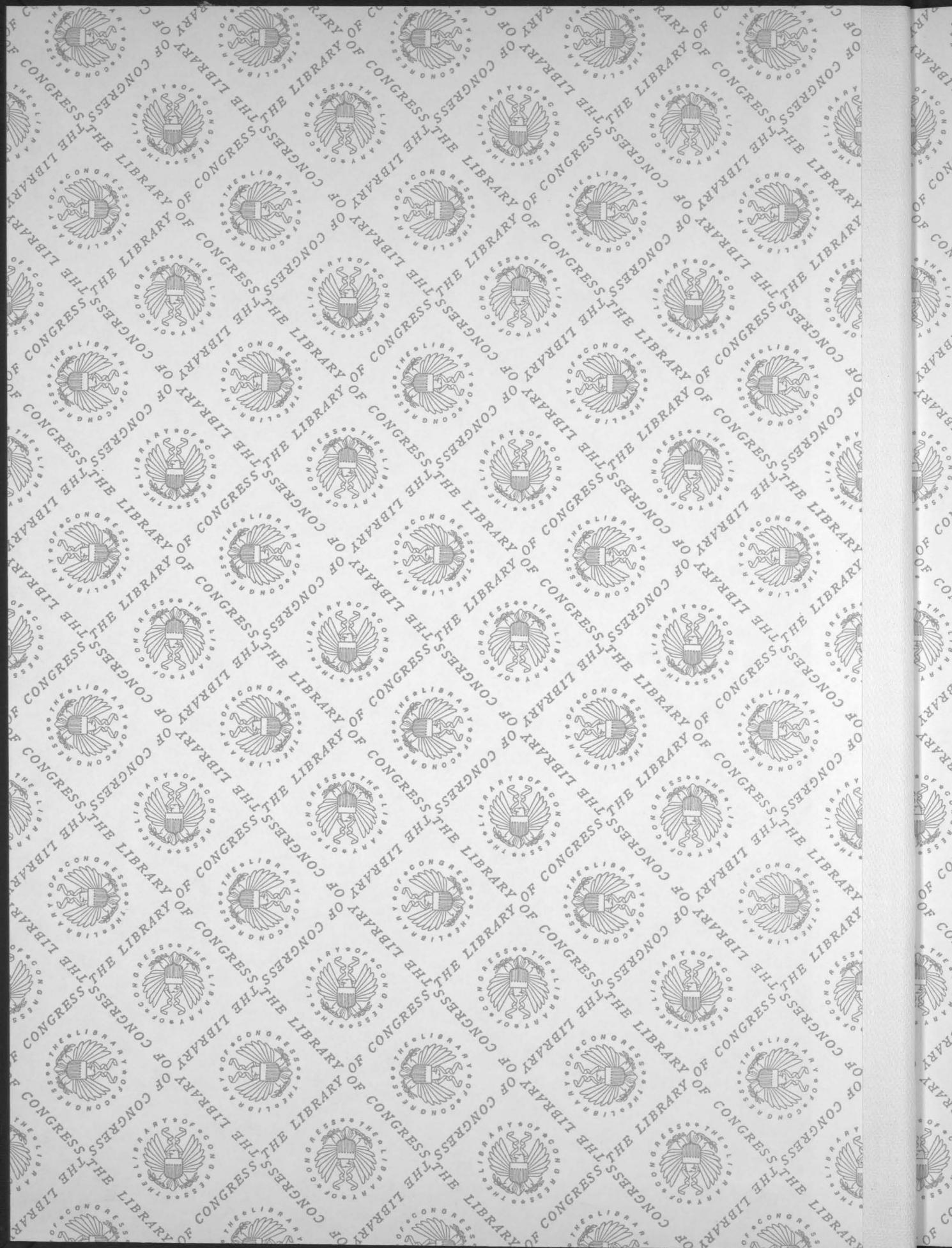
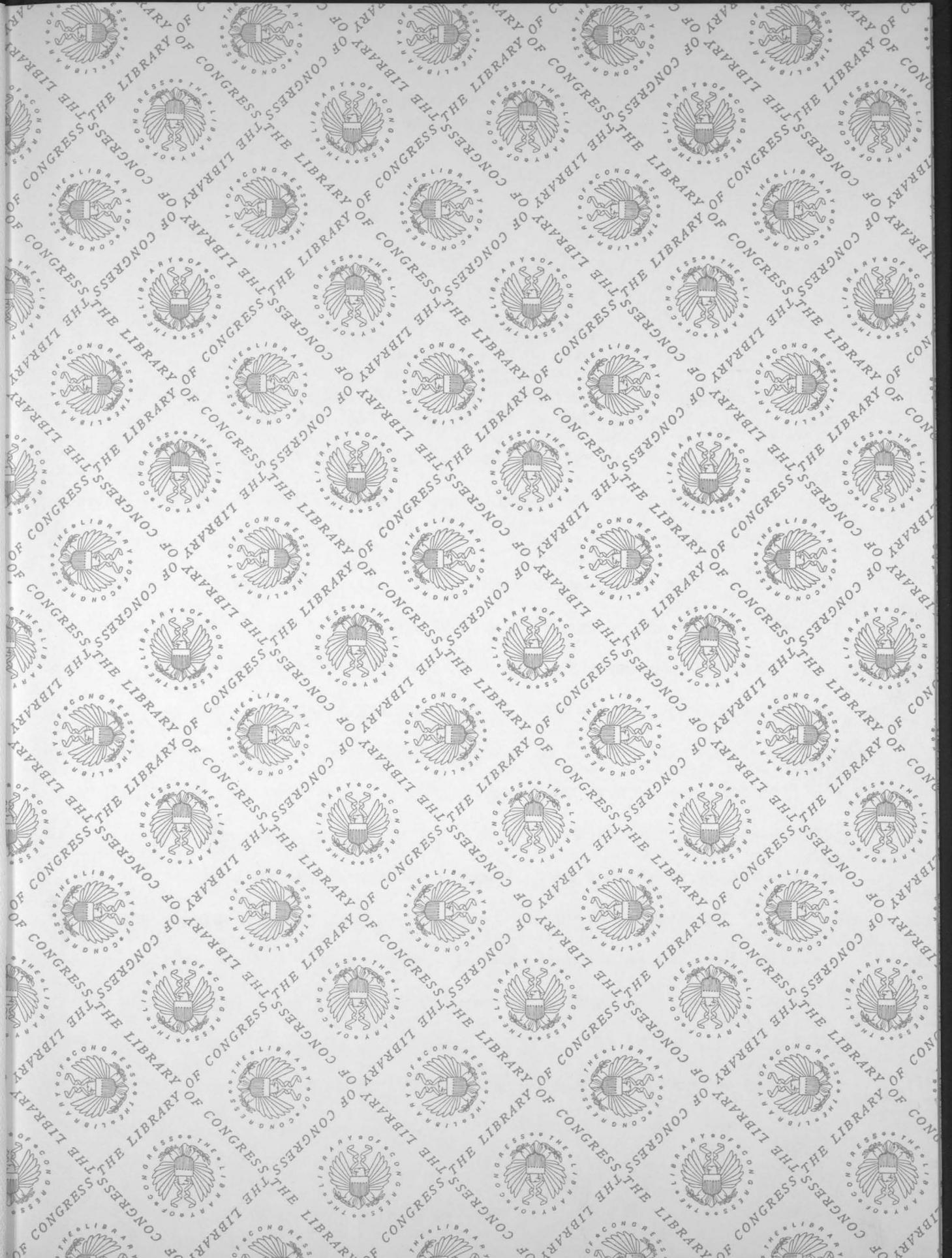
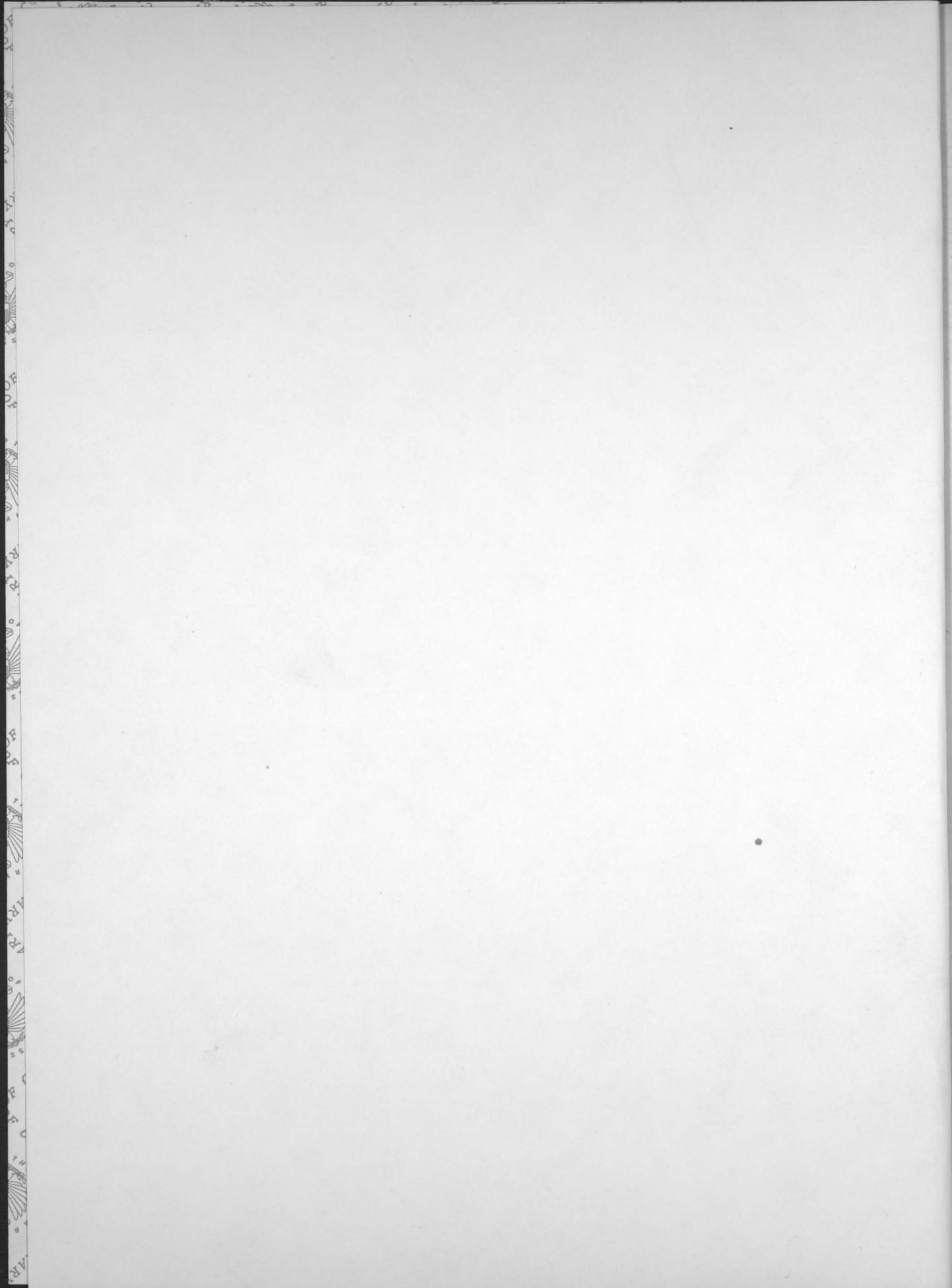


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PRESS RELEASE

For release  
Tuesday,  
November 28, 1939  
4:00 P. M.

DEPOSIT OF THE MAGNA CARTA  
in The Library of Congress  
on November 28, 1939

Remarks of the Right Honourable the Marquess of Lothian, C. H.,  
British Ambassador to the United States

This copy of Magna Carta—the best of the four original versions - is the property of the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral of Lincoln, and their most treasured possession. It was brought to the United States early this year, safely enclosed in the bronze airtight casing in which you now see it, to be the central exhibit in the British Pavilion of the New York World's Fair. There it was guarded by day and by night. This ancient document, for seven hundred years treasured and honoured in Britain, has been welcomed and honoured not less deeply in the United States. In the last six months more than 14,000,000 people passed along the gangway and bent down to read its obsolete Latin legal phraseology, which none but a handful of experts now understand.

Why all this fuss and trouble about a medieval relic? If one reads Magna Carta with the cold objective eye of the historian, it is clear that the protagonists in the historic struggle against the exactions and oppressions of the Crown were not the people but the barons of England. And the barons were certainly more concerned to preserve their own rights and privileges than to extend the liberties of commoner and villein. Yet from that day in 1215 when Magna Carta was signed on the field of Runnymede, by the Thames, a site now fortunately a national preserve, the almost self-evident truths it pronounced have echoed through the pages of history. They have been repeated

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decade after decade, century after century, by individual citizens and subjects, by groups of petitioners, by rebels and conservatives, by Parliaments and Congresses, as the sufficient ground on which to base their claim for liberty and responsibility.

Here are some of its redoubtable sentences. "No freeman shall be taken, imprisoned, disseised, outlawed, banished, or in any way destroyed, nor will We proceed against or prosecute him except by lawful judgment of his peers or the law of the land." "To no one will We sell, to none will We deny or defer, right or justice." "No scutage or aid shall be imposed in Our Kingdom unless by common council thereof, ———."

In these immortal words, and in others, inscribed on the musty parchment before us, we see the nucleus of most of our liberties, of trial by Jury, of Habeas Corpus, of the principle of no taxation without representation, of the Bill of Rights, and of the whole constitutional edifice of modern Democracy, and of what my predecessor in office, Lord Bryce, described as "the supremacy of law over arbitrary power." From those days they have been the inspiration which nerved the hands of my countrymen who struck for freedom and who in later generations built the institutions which secured it.

The principles which underlay Magna Carta are the ultimate foundations of your liberties no less than of ours. Samuel Adams appealed to "the rights of Magna Carta to which the colonists, as free subjects, have an undoubted claim." It was in their name that your ancestors threw the tea into Boston Harbour and rejected the claim of King George III to tax the colonies for defence. It was in their name that, after bitter sacrifices and frustration, they drew up that constitution which Mr. Gladstone, one of the greatest champions of human freedom, described as "the most wonderful work ever struck

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off at a given time by the brain and purpose of man." And it was in their name that Abraham Lincoln fought a four years' war to loosen the fetters from the slaves and to preserve the Union which alone could ensure that the anarchy of national sovereignties, the insatiable breeder of war in Europe, should not appear on this continent.

It has, therefore, been a true and penetrating instinct that has come to regard with peculiar veneration a document which has represented not the findings of philosophers or the dreams of idealists, but a victory in the grim struggle of national life, for the principles of freedom from which we draw our being.

But if seven centuries have passed since they were first formulated, in these times their full meaning has still to be understood and realized. We still have our liberties, though at the moment they are being challenged by totalitarian imperialism, both from the right and from the left. But the fulfillment of the infinite promise they contain depends upon the way in which we use them. The correlative to freedom is responsibility. Without responsibility freedom fails. Individual self-government, which begins with fidelity to principle, is the only lasting foundation for Democracy. If we enjoy free government today it is because the makers of our Parliamentary system and of your federal system felt deeply the moral responsibility which rests upon free citizenship and rose nobly and heroically to the sacrifice of self and the creative social imagination which it requires. There is a no less vast task of achievement before our generation today if Magna Carta is to come to its full fruition.

It was, therefore, but natural that when the second great war of this century descended upon us this autumn the British Government should have

hesitated to imperil so priceless a possession by trusting it to the angry transit of the seas, back to its Cathedral shrine. It therefore instructed me to enquire whether a home for it could be found in the Library of your National Congress for the duration of the war or till it was needed elsewhere. To our great delight the Librarian has granted our request and his courtesy has found for Magna Carta this wonderful position, where it lies alongside its own descendants, the Declaration of American Independence and the American Constitution, and where, like them, it will be guarded by day and by night. Mr. Librarian, I have the greatest pleasure in entrusting Magna Carta to your benevolent care.

DEPOSIT OF THE MAGNA CARTA  
in The Library of Congress  
on November 28, 1939  
Remarks of Archibald MacLeish  
The Librarian of Congress

Mr. Ambassador, it is with pleasure that I accept the trust---pleasure that an American library should be honored with the custody of so notable a document---particular pleasure that the library so honored should be The Library of Congress. For the deposit in The Library of Congress of the Great Charter of 1215 has, or so it seems to me, a peculiar and a deeply moving significance. The Library of Congress is, as its name implies, the library of the people's representatives in the federal legislature. The Magna Carta is one of the great symbols, to all English-speaking peoples, of liberty within the law. The deposit of such a document in such a place is an action full of meaning for our time.

I am aware of course that the precise historical significance of Magna Carta is in dispute among the doctors. I am aware that a sceptical generation of scholars has found much to question in the view, so confidently held by Bishop Stubbs and Sir Edward Coke and Sir William Blackstone, that the barons who dictated the Great Charter "in the meadow called Runnymede between Windsor and Staines" were acting for the people of England to establish the people's rights. Fierce-sniffing philosophers like Professor Edward Jenks, who can smell out the errors of the intellect even in the Muniment Room of Lincoln Cathedral, after innumerable generations of vicars and occasional generations of the vicars' pigeons, have strongly implied that the barons of Runnymede were less concerned for the rights of the people of England than for the privileges they had planned to pocket for themselves.

But this dispute, like so many disputes between the doctors, has little reference to realities. The liberties of the people, throughout the popular experience of liberty, have often been established by those who had no interest in the people. It is not important in the long view of history whether the limitations upon absolute power were limitations imposed by a particular class for the intended advantage of that class, or whether they were limitations imposed by popular will. It is only important that the limitations should exist. The far-carrying phrases which you, Sir, have just quoted, may have been meant by their contrivers to safeguard the vested rights of a few land-owners and deer-killers in thirteenth century England. They have inured to the benefit of the people of seven centuries and of continents of which their authors never heard.

No learned dissertation will persuade the Americans that the document you have so generously deposited in their national library is not a witness to the ancient warrant of their rights. Nor will any amount of scholarly dissension blind them to the meaning of its presence here. The deposit of the Magna Carta in the library of the people's representatives in Congress is a plain and intelligible statement of a plain intelligible fact---the fact, namely, that the institutions of representative government are the protectors, and the only possible protectors, of the charters of the people's rights. For generations past we have taught our children in this Republic that our institutions of representative government were dependent on our constitutional charter for their existence. We have more recently learned, and now believe, that the opposite is also true: that without the institutions of representative government the charters of the people's rights cannot be saved.

There are those in this country, Sir, as there are those in yours, who have told us by direction and by indirection that we should abandon representative institutions. There are those who disparage the people's representatives in Congress and who lose no opportunity of publication or of public speech to explain that representative government is not efficient government in a complicated and industrialized society like our own. But though there is much talk there is little listening. For we have been brought to observe, in these last several years, that government by the people's representatives, whatever else it may or may not be, is the one government of which history has record under which the people's liberties have been secure.

Government by the people's representatives, like other governments, can be misled. Government by the people's representatives may, from time to time, mistake for true defenders of the people's rights, the false defenders of the people's rights---the demagogues, the same in every generation, who appeal to liberty in order to destroy it. Government by the people's representatives may, from time to time, substitute inquisitions and espionage for the equal protection of the laws, and may permit the inquisitors, in their reckless search for enemies of liberty, to break down liberty. But government by the people's representatives is the one government which has never suffered these dishonors long---the one government in all experience of governments, which has always, in the end, restored of its own will the people's limitations on its powers.

History has many curious and circuitous passages---many winding stairways which return upon themselves---but none, I think, more curious than the turn of time which brings the Great Charter of the English to stand across this gallery from the two great charters of American freedom. Thomas Jefferson,

who was the true founder of this library as well as the true author of the noblest of our charters, would have relished the encounter. But Thomas Jefferson would perhaps have relished it with a different understanding from our own. For Jefferson was a man who dared to think of history in timeless terms, and of the rights of men as rights which had existed, and which would exist, in every time and every country:---rights which nothing done by tyranny had ever yet destroyed or ever could.

To Thomas Jefferson, the deposit, beside the Declaration of Independence, of this Charter of the liberties of those from whom we won our independence, would not have seemed incongruous but just and fitting---an affirmation of the faith in which this nation was conceived.

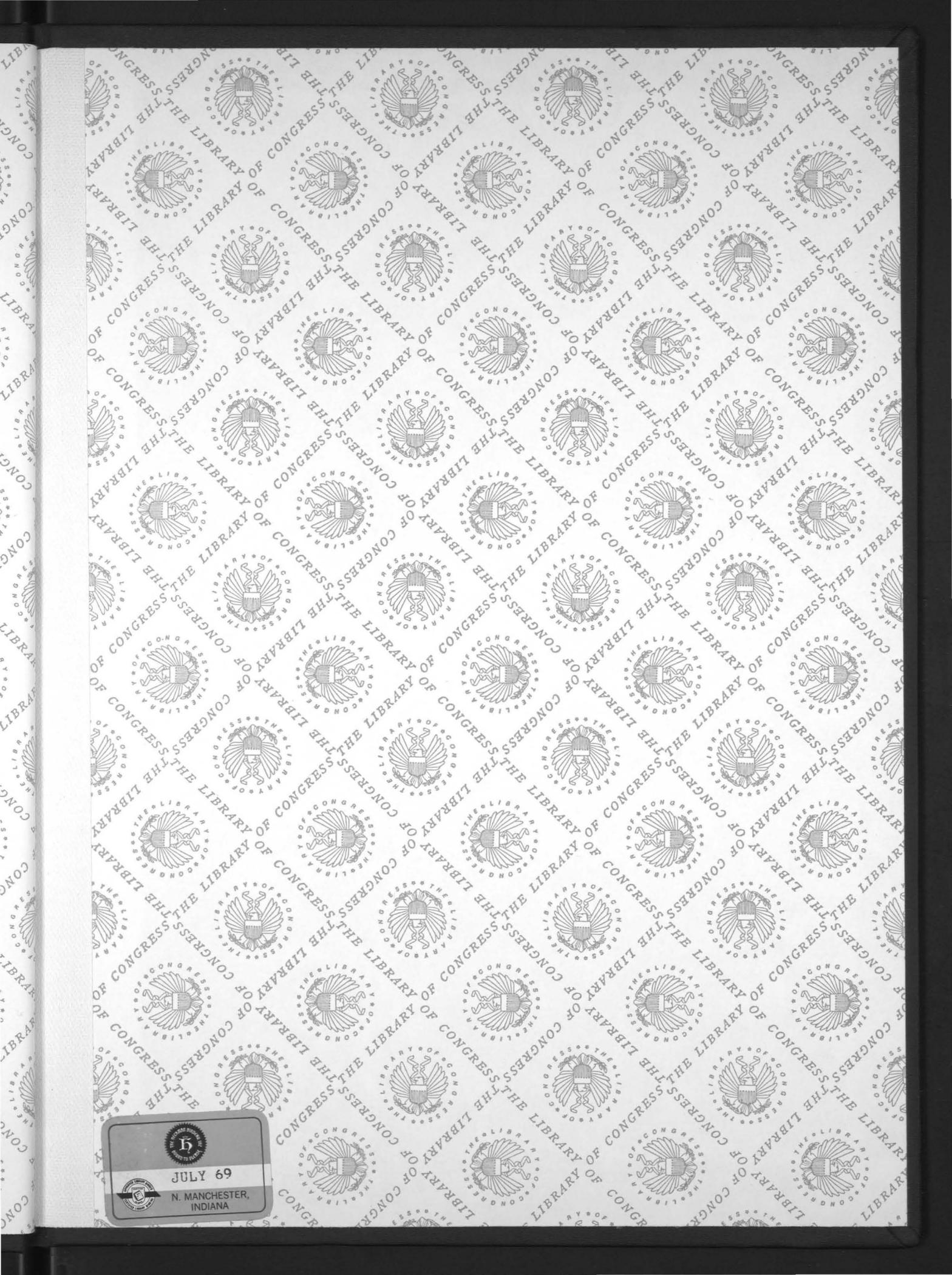
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