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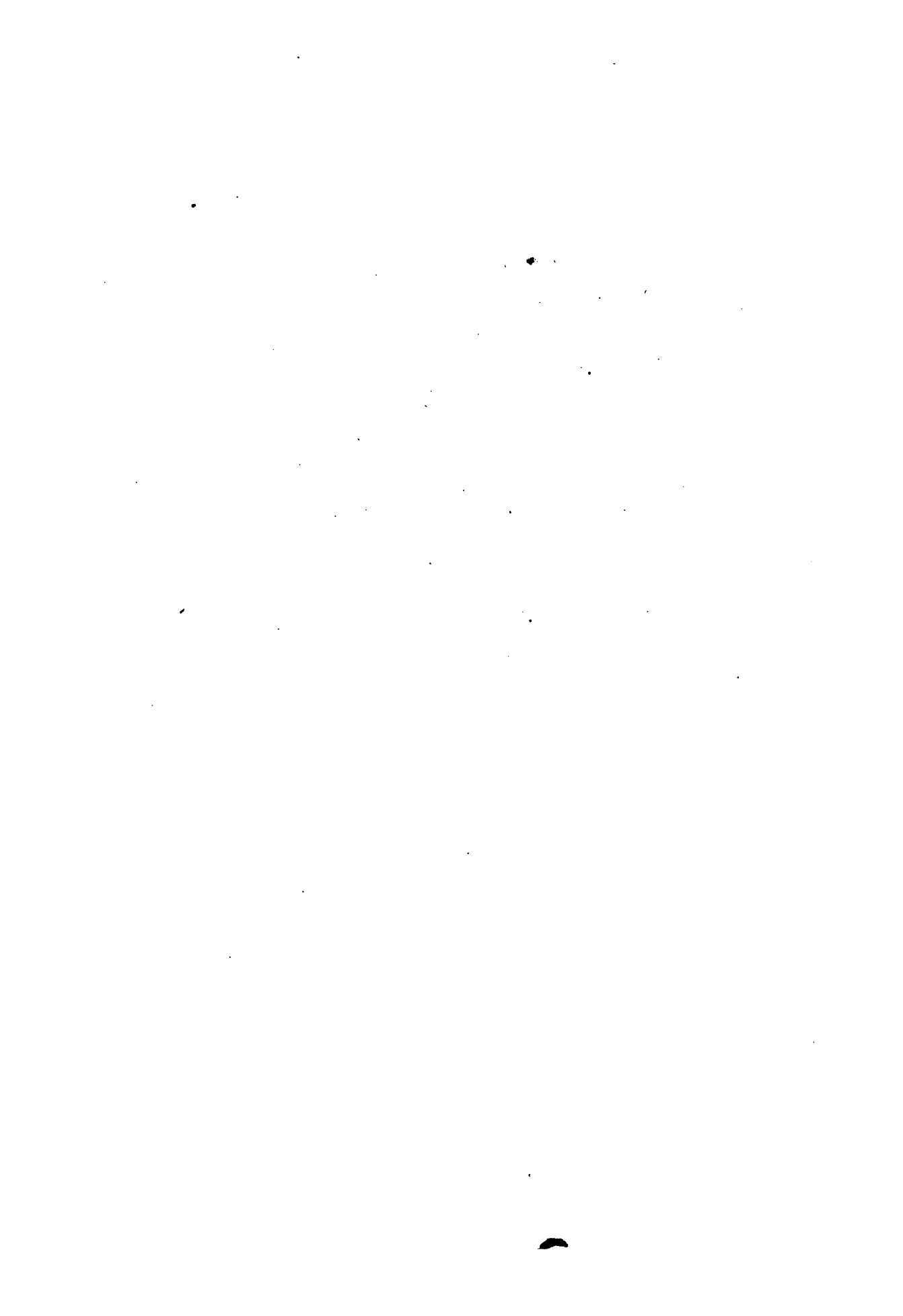


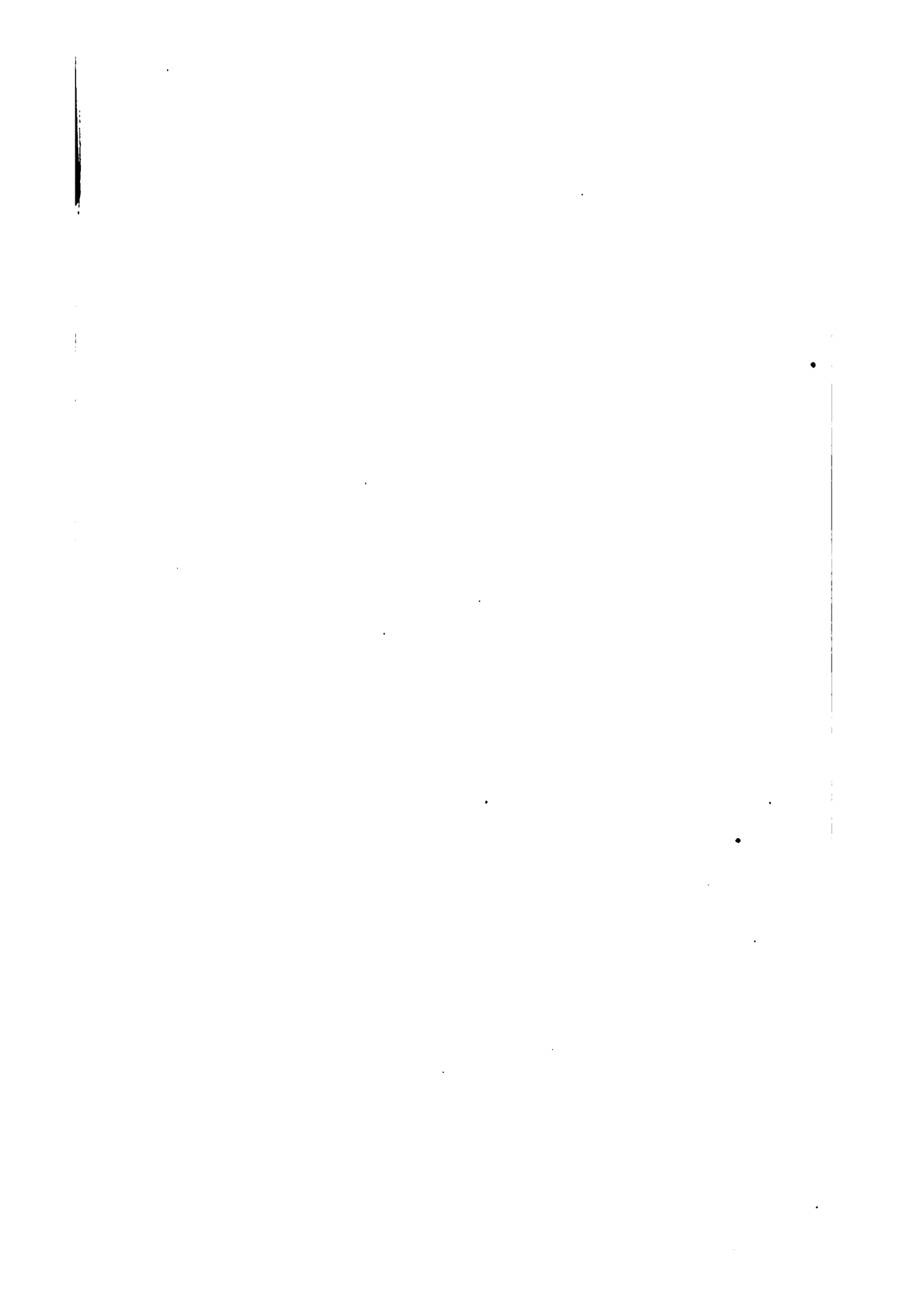
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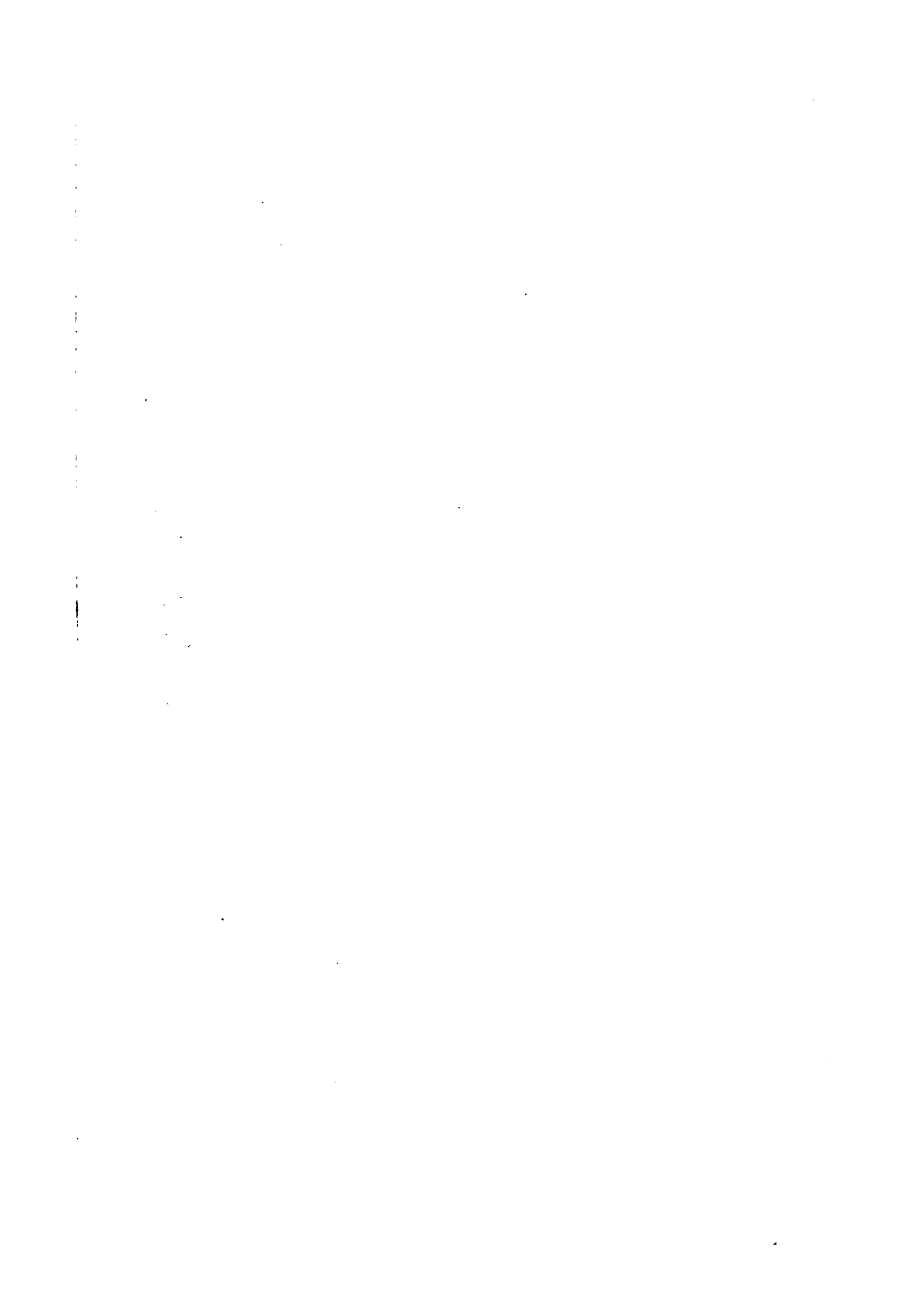
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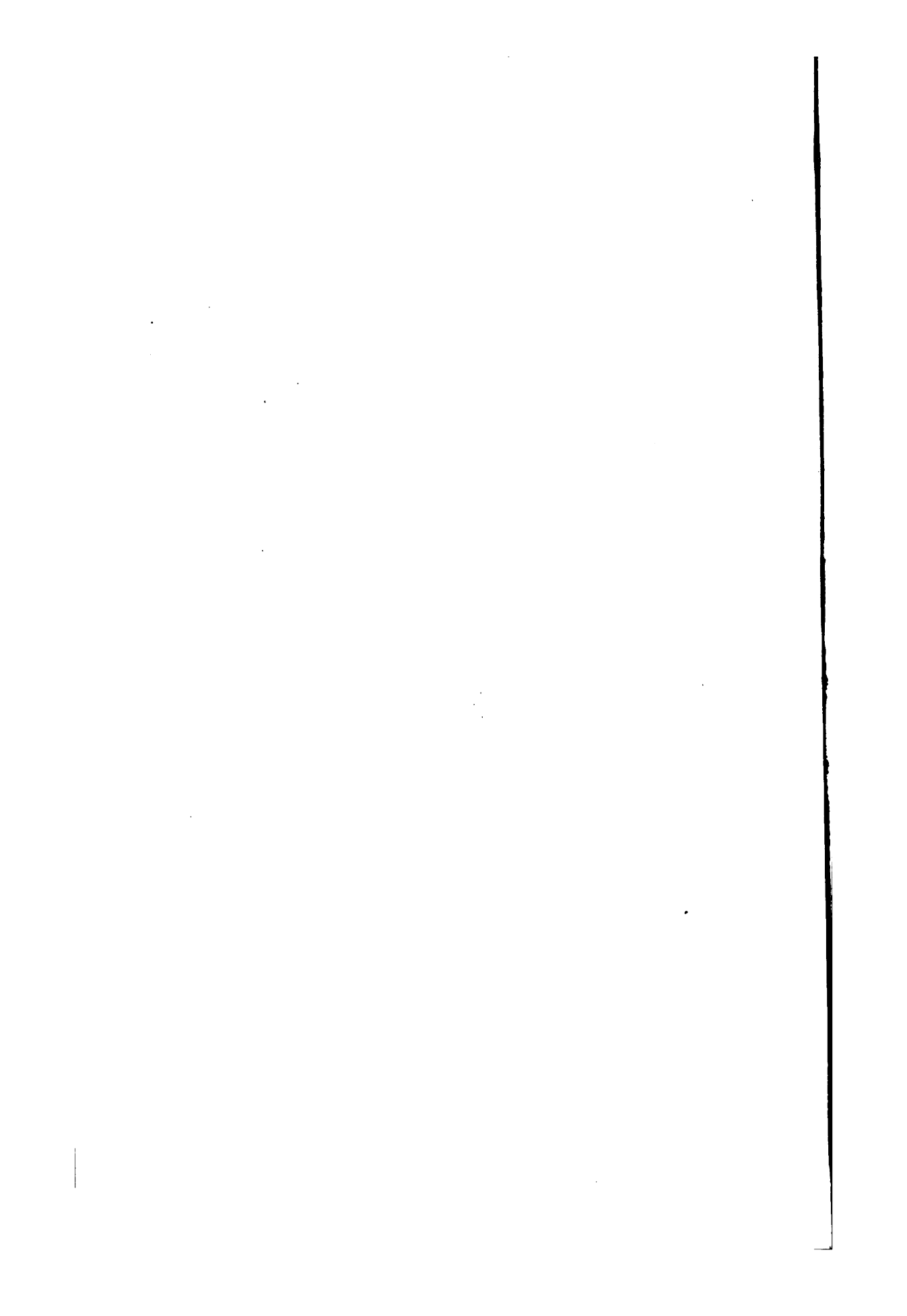
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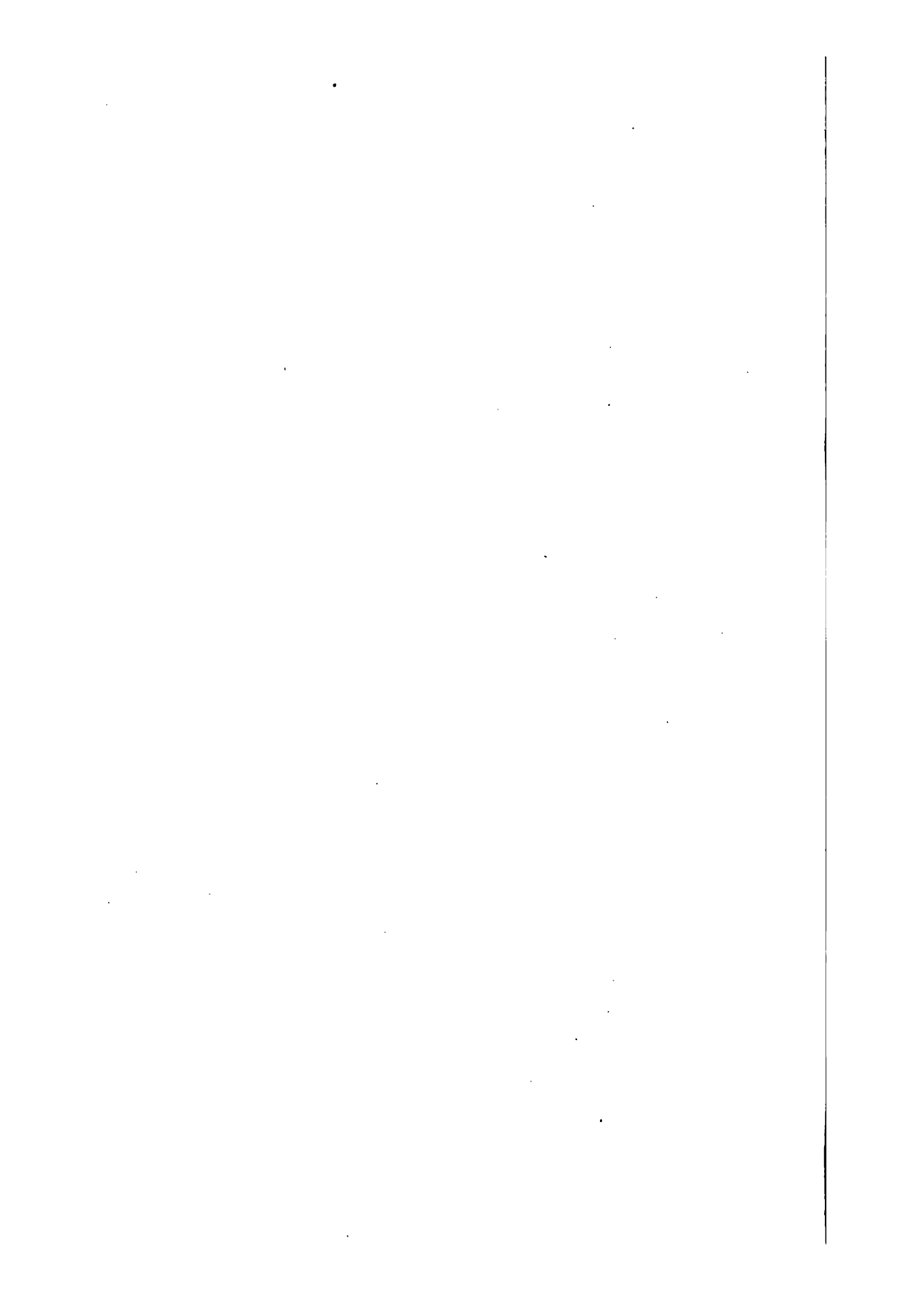








# ALCHEMY



**ALCHEMY**  
**A SYMPHONIC POEM**

**BY**

**ROBERT HILLYER**

**AUTHOR OF "FIVE BOOKS OF YOUTH," "SONNETS AND OTHER LYRICS"**

**WITH DECORATIONS BY**  
**BEATRICE STEVENS**



**NEW YORK**  
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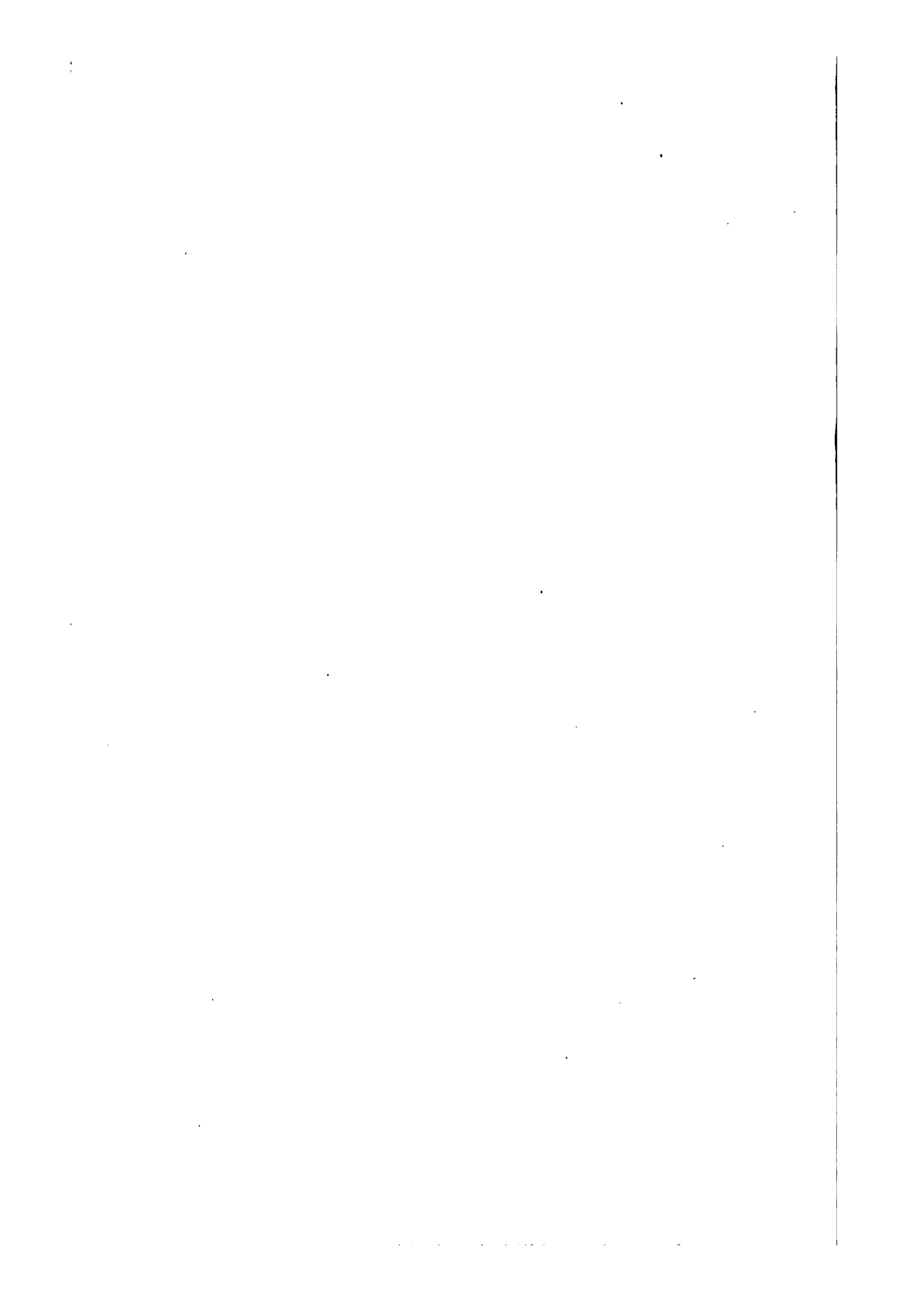
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## CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE PRELUDE . . . . .	11
CANTO I . . . . .	17
CANTO II . . . . .	29
CANTO III . . . . .	41
CANTO IV . . . . .	47
THE CODA . . . . .	59



## THE PRELUDE





**P**OET a thousand years hence!  
Singer of times more dead to me than the past.  
Face calm with unquestioned innocence,  
Eyes with unworldly vision overcast;  
Singer and poet, remember me in the dust,  
When children whistling down the hills of doom  
Run stealthy-footed by my tomb;  
When withered leaves lie heaped in scarlet rust,  
Or whirl along the chilly gust;  
When trees stand gaunt and stark,  
And the fountain freezes in the vacant park.



**I** WOULD speak to you shyly as fits my case,  
Since to you these inquisitive years have run  
    . their race  
And written their answers in your face.

**W**ILL you hear me speak across the years  
    In the night's high choirs,  
    Under the hanging spheres  
When the comets trail their fires  
Through glassy zeniths where all thought and light  
    expires?  
O be my friend, and I will be your brother,  
And we shall sing strange songs to one another;  
I will be gay with you and share your laughter  
During your carnival; thereafter,  
Hearing you weep, I too will shed my tears.



**B**EHOLD this early autumn morning; trees  
Still green though petulantly whispering,  
Their leaves rattling in the fitful breeze,  
Their accent sadder and a little harsh,  
Discord of scraping bow on broken string.  
Faint mist in spiral filters from the marsh  
And creeps along the hill. I too have known  
This overtone  
Of fall that quivers into sharp delight.  
You feel it now, the chill upon the moors,  
The pungent morning and the perilous night;  
You smell the scattered smoke of smouldering leaves;  
You hear the lost winds whining in the eaves,  
Like ghosts of troubadours.



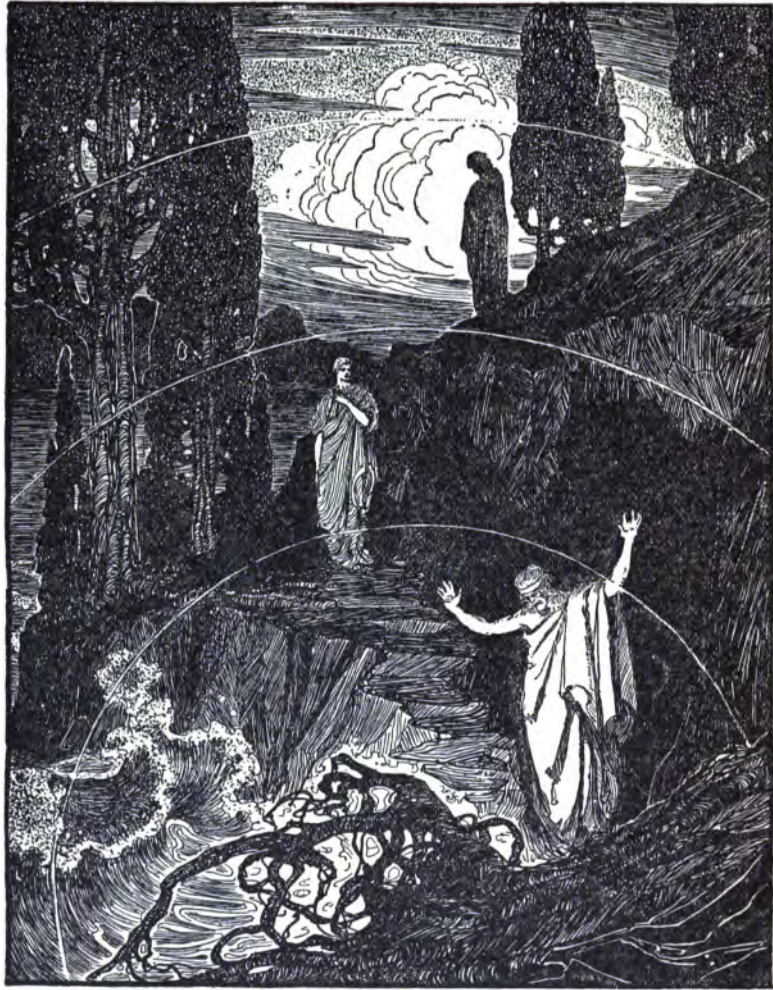
**C**UP-BEARING spring is gone, but her wine  
remains  
Spilled on the crimson plains,  
And the hills reeling with colour beneath the sun,  
Overflowing the walls of tombs and the dun  
Disaster of forest rent by the woodman's axe;  
The buffeting wind curtails her brusque attacks,  
And the woodland sleeps, storm-surfeited;—  
You will have other woods when mine are dead.

**F**OR the years in pageants go their rounds  
To a monotonous singing,  
Rising and ebbing sounds  
From the April wind rain-bringing,  
That slants across the night with songs of green herbs  
springing,  
To the loud, tramping blizzards of December,  
Screaming "Forget!" to a world that would remember;

**C**YCLE on cycle wheeling by, and you alone,  
Poised on the brink of the reticent unknown,  
Seeking the pivot of the whirling change  
That flings us on, disconsolate and strange.



**THE FIRST CANTO**





**O**UT of a dreary house I came  
From long communion with the dead,  
Down sombre windswept streets that led  
Between grey walls eternally the same ;  
My unaccompanied footsteps beat  
A clangour down the empty street,  
Until the city fell away from me,  
And suddenly I stood alone  
On shores uncharted and unknown  
Where tall rocks break the wild teeth of the sea.  
Then on the breathless midnight came  
Rumours of approaching flame,  
The chariots rumbled down the skies  
Striking out flashes of tremendous light.  
With flaming swords the veil of night  
Flared, as those battling centuries  
Swept through the firmament, and passed, and  
ceased.



**A** NEW wind struggled from the east,  
The sea fell back with intermittent moan,  
One last flash quivered down the cloud,  
And, in that moment, I beheld the Stone.  
It lay half-hidden, trodden underfoot,  
With dead leaves heaped upon it like a shroud,  
Clasped intricately in the tangled root  
Of a tree that another storm had overthrown.  
Not I the first to find it, nor the last;  
Many have found it in the storied past;  
Many will come whose stories are not told.  
Plato beheld it when the Age of Gold  
Flowered beneath his touch;  
Exalting it against the skies he saw  
Faces that blinded him with awe,  
And marvelling overmuch  
He cast it down, and left its shining worth  
Half-hidden in the untransmuted earth.



**S**WIFTLY, and like a deity, he strode  
Unto the cities where all men abode  
In caves whose walls were black with busy  
shadows.

“O You whose lives among the shades are passed,  
I saw beyond your caves the radiant meadows  
Where dwell the Immortal Forms by whom are cast  
These flat, distorted phantoms. Speed you forth  
On wings beyond the mountains of the north,  
Ride out upon the chariots of the storms;  
Behold the vast, incalculable Forms  
Whose smallest thought, reflected on your walls,  
Gives token of supernal carnivals,  
And in whose minds the being was conceived  
Of which you are the vague, wan spectres. Go.  
And they that see aright, shall live, and know.”  
Thus Plato spoke; few heard and none believed.



**W**HEN Epicurus came. He found the Stone,  
And touched the world around him into gold,  
And cast the Stone away, nor would unfold  
The gilded vistas Plato gazed upon.  
Beneath his eyes the dawn lay all serene;  
The earth reclining like a Virgin Queen  
Offered her happiness to Man, who fled  
Her raptures, harried by a cynic dread.  
“O You whose lives are passed bemoaning death,  
Propitiating gods, with futile breath,  
Wisdom is that which sets the spirit free  
From fears of death or hopes of life to be;  
In sorrow vested in tranquillity,  
In joy discreet, that chance may not enslave  
A mind to things which only fools should crave.  
Immortal gods may dwell  
In those fantastic fields of asphodel,  
Beautiful, perfect, young, immaculate,  
But what care they of men or human fate?



If life be but a wavering shade, what then,  
If it be worthy in the eyes of men, —  
A calm, deep draught of beauty? all the rest  
Is but the midnight's momentary guest.”

THUS Epicurus in the Garden spoke  
As one who knew the secret of the Stone,  
But through the summer evening there was  
smoke

Out of tall temples blown  
Across the world to where one walked alone.  
Another garden slept beneath the night  
Where Jesus walked, and there was not a star;  
Only the silence, and afar  
The city spread into a fan of light.  
He found the Stone, and turned away again,  
Trembling that beauty was so rife with pain,  
Nor touched the sky to gold, nor touched the earth,  
But gave them both to darkness where abide  
Those that make war against our mortal mirth, —

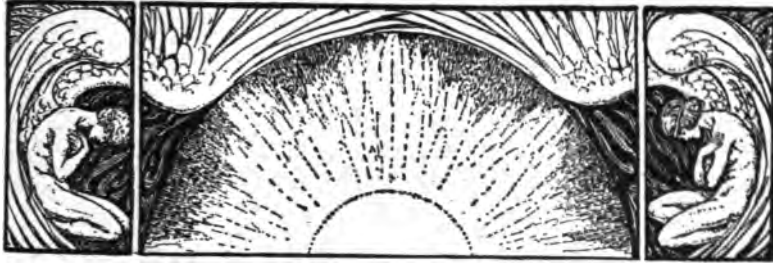


Slim, broken saints, sublimely crucified,  
That hover on the fringe of eventide, —  
And saying, "God is Love," left Godhead still  
A menace on an unfamiliar hill.

**O** WRITE new Gospels in another tongue  
Unknown to Mystic or to Pantheist,  
How Love the Alchemist divinely came  
Out of the nether blackness and the mist;  
How in the empty firmament he hung  
The constellations in a whorl of flame,  
And hid the Stone of Beauty to transmute  
The barren plains to gardens gold with fruit,  
To change the filthy city into gold,  
Dark streets to leaping rivers, pallid faces  
To torches gleaming in the outland places,  
So that through all these things, clear eyes behold  
The blades of life escaping from the mould.

[ 22 ]

*J* *e*



**W**HO sets his heart on unsubstantial god  
Shall never enter into God's abode;  
Whoever scorns the flesh, contemns the spirit  
From whom the flesh derives her golden merit  
Even as the moon, shepherdess of the tide,  
Draws from the covered sun her veil of light,  
And rides across the sky to meet the night,  
And sinks into his arms, his occult bride.  
To love is to adore the earth and bring  
Forth children of her beauty, offering  
To mortal love a mortal's counterpart,  
And, unto Nature, love-children of art;  
Seeking in finite things the precious grain  
Of hidden beauty that shall yield its gain  
Into the joyous hands of the master-player  
Of life, but never to a hollow prayer.



**M**IDNIGHT looms upon her throne,  
The sea retreats with wintry moan  
Along the sedge-grown margins of the world;  
Cities lie curled  
Like gleaming serpents poisoning the shore.  
Blank walls surround the soul once more;  
Ahead there lies the long, unbroken street  
Whose pounding pavements wound my feet;  
Like monstrous blossoms here and there  
Garish arc-lights splash the air,  
And ever like a curious hymn  
The throb of ponderous wheels, remote and dim,  
Pervades the shriller voices of the night.  
Before my sight  
The brawling thieves and murderers pass,



And now and then some slender lass  
Regards me with a twisted smile  
And bids me rest with her awhile;  
Blaring sounds from curtained halls  
Where puppets whirl in bacchanals,  
And under stately roofs make mirth  
The great and wealthy of the earth,  
The worse than thieves, the worse than whores,  
Secure behind their carven doors.  
A stunted elm tree in the park  
Leans shrinking in the friendly dark;  
Unnecessary shame to hide  
Your honest, crippled boughs, where all  
In this mad tinsel festival  
Are stunted worse than you, for all their pride.



**C**AN such base metal be indeed  
Transmuted into flawless gold?  
Can any growth from such a seed  
Come forth for clear eyes to behold?

**O** *JOYOUS STONE whence music springs  
Through the loud dissonance of daily things,  
And struggles up with undefeated wings  
To the high watch-towers where the Lover sings!*

**O**UT of the ignoble ore  
Cast aside upon the shore,  
Out of this, as was decreed,  
Flawless gold shall come indeed.



**F**ROM the stars I saw the world  
Like a blowing ember swirled  
Through the aisles and vaults of space,  
One of countless motes of dust  
Fanned by every changing gust  
Floating in a soundless place;  
Out of that one grain shall be  
Dedicate to deity;  
From that grain the deathless Tree  
And the lark of dawn that sings  
Wisdom, Life, Divinity,  
Singing now, as she began,  
The beauty of incarnate man,  
Love of flesh, of sky, of sea,  
Love of life in mortal things,  
Love.

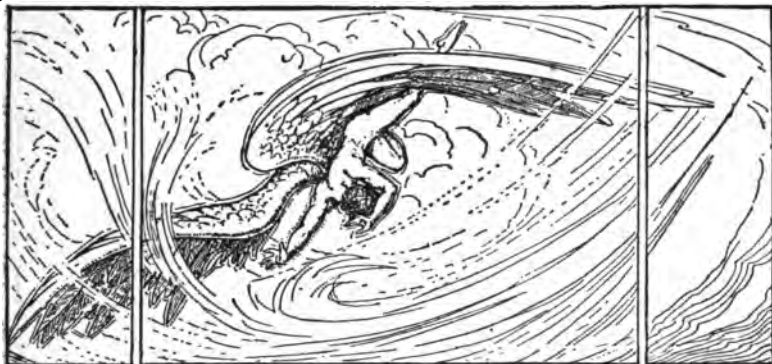




**I**N solemn march the stars' white torches pass  
Across the void's illimitable glass;  
In solemn march the thunder chariots form  
Their blazing ranks across the midnight storm;  
In the beginning was the word of Gold,  
Flung out in wheeling accent, rolled  
From deep to deep, from sphere to empty sphere,  
Blown into cadences of age and year,  
Spun into echoes over envious silence,  
Sung into worlds against oblivion;  
Being against Non-being; Love and Hate;  
Light against Dark; the Word against grim Silence;  
Reverberant from sun to sun,  
And through the dim night desolate  
Dancing in flames across the trembling spheres,  
Comets the heralds, planets the pioneers.



**T**HE seed of Love awaking in the deep,  
Pierced like a dream the sullen mass of sleep;  
Mounted slowly, waving its wings against the  
dark,  
Kindling a sudden spark  
In aboriginal repose. Flight!  
Striking through layer after layer of night,  
Ascending!  
With straining gesture and resounding breath,  
Rising, ascending, still  
Through twilight never-ending,



Monstrous, lowering shapes contending,  
Wings shattered against the icy chill,  
Hurled down again into the depths of death,  
Inarticulately swept beyond the reaches of existence,  
Like a dead leaf down uncharted streets beyond all  
time and distance,  
Tempest driven, broken pinions through the spaces  
terrifying,  
Blown athwart the howling winds of winter, frantic  
voices crying  
Through interminable twilight, voices of the dying,  
Hurled downward into darkness and the silence of the  
snows.



**O**UT of the pit of non-existence glows  
Another flame, and out of quiet springs  
The rhythm of uprising wings;  
The agile music of creative love  
Surprises the abyss with joyful din;  
Pulsating lights come surging in  
Out of the east and west,  
Splashing a spray of glittering stars above  
Night's overtowering crest;  
Out of the south and north  
White hands assault the portals of the dead;  
The great doors yield and swing, flame-garmented,  
Life rushes forth.



**O**UT of the house of death step forth the stars,  
Green impulse moves the slowly thawing  
ground,  
Succeeding waves of life climb up the bars  
And flood the vacant shore with forms and sound.  
Friend clings to friend; sonorous words astound  
The ancient hush, and through the brooding night  
The resolute torch-bearer goes his round  
While beacon after beacon flares to light,  
Giving to eager eyes their little zones of sight.



**H**ARPERS and dancers pass before the flame,  
Prophets and gods and kings and demons fill  
The vision, and then vanish as they came,  
From dark to dark, into the outer chill;  
The wind that wakes the outposts on the hill  
Sings not of them nor of their mournful story,  
For suddenly bright baths of colour spill  
Upon the shining sea, and fiery glory  
Outlines the path of dawn behind the promontory.



↳

**O**UT of the drifting fog wan figures creep  
Who have outwatched the night, and from the  
clay,  
Rising resplendent from their age of sleep,  
Old dreamers wake to hail the exultant day.  
In vain the lingering winter frosts delay,  
There comes a spring they never shall destroy;  
These are the feet that dance upon their way, —  
Pass on, Immortal Girl, Immortal Boy,  
Yours are the feet that dance, invincible with joy.



**T**HE eyes that only knew the dark, discover  
Wide valleys and ripe hills and crystal wells;  
Today the loveless has found love, the lover  
Sings through the forest, chasing miracles.  
The brazen noon reverberates with bells  
That ring no hour, but new delights, and then  
Each hermit soul withdraws where wisdom dwells,  
To wait the twilight when all leaves and men  
Sink tranquilly into their Mother's arms again.

*~*



**T**HE shrivelled seed drops from the open husk  
And falls unnoticed to the frosty ground;  
The frozen pond reflects the fading dusk,  
And tangled, naked birches that surround  
Its margin loom against the snowy mound  
Of some forgotten tomb; all speech has passed  
Utterly into silence, sound by sound;  
The planet has burned out, a cinder cast  
Into the dim confusion of the outer blast.



**W**HO wakens in the night? what sounds are  
those

That stir the void out of inert repose?

What dancer dares to tread the glassy crust

Where life lies folded in defeated dust?

What flight is that which smites the icy air?

The words of life respond from sphere to sphere;

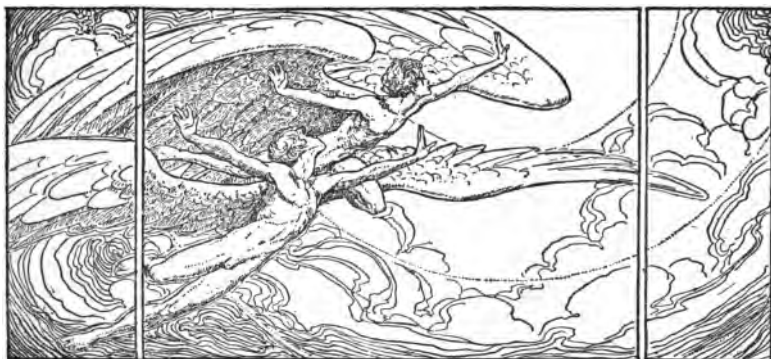
Across unbroken deserts where the snow is deep

Vague horns of fire float upward; ponderous thunders  
creep

Along invisible horizons; troubled ashes

Quicken with warmth, as out of non-existence flies

Unconquerable light demanding dawn.



Circling the resistant zenith, striking out tremendous flashes,  
Beating on the cliffs of darkness, breaking into starry spawn,  
Pushing fiercely out of chaos, soaring into gaping spaces,  
Tearing dark from dark and hurling meteors down the skies;  
Crowding into outland places, calling from the ruined plain;  
Voices of the passing seasons, faltering into rain,  
Swirling light and darkness blending,  
Wrestling, swaying, light ascending;  
Struggling forms uprising to the dawn's faint rim;  
Shouting the Word, the loud spring-morning hymn,  
Then suddenly supremely lifted over,  
They rise into the sun, the loved-one and the lover.





**A**IR child whom I have loved, companion still  
The loneliness of my long errantry;  
Be thou the track of moonlight on the sea,  
The calm retreat beneath the sunny hill.  
In leaves unclasping on the earliest tree,  
In autumn evenings when the dews distill  
Their frosty music on the prairies, fill  
The doubtful silence with clear minstrelsy.

**C**OULD Lucifer, quenched angel of the light,  
Have found his god in thee as I have done,  
He had not warred against the rising sun,  
Nor fallen into the unending night.  
Thou who hast planted dark oblivion  
With gracious seeds to flower in my sight,  
I thank thee that mine eyes have seen aright  
The lustrous threads which Beauty's hands have spun.



**B**ENEATH the tawdry world's external dross;  
I thank thee, gentle guardian of the Stone,  
That thou hast led me to this dazzling zone  
From withered fields, from shadows of the cross.  
Thy work is done, go forth in peace alone;  
Having achieved so much I count no loss,  
Knowing how ruthless are the storms that toss  
Our fates apart; thy best is still my own.

**I**N thee there dwelled the mighty Alchemist,  
Love, who is bounded by no living wall;  
Thou art gone hence, but still I am his thrall,  
And surely know that from those lips I kissed  
I drew the secret wisdom that shall call  
The dead to meet at life's eventual tryst,  
When from brief beauty, all things that exist  
Shall rise into the light perpetual.



**L**OVE bade me touch the iron into gold,  
And first I touched thy hands, thine eyes,  
thy lips,  
Gave utterance to holy comradeships  
Whose mysteries to lovers' ears are told.  
And then beneath my earthly sun's eclipse,  
He gravely bade me touch the manifold  
Recesses of dread Nature, and behold!  
The vaster hands, the vaster eyes and lips.

**G**ET be thou still the symbol of all grace,  
Elusive child of starlight and of dawn;  
Be thou the ray by which the tide is drawn  
Before my ship's unhesitating pace.  
Be thou the tree upon my summer lawn,  
The chorister above my resting place,  
And bend toward me the quiet of thy face  
When other faces and delights are gone.



**S**PARK of ascending light, from thee I learned  
Love's alchemy and purifying hate;  
Love that hath gleaned thy gold within my  
gate,

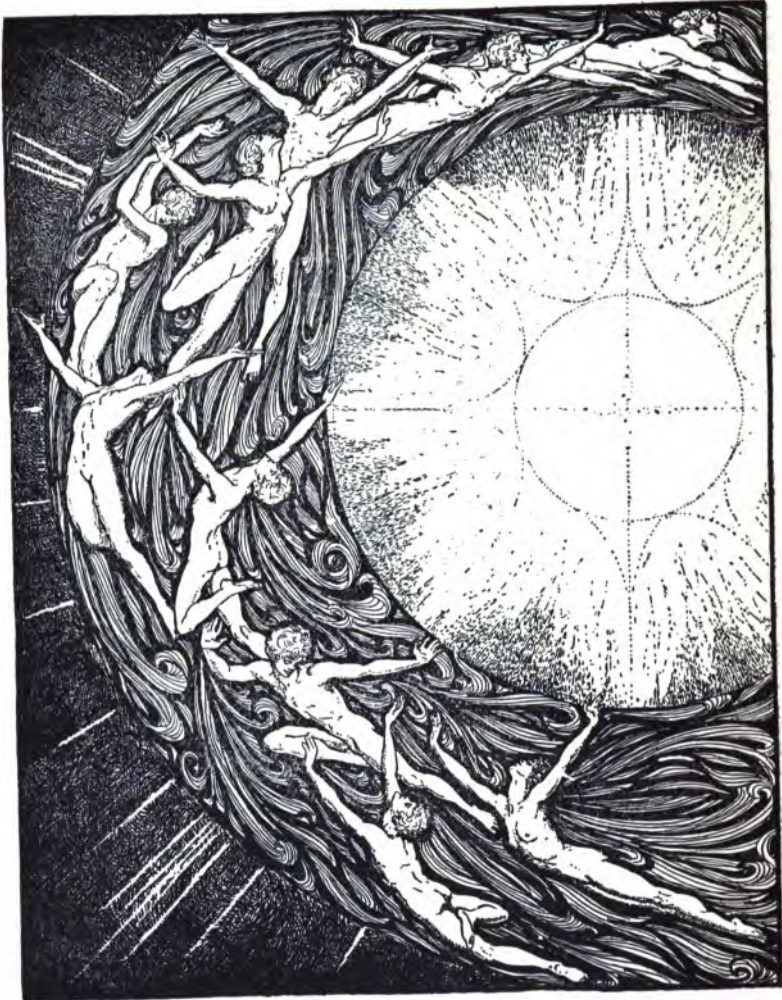
Love that with searing scorn to dust hath burned  
The bitter ugliness of envious fate,  
And in one autumn interval hath turned  
All things that in the Universe have yearned  
Toward beauty, into gold immaculate.

**W**HERE brooding hills lean over the deep lake  
Whose empty shores reëchoed all my cries,  
I watched the sun go down those final skies,  
And gave my youth to sorrow for thy sake.  
In meagre city streets, my sleepless eyes  
Have glimpsed frail images of thee, to wake  
The old desire once more, and overtake  
The phantom horsemen of our memories.



**T**HAT time is past, and once again I stand  
Beneath wide sunsets after many days;  
Here are the hills' forlorn, familiar ways,  
And there the city, indolent and bland.  
My hills I bless with outstretched arms of praise,  
Over my city I hold forth my hand,  
And smile at last, as through the friendly land  
Steals the slow colour of the evening haze.

**A**ND now the dusk is come, when battles cease,  
When light and dark together lie in peace;  
The freighted galley of our sorrow steers  
Into the harbour of the Golden Fleece.  
The spirit opens to the stars and hears  
The wings of Love that brush the trembling spheres.





**T**HE one creator, giver of all light,  
Touches the world with beauty's glowing  
Stone;  
The naked form of Being struggles through the night,  
And through contending silence strikes the Word.  
The end and the beginning are as one;  
The ring of light encircles the abyss of dark  
In one unbroken arc.  
Amid the circle lies the Stone  
Drawing the flashing ring  
Inward across the intervening zone.



The columns of the Universe are stirred  
By challenges flung out and echoing.  
The resolute torch-bearer pushes on,  
Striding across the gulf from sun to sun,  
Kindling the stars in space,  
Kindling the spring  
In the reluctant snows of the desert place,  
Moving the tides across the drowsy sea,  
Drawing the spirit toward one face  
As a ship to the port where she would be,  
Flowering undefiled after the spring,  
In harvest time, and child-bearing.



Planting the seeds of stars, of trees, of men,  
Sowing the wombs of space, of soil, of flesh,  
That Beauty may live again,  
And after winter, summer rise afresh;  
Planting the seeds of colour and of song  
In the deep caverns of the artist's mind,  
To whom the secrets of the gods belong  
Alone among his kind.  
The sterile and the false shall burn away  
Beneath the Stone's hot ray,  
Gold in flesh and soul shall be  
Reconsecrate to deity.



**T**O live and to create,  
Wisely to love, wisely to hate,  
These are the syllables the forest sings,  
These are the letters on the skies' wide scroll,  
The answer shouted by innumerable springs  
To all the wintry questions of the soul.  
The ugly children of oblivion,  
Oblivion shall claim,  
When Beauty laughs beneath the sun  
Washed in flame.  
Defile not beauty, you that would not wound  
Life that struggles from the void;  
The bloated eyes of lust, the mind untuned,  
Shall pass again into the vacant dark;  
They who destroy shall be in turn destroyed,  
Nor feel the Alchemist's transmuting spark.



THE gleaming shafts of sunlight strike the crags,  
Swift arrows from the radiant archer's bow;  
Across the ocean like defeated flags,  
Torn into shreds the winter hazes blow.  
From hills incalculably far I hear  
A grinding avalanche of melting snow,  
Leaving the upland meadows moist and clear,  
Where early blades and slender fingers grope  
Upward to feel the sparkling atmosphere.  
The trees that cling to the precarious slope,  
The stunted trees that lie along the ground,  
Reveal the shy confessions of their hope  
And swell with leaves; the half-forgotten sound  
Of falling water quickens the still air.



Within the city's unpropitious round  
Of toil and food and sooty-faced despair,  
A subtle smile creeps down the muddy street;  
Insistent green arises from the bare  
Scant soil of parks, and the keen wind is sweet  
Beside the bay where seagulls flash and glance.  
Some music seems to call the aching feet  
To play again, and bright uncouth romance  
Shines out of hungry eyes, as new desire  
Suggests new joys, the same that could entrance  
Pharoahs of Egypt, galley-slaves of Tyre,  
Beggars and kings and clerks, the same that heaves  
The ancient mountains into gusts of fire,  
That rides into the maze the forest weaves,  
That kindles all things man has thought or done,  
That scatters into space the silver sheaves  
Of stars; that still shall plant oblivion  
Until there be no void, only the infinite Sun.



THE clarions call across the interim  
Of space, call to the lovers of the earth;  
The drums of death answer, heavy and dim;  
Shake out the music of the ancient hymn,  
Shake out new leaves, thrice-consecrated trees,  
Blaze into light, new stars, new galaxies,  
Pass on, O laughing face, O voice of mirth,  
Pass on, O mighty hearts that dared to break,  
Pass on, O lovers of all men and things.  
The sullen depths of silence heave and shake  
With the sudden thunder of uprising wings.  
In vain the winter tempests crush them down,  
In vain the black smoke rises from the town,  
In vain the wide free pasture lands are scarred  
With hideous forms that war against the light.



In vain the scientist invokes the night;  
In vain, in vain, new universes starred  
Innumerably, bridge the new abyss.  
Pass on, white rapture of the virgin kiss,  
Pass on, great artist souls of all the world;  
In vain the dangerous winds are hurled  
Against your towers, in vain the fierce snows hiss  
Against your palaces of truth and dream.  
They shall not quiet the indomitable theme,  
They shall not freeze the flooding stream,  
They shall not halt the souls that teem  
In splendour up the shadowy air,  
Nor cloud the free horizons where  
New suns ascend.



**T**HE flame of being rings infinity,  
Flawless, without beginning, without end;  
Out of the centre of all worlds that be  
Dart the fine rays of beauty, till they meet  
The ring of life. And they shall meet;  
Pass on, O dancing feet,  
Pass on, Immortal Girl, Immortal Boy,  
Pass on, dear stricken faces of the brave  
Who bade love rise from the beloved's grave,  
Pass on, white feet of joy,  
Pass on, O voice of mirth,  
And all you fair and happy of the earth,  
Pass on abundantly;  
You that have sought the hidden gold,  
You whose beauty shall unfold  
Upon the Tree.



Pass on, for you the morning sings  
The glory of all earthly things,  
For you the harvest of all springs,  
Wisdom, Life, Divinity,  
Love.



**THE CODA**





**P**OET a thousand years hence!  
My windows darken, and the lonely sense  
Of gaping time subdues my distant cry.  
You will awake beneath another sky;  
The forest I have loved you will not know;  
The face that I have sought you will not meet;  
My meadows green with youth or blue with snow,  
My shady arbours and my ~~garden seat~~,  
All things that made my senses shrink or glow, —  
Less than a curious episode  
Upon a gypsy road.



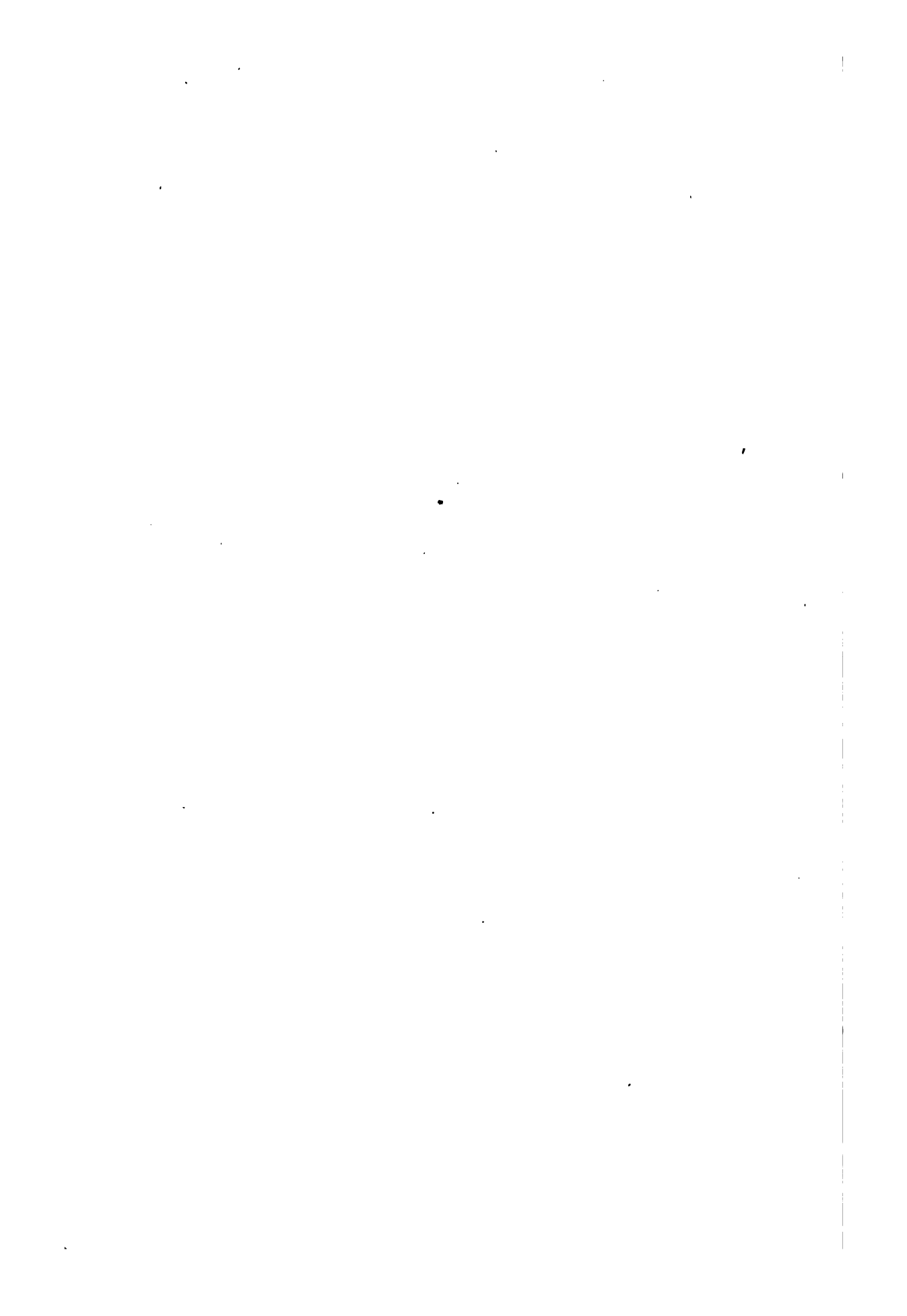
**G**ET, when you also issue from that door  
Whose fiery lintel you shall pass no more,  
And seek the solace of the empty shore,  
When the flood tide comes thundering in  
Against the hollow drum of sand,  
With a deep reverberating din  
As though the stars, the skies, and all that is  
Were massed behind those marching symphonies;  
Will you not stand  
And cry aloud above the sifting gale  
As I have cried long since, "Hail, Master, Hail.  
Thy pulse is mine, thy conflict too is mine,  
In me behold thine image, I am thine,  
And walk with thee, triumphant and divine;—

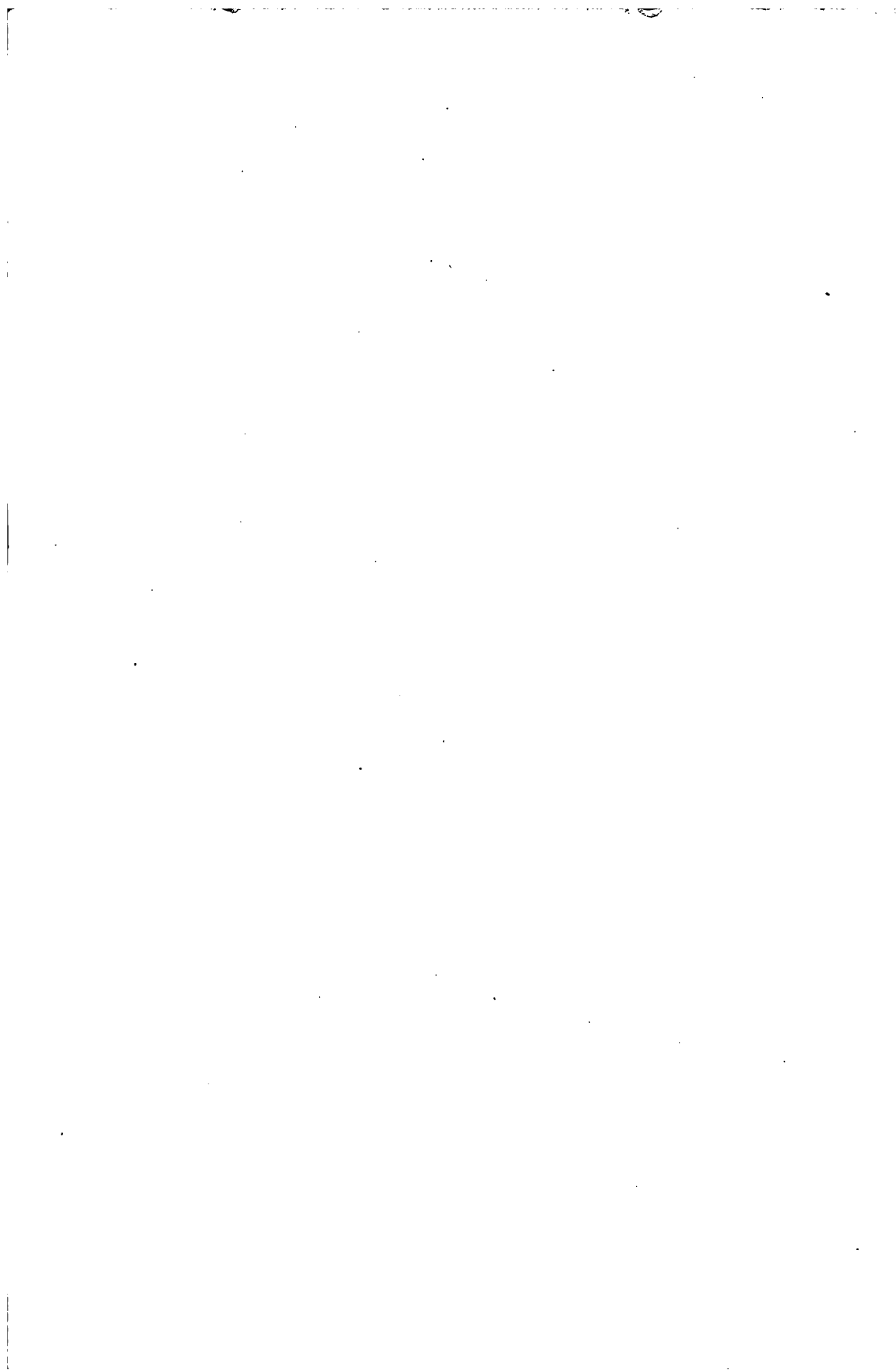


Love that hath planted Being's fruitful spark  
To flower into flame amid the dark;  
Love that hath hidden in the tangled root  
Of earthly things the mystic gem of beauty;  
Love that hath set no task nor any duty  
In life, except to live in very deed,  
And nourish well the blossom of the fruit;  
Love that sets every unsubstantial creed  
At nought, that life may shimmer with delight,  
Performing miracles before my sight,  
So that the world becomes a lover's face,  
And every glade a holy trysting place,  
And everywhere the joy of hill and tree,  
And light transfiguring mortality."

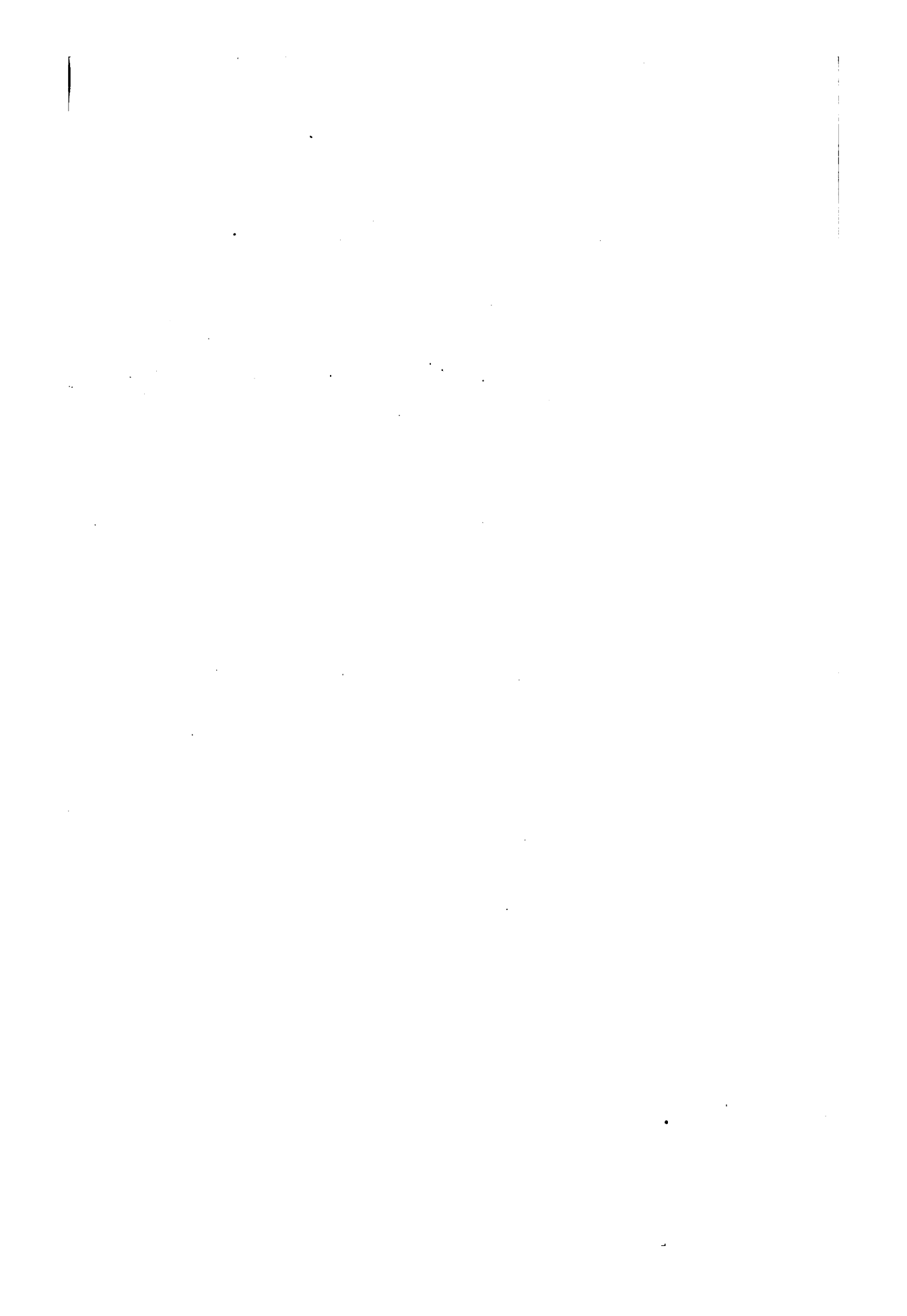




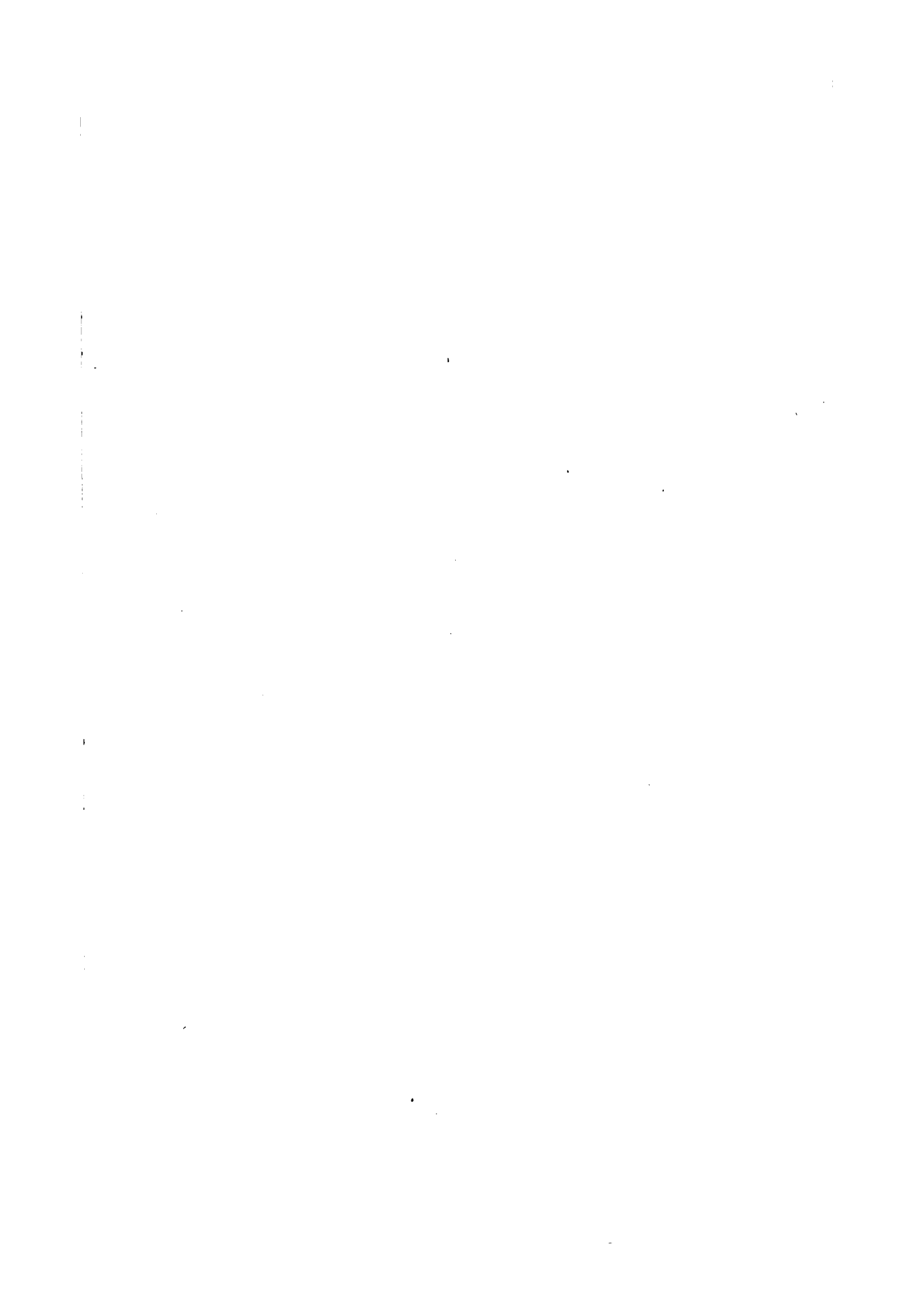


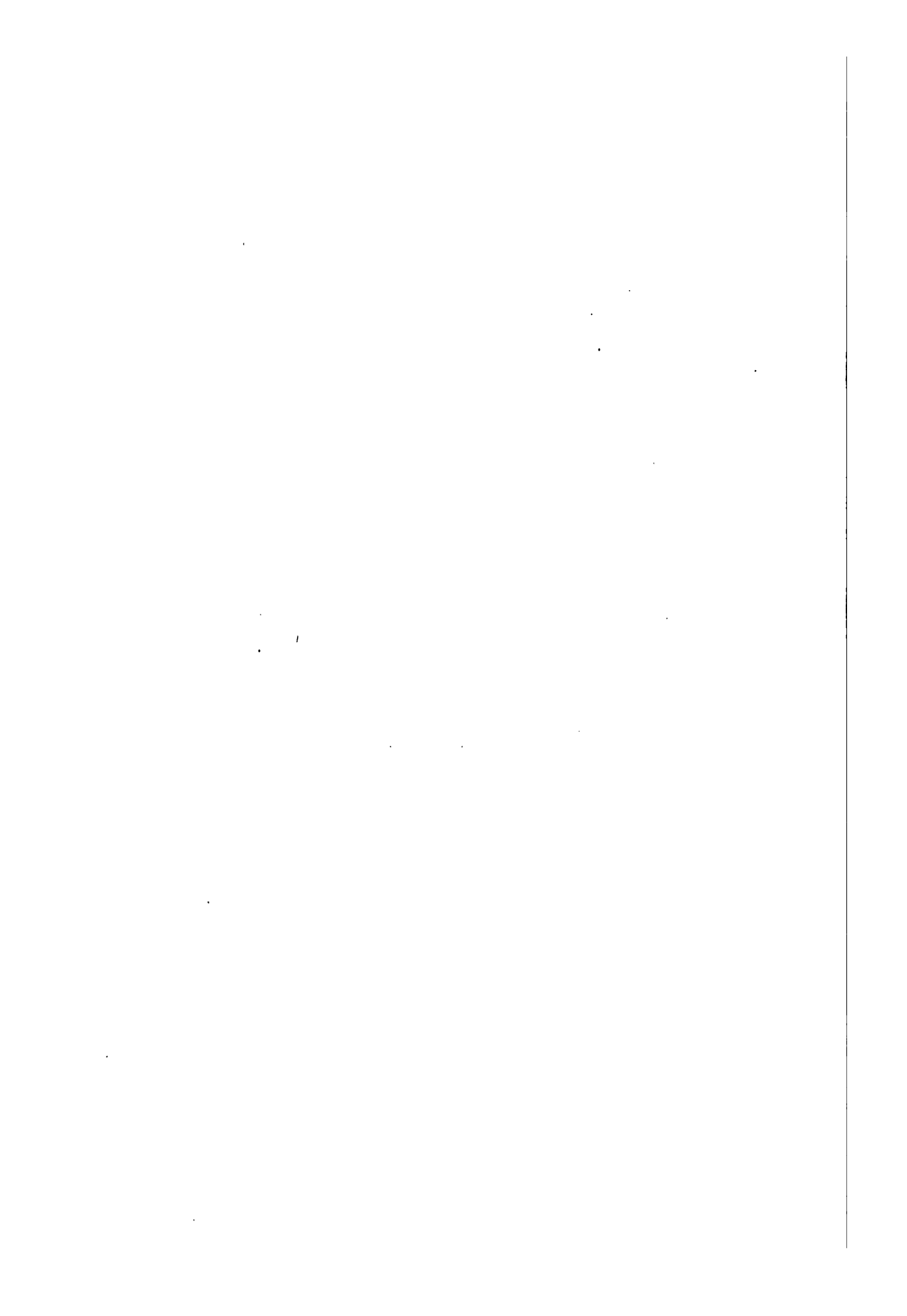














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