body, I was a member of the training class directed by Doctor Maria Montessori, from January 15 to May 15, 1913.

I desire, first of all, to bear open testimony to the gentle courtesy and professional spirit of Doctor Montessori herself whose attitude towards your representative was unfailingly gracious and urgently helpful.

The Montessori training class numbered more than eighty members of almost cosmopolitan representation. Personal and social relation among men and women of so widely differing tradition and preparation was in itself an inspiring influence.

The fact that Rhode Island was the only one of our states to send an official delegate impressed both the participators and patrons of the enterprise.

This training course of four months included lectures and lessons by Doctor Montessori and her associates, together with observation and practice work in various Montessori schools.

I append an outline of the ordered lectures. Two lectures and one practical lesson were given each week by Doctor Montessori.

THEORETICAL LECTURES

January 16 Introductory lecture in the house of Marchesa de Viti Marco.

Subject: General review of the Montessori method as introducing a new experimental science.

There were present:

His Excellency, the Ambassador of the United States of America.

His Excellency, the Ambassador of Great Britain.

His Excellency, the Minister of Public Instruction.

His Excellency, the Minister of the Colonies.

- January 21 Statement of the program of the course.
Guide as to the method of observation and study.
- January 23 Social conditions of the child.
- January 30 Biological concept of liberty.
- February 7 Practical conditions of liberty in the school.
Environment. Didactic Material. Teacher.
- February 13 Independence of the child.
- February 20 Prizes and punishments.
- February 27 Generalizations on the conditions of liberty of the child
in the family.
Social study of the family.
- March 6 (At this lesson Her Majesty the Queen Mother was
present.)
Method of giving a lesson.
Comparison between this method and other methods.
- March 13 Muscular education.
- March 27 Nature in education.
- April 3 Attention.
- April 12 Imagination.
- April 17 Education of the senses.
- April 18 Intellect.
- April 24 Spoken and written language.
- April 25 Will.
- April 30 Moral education.

TECHNICAL LESSONS

- January 28 The biographical chart.
Anthropological observations.

January	31	Stature and weight.
February	6	Causes influencing the variations of stature.
February	11	The head.
February	18	Analysis of the average. Theory of the average man.
February	25	Presentation of the Didactic Material.
March	4	Presentation of the Didactic Material.
March	11	Presentation of the Didactic Material. Exercises of practical life.
April	1	Solid insets. Thickness. Size. Length.
April	8	Limits of the Didactic Material.
April	14	Cutaneous senses.
April	15	Taste, smell, and hearing.
April	22	Writing.
April	23	Reading.
April	28	Arithmetic.
April	29	Summary of the biographical chart.

PRACTICAL LESSONS

The lessons were given once a week by Doctor Montessori in the Casa dei Bambini, at first by Doctor Montessori and afterwards by the students. In this way eleven practical lessons of three hours each took place.

Probably at no other time in the world's history has there been given so universal attention to the theory and practice of education as there is today. Every possible opportunity for the invention of new modes and fashions in the training of children is seized with eagerness. Oftentimes these "new" methods live long enough to reveal themselves as sentimental modifications of old and wise canons, or as fantastic disguises of sane and accepted principles.

However, this cannot be a valid criticism of the method of education to which Doctor Montessori is lending her undoubted genius and her remarkable equipment. While much of her theory is based

upon unquestioned and undoubted philosophical laws, her practice is so honestly and so entirely the expression of her theory, that the contemplation of the one, apart from the scrutiny of the other, is necessarily incomplete and imperfect.

It is painfully true that many schools, both in America and in other countries, purporting to be conducted on a Montessori basis are merely incompetent applications as to the art side without adequate understanding of the Montessori ideas and processes. Apart from any discussion of the merit of the system, a critical examiner discovers serious error in the general misuse of Montessori material by so-called Montessori teachers. To attempt direction of a Montessori class without careful study as to the integrity of Montessori doctrine and clear comprehension of Montessori purposes is a criminal act toward the children who may be victimized.

This report is written in scant sympathy with the superficial accounts of "educational miracles" described by some witnesses of Montessori phenomena. So far as the writer's observation goes, Montessori results are the logical outcome of consistent Montessori practices. It is only professional and just for the educational world to grant fair play to the life labors of Maria Montessori. On the other hand, it is unprofessional and unjust to encourage promulgation of her methods by indiscriminate and hysterical advertisement.

It is to be hoped—and Doctor Montessori shares the hope—that authority will withhold its sanction from school ventures undertaken by men and women who, according to our high American standards, are unqualified for the work of teaching, and unfitted for it because of brief and shallow preparation in unauthorized places.

Even the enemies of the Montessori movement will concede that it is impelled by something inherently estimable, and that there must be within it at least a deposit of good. Naked error may attract, but, as such, it does not hold the human mind. It must be clothed with a semblance of truth before it can lead the sane mind astray.

1 X The basic principle of the Montessori system is auto-education. It presents the most literal interpretation of the undisputed peda-

gogical maxim, "Self-activity is the law of growth." It breaks violently away from orthodox, verbal instruction, and banishes not only the old-fashioned dogmatic instructor, but also the sympathetic teacher, the child's "other self," whose high and holy function is to transform the "soul of the objective world" into a pupil's life through enriched and specialized experience. The law of personal contract, in so far as the teaching act is concerned, is abolished, and children are permitted to work out their educational growth in "unrestrainable joy."

The Montessori system converts the schoolroom into a laboratory wherein is to be born the new science of pedagogy. Its environment must supply conditions positively favorable to life and growth, thereby applying to the culture of human beings the methods employed by science in the development of other living organisms. Within this scientific laboratory children are to be left free, completely free, to develop without disturbance. Even the infrequent and brief lesson tolerated by the true Montessorian is considered as an experiment and viewed as a distraction.

Doctor Montessori's concept of freedom includes all conditions invigorating to growth. Careful regard for nutrition, for respiration, for bodily movement, purposes physical health and harmony, and at the same time subserves the attainment of that absolute inner freedom which is essential to the spontaneous expression of the interior man in all the variations of his individuality.

"Liberty for the child" then is the rallying cry of Maria Montessori. Liberty alone, untrammelled and unfettered, will release imprisoned personality. She warns us, however, against the false notions of freedom for man "which would mean the destruction of education, even as the uprooting of trees would tend to destroy the freedom of nature." A rather free translation presents her real meaning, "Liberty is nature in order, the result of absolute obedience to the laws of creation which brings about harmony and discipline, an idea difficult to put into practice,—for what are the ways leading to the freedom of man?"

Certain external forms are specified as requisites for this plan of schoolroom freedom. There must be liberality of space that children may move around with ease and comfort; furniture must be steady and movable so that it is under the children's control; no stationary chairs and desks may enslave the little ones into artificial conformity; gardens must offer change and refreshment; properly furnished dressing rooms and lavatories must supply the need of exercise in the necessary processes of life, such as washing and dressing. A longer and more determined step toward freedom is accomplished when children are relieved from the constant influence of a teacher. Another free translation of Doctor Montessori's words explains itself, "To give a child liberty we must free him from the direct influence of man, in order that he may be spontaneously free as regards the laws of his inner nature . . . One of the greatest victories of civilization was precisely this,—to free us from the influence of another's mind and spirit over our minds and spirits." So radical a dogma applied to education gives a painful shock to those of us who have beheld truth and beauty springing from the touch of a sterling character. Are we not attracted to perfect thought and life by both conscious personal influence?

To further the project of liberty, children must be allowed to be "busy." Their bubbling energy must direct itself upon some form of work which is apposite to their needs and pertinent to their individuality. "This," says the *dottressa*, "is the pivotal point of the whole method; namely, to offer the child work, not just any kind, but that work which at that particular moment is the one thing necessary for the development of his inner self."

The Montessori Didactic Material is presented at this point as the instrument by which children may educate themselves without a teacher. This material, scientific and exclusive, is offered to the pupil's free selection. It furnishes a graded series of stimuli which, according to the organizer, are adapted to "self-realization," and which nourish psychic life even as proper food for the body sustains physical life.



All kinds of interesting occupations proceed as children from two and one-half to seven years of age make use of this attractive material. Some are exercising the tactile sense with the sand paper apparatus; others are refining their ideas of dimension in the arrangement of cubes or prisms; others are sharpening their perception of differences with the aid of solid insets; and still others are making their far-off preparation for writing by tracing around the edges of geometrical forms. All these children, being in the perceptive stage of their development, are undergoing an elaborate psycho-sensory treatment. Their senses, taste, smell, touch, sight and hearing, both in isolation and in combination, are being exercised to an unusual degree, with a view to accuracy and enjoyment in their appropriation of the world around them.

The real design of this detailed provision for the education of these children is accomplished through their persistent repetition of a given exercise, until attention, reasoning, and will become involved, and the mind is formed even as it is furnished.

The ultimate aim is always an inner one although there is a practical purpose in the direction of motor activity as well as an æsthetic intention to cultivate true refinement. This refinement, according to Doctor Montessori, marks the real equality or inequality of man.

It is relevant to remark, at this point, an idea which stands out with conspicuous merit from all this elaboration of psycho-sensory training; namely, the importance which Doctor Montessori attaches to accuracy of perception as opposed to falsity of perception. "To tread the road of truth," she says, "is to have people live by reality, putting them in touch with truth."

As an individual's sensations are inexact, so does his notion of truth suffer. A formidable challenge is this to some of our American pedagogues who are consciously admitting false perceptions into their educational schemes. According to Doctor Montessori, the calling of a cube a "horse" or a prism a "stable" is an encouragement of false perception in childhood and may mean the fostering of hallucination in adulthood. Is this the shadow of a hand across the wall?

No feature of Doctor Montessori's teaching has caused more diversity of criticism and discussion than has her doctrine relative to the training of the imagination. This same idea of truth and reality informs it. She strikes to kill approved practices of educational fabulists. Myths and fables and fairy stories are eliminated as nourishment for the creative faculty, and only a real sensorial basis serves the stable foundation necessary to the structures of the imagination.

Her theory teaches that the masterful imagination is methodical in that it absorbs honestly and accurately from the senses. We are individual and personal in our impulses of attention to surrounding stimuli. An inner power, acting in the same individual and personal way, gives the world its different creative types. Special tendency, both as it relates to perception and to inner capacity, is to be greatly counted by the educator. There can be no direct development of the imagination. It may be fostered, but not by the imposition of falsity upon childish credulousness unguided by the power of logic. He who would train the imagination of a little child must lead it sympathetically, but no less directly, to its goal.

What the Montessori system stands for in the education of perception and imagination has been but briefly, and therefore inadequately stated. It may not be amiss to suggest some of its standards in the matter of will training and discipline.

Turning again to a translation of Doctor Montessori's words, we read: "Admitting that the fundamental character of the will consists in the possibility of persisting in the act, considering persistence as a fundamental fact, as the fundamental characteristic of the will, we may consider all the other characteristics which are cited as details of this . . . Recognizing this, the first step in educating the will should be that of urging the individual to persistence in a piece of work."

Inner impulses should lead the child to the performance of a definite labor in correspondence to his "latent aptitudes." This, in truth, is development in freedom. The essential characteristic of constancy

is secured to the will by the child's repeated reaction to the stimulation of the Didactic Material, and is indicated as a vital phenomenon of his auto-education.

As to ordinary methods in the management of children's lives, relative to the shaping of their wills in connection with discipline, the Montessori method deplores serious blunder. It condemns the exaction of mechanical obedience to commands which presuppose within the child a maturity like unto that of the adult, and ignore the weakness characteristic of childhood. Such conduct is an attempt to require that they who think as children should act as men.

It is noted that the chief commands directed to children are like to these: "Be quiet," "Do not touch," "Be not restless,"—injunctions which are in violation of the fundamental mechanism of immature nervous life.

Doctor Montessori's anthropological lectures teem with suggestions for better and saner practices in the study of children. Her procedure is to watch and to wait for the growth and transformation of the physical child as well as for the manifestations of the spiritual child. It looks in an all-round way for the attainment of a biological and a psychological destiny. Careful periodic measurements are recorded in a simple and feasible manner, discovering to observant teachers any significant departures from normal standards. They also indicate necessary forms of individual exercise.

It appears that the really fundamental point in the Montessori system, so far as it has been projected, is the teaching of true perceptions in sharp contrast to the instigation of false perceptions. Pupils are supposed to acquire truth and reality as the basis of their higher life from persistent use of certain scientific material. Repeated activity with this same material pledges their intellectual and moral formation, contemporaneously with sense development, through the call made to the judgment, reasoning, and choice involved in the exercise. It suggests very concrete reasoning.

Moreover, some critics will feel justified in their fear that this over-refining of isolated senses may tend to a loss of balance in the nervous system.

It appears, too, that the creative mind is the only one admitted to the scheme. Human knowledge is both productive and apprehensive. May not an over-accentuation of the first mean a neglect of the second?

One beholds in this system a useful reaction against methods of rigidity by which children are repressed and starved into mere automata, but, on the whole, it involves an extreme. Time was when children were regarded as an inert mass, all to be moulded to the same shape by the same outward pressure. Today they are rightly regarded as distinct beings to be comprehended. However, between the two extremes of liberty and license lies the golden mean of wisely tempered authority and discipline. As a reaction against unyielding rigorism, much is to be said in favor of the method, but it is based upon complete liberty. All authority taken from state, family, and school leaves confusion. The school is a miniature society.

Good biology is not necessarily good psychology. This method is applying the results of experiments made in the wrong laboratory. The application of biological theories to the education of human beings is an attempt at having a lower order control the higher. Whatever may have been the origin of the race, the fact of higher development should prevent admitting the control of lower. There is a prevalent movement which would reduce thought to images, psychology to biology, biology to chemistry, chemistry to physics. This tends to a mechanical theory of life and a belief that a study of origin is all that is necessary for human knowledge. Scientists are seeing similarities and overlooking differences.

The Montessori system purposes nothing less than the redemption of mankind. Ambition so vital should focus all the various helps which truth can offer. Assent to or dissent from a system of education must be governed largely by the exclusive or inclusive attitude which the proposed system adopts. It appears that the serious fault with this system lies in its exclusiveness. It tries to convert a good but limited method to a universal philosophy of life. The indefinite is chosen for guidance, and the definite, which man has won for him-

self during the slow course of human progress, is set aside, and all is based on the doubtful principle that the child has within himself the ability, disposition, and power to reach the present level of civilized and Christianized humanity. X

No one is in a position to say the final word as to the pedagogical merit of the Montessori method. Doctor Montessori's experiment with children of elementary school age have not been promulgated. While it is perfectly true that the best results of education are invisible and intangible, parents and teachers still have a duty to see that children's minds are furnished as well as formed. The child is the heir to all the ages. How according to this method is he to inherit his share in the "funded capital of the race"? Doctor Montessori has yet to tell us whether or not we can wipe clean the slate of history in teaching children, and still urge humanity to the attainment of its destiny.

This report has tried to state the merits of the system in so far as projected, but it may not justly conceal the dangers that may lurk in a method which has not stood the test of experience. If all the philosophical and moral principles were carried to their possible conclusion, they would lead to serious disorder in the social world. X

On the other hand, the Montessori movement is a living educational impulse. In either a direct or a reactionary way, it will modify, if it does not revolutionize, methods of kindergarten and elementary teaching. It may not be ignored; it must be considered.

Visible results, for critics of practical turn, are not lacking, even among the very little children under present observation. Those who have struggled with first attempts to acquire the art of writing are amazed at the ease with which this art is mastered in Montessori schools. \

Reading and writing are taught contemporaneously and with less strain upon the minds and bodies of their learners than is evident in our own schools. Results are never forced. They follow a process which is natural and orderly. /

Doctor Montessori has proven emphatically that reading and writing may be taught with more economy, with less nervous strain, and to very young children who are in the stage of development most permeable to the incentives of spoken and written language.

The constantly reiterated assertion that the Montessori method faces failure in American schoolrooms because of certain superficial differences is unwarranted. Its precepts are too original to be thwarted by the mere barriers of nationality. The Italian *bambino* is quite as much the potential man as is the American baby and the laws by which both will attain their destinies are fundamentally the same.

Your representative respectfully recommends that the pedagogical worth of the Montessori method be tested in the Rhode Island Normal School. With your authority she will willingly undertake the supervision of this experiment. In such manner the State Board of Education would give to the educational world another proof of open-mindedness and eagerness in all matters pertaining to the betterment of the young.

Respectfully submitted,

CLARA E. CRAIG.

PROVIDENCE, September 2, 1913.

COMMISSIONER OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS
STATE OF RHODE ISLAND
PROVIDENCE

July 28, 1914.

Mr. J. C. Rowell, Librarian,
University of California,
The University Library,
Berkeley, California.

Dear Sir:

In response to your request of July fifteenth, received this morning, I take pleasure in sending you, under separate cover, a copy of Miss Craig's report on "The Montessori System of Child Culture."

Very sincerely yours,

Commissioner of Public Schools,

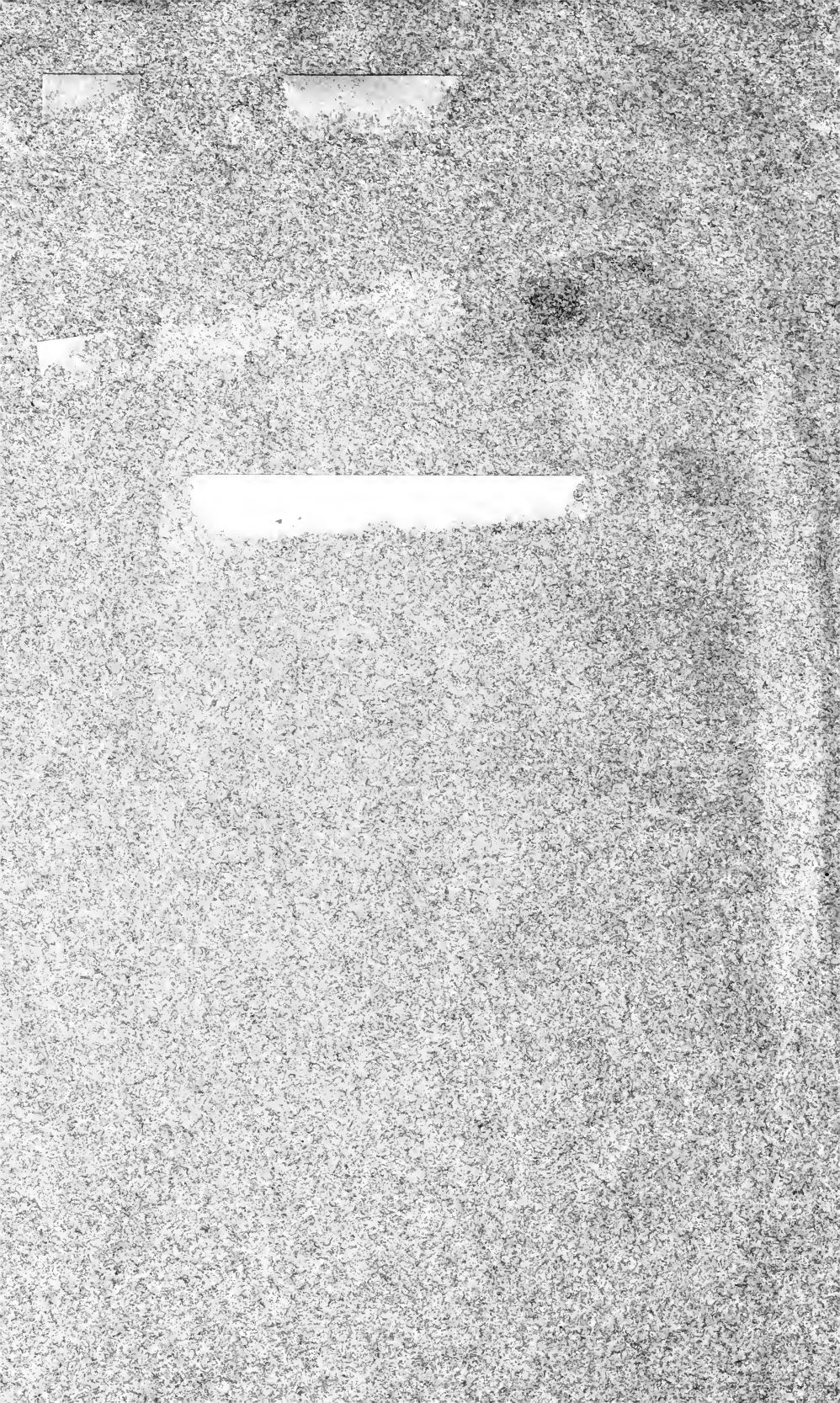
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