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TWO ANCIENT ENGLISH SCHOLARS

ST. ALDHELM & WILLIAM OF MALMESBURY

*Being the first Lecture on the David Murray
Foundation in the University of Glasgow
delivered on June 9th, 1931, by*

M. R. JAMES, O.M.

LITT.D., HON. D.C.L. OXFORD, HON. D.LITT. DUBLIN
HON. LL.D. ST. ANDREWS, F.B.A., F.S.A., ETC.
PROVOST OF ETON, SOMETIME PROVOST OF
KING'S COLLEGE, CAMBRIDGE



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I do feel myself exceptionally honoured by being so graciously invited to deliver the first of what we all hope may be a worthy series of lectures upon the David Murray Foundation. It is my misfortune not to have known personally him whose name is connected with this new enlargement of the sphere of medieval studies, or, as we may figure it, this opening of a new window whence the incredibly wide and varied landscape of medieval life and letters may be surveyed. But I have gratefully learned, from those who were in a position to teach me, something of the life and work of Dr. David Murray; and though I do not propose to preface my lecture—quite long enough as it is—with such a biographical sketch as might more fitly be contributed by another, I feel that I should be sadly lacking in piety if I did not upon this occasion do homage to his memory in a few words. Throughout his long life of eighty-six years Dr. David Murray was indefatigable alike in the service of this University, of which he was a member for over seventy years, in the cause of Archaeology, and in his own profession of the Law. In the first capacity he was well described by your late Principal as the Nestor of the Council of the University, the controller of its finance, its historiographer, its benefactor, and the guardian of its traditions. You, I

think, must be especially grateful to him for three of his many services—his record of the Memories of the Old College, his successful efforts for the preservation here of the great Hunterian collection of coins, and the gift of his valuable library. For the rest, not Scotland only, but the world at large, owes him a great debt for his defence and care of ancient monuments. The bibliographer and the economic historian have likewise cause to be grateful to him, and so, doubtless, has the lawyer : the list of his legal publications is an impressive one. His *Chapters in The History of Book-keeping* are full of the most varied and recondite lore, collected with infinite pains from little-known corners of the book-world. Another solid work of his with which I have some acquaintance is that on the *History and Use of Museums* ; and in his study of the Black Book of Paisley and the other MSS. of the *Scotichronicon*, I gladly recognize something akin to my own branch of research. No question but that his was a full and a useful and beneficent life, and one that richly deserves to be honoured by gratitude and by imitation.

As to the lecture which I am about to deliver : I cannot, as a good Dickensian, fail to be reminded of certain eloquent words of Mr. Micawber, who speaks of his famous indictment of Uriah Heep as “ an investigation of which the smallest results have been slowly piecéd together amid the pressure of arduous avocations, under grinding penurious apprehension, at rise of morn, at dewy eve, in the

shadows of night, under the watchful eye of one whom it were superfluous to call Demon." Such, happily, has not been my case : but it is only due to you, my audience, to say that the collection of material has entailed a good deal of examination and copying of manuscripts in the libraries of London, Oxford and Cambridge, as well as of printed sources, and that an appreciable amount of the information it contains is fresh, though I cannot claim that it deserves to be called sensational. My object in saying so much is to satisfy you that I have not for the purpose of this lecture merely used up old material that I had by me, but have done my best to open up ground that has been imperfectly if at all explored.

It is a truism to which I hardly like to give utterance that the monasteries of Europe were the principal agents in preserving the literature of ancient times. Has any Latin classic survived except through the medium of some monastic or cathedral library? None, I believe—apart from a few broken relics from Herculaneum or Egypt.

This familiar proposition is in some sort the text of my lecture : but, stated as I have stated it, it is far too vague and general to be interesting. If it is to have any actuality we must be told what part such places as Bobbio, Verona, Corbie, Fulda, Canterbury played in the story. We must take each centre separately and estimate its contribution : and to do that we must find out what ancient books it owned, either by studying the catalogue of its library or by ferreting out the existing remains of that library, or

by noting what authors were read by those who lived there. A great deal of research has been carried out along these several paths, but a great deal remains to be done. I have interested myself in the history and contents of English monastic libraries more than a little : and to-day I want to bring to your notice a sample of the kind of knowledge that can be gained by such investigations.

I am going to introduce to you the abbey of Malmesbury in Wiltshire. It is a place of which the existing remains amply repay a visit ; for there you may see a considerable part of a magnificent Norman church, and some of the best figure-sculpture of the Norman period in England. It will do you good to decipher the Bible stories carved on the south porch. But it is with the literary aspect of Malmesbury and not with its external history or antiquities that I am to deal.

Malmesbury Abbey was the home of two great scholars, separated in time by some four centuries. They were St. Aldhelm who died in 709 and William of Malmesbury who must have died either in 1142 or 1143.

Each of them holds a distinctive and distinguished place in the literary history of England. Aldhelm was the first Englishman who could be called a book-learned man, the first of whom we have any literary remains—William was our first really enlightened historian after the Venerable Bede, who died in 735.

A great deal has been written about each of them. But there are certain links between them and certain

facts about them—especially about William—which have either not been noted or not brought together, and it is my object in this lecture to focus them. In doing so I shall have to employ rather dry-as-dust methods, and discharge upon you little facts about manuscripts and such like—pellets of information which may appear detached and scrappy, but which I hope may eventually prove to have some cohesive qualities.

Let me first sketch St. Aldhelm. He was born, it seems, about the year 639, and was a close connexion of the famous English king Ine. His first teacher was an Irishman, a monk, Maeldubh, who settled at Malmesbury and opened a school there. It is from his name, later corrupted to Maildulf, and passing through further stages of mutilation, that the place-name Malmesbury is derived. And this Irish training of Aldhelm is a thing to be noted. It means that, since Ireland had been for about two centuries the most active centre of learning in the West, Aldhelm had the advantage of the best literary training then available. And it is undeniable that the peculiarities of Irish learning and style are very perceptible in much of what he wrote. Without embarking on a description of the Irish manner as it is seen in the Latinity of Irishmen, I will say that it is marked by a fondness for strange and antique words and for a tortuous phrasing which reminds us of the intricacy of the decoration of their works of art, the *Book of Kells* or the Brooch of Tara. A single sentence (others have picked it out before me) which begins one of Aldhelm's letters will show you how

merciless he was in the use—the abuse—of one figure, alliteration.

Primitus pantorum procerum praetorumque pio potissimum
paternoque praesertim privilegio panagericum poemataque
passim prosatori sub polo promulgantes.

That is a sentence which Aldhelm would never have written but for his Irish training: and it was, I think, lucky both for him and for his readers that another strain was woven into his education. In 668 the great archbishop Theodore, the learned Greek, was appointed to the see of Canterbury; within a year or two the equally learned Latin abbot Hadrian joined him, and about 670 or 671 they established a school, where they taught all comers both Greek and Latin. Their teaching was based, more directly than the Irish, upon the surviving classical tradition of Italy, and their scholarship was of a purer type. To them came Aldhelm, soon after their school was set up; in fact, he came twice for not inconsiderable periods, it seems. From them he learned Greek (though he did not, I think, own any Greek books or use them in later life) and with them read many Latin authors; and from Canterbury I have no doubt that he took back with him to Malmesbury a number of sound good books.

In 675 he became Abbot of Malmesbury which he ruled for thirty years: in 705 he was made bishop of the new see of Sherborne: and in 709 he died.

He has left us perhaps a little church at Bradford-on-Avon, and certainly a number of Latin writings: he has not left us, what we should have been even

better pleased to possess, the poems in Anglo-Saxon which he used to sing to his harp on the bridge, at Malmesbury I suppose, to attract the country people to church, and which King Alfred, a good judge of such matters, seems to have known and admired, and perhaps collected. Still, what we have of his gives him the right to be called the father of Latin poetry in England.

A hundred riddles in verse, many of them showing a pretty fancy, and most of them great ingenuity : and a long poem on Virginité, with an appendix about the Eight Principal Sins—these attest his facility in handling Latin verse. And in passing let me say that when I see sculptured on the Norman south porch of Malmesbury Abbey Church eight pairs of Virtues combating Vices, I fancy that I may be looking at something suggested by Aldhelm's poem. I only say I fancy it, because another source is equally probable for the idea of this piece of imagery.

Aldhelm's works, his real learning and his incredibly florid style, earned for him a reputation outside this country : it is strange to think that in the ninth century poetry of his was read in Spain and that one of the best ancient copies of one of his works belonged to an abbey at Limoges. It is more natural, though remarkable, that the very earliest manuscript belonged to the abbey of Reichenau near Constance, for the first connexions of that house were English. And English missionaries like Boniface were both students and diffusers of his works on the continent. I could give you a long list of imitators of his style. All which facts attest his European reputation, which

however did not last long : in the tenth century it had died out, and it is very rare indeed to find copies of any of his writings being made in the later medieval period.

Almost everything that I have been telling you so far you might if so inclined gather for yourselves from reasonably accessible books. It would demand rather more research to collect the facts to which I now want to call your attention. A principal point of interest about any pioneer in literature, such as was Aldhelm, is to know what ancient books he had : what were his sources of knowledge : what was his library, and what became of it. The answer to these questions should in the case of Aldhelm tell us something about what classical authors were to be found in this country when Theodore and Hadrian were beginning to teach us, and so help to fill up a gap in the history of the transmission of ancient literature. Perhaps we shall find that it will also serve to link up the two great Malmesbury scholars, Aldhelm and William.

Now have we any reason to think that of Aldhelm's library, which we may safely say remained at Malmesbury, any relics continued to subsist? I can produce an instance which seems irrefragable. Skip eight centuries, from 709 to about 1530, and you find our earliest antiquary John Leland being sent round the country by Henry VIII to inspect monastic libraries and note remarkable books, I imagine with some idea on the king's part that he would form a great royal library out of the spoils—a project which, like most of Henry's better inspirations, came to

nothing. Well, Leland visits Malmesbury and makes a brief list of the books which struck him as rare.¹ And one of the titles he quotes is

Junilius ad Primasium papam

A few people have occasion to know what book is meant. It was quite a rare one in England: Glastonbury had a copy, but I know of no other. Junilius, a layman of the sixth century, wrote a short treatise about the Scriptures and dedicated it to one Primasius. Here we see Leland calling Primasius a pope: but there never was a pope Primasius. However, I turn to Aldhelm and I find him quoting Junilius in these terms. "Junilius, dedicating his *Institutes* (so his book is called), which he had learned from Paul the Persian, a man well instructed in the schools of the Syrians, to Primasius the bishop of the apostolic see," says so and so. And I conclude that Aldhelm's copy of Junilius mistakenly described Primasius as a pope, and that that same copy was seen by Leland at Malmesbury in the sixteenth century. That, I consider, is a fixed point. Can we find another? I think so.

Aldhelm while studying at Canterbury writes a letter to Leutherius, bishop of Winchester, apologizing for not being able to keep Christmas at Malmesbury because he is detained by his studies. These studies he proceeds to describe. They included Latin metres (on which he wrote one of his principal books), the computation of the calendar, astronomy, and, most remarkable of all, Roman law. He does not

¹ Leland, *Collectanea*, ed. Hearne, vol. iii, p. 157.

specify the law-book he used ; he merely says, " these studies take a long time, especially for him who, kindled with the desire for learning, investigates to the marrow the ordinances of the Roman law and scrutinizes to the very heart all the secrets of the jurisconsults." Now I will venture to say that this reference to Roman law as a subject of study is unique for England not only in the seventh but in many following centuries. Aldhelm, then, had a Roman law-book. What book ? Again, skip a few centuries and you find William of Malmesbury transcribing with his own hand at Malmesbury a Roman law-book which is now at Oxford¹, and that book, again, is unique at that time in this country. It is not the Code of Justinian, but an earlier compilation, made by King Alaric II of Spain about the year 506, known nowadays as the Breviary of Alaric, together with the Novellae or Laws of late Emperors from Theodosius to Anthemius, and fragments of the legal writers Paulus and Gaius. I say with confidence that it was Aldhelm's book, brought by him from Canterbury and surviving at Malmesbury down to William's day, which William copied out. And if I am right, here is a link between Aldhelm and William.

I find another link, perhaps less impressive, but not without significance. Both Aldhelm and William speak of and quote Cicero's *Invectives*, by which they mean the orations against Catiline. That title may be found elsewhere : but in view of what we have already seen it is significant, and may appear more so

¹ MS. Bodl. Selden, B. 16.

when we come to inquire what William knew about Cicero.

I now leave the discussion of Aldhelm and his books with the intimation that quotations from some forty Latin authors, pagan and Christian, may be traced in his works, made in such a manner as to imply acquaintance with their writings. I have shown, I think, that part of Aldhelm's library existed at Malmesbury until the Dissolution, and that William made use thereof. And with that I turn to the consideration of William and his attainments and his library.

Bishop Stubbs in his introduction to the Rolls series edition of William's *Gesta Regum* has written of his life and works in a manner not to be superseded, but capable of being supplemented in minor ways, as I hope to show.

That William was the most enlightened of our historians since Bede I have already said. He was not only the most enlightened, but in some ways the most entertaining. It may be in your minds that it is to him that we owe the stories used by William Morris in the *Earthly Paradise*—of Pope Sylvester and the statue which had "Strike here" inscribed on its forehead, and of the ring which the young man put on the finger of Venus's statue: and also that of the Old Woman of Berkeley which Southey wove into a ballad, with not a few others. That, by the way. Three historical works called *Gesta Regum*, *Gesta Pontificum* and *Historia Novella* are the achievement for which he is principally known, and there is a smaller tract on the antiquity—not antiquities—

of Glastonbury which has reached us in a much interpolated form. This book was the outcome of a stay which William made at Glastonbury—a stay of some considerable length, during which he made a careful examination of the muniments of that venerable place. We are not surprised to find that in later years the Glastonbury monks foisted into William's sober text a number of the fictions by which they strove to carry back the history of their abbey to the days of the Apostles. But these books do not nearly exhaust the list of his productions. I am not going to trouble you with a description of all his minor compositions—commentary on *Lamentations*, miracles of the Virgin, fifteen books of Latin verse on the history of the Gospels, lives of several saints, and so on—but I do want to dwell upon his compilations, his transcripts, and the evidences of his reading. And I preface the topic by quoting a few words of William's own about his work for the library of Malmesbury. Near the end of the *Gesta Pontificum*¹ he tells of Abbot Godfrey, who succeeded in 1081 and ruled till 1105: "In his time, and by him", says William, "some books were written or, I might say, the firstfruits of a library were contributed. If I draw attention to this activity of his, I think I am within my rights, for in this respect I have not yielded to any of my predecessors [he means in the office of librarian]: nay, if it is not boastful to say so, I have far outstripped them all. May there be some one to care for all that has now been secured! I have collected much material for reading, in emulation

¹ Lib. v., Section 271, p. 432, Rolls ed.

of the vigour of one who deserves praise in this regard at least [Abbot Godfrey, I may say, does not escape William's criticism in other respects]. I have done my best to further his laudable beginnings. I hope some one will cherish the results of our labours." These words have been taken before now to mean that William helped Abbot Godfrey to collect books; but, since he was only about ten years old when Godfrey died, I am sure this is a mistake. What we are to understand is that William was librarian of the abbey, and while in that office did his best, following Godfrey's example, to enlarge it: and when he says he had collected a quantity of material for reading, I believe he is thinking of those compilations which I am to describe, and which ought to show us better than anything else the range of his interests. Of these Bishop Stubbs has noticed several, but there are some to be added to his list.

Perhaps the most important—Stubbs describes it at some length—is the book I have mentioned in William's own handwriting among John Selden's gift of MSS. to the Bodleian library. It contains that Roman law-book—the Breviary of Alaric and the rest of which we have heard, and also a whole series of historical writings. The story of the Trojan war attributed to Dares, Orosius' history of the world, Eutropius's Roman history, continued by Paul the Deacon, Jordanes' Roman history, and a summary of the story of the later Emperors compiled by William himself and brought down to the year 1137. Moreover, we have a second copy of this historical *corpus*,

without the law-book, in one of the many manuscripts which William Gray, bishop of Ely (*d.* 1478) caused to be written in the fifteenth century and bequeathed to Balliol College, where it now is.¹ Bishop Gray's books will help us again. In this collection we have the completest manual or text-book of Roman history which William could get together, reaching from the legendary Trojan origins to his own time.

The next compilation which Stubbs notices is a collection preserved in one of the Harleian MSS. in the British Museum : it once belonged, I find, to Emmanuel College, Cambridge.² It has copies of five ancient treatises on grammar or orthography by Cassiodorus, Agroetius, Caper, Alcuin, Bede. They have some prefatory extracts and an epilogue in which William speaks of himself as the collector, and explains his plan of treating the texts. In the same volume is a copy, imperfect at the beginning, of a still more important collection of extracts, mostly historical, from pagan and Christian writers. Stubbs was not certain whether this was really William's work ; but, says he, "it would be a most interesting relic if we could confidently claim it for our author." He need not have been uncertain, for the MS. has on its last leaf a medieval list of contents, made no doubt when the volume was perfect, and this definitely calls it "Malmesbury on the memorable sayings and doings of Philosophers." Besides, I have found in the library of St. John's College, Cambridge, a complete copy of

¹ MS. 125.

² Harl. 3969 of Cent. xiv.

it.¹ Its proper title, found in that MS., is the *Polyhistor*. Of this book more must be said.

These three collections, the Selden MS. of history and law, the orthographers, and the *Polyhistor*, show William as a lover of secular history and literature. Three more will testify to his interest in Christian writers. The first, found in several MSS. at Lambeth and elsewhere,² is an abridgment of the work of one Amalarius, well known in his day, on Church services, made by William at the request of a friend named Robert. The work of simplification of language and rearrangement of the matter, with addition of preface and epilogues, are all that is due to William. But his preface is not without interest, for in it he takes occasion to speak very severely of an earlier writer of great repute in his day, Raban Maur, as being a confirmed plagiarist who really must have imagined that his readers would have no memories at all, or they must detect his thefts. A similar task, not noticed by Stubbs, was the making of a selection from the voluminous works of Gregory the Great, which he undertook for his fellow-monks at Malmesbury and furnished with a preface and notices of Gregory's life. The preface is of the usual kind, modest and sensible, claiming no credit for any part of the work except the labour of selection and possibly the neatness of the arrangement. I have found but one copy of this, in the Cambridge University Library (li. 3. 20 of Cent. xii).

¹ MS. 97 of Cent. xiv, from St. Augustine's, Canterbury.

² E.g. All Souls Coll., 45, whence Stubbs prints the Prefaces, etc.

Further, Stubbs just mentions a volume—another of Bishop Gray's gifts to Balliol (MS. 79) and written like most of them in the fifteenth century—which contains works of two early Christian writers, Lactantius, and the *Apology* of Tertullian, and furnished with some prefatory matter exactly in William's manner. I think the book may be pretty confidently connected with him, because, both writers being very rare in England, Aldhelm quotes Lactantius, and William quotes Tertullian's *Apology*, and lastly, Leland saw a copy of Tertullian at Malmesbury. Before I make additions to Stubbs's list, I must, as he does, mention the collection of Anselm's works and letters which, written for the most part by William, and signed by him, is in the Lambeth Library (MS. 224), and affords us a good standard for recognizing William's writing: it warrants us in saying that not only is the Selden MS. in his hand but that we also have his autograph copy of the *Gesta Pontificum*, now at Magdalen College, Oxford (MS. 172).

Two additions I have to make to the list of William's compilations, and they will show once again his interest both in Christian and in secular literature. The first is a massive volume in the Cambridge University Library (Kk. 4. 6) of most miscellaneous contents. It has in it tracts by Jerome and Cassiodorus, excerpts from many Fathers, some writing of William's own contemporary Hugh of St. Victor, and finally the old collection of Lives of the Popes which is known as the *Liber Pontificalis*. This it is which gives the volume its interest: it

has been minutely studied by the leading expert on the subject, Wilhelm Levison,¹ and he is decidedly in favour of attributing the whole collection to William. My own examination of the manuscript confirms this; I even seem to recognize William's handwriting in more than one place, though the bulk of the book was undoubtedly written by other scribes working under his direction. A telling little point is this, that passages from both the Breviary of Alaric and the historian Jordanes (which, we know, are among the rare books copied by William) are inserted in the Cambridge MS. by the compiler. And yet another indication there is, which comes nearer home. William in his histories tells us of a book now lost written by King Alfred—the Handbook—apparently a miscellaneous gathering of things that interested that great man. In the Cambridge book a hand which I call William's writes in the margin a story taken from the Sayings of Alfred.² There are other coincidences, too, and the cumulative effect of them is to make me add the Cambridge volume with confidence to William's long catalogue. My second addition is another large manuscript in the Cambridge Library (Dd. 13.2). It is, I have no doubt, one of Bishop Gray's books, and meant for Balliol; but along with one other book at least it strayed in the sixteenth century from there to Cambridge. This book contains a collection of the philosophical works of Cicero and of his orations—

¹ In the *Neues Archiv f. Deutsche Geschichtskunde*, xxxv (1910), pt. ii, pp. 333 *sqq.*

² See Levison, *l.c.*, p. 424.

so copious as to fill over 600 folio pages. In view of its late date (1444) you might guess that such a book would be the work of some humanist, a product of the Renaissance. But wait till you have heard the English of a paragraph which occurs in it after the text of the *Academicus* of Cicero.

At the beginning of his second book on Divination Cicero says that he wrote a book in which he brought in Hortensius exhorting to the study of philosophy. In the same place he says that he had published six books on the Republic. Now since these books are not to be found in England, I, William of Malmesbury, have according to my accustomed practice appended here all that I could find about the matter and purpose of them in St. Augustine. And I take this opportunity of observing that no one ought to blame me for reading and writing out so many books of the heathen *as I do*. The man who reads such books because he despises the Holy Scriptures commits a grievous and punishable sin . . . but he who reads them to the end that he may transfer to his own writings whatever of beauty or eloquence they tell him, to the honour of God and His Saints (following that rule of the Apostle, "Prove all things: hold fast that which is good: abstain from all appearance [*or every kind*] of evil"), such a man I cannot believe does wrong in studying the writings of the heathen.

These are the words of a broad-minded man ; and they show that the writer was a diligent student of the classics, and that he had taken pains to collect at any rate all the works of Cicero that he could hear of. And not only does this volume testify to his success, but in his *Polyhistor* he shows a wide knowledge of Cicero's works, citing as he does passages from writings which are not included in the Cambridge

collection. I note in passing that both in the *Polyhistor* and the Cambridge MS. the orations against Catiline are called the *Invectives*. With the exception of the Letters, which came to light principally in and after Petrarch's time, and some of the orations and of the works on Rhetoric, there is very little of Cicero's extant writings which William did not know: and this one fact should earn for him a most distinguished place among our ancient scholars. It is also a fact to which, so far as I can see, nobody has yet drawn attention.

In the paragraph I read you William says that "according to his accustomed practice" he had collected matter out of St. Augustine about works of Cicero. It was indeed his practice, and a very useful one to his readers, to prefix or append notices about authors to his transcripts of their works. He has done it for the historians in the Selden MS. and for Lactantius and for the orthographers and for Gregory and Amalarius. If there was, as I imagine, a preface to the Cicero, it has disappeared along with the first leaves of the manuscript: but in the body of the book he has collected what Macrobius records about Cicero's jokes, and has written prologues to the *Timæus* and the *Philippics* at least. He was, in short, really interested in the personality and still more in the subject-matter of his authors.

I must here stray a little out of my direct path in order to clear up a matter which has caused some doubt. The Balliol copy of Lactantius and Tertullian is furnished with rather copious annotations in the margin—calling attention to points in the

text and also referring to a whole crowd of ancient authors, such as Aristotle, Valerius Maximus, Florus, Seneca and many more. This same annotator has been at work also upon the Balliol copy of the historians (which I remind you is a transcript of the Selden MS.) and upon the Cicero. In these two we find the same authors cited, and more, and, what is at first very startling, almost every Book of Livy from the first to the 120th. What does this mean, thought I? Can it be that a complete copy of that history of which less than half has reached us was extant when these notes were made? Hardly. And my disappointment was not great when I found the writer in one or two places adding the words "in the epitome" to his reference. So he only had the epitomes of the lost Books; but even they were not by any means common. Now these annotations have been guessed by some to be William's work. If so, they would give us more information about his library. So it became necessary to compare William's undoubted work in the Selden MS. with what appears in the Balliol copy of the historians. The result was clear. William himself made hardly any marginal notes in the Selden MS.: all that he did make—notably two quotations from the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius—were duly copied into the Balliol book: but that was all.

However, I satisfied myself that the annotator of the Balliol MSS. and the Cicero was one and the same man, that he was almost certainly an Englishman, that he read authors as late in date as the fourteenth century, had access to William's own MSS.,

had studied many authors known to William, and many outside that range. I have no right or reason to say that he was not a monk of Malmesbury. I hope he was. If so, William's prayer that posterity might cherish the books he had collected was in part fulfilled. If our unknown scholar was not a monk, I feel confident that he must have been a member of one of the two great Orders of Friars, and the fact that he quotes the Rule of St. Francis may be taken to point that way. In any case, he was a distinguished scholar.

I must now drag you back to the undoubted works of William with the view of discussing more exactly than I have yet done the extent of his reading and consequently of his library, and especially the classical portion of it.

From the two principal books, the *Gesta Regum* and *Gesta Pontificum*, we can gather a not unimpressive list of poets and prose authors. Among poets, Virgil is the favourite: but Juvenal, Persius, Lucan and Terence are quoted often enough to show familiarity with them. Plautus and Horace seem to have but one reference apiece. Ovid is rare. Statius, so popular in the medieval period, he apparently did not know. He, and the tragedies of Seneca, which were known to Aldhelm, are the most remarkable absentees. Among prose writers Cicero is cited, but not so often as we might expect. I feel sure that William's knowledge of him grew much wider in the last twenty years of his life—after 1125, the date of publication of his *Gesta*. We find besides Cicero, the Gallic Wars of Caesar, Pliny's Natural

History, the elder Seneca's declamations, the younger Seneca's satire on the death of Claudius, and Suetonius's Lives of the Caesars. Once Livy is quoted, but only at second-hand, from Orosius.

If we remember that in these books William is not concerned to make a show of his learning, and that all his classical quotations are merely incidental, we shall allow that the list I have given is more than respectable. There is, however, another source which yields a great deal more of what we are seeking, and that is the *Polyhistor*. Possibly the best way of giving you an idea of its object and contents will be to read you the preface to it, which exists (as far as I know) in one manuscript only, and has never appeared in English. It runs thus:

William to his friend Guthlac. Since you have thought proper to consult me as to what books of the heathen that we have ought to be read either for—[*probably* pleasure, some words have dropped out] or for precepts of right living, I will answer you briefly. Hermes Trismegistus, who is commemorated by Augustine in his books on the City of God and in his discourse against five Heresies, strives with the greatest earnestness to persuade men to worship one God, which is the beginning of wisdom: save that after the heathen manner he calls certain beings gods, who, however, he does not deny were created by the Supreme God.

Tullius in his books on Old Age and Friendship and on Duties (*de Officiis*) discourses usefully about virtues and vices, and does so perhaps in other books; but I am only speaking of those of possessing which I am proud. [He does not mean, as the sequel shows, that he had no others, but that he took special delight in these.]

All Seneca's books except that on the death of Claudius

and the Declamations are almost as full of profit as they are of words: these therefore you should read, as agreeable to the purpose of right living: the others are less suitable to your profession [of the religious life, the monastic]: for they either thunder with ragings, as does Tullius in his *Invectives* and *Philippics*, or equip your utterance with eloquence, as he does in his *Rhetoric*, or thresh out empty questions, as he does throughout his *Academics*. Still, lest you should be deprived of certain narratives which the heathens introduce into their writings, I have collected, not out of them only, but also out of Christian books, and compressed into a volume, matter which should be pleasant to read and profitable to remember, to this end, that when you are wearied of the multitude of precepts of the writers I have named, you may take your ease in the others. It is right that you should understand that I have not laid a finger on any of the historical writers. The whole aim of their work is to ennoble their writings with memorable sayings and doings. I have only cared to cull from those who have put such matter into their books by stealth, and in passing. If this is not enough for you, read *Valerius Maximus* and *Solinus*, one of whom has written of remarkable sayings and deeds, the other of remarkable places.

Here then you have a book of varied content, to strengthen your purpose and delight your mind. In it, apart from my labour of selection, you will find nothing of my own making, save that some passages of *Pliny* I have either abridged for brevity's sake or altered for the easier understanding of them. And I would warn you that you must attribute those miracles and prophecies of demons which proved true, to the long-suffering of God, who permits them to have so much power.

Then we embark upon the extracts, which are nearly all historical anecdotes or bits of natural history. They are taken from the authors he has named and from a number of others. The *Attic Nights* of

Aulus Gellius are extensively used, and so is the Architecture of Vitruvius, and the *Saturnalia* of Macrobius. We also have a passage from the astrologer Julius Firmicus on the death of Plotinus. As he passes from one author to another William inserts characteristic remarks of his own. Heathen writers are followed by Christian, of whom Tertullian's Apology is the most uncommon example. I think I must dwell for a moment upon this book.

To most men of the Middle Ages Tertullian was a mere name. We have, it is true, a large mass of his writings, but they have been preserved as it were by accident in single copies, and did not emerge till the age of printing. The Apology was rather better known than the rest, but was still a rare book. In England we observe that it exists in the Balliol MS. which we connect with William: we are sure that William read it: we find Tertullianus among the writers seen by Leland at Malmesbury, and we may be confident that it was the Apology that he saw there. Can we trace it further? I believe we can. In an edition of Tertullian printed at Bâle in 1550, the editor Gelenius says that he had the use of an ancient copy from the extremity of Britain, from an abbey which he calls Masburensis, and that it was lent to him by his friend John Leland. I cannot doubt that Leland borrowed the Malmesbury copy and lent it to Gelenius, who failed to return it; or that in the Balliol MS. we have a transcript of that identical manuscript.

To return to the *Polyhistor*. After the first burst of extracts, pagan and Christian, William goes back

on his tracks, beginning apparently a second Book with a note to the effect that after more careful reading of these and other authors he will make more additions: and so he does, from Cicero, Jerome, Cassiodorus and others, and in a third Book he pursues the same plan. But I am left in doubt as to whether we have, in either of our two copies of the work, the end of it as he left it, or, indeed, whether he lived to finish it, for it ends quite abruptly in one copy, and in the other it tails off into a different sort of anthology, not of historical or natural history extracts, but of moral precepts; such florilegia, as they were called, were quite common, whereas those of the historical sort were not. Moreover William says that he means to put in the epigrams of Godfrey, Prior of Winchester, and these are nowhere to be found. However, what we have of William's undoubted compiling is drawn from some fourteen authors. To the list of them we have warrant for adding all the Roman historians and the orthographers whom he transcribed, a long series of old authors quoted by him in others of his works, and all the more modern sources from which he drew in his abridgments and compilations and in the writing of his histories. It should not be forgotten that he procured the Lives of the Popes from Canterbury (as Levison has shown), or that he was a most diligent student of charters and letters. He had, too, the instincts of the antiquary. At Glastonbury he copies the defaced inscriptions on certain mysterious ancient monuments—he calls them pyramids—which stood in the monks' cemetery: he

tells us of a Roman inscription at York: he embodies in the *Gesta Regum* a long description of Rome, and he has preserved a number of papal epitaphs in verse. Evidently for him old Rome, both pagan and Christian, came to have a magical fascination: and he was hardly less bitten with the longing to penetrate the mists that overshadowed the early history of his own country. In short, both as scholar and historian, he had recourse to every species of document that could be of use to him.

How did he gather his knowledge? Largely, I think, from visits to monasteries in this island. It cannot, I believe, be shown that he was ever out of England, but within England we know that he resided for some time at Glastonbury; and that he examined books at Canterbury and Bury St. Edmunds is probable if not proven.

In any case his accumulations point to the existence at Malmesbury of a library of astonishing variety and value. That part of it was of great antiquity and dated from Aldhelm's time, I think I have shown: that William's own additions to it were large and precious is obvious.

Only one writer of the century in which he lived can be said to rival him in his literary equipment, and that is the somewhat younger John of Salisbury, the range of whose reading is co-extensive with William's, though naturally differing from it both by excess and defect. Like William, he was an ardent lover of Cicero. But in the case of John we are dealing with one whose education and career were continental: he spent twelve years at the

University of Paris and the school of Chartres, resided much abroad at the Papal court, and died Bishop of Chartres. Whereas William lived out his life within the precincts of English abbeys and most probably never crossed the Channel.

What became of his books? The question is of a sort very hard to answer. We have seen that at the Dissolution a number of precious books were still at Malmesbury. We are sure that in the fifteenth century Bishop Gray when forming his library was able to have William's books—the Selden MS. of the historians, the Lactantius and Tertullian, and the Cambridge Cicero—copied for him. Not that these were copied direct from the twelfth-century archetypes: that is impossible, for when copied, they were already provided with the notes of which I have spoken. Moreover, the Balliol transcripts are the work of mere professional scribes, quite incapable of adding anything to the written text before them. At some intermediate stage, then, William's books were transcribed and annotated, and these transcripts, the sources of the Balliol books, need not have been housed at Malmesbury. They may have been made there: it is *a priori* likely, and it is certain that, whoever was the maker of the notes, he had access to some very considerable library.

Of the actual autographs of William we do not know the history. The Lambeth Anselm seems to have made its way to Oxford, and then, in post-Dissolution times, to a Vicar of Croydon. Of the Selden MS. I can say nothing: the autograph of the *Gesta Pontificum* at Magdalen, Oxford, went

in medieval times to the Abbey of Bury St. Edmunds, whose pressmark is in it. This seems to me very strange, but I am not in a position to contest the fact: who gave it to Magdalen and when is not known.

The obvious and unpleasant conclusion is that the Dissolution has to answer for the disappearance of William's hard-won collection. John Aubrey, the Wiltshire antiquary, tells how in his boyhood leaves of ancient MSS. were drifting about in the school-rooms of the region, and how when he passed through Malmesbury he saw broken windows patched with fragments of them, and the bakers had not even yet (in 1650 or thereabouts) consumed the stores of paper—and, I suppose, vellum—they had accumulated for heating their ovens. I cannot suppose that Mr. Stumpe the clothier, who purchased the Abbey buildings and spared only an exiguous fragment of the church, was one who would trouble his head greatly about the fate of its books. It is certain that at the present moment I should be puzzled to make a list of as many as twenty volumes which can confidently be said to have belonged to the library of Malmesbury.

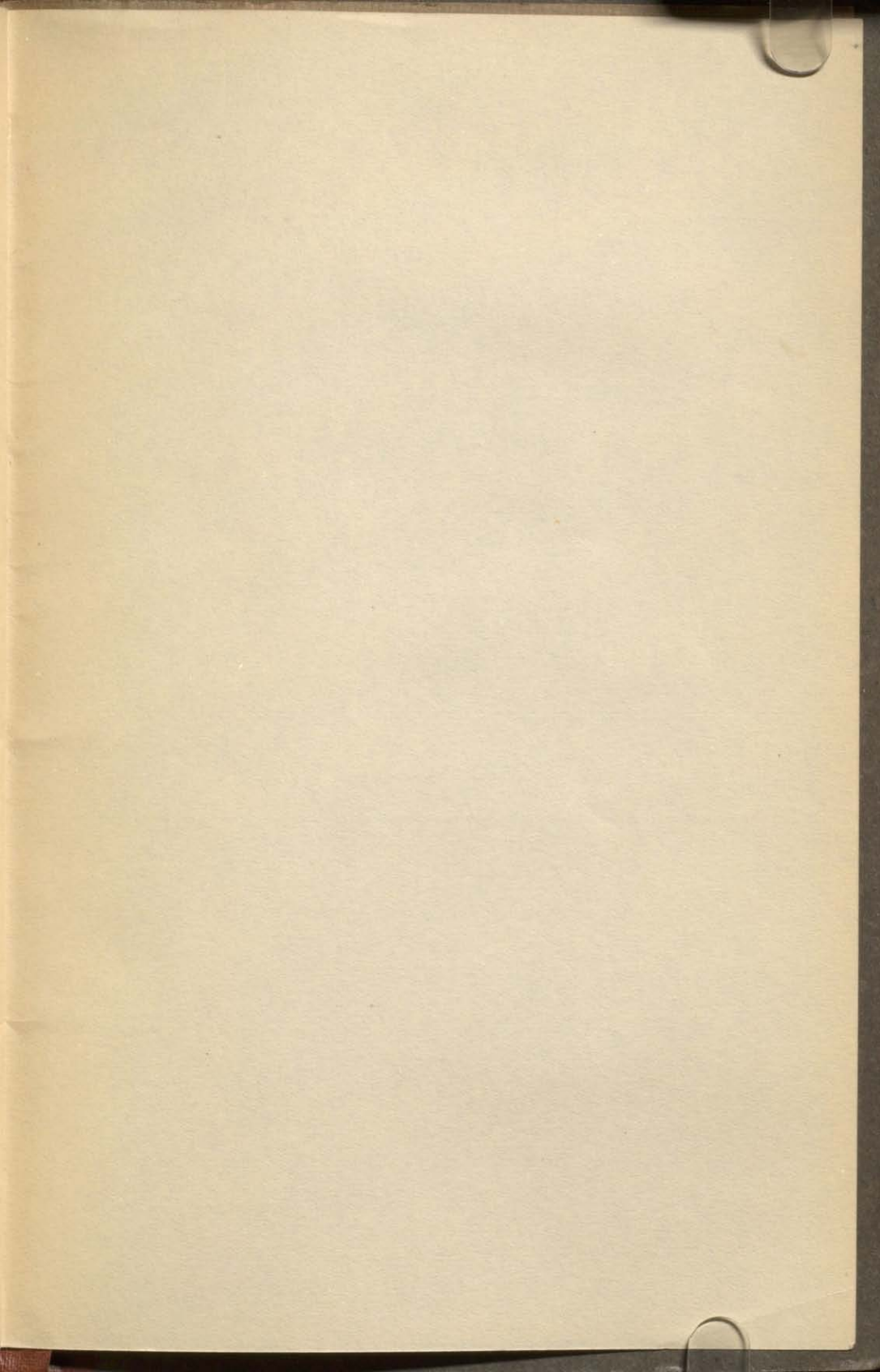
I now bid farewell to our two Malmesbury scholars. Widely separated as they are in time, it is possible to trace some frail links between them: it is certain that the later of the two, William, was a fervent admirer of his predecessor Aldhelm, whose life he wrote at great length. It may well be that from Aldhelm's copy of Cicero he began to imbibe that enthusiasm for Roman literature which

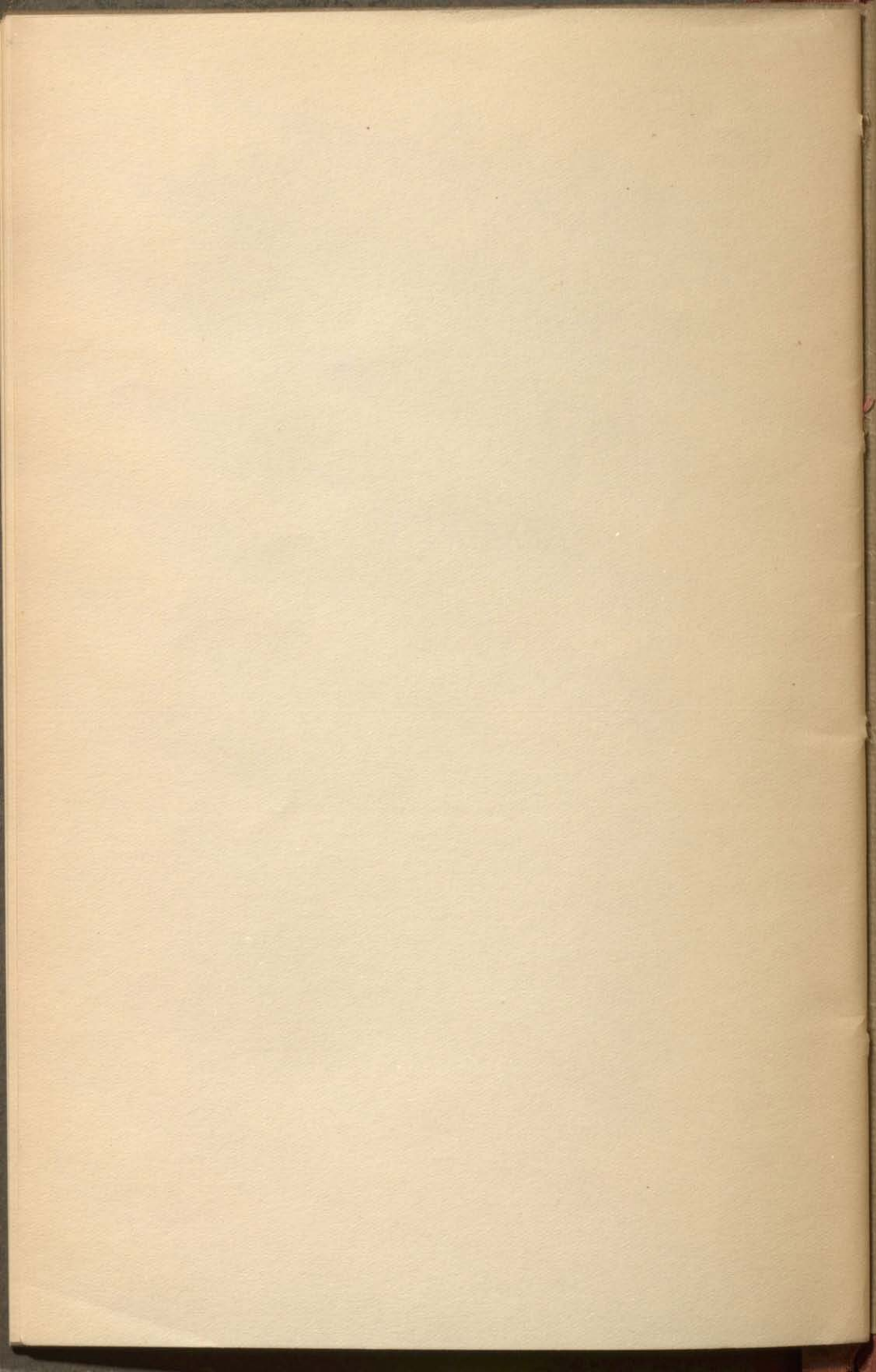
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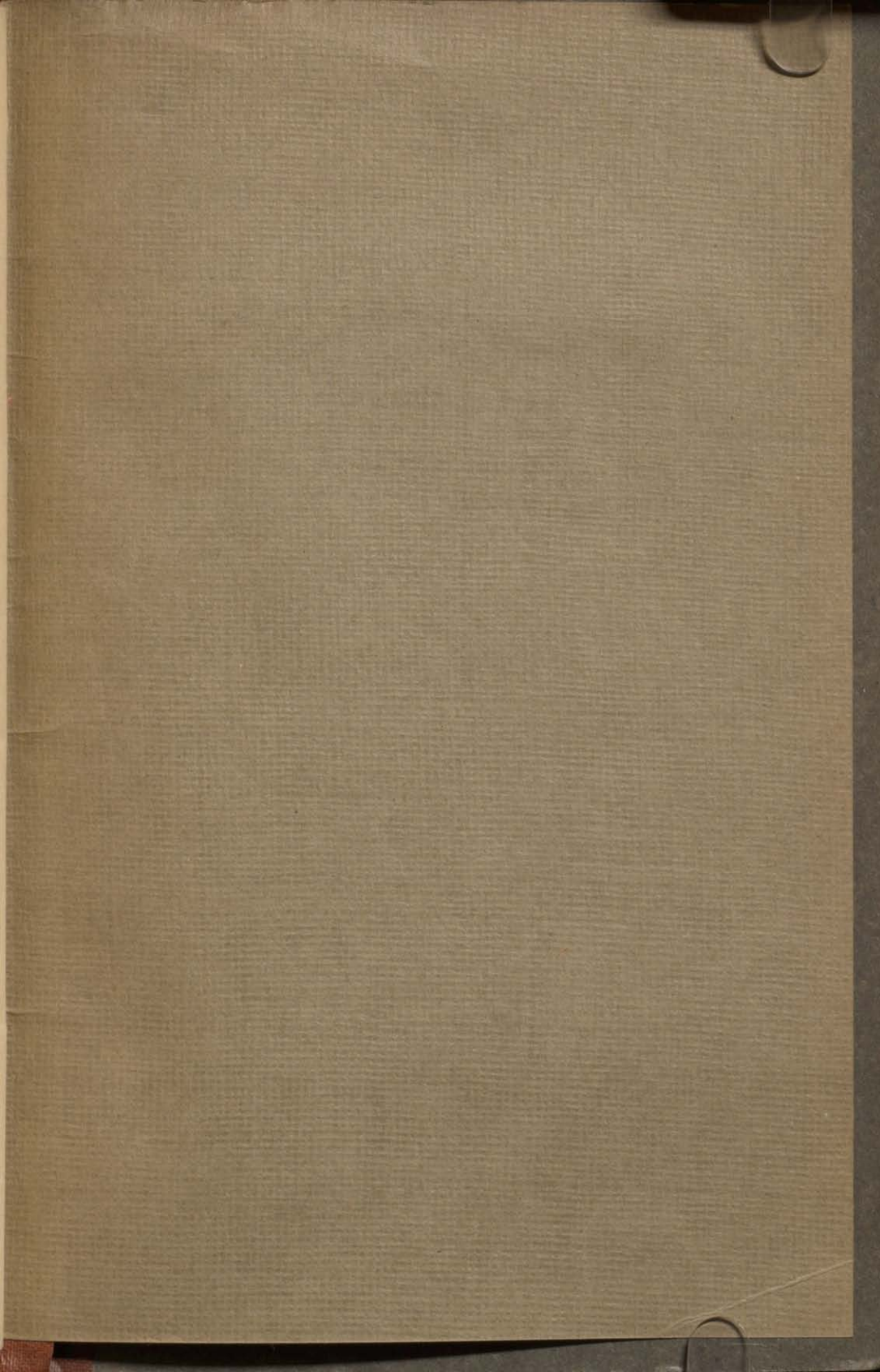
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