

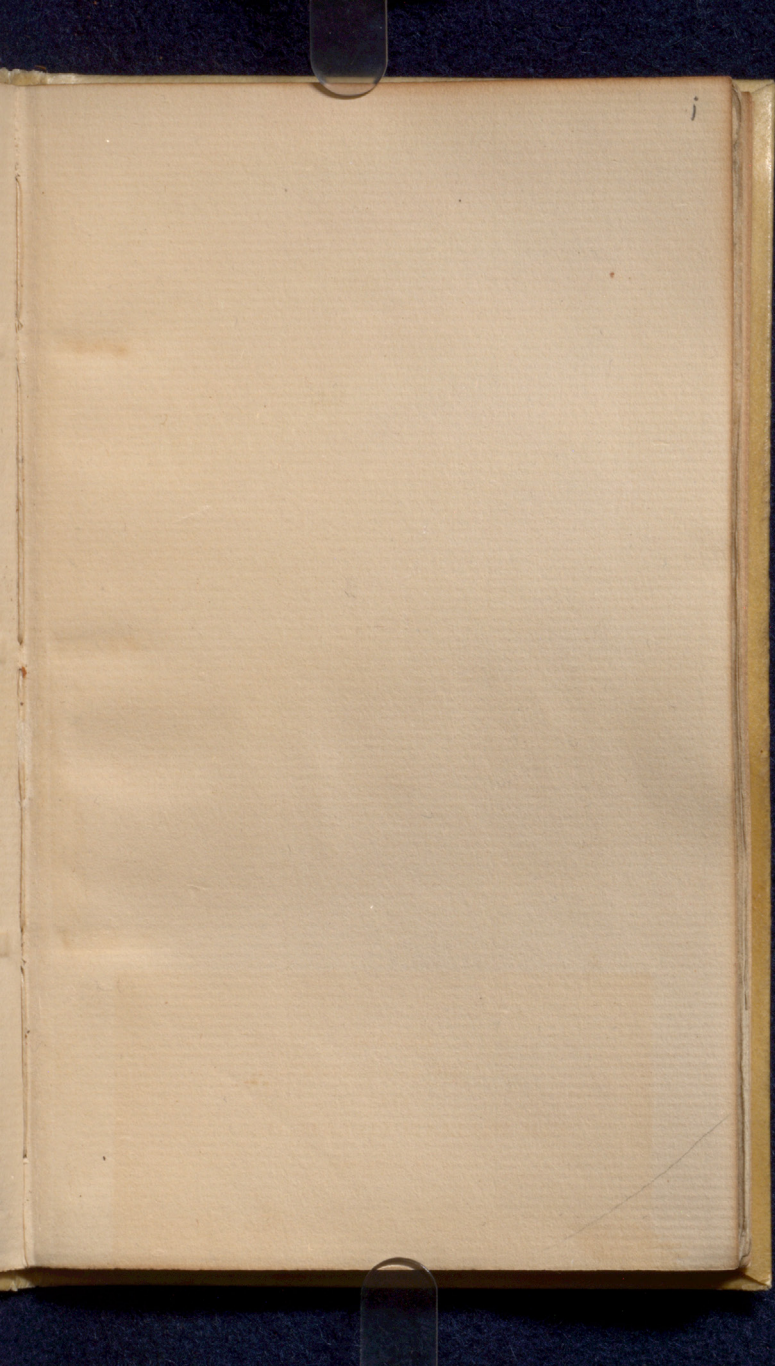
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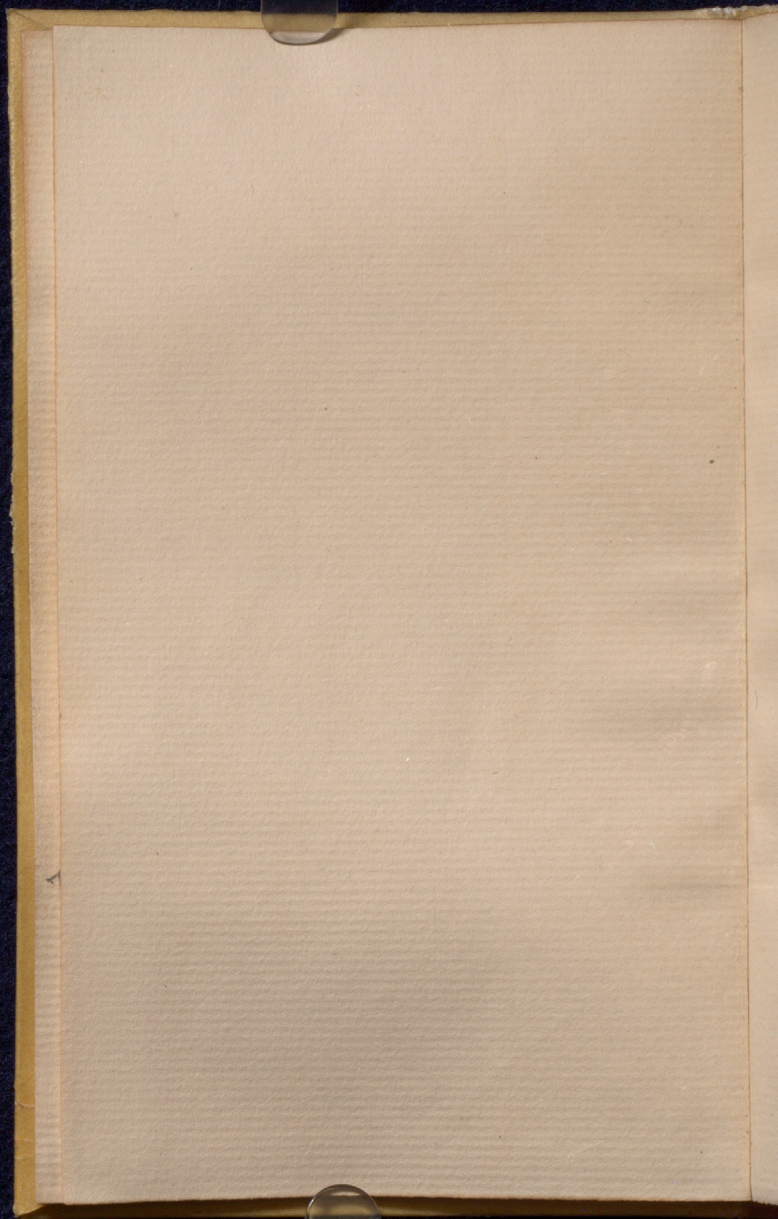
7606. In English, on paper (watermarked 18[1]4):
written in 1817 by Edward Osler: $6\frac{1}{4} \times$
 $3\frac{3}{4}$ in., iv + 22 leaves.

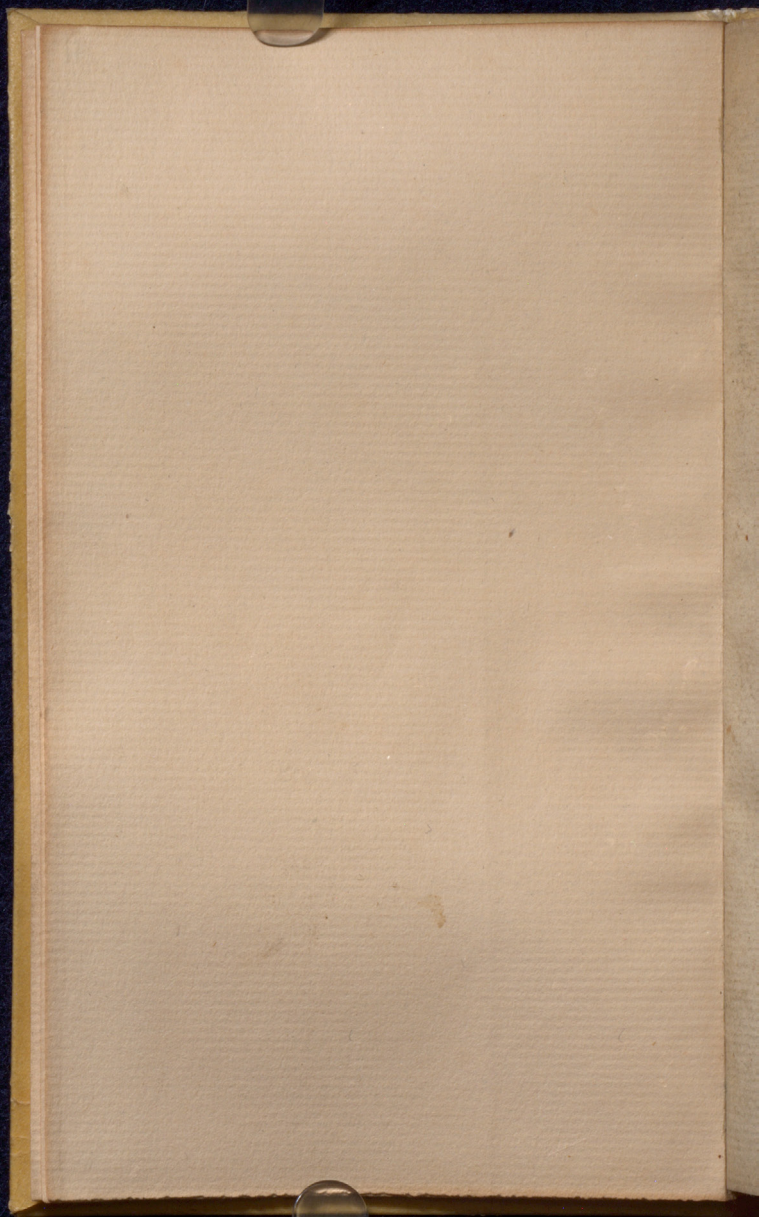
‘No 4. E. O. A Dissertation on Nervous
Influence. Life. The Will.’ Part of a thesis
read by Edward Osler at the Abernethian
Society, 1817. Formerly foll. 59-70 of a
larger MS. Foll. i-iv, 13-22 are blank.

7606

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No 4

E.O.

A Dissertation
on
Nervous Influences

Life
The Will

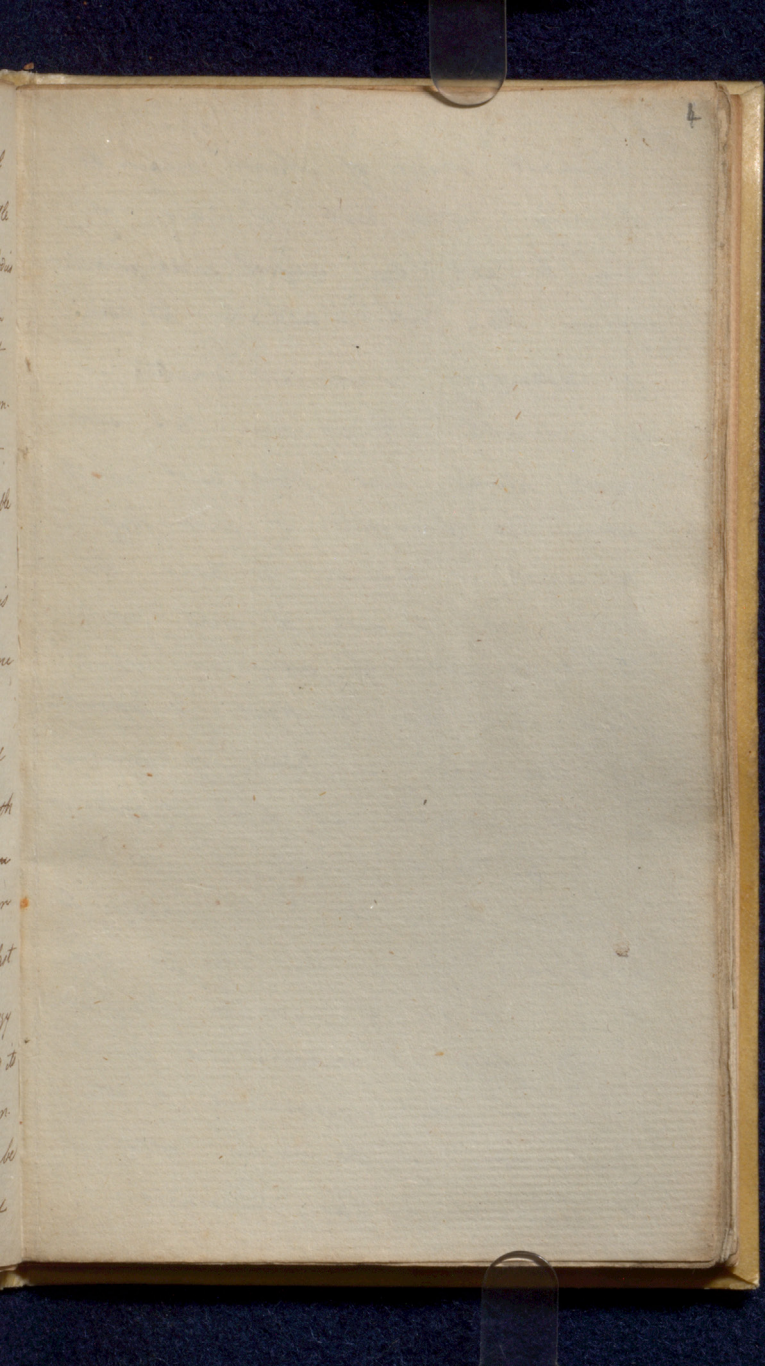
I have now indicated (as far as the limits of a dissertation will allow) to explain the nature action & effects of the Nervous fluid & I proceed to speak of the principle which governs it; a principle whose grandeur excites our curiosity but whose obscurity forbids all speculation. Powerful, active, essential as the Nervous fluid is it is only an agent directed & controlled by something ~~of a~~ more fixed & noble nature. To explain the ^{nature} connexion of life & of the will, their connexion with each other & the manner in which they exercise their authority over the system is a task far too difficult for the most gifted capacity; nor is it probable the subject will ever be elucidated since we have no

analogy to guide us & a knowledge of all the effects only shows the impenetrable obscurity which envelops the cause. I shall first consider the effects of life & then briefly enumerate a few of the principal phenomena of the will. Whether or not these are synonymous I will not pretend to say. Probably they are not so since though the will is necessarily dependent on life, life may exist without the will. But this is of little importance since we know nothing of either.

Whether the principle of life pervades the whole frame or resides in a particular part of the system affecting distant organs by the agency of the Nervous fluid are questions foreign to the present enquiry. Its nature I believe to be decidedly material for

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I cannot conceive an immaterial principle effence animating a beetle or a moss. It can remain in bodies for years in a latent state as in the eggs of animals & the seeds of vegetables preserving them from decomposition & ready to spring into action whenever excited by favorable circumstances. The state generally required to awaken its powers is a certain temperature either alone or combined with moisture. It is not in general injured by cold but excessive heat destroys it, though ~~not carried so far as the disorganism~~ perhaps from disorganizing the germ in which it resides. When at last it is caused to action, its energy can no more sleep. To suspend its powers then is to destroy them. Exceptions to this are only to be found in the lowest orders of



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animals some of which may be literally frozen into a mass of ice & yet by careful management regain their life & activity. Its power of organizing inanimate matter is indisputable. If we deny this we must admit that there exist in the acorn the rudiments of every leaf & the which is destined to adorn the future oak & not of that single tree alone but of every one which shall grow from its fruit ad infinitum. Life then has the power of forming a plan: simple at first it enlarges & builds upon it till it expands the germ to a tree & the embryo to a man. Now is this all for which it has carried to perfection the plant or the body it inhabits, it forms germs or oves appropriated to the propagation of the species which it animates by an emanation

from its own essence.

Now is the will less astonishing. The most indefatigable anatomist does not seem to be so well acquainted with the situation & office of every muscle. Whenever a motion is to be made it dispatches the Nervous Principle to those muscles & to those only whose action is required to effect it. Then in ^{a moment} an instant ^{by withdrawing} it withdraws that influence & it? paralyzes them like the wand of Prospero while it conveys its energy to their antagonists. Wonderful as this is, it is the simplest of its operations. From the innumerable multitude of ideas which are treasured in the memory it selects & brings out ^{selects} that one which is required or by the operation of what we call judgment selects a greater number comparing, analyzing

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& clasping them so as to produce
new results. The precision of its
movements is inimitable, the velocity
incalculable. But how is this
inscrutable principle acted on?
Whence is it enabled to effect such
great results? Nay, what is it?
Here we are lost & every step we
take only increases our perplexity
& buries us in deeper obscurity.

65 I shall now briefly consider the phenomena of death a negative state of which perhaps the best definition is that it is a privation of life. When from age the organs which composing the system become so rigid as to be unable to perform their functions — when any part becomes so extensively disorganized by disease ^{materially} as to affect the system generally — when any accident occasions an irreparable mischief or produces a shock too violent for the constitution to resist — when a ^{continued} discharge of any of the fluids or secretions of the body is greater than can be supplied by the assimilated nourishment — & finally when the whole system becomes exhausted from pain, fatigue or starvation the powers of life sink

& death consequently ensues. The immediate cause of this state must in every instance depend on the inability of the Nervous System to perform its functions. Hence in general the symptoms of death very much resemble those of syncope. The patient generally becomes insensible unless the disease has been marked by irritability when as in Phthisis he often retains his senses to the last moment.

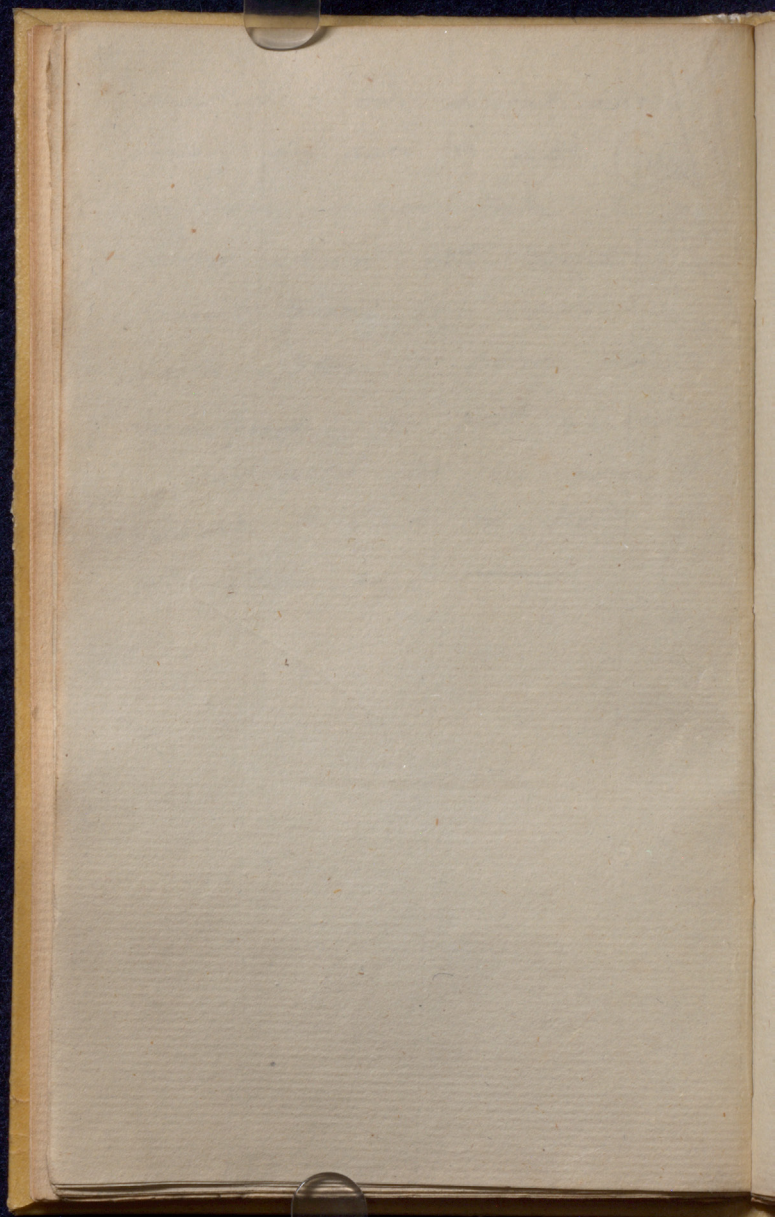
The skin loses its polish & semitransparency. It is opaque & of a dull white. The lustre of the cornea fades, & it becomes gradually duller as the fatal moment approaches - the pupils are dilated - a peculiar coldness seizes the extremities extending gradually upwards -

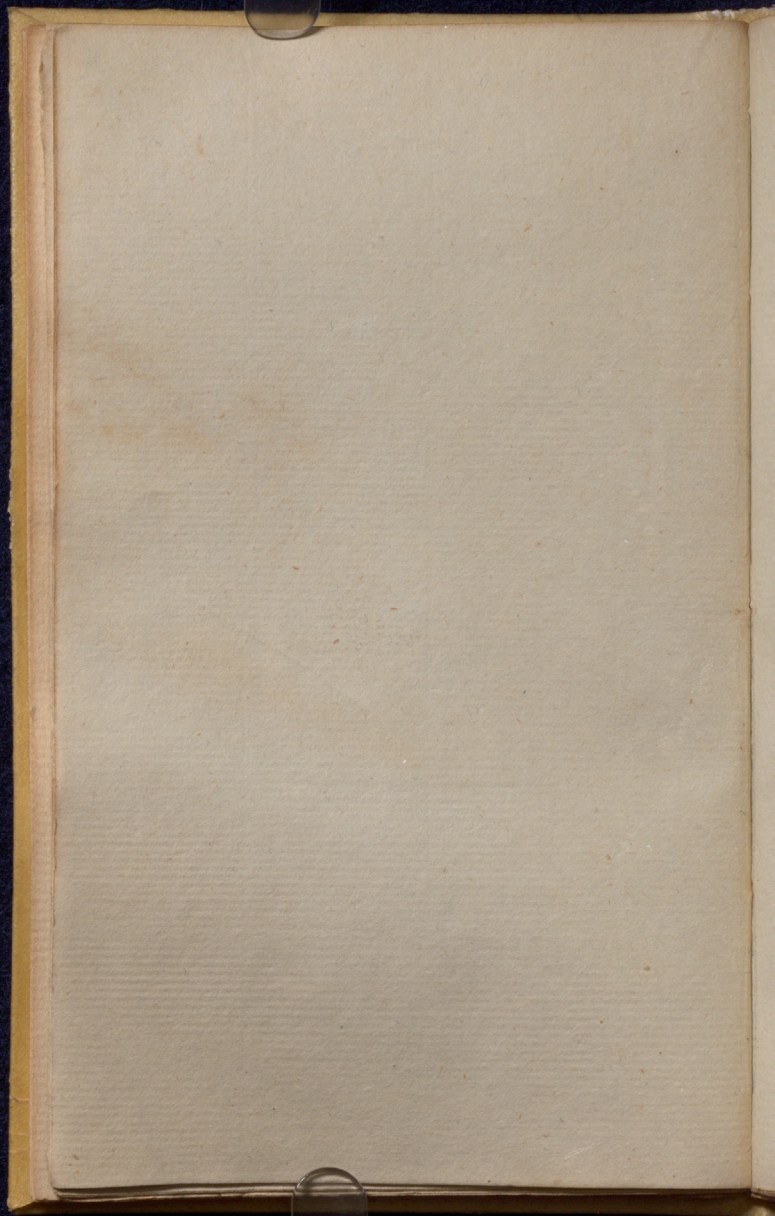
67 the pulse is generally quick & feeble, & the respiration hurried & laborious - a cold clammy sweat breaks out on the forehead & face the lips become livid, the features contracted, the eyes & mouth are half closed. & the pulse & respiration gradually diminish in frequency till they finally cease altogether. Such are the usual appearances which however are frequently modified or altered ^{by circumstances}. The Nervous fluid is generally far from being exhausted at the moment of death. It is therefore gradually discharged by the nerves, producing a slight but universal stimulus so that all the muscles become rigid, the blood congeals & the process of decomposition is for a time

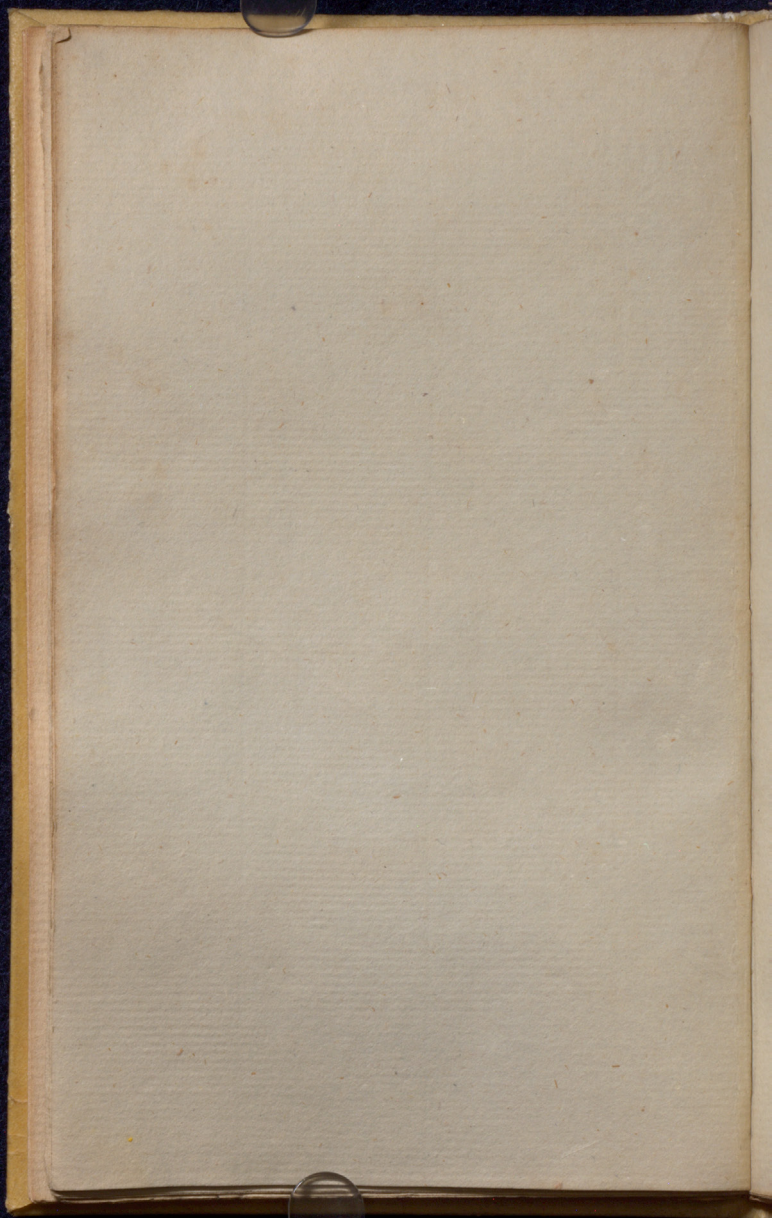
retarded. There can be little doubt that the coagulation of the blood depends on the Nervous principle. When blood is drawn from a patient with Inflammation when the power & action are great the coagulum is firm & compact. But if he be laboring under Typhus it is loose & the separation is imperfect & in persons destroyed by certain poisons or killed by the Electric fluid the blood does not coagulate at all nor ~~do~~ the muscles ^{become} rigid. ~~All~~ ^{Here} also the Nervous Principle being completely destroyed, decomposition ensues immediately on death, & its progress is much more rapid than under ordinary circumstances.

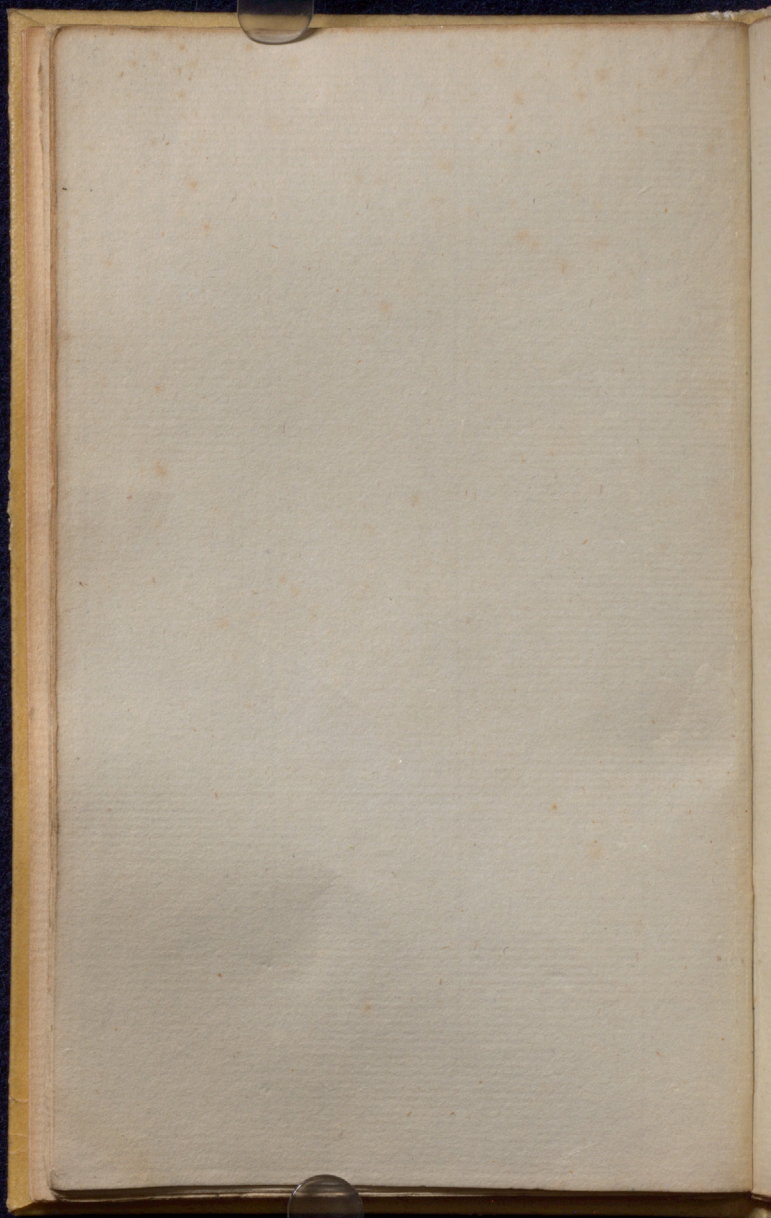
I have now completed the plan
 I had proposed ^{to myself} in commencing
 this Essay & nothing remains but
 to apologize for its defects. When
 a subject furnishing ^{ample} matter for
 a folio is compressed within the
 limits of a dissertation, the
 different points it embraces must
 be treated far more concisely
 than their importance demands.
 Hence I have been compelled to omit
 many facts intimately
 connected with the Nervous System
are altogether omitted) & those
which I have selected are examined
 in a cursory manner. I am convinced
 the Society will pardon minor
 inaccuracies since they will know
 how small a portion of time is
 at the disposal of a Medical
 Student. But should they detect

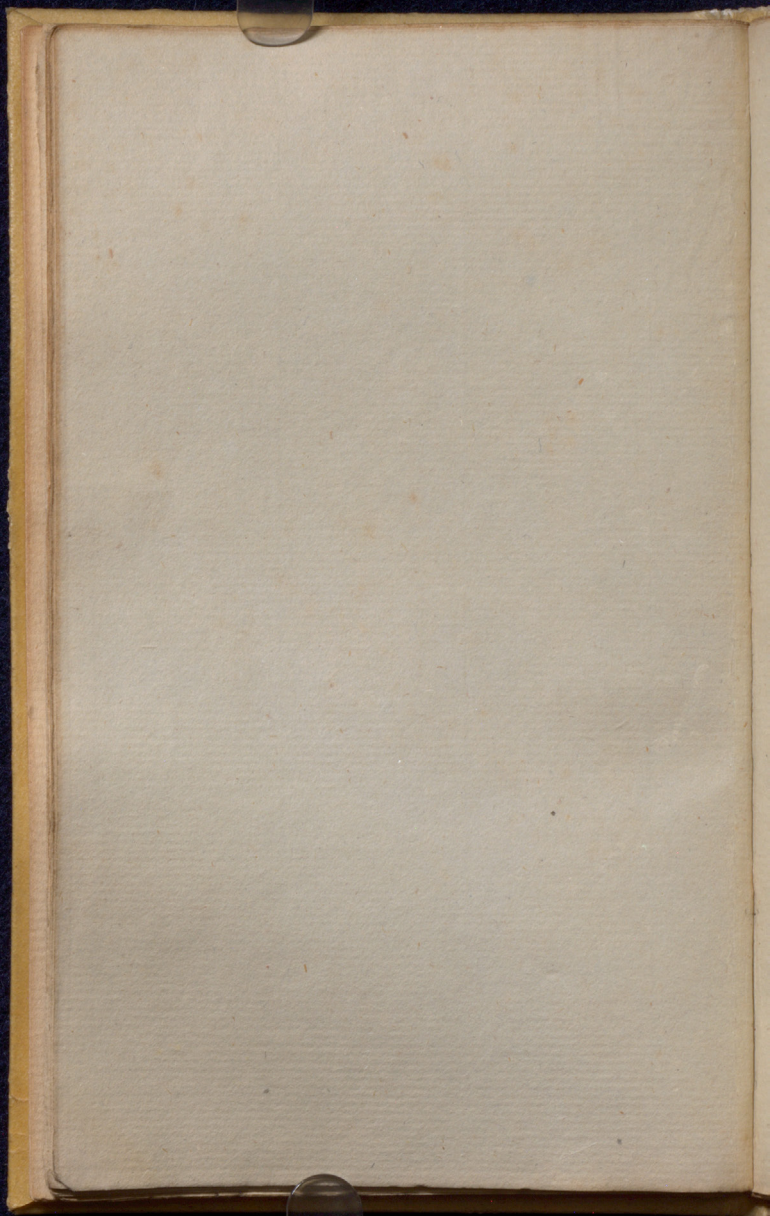
errors of a more serious nature —
should my data be false, my
conclusions unwarrantable & my
theories absurd, still though I
cannot claim their approbation I
would venture to solicit their
indulgence. The first excursion of
a half-fledged bird can never be
expected to rival the flight of
the veteran eagle —

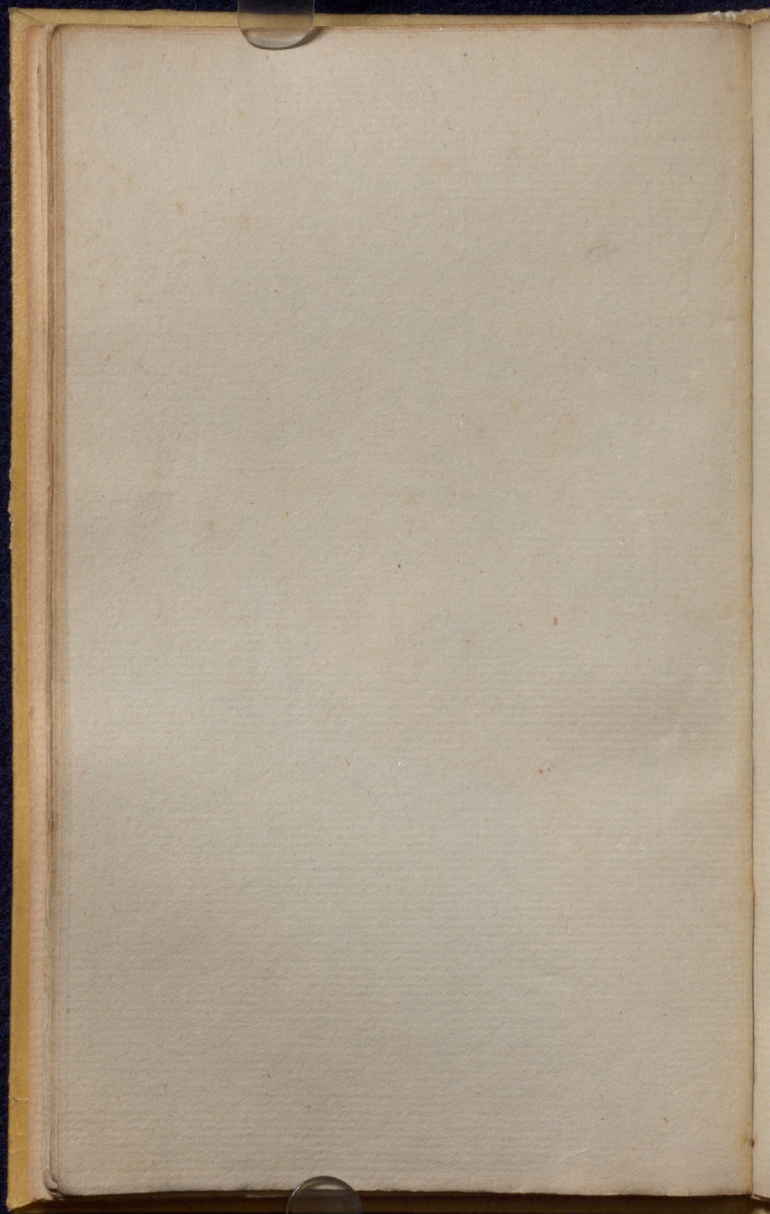


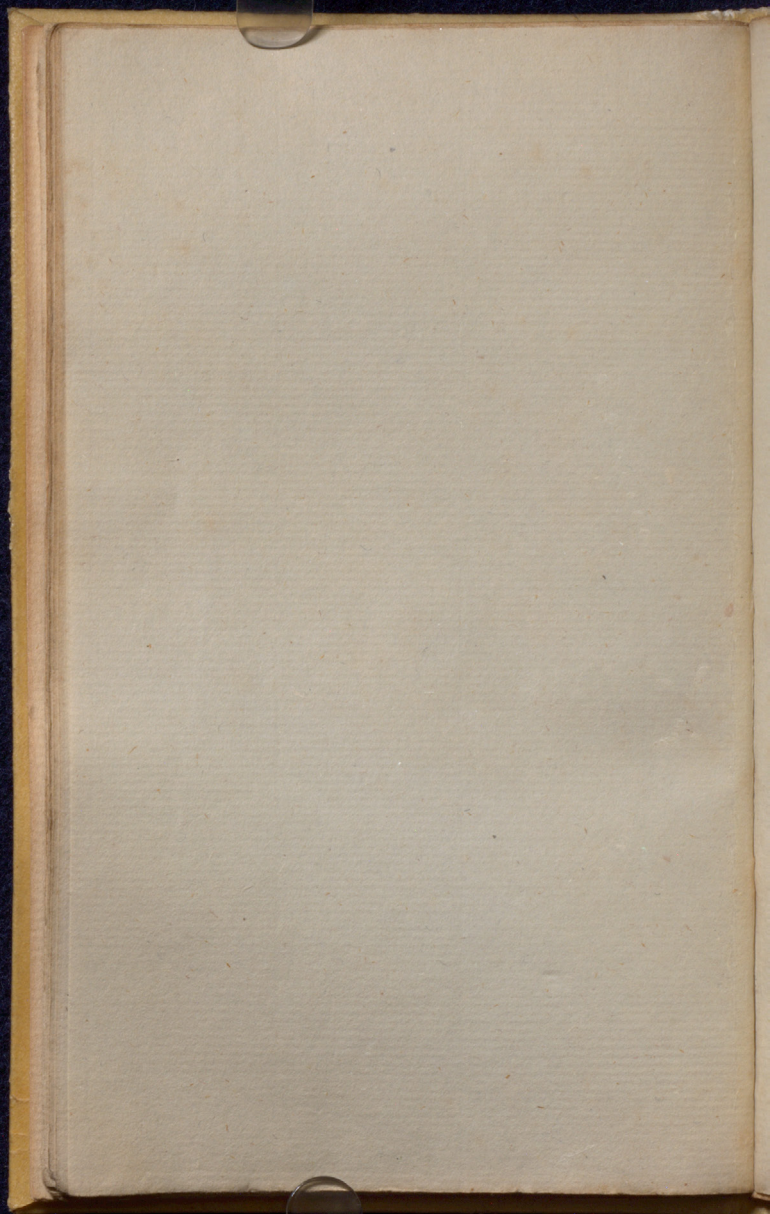


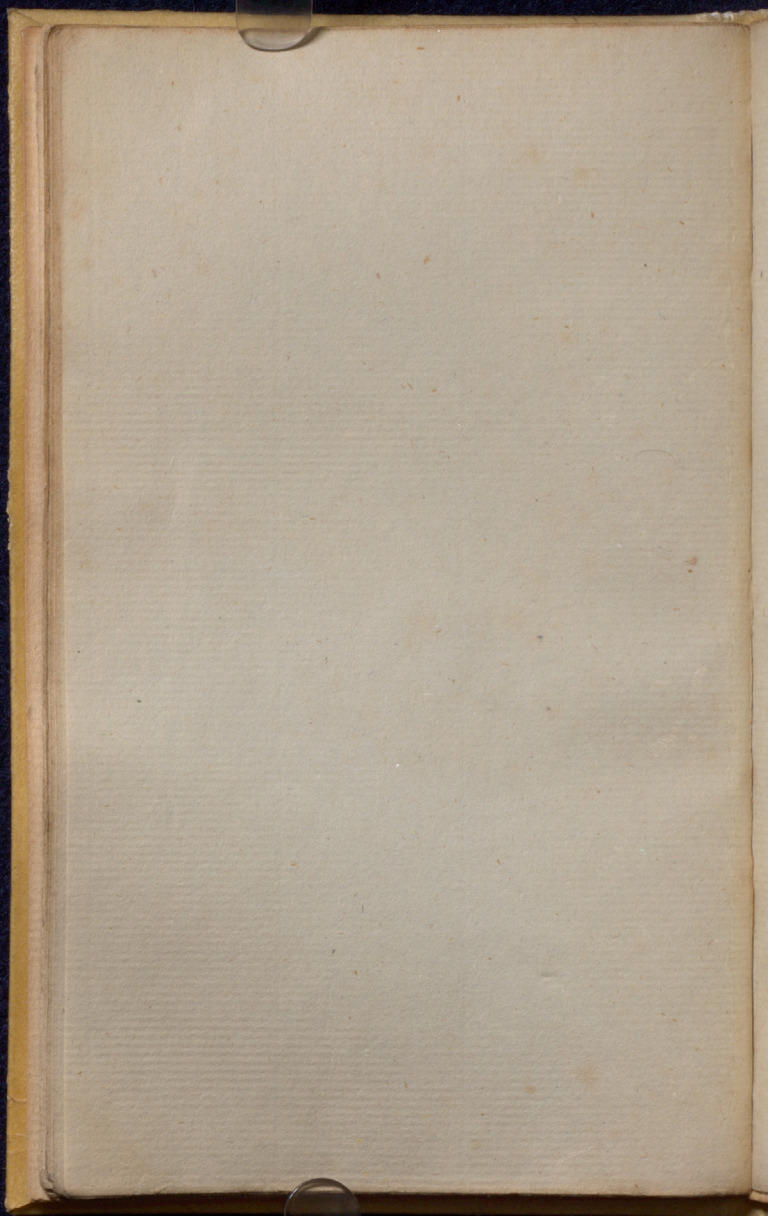


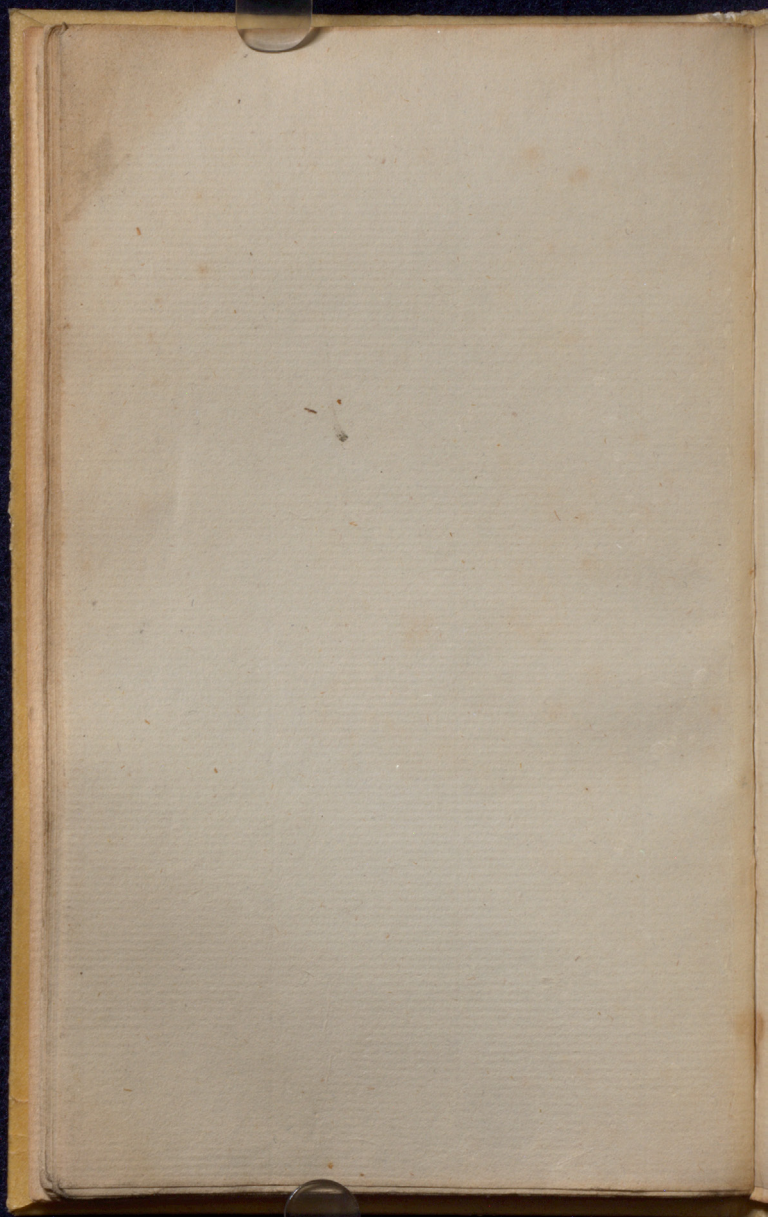




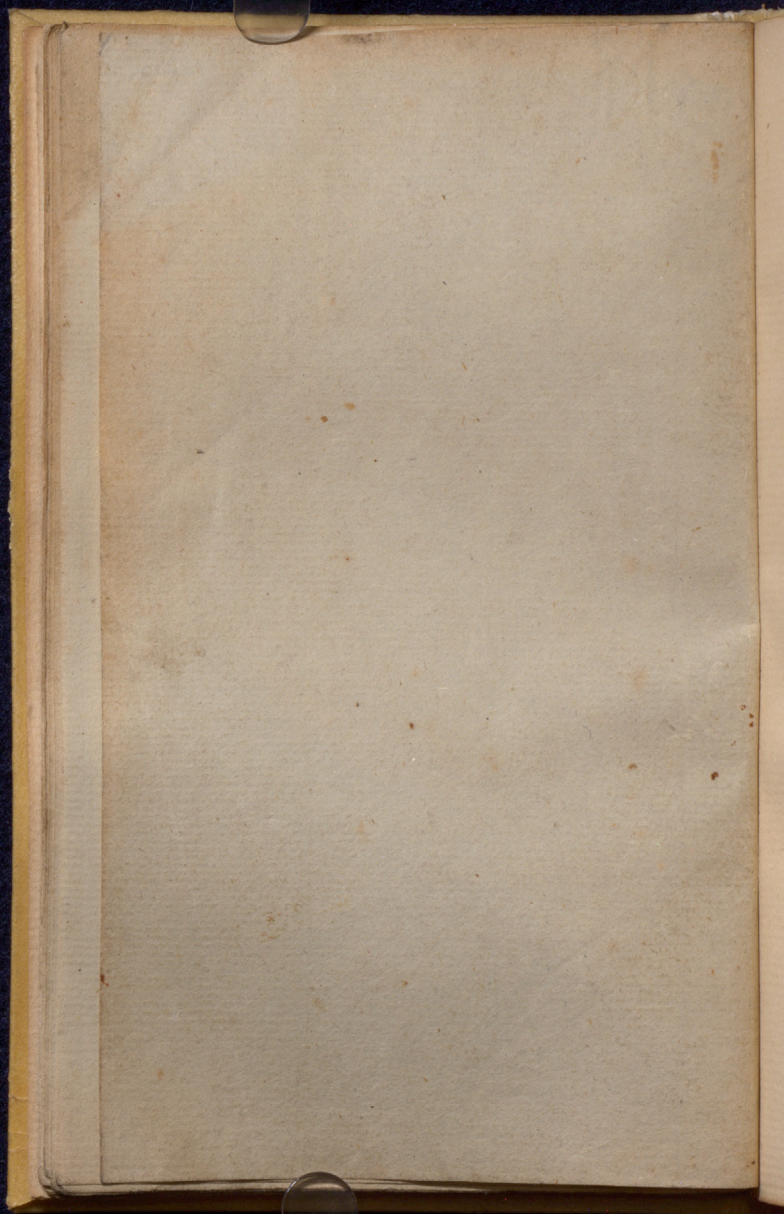


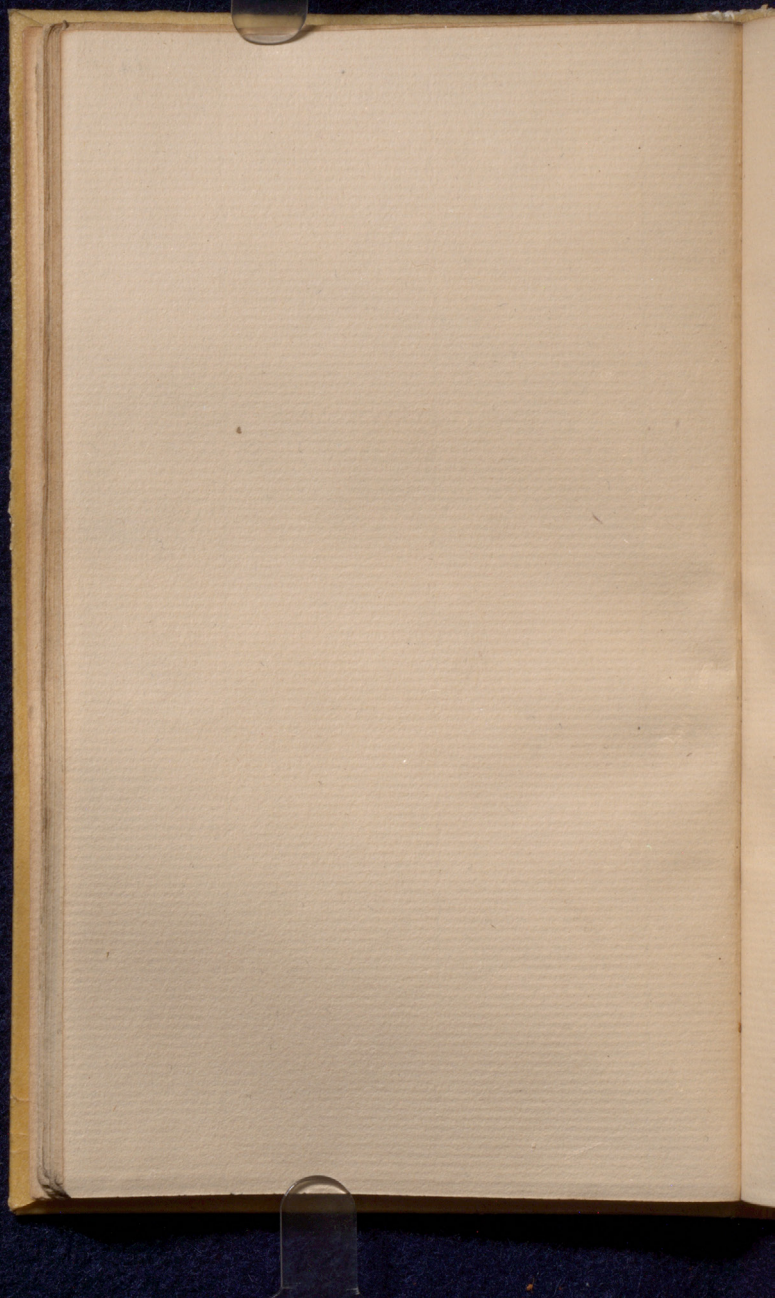




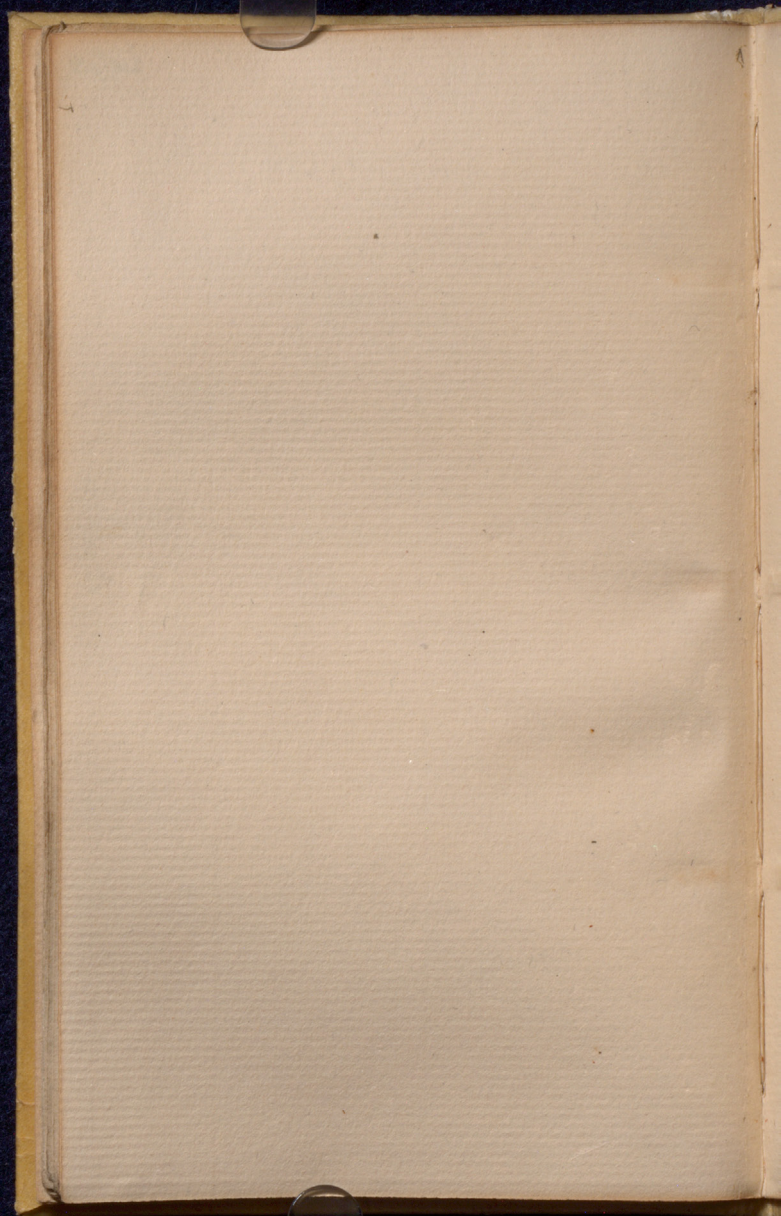


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