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THE

D U M B B O Y .

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[THE following touching narrative is probably founded on the same facts as those which are related in the "Idiot," a little book in our fourth series. The variations are such as might occur, if the latter was written from memory, and with a knowledge of but few facts, and the former from a personal acquaintance with all the circumstances.]

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THE DUMB BOY.



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POOR Widow McNiel! she was greatly to be pitied! but there were few who pitied her—or rather who knew or cared any thing about her case.

Pity, without help, does little good; but it is better than nothing. Poor Widow McNiel was indeed much to be pitied, and it was sad to think there was no one to help her.

Her husband was dead long ago; and her children (the children for whom she had toiled and cared) had gone away to seek their bread elsewhere, and she never heard from them, for those were not days when one could get a letter as cheap as we do now; and where was poor Widow

McNiel to find a shilling or two to pay for a letter from a distance?

But she was not quite alone; she had one child with her: perhaps it was because no one else would have any thing to do with him. For Tommy was a dumb boy, and who but a mother would care so much for a dumb boy? Poor Widow McNiel did care for her dumb boy. Oh! how much she cared for him. To earn enough to give him a bit to eat, was her daily work; and if she could ever save enough to buy him a pair of shoes, or some article of clothing, how proud, how happy she was; though her own apron was almost worn to rags, and her old gray cloak had grown so very thin with age that you could see through it.

Widow McNiel was an apple-seller, and she had a stall in the streets, close by Trinity College in Dublin, Ireland. A very crowded place it is, where all sorts of persons

may be seen constantly passing on foot in throngs; and cars and carriages of all kinds are dashing furiously along the street.

But there poor Widow McNiel sat, from morning to night, and there, sometimes sitting on what is called in Ireland a creepy, (a very low stool,) and sometimes standing by her side, was always to be seen her poor dumb boy.

What was the exact cause of Tommy's dumbness, I do not know. It was not owing to a want of sense; for he seemed capable of understanding, and I must now explain how he showed this.

Widow McNiel was very pious. Religion was her great consolation in all her troubles; and every morning and night, with clasped hands and uplifted eyes, she offered up her humble petitions to the throne of mercy. Many a cold evening, when she had sat all day in rain and wind

behind her stall, and sold nothing—for who would stop in a torrent of rain, or in a high wind, to buy an apple?—the poor woman would sit leaning over the miserable bit of fire on her hearth, trying to dry her old wet clothes; and then would look up to heaven, and think of the sufferings of our blessed Saviour when on the cross, and clasp her thin, hard hands and say—“And sure He looks down on me now, and He knows all my sufferings and sorrows in this weary world as well as I do myself; and bad as they are, they are not a thousandth part as bad as what He bore for me, and my sins—praise be to his holy name. Amen.” And when she said the last words she bowed her head.

Now, Tommy, the dumb boy, as soon as he saw his mother look up to heaven, and clasp her hands, and move her lips, looked up too, and clasped his hands; and when she bowed her head and said Amen, he

unclasped his hands; and said in a devout tone—"La—La." It was very strange, but these were the only distinct words he ever pronounced. Every night, and every morning, he knelt as he saw his mother do, and seemed to pray; but the only words he ever said were—"La—La." God had not given him the gift of speech; that noble gift, which David called his glory, and which indeed is meant to be the glory, but is too often made the shame, of men.

"But God is a spirit, and must be worshipped in spirit and in truth." And who can tell whether the dumb boy's "La, la," did not breathe from the heart a prayer acceptable unto God—a hymn of grateful praise—which his fellow-creatures could not interpret, but which might reach to that God, to whom all hearts are open.

It seemed that Tommy, while he could not talk about religion, knew

its spirit, and felt its influence on his heart; for he certainly seemed to show it in his life: and our Lord himself said of his followers—"By their fruits ye shall know them."

I must now describe how the dumb boy, without speech or language, showed that he felt something of the influence of Jesus Christ's religion.

Many children who have not the power of speech, and a great many children who have, the power of speech, show violent, unruly dispositions; they are a torment to their parents, to their friends, to the people who are with them, and to themselves. Such children, whether they can talk about Jesus Christ and his religion, or not, certainly do not know any thing of its spirit, for Jesus Christ was meek, gentle, forgiving, and, in his childhood, obedient.

Other children are cross, peevish, liking their own ease or their own pleasure, and unwilling to yield to

others, or to give up what they like. These children may be able to talk about Christ, or, like poor Tommy, they may be dumb and unable to say a word, but they do not show that they know the spirit of Christ, for Christ was not fretted even by the ill treatment He received. He pleased not himself, but lived and died for the good of others.

Now Tommy, the dumb boy, was gentle, forgiving, obedient, and loving. Many children in the midst of ease and comfort are dissatisfied, teasing others and themselves:—but in poverty, cold and hungry, poor Tommy always appeared contented himself, and only seemed to think of his poor mother. This then is the reason why I think he was capable of understanding: and this is one of the things that makes me hope that when the speechless child bent his knees, morning and evening, as he saw his mother do, God knew the language of his simple

heart, and gave him his grace and blessing.

The dumb boy *could* not render railing for railing; but he could show angry passions, and resentment in action, when idle or naughty children tormented him. This I am sorry to say was often done by those who ought to have been ashamed of such conduct: for some of the lads who went to Trinity College thought he was an idiot, and used to amuse themselves by trying to provoke him, and rough, idle boys used to call him "Dummy," and run after him in the streets.

But when he was thus teased, all poor Tommy did was to hide his head under his mother's old apron, and say in a pitiful tone—"La—La."

One day a young man who was studying for the ministry, and who was going shortly to be ordained, observed this poor boy when he was teased, and his patience and gentle-

ness pleased him; for it is generally seen that persons who can vent their passions in angry words, show more furious and revengeful tempers; and often will throw stones, or any thing that comes in their way, at those who torment them. So this young man reproved Tommy's persecutors and bade them love him; and then he went up to the poor apple-seller, and asked about her son, whom she was trying to shelter; and when he found he was dumb, he said it would be a great charity to have him placed in the Deaf and Dumb Institution, where he would be instructed, and taken care of. He inquired where Widow Mc Niel lived, and told her if he could, he would send some one to talk to her about it.

Poor Widow Mc Niel scarcely knew what to say. She felt that it would be a great thing to have her dumb boy taken care of; but for her own sake she was ready to clasp him

to her heart, and say she would beg round the world with him, rather than part with him. However, the gentleman did not think of all this, or expect her to give an answer, for he thought it was very uncertain whether he should be able to do any thing, or make any interest to get the poor boy into the institution.

He put a couple of pennies into Tommy's hand, and went away.

Some time after this, poor Widow Mc Niel was poorer than ever. She had not sold any apples; and when she came into her miserable dwelling one evening, she felt very poorly, and she had scarcely a bit of fire, and very little to eat. She raked up the cinders together, and warmed a little tea that had been laid by, and put some dry crusts into it, and gave it to Tommy for his supper; and then she went over to her store of apples, and she took one up and looked at it, and took an old knife, and sat down at the

hearth, and began to eat it. It was all she could find for her own supper ; but as she looked at it, she bowed her head and said, " Well, the Lord be praised ! "

Now Tommy had been hungry, but when he saw his mother was not going to take her tea, which the poor woman dearly loved, he stopped eating, and rose up, and pointed to the stool on which she used always to put her cup and saucer, and her bread, when she had these little comforts ; and he ran over, and got the stool and put it down before her ; and then pointed to the tea-pot with the broken spout, and then to the hearth where it used to be put, and cried, rather impatiently, " La—La ! "

Widow McNiel shook her head, and sighed ; and made him understand that she had no tea and no money to buy any. And Tommy looked very sad, and would not eat his supper till his mother pretended to take a share of it. And then she went and said her

prayers ; and he knelt with her and said his own in his dumb way, and ended it with his strange "La—La:" and they laid down to sleep in their cold, comfortless bed, and who could say that there were more thankful hearts to the God of all consolation, resting in beds of down, after feasts and scenes of joy?

The next day poor Widow McNiel felt very ill ; but she went out as usual, and took her place behind her stall of apples. She sat with her head lowered down and her old cloak drawn tightly round her. At other times she used generally to sit mending some of her dumb boy's clothes.

Tommy must have noticed this change, and whether he knew of his poor mother's illness or not, he seemed to recollect that she had no tea, and perhaps he thought it was the want of it that made her so sad.

We can only guess at what passes in the minds and hearts of those to

whom the power of speech is denied ; and so we can only guess that it was the hope of getting some relief for his poor mother, that made the dumb boy catch hold of the fine coloured silk dress of a young lady, who was passing by, and pulling it to attract her notice, point to his mother, and cry "La—La."

The lady angrily drew away her dress, and hastened on, rubbing it with her handkerchief, where Tommy's hand had caught it, and saying it was a shame to suffer such objects in the streets.

But soon after, Tommy spied at a distance the gentleman who had delivered him more than once from his tormentors. He ran after him, without his mother noticing his absence, and he pulled the young man's coat, as he had done to the lady's fine silk dress, and pointed back to his mother, and said "La—La!" in a very eager tone. Now the gentleman's

black coat was not certainly so likely to be spoiled as the lady's silk dress ; but besides this, I think his heart must have been more tender ; for he did not look angry. He seemed to guess what the dumb boy wanted, and putting his hand in his pocket, he drew out a piece of money and gave it to him.

It might have been as I said, that he guessed what Tommy wanted ; or it might have been that he thought this was the quickest way to get rid of the poor child who held his coat ; or it might have been that God, who careth for all his creatures, put it into his heart to send this little relief in answer to poor Widow McNiel's prayers, and to strengthen her simple faith.

I do not suppose that Tommy could reason much ; or he would never have thought of running away home, as he did, with his money, without considering what a fright he would give his poor mother, when she found he had

gone away and left her; a thing he never did at other times from morning to night. But now he ran away home as fast as he could go; and when he got there, he set to work, and kindled up a little fire, and hung the old kettle over it, and then he went away to the grocer's, where his mother sometimes sent him, for a little tea and sugar; and he pointed to the scales as usual, and then opened his hand and showed his money. So the man weighed him a little tea and sugar; and Tommy caught them with a look of joy, and saying "La—La!" ran back to the house.

Poor Widow Mc Niel was sadly terrified when she found her dumb boy had gone away: she took up her stall, when she saw he did not return, and, though it was earlier than usual, she hastened home. But when she came into her poor abode, what was her surprise! There was the fire made, and the kettle of water smoking

over it, and the stool placed upon the hearth, and her cup and saucer, and two little brown papers with tea and sugar, all left ready for her : and there was her dumb boy standing waiting for her with sparkling eyes ; and as soon as he saw her, he jumped about, exactly like a dog who is delighted to see his owner come home ; and then he pointed to the fire, and then to the kettle, and then to the stool, and cried out—" La, la, la, la !"

And oh ! how she loved him, how great was
her joy,
To think her dear Tom was a dutiful boy,
Her arms round his neck she would tenderly
cast,
And kiss his red cheek, while the tears trickled
fast.

But this was said of some other child, for Tommy's cheek was not red, it was very pale ; he was always sickly-looking.

Poor Widow Mc Niel ! did ever any one drink tea with so grateful a

heart! Tommy made her understand that some one had given him money. It was marvellous how the mother and son understood each other. You would think that they spoke together; and yet it was all by action.

But poor Widow McNiel was very, very ill; she went out as long as ~~she~~ could to sell her apples; but at last she could go no more.

It happened at this very time, that the gentleman who had been studying to be a minister, and who had now become one, was looking for her, as he had heard something about the Deaf and Dumb Institution, and wanted to speak to her. When he passed by the place where she used to sit with her dumb boy and her stall, he thought of her; but she was not there; neither was she there the next day that he passed. He therefore recollected the place where she lived, and went to find her, accompanied by a friend who was interested for dumb persons, and

knew a good deal about the institution.

Judge what was the gentleman's surprise when he entered her miserable, poor abode:—there lay poor Widow McNiel dead upon her bed! stretched out quite pale and cold! And her dumb boy was lying beside her, with his arms over her body, mourning very sadly, and uttering in a most melancholy voice, the words “La—La!” He looked up and saw the gentlemen; and raising himself a little he took the cold hand of the corpse, and lifted it up; as if either to show them that his mother was dead, or to ask them why she was thus, so still, so cold: and as he did this, and looked closely at the shut eyes, and pale face, that used always to smile on him, he cried out more bitterly than ever—“La, la, la, la!”

The young clergyman was very much affected: he went and lifted poor Tommy up, and drew him away

from his mother's lifeless body ; he did not resist, but went and sat down on a stool : cold and pale, and very miserable he looked.

The gentlemen talked together as to what was the best to do with the boy. Tommy seemed to guess what they were saying, perhaps by the manner in which they looked at him ; and he stooped down and took up some of the ashes and dust that covered the floor, and put them upon his head, and then pointing to the ground said, "La—La!"* as if he would inform them that the earth would give him also a dwelling-place, that he should die like his dear mother, for he had none now to care for him, and to love and protect him.

But God is the father of the fatherless, and how much more must he be the father of the dumb boy. He would

* I have been assured that this circumstance is a fact, and occurred exactly as I relate it.

not leave poor Tommy, whoever else would; and doubtless the prayers of poor Widow McNiel had been heard, and there was help and comfort for her desolate child on earth as well as in heaven.

These gentlemen tried to console the dumb boy, by making him understand that his dear, good mother had gone to heaven, that she was free from all her troubles and cares. Tommy seemed to understand them; but still he would look over at that cold face, and point to it, and cry, "La—La!" Yes; we all think more of the cold dust before us, than of the happy spirit that has escaped from it: our thoughts are always more around the tomb, where the body is buried, than in the heaven where the soul is rejoicing.

Poor Widow McNiel was buried in the grave where her husband had been laid: it was in an old churchyard at some little distance from the city.

Perhaps Tommy recollected his father's burial, and that might have given him the idea of putting the ashes on his head to express that he too would follow his parents to the grave.

The kind young clergyman became very much interested for this dumb boy, and after poor Widow McNiel was buried, and while he was trying to get him received into the institution, he took him to stay with himself in the little cottage where he lived, for he was the minister of a parish not more than a mile and a half distant from the spot where she was buried.

The children who were taken into the institution were elected at certain periods according to the number of votes given for each child, and so this clergyman tried to get as many votes as he could for Tommy; and while he was doing this and waiting for the election, he kept the friendless boy with himself.

But all his care and kindness failed

for a long time to console poor Tommy for his mother's loss. He was in a better house, he had better food and clothing; he had indeed every comfort, but he had not his mother, and it was sad to see how he missed her. Every morning he seemed to expect her; every evening he seemed to seek for her; and when he found her not, he went away by himself and wept.

His kind protector would sometimes come to console him; and Tommy seemed grateful to him; and, wiping away his tears, would take his hand and say more cheerfully, "La—La!" as much as to say—"I will be good and try to be happy."

There was one way in particular in which the dumb boy showed that he never forgot his mother; and this was, that every morning, and every evening, he knelt down in the manner she used to do when on earth, and in his own way he prayed. We cannot tell

what he knew, or what he thought, or what he said to God; but God, who knoweth all things, knew as well as if the most eloquent words were poured forth by the lips; and after all—

“Prayer is the heart’s sincere desire,
Uttered, or unexpressed;”

And so the dumb boy could pray without words; and God could hear and answer without words. Tommy could not be instructed in the knowledge of God; but God could cause him to know, and to love, and to desire to serve him.

His religion, poor boy! was all combined with love for his mother: it seemed that when he thought of God and heaven, he thought of her; and that when he thought of her, he thought of her God and of the heaven where she had gone. Happy is it for us when all our memories of those we have loved and lost are thus

linked to heaven : that when we point, like poor Tommy, to the churchyard, where he uttered his most melancholy “La—La!” we can also look up to heaven, and understand better than he could do, that a day will come when those who sleep in Jesus, the Lord will bring with him.

The young minister was obliged to go away, and leave his parish for some little time ; but he left Tommy still in his cottage. It would distress you to see the poor boy during his absence. He could not understand it, and no one could explain it to him ; and I suppose he thought that his last earthly friend was gone for ever—dead and buried like poor Widow McNiel.

He would wander about just like an animal that had missed its owner : his attachment to the good man was never known till then. He would come into the room where he used to see him reading, or preparing his sermon, and

he would turn his eyes all round and round it, and at last when he was sure he was not there, he would say in a low, sad tone, "La—La!" All this time Tommy looked very ill; he was paler and thinner than he had been when he fared worse. He ate little, and often put his hand to his head and side, as if there were pain there. But he was not cross or fretful: he was quieter and more gentle than before; and often sat for an hour at a time, but what he was thinking of, or if he thought at all, no one knew.

The minister came home, and it was well the dumb boy did not die of joy. He did not show his joy, to be sure, very much, but he was evidently bewildered with surprise and pleasure, for he had never known his mother to go away from her home and stay away, for a single night. He held the minister's hand between his, patting and stroking it, and hugging it to his breast, and calling out, "La, la, la!"

in the most delighted and touching manner.

Then he would run about the room, and over the house, as if he did not know what he was about; and carry the clergyman his slippers, and place his Bible before him, and run off and bring him some paper, and pens, and ink: as if he thought he must begin to make his sermon directly.

The minister was very sorry to see Tommy looking so poorly; and he resolved to send him over to the Dispensary, for the doctor to see if he could make out what ailed him; but when the doctor saw him, he said that the boy's lungs were very much diseased.

Some time after this, Tommy came to the minister one evening, and took his hand, and patted it in a very coaxing manner. The minister could not think what he wanted; but Tommy went and took up his hat and his walking cane, and brought them to

him, and then pointed to the door, and said—"La—La!" So he understood that he wanted him to go out.

They went out together; and Tommy held his hand, and the minister wondered where he was taking him; but he soon saw that the dumb boy was leading him towards the church-yard where poor Widow Mc-Niel was buried.

As soon as Tommy saw the grave, he ran forward and knelt down beside it, and pressed his lips on the grass sod that covered it; then he lifted up his head, and clasped his hands, and raised up his eyes, just as his poor mother used to do; and then he bowed his head, and said—"La—La!"—
(See *Frontispiece*.)

The minister stood behind him, and a tear was in his eye. He waited till the dumb boy rose up, and then he pointed up to heaven. Tommy seemed to recollect what had passed when his poor mother lay dead, for he made the

signals the clergyman and his friend had then made : he pointed with one hand to the grave, and with the other to the sky, and repeated twice, "La—La! La—La!" And afterwards it was plain that he wished to show the minister why he had brought him to his mother's grave ; he took up some earth, and put it on his head as he had before done, and then drew his hand over his person, and made an action as if to uncover the grave, and said, "La—La!" The minister understood clearly that he meant to tell him, that when he was dead, he must be put in his mother's grave ; and he replied in the same way, and made the dumb boy understand that he would put him there.

Some time afterwards the dumb boy grew very ill ; and the minister saw there was no use in trying to get him into the institution : for he trusted that Christ had prepared for this poor, forlorn being a mansion in his Father's

house, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens, where even the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

Tommy could not rise out of his bed; and one day when the good minister went into his little room to see how he was, he beckoned him over close to him. The dumb boy raised his thin, trembling hand, and passed it over his person; he then pointed out of the window in the direction of the churchyard; and smiling sweetly, raised his eyes and his hands towards heaven. And by this the minister understood the dumb boy without speech or language, to say—"When I am dead, bury me with my mother, lay my bones beside her bones: and Jesus Christ, who died on the cross for me, will take me to be in heaven, where He also is."

And when Tommy died, his body was buried in his mother's grave; and the good minister hoped, and believed, that his soul was with Jesus Christ in

Heaven: for Christ said of God's own children, "By their fruits ye shall know them;" and the dumb boy seemed to bring forth, in his short, suffering life, some of those "fruits of the spirit," which are "meekness, gentleness, goodness, patience."

And poor Widow McNiel and her dumb boy rest together, beneath the same grassy sod; and simple and ignorant, poor and despised as they might have been in this proud world, we must hope that their hearts could say—

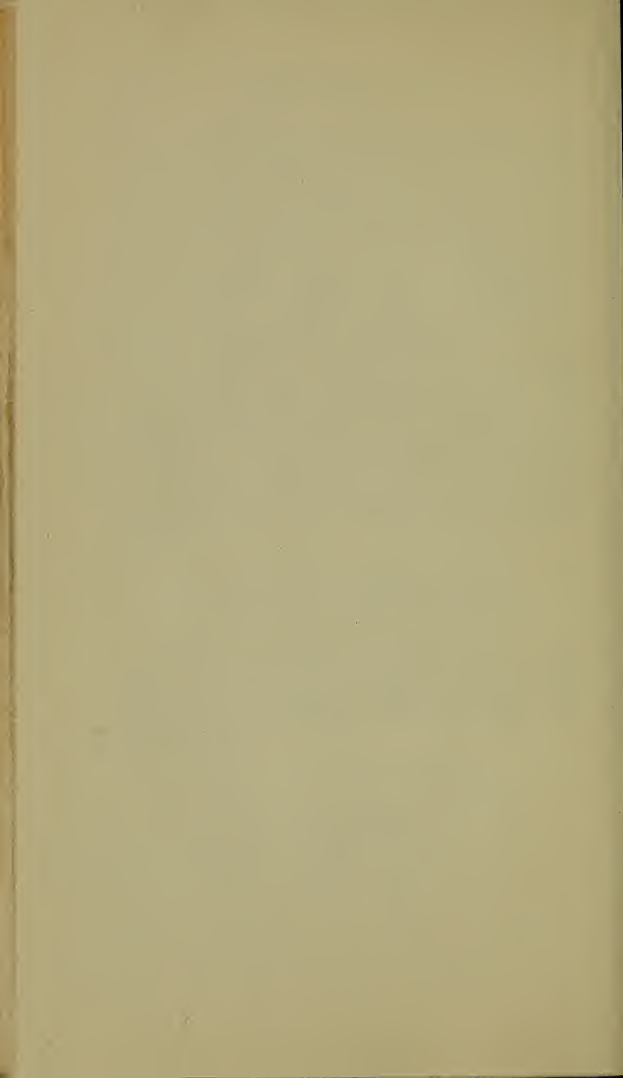
"Poor though I am, despised, forgot,
Yet God, my God, forgets me not."

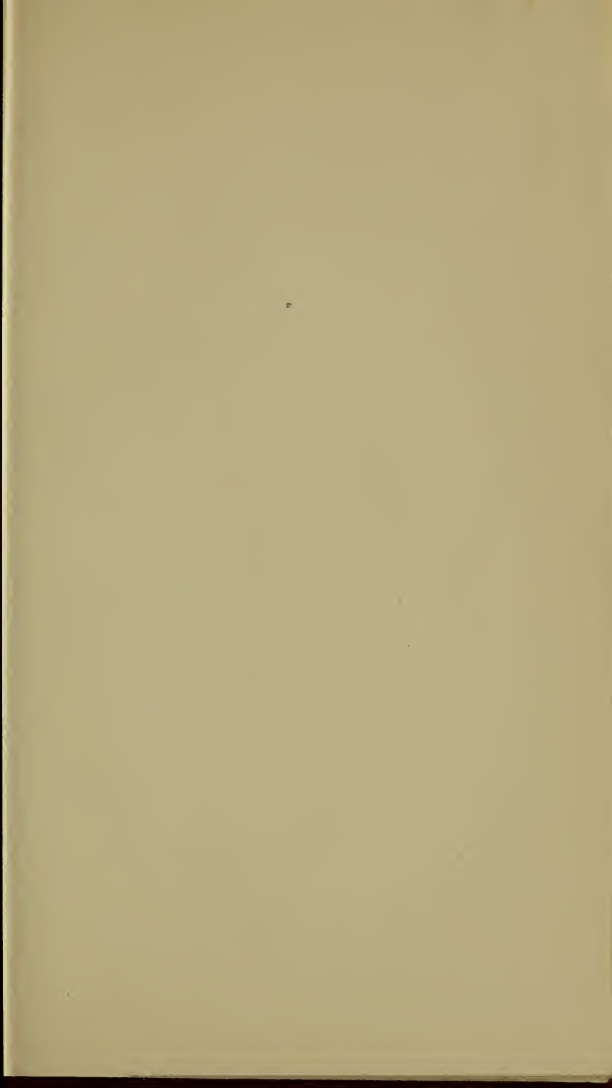
And some among us might be happier, were we to imitate the faith and practice of Widow McNiel and her Dumb Boy

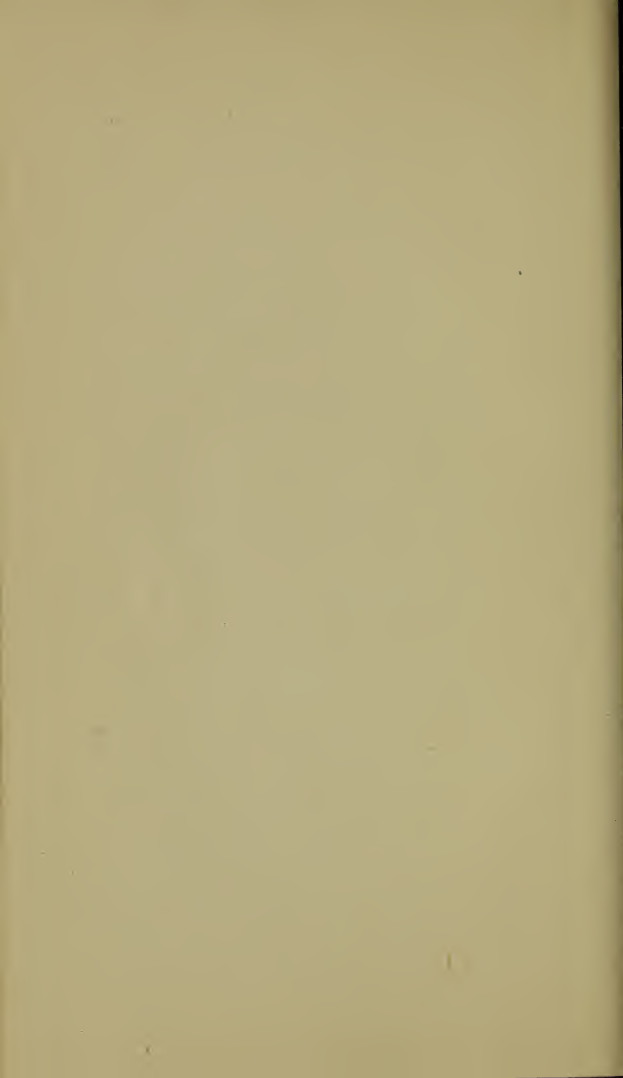
THE END.

Widow McNiel
and her Dumb Boy







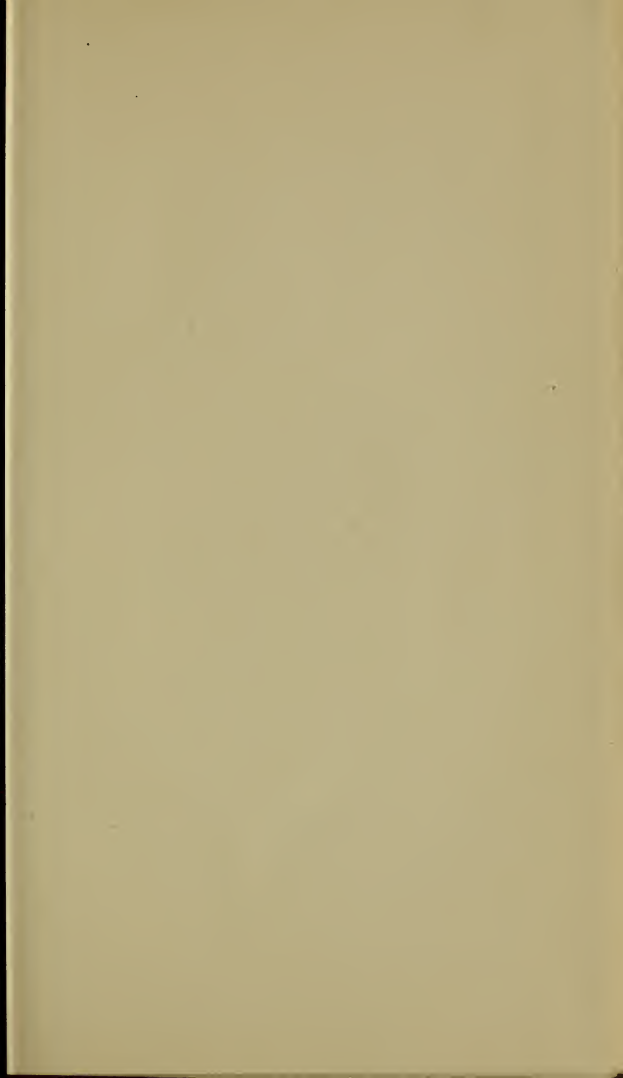






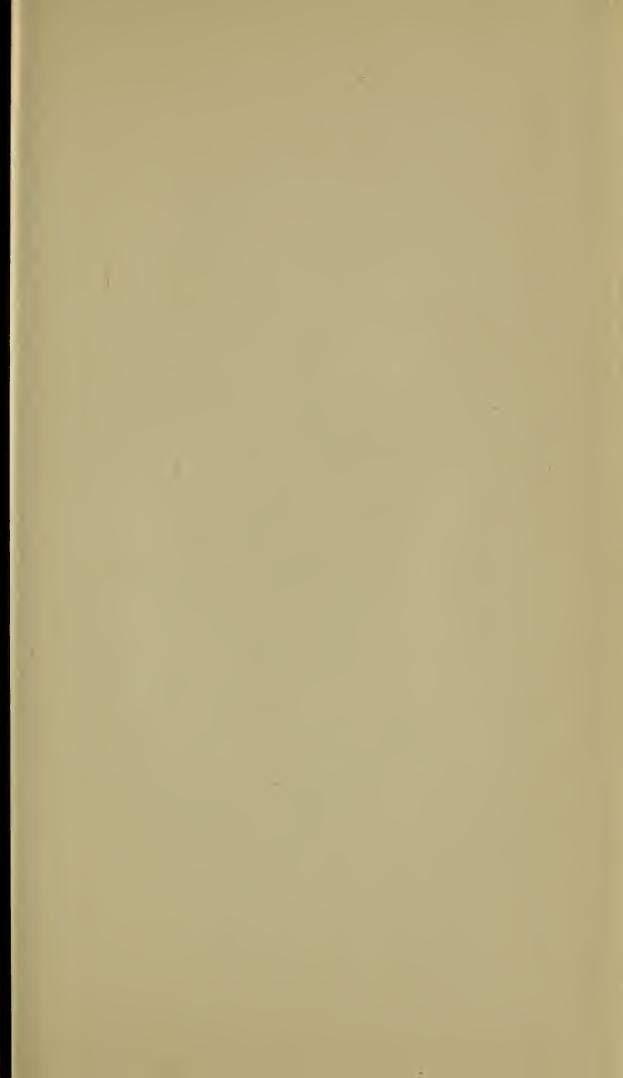




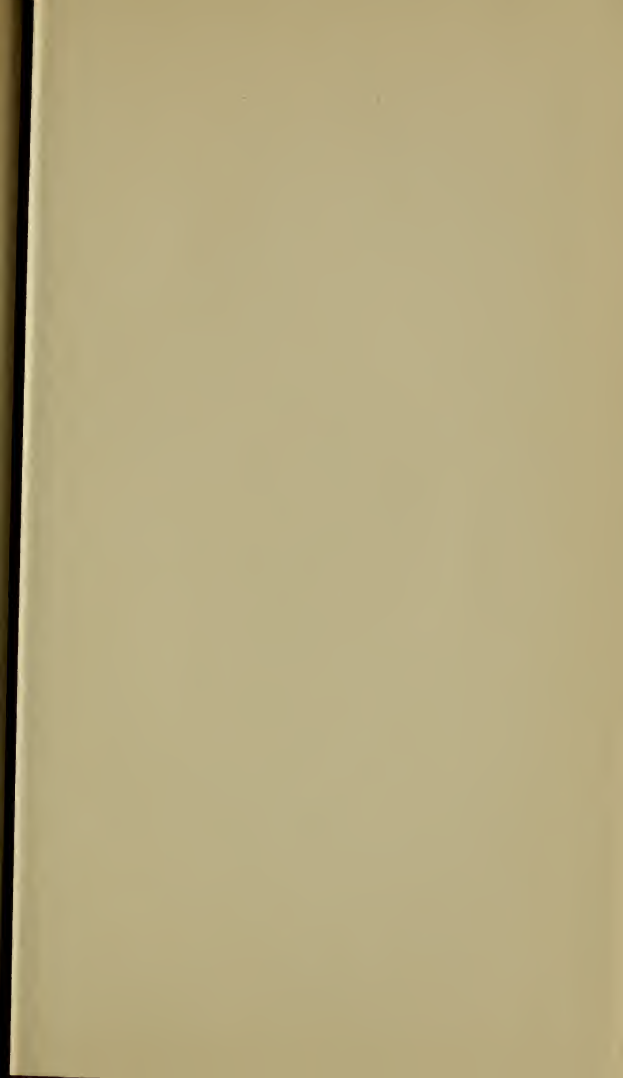




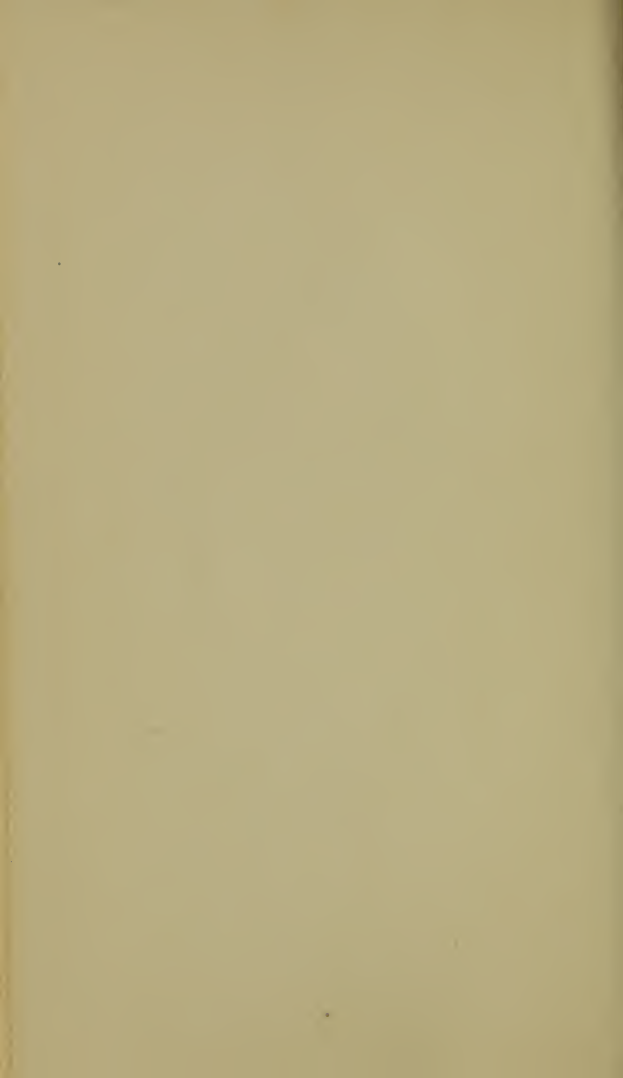




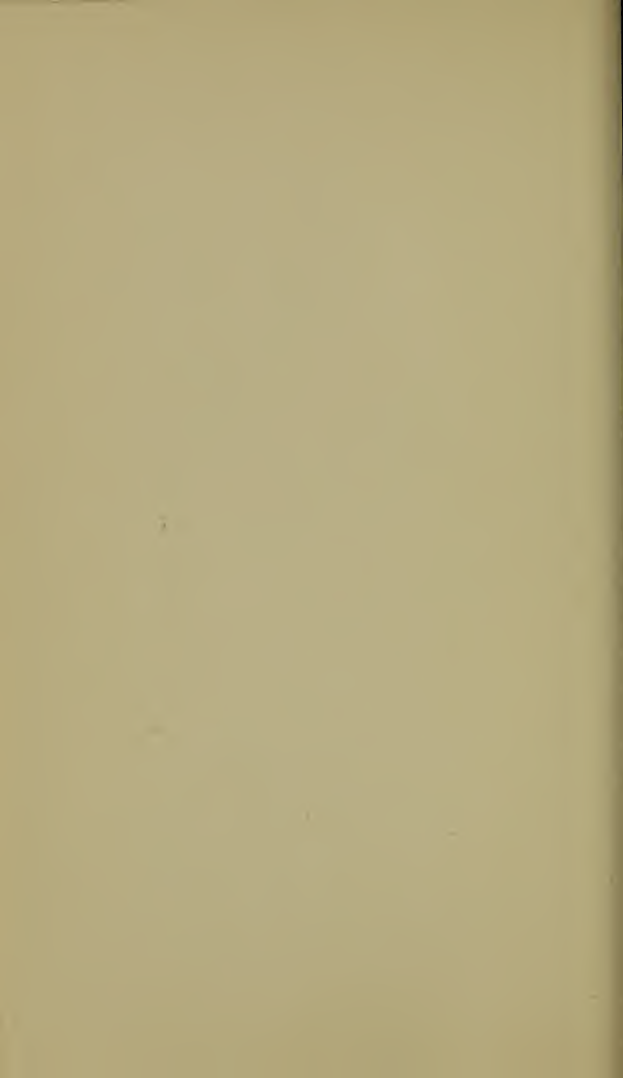


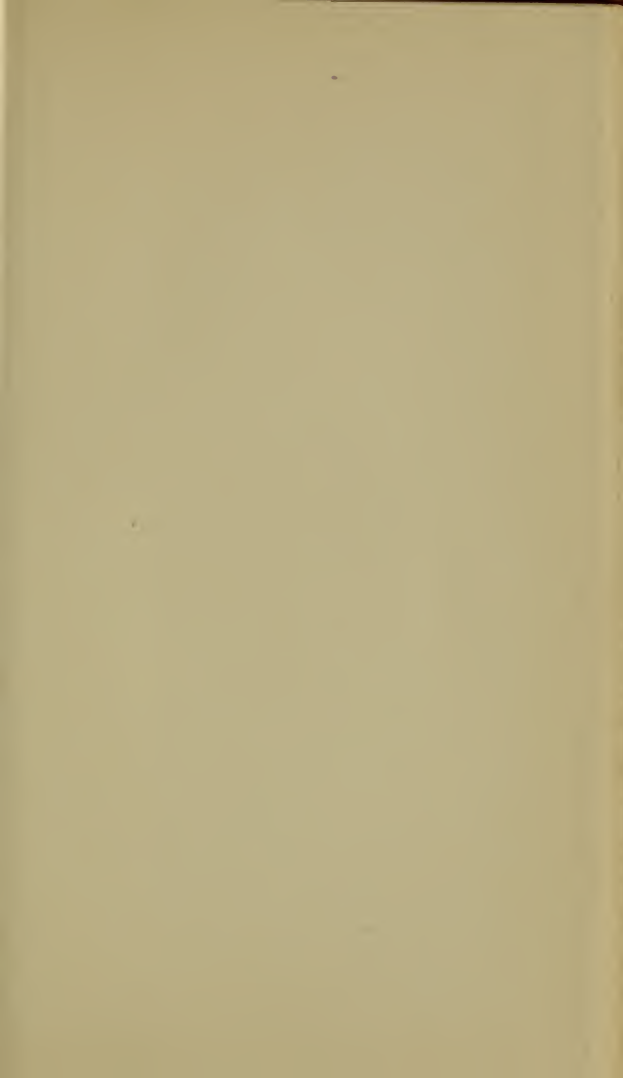


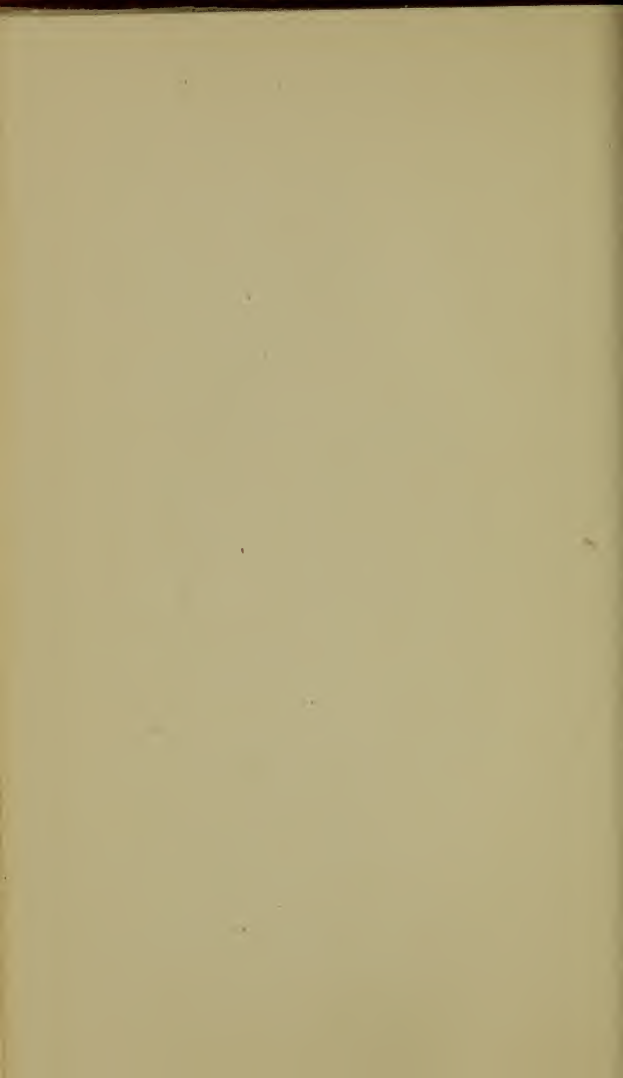


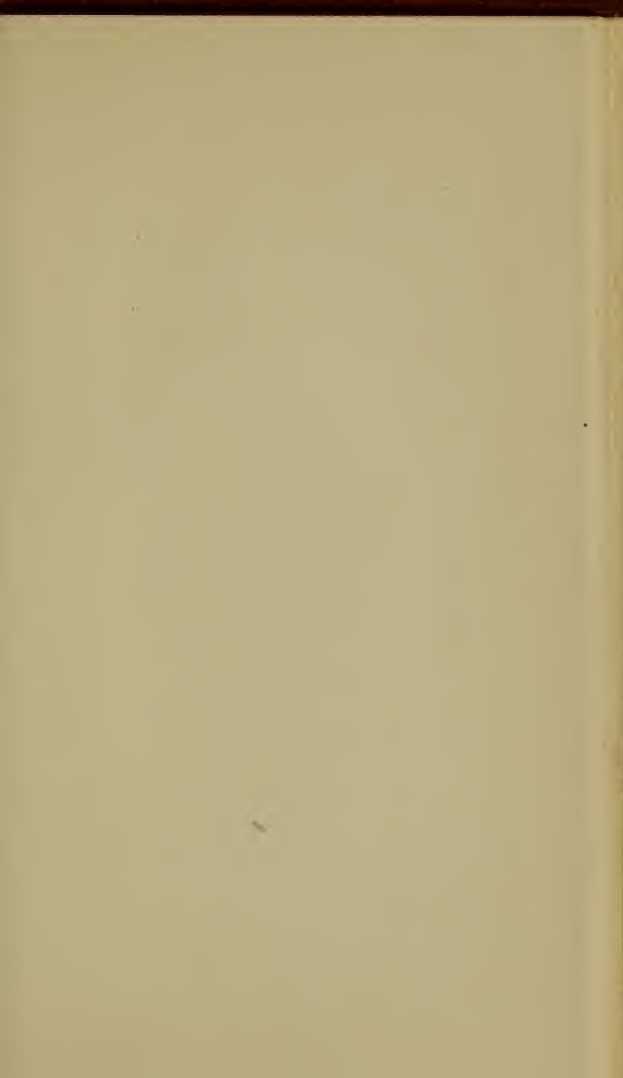






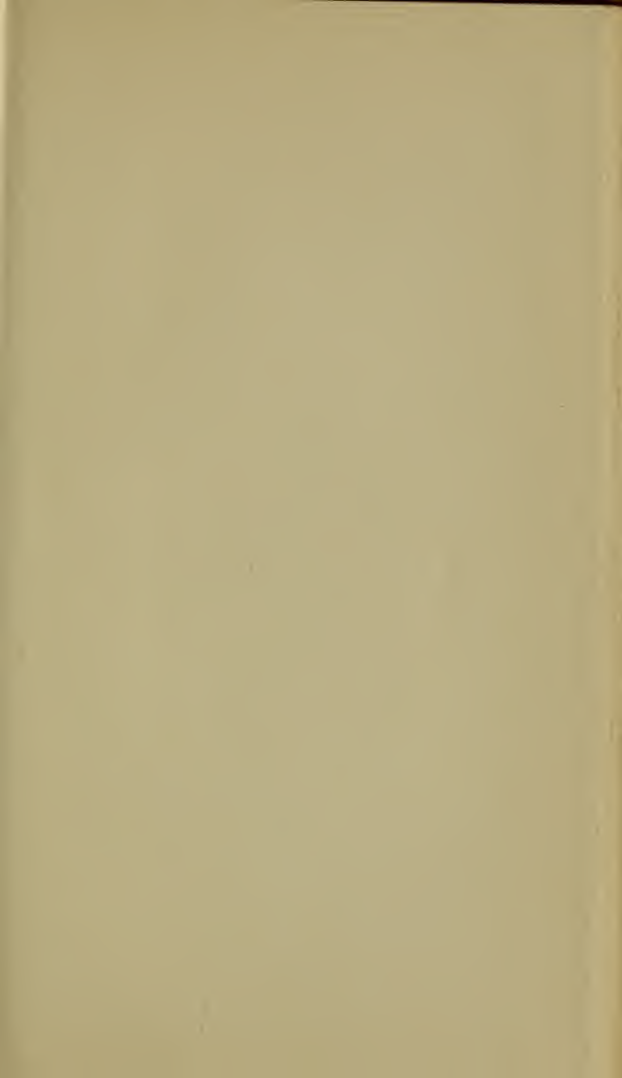


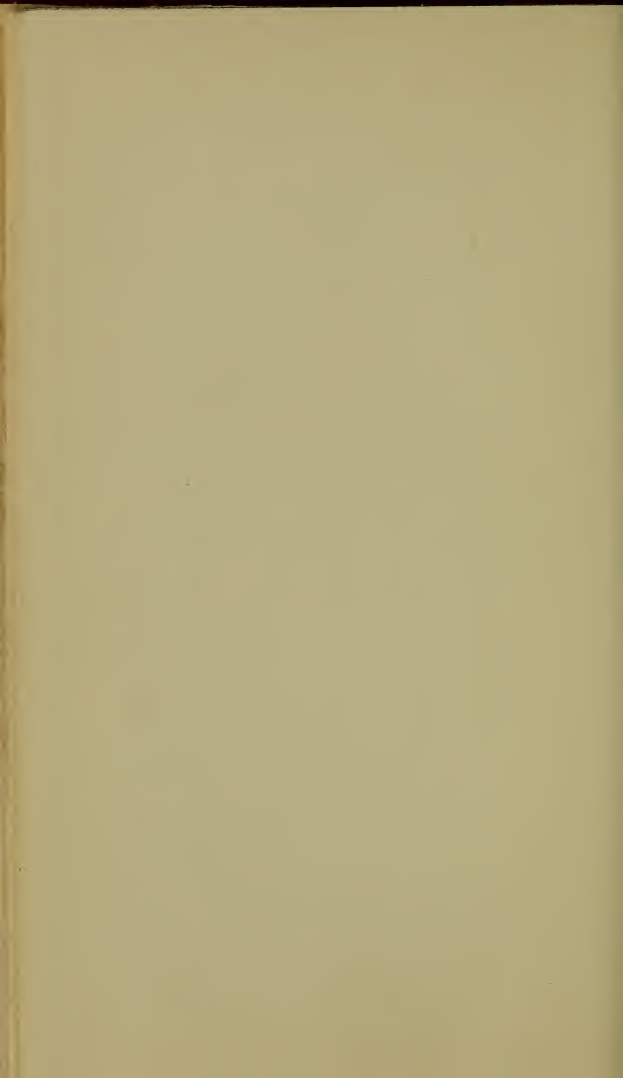




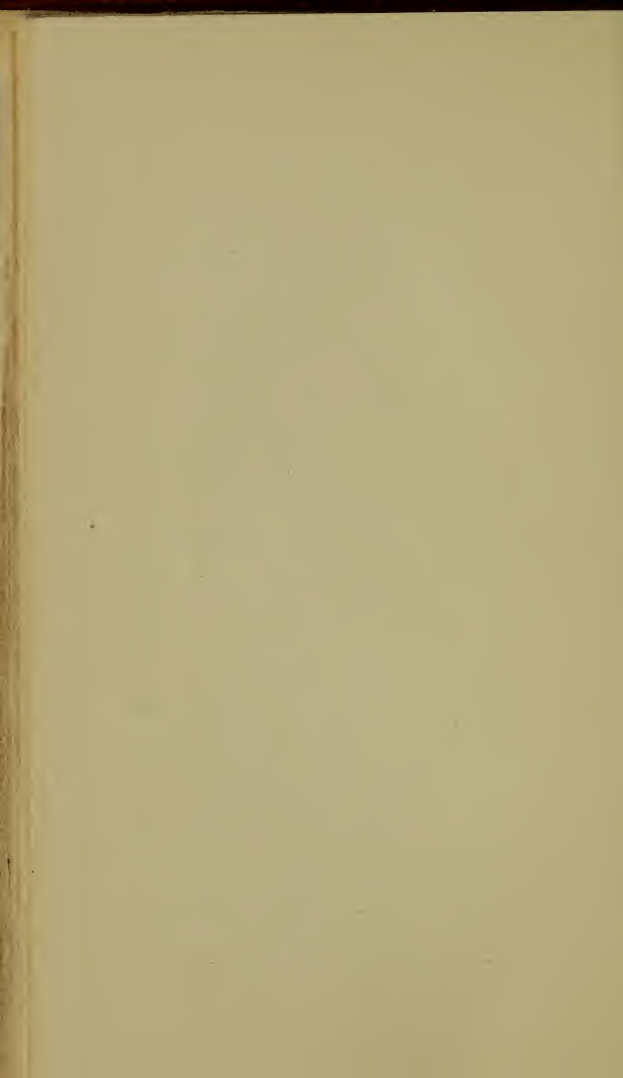


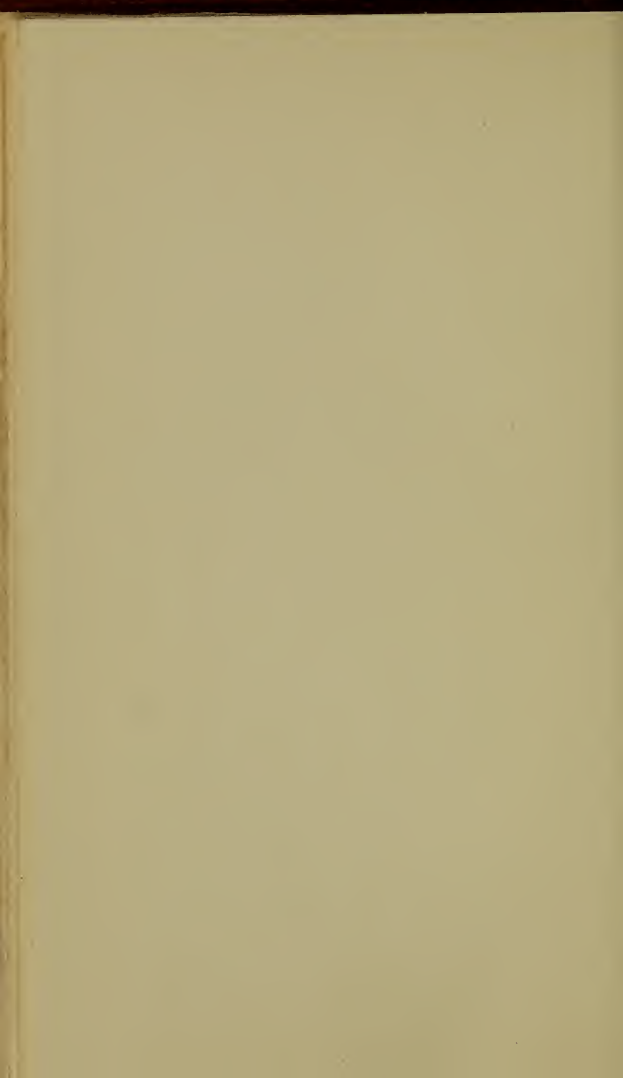


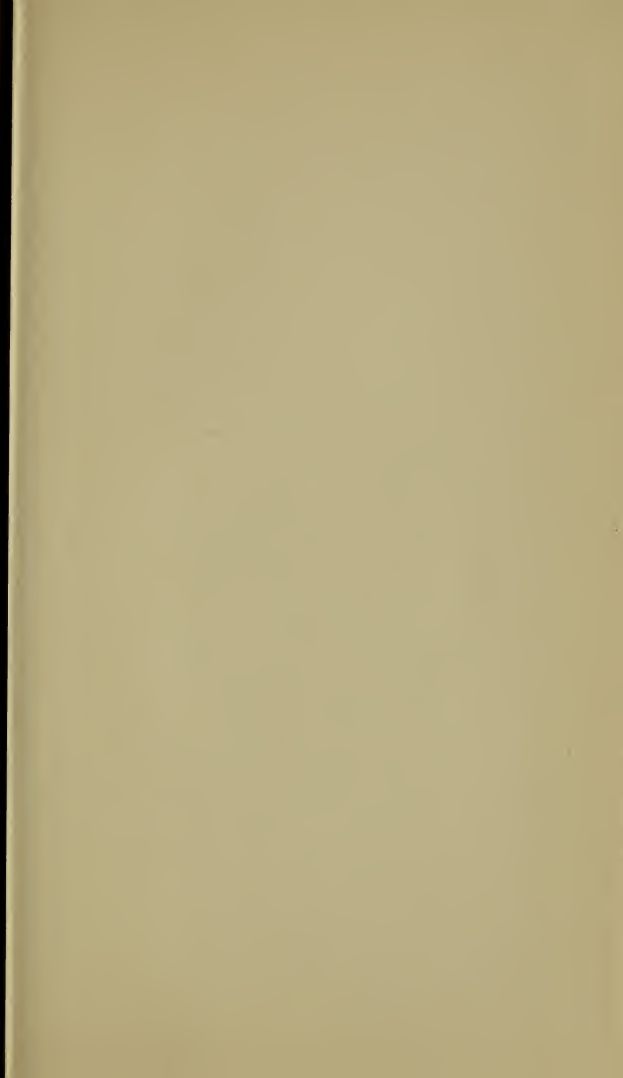


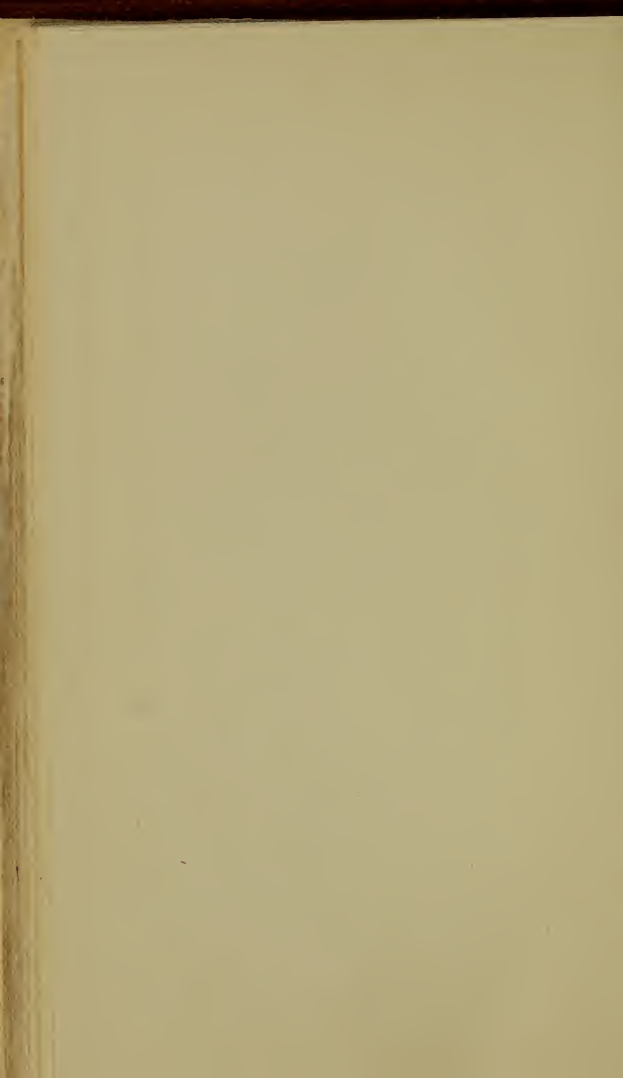












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