

# THE WAY OF A PILGRIM

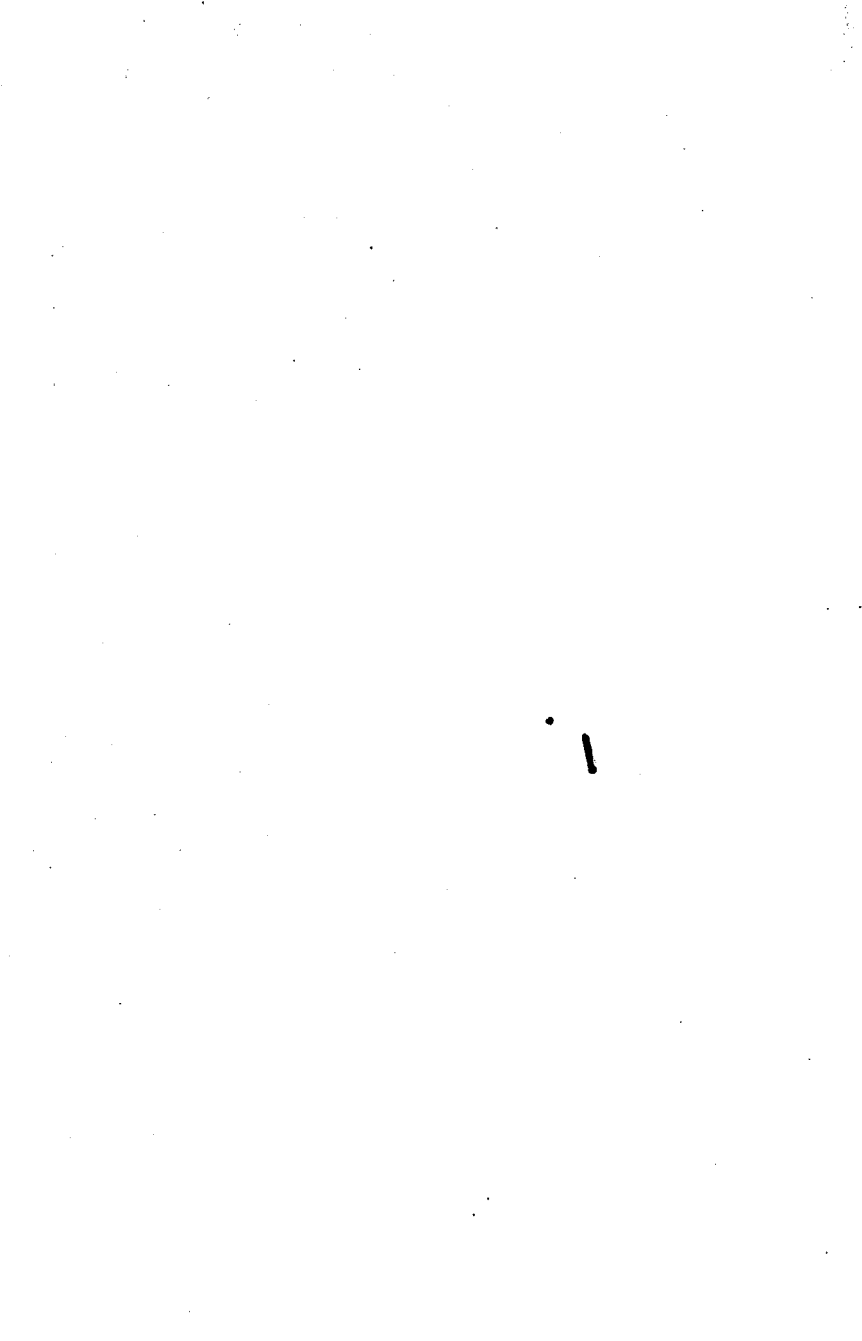
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THE PILGRIM CONTINUES  
HIS WAY

*Translated from the Russian*

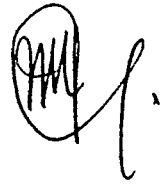
BY  
R. M. FRENCH

LONDON  
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1963



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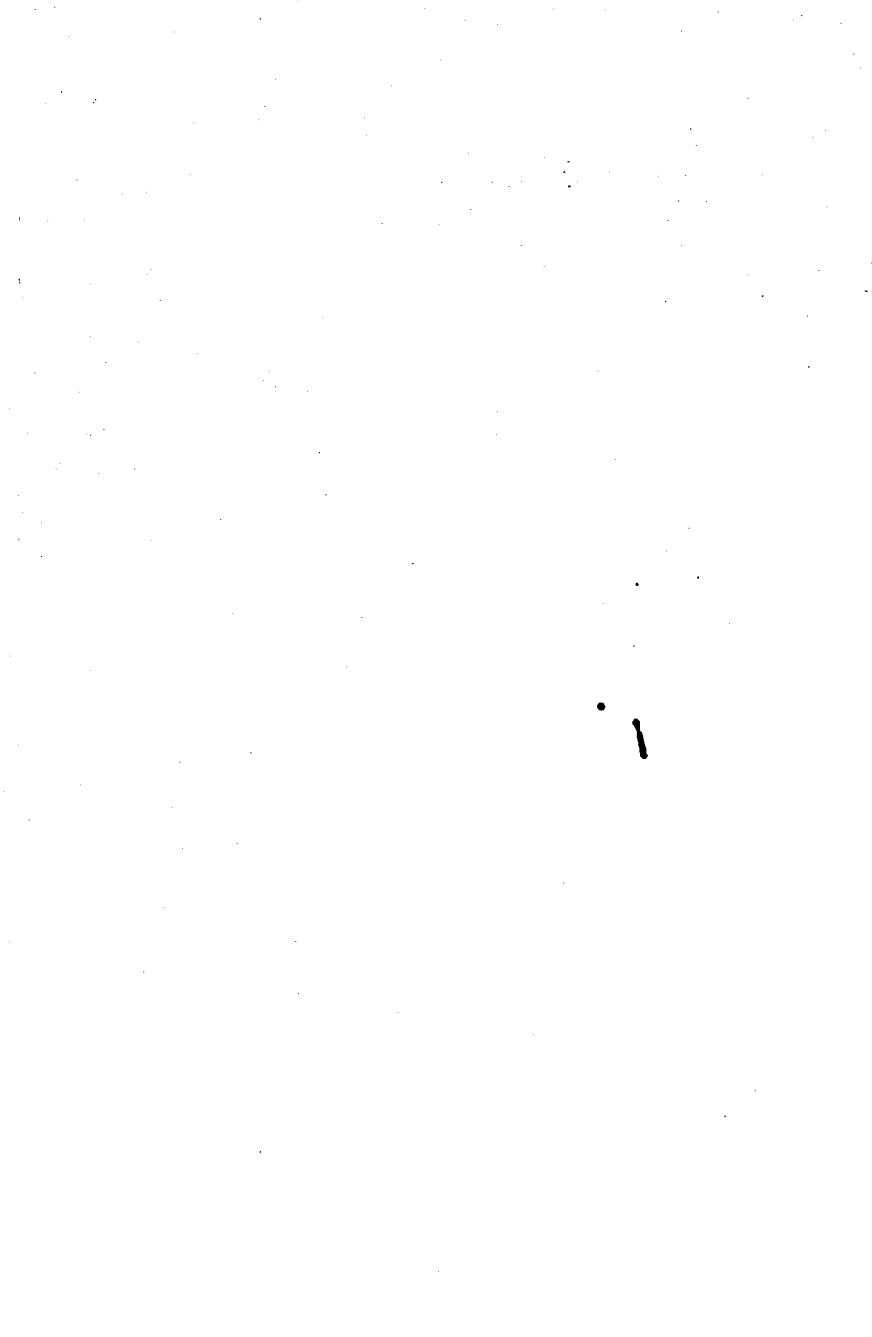
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*The Way of a Pilgrim*







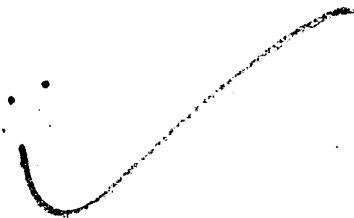
# THE WAY OF A PILGRIM

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## To the Reader

TRY a little journey with this Pilgrim ; for you will find him very good company. You probably will not always agree with his naïve talk ; but your differences from his outlook will afford much fruit for reflection in the silences which he so greatly values : and in any case you will appreciate his entire simplicity and sincerity.

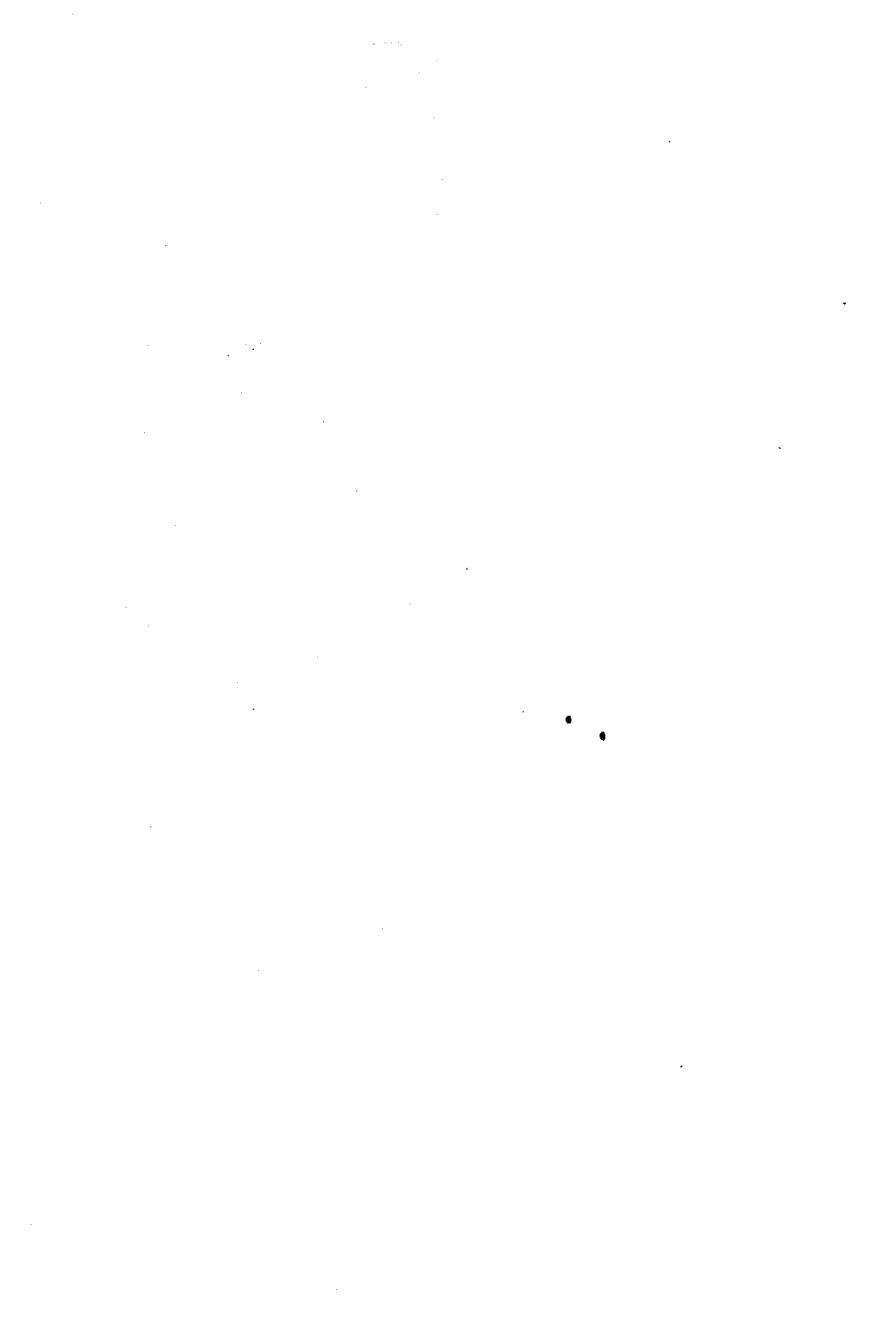
He harps very much on one string, no doubt ; but what a string it is !—a deep bourdon-sound, which runs on, underneath the harmonies and discords of daily life, till it has brought them into unison with God.

If that ever seems monotonous, at any rate there is variety and charm in the vivid pictures of Russian life which illustrate his theme. They suggest a comparison with the matchless folk tales of Leo Tolstoi ; and they do not suffer by such a comparison.

For the religion is sounder. Tolstoi wrote as the artist, who, in spite of his own morbid and restless mind, could depict what he saw and heard, but did not really *know*. Our pilgrim *knows* every bit of what he says : and you will listen, even to the strangest things that he says, with the respect which is due to real, vital knowledge.

I think you will be sorry when, at the end, he suddenly disappears into the obscurity from which he emerged when you first came across him.

WALTERUS TRURON.



## Introduction

THE Russian title of this book may be literally translated "Candid Narratives of a Pilgrim to His Spiritual Father." The title chosen for the English version explains itself and is meant to cover the twofold interest of the book. It is the story of some of the Pilgrim's experiences as he made his way from place to place in Russia and Siberia. No one can miss the charm of these travel notes in the simple directness with which they are told and the clear-cut sketches of people which they contain.

It is also the story of the Pilgrim's learning and practising, and on occasion teaching to others, a way of praying. Upon this, the *hesychast* method of prayer, much might be said, and not everyone will be in sympathy with it. But everyone will appreciate the sincerity of his conviction and few probably will doubt the reality of his experience. Strongly contrasted as the method may be with an ordinary religious Englishman's habits of devotion, for another type of soul it may still be the expression of vivid realisation of the truth "for me to live is Christ."

Those who wish to read more of the *hesychast* method of prayer and its connection with the great Byzantine Mystic, St. Simeon the New Theologian, who lived from 949 to 1022, may be referred to *Orientalia Christiana*, Vol. IX, No. 36 (June and July, 1927).

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The events described in the book appear to belong to a Russia prior to the Liberation of the Serfs, which took place in 1861. The reference to the Crimean War in the *Fourth Narrative* gives 1853 as the other limit of time. Between those two dates the Pilgrim arrived at Irkutsk, where he found a Spiritual Father. He tells the latter how he came to learn the Prayer of Jesus, partly from the oral teaching of his *starets*, and after the loss of his *starets*, from his own study of *The Philokalia*. This is the substance of the first two *Narratives*, which are divided by the death of the *starets*.

The *Third Narrative* is very short, and tells, in response to his Spiritual Father's enquiries, the Pilgrim's earlier personal history and what led him to become a Pilgrim at all.

It was his intention to go on from Irkutsk to Jerusalem, and indeed he had actually started. But a chance encounter led to a postponement of his departure for some days, and during that time he relates the further experiences of his pilgrim life which make up the *Fourth Narrative*.

Of the Pilgrim's identity nothing is known. In some way his manuscript, or a copy of it, came into the hands of a monk on Mount Athos, in whose possession it was found by the Abbot of St. Michael's Monastery at Kazan. The Abbot copied the manuscript, and from his copy the book was printed at Kazan in 1884.

In recent years copies of this (until April, 1930, the only) edition have become exceedingly difficult to get. There appear to be only three or four copies in existence

## *Introduction*

outside Russia, and I am deeply indebted to friends in Denmark and Bulgaria for the loan of copies from which this translation was made. I am very grateful also to the Reverend N. Behr, Proto-priest of the Russian Church in London, for so kindly reading through the manuscript of my translation.

A very few notes have been added and placed at the end of the book. They are chiefly to explain one or two words which it seemed best not to attempt to turn into English.

R. M. F.

## *Note to Second Edition*

“THE Way of a Pilgrim ” was first published in 1930. Its sequel, “The Pilgrim Continues his Way”, came into my hands later and was published separately. The two are now issued as one continuous narrative.

I have added a few more short biographical notes on the Eastern Fathers who are mentioned in the text. All the biographical notes are now printed apart from the other notes and in alphabetical order.

This edition has the further advantage of being illustrated by four drawings especially made by Mr. Hans Feibusch.

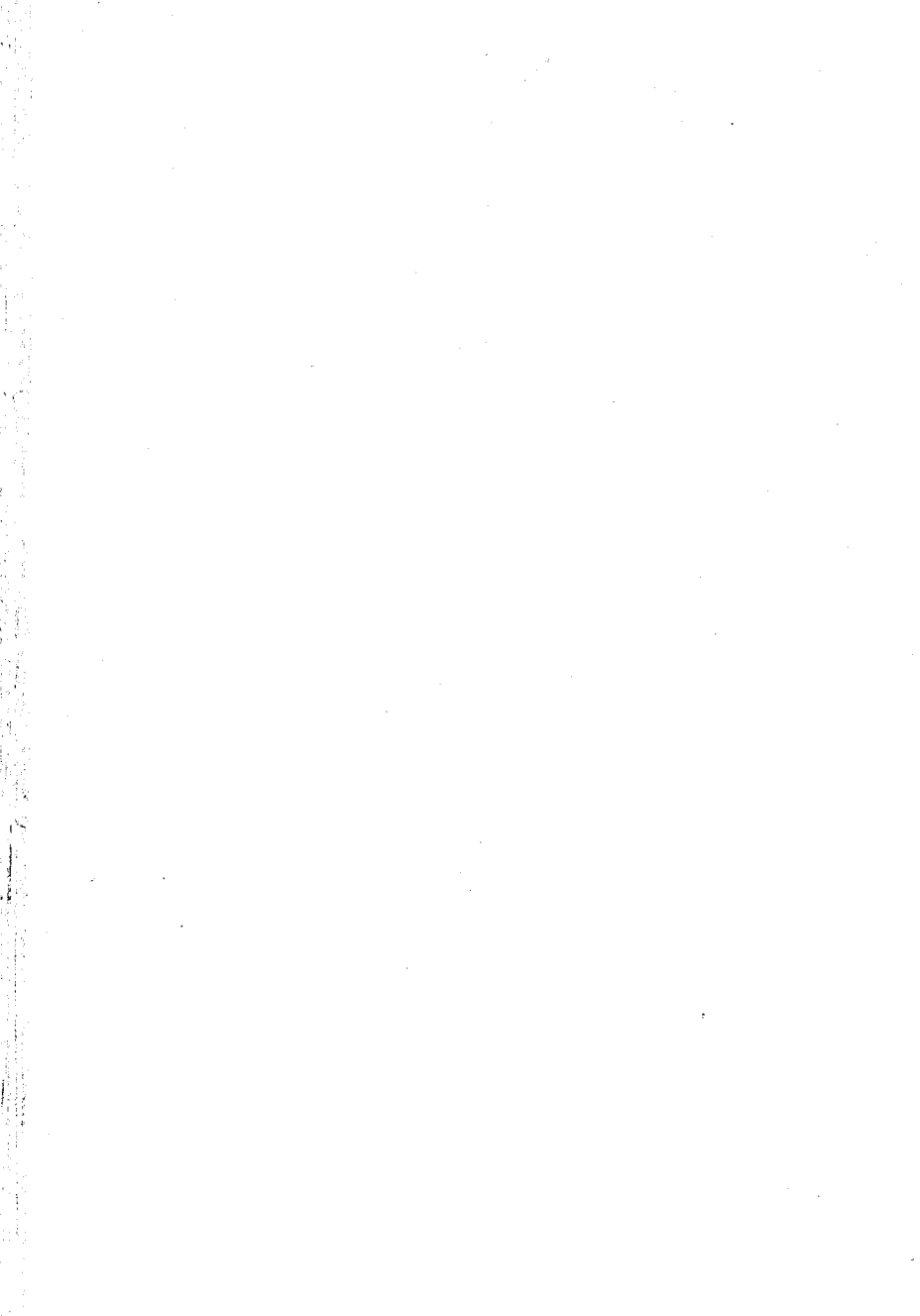
*Hampstead, 1952*

R. M. F.

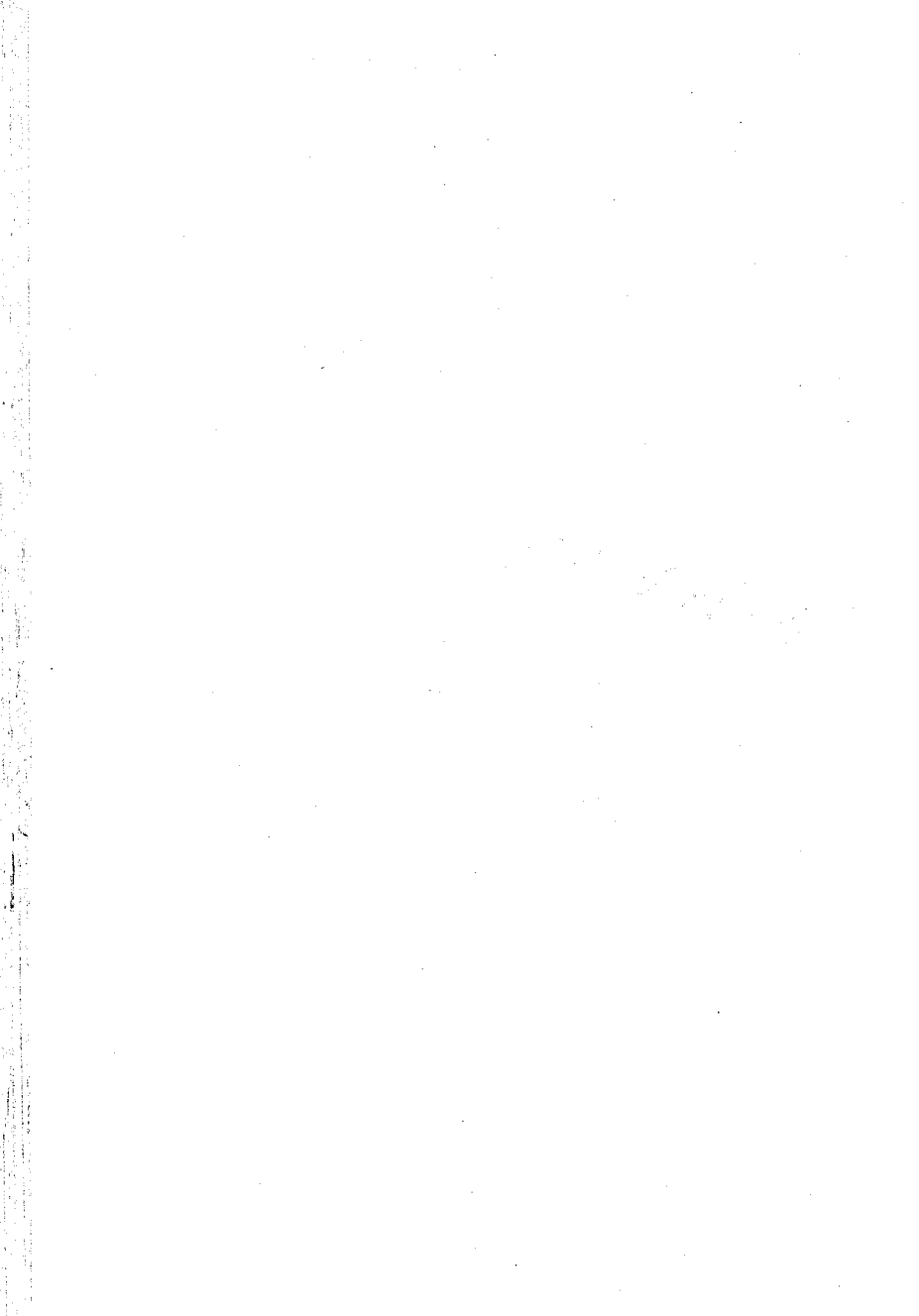
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**B**Y the grace of God I am a Christian man, by my actions a great sinner, and by calling a homeless wanderer of the humblest birth who roams from place to place. My worldly goods are a knapsack with some dried bread in it on my back, and in my breast-pocket a Bible. And that is all.

On the 24th Sunday after Pentecost I went to church to say my prayers there during the Liturgy. The first Epistle of St. Paul to the Thessalonians was being read, and among other words I heard these—“*Pray without ceasing.*” It was this text, more than any other, which forced itself upon my mind, and I began to think how it was possible to pray without ceasing, since a man has to concern himself with other things also in order to make a living. I looked at my Bible, and with my own eyes read the words which I had heard, *i.e.*, that we ought always, at all times and in all places, to pray with uplifted hands. I thought and thought, but knew not what to make of it. “What ought I to do?” I thought. “Where shall I find someone to explain it to me? I will go to the churches where famous preachers are to be heard; perhaps there I shall hear something which will throw light on it for me.” I did so. I heard a number of very fine sermons on prayer; what prayer is, how much we need it, and what its fruits are; but no one said how one could succeed in prayer. I heard a sermon



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**T**HE STARETS. *A year had gone by since I last saw the Pilgrim, when at length a gentle knock on the door and a pleading voice announced the arrival of that devout brother to the hearty welcome which awaited him.*

*“Come in, dear brother; let us thank God together for blessing your journey and bringing you back.”*

*The Pilgrim.* Praise and thanks be to the Father on high for His bounty in all things, which He orders as seems good to Him, and always for the good of us pilgrims and strangers in a strange land. Here am I, a sinner, who left you last year, again by the mercy of God thought worthy to see and hear your joyful welcome. And of course you are waiting to hear from me a full account of the Holy City of God, Jerusalem, for which my soul was longing and towards which my purpose was firmly set. But what we wish is not always carried out; and so it was in my case. And no wonder, for why should I, a wretched sinner, be thought fit to tread that holy ground on which the divine footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ were printed?

You remember, Father, that I left here last year with a deaf old man as a companion, and that I had a letter from a merchant of Irkutsk to his son at Odessa asking him to send me to Jerusalem. Well, we got to Odessa all right in no very long time. My companion at once booked a passage on a ship for Constantinople and set off.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> *Starets*, pl. *startsi*. A monk distinguished by his great piety, long experience of the spiritual life, and gift for guiding other souls. Lay folk frequently resort to *startsi* for spiritual counsel; and in a monastery a new member of the community is attached to a *starets*, who trains and teaches him.

<sup>2</sup> *Philokalia* (in Russian: *Dobrotolyubie*). "The Love of Spiritual Beauty." The title of the great collection of mystical and ascetic writings by Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church, over a period of eleven centuries.

<sup>3</sup> *Dyachok*. A minister whose chief liturgical function is to chant psalms and the Epistle in the Russian Church.

<sup>4</sup> *Mir*. The Assembly of all the peasant householders in a village. It was a very ancient institution, in which the peasants only had a voice, even the great landowners being excluded. The *mir* enjoyed a certain measure of self-government, and elected representatives to the larger peasant assembly of the *volost*, which included several *mir*s. The *starosta* was the elected headman of the *mir*.

<sup>5</sup> *Zavalina*. A bank of earth against the front wall of the house, flat-topped and used as a seat.

<sup>6</sup> *Priests*. The word is *ksendz*, which means a Polish priest of the Roman Catholic Church. The steward, being a Pole, was a Roman Catholic.

<sup>7</sup> *Skhimnik* (fem. *skhimnitsa*). A monk (nun) of the highest grade. The distinction between simple and solemn vows which has arisen in the West, has never found a place in Orthodox Monasticism. In the latter, Religious are of three grades, distinguished by their habit, and the highest grade is pledged to a stricter degree of asceticism and a greater amount of time spent in prayer. The Russian *skhimnik* is the Greek *megaloschemos*.

<sup>8</sup> *Icon*. The icon or sacred picture occupies a prominent position in Orthodox life. In Russia icons are found not only in churches but in public buildings of all sorts, as well as in private houses. In the devout Russian's room the icon will hang or rest on a shelf diagonally across a corner opposite the door, and a reverence will be made to it by a person entering or leaving the room.

<sup>9</sup> *Onoochi*. Long strips of material, generally coarse linen, which

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the Russian peasant wraps round his feet and legs instead of wearing stockings.

<sup>10</sup> *Bashmaki*. A kind of shoes.

<sup>11</sup> *Altar*. In Orthodox churches, *altar* is the name of that part of the building which is known in the West as the Sanctuary. What Westerners call the *altar* is in the East the *throne* or *holy table*. In Orthodox phraseology the *throne* stands in the *altar*.

<sup>12</sup> *Batyushka*. "Little Father," a familiar and affectionate form of address, applied usually to priests.

<sup>13</sup> *Dark water*. The popular name for glaucoma.

<sup>14</sup> The Tartars, of course, being Moslems.

<sup>15</sup> *Samovar*. A sort of urn heated with charcoal to supply hot water for tea.

<sup>16</sup> *Evreinov*. Literally the name means "Son of a Jew."

<sup>17</sup> *Kotomka*. A sort of knapsack made of birch-bark. It has two pockets, one in front and another behind, and is worn slung over the shoulder.

<sup>18</sup> *Starosta*. The head-man of the village community, or *Mir*.

<sup>19</sup> *Near the saints*—i.e., near where they are buried, the Kiev-Pecherskaya Lavra. This was one of the most famous and influential monasteries in Russia and was visited by hundreds of thousands of pilgrims every year. It was founded in the eleventh century, and its catacombs still contain the uncorrupted bodies of many saints of ancient Russia.

<sup>20</sup> From the eighth prayer in the Morning Prayers of the Lay Prayer Book of the Russian Church.

<sup>21</sup> *Lavra*. Originally a monastery which followed the rule of St. Anthony, but later used simply to designate certain large monasteries. Beside Kiev, there were eight monasteries in Russia which bore the title "Lavra."

<sup>22</sup> *The Holy Footprint*. The legend, which is said to date from about the thirteenth century, says that Our Lady surrounded by saints appeared in a blaze of glory to a group of shepherds. The rock upon which she stood was afterwards found to bear the imprint of her foot, and from it trickled a flow of water which subsequently proved to have healing powers. A monastery was later built over the site and the shrine of the Footprint is still preserved in the crypt.

<sup>23</sup> *Pravoslavny*. The name which the Russians give to the Orthodox Church. Literally it means "right praising."

<sup>24</sup> *Raskolniki*. Literally "schismatics", sometimes, called Old

## Notes

Believers. In the seventeenth century Nikon, the Patriarch of Moscow, in the face of fierce opposition, carried through a reform of the Service Books. The Old Believers, led by Avvakum, seceded from the Church rather than accept the changes. The origin of Russian Dissent is, therefore, the exact opposite of the origin of English Dissent. The *Raskolniki* afterwards themselves split into more sects, some having a priesthood and some being without. Some of these sects degenerated into oddities, and indulged in the strangest excesses. But the more sober element among the Old Believers incorporates some of the best of the Russian religious spirit and character. Altogether these sects numbered some two per cent of the Christian population of the Empire at the beginning of the twentieth century. There is an English version of the autobiography of the archpriest Avvakum.

<sup>25</sup> *Podvizhnik*. A *podvig* is a notable exploit, and the man who performs it is a *podvizhnik*. The terms are applied in the spiritual life to outstanding achievements in the life of prayer and ascetic practices, and to those who attain to them.

<sup>26</sup> *Bobil*. A landless peasant, hence a miserable poverty-stricken fellow.

<sup>27</sup> *Solovetsky*. The famous monastery on the group of islands of that name in the White Sea. It was founded in 1429 by St. German and St. Sabbas. The former had been a monk of Valaam.

<sup>28</sup> A *Skeet* is a small monastic community dependent upon a large monastery.

<sup>29</sup> *Acatnist*. One of the many forms of the liturgical hymnody of the Orthodox Church. Its characteristic is praise. There are acatnists of Our Lady and of the Saints.

The *Kanon* is another element which enters into the structure of Eastern Orthodox Services. Further information on this subject may be found in the writer's article on Eastern Orthodox Services in *Liturgy and Worship*, p. 834.

<sup>30</sup> The original has a note here as follows: "From the author's MS. received by Father Ambrose of the Dobry Monastery."

<sup>31</sup> The original has a note here as follows: "In the nineties of the last century there died at the Troitskaya Lavra <sup>32</sup> a *starets*, a layman in his hundred and eighth year; he could not read or write, but he said the Jesus Prayer even during his sleep, and lived continually as the child of God, with a heart that yearned for Him. His name was Gordi."

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<sup>32</sup> *Troitskaya Lavra*. The famous monastery of the Holy Trinity near Moscow, founded by St. Sergei in the fourteenth century. The part it played in Russian religious life has been compared by Frere in some respects to the Cluniac movement (*Links in the Chain of Russian Church History*, p. 36). The Troitskaya Lavra was intimately connected with Russian history, and was the focal point of the national movement which drove out the Poles and placed the first Romanov on the Russian throne in 1613.

<sup>33</sup> *St. Augustine*. The reference is to *Dilige, et quod vis fac*. St. Augustine, Tract on the First Epistle of St. John, Tract VII, Chapter X, paragraph 8, Edition Migne, III, p. 2033.

<sup>34</sup> *Otechnik*. Lives of the Fathers with extracts from their writings.

## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES

**ANTHONY THE GREAT** was born about A.D. 250 in Egypt. As a young man he adopted the solitary life of the ascetic and was perhaps the first to withdraw into the desert to live a hermit life. His influence spread widely and he kept in touch with his friend St. Athanasius the Great who wrote his *Life*.

**BASIL THE GREAT.** Bishop of Cæsarea in Cappadocia in the fourth century. A great writer and preacher, he was a reformer also in the spheres of the Liturgy and the monastic life. The "Liturgy of St. Basil" is used by the Orthodox on Sundays in Lent and a few other days. Orthodox monks and nuns follow the Rule of St. Basil.

**BLESSED DIADOKH** was Bishop of Photice in Epirus. Victor, Bishop of Utica, writing in the preface to his *History of the Barbarity of the Vandals* about the year 490, calls himself the pupil of Diadokh, and speaks in high praise of his spiritual writings. Diadokh, therefore, flourished in the second half of the fifth century. His signature appears among those attached to the letter from the Epirote bishops to the Emperor Leo. But nothing more is known of him.

**CALLISTUS THE PATRIARCH**, a disciple of Gregory the Sinaite in the *skeet* of Magoola on Mount Athos, led the ascetic life for twenty-eight years in company with one Mark, and especially with Ignatius, with whom he had so great a friendship that "it appeared as though but one spirit was in the two of them." Later, after he had been made Patriarch, he was passing by Mount Athos on his way to Serbia, and during his stay in the Holy Mountain one Maxium foretold his early death. "This *starets* will not see his flock again, for behind him can be heard the funeral hymn, 'Blessed are they that are undefiled in the way.'" On his arrival in Serbia Callistus did, in fact, die. Gregory Palamas, in his treatise on the Jesus Prayer, speaks very highly of the writings of Callistus and Ignatius on the same subject. They lived in the middle of the 14th century.

**CHRYSOSTOM.** The most famous of the Greek Fathers. He was born about A.D. 345 at Antioch in Syria, and was trained as a lawyer. At the age of thirty-five, however, he was baptized and later ordained. He became Archbishop of Constantinople, in which office he led a life

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of ascetic simplicity, and was celebrated for his writings and sermons. (The name means "golden-mouthed.") He died in 407.

**EPHRAEM THE SYRIAN.** The great Syriac writer, poet, and commentator, of the 4th century. He was ordained deacon but in humility refused any higher order. The bulk of his vast output of literary work was written in verse and upon many varieties of theological subjects. He was a notable champion of orthodoxy especially against Marcion and in defence of the creed of Nicaea. He died at Edessa about A.D. 373.

**GREGORY PALAMAS.** A 14th-century monk of Athos and the outstanding defender on dogmatic grounds of Hesychasm (see **SIMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN**), to which the Council of St. Sophia gave the official approval of the Orthodox Church in 1351. Palamas died as Archbishop of Thessalonika in 1359.

**GREGORY THE SINAITE** took the habit in the monastery on Mount Sinai about the year 1330. Later he went to Mount Athos, where he stimulated the contemplative life. He also founded three great Lavras in Macedonia, and taught the practice of unceasing prayer. Callistus, the Patriarch of Constantinople, a former pupil of his, wrote his *Life*.

**INNOCENT** was one of the great Russian missionaries of the 18th century. By the appointment of Peter the Great he was consecrated to be the first Bishop of Pekin, but the Chinese refused to allow the establishment of the bishopric in that city, and Innocent became Bishop of Irkutsk. He laboured as a missionary bishop for some ten years and died at Irkutsk in 1731.

**ISIKHI** was a native of Jerusalem and in his early years a pupil of Gregory the Theologian. He retired to one of the hermitages in Palestine for some years, but became a priest in the year 412 and established a great reputation as a teacher and interpreter of Holy Scripture. The date of his death is given as 432-433.

**JOHN OF DAMASCUS.** The famous theologian and hymn-writer who lived in Palestine in the 8th century and is honoured in East and West alike. His great work, *The Fountain of Knowledge*, is concerned with religious philosophy and dogmatic theology. A man of immense learning in many fields, he is well known for his three treatises in defence of the "Images" (Icons). One or two of St. John Damascene's very large output of "hymns" are to be found in English

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hymn-books, e.g., "Come ye faithful, raise the strain," "The Day of Resurrection," "What sweet of life endureth."

JOHN KARPATISKY. Nothing certain seems to be known about this writer. But Photius speaks of reading a book which contained, beside writings of Diadokh and Nil, a section by John Karpathisky entitled, "A consoling word to the monks who have turned to him for consolation from India." This has been taken to imply that he was a contemporary of Diadokh and Nil, and belongs to the fifth century. Karpathos is an island between Rhodes and Crete, and he was presumably either a native of the island or lived there for some time.

KASSIAN THE ROMAN was born between 350 and 360, probably in the neighbourhood of Marseilles. His parents were well-known people and wealthy, and he received a good education. He went to the East and became a monk at Bethlehem. About two years later, hearing of the ascetic achievements of the Egyptian Fathers, he went with a friend, German, to visit them. This was about the year 390. Except for a short visit to their own monastery in 397, the friends stayed among the Egyptian hermits until the year 400. In that year they went to Constantinople, where they were received by St. John Chrysostom, who ordained Kassian deacon and German priest. The two friends were among those who were sent in 405 to Rome by the friends of Chrysostom to seek help for him when he was imprisoned. Kassian did not return to the East, but spent the rest of his life in his native land, still practising the severe asceticism he had learned in Egypt. He left some twelve volumes on the constitution and ordering of the monastic life, written, it is said, at the request of many in whom the monasteries he founded inspired great admiration. He died in 435 and is commemorated by the Orthodox on February 29.

MACARIUS THE GREAT (of Egypt) was the son of a peasant and himself a shepherd. Feeling a strong attraction to the hermit life, he retired to a cell near his own village and later withdrew with some other monks into the desert on the borders of Libya and Egypt. He was ordained priest and became the head of the brotherhood. He suffered at the hands of the Arians for his rigid orthodoxy, and died in the year 390 in the desert at the age of ninety, having spent sixty years in solitude. Miraculous power and the gift of prophecy were attributed to him. He left numerous writings on the spiritual life. His relics are venerated at Amalfi.

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MARK THE PODVIZHNIK was one of the most notable of the Egyptian Fathers, but little is known of his life. He is said to have been mild and gentle, to have had such love of the study of Holy Scriptures that he knew both the Old and New Testaments by heart. He is supposed to have lived beyond the age of a hundred years, and to have died at the beginning of the fifth century. He left behind him the memory of his deep spirituality and of his devotion to Holy Communion; but few of the numerous writings ascribed to him have survived.

NICEPHORUS THE RECLUSE was a great ascetic of Mount Athos, who died shortly before 1340. He was the director of Gregory of Salonika (Palamas).

NICETAS STETHATUS was a presbyter of the Studium in the eleventh century, and pupil of St. Simeon the New Theologian, whose virtues and wisdom he absorbed to such an extent that he was said to shine as the twin sun of his teacher.

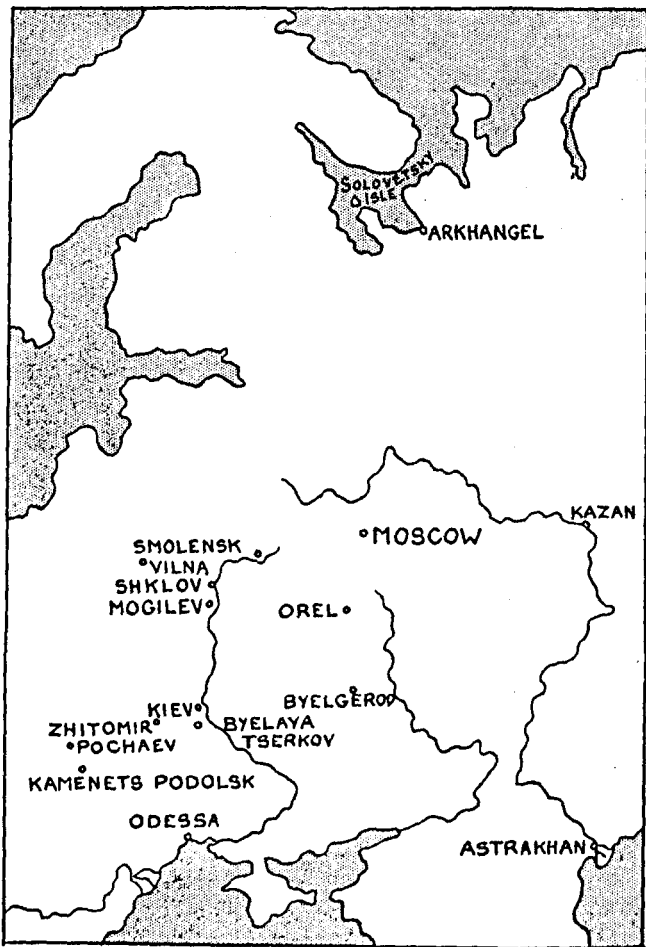
PHILOTHEUS was *igumen* (abbot) of the Slav monastic community on Mount Sinai, but at what date is not known.

SIMEON THE NEW THEOLOGIAN died in the first half of the eleventh century. He was a monk of the Studium in Constantinople, and a great visionary and mystic. His visions began when he was a boy of fourteen. *The Method* (i.e., the *Hesychast* method of prayer, the way of using the Jesus Prayer) has been attributed to him, but Hausherr gives reasons for concluding that he was not the author, though his influence contributed to the spread of the method. Various explanations of his name have been given, and it has sometimes been translated as "Simeon the Young, the theologian"; but according to Nicetas Stethatus, who wrote his life, the name recalls St. John the Divine, and so would mean "the new St. John." An examination of the whole subject of the *Hesychast* method and its connection with Simeon is to be found in *Orientalia Christiana*, vol. ix, No. 36, June-July, 1927.

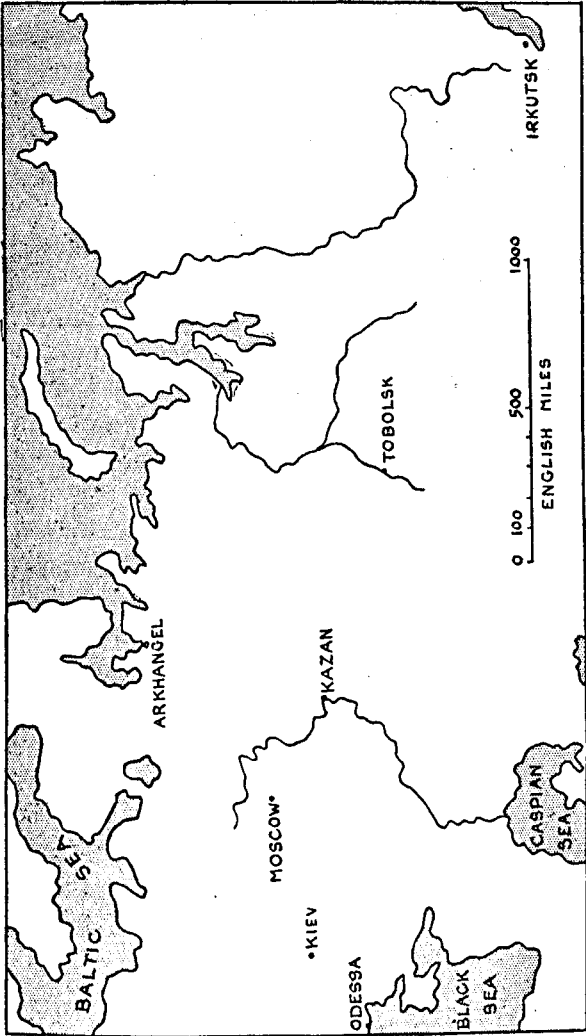
ST. JOHN OF THE LADDER, or KLIMAX, lived for forty years in a cave at the foot of Mount Sinai. Then he became Abbot of the Monastery on the Mountain. He died about 600. He wrote a book called *The Ladder to Paradise*, and from this he derives his name. *The Ladder* has been translated into English.

THEOLEPT. A monk of Mount Athos, and later Metropolitan of Philadelphia. Among his pupils at Athos was Gregory Palamas.

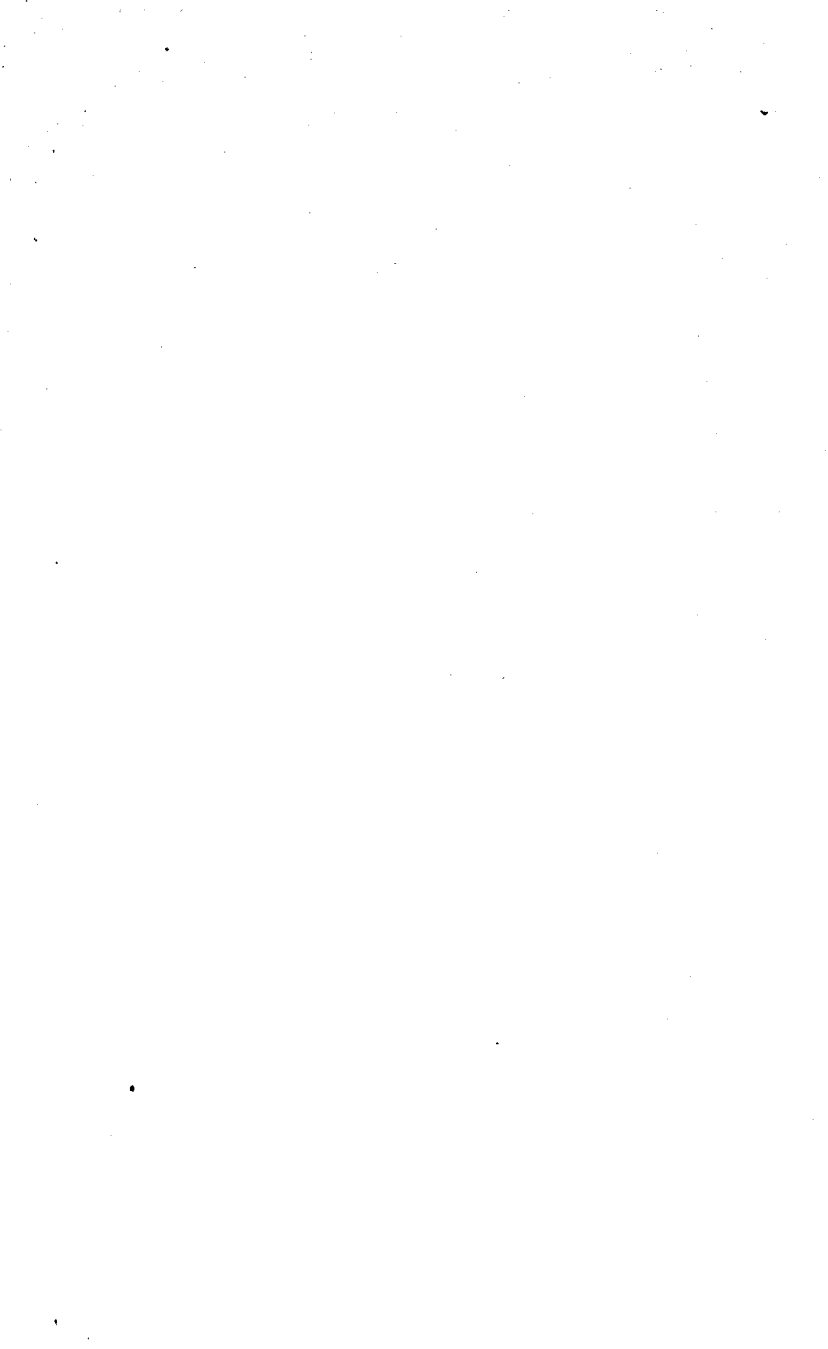
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