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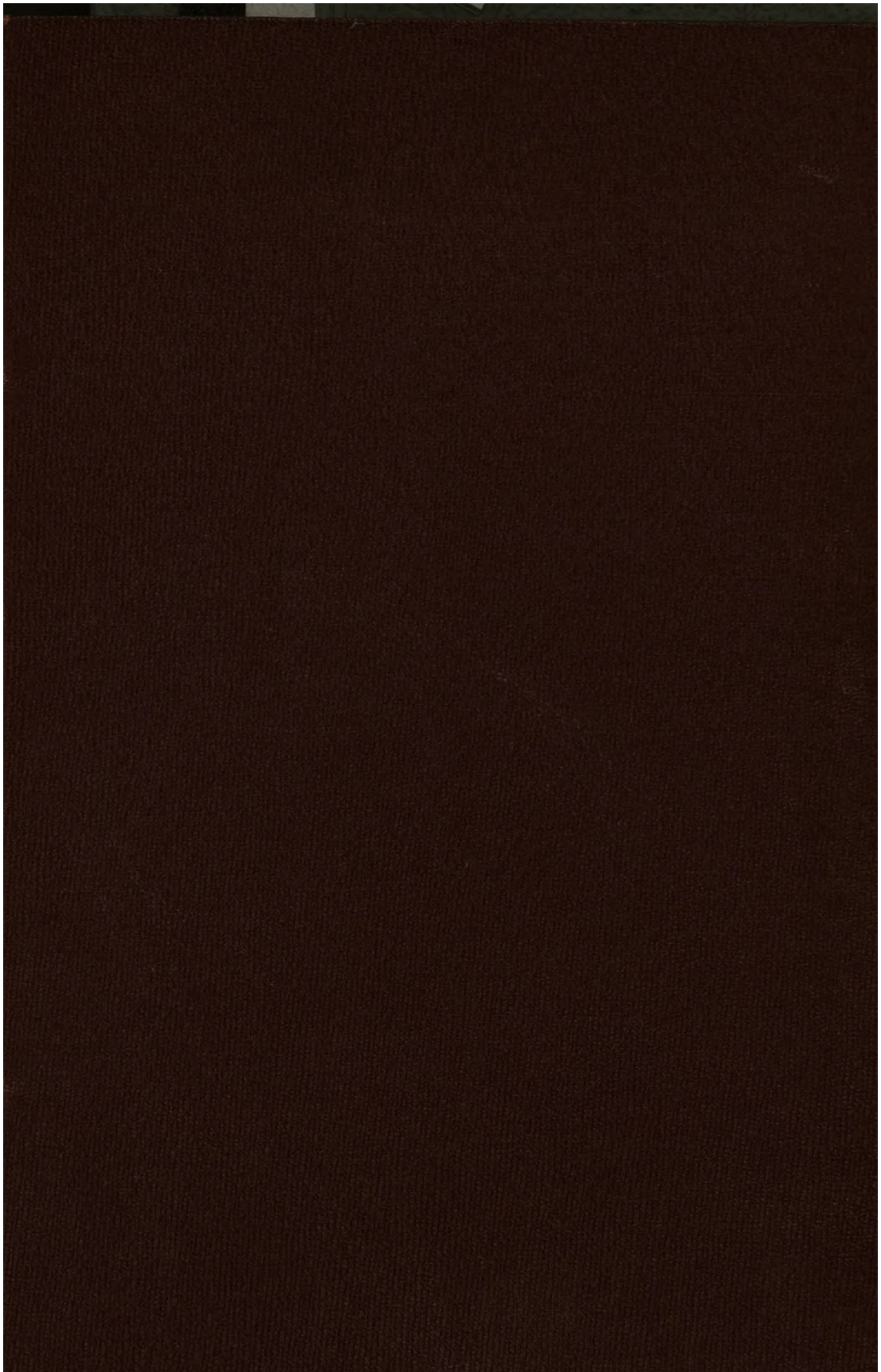
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OBSERVATIONS ON THE SOUTH KENSINGTON
ESTATE, THE PROPERTY OF HER
MAJESTY'S COMMISSIONERS
FOR THE EXHIBITION

OF 1851,

ADDRESSED IN A LETTER TO HIS ROYAL
HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF WALES, K.G.,

PRESIDENT OF THE
COMMISSIONERS,

BY

SIR HENRY COLE, K.C.B.



107

LONDON:

PUBLISHED BY GEORGE BELL AND SONS,
YORK STREET, COVENT GARDEN.

1880.

[Price One Shilling.]

Gough Add. MSS.
8^o 224.75.

TO HIS ROYAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE OF
WALES, K.G., PRESIDENT OF HER
MAJESTY'S COMMISSIONERS
FOR THE EXHIBITION
OF 1851.

106, *Philbeach Gardens,*
South Kensington, S. W.

9th Nov., 1880.

Sir,

I have the honour to send to your Royal Highness the following observations which I have prepared on the relations between Her Majesty's Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851 and the Government for the use of the South Kensington Estate in the promotion of Science and Art, and I sincerely trust that they may meet with your Royal Highness's approval.

I have the honour to be,

Sir,

Your Royal Highness's faithful Servant,

HENRY COLE.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE SOUTH KENSINGTON ESTATE.

I.

THE termination of the late correspondence between Her Majesty's Commissioners for the Exhibition of 1851 and Her Majesty's Government (¹)

(1) In letter of 21st June, 1876, the Commissioners proposed as follows:—1. To erect a building for a Museum of Scientific Instruments and fitted to advance other objects of Scientific Education; for examination rooms and the commencement at least, of a National Scientific Library. 2. Such building not to exceed a cost of £100,000, to be erected on ground, the property partly of the Commissioners and partly of the Government. 3. To exchange ground. 4. To sell to Government, ground for the future extension of the Museum or Library. 5. Government to obtain power for Public Works Commissioners to advance money at 3½ per cent. sufficient to pay off mortgage of £165,000 and cost of Museum building.

By letter of 16th July, 1878, the Commissioners amended the first letter and proposed:—1. A change of the site of the new Museum. 2. To lease the East and West Exhibition Galleries. 3. If the lease were accepted, to lease Horticultural Gardens "free of rent on conditions that they be maintained wholly or partially as a public park." These letters are published in the 6th Report of the Commissioners, 1878, pp. 126, 128.

The Treasury by letter of 5th March, 1879, "with much regret, declined the offer made by the Exhibition Commissioners."

and the unwillingness of the latter to accept the proposals of the Commissioners appear to me to create an opportunity not to be neglected, for examining the relations between the Government and the Commissioners, in view of making, if possible, permanent arrangements for the preservation of the land for buildings to promote Science and Art applied to productive Industry, in accordance with the intention when the land was bought.

Permanent arrangements for preserving the South Kensington Estate desirable.

II.

I AVOID discussing in detail the somewhat complex proposals which are made in the Commissioners' letters, but I take leave to say that the answer of the Treasury seems to show the futility of repeating a similar offer to the Government. Any new proposal, I respectfully submit, must be simple and attractive for acceptance, and quite intelligible to Parliament when brought forward by the Government.

III.

I NTERVENTION of the Government at this crisis seems to me to afford the only means of preserving the South Kensington Estate from the enterprize of speculative builders, and securing it for the purposes of Science and Art. Since I offered suggestions to the Commissioners in my

Intervention of Government necessary.

Memorandum of the 25th May, 1875 (1), new circumstances have arisen which have altered the position of affairs, and looking to experience gained, I now venture to express my opinion that it is undesirable for the Commissioners to take in hand any buildings to promote Science and Art on the South Kensington Estate, which it is clear that the Government would erect at some time to meet the public wishes. Clear boundaries of action should exist between the two authorities, although each has the same object in view. I proceed now to state the reasons for this opinion.

IV.

IN the first place it seems desirable to revert as briefly as possible to past events. It is universally admitted that the influence of the Great Exhibition of the Works of Industry of all nations in 1851, in creating a demand for Public Instruction in Science and Art applied to productive Industry (I use the well-defined expression of the Prince Consort), has been great and is even now, after a quarter of a century, increasing year by year.

Influence of the Exhibition of 1851.

Origin of the South Kensington Museum.

The institution of the South Kensington Museum was due to the assistance and active influence of the Prince Consort and of Her

(1) See printed Minutes of 109th Meeting of the Commissioners, p. 38.

Majesty's Commissioners. When the South Kensington Museum was first opened, the Parliamentary vote in 1857-8 for Science and Art was only £46,251 for that year, whereas for the year ending 31st March, 1880, it has risen to £263,960.

Growth of public demands.

These facts show that however much useful work the Commissioners have been able to do by means of their most profitable investments in the Estate at South Kensington, public demands for such work, as expressed through Parliamentary votes, have completely gone beyond the limit of the financial resources of the Commissioners.

V.

THE purchase of the land at South Kensington, made entirely through the foresight of the Prince Consort, has proved most successful in the public interest. In 1852 about 90 acres

Increasing value of the Estate.

were bought for about £3,800 an acre. This required an expenditure of £342,500, of which sum £165,000 were advanced by the Commissioners and £177,500 by the Government, and a sort of partnership was formed between them. Differences of opinion as to the uses of the land, almost at once, arose between the Commissioners and the Government.

Proposal to build Barracks.

For instance, it was proposed by the Treasury to build Barracks where the South Kensington Museum now stands, but the land having been acquired to

promote Science and Art, and not Barracks, the vigilance of the Prince Consort prevented the carrying out of this scheme, and His Royal Highness placed the temporary Iron Museum on its present site in 1855. In the early days of South

Public prejudice against South Kensington.

Kensington public prejudice was strong against the locality, and its strength prevented the removal of the National Gallery to South Kensington which had been recommended by a Committee of the House of Commons as well as by a Royal Commission, and the prejudice defeated the Bill introduced into the House of Commons afterwards in 1856. This prejudice still exists in some quarters, though common sense asserts itself.

VI.

WITH consent of the Prince Consort in 1853 I had the honour to address a letter to him, which was published as a pamphlet, in which I recommended a dissolution of the partnership. The Commissioners dissolved the partnership. The Commissioners

Land leased to the Horticultural Society.

being free, afterwards leased about 22 acres to the Royal Horticultural Society for 31 years at a contingent rental in order that a *temporary* use of the land should be made

VII.

THE unfortunate death of the Prince Consort took place in the first year of the Society's posses

sion, and frustrated the well-working of the experiment. In 1871 the Annual International Exhibitions

Annual International Exhibitions started in 1871.

were started with much success. The first Exhibition paid upwards of £5,031 in 1871 to the Horticultural Society, (and other sums afterwards making a total of £7,145,) for the use of the Gardens, and realised a surplus of £17,671 for the Commissioners beyond the expenses of the Exhibition (1). But the residents at South Kensington who were Fellows of the Society, viewed the Gardens as a monopoly created for their own use, and not a trust for the benefit of the public. The Exhibitions were sacrificed to the opposition thus raised, and the Fellows of the Society succeeded in practically depriving the visitors to the Exhibition

Exhibitions opposed by the Horticultural Society.

of the use of the Gardens. The Exhibitions, ruined by the mistaken policy of the Society, were abandoned. The Society itself has become bankrupt. It has struggled against its inevitable doom, and will have to give up its tenure of the Gardens in a very short time. The Gardens and buildings are now in a most melancholy and neglected condition.

Society forfeits its Lease.

VIII.

THE present financial position of the Commissioners will not allow them to make plans or

(1) See the Report on International Exhibitions 1872 to 1874.

to embark in any buildings or enterprise whatever. To do so they must obtain capital by selling or leasing the land for private houses, and thus abandon the very object for which the land was bought and is still urgently wanted.

Land sold for private Houses.

My proposal which I venture to suggest is, that the land should be reserved wholly for public buildings, to be erected as required by the Government, according to public wants.

IX.

NOTWITHSTANDING the present crisis in the affairs of the Royal Commissioners at South Kensington, I think it right to repeat emphatically what I have said before ⁽¹⁾, that the purchase of the Estate and the temporary lease to the Royal Horticultural Society have, in spite of delays and failures, proved most valuable in promoting Science and Art. From the mere financial aspect, the value of the land has increased, whilst one of the finest suburbs of the metropolis has been created.

X.

WITH all deference, I express my conviction that the Commissioners' late proposals touching the erection of a Patent and Scientific Museum and Library seem to me very like competing with

(1) Letter to Lord Granville, 18th December, 1874.

Competition for
buildings with
the Govern-
ment.

Government, to do that which the Government should do itself if it is to be done at all (1). Such a competition I imagine can hardly be acceptable to the Government or to Parliament.

XI.

RECENT observations made in Parliament upon the urgent want of a building for a **PATENT MUSEUM**; upon the provision of a safe repository for the **NATIONAL PORTRAITS** now in some jeopardy, being exposed to risks of fire, to which attention has been called in previous Reports, and again in the last Report of the Trustees; upon the creation of a **GALLERY OF CASTS OF CLASSICAL ART, &c.**, all point to the execution of public works belonging exclusively to the function of Government. I believe it by far the best policy for the interest of Science and Art that all competition between the Government and the Commissioners for executing works on the South Kensington Estate should cease.

Urgent want of
Public Build-
ings.

XII.

I VENTURE to submit that the best course for Her Majesty's Commissioners to adopt, would be

(1) In June, 1876, a Memorial signed by many members of the Royal Society and others was presented to the Lord President (the Duke of Richmond), urging the establishment of a Museum of Science.

Gift of Land
worth a million
of pounds to the
public.

to make a free gift to Government for the Public of all the land on the South Kensington Estate, which is not already leased or appropriated, and is of the value of about a million of pounds sterling after discharging the liabilities. The liabilities on the Estate entail the payment of less than £200,000 in return for more than a million of pounds value in land (1). Even this sum would be a rental of only about 1 per cent. per annum on the value for 20 years. The land would then be used by the Government on its sole responsibility, and according to the public wishes.

XIII.

BUT I suggest that Her Majesty's Commissioners should *remain Trustees for the whole Estate*, reserving in their own hands only the northern portion on which the Royal Albert Hall stands, whilst the whole of the main square not yet sold to the Government should be leased to it at a peppercorn rental for a term of 999 years. This property consists of the Horticultural Gardens. It includes the land to the *south* of the Orchard Houses east and west of the Horticultural Gardens, all the Galleries (and their rentals), the Arcades, and all other land and buildings at the south end of the

Commissioners
to remain Trus-
tees.

(1) According to Sir H. A. Hunt's estimate £1,080,000. (See Report of Special Committee, p. 12.)

Gardens (as marked blue on the plan). The sole condition of the lease would be that no buildings are erected except for the promotion of Science and Art.

XIV.

THE Government, according to its discretion, would arrange to pay off the mortgage by instalments or at once, and to deal equitably with the Debenture Holders. The offer of the Commissioners would represent, according to the Estimates of Sir H. Hunt, a value of a free gift to the public of about £1,000,000.

Mortgage and Debentures to be paid to Government.

XV.

THE portion of the Estate which the Commissioners would keep in their possession, is the land and rents, etc., at the *north* end of the Estate above the Orchard Houses (coloured red on the plan). The income from this part, say about £6,500 a year, would be used by the Commissioners in dealing with the promotion of Science and Art according to their discretion but not in competition with the Government for erecting buildings.

Northern end of the Estate kept by the Commissioners.

XVI.

THE FINANCIAL results of such an arrangement to the public would be very profitable. Putting aside the value of the land, the value of the build-

ings now in public use for which the Government pays a rental, would go far in paying off the mortgage.

XVII.

I TRUST I may be permitted to offer a few further suggestions. The ROYAL HORTICULTURAL GARDENS after the conclusion of the law suit, might be opened to the public, and kept in order with a popular and scientific treatment under the Kew Gardens administration. The annual cost would be reduced by low fees for admission; and the public might be admitted daily. Visitors to the Museum and Gallery might be admitted *through them to the Gardens*, three days free and three days paying sixpence, or ten shillings a year as at the South Kensington Museum. This would be an arrangement extremely popular, acceptable to the general public especially, and refreshing to the Students to the Galleries surrounding the Gardens, whilst the residents in the neighbourhood would obtain a quiet use of the Gardens at certain times for ten shillings a year. I would recommend that the Royal Horticultural Society should be permitted to hold a limited number of Exhibitions in the grounds on easy terms, which would help to pay cost of managing these public Gardens.

Suggestions for immediate use of the land.

Gardens public.

Horticultural Exhibition in Gardens.

XVIII.

THE land and buildings being thus leased, to the Government, they would be under its sole control and management, and be applied as wanted for the purposes of Science and Art. The NATIONAL

National Portrait Gallery put in safety.

PORTRAIT GALLERY might at once be transferred to *safe* galleries on the west side, as well

lighted and secure as any Picture Galleries in the world. Proper buildings are urgently wanted for the

Patent Museum built.

PATENT MUSEUM. It might well be erected on the Western Annex in connection with the

Galleries of Scientific objects already located in the basement. For the proposed GALLERY OF CASTS

Gallery of Casts of Classical Art in Arcades.

OF CLASSICAL ART, the existing Arcades might be rendered most

suitable at a small cost. A detailed Plan adopting this policy

and providing for future wants would of course have to be prepared.

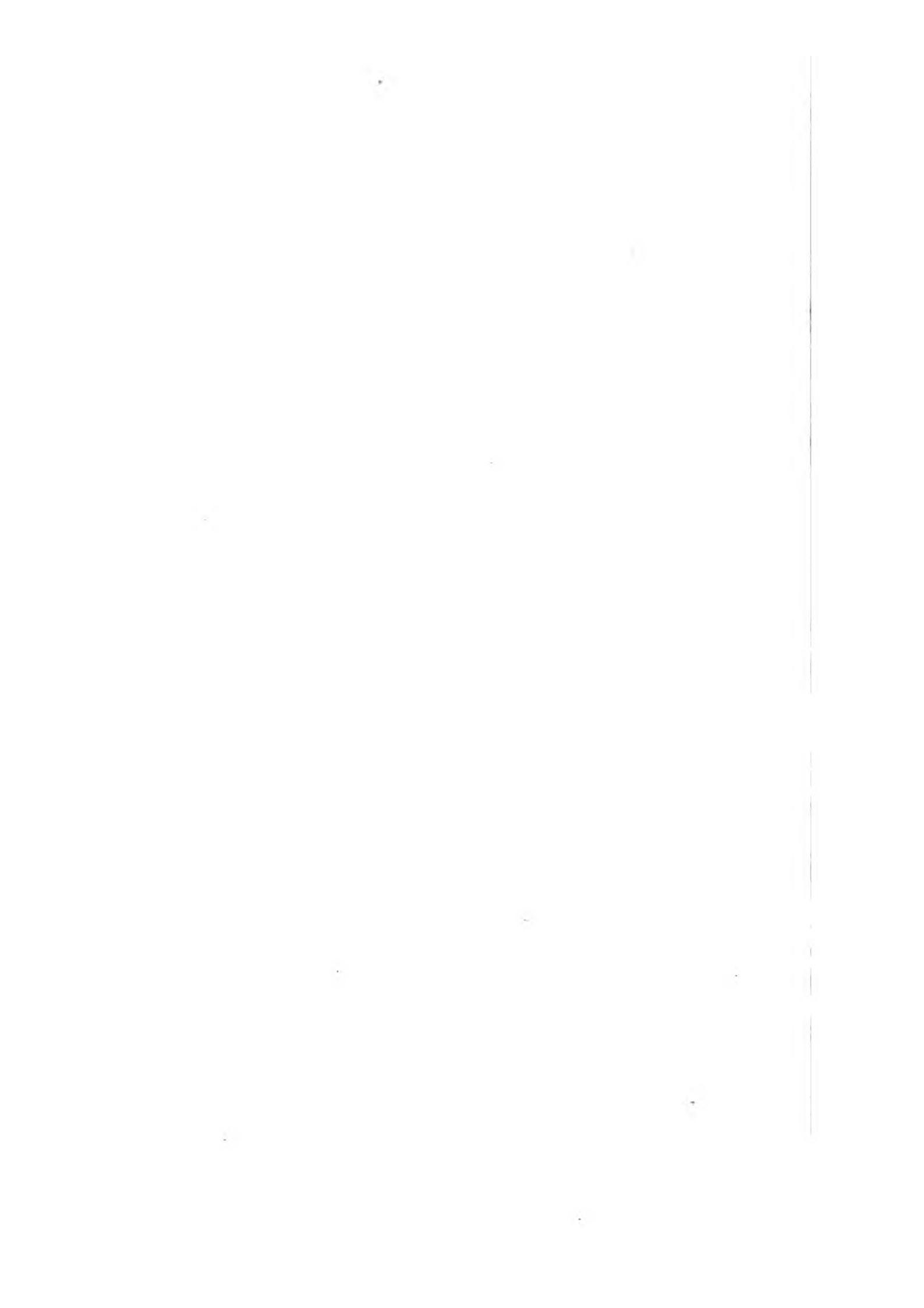
XIX.

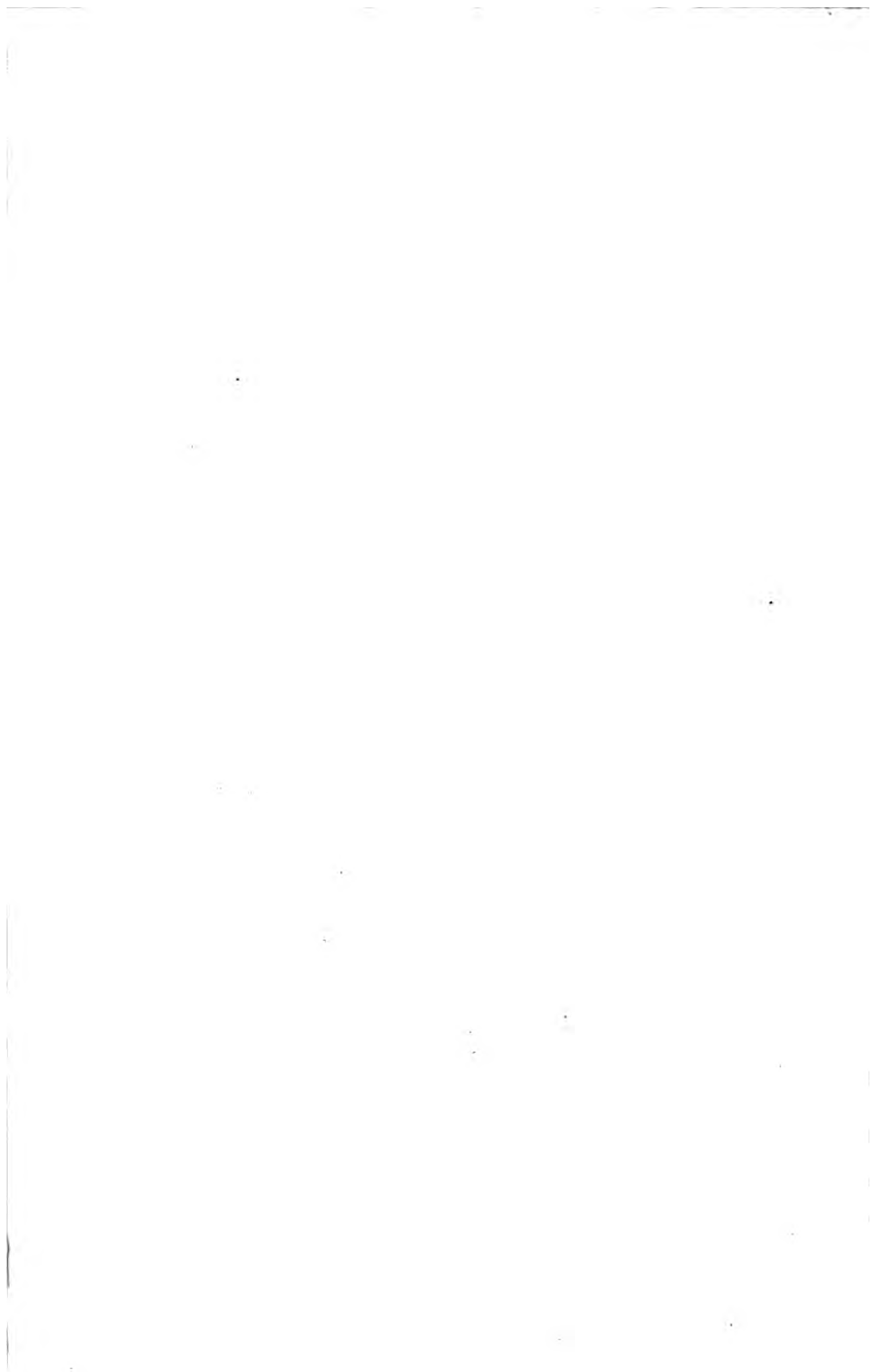
IF these suggestions were adopted, the whole Estate might speedily be put into good order, which is much needed, and be administered on a simple and responsible system. The Public and Students would have the enjoyment of the Gardens until the wants of Science and Art called for any other use of them. Even the Royal Horticultural Society would

be benefited, being relieved of responsibilities which it cannot fulfil. All bargaining and competition between the Government and Her Majesty's Commissioners for this or that object to promote Science and Art would cease. Parliament would have the satisfaction of obtaining an undivided control over the annual expenditure at South Kensington. Her Majesty's Commissioners would only surrender the power of dealing with a portion of the land, whilst your Royal Highness as the President, would have the satisfaction of reporting to the Queen that the Prince Consort's great object in obtaining the land for buildings to promote Science and Art applied to productive Industry, had been finally secured for all time.

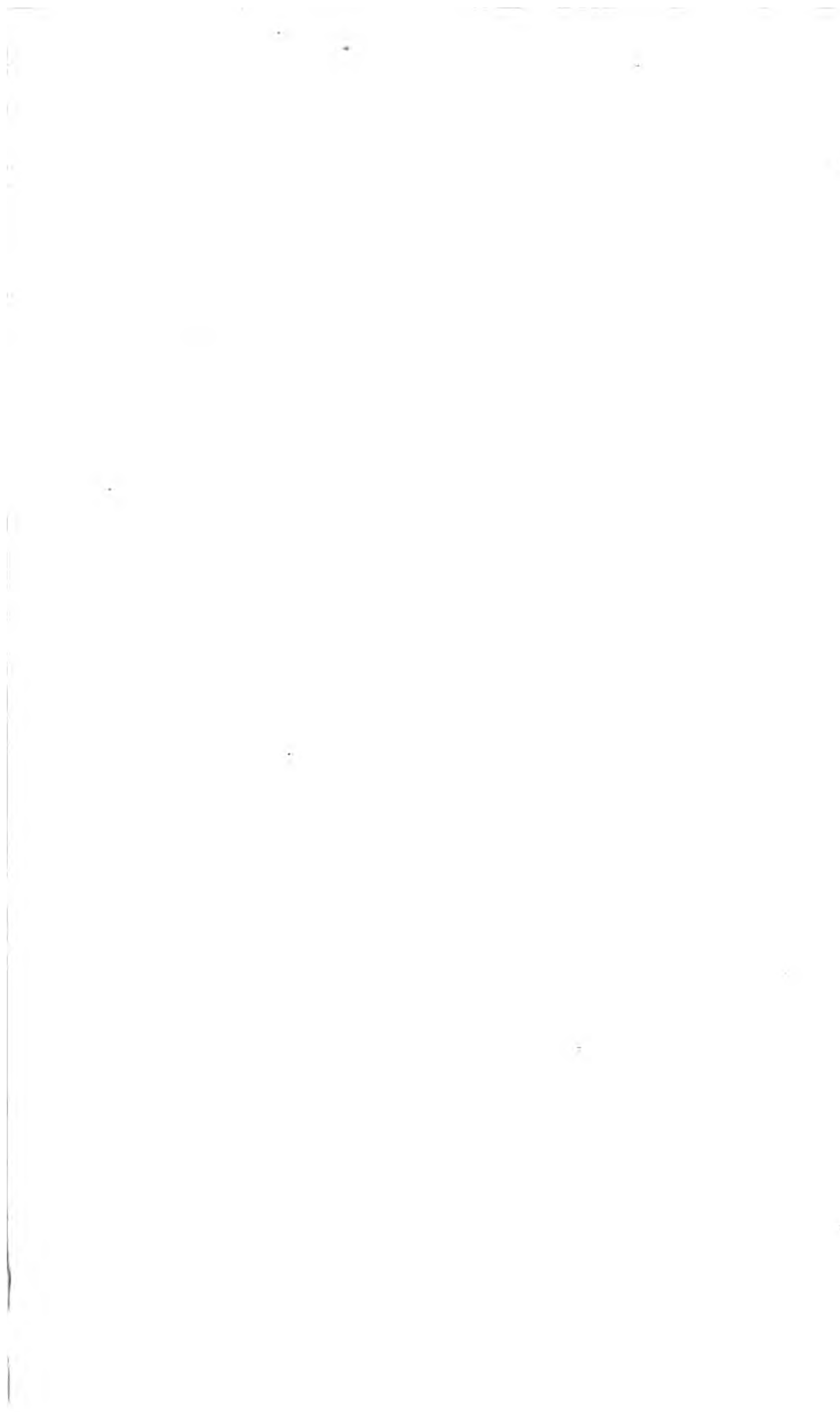


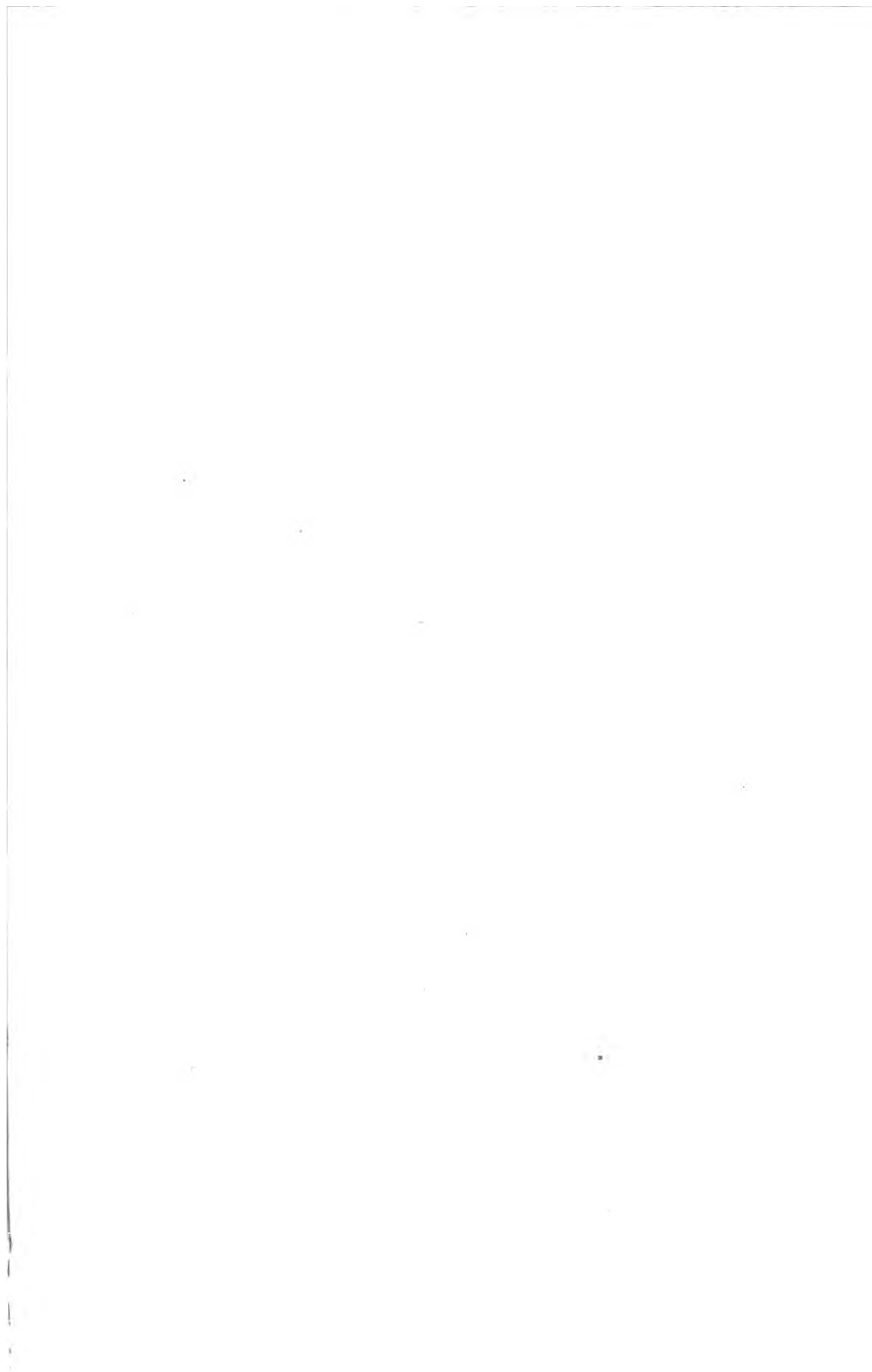


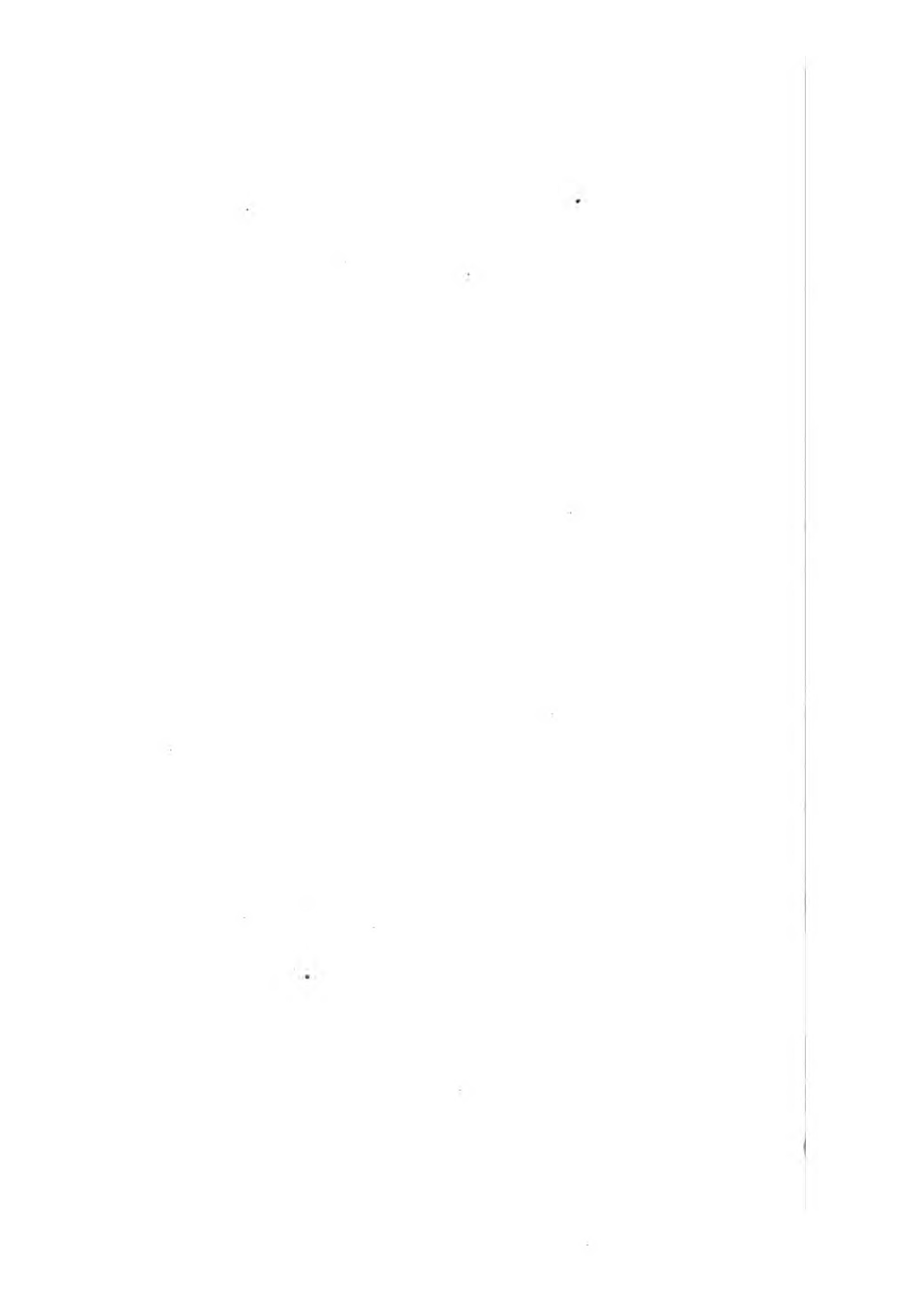












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