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Ellet, Charles  
The Army of the  
Potomac



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# THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC,

AND ITS

## MISMANAGEMENT;

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Respectfully addressed to Congress

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BY CHARLES ELLET, JR.,

CIVIL ENGINEER.

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The Army abounds in Skill, Science and Enterprise; but these qualities are not at its head: hence its inefficiency.

WASHINGTON:

1861.

C. H. S.

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## THE ARMY OF THE POTOMAC.

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The following communication was written and forwarded to the NEW YORK TIMES the date it bears, October 9th, and was immediately set in type, but its publication was postponed, for a season, at the instance of the editor of that able journal, who became impressed with the conviction that the strategy of General McCLELLAN, in a few days from that time, would be vindicated by movements and results which would satisfy the country.

The plans of the General, in the eight weeks that have intervened since that period, have been fully developed, but the results have served only to illustrate, most sadly and painfully, the soundness of the writer's early formed opinions of the incapacity of that officer to discharge the duties of his great trust.

These results are exhibited *in the blockade of the Potomac*, effected since the paper was written, under the immediate eyes of the commander of perhaps two hundred and fifty thousand brave and loyal volunteers, whom a confiding country has intrusted to his care.

They are further exhibited in the attempt—made also since the paper was written—to send a portion of the right wing of this great army across the Upper Potomac, after three months of deliberate and costly preparation, *in an old scow and two small skiffs*.

They are exhibited, too—these sad and humiliating results—in the consequent repulse and deplorable loss of half the gallant men who were thus placed in peril and led on to destruction, with their General's knowledge and in pursuance of his own plans, if not by his immediate orders, and almost under his own eyes.

They are exhibited, moreover, in the *national shame* due to the prolonged and undisturbed presence of a defiant rebel army, in the face of a quarter of a million of loyal bayonets, of which the irresistible power is paralyzed by the impotence of their Commander.

They are exhibited in the depression of the people's hearts—chilled and discouraged at the sight of their capital be-

leaguered—their vast armies at a dead-lock—a feeble and traitorous conspiracy mocking their imbecility—and every man of soldierly qualities in the civilized world sneering at a General who has been allowed to collect an army so vastly superior to his intellect that he is unable to move it.

Disappointed patriots, looking at the slow progress of the war—with the hundreds of thousands of men in arms, and *the daily million* which it costs the country—naturally conclude that we have greatly underrated the power and the prowess, the unanimity and the military resources of THE SOUTH.

But the difficulty is not there. The disloyal part of the South is no stronger, nor is the loyalty of the country weaker than was supposed.

The strength of the Union, before its forces were called into the field, was latent and unavailable.

The strength of the armies in their camps will still continue to be latent and unavailable, until their resistless power can be moved and directed by a clear, energetic, and comprehensive intellect.

The Commanding General is the army's brain. We may accumulate hundreds upon hundreds of thousands of brave and loyal volunteers, rich in all the science and art and mechanical skill of the abundant land; we may provide our proud army with battery upon battery, and squadron upon squadron, and pour accumulated comforts upon it, until invention is exhausted and the railroads groan beneath their ceaseless loads. Yet that army, of which all the individual fire, intelligence, and skill are subordinated by the rules of military service to the assumed superiority of an incompetent commander, will either rest idle in its camps, a helpless burden upon the country, or be moved, if moved at all—as recently on the Upper Potomac—to its own destruction.

Such is now our unfortunate position. The ARMY is all that the ardent patriot could wish it to be—brave, loyal, and ready. But the General at its head, though respectable as a man, is not *a superior man*, and therefore unequal to his great duties.

There have been periods during General McCLELLAN'S presence here on the Potomac, while his army was resting in camps before the Capital, when opportunity upon opportunity for annihilating the rebellion in Virginia, at a blow, was suffered to pass by him unseen and unimproved.

There have been weeks in succession this summer and autumn, when the transfer of only ten thousand men—entirely useless here—to the region drained by the Great Kanawha, would have enabled a general who understood the topography of Western Virginia, and the elements of military strategy,

to capture the entire forces under LEE, FLOYD, and WISE, without the necessity of a single battle to adorn his triumph in blood.

In fact, the whole rebel army in Western Virginia placed itself recklessly in our power; while our commander here, wholly unconscious of the opportunity inviting him to prompt action and to a bloodless victory, continued his daily parades, with unbroken self-applause—apparently satisfied with the display of his impatient troops and the barren amusement offered to an admiring public.

Yet, the defeat of that rebel army in Western Virginia—not by a battle, but by a *march*—would have enabled Rosecrans to lead his victorious and united forces across the Blue Ridge to the railroads south of Manassas, where he would have commanded all the communications of Johnson and Beauregard, and forced the rebel army of the Potomac, also—not to fight, for that would have been unnecessary,—but to *surrender* or *disperse*.

An army cannot fight without *food*; and we have been for long periods in a position—needing only a General competent to use the advantages placed within his reach—to deprive the rebel armies of their supplies of food, at our discretion.

It is quite possible that these opportunities may occur again, when there may be A GENERAL in the field; and after the people shall have learned to know that neither the President's commission, with the Senate's confirmation, nor a military dress, nor a "brilliant staff," nor newspaper adulations, nor all combined, can form A LEADER competent to the work now before the country. Until then we must have patience.

In the meantime, the following letter is submitted in the form in which it was printed nearly two months since, showing, as nearly as the writer could state the facts without the risk of giving available information to the enemy, some of the salient errors of our over-burthened Commander-in-chief.

These errors may be repeated, and Ball's Bluff tragedies exhibited to the country again on a broader scale.

The magnitude of the army is no protection against their occurrence. When vast masses of troops are thrown into confusion by imbecile attempts to carry out imperfectly digested arrangements, such as we have already seen and shuddered to look on, the greater the numbers in the field the greater is the danger, and the more terrible the reverse to be apprehended.

GEORGETOWN, *December 4, 1861.*

To the President of the United States—

GEORGETOWN, D. C., Oct. 9, 1861.

I trust, Mr. President, that I need not pause to apologize for addressing you, the chosen custodian of the public welfare, on grievances from which, in common with all our loyal countrymen—as well those who are cognizant of the facts as those who are unconscious of their existence—you and I, and all of us, are now suffering, but which you alone possess the lawful power to remove.

Happily, in this country, we still possess, in defiance of treasonable insurrection, and all its consequences, a *free Press*; and through that, after wasting many weeks of precious time in unavailing personal efforts, I now appeal for a redress of palpable evils.

My wish is to invite your attention to what I deem to be serious neglects and mismanagement on the part of the commander of the Army of the Potomac exhibited—not beyond the Mississippi, but here under our own eyes, within sight and sound of the Capital—where the existence of this great nation is in immediate issue, and where all the facts which I shall state are *patent*, or may be verified by yourself or others, with little difficulty.

On the strength of these facts—without intending to impeach the patriotism, the courage, the zeal, or the industry of the Commanding General—I propose to demonstrate that *he is not equal to the command of the two hundred thousand patriotic volunteers said to be contained in the present Army of the Potomac.*

You are aware, sir, that I have been for many weeks vainly endeavoring to obtain an interview with Major General McCLELLAN, for the purpose of submitting to him the evidence that the rebel army, which has so long threatened this Capital, is wholly dependent for its existence as an organized body, on the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, and the extensions of that work to Richmond, and to the West and Southwest: That the destruction of that road and its motive power, as matters now stand, would be equivalent to the destruction and disastrous dispersion of the army which it supplies with food, munitions of war, and reinforcements; that this road and all its connections north of James river are very deficient of locomotive engines and rolling stock; vital facts, on which I had a right to ask to be heard, because as an engineer long in the actual professional control of large portions of these works, I was necessarily very familiar with their condition.

Based upon these facts, I desired to submit to the Commanding General a plan by which this already exceedingly

deficient supply of locomotive engines could be almost instantaneously reduced; the railroad line which sustains the rebel army, and all its tributaries, could be for a season disabled; and how a strong division might then be placed between that army, thus crippled, and its sources of supply, both to prevent it from restoring its communications and to cut off its inevitable retreat.

The plan, in fact, contemplated the immediate and entire destruction of the insurgent army, almost without bloodshed; provided, only, that the facts could be submitted to the General in command, and he would have the prudence to act upon them with *absolute secrecy* and prompt dispatch.

Although Gen. McCLELLAN knew of my long connection with these works, and of my intimate local knowledge, I was obliged, in order to procure a brief interview with him, to develop parts of my plan to yourself, to several members of your Cabinet, to Gen. SCOTT and gentlemen of his Staff, to Gen. McCLELLAN's Aid, and to other distinguished persons, and with all these efforts, supported by your own written request that he would hear me, so great, apparently, was the pressure upon the General's time, that I was finally obliged to abandon the effort as hopeless.

I would not have passed through this ordeal for any conceivable personal interest of my own; but I was willing to submit to any sacrifice where so deep a stake was involved as the prompt suppression of this most foul and wicked rebellion.

While I was thus patiently visiting the General's headquarters, day after day, to offer with my life to destroy the enemy's means of transportation, and with the destruction of that transportation to terminate the war in Virginia, the General himself, apparently unconscious of the magnitude of the issue involved, allowed that enemy to come over both the Catoctin Mountain and the Blue Ridge, and seize the great locomotive engines on the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad, and convey them away, over mountains and valleys, in sight of the very watch-fires of our own camps on the Upper Potomac.

Further than this: The immense war transportation which has been thrown upon the Virginia railroads has created a demand for iron rails, to lay down many new tracks, turn-outs and sidings. They accordingly came, and were allowed to come tranquilly, almost within cannon-range of our own pickets, and strip mile after mile of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad of its iron tracks.

To move these great engines over the mountain roads of Virginia must have required thirty or more horses to each locomotive. To carry off ten or twelve miles of the iron of

the double track of that road, and the other needful appurtenances, must have demanded nearly two thousand trips of a single four-horse team, or twenty successive trips of one hundred such teams.

Yet all this work was allowed to be done within two hours' march of our lines, without the least interruption or resistance on the part of our Commanding General, though it was perfectly practicable, not only to have rescued the engines and the iron which they were bearing away, but to have captured all the men, and teams, and troops engaged in that disastrous robbery.

Had the commander of a blockading squadron been known to allow vessel after vessel to enter a rebel port with prohibited supplies, without making an effectual effort to capture one of them, he would have been immediately recalled and cashiered by the finding of a court-martial. But the Commanding General here, charged with the defence of the nation's menaced Capital, and provided with all the men and materials which his heart could desire, has stood silently by, engaged in holiday reviews and dress parades, and allowed a feeble enemy to supply themselves with machinery more needed for the prosecution of their enterprise against that Capital than almost anything the ocean itself could bear into their ports. Each of these locomotives, when conveyed to the track of the Orange and Alexandria Railroad, will be worth to the rebels the services of *a thousand horses*, and, consequently, the ten great engines which they have thus been permitted to obtain, will accomplish more work for them than *ten thousand horses*, with army wagons, can perform on the rough roads of Virginia.\*

I know it may be said, in extenuation of this almost criminal neglect, that General McCLELLAN was not fully aware of the importance of cutting off the enemy's supplies, and should not, therefore, be so strongly censured for neglecting a movement of which he could scarcely appreciate the magnitude and consequences.

That may be, and no doubt it is, true. But it is, nevertheless, most unfortunate for the country that it is so.

A week ago our army was encamped within or near its fortified lines south of the Potomac, while the enemy was pressing forward—just as a competent Commander would wish, for the moment, to see him come—close up to our redoubts on the banks of the Potomac. The nearer he could

\* DEC. 4. It is now said that this devastation has been suffered to continue until over twenty miles of the double track have been removed.

The deficiency of rolling stock, and other railroad facilities here pointed out, will be found fully confirmed by the message of the traitor President, dated November 18.

be induced to approach, the easier it would be for us, having command of the river, the canal, and the railroads, and resting secure under cover of our forts, *to get behind him* and cut off his communications and supplies and retreat. But, not perceiving, or unwilling to do this, we have advanced from our cover into the open field, pressing upon the enemy before we have placed a force in his rear, with the intention, apparently, of giving him, once more, the choice of time and place for a conflict, when it is in our power to suit ourselves in both.

It has been a part of the business of the army, for many months, to surround this city with a cordon of forts and redoubts, covering not only all the existing approaches, but the whole southern front of Washington on the south side of the Potomac. These forts have just been finished, and armed with rifled cannon and siege pieces in ample numbers. By the side of every mounted gun there is a present supply of grape and shot. The magazines are all finished and well filled with ammunition. The forests are cut down for many miles, and over thousands of acres, that nothing may interfere with the view or with the range of this formidable artillery.

A week or so ago the army shifted the position it had held under cover of these finished works, and advanced about four miles towards the enemy's line, where it is now encamped without artificial cover or defense of any description.

The impression of all experienced men has been, that these fortifications were intended, in part, at least, as a protection to the Capital in the event of an unhappy result of the next conflict in the field. These forts being firmly held, the enemy's advance could be checked, while our defeated regiments could be rallied under cover of their guns.

What now, Mr. President, will be your conclusion when I tell you—as I have already told the Secretary of War—that as the army of the Potomac was moved forward upon the enemy's line—just at the moment, if ever, when these forts could be of any use—the garrisons were withdrawn from no less than seven redoubts, constituting the entire chain of artificial defenses south of the Potomac; and forts raised for the protection of the Capital were left without men enough to hold them against a surprise?

Forts which would require about five thousand men for their proper defense, I think scarcely contain, at this time, an aggregate of three hundred bayonets, or an average of fifty men each.

To show the importance of this oversight, permit me to call to your mind the fact that the defensive line now occupied by our troops, starting on the Potomac, two or three miles below

Alexandria, and bending round by Bailey's Cross Roads, Munson's Hill, and Falls Church, to the Potomac again, above the Chain Bridge—presents an unprotected development of not less than eighteen miles.

Now, if the enemy should have the address to make a break in any part of this line—whether it be effected by surprise, by strategy or by main force—the column that makes its way through from certain points in the line, can reach and occupy these abandoned fortifications *in little over one hour's march*.

It will be replied, doubtless, that this enemy will have a very strong force to overcome, and that Gen McCLELLAN is publicly pledged “to have no more Bull Run affairs.” I admit both facts; and yet I well know that if the enemy attack our lines—holding the object of reaching these well-armed but neglected redoubts expressly in view—his columns must be most impotently commanded if he cannot get four or five regiments and a few field batteries through and into the works.

And here let me add that if he once enters, and turns one portion of our own excellent but abandoned guns upon our own communications, and the other portion upon the Capital, two events will assuredly and speedily follow. The seat of Government will fall into his hands. He will destroy that part of the army of the Potomac which will occupy the narrow and devastated region lying between the forts which he will then hold, and his own free columns in the field, confronting our lines, the greater part of which contracted ground will then be swept by the artillery of our own forts in the hands of the enemy.

*These are facts, Sir;* and I most respectfully ask you to visit the works and examine them for yourself, and if you find their condition still such as it was three days ago, to order the return of the garrisons and the maintenance of the strictest vigilance there.

Allow me to ask you, moreover, Mr. President, whether the General whose cares of office are so great, that, after spending months of labor in rearing and arming these works, forgot their purpose, and withdrew their garrisons at the very moment when the probability that they might be needed was most imminent, is not carrying a greater load of duty than his shoulders were naturally made to bear? I ask you, is General McCLELLAN equal to the multiplied duties involved in the command of two hundred regiments of volunteers, and to be made the sole protector of the immortal destinies of this country?

Let me add still another word on this subject. If these forts can ever be of any value, it is precisely when the enemy's guns are within sound of the Capital. It is *then* that



they should be firmly held, so that come what may in the next conflict, the seat of the National Government, at least, shall be safe.\*

In common, I presume, with almost every practical man in this District, I have for many weeks looked with anxious apprehension at the condition of the *Long Bridge*, the only available direct communication between the Capital and the vast army south of the Potomac. This bridge has been long known to the public to be in a critical condition, and has repeatedly been so much impaired as to arrest the passage of troops and supplies since the army first moved into Virginia.

In view of the disasters which might result from the giving way of this structure, at a period of some great emergency, I have repeatedly advised the construction of a provisional bridge below the Georgetown Aqueduct, which might be established there, at any time, in the course of three or four days.

Yet the direct communications of a great army are left, month after month, wholly dependent on this frail and precarious structure; a neglect which, on a similar occasion, and within the memory of living men, cost a worsted general the loss of thirty or forty thousand of his defeated but gallant army.

Last week I passed over this bridge, and was requested by the sentinel to drive my buggy slowly, a drove of cattle for the army having broken a span. A few days later, after visiting these vacated redoubts, I crossed the river again, and found that the iron work of the draw had just then given way, so that only one horse at a time was permitted to pass, while a long train of army wagons stood on the bridge waiting for its repair.

I could not induce the Commanding General to listen to a plan for destroying the enemy's exposed communications, apparently not being aware, in the hurry of his engagements, that an army could be defeated just as disastrously by cutting off its supplies as by charging it with the bayonet, or mowing down its misguided ranks with artillery.

Not perceiving the consequences of interrupting the enemy's communications, he is unwilling to take the trouble to seize them. Equally unable, amid his multiplied cares, to appreciate the value of his own, our General has not only constructed and armed seven formidable redoubts which command his roads, and then left these finished works as an easy prize for the enemy, but now permits the safety of the most valuable army—considering the material of which it is com-

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\* It is true that, although the forts continued to be neglected, the enemy made no attempt to seize them, a forbearance for which the country ought to be thankful. My earnest advice is still, however, to guard them well.

posed—that was ever marshaled on a battle-field, to depend on a bridge so frail that the passage of a single battery on the run would rack it to pieces.\*

Let us turn to the Upper Potomac. There rests the right wing of our army, of which, in these days of secrecy, when an unknown man is deemed a safer depository of all facts bearing on the national welfare than an intelligent public, the numbers are untold. This right wing is within sight of the camps and within sound of the guns of the isolated and wide-spread left wing of the enemy on the opposite side of the river. We have the advantage of railroad and canal transportation, and the means of silently accumulating, at any point we may select, whatever masses of troops we may need for any enterprise, without the knowledge of the enemy.

Nothing separates the two armies but the Potomac river, which, fortunately, has not been fordable since these two wings confronted each other.

The excuse offered for the inactivity of that division of our great army is the prevailing high water. But this fact, Mr. President, covers the very reason why the over-extended left wing of the enemy should have been surprised long ago and cut off.

He has been there waiting in security for the fall of the water. A commanding General, possessing ordinary military resources, and not over-burdened with cares, would have thrown a bridge across the Potomac some dark night, at a point where there is neither ford nor ferry, passed over with twenty or thirty thousand men, and have surprised and cut off that left wing from its centre, and rolled it up to the Catoctin Mountain. He would then have had an ample force on the left flank of the enemy's centre, now menacing our fortifications in front of Washington, and been relieved of the continued necessity of guarding the Upper Potomac against its passage by the rebels.

It is precisely because such a movement would be popularly supposed to be impossible that its performance would be easy. The only impediment has been the swollen state of the river; but, with proper and timely preparation, the Potomac can be bridged almost anywhere above the Great Falls in a few hours, and in several places *in a single hour*.

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\* Dec. 4. The Long Bridge has been repaired and strengthened since this was written, but it is still a very inadequate dependence for the use and safety of a great army.

An active enemy, as our own army is commanded, and as the forts are held, could destroy the Long Bridge, and isolate our troops on the Virginia shore, and cross the Potomac with forty thousand men simultaneously above and below the Capital, and force his way into it in defiance of all the impediments the generalship which was illustrated at Ball's Bluff would know how to prevent.

I know the character of the river well, for I surveyed it all in my early youth, and have forded it in many places.

Yet, with this opportunity inviting enterprise, there stands our gallant army, with hundreds of officers and men straining on the bit, and vainly sighing for honorable and loyal service, but obliged to wait on the convenience of a Commander whose time is so engrossed by other duties that he has no leisure to think about cutting off the enemy's wide-spread wings, or interrupting his unprotected communications.\*

The cry is now still, as it has been, for *more men*. Permit me to say, Mr. President, that *we need no more men here*. We have bayonets and artillery more than enough in this army of the Potomac. You have more men and equipments now here than NAPOLEON moved when he prostrated Prussia in a three weeks' campaign. You have more men here on the Potomac than he moved when he marched to the heart of Austria, occupied Vienna, and dictated laws to the sovereigns of Europe from the Palace of Schoenbrunn.

You have, in fact, more men now assembled in this one army than your General has the capacity and experience to put in active motion.

The efficiency of an army is not to be measured by counting its regiments and batteries. Like the momentum of a railway train, its power is a function of its mass and its *velocity*. Ten thousand *living* men under an able, enterprising and active leader, will accomplish more than two hundred thousand under one who is so lost in the mazes of his own columns that he not only forgets to leave garrisons in his forts at the moment when they are most liable to be taken, and keep open his roads when their obstruction would be most fatal, but is unable to hurl his vast masses where the weakness of the enemy invites his attack.

This machine is, in fact, too heavy for your engineer. His feeble hand cannot move the starting lever. Your gallant army, therefore, stands idle, while rebellion riots on the substance of loyalty, and a traitor government is assuming solidity in repose.

I do not wish to discredit our General because he has a duty to perform far beyond his capacity. That is not his fault. A man is not often responsible for his own mental or physical qualities; and it is saying nothing derogatory to General McCLELLAN to show that he is incompetent to the command of the armed hosts now assembled on the Potomac.

Let me remind you, Mr. President, that an army of two hundred thousand men, with its baggage trains, cavalry, and

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\* Ten days after this paper was printed, the attempt was made by General McCLELLAN to cut off the enemy's force at Leesburg, *in his own way*—by crossing the Potomac at Ball's Bluff on an old scow, aided, it is said, by two skiffs.

artillery, will occupy so great a space that there is no single road leading from Washington to Richmond—a distance of about one hundred miles—along which it can be marched. In other words, such an army in marching array will fill up more than one hundred, probably over one hundred and twenty miles, of any road I have ever traveled in Virginia.

Distributed among four commanders, on as many different roads, each separate column will occupy some twenty-five or thirty miles.

We may thus perceive why the progress of an army in the Southern States—where we will find no wide, well-paved and graveled European causeways—will necessarily be very slow, even where the roads are smoothest and there is no enemy in front. But the march of General McCLELLAN—should he ever begin it—will be enlivened by a battle, or a promise of one, every day.

When one of these great columns is unexpectedly attacked by a light and active enemy, and thrown into confusion, and its regiments begin to surge upon each other—the bridges to break down—mines to explode—the baggage to become entangled with the artillery—teams to stall in the mud-holes or upset on the steep hill-sides—while new roads are to be opened and the old ones to be enlarged by your engineers, under fire—*then* will be the time to judge of the merits and powers of commanders. Then, too, the public will be able to decide whether it would have been most advisable to undertake to roll an army of three hundred thousand men over all the South, down to the Gulf of Mexico, or to send a detachment upon the enemy's rear, command his communications, and annihilate his armed force *where it now stands*.

I know, it will be asked: What is to be done? For, in truth, we cannot yet have generals whose experience and capacity would be equal to this great command.

The remedy, in my opinion, is to let General McCLELLAN *stay here* and garrison and defend the thirty-two fortifications around Washington—which, with daily reviews and parades, will abundantly occupy his time, and give the fullest scope to his capacity—whatever that may be; and, at the same time, let the enemy remain in front of these works and threaten to attack them.

This policy will set free, perhaps fifty, perhaps a hundred thousand men; and this force may be put under the command of some of your most active Generals, with instructions to fall on the rear, and communications of the enemy, by different routes, and by a concerted and consistent plan.

If, instead of moving his army forward, General McCLELLAN had remained within and behind his forts, and only ten thousand men, under a vigorous leader, had been suddenly thrown

across the Upper Potomac—not loaded down with baggage, but in marching and fighting trim—to move *rapidly* upon the rear of LEE, the communications of that leader would have been cut off, and the three rebel Generals—LEE, WISE and FLOYD—have been simultaneously surrounded.

So, too, if only ten thousand of this vast and most unwieldy army of the Potomac had been allowed to remain west of the Allegany Mountains, and sent thence directly up the Great Kanawha, and along the west side of New River, through Fayette and Mercer—*where the way has always been entirely clear*—they would have reached the Lynchburg and Tennessee railroad without opposition, taken possession of it, deprived the rebel army on the Potomac of its Southwestern supplies and reinforcements, given hope and aid to East Tennessee, and, moving down the Valley, co operated in cutting off the three rebel divisions of Western Virginia.

Simultaneously with these movements, another ten thousand could have been landed on the Potomac below Matthias Point, or on the Rappahannock, and by a sure and sudden process—which I need not indicate in a published paper—have destroyed the present use of the Fredericksburgh, Central and Orange Railroads, and, by a single blow, in a single day, have utterly cut off all the railroad supplies of every division of the insurgent forces in Virginia, including their army of the Potomac. We would then have had Western Virginia cleared of the enemy, and forty or fifty thousand men to pour over the Blue Ridge in the rear of the rebel army of the Potomac.\*

The efficiency of General McCLELLAN's vast command would have been increased, instead of being lessened, by the withdrawal of these forces—just as a stone which is found to be too heavy for the muscles of the slinger's arm, is made more available by breaking the unwieldy mass into pieces.

Up to a certain limit, it is true, good generalship is shown by concentrating battalions, so as to present a superiority on the actual field of battle. But when the concentration is too great for the character of the roads to be traversed, for the ability of the country to sustain the army, for the capacity of the commander to wield the thunders he has brought together—then, every additional regiment and battery adds to the confusion, or takes from the efficiency of the command.

Our army here has already reached and transcended that limit. It is now large enough, if properly used, to sweep rebellion from the land, and restore the loyal people of the South to the enjoyment of all their rights.

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\* December 4. All the lines named here were open to our advance, in October. *They are now all occupied by the enemy, in force*; and his new positions must be turned by a very different strategy.

Let me repeat the statement of a transparent fact. The true base of the rebel army of the Potomac is Manasses Junction. From that point all supplies are now conveyed to the army north of the Junction by common teams.\*

But south of this true base—unlike the great armies of past times—they have no common road transportation, but depend wholly on their railroads. These railroads, and the country which they traverse, from Manasses Junction to the Gulf of Mexico, are, in a military sense, wholly unprotected. Even now, you may strike in south of that position, almost anywhere, with a small division, under a gallant leader, *and march southwardly almost with impunity*—disabling the railroads and machinery as you advance, to prevent pursuit by the rebel army of the Potomac, and avoiding the large cities, if you have not force sufficient to take them. It will be unnecessary to invest these cities, even, to render them harmless. By temporarily crippling their railroads and canals merely, they will be sufficiently invested.

By thus disabling the unprotected railroads and machinery south of Manasses, you will at once place the rebel army before Washington, starving and helpless, at the mercy of your General here—provided he is then able to put any part of his vast, patriotic, and fiery masses in forward motion.

Mr. President, *winter is approaching*, and the delay still continues. These are truly precious moments, richer than the mines of California in golden opportunities. Let them not be wasted for any misplaced tenderness of the pride or vanity of a Commanding General. There is still time, with instant action, guided by intellect, to destroy the enemy's communications, and stop his supplies, and demoralize his disloyal forces. But, to do it, we must pluck the passing day. Next month may be too late.

Then in God's name and our country's name, *let us move at once*, and postpone our daily reviews until treason is subdued, and our patriotic regiments can display, by the side of their new silken banners, the captured colors of the enemy as they file proudly by the front of the Executive Mansion.

Most respectfully,

Your obedient servant,

CHARLES ELLET, JR.,  
*Civil Engineer.*

GEORGETOWN, D. C., *October 9, 1861.*

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\* This was true when it was written. Things have changed since then, but the rigid strategy of our General is still the same—and equally adapted to all emergencies.

# NOTES.

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## THE BALL'S BLUFF CALAMITY.

I hold General McCLELLAN responsible for the Ball's Bluff calamity for the following, among other, cogent reasons :

Because he had taken three months to prepare for crossing the Potomac, and yet moved his forces before he had made any preparations :

Because he had timely offers from experienced parties to form corps of engineers and artisans to build boats and bridges, or do other mechanical work, constantly before him, which he treated with contempt :

Because his order to General STONE was vague and indefinite ; and both General STONE's reply to that order, and his subsequent conduct, as well as his Report, show that he construed the order (or some other unpublished communication) to mean that he was to send his command into Virginia as rapidly as his transportation would allow :

Because the final order to General STONE, written after General McCLELLAN had been informed of the fall of the chivalrous BAKER, and of the repulse and destruction of his dauntless command, "*to hold his position (on the Virginia shore) at all hazards,*" shows that a primary object of the expedition, if it had any object, was to establish a force on the south side of the Potomac, with a view to unexplained ulterior movements.

The subsequent order to General BANKS, *to proceed immediately with three brigades to the support of General STONE*, is not reconcilable with the hypothesis of an available intellect at the moment when that order was issued.

General BANKS was on the north side of the Potomac, and General STONE, whom he was ordered to support, was on the south side ; the river was not fordable, and the principal scow which had been used for ferrying the army across, laden with the dead victims of official stupidity, was on the bottom.

Yet General BANKS was ordered, in all haste, to the support of General STONE, whom he could not approach, because the deep, wide, and rapid river was between them; while General McCALL, who, with his brave Pennsylvanians, was, a large part of the time, on the Virginia side of the Potomac, on the enemy's right flank, and within about two hours' march of STONE's position, was neither advanced to the rescue of BAKER in his extremity, nor to the support of STONE in his isolated and perilous post,—which it was the Commanding General's intention to hold at all hazards,—*but was withdrawn*.

The statement at the close of General McCLELLAN's explanatory report, that “on proceeding personally to the scene of operations, *on the 22d*, and ascertaining that the enemy were strengthening themselves at Leesburg, and that our means of crossing and recrossing were very insufficient,” he withdrew his forces from the Virginia side, might lead to a misapprehension of the facts.

General McCLELLAN had been informed by General STONE, *on the 20th*, two days before he went personally to Edward's Ferry, precisely what his means of crossing and recrossing really were, and did not first ascertain that fact on going there.

I allude to these things as collateral evidence of the correctness of the opinion which I have freely expressed—that the Commanding General's mind is incapable of providing for, or properly handling, numerous large bodies of men.

It seems, in fact, to be deficient in powers of combination, and was obviously too much overwhelmed by the disaster at Ball's Bluff to order McCALL's division forward to the support of his discomfited troops on the Virginia side, but telegraphed to BANKS, in his confusion, to move forward *his* column, without reflecting that BANKS had not been provided with the means of crossing the Potomac.

The order from General STONE to General BAKER *is alleged* to be a forgery. The question of its authenticity should be investigated, and if it is ascertained to be a forgery, an effort should be made to detect and punish the traitor who committed the crime.

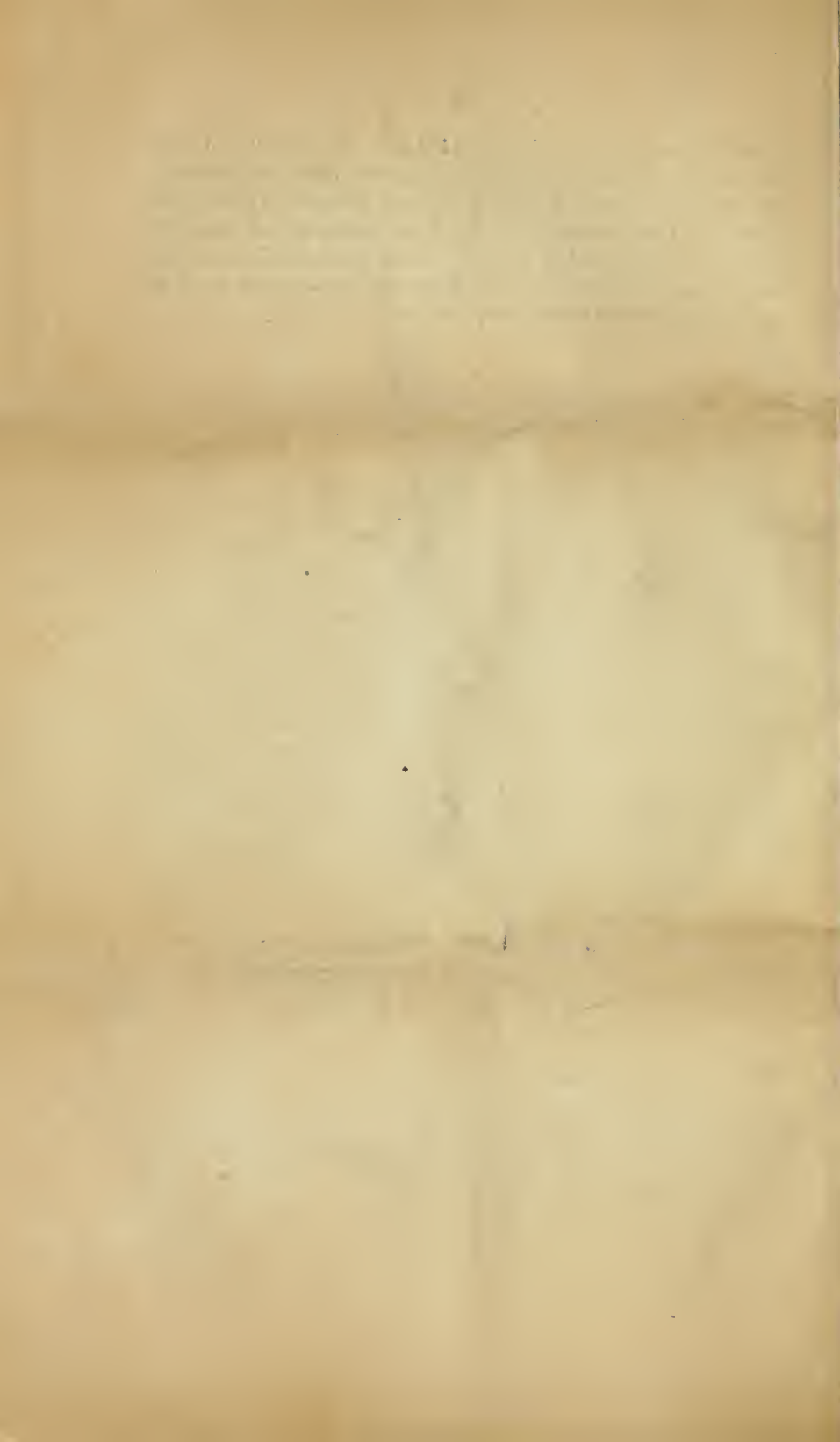
#### THE BLOCKADE OF THE POTOMAC.

An intelligent observer, looking at the forces assembled around Washington, and the operations of the rebels in blockading the Lower Potomac, would suppose that the troops under the command of General McCLELLAN were placed here to protect the enemy while raising their batteries along the south bank of the river from unauthorized interruption by the Union men of the North.

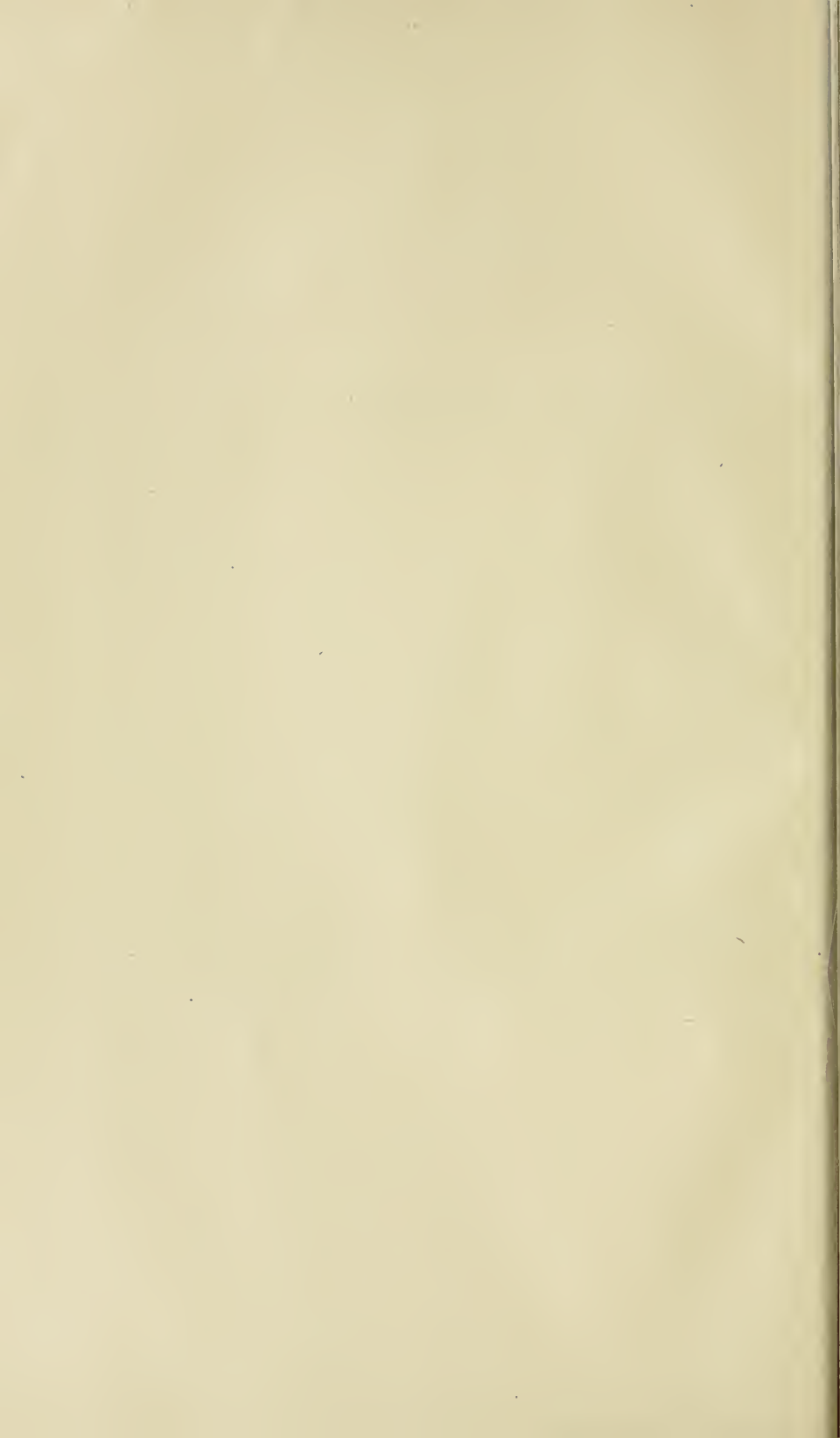
But, for the benefit of such observers, it may be advisable to say,

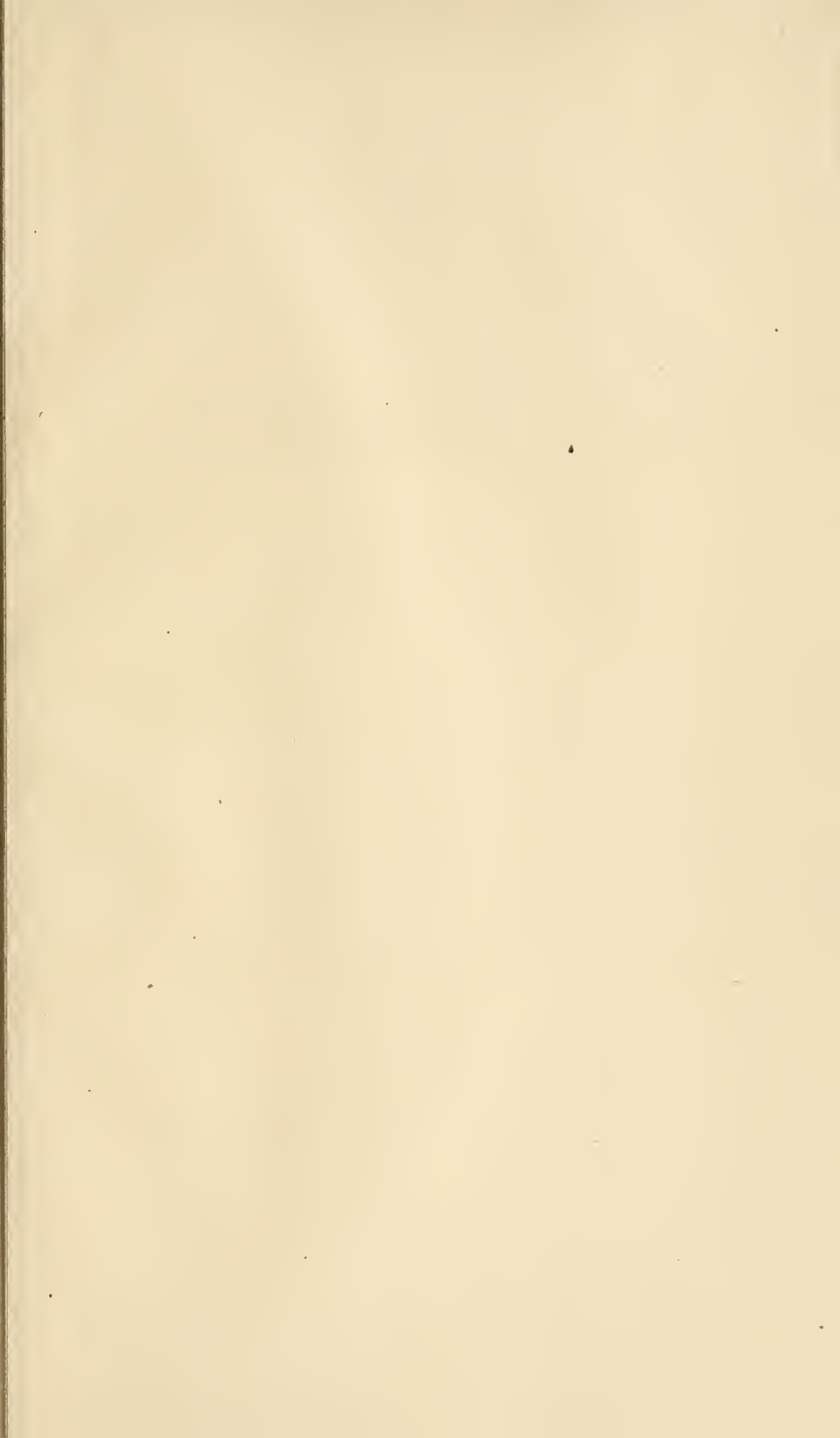


that the unresisted blockade of the Potomac—the undisturbed fortifications now in course of erection along the Winchester turnpike—the unrebuked robbery of the iron rails and locomotives of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad—the quiet occupation of the strategical points at Dumfries—and the massacre at Ball's Bluff—are merely salient exemplifications of a single principle, common to them all, and that principle is—MILITARY INCAPACITY.

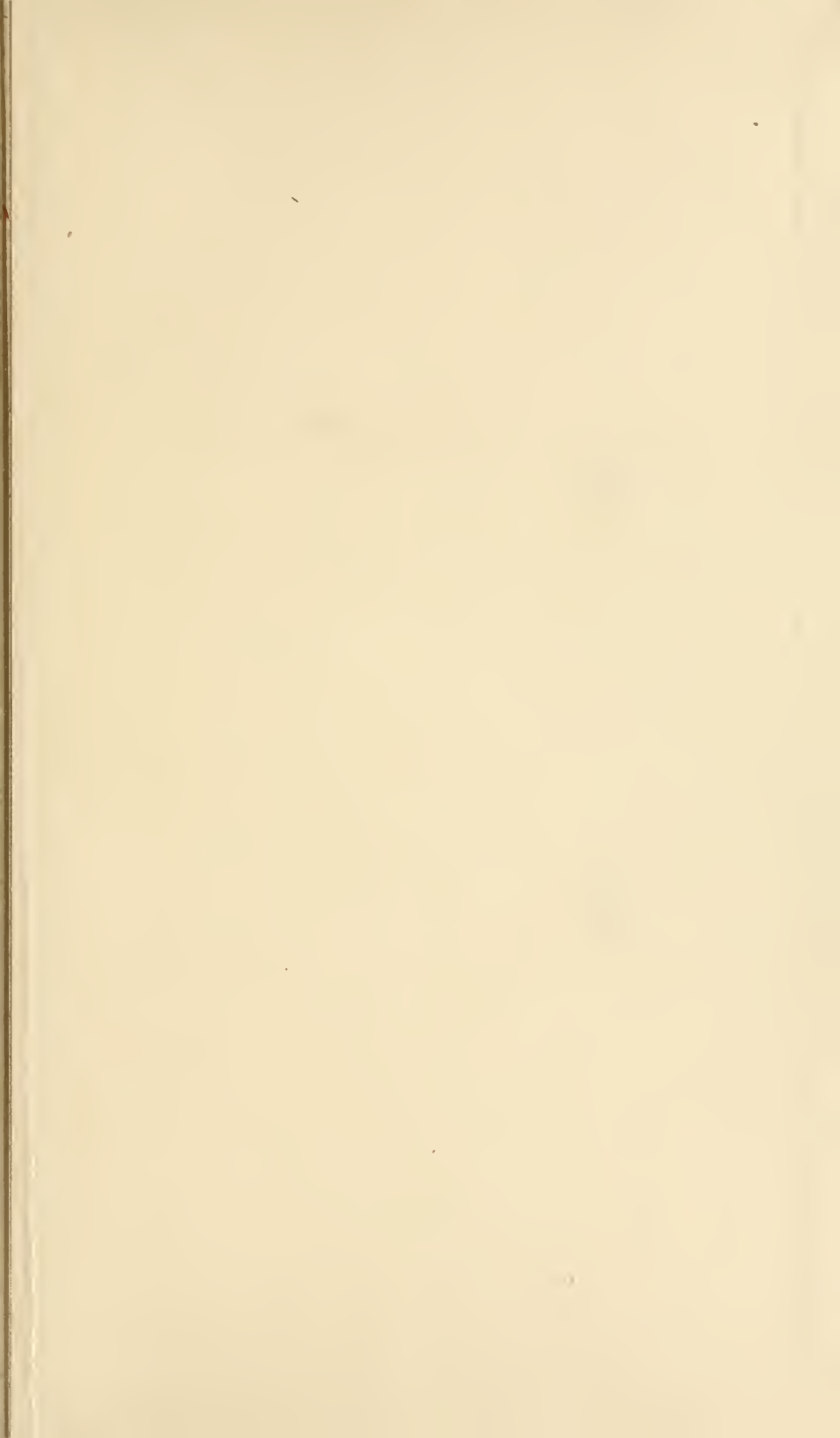












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