

# Etchings by Matisse

With an introduction by William S. Lieberman

Author

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# ETCHINGS BY MATISSE

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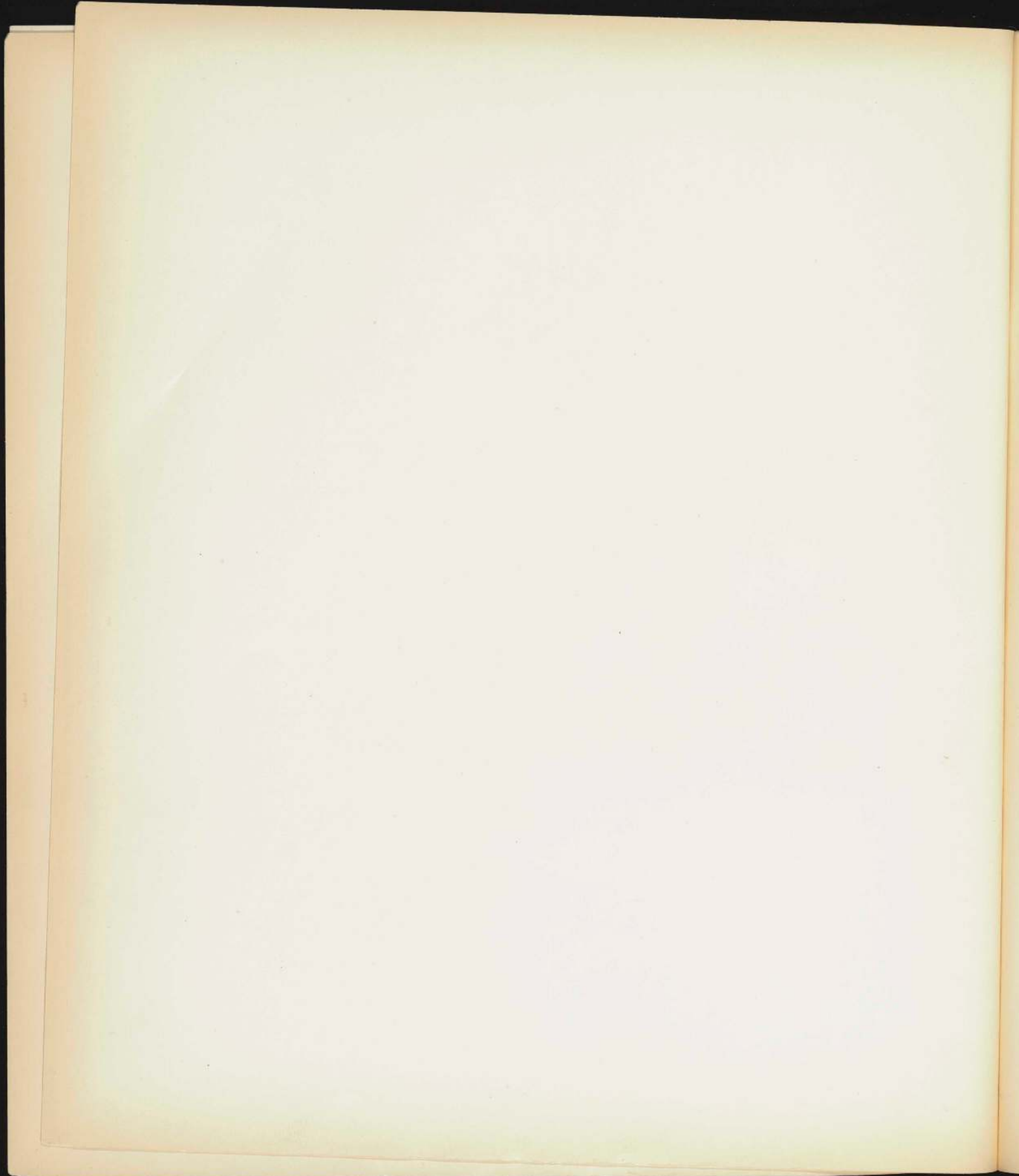
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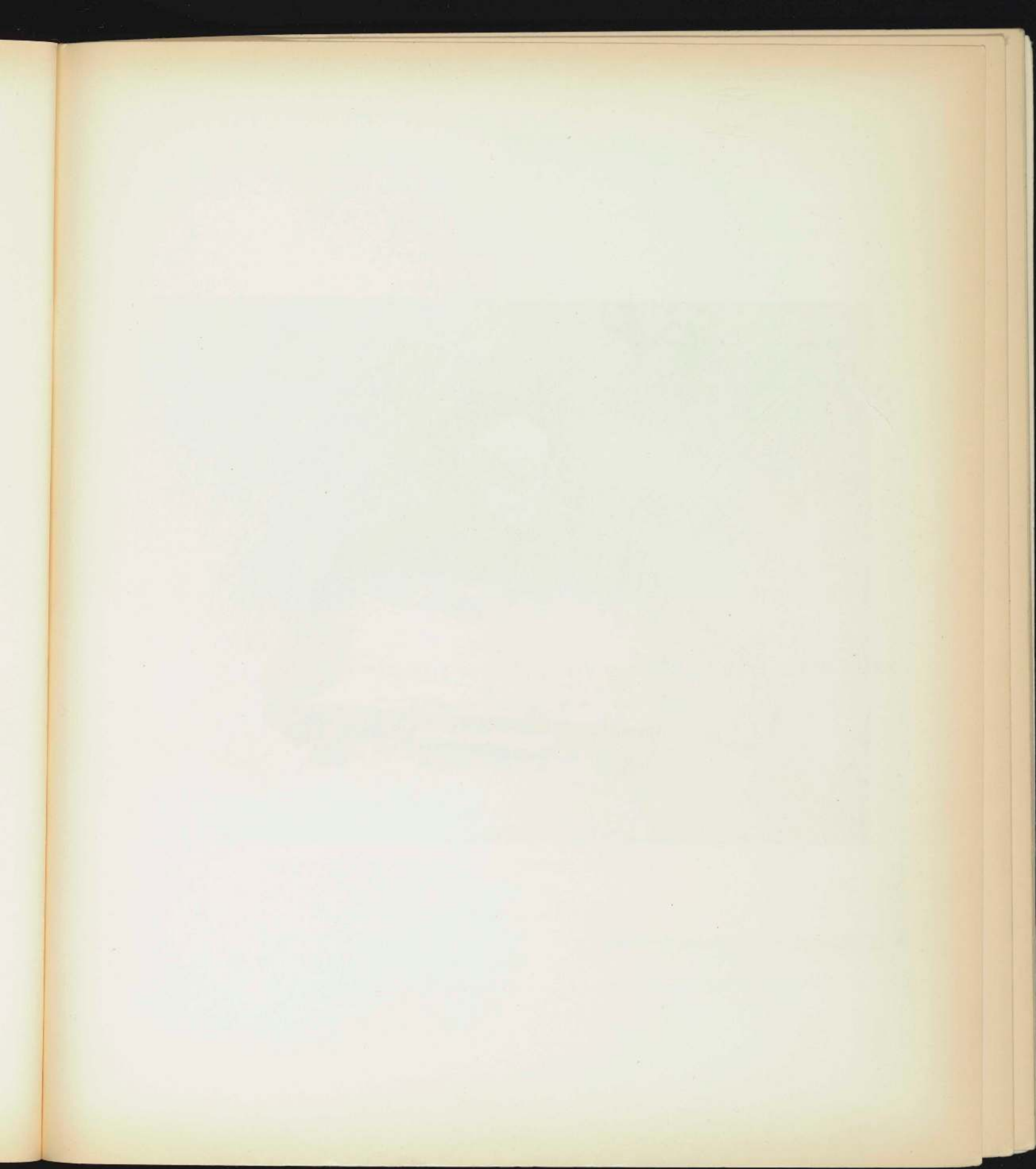
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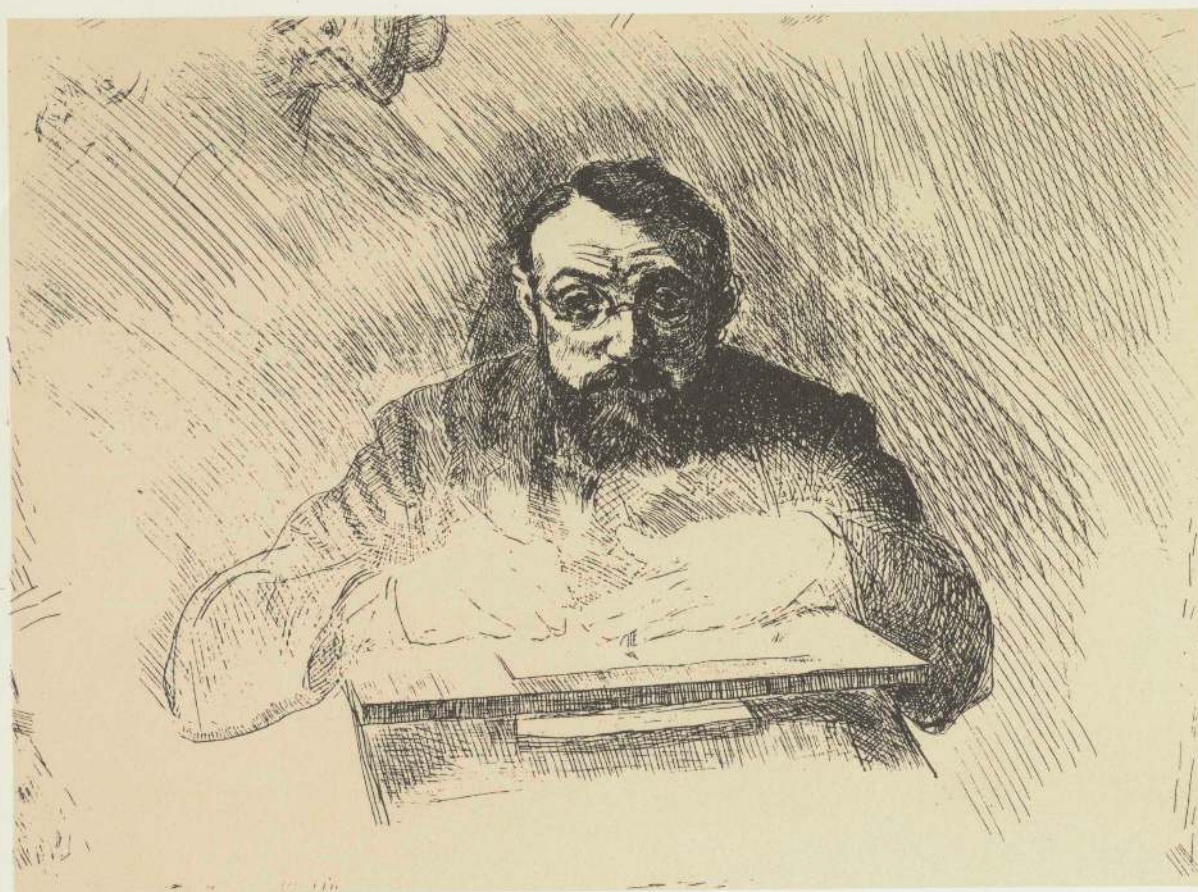












# ETCHINGS BY MATISSE

*with an introduction by William S. Lieberman*

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART NEW YORK

*distributed by Simon and Schuster New York*

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Unlike Picasso or Rouault, Matisse never sustained a continuous interest in printmaking as such. His accomplishment as an etcher and lithographer was prodigious, but it was also limited to comparatively short intervals throughout his career. Twice, in 1914 and 1929, he took up etching with enthusiasm, as if he deliberately sought temporary refreshment from easel painting in the chemistry of a minor medium.

Matisse first worked on copper some time about 1903. His early prints are tentative essays, less than ten plates frankly in the nature of sketches. The drypoint, *Studies of a Woman in Street Costume* (plate 2) seems less assured than the *Self Portrait as an Etcher*, a factual reflection of the artist's mirror image (frontispiece). The group of prints also includes a half dozen studies of the nude. The casualness of these sketches is typified in one plate where heads of the artist's son and daughter have been added to two views of the same nude (plate 3).

Matisse did not resume etching for some time, although in 1906 he composed his first lithographs and linoleum cuts. His first etchings, cumulatively significant as a series, were begun in 1914, a year in which he returned to printmaking in several media. Within a period of a few months he produced nine or ten lithographs, about as many monotypes, and some fifty etchings. The intaglio plates are mostly portraits of friends and family: the wives of the painters Derain, Galanis and Gris, the model Loulou, Mme La Forge, Mme Vignier and her young daughter, Mlle Landsberg, the artist's daughter, son and wife. To the student of Matisse's art the inclusion of so many portraits of men is remarkable: Iturrino, Galanis, Walter Pach, Bourgeat, Mathew Prichard, Olivarés and Joan Massia. Several of the artist's friends sat more than once and, in the series, there are as many as seven or eight portraits of a single individual.

The portraits were finished with astonishing speed after careful consideration of the sitter. The drawing is at once spontaneous and disciplined. Like all Matisse's etchings, each is distinguished by its economy of means. Individual characterizations are concentrated into a few vivid details and often the contours of the face fill the rectangular format of the copper plate itself. Figures are treated at greater length only occasionally—in the

double portrait of Josette Gris (plate 7) and in the *Woman in a Kimono*, a portrait of Mme Matisse (plate 1).

The American painter Walter Pach has written a lively account of Matisse as an etcher in 1914. One morning they had been "talking art" for several hours. Just as Pach was ready to leave, Matisse said he would like him to sit for an etching.

"I'll do it right now. I have a plate already."

"But I've got to meet M. Hessel for lunch. I've got to leave in five minutes or so."

"All right. I'll do it in five minutes."

Matisse took out his watch, laid it on the table and in five minutes finished drawing on the plate.

"This isn't serious," Matisse said, "I wanted to set down an impression of you then and there. But come on Sunday morning and we'll have time for a real one."

When Pach returned he found the sketch already printed (plate 4). Then for three hours Matisse worked over other plates. But, as Pach remembers, "We looked at the little five minute etching, and it had just the life that the more heavily worked things had lost."

To the gallery of miniature portraits Matisse added a few studies of the nude (plates 12 and 15), a landscape and a sketch of foliage. He originally intended to gather the portraits together as an album but, instead, all the etchings of 1914-15 were issued separately in editions of from five to fifteen proofs.

During the following years and throughout the 1920s, Matisse continued to etch a few plates (plate 13), but his most important prints were lithographs composed between 1926 and 1930. Then suddenly at the end of the decade and again within a year, he etched more than one hundred plates. These are studies of professional models: nudes, odalisques, girls gazing at goldfish. Again, as in 1914, Matisse worked directly on the plate from the model. Purely for his own personal satisfaction, Matisse plays variations on certain themes. Sometimes the etchings repeat or anticipate motifs in his painting, but most often they remain distinct. At first the etchings may seem incidental but, freshly examined, the series appears as a brilliant sequence of quick and informal statements. The most successful variations offer daring reductions of a pose or movement into an abbreviated essential of lines.

The etchings of 1929 were issued separately, usually in editions of twenty-five proofs although some smaller editions and several "trial" and "artist's" proofs of each plate were also printed.

In 1930 Matisse began a third important series of etchings, his illustrations to the poems of Mallarmé. The book, superbly produced with twenty-nine plates, was published



in 1932. Matisse actually executed more than twenty-nine etchings, but he never hesitated to discard a plate with which he was not satisfied. Since the Mallarmé illustrations, often large enough to cover a page, are integrally related to the text and design of the book itself, none of the etchings are reproduced here. During the last twenty-five years of his life, Matisse's major efforts as a printmaker continued to be commissions for book illustrations. They include only one group of intaglio plates, six soft-ground etchings for an edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses* published in 1935. Almost twenty years later, during the winter of 1952-53, Matisse drew a series of about twenty-five aquatints. These consist mostly of women's heads freely brushed onto the plate to create, when printed, the effect of drawings in ink.

The etchings and drypoints on the following pages appear in their original size. The frontispiece is reproduced through the courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Carl Zigrosser. Otherwise all the prints have been selected from the collection of over one hundred of Matisse's etchings in the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Print Room of the Museum of Modern Art.

In the list of etchings reproduced, numbers in parentheses refer to those used in the catalogue of Matisse's prints established by his family and also used and annotated by Mr. Carl O. Schniewind. For further information about the artist as well as his prints, Alfred H. Barr, Jr.'s *Matisse: His Art and His Public*, published by the Museum of Modern Art, is indispensable.

W.S.L.

## LIST OF PLATES

Etchings and drypoints are reproduced in the original size with the exception of the frontispiece.

In the list, numbers in parentheses are those used in the catalogue of Matisse's prints established by his family and also used by Mr. Carl O. Schniewind.

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Frontispiece: *Self Portrait as an Etcher*. c. 1903. Etching and drypoint (no. 52)

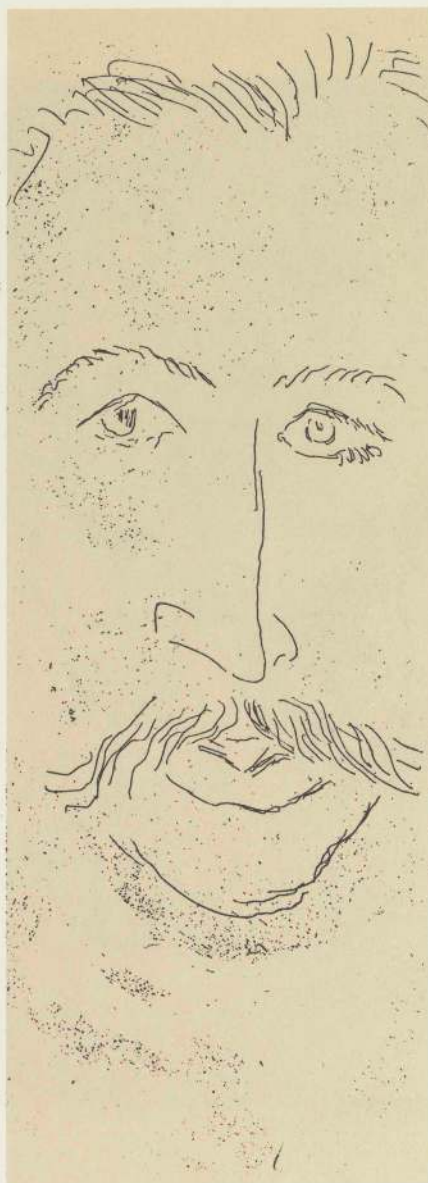
- 1 *Woman in a Kimono* (Mme Matisse). 1914. Etching (no. 13)
- 2 *Studies of a Woman in Street Costume*. c. 1903. Drypoint (no. 56)
- 3 *Sketches: Nudes and Children's Heads*. c. 1903. Drypoint (no. 55)
- 4 *Walter Pach*. 1914. Etching (no. 33)
- 5 *Portrait of Bourgeat*. 1914. Etching (no. 23)
- 6 *Séraphique* (Mme Juan Gris). 1914. Drypoint (no. 30)
- 7 *Double Portrait* (Mme Juan Gris). 1914. Etching (no. 32)
- 8 *Loulou in a Flowered Hat*. 1914. Etching (no. 41)
- 9 *Loulou*. 1914. Etching (no. 42)
- 10 *Head*. 1914. Etching (no. 14)
- 11 *Mme Demetrius Galanis*. 1914. Etching (no. 18)
- 12 *Seated Nude*. 1914? Drypoint (no. 48)
- 13 *Kneeling Nude*. 1918. Etching (no. 104)
- 14 *Girl Clasping Her Left Knee*. 1929. Etching (no. 111)
- 15 *Three Studies of a Nude*. 1914? Etching and drypoint (no. 50)
- 16 *Seated Hindu*. 1929. Drypoint (no. 119)
- 17 *Seated Odalisque*. 1929. Drypoint (no. 116)
- 18 *Head, Fingers Touching Lips*. 1929. Etching (no. 118)
- 19 *Seated Nude*. 1929. Drypoint (no. 121)
- 20 *Reclining Nude, Head Down*. 1929. Etching (no. 129)
- 21 *Interior with Nude and Goldfish*. 1929. Etching (no. 131)
- 22 *Woman, Profile, beside an Aquarium*. 1929. Etching (no. 140)
- 23 *Woman, Full Face, beside an Aquarium*. 1929. Etching (no. 142)

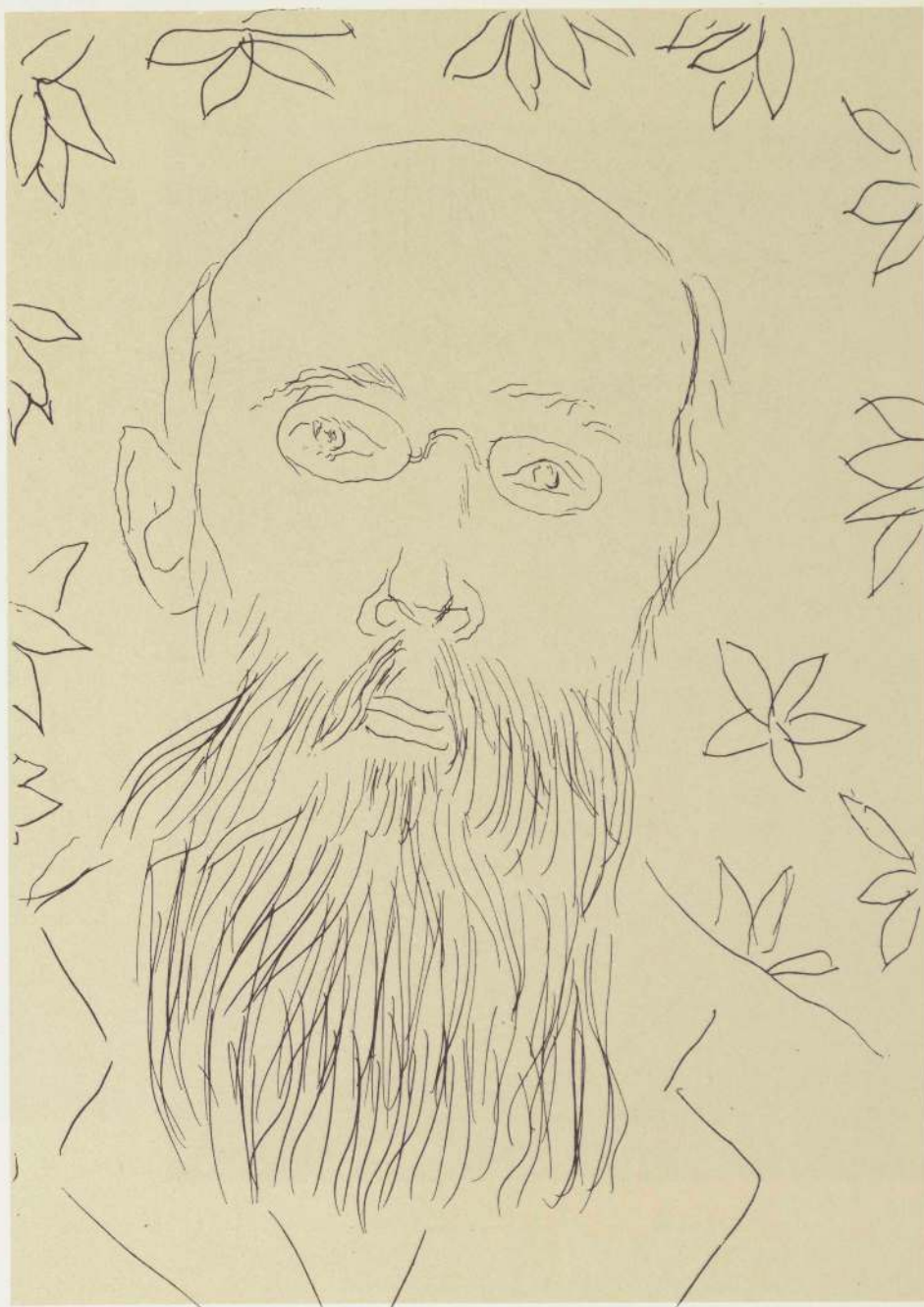




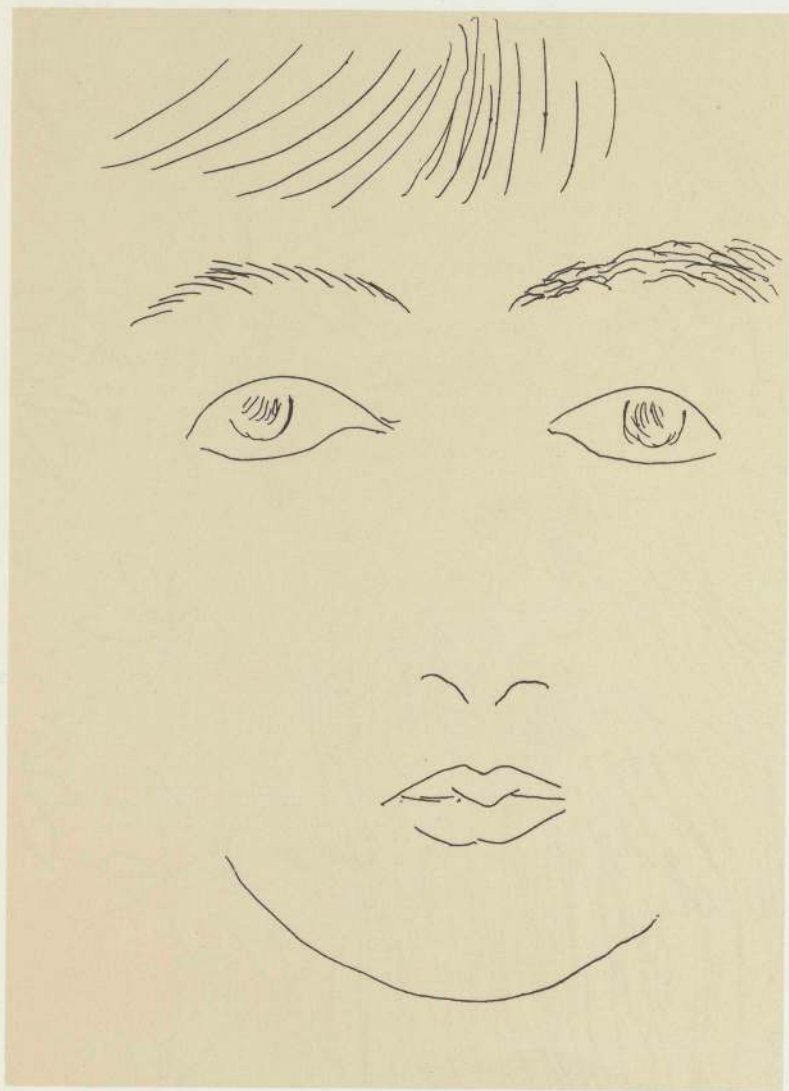










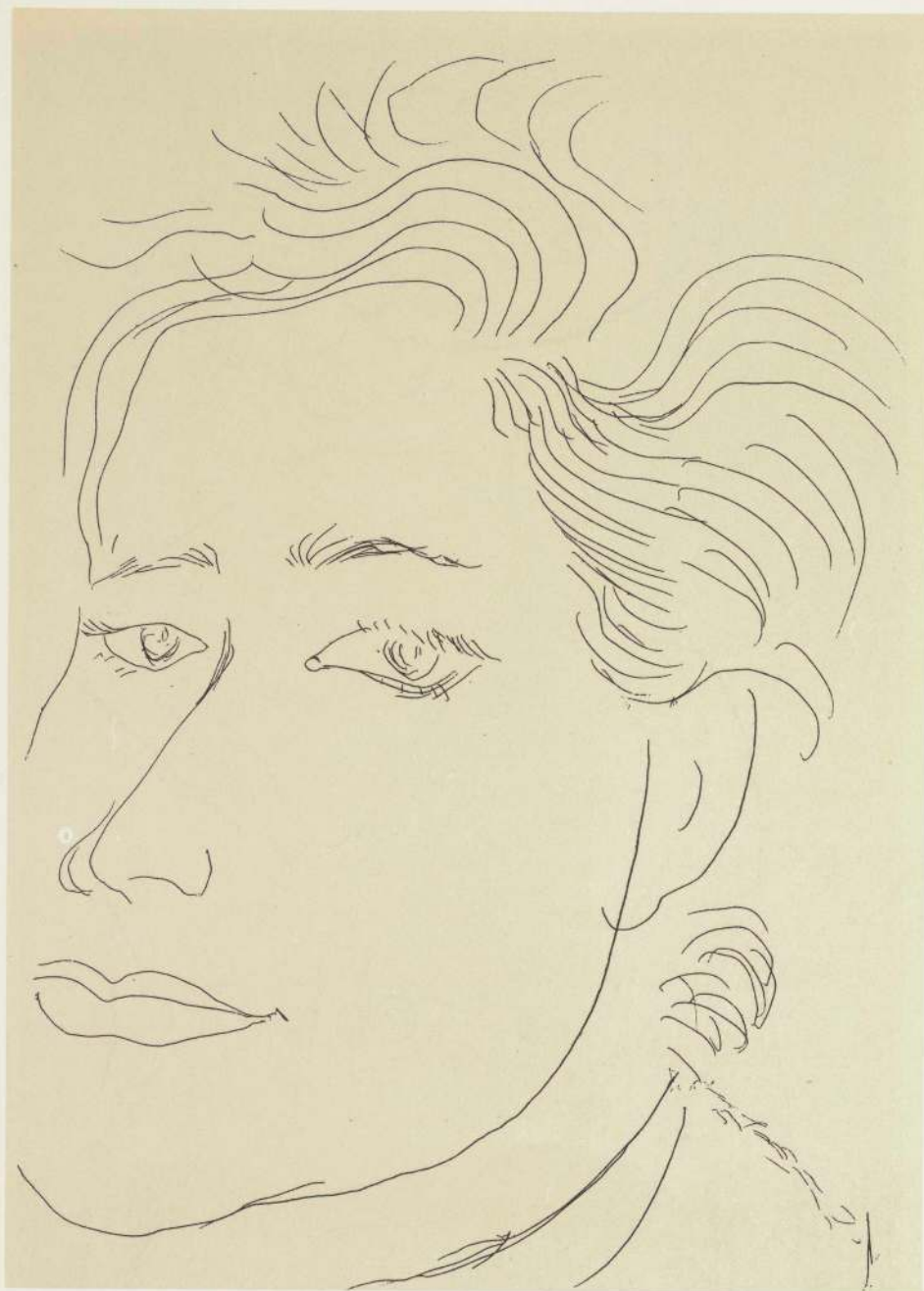




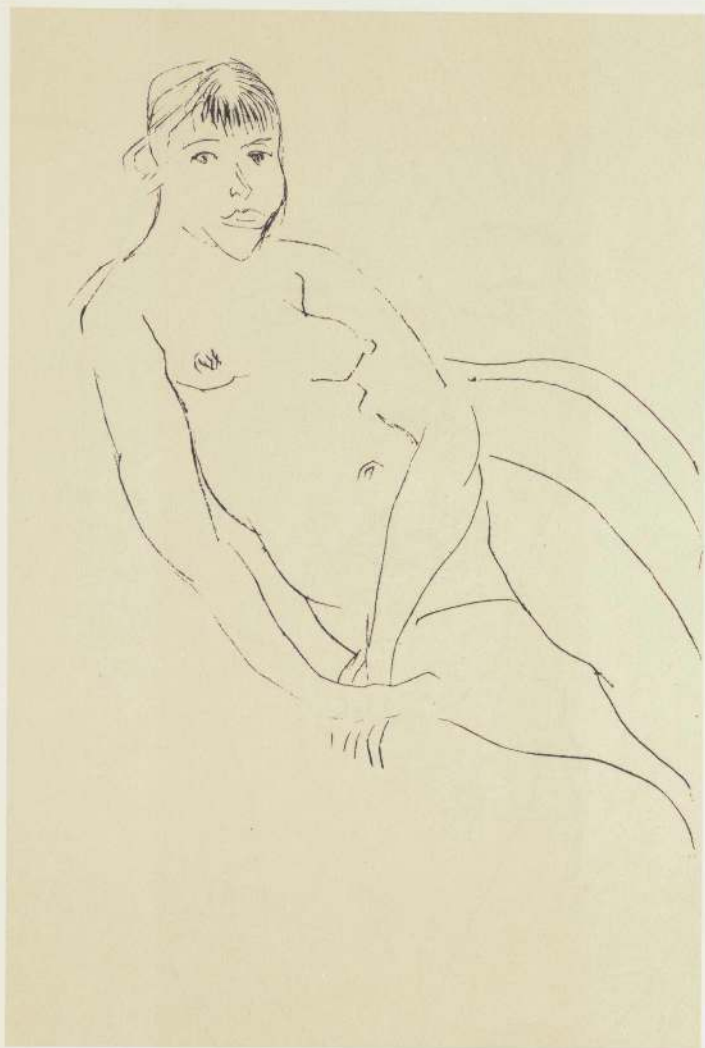








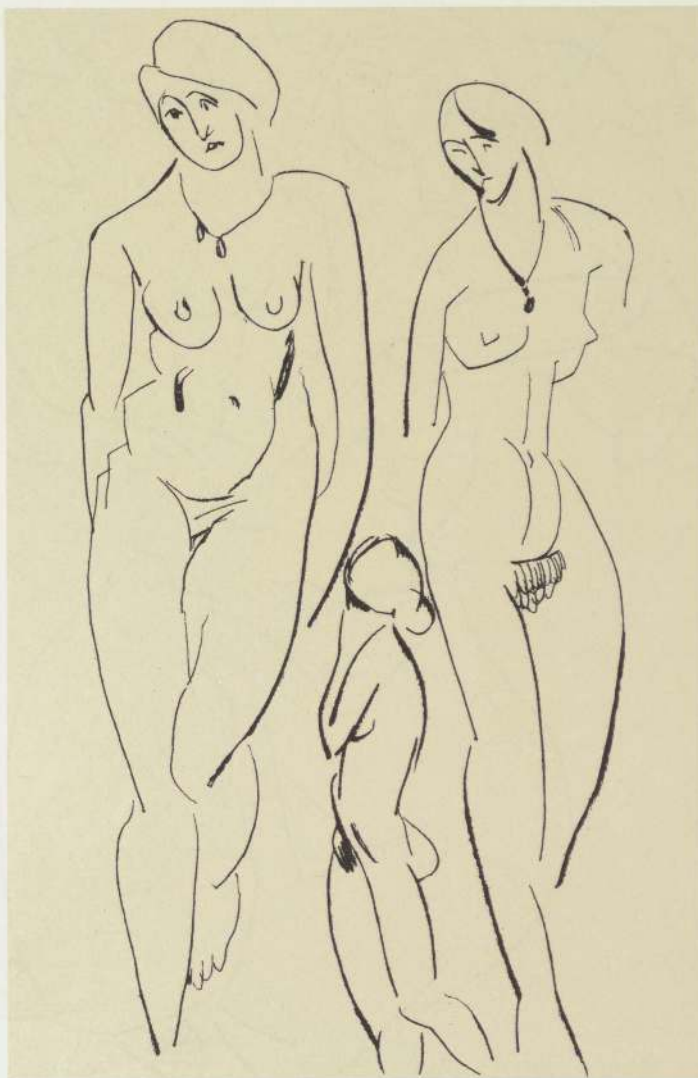




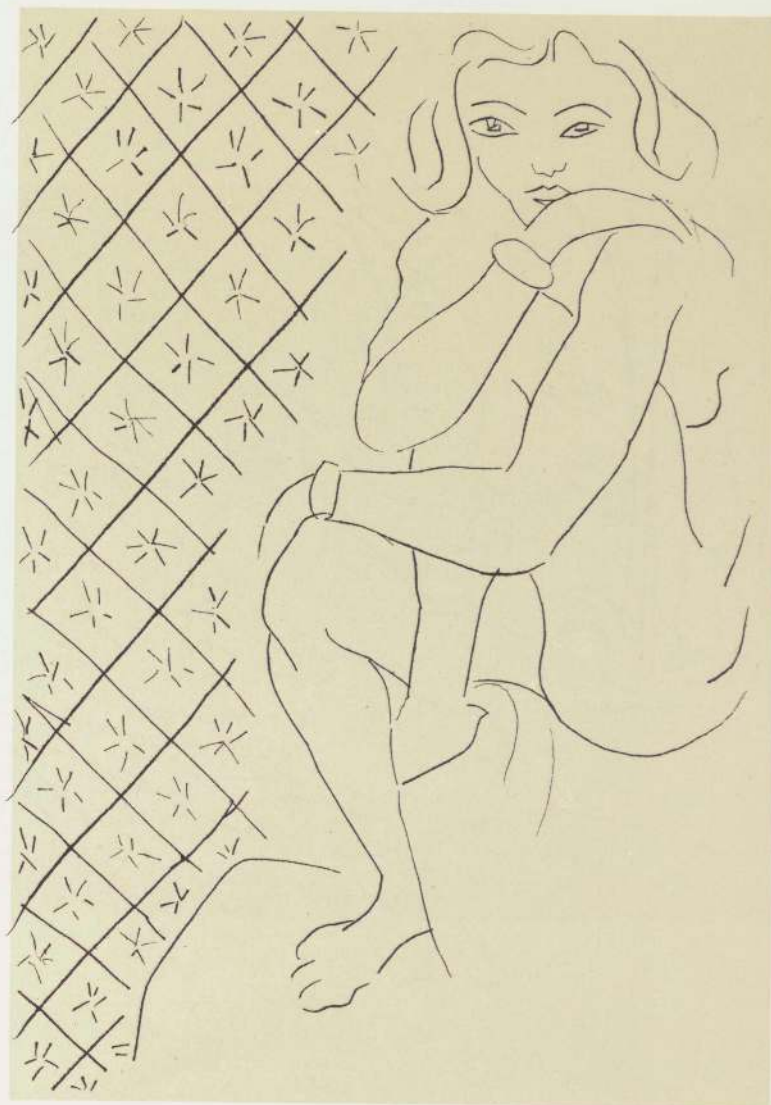








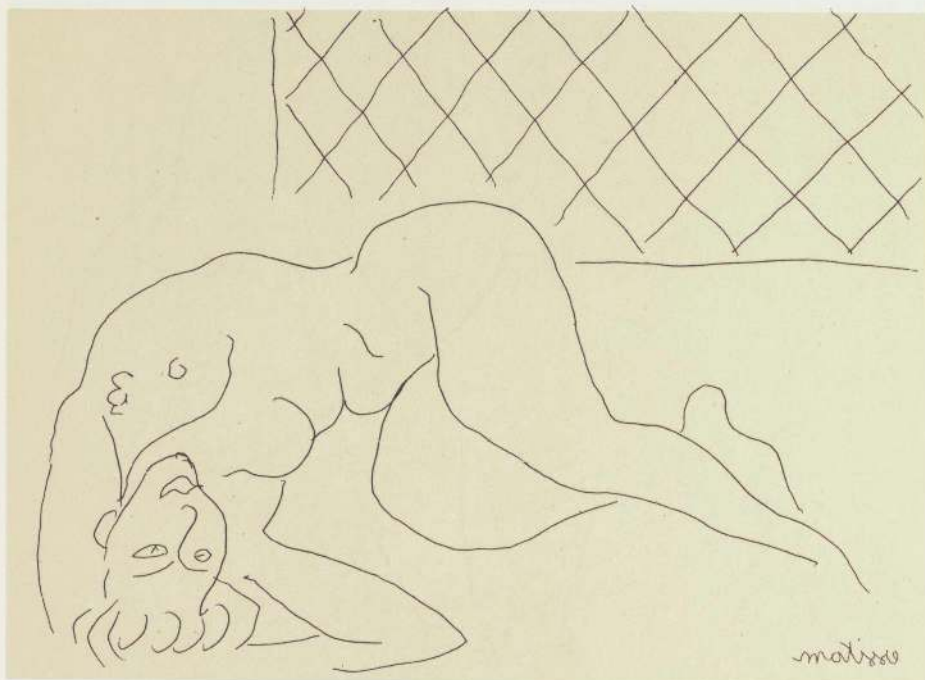










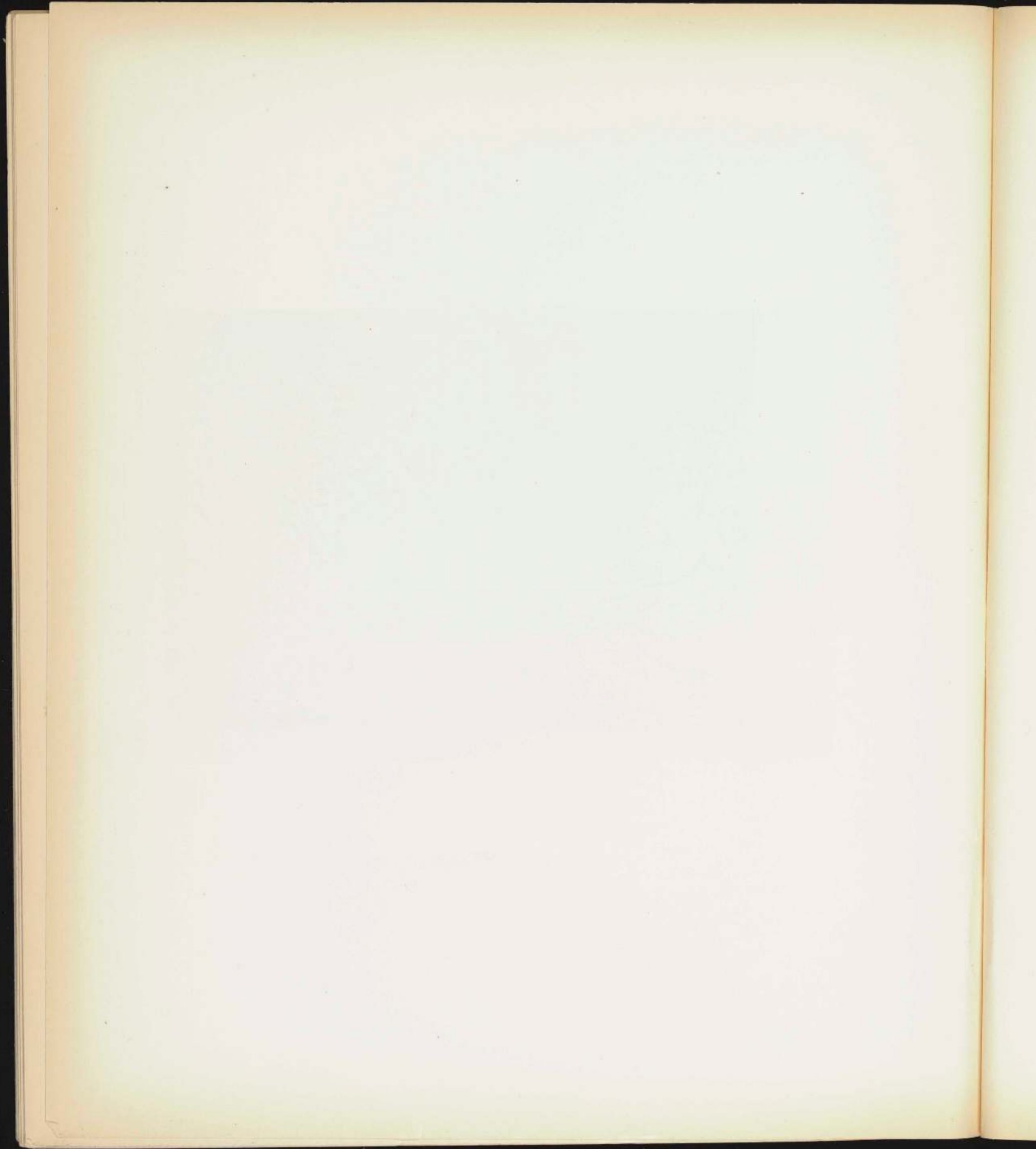


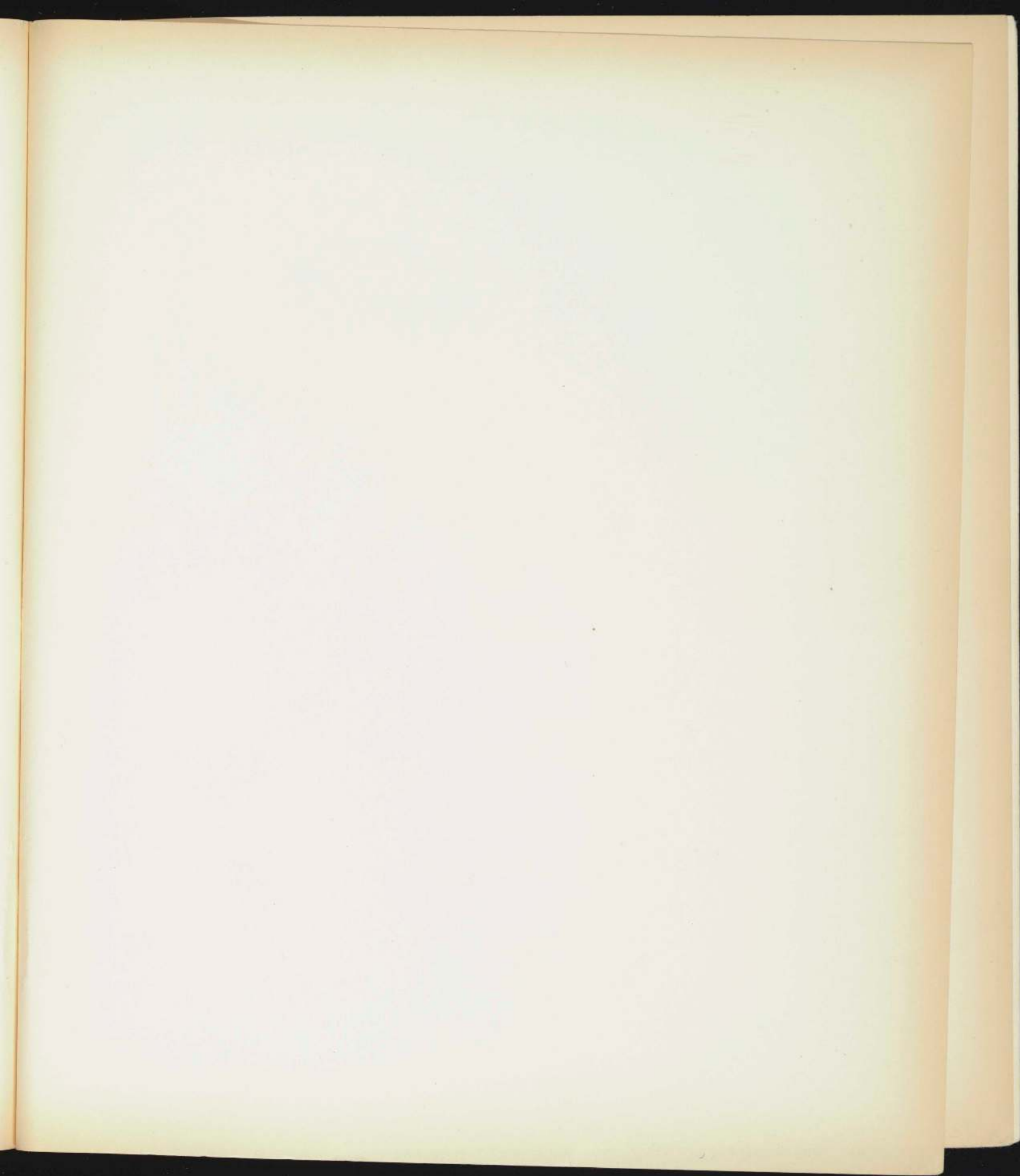








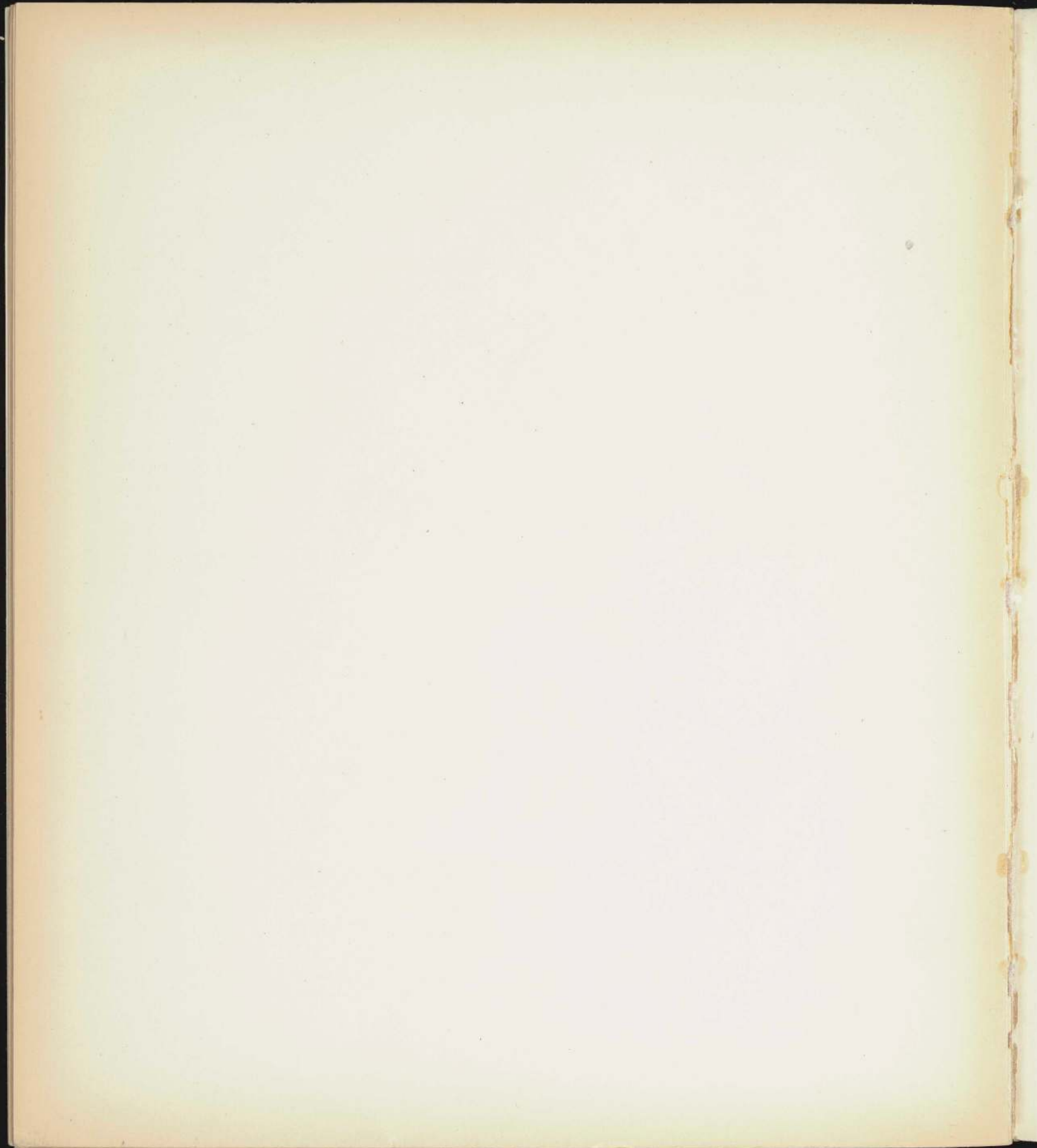












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