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LAFAYETTE HOUGHTON BUNNELL, M.D., DISCOVERER OF THE YOSEMITE

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BALTIMORE, MD.

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FEW great discoveries have passed into history without the controversy of conflicting claims, whether it be the discovery of an America or of a telephone, of antisepsis or a Sims's speculum, or the operation for fistula. The thoughtful student of history will, I think, conclude that there is often much to be said in justification of many of these forgotten priority disputants, and that almost invariably some meed of credit denied by a careless posterity is their due.

The busy working world, dramatic in its impulses, and too pressed to stop to analyze claims to adjudicate varying degrees of merit, gladly seizes a prominent, much advertised name which has caught its fancy and adopts that as the best peg for memory's facts. If, as with Marion Sims in his vesicovaginal fistula operation, the world learns that he has persisted through years of discouraging effort, and through thirty or forty operations on a poor negro wench until at last the success, which had eluded centuries of effort, crowns his skill, and if it then sees him quit his plantation home and journey abroad to teach the great surgeons of the world how to operate, and then to cap the climax beholds him bemedalled and honored by kings, queens and potentates, while arousing the jealousy of eminent competitors—then the world gives a sigh of satisfaction and rests content, and writes that name down on the page of history as the indisputable claimant. Usually the world is correct in its estimate, but it still remains the grateful task of the student of history to scrutinize more closely the events leading up to the great discovery and to assign varying degrees of merit to forgotten heroes who have toiled to lay the foundation on which to erect the monument. I do not note that this subsequent investigation of the contributing factors with the assigning of a share of credit to others has ever yet hurt the principal claimant; rather is his merit enhanced as he stands thus *primus inter pares*.

With these obvious and salutary reflections I would lead up to a matter in which, among other claimants, not too pressing, the true discoverer has been forgotten, and I would here reassert his claim to an important discovery; I refer to Lafayette Houghton Bunnell, M.D., the discoverer of the Yosemite Valley of California in the year 1851. The importance of the matter lies in the fact that in all this vast country there exists no such remarkable grandiose scenery as in the Yosemite; we are glad, therefore, to hail a fellow craftsman as the one whose imagination was first fired by the mystery of the park, who kept it in mind and eagerly embraced the first opportunity to enter, and who journeyed in with a juvenile enthusiasm and then and there proposed its name—"Yosemite."

I will relate how my interest in Bunnell was awakened, and then give his history, and summarize his claims.

Dr. William Browning, the well-known neurologist and bibliographer, wrote an entertaining paper entitled "Some of our Medical Explorers and Adventurers."[1]

In the *Medical Record* for November 23, 1918, appeared a letter from Dr. H. E. W. Barnes, of Santa Ana, California, in which, after expressing his interest in Dr. Browning's article, he regrets the omission of Dr. Bunnell's name, cites his achievement in the Yosemite and states that "he wrote a book on this

[1] *Med. Rec.*, October 26, 1918.

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discovery that is a frontier classic. To him and his courageous companions forever will remain the honor of first visiting this mysterious valley and making known to the world the majesty and splendor of its unsurpassed scenic beauty. . . . It would be scant justice to the memory and merit of the intrepid Dr. L. H. Bunnell if his name is not included in the list of Dr. Browning's immortals."

Inasmuch as there was here clearly a chance to enhance the honor of our profession, I wrote at once to Dr. Barnes, to Dr. Browning, to the publishers of Bunnell's book, to libraries in localities where the name of Bunnell might be known, or where large collections of books might be found, and to many individuals. Replies were courteous, but for some time absolutely no information was forthcoming; Bunnell seemed to be but a name, almost a myth, although the author of an interesting book. In time, tiny clues rewarded persistent efforts until gradually from many threads has been woven a complete history of this man who was the means of bringing to notice this wonderful *terra incognita.*

Lafayette Houghton Bunnell was born in Rochester, New York, in March, 1824, son of Bradley Bunnell, a physician, and Charlotte Houghton. Bradley Bunnell, the father, was born in New London, Connecticut, in 1781 and seems to have lived in different places in New York State. In 1828 he had been in Detroit, Michigan, practised medicine, had made friends with many of the early pioneers, and purchased land. His name appears in the Detroit city directory for 1837.

Lafayette's mother, Charlotte Houghton, came of the family after whom Houghton Square, London, was named. She was born in Windsor, Vermont, daughter of James Houghton and granddaughter of James Houghton, patriot in the American Revolution, who was killed by a Tory in a local affray. Douglas Houghton, distinguished naturalist and physician, was a cousin of Charlotte Bunnell's; he was born in Troy, New York, September 21, 1810 and from his youth was interested in nature. He experimented with percussion powder (but lately invented), and bore the marks of an explosion. He graduated at the Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute and was afterward a member of the faculty. In 1831 the Medical Society of Chautauqua County gave him a license to practise, and he went as physician and botanist on the Henry R. Schoolcraft Government Expedition to explore the sources of the Mississippi River. He had an extensive knowledge of the flora of the northwest, practised in Detroit from 1832 to 1837, projected the Geological Survey of Michigan and was appointed state geologist. In 1838 he gave scientific lectures at Detroit, and was mayor of Detroit in 1842. While at work on a new government survey he was drowned in a heavy sea in Lake Superior, October 13, 1845.

This man was an inspiration in the life of Lafayette Bunnell, who tells of listening to his stories of adventure, declaring that "these conversations were overheard by an observant child of good memory, and they made him ambitious of adventure, and just a little romantic. They were not the least injurious from a moral point of view, for he thought to emulate Dr. Houghton in usefulness, but alas for boyish imaginings. Dr. Houghton's skill as a geologist pointed to millions hidden in the earth, and he was drowned in Lake Superior, a victim to its angry waters, on its rock-bound shores."

Another kinsman of Mrs. Bunnell's was Edward Houghton "to whom was conveyed the supposed title of Jonathan Carver to the vast area known as the 'Carver tract.'"

Dr. Bradley Bunnell (the father) and his wife had twelve children, six of whom died in childhood. In 1832, when Lafayette was

eight years old, the family moved to Detroit, then a small French village, mostly dependent for its trade upon furs and peltries, and a gradually increasing demand for the white fish caught in the river. Another source of revenue was the lumber—pine and black walnut—cut from the virgin forests. Bunnell says: "Eastern settlers began to come into the then new territory to occupy a part of the large area of vacant land, and, with their arrival, some money was put in circulation, but there was a good part of trade carried on by means of barter."

Just before going up to Detroit, Lafayette had Asiatic cholera and remembered "its outbreak among the soldiers of the regular army on their way to take part in the Black Hawk War." General Winfield Scott commanded the soldiers who were going to Fort Dearborn and several were quarantined at Detroit.

Lafayette went to O'Brien's Catholic school, because "it was the best," although he was not a Roman Catholic. He tells of attending the funeral services of the Reverend Gabriel Richard, "Good Father Richard," founder of the Indian Missions of the Lakes (September 13, 1832), and says that Father Baraga, famous for his good influence over the Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, and Father Richard were looked upon as saints. He recalls the sober Ottawa Indians "converted to an honorable religious life, by the Catholic Missionary Fathers," becoming "victims of their appetites for raw whiskey, that they drank not as most white men drink, but poured down their throat until oblivion cast its mantle over all that was human in their actions. At that date . . . and after . . . the Ottawas, and the older Chippewa bands of the upper lake region, assembled at Detroit to receive the annuities given them by our Government, and then, some of the Indians of the same bands would cross over to the Canadian shore of the strait, and there receive the subsidy that the British policy had continued as a reward for their services in scalping Americans, and harassing our frontier during the war of 1812."

Bunnell was in close sympathy with Indian and mixed-blood boys and French traders, and boasts, "I was vain enough not to allow an Indian (*for I was a white American*) to do what I could not. Or if he did, it was not for long, for I practised his art of swimming in the swift cool current of the Detroit river, paddled his birchen canoes until I could excel him in speed and endurence, and when the ice formed on that treacherous stream, I would skim over the thin ice on skates where his instinct would not allow him to venture. My folly, upon one occasion, met its reward in a very cold bath in the river, during which I was nearly drowned, but the lesson I remembered. The spirit of rivalry soon extended to my French boy companions, and the result was that, by this close association, I soon 'picked up' a pretty good knowledge of bad French and some good Indian."

He knew well the families of the "old French fur traders," particularly Old Daniel Campau and his brother Barnabas. Old Daniel had accompanied General Cass to the sources of the Mississippi in 1820, then became a trader and invested largely in land. "The Cass farm and the Campau lands comprised the greater part of Detroit" at that time.

John B. Desnoyer was a "fur trader of long experience," whose daughter Matilda married Willard Bradley Bunnell, brother of our Lafayette. She was a splendid type of pioneer woman, refined, domestic and modest, yet brave and ready to meet emergencies. She could converse fluently with the Chippewas, Winnebagoes and Sioux and knew something of other dialects, and the Indians "respected and feared her although only a 'woman.'"

Family reverses forced young Bunnell to leave school and go to work with Benjamin

LeBritton, a druggist in Detroit. He was boarding at the American Hotel and, after it was destroyed by fire, at the Wales Hotel erected on its site. Here lived Henry R. Schoolcraft with his invalid wife and her Indian maid. With the maid Bunnell used to talk Chippewa; finding that her dialect differed from his, she explained it by saying that his Chippewa was French Chippewa while hers was real *old* Chippewa, "and I have never forgotten her distinction nor its usefulness when I hear Indian names lacerated. . . . I think that the influences that surrounded my boyhood gave me a taste for frontier life, and certainly 'Old MacSob,' an American Chippewa, as he called himself, while annually staying with us during payments, gave shape to my determination to visit the upper lake country. . . . The old fellow once taught my father a lesson in hospitality that I have never forgotten. MacSob, who had been fishing through the ice with his little band, and selling his trout to shippers, came down to Detroit on the first boat. On that vessel were some excellent Mackinaw trout packed in ice, a large one of which my father bought and had it baked for dinner on the day of old Mac's arrival. Thinking to please the old Indian, after we had left the table he had Phyllis, a mulatto serving woman that had been in the family for years, place a plate for the old warrior, and invited him to partake of the trout. Old MacSob looked at the fish and then at 'Black Meat,' as he always called Phyllis, and cried out, 'Take him away! too much fish! all winter fish, fish, damn the fish! Black Meat, give me some pork!'" The moral applied by Dr. Bunnell's father was: "Never give a guest what he has been feeding upon at home."

The elder brother Willard Bunnell, who had been on the Lakes as cabin boy, wheelman and pilot, gave up this life on the water after his marriage, and went into the fur trade, locating at Little Bay du Noquet, near the "present site of Escanaba;" he asked his father to let Lafayette "come up and assist him."

Lafayette Bunnell was seventeen years old but, as he says, he "had been one of the *original drummers and collectors* for the drug house I was with, and for my age was a pretty good student of human nature; so that after some considerable delay my father gave his consent to my going." When he reached the point of meeting, his brother had departed and it was spring before he reached him. Willard was concerned about his health, fearing he would have "the family's hereditary disease, consumption of the lungs," and wished to move to the drier climate of the upper Mississippi. They were undecided as to the exact location for settling; Alexander Grignon, a trader, urged the mouth of the river and "actually pictured to us, in graphic language, the lumber trade that would spring up, and the cities that would arise . . . but we were too obtuse to see things from his point of view." The choice finally lay between Trempealeau and Prairie La Crosse and Bunnell tells of Willard's "picking up a chip and spitting on it, after the fashion of school-boy days, he said: 'Wet or dry—wet up, we go up; wet down, we go down.' It came down wet up, and that being my choice, we started up the river. By just such absurd and unreasonable incidents are our lives sometimes directed."

They reached LaCrosse in June, 1842; passing "Catlin's Rocks" where Bunnell plainly saw the name of the artist, George Catlin (1796–1872), painted in red on the rocks (Catlin had painted Indian portraits in 1835). They moved on to Trempealeaus east of the river, and settled there. Later they settled at Holmes's Landing, where the winter of 1842–1843 was spent. Bunnell', chief comment of this period is that "the comet stayed with us all winter." When the ice left the river they returned to the cabin at Trempealeau, which began to take on a homelike aspect, aided by a fine garden.

Bunnell says that his brother caught the secret of success by "never allowing a weed or blade of grass to grow in his garden."

Bunnell was quick to learn the sign language and had a gift of making friends with the Indians; his Winnebago name was "Woon-gua-shu-shig-gar." He was then a child of the West in her pioneer days, an intrepid, restless, aggressive spirit, with but an ordinary school education, a keen observer with a retentive memory and powers of observation of localities and natural events equal to an Indian. His large experience on the frontier made him a natural leader in coping with the raw energies of nature. In due time he expressed himself in writing freely and well, though with little polish. "Winona," written in his later years, is a storehouse of precious facts relating to early days in the Middle West, especially along the upper Mississippi; here in retrospect we sit by the cradle of a great empire. One of the most interesting episodes is an account of an adventurous trading trip with a companion through Lake Pepin. Before starting, Bunnell had banked wood near LaCrosse, Wisconsin, and sold it. There was a scarcity of pilots and he was offered a position. He says: "I declined the offer, but my taste and passion for beautiful scenery led me to study the river whenever I was travelling upon it." At times he took the pilot's place without compensation, and later he received pay for running steamboat spars to St. Louis or hardwood logs for furniture to other places. Curiously enough, although a good marksman, he was not, like many similarly placed, a good hunter.

In the autumn of 1843 he decided upon a claim at LaCrosse and plowed a furrow with six yoke of cattle around 160 acres, taking in the greater part of the lower section of the present city.

In 1844 he went after some lumber at Beef Slough, and worked the scheme with success; put some money into a lumber camp on the Chippewa, then started to bring his father and the family to occupy the claim at LaCrosse. His father had consented to migrate, hoping the change would improve the condition of three members of his family (a daughter, son, and grandson) who had consumption. These three died at LaCrosse in the spring of 1845. During the summer of 1845 a messenger came to Bunnell's logging camp, seven or eight miles below the mouth of the Eau Claire River, with news of his mother's death from heart disease. His father had now only a young daughter to live with, and was lonely and discontented, longing for his old home in Detroit and declaring that the younger Bunnell was wasting his life in a wilderness that would not be settled in fifty years. Bunnell says:

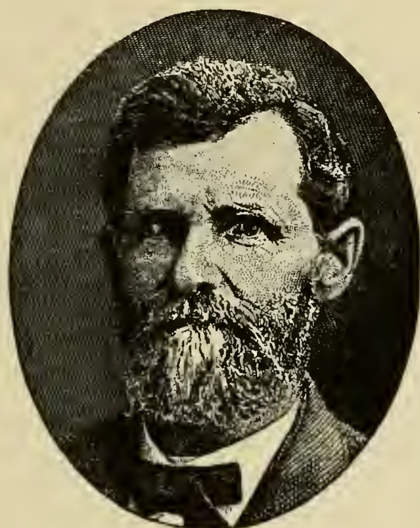
> He spoke of the howling, drunken Indians and the not much less brutal white men who made them drunk, and taken as he delivered it, it was a strong plea for my return with him to Detroit. I then had no thought of yielding to his persuasions, but told him of my prospects of realizing a goodly sum from my venture on the Chippewa, and ended by giving him ample funds, which I had saved, to return with my young sister to Detroit, where she had associations that were dear to her, and I went back to my business on the Chippewa, and also to fill a contract I had in St. Louis for spars of large size for the lower river trade.

His father remained in LaCrosse until the next spring, then went to Detroit. Later, while Bunnell was in California, he returned to live in the "howling wilderness," and died of strangulated hernia, at Homer in 1856.

Willard Bunnell and his family crossed the river from Trempealeau and settled at a place first known as Bunnell's Landing which later received its present name of Homer, in honor of the birthplace of Willard Bunnell, Homer, New York. Lafayette Bunnell helped to build the first "permanent house" at Homer, Minnesota,

and after his many adventures returned there and spent his last days in this house erected in 1844.

He served in the Mexican War in 1847, and in 1849 it was inevitable, with his character and training, that he should seek gold in California. His experiences in California form interesting reading in his own words, in his book "Discovery of the Yosemite" (1880). He says in the beginning of his book:



Autographed portrait of LAFAYETTE HOUGHTON BUNNELL.

During the winter of 1849–50, while ascending the old Bear Valley trail from Ridley's ferry, on the Merced river, my attention was attracted to the stupendous rocky peaks of the Sierra Nevadas. In the distance an immense cliff loomed, apparently to the summit of th mountains. Although familiar with nature in her wildest moods, I looked upon this awe-inspiring column with wonder and admiration. While vainly endeavoring to realize its peculiar prominence and vast proportions, I turned from it with reluctance to resume the search for coveted gold; but the impressions of that scene were indelibly fixed in my memory. Whenever an opportunity afforded, I made inquiries concerning the scenery of that locality. But few of the miners had noticed any of its special peculiarities. On a second visit to Ridley's, not long after, that towering mountain, which had so profoundly interested me was invisible, an intervening haze obscuring it from view. A year or more passed before the mysteries of this wonderful land were satisfactorily solved.

The events which led to the discovery are as follows: James D. Savage, a trader, had two stores or trading posts, one on little Mariposa Creek, about 20 miles south of the town of Mariposa, the other on Fresno River, where friendly Indians used to congregate. Savage took an Indian chief, José Jerez, to San Francisco to witness the celebration of the admission of California as a state—October 29, 1850. While there the old chief became drunk and quarrelsome and Savage struck him. The Indian upon his return home roused his fellows against Savage and both his stores were attacked. Savage thought that an Indian war was beginning, and commenced to raise a volunteer battalion. He made an appeal for arms to the Governor, John McDougal, when hostilities began. After the "Mariposa Battalion" was formed and assigned to duty by Governor McDougal, there was a "period of preliminaries"; United States Commissioners arrived in camp, about fifteen miles below Mariposa village, and a few Indians came to parley with them; among the visiting Indians were Vow-ches-ter, chief of one of the more peaceful bands, and Russio, a Mission Indian. Vow-ches-ter said the mountain tribes would not make peace. Russio said, "The Indians in the deep rocky valley on the Merced River do not wish for peace, and will not come in to see the chiefs sent by the great father to make treaties. They think the white man cannot find their hiding places and that, therefore, they cannot be driven out." Vow-ches-ter further declared: "In this deep valley spoken of by Russio, one Indian is more than ten white men. The hiding places are many. They will throw rocks down on the white

men, if any should come near them. The other tribes dare not make war upon them, for they are lawless like the grizzlies, and as strong. We are afraid to go to this valley, for there are many witches."

Bunnell after this talk asked Savage, the interpreter, if he had ever visited the "deep valley" mentioned by the Indians. Savage first said that he had, but in a later conversation with Bunnell said that he was mistaken and explained as follows:

Last year while I was located at the mouth of the South Fork of the Merced, I was attacked by the Yosemites, but with the Indian miners I had in my employ, drove them off, and followed some of them up the Merced River into a cañon, which I suppose led to their stronghold, as the Indians then with me said it was not a safe place to go into. From the appearance of this rocky gorge I had no difficulty in believing them. Fearing an ambush, I did not follow them. It was on this account that I changed my position to Mariposa Creek. I would like to get into the den of the thieving murderers. If ever I have a chance I will smoke out the Grizzly Bears (the Yosemites) from their holes, where they are thought to be so secure.

Bunnell says:

The deliberative action on the part of the commissioners, who were very desirous of having the Indians voluntarily come in to make treaties with them, delayed any active cooperation on the part of our battalion until the winter rains had fully set in. Our first extended expedition to the mountains was made during the prevailing storms of the vernal equinox, although detachments had previously made excursions into the country bordering upon the Sierras. This region, like parts of Virginia, proved impassable to a mounted force during the wet season, and our operations were confined to a limited area. It was at last decided that more extended operations were necessary to bring in the mountain tribes.

Bunnell next describes the starting out:

Notwithstanding a storm was gathering, our preparations were cheerfully made, and when the order to "form into line" was given it was obeyed with alacrity. No "bugle call" announced orders to us; the "details" were made quietly, and we as quietly assembled. Promptly as the word of command "mount was given, every saddle was filled. With "forward march" we naturally filed off into the order of march so readily assumed by mounted frontiersmen while traveling on a trail.

We left our camp as quietly and as orderly as such an undisciplined body could be expected to move, but Major James D. Savage said that we must all learn to be as still as Indians, or we would never find them.

This battalion was a body of hardy, resolute pioneers. Many of them had seen service, and had fought their way against the Indians across the plains; some had served in the war with Mexico and had been under military discipline. . . .

The temperature was mild and agreeable at our camp near the plain, but we began to encounter storms of cold rain as we reached the more elevated localities.

Major Savage being aware that rain on the foothills and plain at that season of the year indicated snow higher up, sent forward scouts to intercept such parties as might attempt to escape, but the storm continued to rage with such violence as to render this order useless, and we found the scouts awaiting us at the foot of a mountain known as the Black Ridge. This ridge is a spur of the Sierra Nevadas. It separates the Mariposa, Chowchilla, Fresno and San Joaquin Rivers on the south from the Merced on the north.

An account is given of the approach to the village of the Yosemites; then Bunnell says:

We suddenly came in full view of the valley in which was the village, or rather the encampments, of the Yosemites. The immensity of rock I had seen in my vision on the Old Bear trail from Ridley's Ferry was here presented to my astonished gaze. The mystery of that scene was here disclosed. My awe was increased by this nearer view. The face of the immense cliff was shadowed by the declining sun; its outlines only had been seen at a distance. This towering mass.

"Fools our fond gaze, and greatest of the great
Defies at first our Nature's littleness,
Till, growing with (to) its growth, we thus dilate
Our spirits to the size of that they contemplate."

That stupendous cliff is now known as "El Capitan" (the Captain) and the plateau from which we had our first view of the valley, as Mount Beatitude.

It has been said that it is not easy to describe in words the precise impressions which great objects make upon us. I cannot describe how completely I realized this truth. None but those who have visited this most wonderful valley can even imagine the feelings with which I looked upon the view that was there presented. The grandeur of the scene was but softened by the haze that hung over the valley—light as gosamer—and by the clouds which partially dimmed the higher cliffs and mountains. This obscurity of vision but increased the awe with which I beheld it, and as I looked, a peculiar exalted sensation seemed to fill my whole being, and I found my eyes in tears with emotion.

During many subsequent visits to this locality, this sensation was never again so fully aroused. It is probable that the shadows fast closing all before me, and the vapory clouds at the head of the valley, leaving the view beyond still undefined, gave a weirdness to the scene, that made it so impressive; and the conviction that it was utterly undescribable added strength to the emotion. It is not possible for the same intensity of feeling to be aroused more than once by the same object, although I never looked upon these scenes except with wonder and admiration.

. . . Our imagination had been misled by the descriptive misrepresentations of savages, whose prime object was to keep us from their safe retreat, until we had expected to see some terrible abyss. The reality so little resembled the picture of imagination, that my astonishment was the more overpowering.

To obtain a more distinct and *quiet* view, I had left the trail and my horse and wallowed through the snow alone to a projecting granite rock. So interested was I in the scene before me, that I did not observe that my comrades had all moved on, and that I would soon be left indeed alone. My situation attracted the attention of Major Savage—who was riding in rear of the column—who hailed me from the trail below with "you had better wake up from that dream up there, or you may lose your hair; I have no faith in Ten-ie-ya's statement that there are no Indians about here. We had better be moving; some of the murdering devils may be lurking along this trail to pick off stragglers." I hurriedly joined the major on the descent, and as other views presented themselves, I said with some enthusiasm, "If my hair is now required, I can depart in peace, for I have here seen the power and glory of a Supreme Being; the majesty of His handywork is in that 'Testimony of the Rocks'. That mute appeal—pointing to El Capitan—illustrates it, with more convincing eloquence than can the most powerful arguments of surpliced priests." "Hold up, Doc! you are soaring too high for me; and perhaps for yourself. This is rough riding; we had better mind this devilish trail, or we shall go *soaring* over some of these slippery rocks." We, however, made the descent in safety.

Bunnell says:

My devout astonishment at the supreme grandeur of the scenery by which I was surrounded continued to engross my mind. . . .

After supper, guards stationed, and the camp fires plentifully provided for, we gathered around the burning logs of oak and pine, found near our camp. The hearty supper and cheerful blaze created a general good feeling. Social converse and anecdotes—mingled with jokes—were freely exchanged, as we enjoyed the solace of our pipes and warmed ourselves preparatory to seeking further refreshment in sleep. While thus engaged I retained a full consciousness of our locality; for being in close proximity to the huge cliff that had so attracted my attention, my mind was frequently drawn away from my comrades. After the jollity of the camp had somewhat subsided, the valley became the topic of conversation around our camp fire. None of us at the time surmised the extreme vastness of those cliffs; although dark, we had seen El Capitan looking down upon our camp, while the "Bridal Veil" was being wafted in the breeze. Many of us *felt* the mysterious grandeur

of the scenery, as defined by our limited opportunity to study it. I had—previous to my descent with the major—observed the towering height over us of the old "Rock Chief," and noticing the length of the steep descent into the valley, had at least some idea of its solemn immensity.

It may appear *sentimental*, but the coarse jokes of the careless, and the indifference of the practical, sensibly jarred my more devout feelings, while this subject was a matter of general conversation; as if a sacred subject had been ruthlessly profaned, or the visible power of Deity disregarded. After relating my observations from the "old Bear Valley Trail," I suggested that this valley should have an appropriate name by which to designate it, and in a tone of pleasantry said to Tunnehill, who was drying his wet clothing by our fire, "You are the first white man that ever received any form of baptism in this valley (Tunnehill with the mule he was riding had during the trail been immersed, unexpectedly taking a plunge bath in the ice-cold waters of the Merced), and you should be the proper person to give a baptismal name to the valley itself." He replied, "If whiskey can be provided for such a ceremony, I shall be happy to participate; but if it is to be another cold-water affair, I have no desire to take a hand. I have done enough in that line for tonight." Timely jokes and ready repartee for a time changed the subject, but in the lull of this exciting pastime, someone remarked, "I like Bunnell's suggestion of giving this valley a name, and tonight is a good time to do it." "All right—if you have got one, show your hand," was the response of another. Different names were proposed but none were satisfactory to a majority of our circle. Some romantic and foreign were offered, but I observed that a very large number were canonical and Scripture names. From this I inferred that I was not the only one in whom religious emotions or thoughts had been aroused by the mysterious power of the surrounding scenery.

As I did not take a fancy to any of the names proposed, I remarked that "an American name would be the most appropriate;" that "I could not see any necessity for going to a foreign country for American scenery—the grandest that had ever yet been looked upon. That it would be better to give it an Indian name than to import a strange and inxepressve one; that the name of the tribe who had occupied it would be more appropriate than any I had heard suggested." I then proposed that we give the name of Yo-sem-i-ty, as it was suggestive, euphonious, and certainly *American;* that by so doing, the name of the tribe of Indians which we met leaving their homes in this valley, perhaps never to return, would be perpetuated." I was here interrupted by Mr. Tunnehill, who impatiently exclaimed: "Devil take the Indians and their names! Why should we honor these vagabond murderers by perpetuating their names?" Another said: "I agree with Tunnehill—the Indians and their names. Mad Anthony's plan for me! Let's call this Happy Valley." In reply I said to the last speaker: "Still, for a young man with such *religious tendencies* they would be good objects on which to develop your Christianity." Unexpectedly a hearty laugh was raised, which broke up further discussion, and before opportunity was given for any others to object to the name, John O'Neil, a rollicking Texan of Captain Boling's Company, vociferously announced to the whole camp the subject of our discussion, by saying, "Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye! A vote will now be taken to decide what name shall be given to this valley." The question of giving it the name of Yo-sem-i-ty was then explained and upon a *viva voce* vote being taken, it was almost unanimously adopted. The name that was then and thus adopted by us, while seated around our camp fires, on the first visit of a white man to this remarkable locality, is the name by which it is now known to the world.

Bunnell says: "When we sought our repose it was with feelings of quiet satisfaction that I wrapped myself in my blankets, and soundly slept."

The signification of the name, "a grizzly bear," was not at that time generally known to the Battalion, Bunnell says, and the pronunciation was not uniform. Bunnell considered Major Savage the best authority for the correct pronunciation, and he said that Ten-ie-ya (the old chief of the tribe) pronounced it Yo-sem-i-ty although

some other bands pronounced it O-soom-i-ty, and said it signified "a full-grown grizzly bear," and was given to Ten-ie-ya's band because of their "lawless and predatory character."

Lieutenant Moore, of the U. S. A., in his report of an expedition to the valley in 1852, substituted *e* as the terminal letter, in place of *y* in use by us; no doubt thinking the use of *e* more scholarly, or perhaps supposing Yosemite to be of Spanish derivation. This orthography has been adopted, and is in general use, but the proper pronunciation, as a consequence, is not always attainable to the general reader.

Ten-ie-ya repudiated the name for the valley, but proudly acknowledged it as the designation of his band, claiming that when he was a young chief, this name had been selected because they occupied the mountains and valleys which were the favorite resort of the Grizzly Bears, and because his people were expert in killing them. That his tribe had adopted the name because those who had bestowed it were afraid of "the Grizzlies" and feared his band.

"Ah-wah-ne," the Indian name for their valley, was not known to Bunnell until the name "Yosemite" had been generally accepted. In 1855, J. M. Hutchings visited and published an account of the Yosemite, giving the name of Yo-Hamite, but after a long discussion of this point, he wrote, "Had we before known that Doctor Bunnell and his party were the first whites who entered. . . we should long ago have submitted to the name Dr. Bunnell had given it, as the discoverer of the valley."[2]

Hutchings later says, "For early records of the Valley I am mainly indebted to Dr. L. H. Bunnell, who was not only one of its first visitors and discoverers, but its earliest and principal historian."[3] He says of Bunnell's book that it is "an invaluable and deeply interesting narrative of personal observation and adventure."

Dr. Bunnell wrote on the Yosemite, his statement appearing in Hutchings's *California Magazine*, signed by himself and certified to by two members of the California legislature—James M. Roan and George H. Crenshaw—who were in the expedition. Attention once called to the Yosemite and its discovery, voices for other claimants were heard. The one which seems to be most worthy of consideration was that of Joseph Walker. Mr. Williams says that—"History has done scant justice to Joseph Reddeford Walker. . . He was the first white visitor to the Yosemite region." The claim has been made that he "discovered and camped in the Yosemite Valley. . . The evidence available hardly seems to sustain this claim in full. . . On his gravestone in Alhambra Cemetery, at Martinez, Cal., is the following: 'Camped at Yosemite, November 13, 1833'. . . We may accept 'Camped at Yosemite,' but are we warranted in assuming that 'at' means 'in'?"[4] Mr. Williams adds, "Dr. Bunnell's account of it, and of the Indian war of 1851, of which it is a part, is a frontier classic, with Tenaya as its hero."

In 1880 Walker's claim was "set up" in the *San José Pioneer*, and answered by Bunnell in the same paper. Bunnell says, in his book:

> I cheerfully concede the fact. . . that "His were the first white man's eyes that ever looked upon the Yosemite" *above* the valley, and in that sense, he was certainly the original white discoverer. The topography of the country over which the Mono trail ran, and which was followed by Capt. Walker, did not admit of his seeing the valley proper. The depression indicating the valley, and its magnificent surroundings could alone have been discovered, and in Capt. Walker's conversations with me at

[2] Hutchings, J. M.: Scenes of Wonder and Curiosity in California. New York and San Francisco, 1871.

[3] Hutchings, J. M.: In the Heart of the Sierras; the Yosemite Valley. Yosemite Valley and Oakland, Cal., 1886.

[4] Williams, J. H.: Yosemite and Its High Sierras. Takoma and San Francisco, 1914.

various times while encamped between Coultersville and the Yosemite, he was manly enough to say so. . . . I told Capt. Walker that Ten-ie-ya had said that, "A small party of white men once crossed the mountains on the north side, but were so guided as not to see the valley proper." With a smile the captain said: "That was my party, but I was not deceived, for the lay of the land showed there was a valley below; but we had become nearly barefooted, our animals poor, and ourselves on the verge of starvation, so we followed down the ridge to Bull Creek, where, killing a deer, we went into camp.". . . I was strongly impressed by the simple and upright character of Captain Walker. . . . All that I have ever claimed for myself is, that I was *one* of the party of white men who first *entered* the Yosemite Valley as far as known to the Indians.

Bunnell further says that Captain Walker told him that he "once passed quite near the valley on one of his mountain trips; but that his Ute and Mono guides gave such a dismal account of the cañons of both rivers, that he kept his course near to the divide until reaching Bull Creek, when he descended and went into camp, not seeing the valley proper."

Walker's River, Lake, and Pass were named for Joseph Walker. It is to be noticed that Bunnell's name is nowhere attached to any point connected with the Yosemite, and even the government publications I have seen fail to associate his name with the discovery of the Yosemite. On the contrary a statement reads:

The Yosemite was discovered to the world in 1851 by Captain John Boling, while pursuing hostile Indians, with a detachment of mounted volunteers.

The Indians called it the heart of the Sky Mountain, or *Ahwanee*, "the deep grass valley." Later the name *Yo Semite* was given to the valley, its meaning being "the great grizzly bear," and subsequently, when the National Park was established, this famous name was retained.[5]

Another publication also says: "The Yosemite Valley was discovered in 1851 by Captain John Boling," etc.[6]

Another publication declares that "the valley was discovered in 1851; when a detachment of mounted volunteers, under Capt. John Boling, in an effort to put an end to the depredations of the Indians that infested the region, pursued them to their mountain stronghold. The tales the soldiers brought back of the marvelous scenery of the valley induced J. M. Hutchings, who was then gathering data on California scenery, to organize in 1855 an exploratory expedition to the Yosemite Valley."[7]

Galen Clark, who in 1857 discovered the Mariposa Grove of big trees, makes no mention of Bunnell in his book.[8] He went to California from New England in 1853, two years after the discovery of the Yosemite. He was made guardian of the Yosemite Valley.

John Muir gives an excellent and brief account of the discovery of the Yosemite, without, however, paying much attention to Dr. Bunnell. He says "After supper, seated around a big fire, the wonderful Valley became the topic of conversation and Dr. Bunnell suggested giving it a name. Many were proposed, but after a vote had been taken the name 'Yosemite,' proposed by Dr. Bunnell, was adopted almost unanimously to perpetuate the name of the tribe who so long had made their home there."[9] (Muir spells the name "Bunell.")

Bunnell's book on the discovery appeared

[5] United States Railroad Administration. National Park Series. Yosemite National Park, California.

[6] General Information Regarding Yosemite National Park, 1919. Washington, 1919, Government Printing Office.

[7] Matthes, F. E.: Sketch of Yosemite National Park and Account of the Origin of the Yosemite and Hetch Hetchy Valleys. Department of the Interior, Washington, 1912.

[8] Clark, Galen.: The Yosemite Valley. Yosemite Valley, Cal., 1911.

[9] Muir J.: The Yosemite. New York, 1912.

in 1880;[10] in 1890 a discussion in *The Century Magazine*[11] brought from Dr. Bunnell a response giving a clear and definite account of the event. An abstract is given here:

I did not fix the day of the month, but remembered that the discovery occurred during a long-continued rain and snow storm at about the time of the vernal equinox. That statement was verified at the time by James M. Roan and George H. Crenshaw, two comrades who, with the writer, were the first white men to enter the valley, and who were then members of the California legislature. . . . Major Savage, our commander, had waited at our camp in the foothills knowing that rain below indicated snow in the mountains, and that by marching in and through the storm we would be most likely to surprise and capture the hostile Indians.

Bunnell tells of the march, then:

Fortunately we had provided barley for our animals, and they did not suffer for lack of forage. After an Indian village was captured, Indian runners were dispatched to bring into headquarters the Indians in hiding; but no response was made by the Yosemites. Upon a special envoy being sent Ten-ie-ya, their chief, came alone, and stood in dignified silence before one of the guard until ordered into camp. Ten-ie-ya was immediately recognized and kindly cared for, and after he had been well supplied with food Major Savage informed him of the orders of the Indian Commission under whom we were acting. The old sachem was very suspicious, but finally agreed to conduct an expedition into his beloved valley.

Only a few men were required for this service, though all volunteered, notwithstanding it had been represented that horses might not be able to pass along the rocky trail. Finally a foot race was ordered to determine the fleetness, and consequent fitness, of those most anxious to go; some in their anxiety to win the race ran barefoot in the snow.

[10] Bunnell, L. H.: Discovery of the Yosemite and the Indian War which led to that Event. Chicago, 1880. 3rd ed., N. Y., 1892. 4th ed., Los Angeles, 1911, G. W. Gerlicher.

[11] *Century Magazine*, 1890, xl, 795–797.

Here follows an account of the expedition through snow from three to five feet deep, and in some places deeper; and Bunnell goes on with:

The trip was looked upon as likely to be only an exploration of some mysterious cañon. The importance of recording the date of the discovery of the Yosemite did not impress itself upon my mind at the time, for I became completely absorbed in the sublimity of my surroundings. It seemed to me that I had entered God's holiest temple, where were assembled all that was most divine in material creation. For days afterward I could only think of the magnificence, beauty and grace of the waterfalls, and of the mountain scenery; and an almost total lack of appreciation of the event on the part of Major Savage caused me to think him utterly void of sentiment.

Such experiences were not likely to have been soon forgotten, and hence my surprise when I saw in print the statement that the Yosemite Valley was first entered by the Mariposa Battalion on May 5 or 6, 1851, when the rainy season would have been past. This statement is said to have been officially made by our adjutant, and if so, must refer to the date of our second entrance, as our adjutant was not with us on our first entrance or discovery.

Bunnell says that:

Adjutant Lewis was a most genial, kind-hearted gentleman, but I never knew any duties he performed in the field.

As a matter of fact, our Adjutant was not with us when the discovery was made in March, nor were there ever but two companies in the Yosemite at any time, Boling's and part of Dill's. Captain Dill himself was detailed for duty at the Fresno, after the expedition in March, as was also the adjutant. In making out his report, Mr. Lewis must have ignored the first entry of the valley by the few men who discovered it, and made his first entry to appear as the date of the discovery. This may or may not have been done to give importance to the operations of the battalion. I have never seen the report.

I do not wish to call in question the motives of our officers, but our little squad who first

entered the valley should have the credit of the discovery, let it be what it may.

Bunnell goes on to say that he saw El Capitan from Mount Bullion as early as 1849, but nothing could be learned of it. Ten-ie-ya and other Yosemites said they were the very first to enter the valley and it could not have been entered without their knowledge. They left after two nights encampment, a slight fall of snow making them fearful of being cut off from supplies.

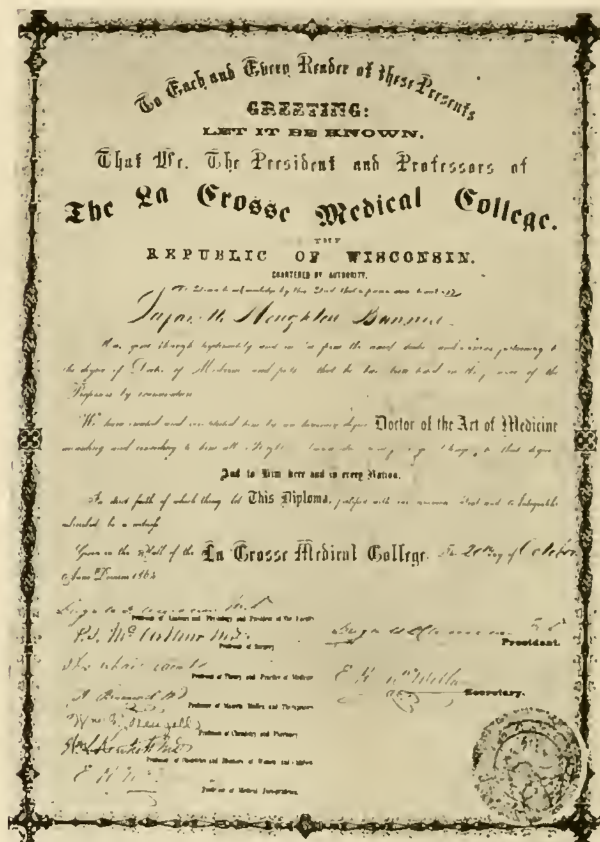
The Mariposa Battalion was mustered out July 25, 1851. The first attack on Savage had been in May, 1850; hostilities ceased with the capture of Ten-ie-ya and his band in June, 1851. "Lieutenant Treadwell Moore, U.S.A., caught and executed five Yosemites in 1852, but no war followed." Bunnell continues:

Comrade Starkey of our old Battalion was murdered in 1853. His murderers were pursued by Under-Sheriff James M. Roan, also a comrade, and when overtaken three of them were killed, and the others put to flight. Mr. Moore was compelled to notice the criticisms of the press, and in doing so, in 1854, became the first to draw attention to the scenery. In 1855 Mr. Hutchings first visited it, and since that date has done more to bring the valley into public and appreciative notice than any other man.

After the Mariposa Battalion was mustered out, Bunnell remained in California, trading, mining, and surveying, as late as 1856. He returned to his early home in the Middle West and on April 18, 1861, at LaCrosse, Wisconsin, enlisted in the United States Army. He was appointed hospital steward July 22, 1861, and discharged in May, 1862.

He enlisted in "Company B, Second Wisconsin Cavalry Volunteers in November, 1863, and was discharged March 1, 1865, to accept a commission as assistant-surgeon Thirty-sixth Wisconsin Infantry Volunteers. He became surgeon in July, 1865, and was mustered out with the regiment the same month and year."[12] His war record included service in the Mexican War, the Indian War of 1851, and the Civil War.

"M.D." appears after his name on the title-page of each of his books, but the fact of his medical education has been most


To Each and Every Reader of these Presents
GREETING:
LET IT BE KNOWN.
That We, The President and Professors of
The La Crosse Medical College.
THE
REPUBLIC OF WISCONSIN.
CHARTERED BY AUTHORITY.
Doctor of the Art of Medicine
And to Him here and in every Nation.
This Diploma,
La Crosse Medical College
President.
Secretary.

Diploma of Lafayette Houghton Bunnell

difficult to establish. The fact that he had a degree, however, has been definitely settled by the discovery of his medical diploma now in the possession of the Minnesota Historical Society; a photographic copy has been furnished me through the courtesy of Mr. Solon J. Buck, superintendent of the Society, who has also given further valuable data concerning Bunnell, prepared by Miss B. L. Heilbron, his assistant.

At the age of sixteen Bunnell was taken into his father's office to study medicine,

[12] Aubery, J. M.: The Thirty-sixth Wisconsin Infantry (Army of the Potomac).

"much against his will;" and for nearly two years he read, and attended private clinics and demonstrations. After some experiences of frontier life he again turned to medicine, studying with Dr. Scoville at Detroit, but gave up to enter the Mexican War. While his regiment was quartered at Cordova, Mexico, he had charge of the hospital, and was in medical charge of a battalion at the close of the war.

On October 20, 1864, he received M.D., designated "honorary," from LaCrosse Medical College, which was instituted in

Sarah Smith Bunnell
(Mrs. L. H. Bunnell)

the autumn of that year. The episode of this college is a brief and almost forgotten chapter of Wisconsin medical history.[13] Its charter was granted April 18, 1864, to Dugald D. Cameron, P. S. McArthur, J. B. G. Baxter, William L. Kennett, Ewen H. McMillan, William T. Wenzell and Augustus Brummel, as charter members.[14]

Grave of the late Dr. Bunnell in Woodlawn Cemetery, Winona, Minnesota. Marked by the G. A. R. emblem.

As he grew old his chief occupations were reading, writing and gardening. At the age of seventy-three he made the valuable contribution to local history referred to, entitled "Winona."[15]

After the Civil War he settled at Homer, Minnesota. He married Sarah Smith, daughter of Joel and Anna Smith, early settlers, and sister of Edward S. Smith, prominent in railroad and other interests. They had no children. Bunnell died at Homer on July 21, 1903, and was buried at Woodlawn Cemetery, at Winona. His grave is

[13] History of LaCrosse County, Wisconsin, 1881.

[14] Dr. William Snow Miller is in possession of interesting facts relating to this ephemeral institution and will doubtless publish them.

[15] Winona and Its Environs on the Mississippi in Ancient and Modern Days. Winona, 1897.

marked solely by the G. A. R. emblem with the small flag. He is buried in the family lot of his brother-in-law, E. S. Smith. The large shaft is the Smith family monument.[16]

The credit of the discovery belongs to Bunnell, for after seeing the Yosemite Valley at a distance his interest and poetic imagination were whetted by its seeming grandeur and he kept turning it over in his mind for two years; he alone of the little group that entered on a punitory expedition went eager and thrilled with the zest of discovery. He fully appreciated the opportunity, and was filled with a sense of mystery. His companions were impassive and unimpressed, while he was exulting in the glories that unfolded before them; he became its baptismal sponsor and gave the valley its euphonious name and later wrote about it in a never failing spirit of enthusiasm.

For these reasons we claim that Dr. Lafayette Houghton Bunnell was the true discoverer, about March 21, 1851.

[16] Information and photograph through the kindness of Judge H. L. Buck, postmaster, Winona, Minn.

A MEMORIAL STONE FOR THE GRAVE OF DR. BUNNELL

As Dr. Kelly states, the grave of Dr. Bunnell remains unmarked save for the G. A. R. emblem.

Dr. Kelly asks that those who feel interested in the plan forward such amounts as they may choose to give for the purpose.

It is to be hoped that such an opportunity to honor a real medical pioneer will not be neglected by the members of his profession. One dollar will be gladly received as a donation.

Those desiring to contribute should send their contribution to Dr. Howard A. Kelly, 1406 Eutaw Place, Baltimore, Md.

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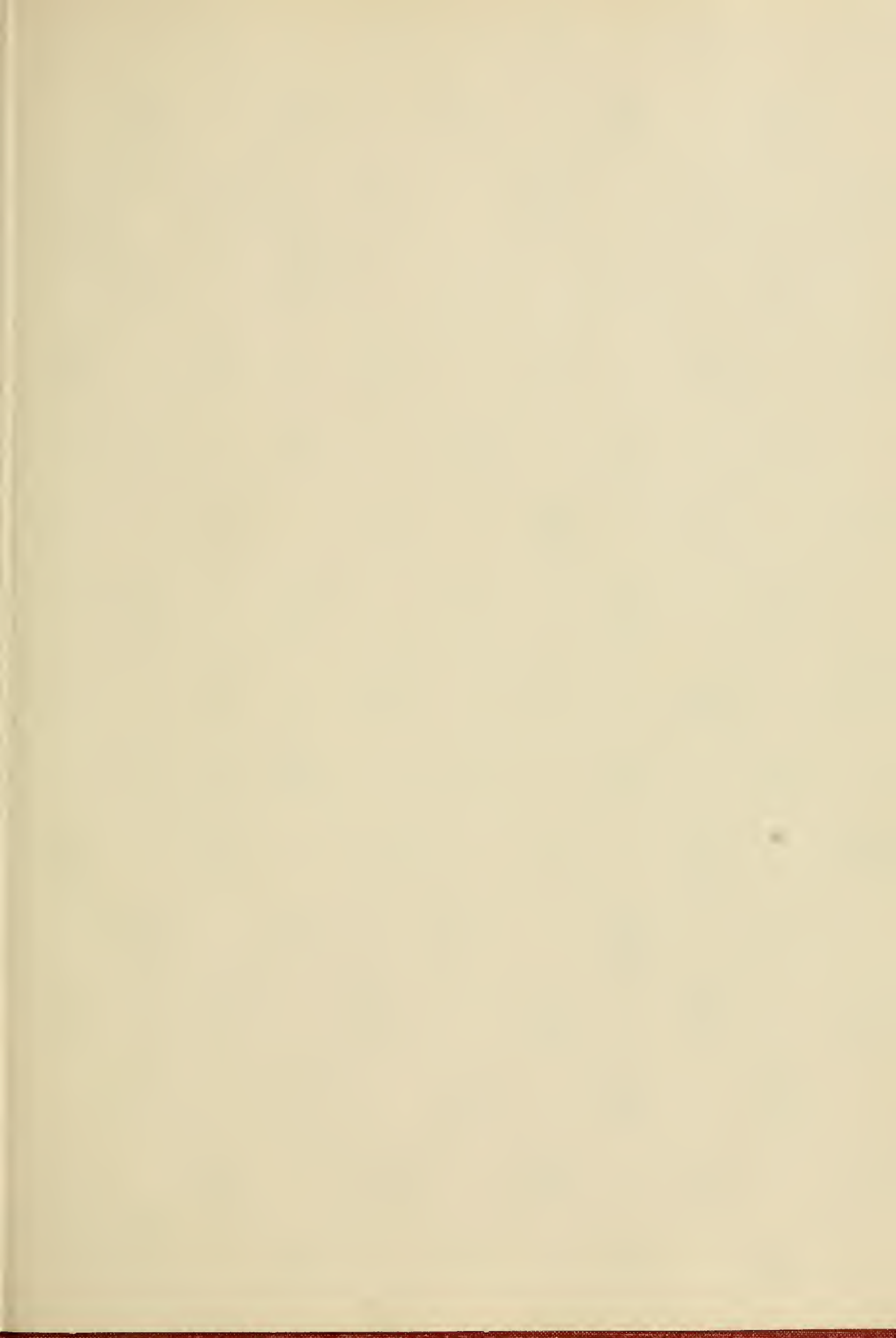

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