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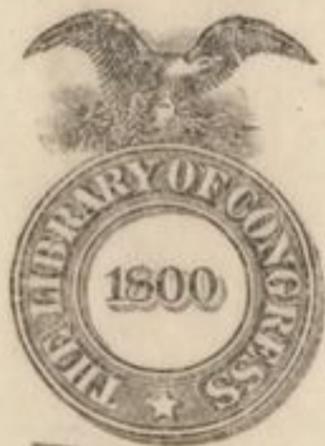
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BRITISH WEST AFRICA
(GENERAL)

LONDON :
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1920



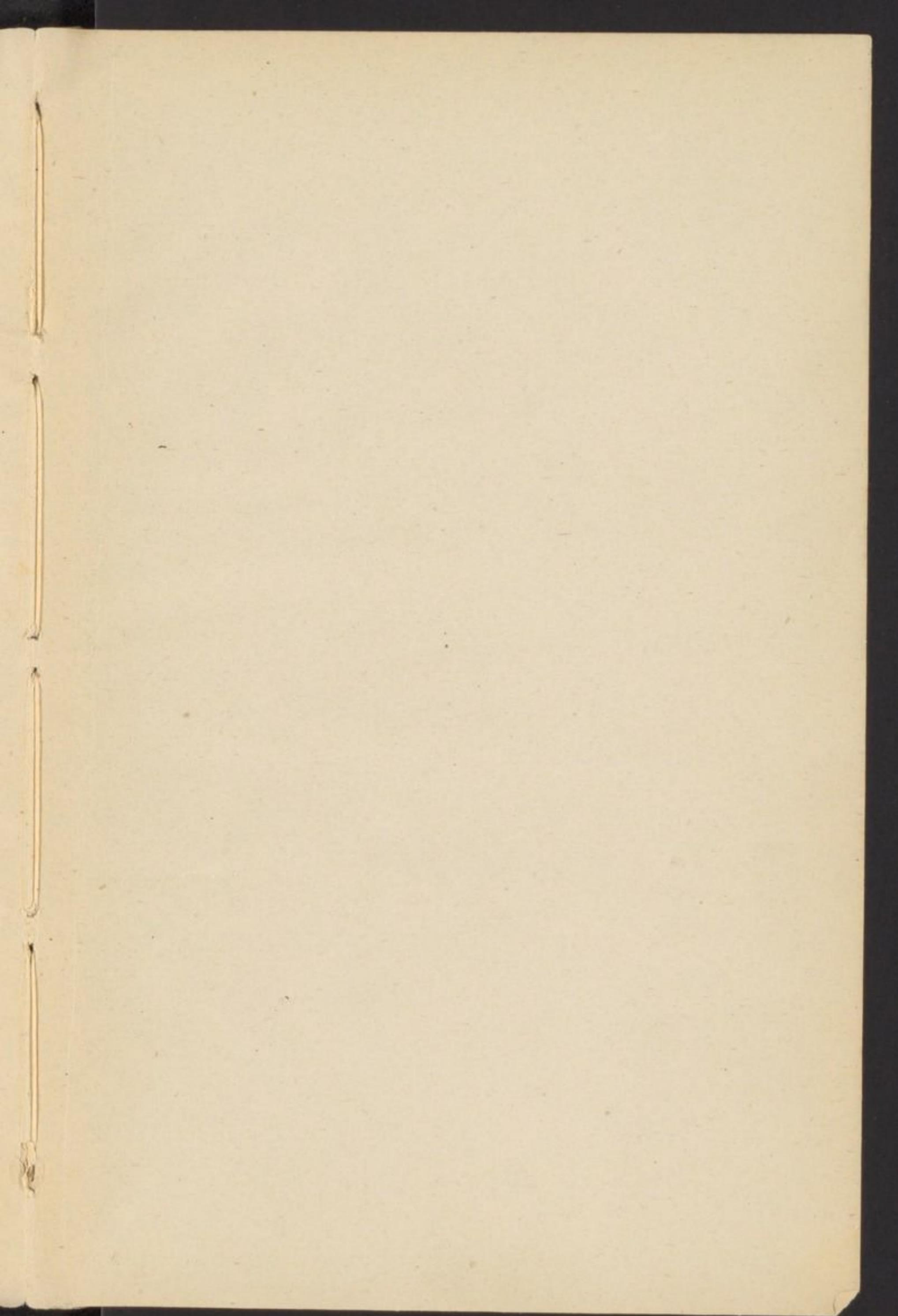


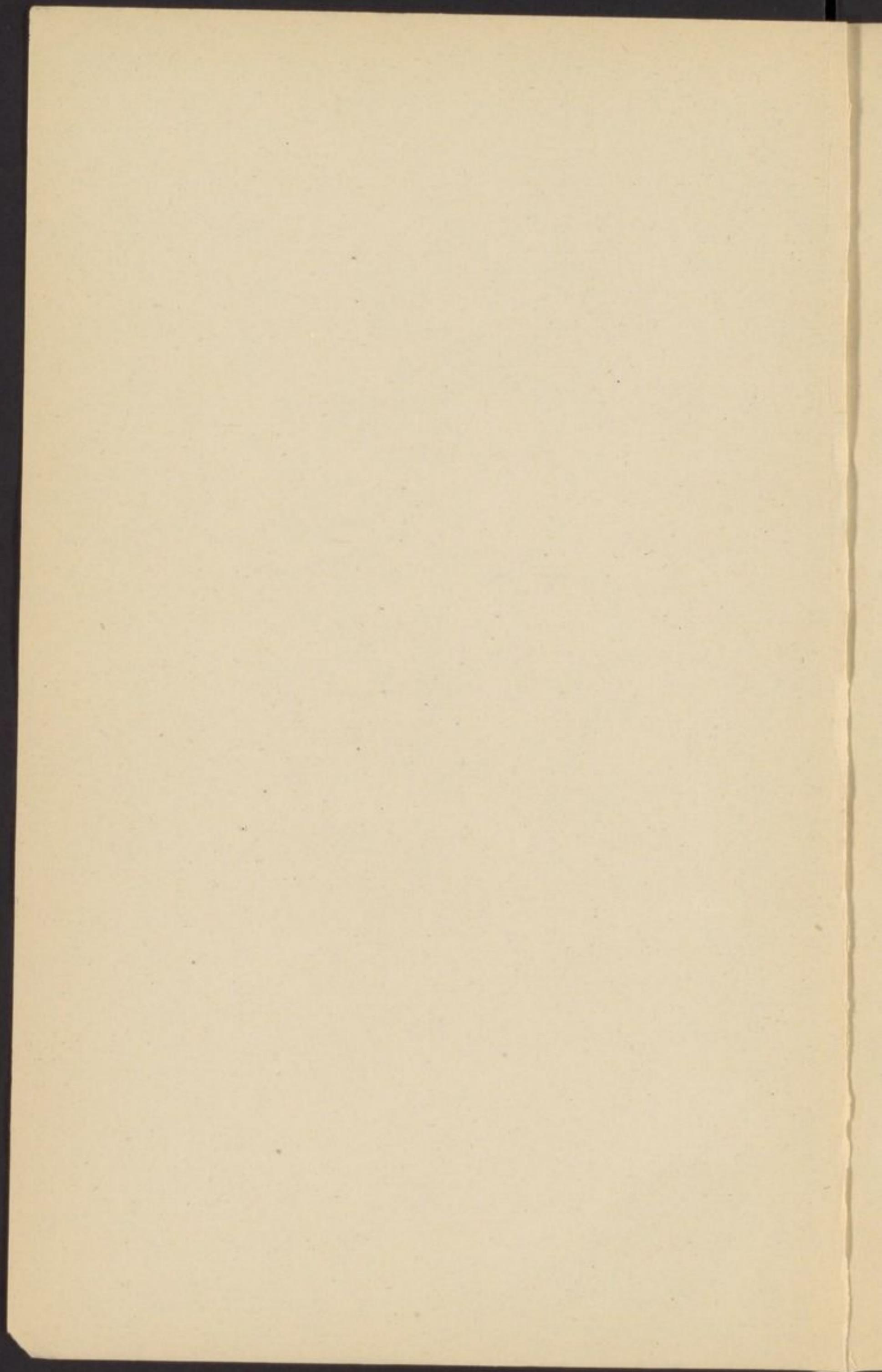
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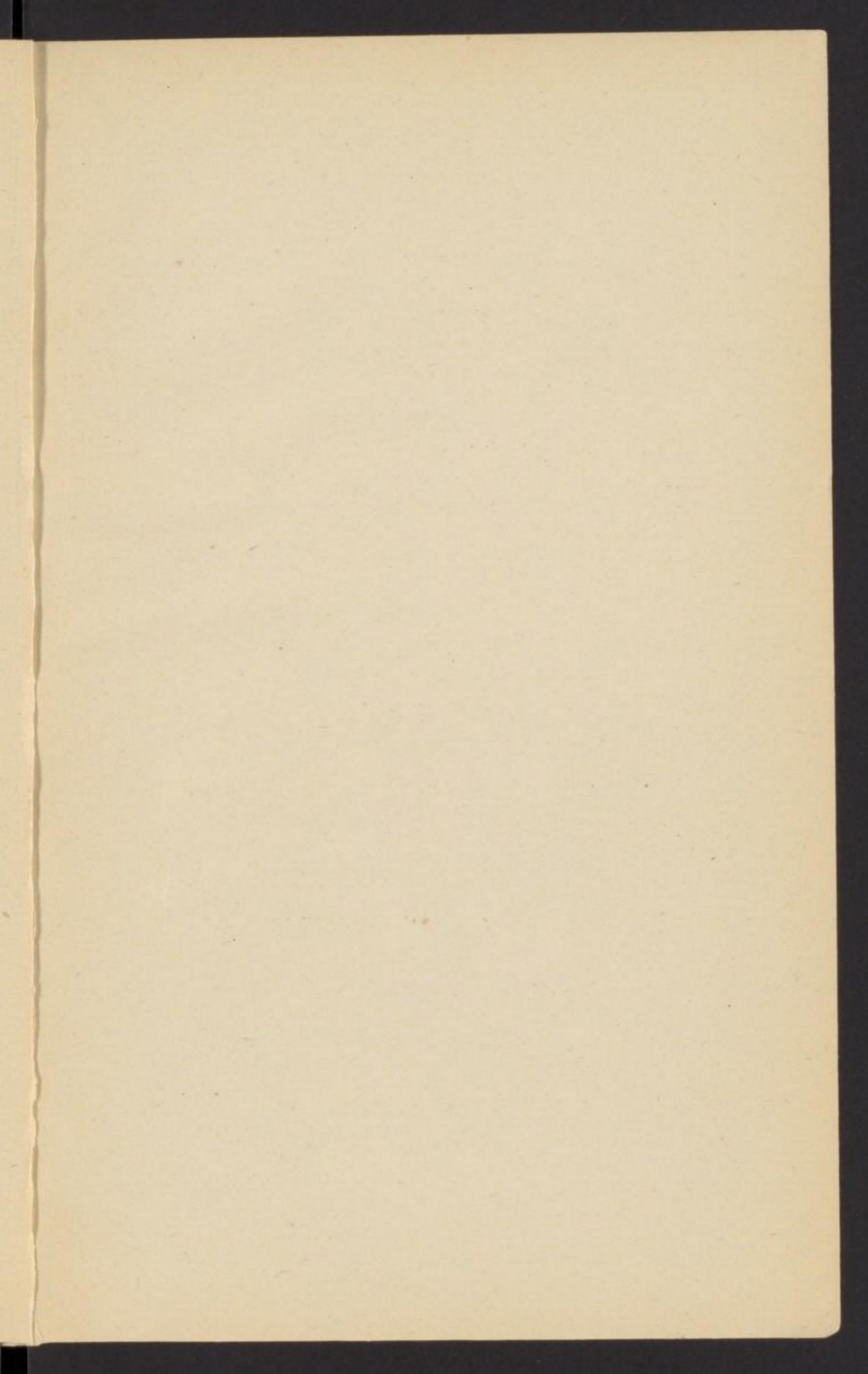
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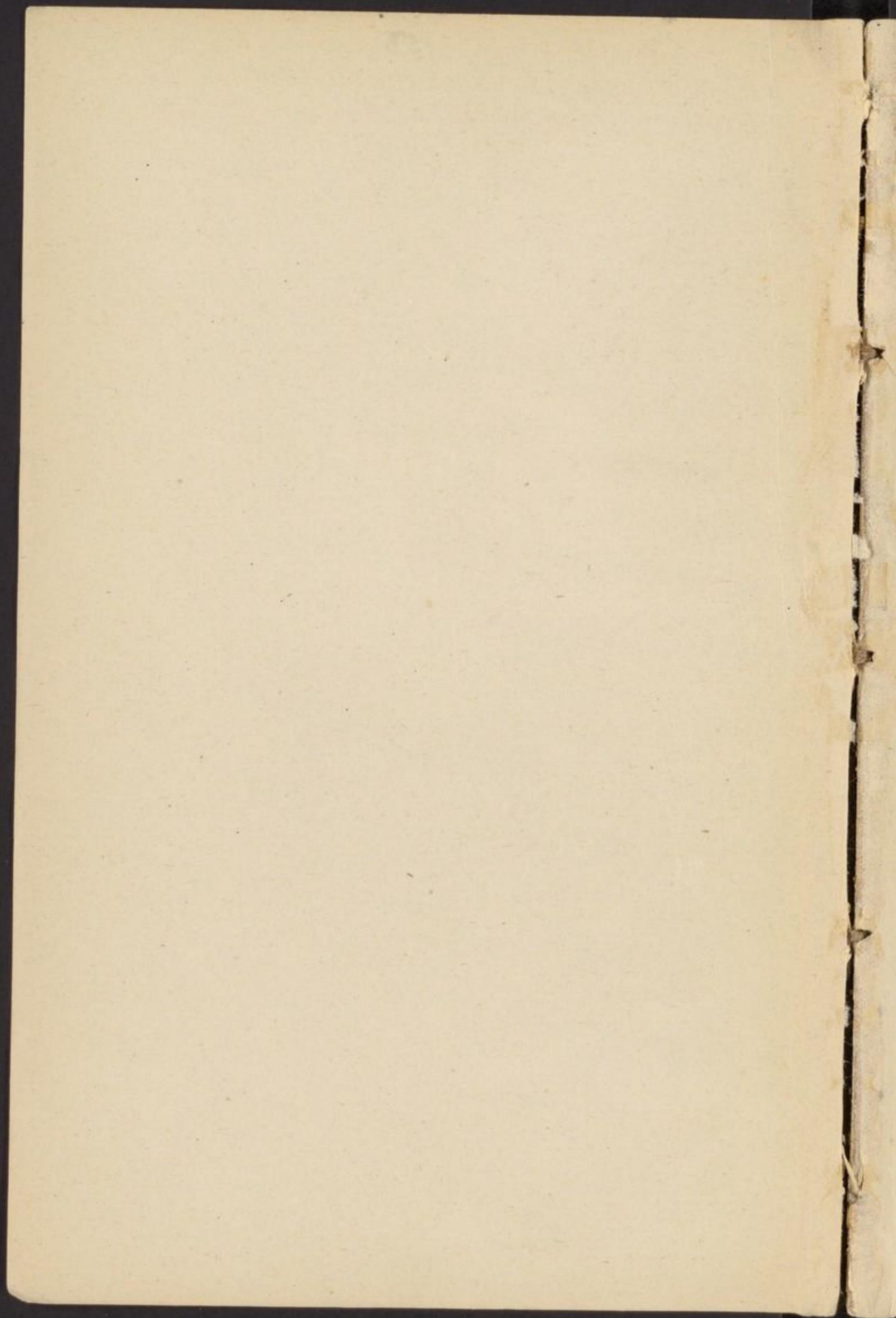
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It must be understood that, although the series of volumes was prepared under the authority, and is now issued with the sanction, of the Foreign Office, that Office is not to be regarded as guaranteeing the accuracy of every statement which they contain or as identifying itself with all the opinions expressed in the several volumes ; the books were not prepared in the Foreign Office itself, but are in the nature of information provided for the Foreign Office and the British Delegation.

The books are now published, with a few exceptions, substantially as they were issued for the use of the Delegates. No attempt has been made to bring them up to date, for, in the first place, such a process would have entailed a great loss of time and a prohibitive expense ; and, in the second, the political and other conditions of a great part of Europe and of the Nearer and Middle East are still unsettled and in such a state of flux that any attempt to describe them would have been incorrect or misleading. The books are therefore to be taken as describing, in general, *ante-bellum* conditions, though in a few cases, where it seemed specially desirable, the account has been brought down to a later date.

G. W. PROTHERO,

General Editor and formerly

Director of the Historical Section.

January 1920.

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BRITISH WEST AFRICA

Introduction.—The size and importance of the British dependencies in West Africa increases with their distance from the United Kingdom. Gambia, 2,500 miles from England, is a mere strip of territory, under 4,500 miles in area, on both banks of the river from which it derives its name. Sierra Leone, 3,000 miles distant, is a peninsula and long coastal strip with a restricted back-country, having a total area of some 30,000 miles. The Gold Coast, 4,000 miles distant, with its dependencies, Ashanti and the Northern Territories, covers 80,000 square miles; and Nigeria is a miniature empire of 336,000 square miles, comprising the whole lower course of the Niger river.

Each of the four territories includes a colony and a protectorate—the Gambia colony and protectorate, the Sierra Leone colony and protectorate, the Nigeria colony and protectorate, the Gold Coast colony and the Northern Territories; the Gold Coast has also attached to it Ashanti, which is technically a colony. The essential distinction between colony and protectorate is that the former is formally part of the British dominions, having become British territory, while the latter has not this status. But in West African protectorates the British Government claims and exercises the fullest sovereign authority; and the administration is carried on in its name and not in that of native chiefs, who are servants of the

Government, not semi-sovereign princes. The chief distinction between the administration of the colonies and the protectorates is that in the former, which have been longer under British control, administration is more largely carried out by governmental officials; while in the latter, which are of more recent acquisition, the former native authorities, reorganized and controlled by the Government, carry out the work of administration. But the distinction is not absolute, for in fact parts of the colonies of Sierra Leone and Gambia are administered together with the protectorates. Natives of the protectorates are not British subjects, but they are entitled to effective protection in foreign countries as British protected persons.

The area of the colonies proper is extremely small in comparison with that of the protectorates. The colony of Gambia is only 69 square miles, that of Sierra Leone 4,000, that of the Gold Coast 24,200, and that of Nigeria 1,400. The contrast is explained by the history of British enterprise in West Africa, which, prior to the European movement of the eighties for the partition of Africa, was adverse to securing more than the minimum territorial control requisite for trading purposes, and for affording means of combating the slave-trade, of which West Africa was long the head-quarters. Even these modest aims were formally disapproved in 1865 by a strong committee of the House of Commons, which definitely reported against any extension of British sovereignty or protectorate on the coast, and upheld, as the ideal to be achieved, the gradual withdrawal of British authority from every part of the coast with the possible exception of Sierra Leone. This ideal proved, however, incapable of realization; and the activity of France after 1870, and of Germany from 1884 onwards, gradually evoked a more vigorous

policy on the part of the United Kingdom. Hampered, however, by considerations of general foreign policy, and more especially by commitments in regard to Egypt, Great Britain was unable to prevent Gambia and, in a somewhat less degree, Sierra Leone from being shut off from their natural back-countries, which are in the possession of France. Greater success was achieved in the case of the Gold Coast; and in 1898 France finally recognized British control of the lower Niger.

The activities of Germany, who in 1884 established herself to the east of the Gold Coast in Togoland, and to the east of the Niger Delta in Cameroon, were in the case of West Africa productive of less friction than those of France; and questions of frontier were adjusted without serious difficulty.¹

Since 1900 no large question of territorial relations has remained to be disposed of, though many minor points have been settled. At the outbreak of war the salient facts of the relations of the British territories to foreign Powers were that Gambia, and in a less degree Sierra Leone, were deeply interested in the commercial conditions prevailing in the adjoining French possessions, with which their economic position was closely concerned; while in all the West African territories, even including Gambia, Germany was becoming of increasing importance as a commercial factor, providing a large part of the shipping by which their products were conveyed to Europe, and affording a market which for some products was much more important than the United Kingdom itself. At the same time German firms were steadily acquiring a footing at the chief commercial centres, showing enterprise and skill in their dealings with the natives.

The European Population.—No part of the West

¹ See *The Partition of Africa*, No. 89 of this series.

African dependencies offers any prospect of becoming suitable for European settlement. Much indeed has been done, and much can still be done, to improve conditions of residence for the officials, missionaries, traders, and miners who practically constitute the European population; but there is practical unanimity that in Gambia, Sierra Leone, and the Gold Coast climatic conditions are such as to render frequent visits to England an essential condition of retaining any measure of health. The same consideration applies to the southern provinces of Nigeria, and to the larger portion of the northern provinces. It is true that on the plateaux in the north, as for instance at the minefields, Europeans and their wives have enjoyed good health for periods of as much as three years; but, apart from the grave difficulties of European settlement among a native population,¹ it is clear that this fact affords no ground for varying the belief that West Africa is essentially a country where Europeans can reside merely as passing visitors. In the whole of Nigeria the white population did not in 1915 exceed 3,000, as against some 17,000,000 natives; in the Gold Coast it was about 2,200, in Sierra Leone under 1,200, in Gambia 128; and a third of these were officials. Of the mercantile and mining population a large proportion consists of men who come to the coast for a comparatively brief period—two or three years—and do not return. Comparatively few European women take up residence on the coast; but the number was increasing at the outbreak of war, since when their passage to Africa has been difficult or impossible.

The Natives.—Despite innumerable differences in detail, there is marked similarity in essentials in the characteristics of all the negro tribes inhabiting the four territories. In none of the territories has any sub-

¹ Cd. 8172—4, p. 52.

stantial native State been erected without foreign inspiration; the Fula Empire of Sokoto, which forms an apparent exception, owed its origin to Arab enterprise, and did not, even at its height, attain a high standard of government. The Fulas are, however, much more enlightened than the negroes of the coastal districts, as are also the Hausas and the Arab inhabitants of Bornu. Even under British supervision it has been found impossible to secure effective native government without assuming full control. An interesting experiment in Lagos, under which the Alake of Abeokuta, a decidedly enlightened native ruler, was encouraged to govern his people on native lines, had to be modified in 1914 as the result of internal commotion, which could only be repressed by the use of the governmental forces.¹ As direct European administration of the territories is impracticable on grounds of finance and expediency alike, the plan is adopted of governing in the protectorates, and in some measure in the colonies also, through the medium of native institutions; and in cases where, as in the southern provinces of Nigeria, such institutions were practically non-existent, steps have been taken to establish a simple form of rule. Experience, however, shows clearly that, in the vast majority of cases, government by this method is effective in exact proportion to the activity of the British officer under whose control the administration is directed. Similarly, while with careful training native troops will fight well, their utility is bound up with the control exercised over them by their officers and the degree of confidence which they feel in them—a fact which renders the raising of large native forces a task of great difficulty. Constant supervision is also necessary to secure any degree of efficiency in the working of the native tribunals which, especially in

¹ Cd. 8172—4, pp. 44, 45.

Nigeria, are used to decide civil cases based on native law.

To continuous hard work of any kind the native evinces a strong antipathy, natural in itself, and doubtless fostered by centuries of insecurity of ownership and the degenerating effect of the prevalence of slavery. No more obvious example of this distaste, which has outlived its immediate causes, can be adduced than the difficulty of persuading the natives of the Gold Coast to take the necessary steps to protect from disease the cocoa crops which form their chief source of wealth. Climatic conditions foster the attitude of mind which seeks to maintain life by a minimum of labour in the collection of crops which grow with little attention; and this factor has seriously hampered the efforts of the British Cotton Growing Association to establish that industry on a large scale in West Africa. Normally, there is no pressure of population to encourage intensive methods of farming, and there is little or no really cheap labour.

The low mental status of the negro is most clearly reflected in his religion. Whatever germs of higher conceptions may exist in native paganism, the obvious features which it represents are the worship of natural powers embodied in material objects or fetishism, and the propitiation of the spirits of the dead, which was one at least of the motives for the human sacrifices that were prevalent in the kingdom of Ashanti before the conquest. The persistence of these beliefs is remarkable even among natives of some education, and forms a grave obstacle to the progress of civilization. Conversion to Mohammedanism is, therefore, in many cases a decided improvement in the mental outlook of the convert; and the best side of Mohammedanism, coupled with a political organization ultimately due to Arab

influence, is seen in the northern provinces of Nigeria. Here the areas which were part of the Fula Empire are infinitely superior in civilization to the territories of the pagan tribes, and remained unshaken in their loyalty to the British Empire during the early stages of the war, when German influences caused unrest among the pagan tribes of Nigeria. Outside Nigeria, however, it is doubtful whether Islam is making much progress; in the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast the movement appears to be stationary.¹

In the early days of the efforts to bring Northern Nigeria under effective control, Mohammedanism undoubtedly served as a basis of union among the Mohammedan States against the British. The political overthrow of the Mohammedan rulers and the disappearance from the scene of those chiefs who were in power before the British occupation became effective, coupled with the elaborate care taken by the Government to prevent any attack on Mohammedanism as a faith, appears to have removed for the time being this factor as an element of danger in the position of the government of Nigeria. Consistently with this policy, Mohammedan law has been permitted to continue to regulate civil relations of the people in the Mohammedan states, care being taken to secure its more efficient application.

Christianity has but little hold at present among the tribes in the protectorates; and even in the colonies its existence is somewhat feeble. It suffers in attractiveness in comparison with Mohammedanism by its insistence on monogamy, a status which is repugnant to native ideals; and native Christians show the same tendency to schism which has marked the history of the native Christian Churches of South Africa. European culture has inevitably made little

¹ Cd. 8434—4, p. 18.

progress in West Africa generally; in the capitals there is a small body of men who have assimilated in very varying degrees European ideals, but who in doing so have rendered themselves less able to interpret the aspirations of their fellow-countrymen. Education, which is partly in the hands of missionaries, Christian and Mohammedan, and partly supplied by governmental agencies, affects as yet a very small proportion of the people, few of whom appreciate its value.

In these circumstances the essential duty of the Government towards the native population lies in the maintenance of effective and just government, the protection of the natives in person and property, and the provision of gradual means of developing a higher form of civilization. The efforts of the governments of the territories are, therefore, directed to the elimination of oppression of natives by their chiefs, the prevention of the exploitation of the natives by European concession holders, and the development of the resources of the territories in such a way as to secure a fair share of the profits for the natives, the preservation to them of their rights in the land, and the improvement of the public health. These aims, of course, impose serious limitations on the sphere of governmental activity; for they not merely negative the process of compulsorily utilizing native labour for European interests—a method which has largely been adopted in the German possessions in Africa—but they are held to preclude any action by the Government to compel the natives to develop their lands by methods which they do not spontaneously adopt.

Government.—The form of government prevailing in West Africa is essentially conditioned by the needs of the native population, which must be protected from spoliation in any form. The supreme executive and

legislative authority is therefore vested by the combined effect of the British Settlements Act, 1887, and the Foreign Jurisdiction Act, 1890 (replacing older enactments to the same purpose), in the Crown, which, acting through the Secretary of State for the Colonies, appoints or approves the appointment of the executive officers, who hold office at pleasure and are thus under effective subordination to the Imperial Government. The head of the executive government and the channel of communication with the Secretary of State is the Governor, who is assisted in his conduct of government, in the case of the colonies and the Nigeria Protectorate, by an executive council consisting of the chief officials of the Government, but is not bound to act on their advice; he is required to act in all matters of importance in accordance with the directions of the Secretary of State. The legislative authority for the colonies and protectorates, other than the Nigeria Protectorate, Ashanti, and the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast, is vested in the Governor in Legislative Council, subject to the right of the Crown to disallow any legislation and to legislate by Order in Council. The composition of the Legislative Councils is by nomination; certain officials in each case are *ex officio* members, and other officials and non-officials, including natives, are nominated as members. In each case the officials are in a majority, and while, as a general rule, they are free to vote as they think fit, they can be required by the Governor to vote in accordance with the policy of the Government, so that any measure desired by the Secretary of State can, if necessary, be carried by the official vote. The Governor has a negative voice in any legislation; and thus no legislation can be passed without his approval. Election of members to the councils is impossible at present, owing to the political inexperience of the native popula-

tion; and the needs of that population are represented in the main by the officials and by those nominated members who understand their conditions. The views of the commercial community are expressed by those nominees who are drawn from their ranks. In the case of the Nigeria Protectorate, the Governor alone is vested with legislative power, since it would be impossible to subject the Mohammedan emirates to the legislative council of the colony, who could have no understanding of their needs;¹ and for similar reasons the legislative power in Ashanti and the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast is now vested in the Governor of the Gold Coast alone. There is in Gambia and Sierra Leone no such distinction of circumstances as to render legislation by the councils of the colonies inappropriate for the protectorates; and they exercise this authority accordingly.

Defence.—Since 1897 there has been created for the protection of the frontiers and the preservation of internal order a military force, the West African Frontier Force, of which regiments were before the war stationed in Nigeria and the Gold Coast, a battalion at Sierra Leone, and a company in Gambia. This force was used with success in the campaigns against Togoland and Cameroon, which in 1914–16 resulted in the surrender of those possessions. Valuable assistance was also rendered by armed Government vessels from Nigeria. On the termination of the operations in West Africa, contingents from Nigeria, the Gold Coast, and Gambia were sent to East Africa, where they fully maintained the reputation they had established in the Cameroon campaign. A large force of carriers was also recruited for service in East Africa. The only point at which Imperial forces have been stationed is Sierra Leone.

¹ Cd. 8172—4, p. 35.

Liquor Traffic.—The necessity of concerted action to repress the evils of the trade in liquor with West Africa was effectively recognized by the Brussels General Act, 1890, which laid down the principle that a minimum duty equivalent to $6\frac{1}{2}d.$ a gallon should be imposed on all spirits imported into the area between 20° N. latitude and 22° S., in which a trade in liquor already existed, while it was agreed that spirits should not be imported into, nor their manufacture permitted in, districts where religious prejudices against such a trade existed. The Niger Company, in accordance with the provisions of the Act, forbade the introduction of spirits into the territories inhabited by Mohammedan tribes which they controlled; and in all the other British territories much higher duties were imposed, with the double object of at once reducing consumption and increasing the revenue.

In 1899 a further conference was arranged at Brussels to deal with the anomalies which arose from wide differences of duty prevailing in adjoining territories belonging to different Powers; and a general agreement was arrived at, under which the minimum duty was fixed at approximately 3s. a proof gallon, with 2s. 6d. for Dahomey and Togoland, in both of which the rates had been much lower. This was increased to 3s. $7\frac{1}{2}d.$ by a further conference in 1906. In 1909 the question was raised in a somewhat acute form in the case of Southern Nigeria, in which nearly half of the revenue was derived from the duties on spirits; and on the representation of the Native Races and Liquor Traffic United Committee, a commission of inquiry was appointed by the Secretary of State for the Colonies. The report of the commission showed that many of the representations of the evil effects of liquor were exaggerated; that the trade gin and rum

were seldom deleterious in composition; that drink was rarely a cause of disease or death; that the people were in the main sober, and able to make a reasonable use of liquor; and that the prohibition of the import of spirits would merely mean the resort by the native to indigenous forms of intoxicants of a much more deleterious type, over which Government supervision would be extremely difficult. The commission also called attention to the fact that increases of duty unaccompanied by similar increases in the adjoining French and German territories would certainly lead to smuggling, which in some degree already existed in the Badagry district as the result of the difference between the British duty, raised to 5s. a gallon in 1908, and the French duty, which stood at 3s. 7½*d.*

It was accordingly felt by His Majesty's Government that the first step desirable was a revision of the existing agreement as to the rate of duties; but an international conference summoned in 1911 at Brussels for this end broke up without agreeing to any increase. It was then decided that the duties should be raised irrespective of foreign action; that distilling should be forbidden in the British territories; and that the introduction of distilling apparatus should be prohibited. In accordance with that policy the duty on spirits was raised in Nigeria from 5s. a gallon in 1911 to 7s. 6*d.* a gallon in January 1915, with 2½*d.* additional for every degree above 50, and 1½*d.* reduction for every degree below 50, with a minimum of 6s. 6*d.* The result was that the proportion of spirits to the whole inward trade, including specie, fell from 7.76 per cent. in 1911 to 5.51 per cent. in 1915. In December 1915 the duty on 'trade spirits' was raised to 8s. 9*d.* a gallon, and in November 1918 to 10s. a gallon with 3*d.* additional for every degree above 50, and 1½*d.* reduction

for every degree below 50, and a minimum of 8s. 9d. In the Gold Coast the position was complicated by an agreement with Germany, under which east of the Volta the rate had to be fixed as in Togoland; but in March 1915 the rate was raised for the whole of the colony to 7s. 6d. a gallon. This was increased to 8s. 6d. a gallon in November 1917, and to 9s. 6d. a gallon in May 1918. In Gambia, since April 1, 1915, the duty has been raised to 5s. 6d. a gallon; while in Sierra Leone the duty from July 21, 1915, has been 7s. 6d. a gallon, and the proportion of spirits to other imports, including specie, has fallen from 6.01 per cent. in 1911 to 4.47 per cent. in 1915.

International Policy.—The policy of the Imperial Government in regard to the treatment of foreign nations in its West African possessions has been to avoid any differentiation of treatment between British subjects and foreigners. It was expressed in the offer made by the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs to the German Ambassador on May 16, 1885, which was duly accepted on reciprocal terms by the German Government on June 2, 1885. Under that agreement the two Powers bound themselves not to treat differentially in their protectorates in the Gulf of Guinea foreigners or foreign goods; to apply to their protectorates the provisions of Article V (2) of the Act of Berlin of February 26, 1885, regarding the protection of the property and persons of foreigners; and to engage that there should be no differential treatment of foreigners as to settlement or access to markets. Similarly the treaty of June 14, 1898, which settled the Nigerian boundary with France, stipulates for the same treatment of British and French subjects for a period of thirty years in all matters of river navigation, commerce, tariff, and fiscal treatment and taxes generally; and apart from treaty, the same policy has

been applied to other nations. Under the encouragement thus afforded grew up the powerful German interests in West Africa. On the outbreak of the war 'the many enemy firms in Nigeria were treated with every consideration, and were at first allowed to continue their business on condition that they neither remitted money to, nor traded with, Germany. But, when evidence was forthcoming that some among them had endeavoured to incite the natives to rebellion—though this action was indignantly repudiated by others—it was decided to deport them all, and a receiver was appointed to wind up their businesses.'¹

Their property was subsequently sold on conditions designed to prevent it falling back into the hands of its original owners or other enemy subjects.

Success of British Administration.—The general success of the system of administration adopted is seen in the attitude of the native population towards the war. In January 1915 it was found possible to send the whole of the Sierra Leone battalion of the West African Frontier Force to Cameroon, with the exception of a nucleus for recruiting purposes.

'The dispatch of the whole battalion', the annual report² states, 'was only rendered possible by the settled state of the Protectorate and the law-abiding nature of both chiefs and people. The loyalty of the chiefs has been manifested not only by their co-operation with the District Commissioners in policing and maintaining peace in their various chiefdoms, but also by the readiness with which they have recruited carriers and provided rice for the Cameroons expedition.'

The annual report³ on the Gold Coast for 1915 states:

'It is no exaggeration to say that, on the whole, the twelve months have been a period of prosperity for the native community; and for the fact that this Colony can record a year of prosperity during the great war the credit is given intelli-

¹ Cd. 8172—4, p. 44.

² Cd. 8172—14, p. 33.

³ Cd. 8172—20, p. 30.

gently and gratefully where it is due—to the navy. It is generally realized that the existence of the Colony as it is to-day depends upon its communications by sea; and this fact perhaps more than any other has brought home to the community their dependence on the Crown and their immediate concern in the fortunes of the war. It may be too early now to attempt any summary of the effect the war has had or will have on the course of affairs in this Colony. One effect, however, is obvious: it has compelled the native to take stock of things as they are and of things as they might be; and the result appears to have been to confirm, and to evoke expressions of, his loyalty. Generous subscriptions from all parts of the Colony to the war fund, to the Red Cross, to the Belgian Relief Fund, gifts of aeroplanes, the subscription from a chief in the interior to the Edith Cavell Fund, the enlisting of a native barrister and of clerks in the ranks of the Gold Coast Regiment for active service in the Cameroons—these and other instances, all of which in due time will have their record, are the endeavour of the native community to express articulately that it is heart and soul with the empire and that any other connexion is unthinkable.’

In Nigeria, in which the pressure of the war was most keenly felt, owing to the fighting which took place on the frontier, the Mohammedan states in the north showed enthusiastic loyalty, and contributed large sums from their treasuries for war purposes. While the more barbarous pagan tribes were in many cases restive, owing to the usual rumours that the British were about to leave the country, and that it was therefore safe to indulge in intertribal quarrels, it was ‘notable, however, that the tribes nearer to the German frontier, who could appreciate the contrast between British and German rule, gave loyal and ungrudging assistance’.¹

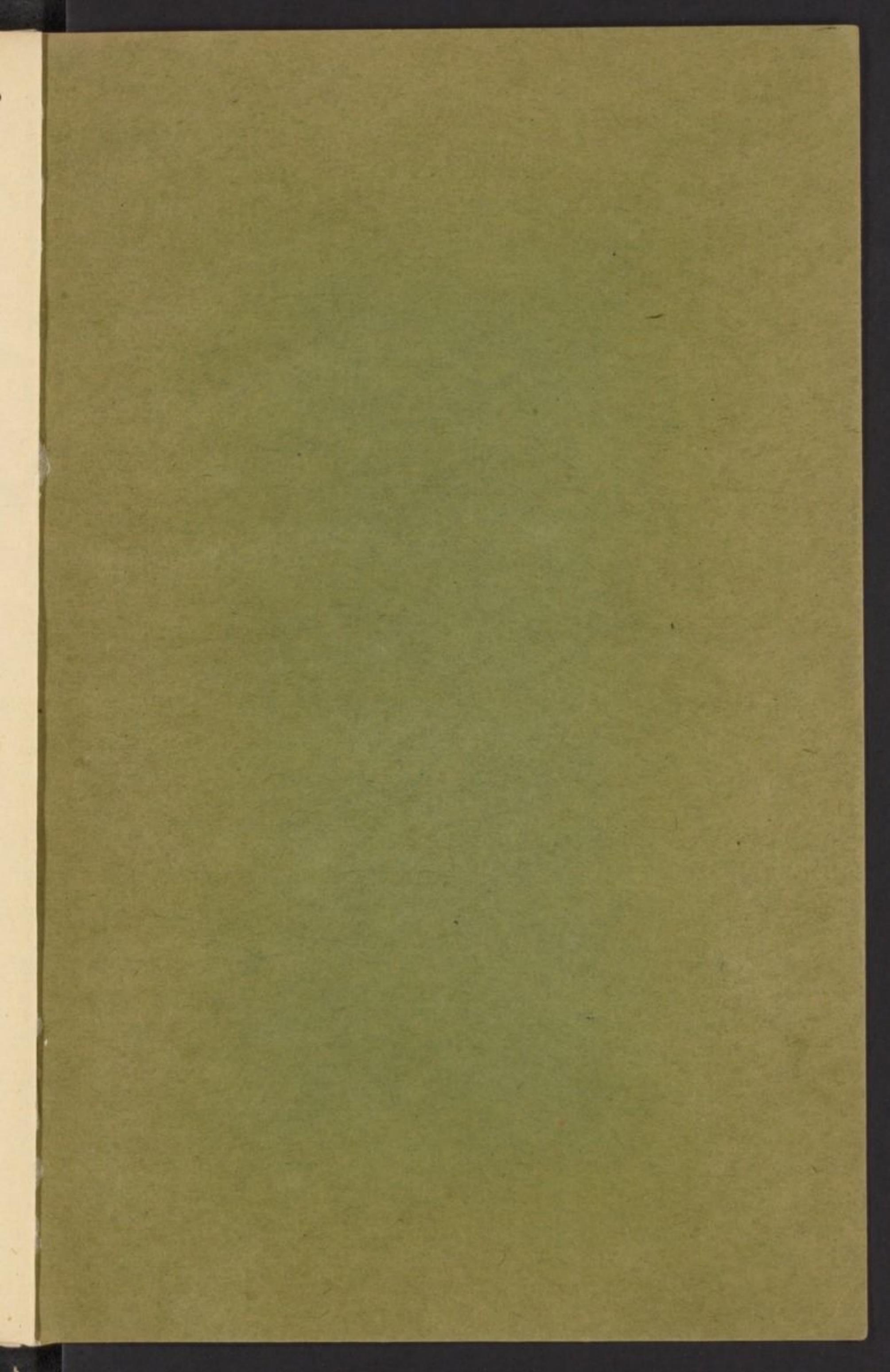
¹ Cd. 8434—7, p. 29.

AUTHORITIES

Sir C. P. Lucas's *Historical Geography of the British Colonies*, vol. iii, West Africa, third edition, by Professor A. B. Keith, Oxford, 1913. See also *The Partition of Africa*, No. 89 of this series ; and Nos. 91-94, relating to the separate Colonies and Protectorates.

MAPS

A map of West Africa, from Senegal to Spanish Guinea, on the scale of 1 : 6,336,000 (1903, additions 1914, boundaries corrected 1919) has been issued by the War Office (G.S.G.S. 2434).



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