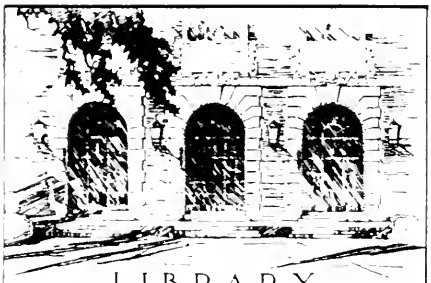

* The "Plea for the Middle Classes" was the document which led to the foundation of the large groups of "Woodard Schools" which now (1884) include 3 in Sussex (Lancing, Hurst-Pierpoint & Ardingly) 1 in Staffs. (Denstone) 1 in Shropsh. (Ellesmere, dependent on Denstone) 1 in Somersetsh. (Taunton) & 1 I think in Yorkshire. J.G.T.

* a Plea for the Middle Classes Rev. N. Woodard.

THE SERVANT OF CHRIST.

A SERMON

PREACHED BEFORE

THE UNIVERSITY OF OXFORD

ON THE

FESTIVAL OF ST. LUKE,

WITH REFERENCE TO THE CHARACTER

OF THE LATE

DUKE OF WELLINGTON.

BY THE

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Philippians ii. 5—9.

Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God; but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name.

St. Luke in an eminent manner is the biographer of the Christian Church. He brings before us, especially in the Acts of the Apostles, a series of portraits most graphically thrown out, and most delicately discriminated. And what our characters and principles of conduct should be, charged as we each are in our several provinces with that one great work of Christian men, the labour that God's 'kingdom may come, and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven,' we may learn from the example of those, whom He selected as his first instruments and servants, in the foundation under Christ of his Church.

It may not therefore be inappropriate to the day, if I suggest briefly and simply, and especially to our younger members, a little summary of practical maxims, which may at once test and form their character, as Christian Churchmen—

Christian Churchmen, each and all, whatever be their post in life—as rulers or ruled, laity or clergy, directly or indirectly witnesses to God's truth, and influencers of their fellow men—each and all of them pledged at the font to carry on in their own sphere and proportion of responsibility the great work of God upon earth, and to labour in it "as Christ's faithful soldiers and servants unto their life's end." And if, as line by line we fill in the features of this character, and trace their development in the relation of man to his Saviour and his Church, there should rise up before our eyes involuntarily, without any direct reference, or forced suggestion, another form—an aged, grey-haired, venerable form, bent down with years and toils for his country and his Sovereign, covered with the honours of the world, and now about to be laid in his grave by the veneration and gratitude of this great empire—if the maxims which Scripture enjoins for our service to Christ in his Church strike on us but as echoes of words, which have fallen almost like proverbs from the lips and the pen of that great man, inculcating our duties to our Sovereign and our country—perhaps it will not jar upon our feelings. Perhaps such associations will be only natural and anticipated, surrounded as we are, almost for the first time, with the memorials of his loss; on a day which the Church sets apart that we may gather instruction and goodness, not merely from the lessons of God, but from the example of man; and in a place where the thought already must have flashed

across all our minds, how great a part of ourselves that Spirit was, which has now passed before the judgment-seat of his Maker, beyond the reach either of our prayers or our praise.

I. There is then one grand maxim, the maxim of the text, which is the foundation of all the others, and the very first to be learnt by Christians, as it is the very last, which from the constitution of nature is learnt by the young. It is, that our place in this world, the place of the mightiest potentate on the throne, the place which Christ Himself assumed upon earth, is that of a subject and a servant. To do not our own will, but the will of Him that sent us—to become the slave, δοῦλος, of Christ, to submit ourselves entirely to his laws, to fix our eyes constantly on God's authority above us, and on his commands around us, with an entire abdication of self-will, and a surrender of all our powers to his service—this is the blessed close of the Christian life, and the perfection of the Christian character. But it is not the lesson which nature seems to teach. She rather to the outward eye seems training us up to freedom and supremacy, almost to lawlessness. Day by day she loosens our bands, strengthens our powers, removes our controllers, widens our sphere of action, tempts us on from infancy to childhood, from childhood to youth, from youth to manhood, from manhood to age, by opening prospects of ambition, and over ascending heights, from whence we look down upon our fellows as the rulers and not the ruled. It seems a problem, and a snare;

a school and discipline, adapted to form a master rather than a servant, and a sovereign rather than a subject. And so it is. Man is destined to be a master and a ruler, on earth as well as in heaven. And he must learn by degrees the duties and the privileges of power. But remember, I entreat, those of you especially just entering on that new and advanced stage of apparent disenthralment which awaits you in this place, that each withdrawal of external visible restraint is intended to give scope and opportunity for an unseen restraint within—a restraint from the laws of God instead of the will of men—a restraint by your own conscience upon your own heart, not by the arm of another upon your outward acts. Think of yourself at every moment, even when shrouded in night, let loose in the wilderness, armed with an absolutism of power, still as a subject and a servant, the slave of Christ. Never lose sight of Him above you, guiding you by his eye, when his hand seems far removed. Let it be your boast in every station of life, to be (I am quoting words) not as a head but a right hand; if not a right hand, at least some humble member of the body, prompt as a right hand to execute the will of Him who only can be a head. Let it be as wild—as ludicrous a dream—in the Tempter of mankind to seduce you from your humility as Christ's servant, by any vision of ambition or self-will, as it was in the despot of France to tempt the all-powerful subject of this empire from his allegiance and subjection even by the offer of the crown.

II. When you have thus stamped upon your heart your true relation to your Saviour, there will follow as a necessary consequence, the surrender of yourself into his hand, to be disposed of according to his pleasure in any post, for the performance of any duty. Never move from any spot where He has placed you, never indulge the caprice of selection, never root your affections in any occupation, or devote yourself to any profession, or accept any offer of a change which may be only a temptation, without first asking in prayer, and consulting the wisest of his servants, if his finger is pointing you on your course. Is it his call? He does call in various ways,—not now by the Word of the Lord, or by his angel from heaven, or by visions in the night, but by the providential arrangement of opportunities, by clear obvious duties, by overruling necessities, by the choice of his Ministers, and by the advice of his holy followers. If He summons you like Abraham from your kindred, follow, though you know not whither. If He sends you like Philip to the South[a], even to a desert way, where no field seems opening for your labour, go. If He arrests you on your path like Paul with some sudden stroke, let your first words be the words of Paul, 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me do[b]?' If He would send you to the Gentiles, depart at once[c]. If he bind you in the Spirit to go up and confront the bonds and the scourges, let no voice, even the voice of a prophet, turn you aside. If

[a] Acts viii. 25. [b] Acts ix. 5. [c] Acts xxii. 21.

He calls to you by the voice of men to come over and help them, loose yourself at once, and cross over.

He of whom we are thinking, even in the last infirmities of age, would have quitted his comforts and his glories, and gone forth to have sunk exhausted upon the sands of India, if his Sovereign had given the word. And shall we do less for Christ?

III. This willing submission, this unhesitating subordination to a power above us, will dignify, and sanctify, and sweeten, by our reverence and affection to that power, every post whatever, foreign as it may be to our tastes, and every task entrusted to us, however mean and lowly. If the Lord of Hosts select our hand to fight his battles at the head of his armies, we shall struggle to fight them well. If he place us as a solitary sentinel to watch some insignificant outwork, we shall struggle to watch it well. There will be no murmur, no jealousy, no discontent, no complaint of slighted merit, no threat of resignation, no scorn and contempt at the pettiness of the work, no carelessness or remissness in fulfilling it. Duty no less than love thinks no office mean. And the poor whose heart is in his sacrifice, and who measures the greatness of his act, not by the meanness of man but by the grandeur of God, will lavish as much interest and zeal on his little offering of the turtle dove, or the two young pigeons, as the rich upon a hecatomb of oxen.

IV. On this abnegation of self, and this uncon-

ditional devotion of ourselves to the service of Christ, there will follow a temper of mind, which I would intreat all of us to cultivate at once, but especially the young, most prompt to throw themselves with hopefulness and enthusiasm, and a thirst for sympathy and cooperation, into works for the glory of God, especially in days like these. Prepare, at least in the beginning, to be thwarted and obstructed, to be chilled by neglect, maligned by suspicion, injured by misconstruction, despised as an enthusiast, rejected, perhaps insulted, perhaps persecuted, even by the very men for whom you have been made a sacrifice. Devote yourself to any work for the welfare of the world, lavish on it your time, your money, your labour, your all; but do not count upon any return from men. "He was despised and rejected of men. He was mocked and spitefully entreated, and spitted on, and scourged, and crowned with thorns[d]," even by those for whom He died upon the cross. Write this upon the walls of your room, as the history of the Saviour of mankind, the history of those who must follow Him in all his works of mercy. "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children[e];" that is, every work of thy hand, those works especially most precious in your own eyes, and most precious in the sight of God. Prophesy this to yourself at the commencement of every undertaking. It is the law of creation in a world which lies under the curse of sin. "I have nourished and brought up children, and they have

[d] Luke xviii. 5. [e] Gen. iii. 16.

rebelled against me." Remember this trial of the Lord, when you look for the gratitude of others. And shall you not have the same? A trial indeed it is. Do not sink under it. Do not throw up the work, cast down your arms, retire sullenly and peevishly from the post, in which not your own choice but the arm of God has placed you; and placed you to labour for Him, to till his ground with the sweat of your brow, that in time He may reap his harvest, not to cull flowers for yourself. Never let resentment or pique, disappointment or provocation of men, drive you from your duty to God. If it be ingratitude, if it be sinfulness, or selfishness, or malignity, or jealousy, which seems to bring you this requital from those for whose good you are toiling, yet remember the long-suffering of Christ, and your own sins for which He died. But far rather distrust your own heart, when in impatience and irritation you are tempted to stamp with such cruel names the conduct of those who are opposed to you. Think of your own errors and your own provocations to them; remember the chances of misconception—how rashly and how fatally we do ourselves interpret even the most innocent, the most praiseworthy of actions. Be not surprised that others should ignore sacrifices, which you laboured to conceal, or that ignoring they should not be grateful. Place yourselves in the same relation with those whose conduct you are resenting. Think if their other interests, and other duties, and complications of unknown circum-

stances may not render impossible to them, what to you seems easy. Remember that associated men are not as individuals. They are limited by rules, fettered by the wills of each other, deadened in delicacy of feeling by the absence of personal responsibility. Their power in innumerable points is weakened, not strengthened, by association. Asssociation in many cases gives them safety, not wisdom; the safety of delay and inertness, but rather corrupts the mass by the infusion of the evil of each member, than purifies it by the addition of his good. Do not charge upon the depravity of man what may be the accident of circumstances, and fly from it to solitude and indolence, to sit down with folded arms and wounded heart, a recreant from the service of God because of the ingratitude of men. But read (it is a wondrous lesson) the early, patient, long enduring struggle against suspicion, neglect, ingratitude, and obloquy of that great man, whose life at last cleared forth from those early clouds, and set in a full unclouded blaze of glory. And remember so yours will set, in heaven if not on earth, if only you do your duty, whatever be your requital from man.

V. And the servants of God are sent forth two and two. You must serve God in cooperation with others as their equal, or their inferior, or their ruler. And it is only this deep conviction of your own position as a servant, which will preserve in you a right temper of mind in each of these three relations.

If you throw yourself into any work as supreme yourself in its operations, as free to do whatever may seem good in your own eyes, as doing your own will, and responsible only to yourself; even zeal and earnestness will tempt you to disregard the rights, and to trespass upon the provinces of others. You will be impatient of their errors, rash and presumptuous in interference, and take upon yourself uncalled the duties which belong to them. A true Churchman, a true Christian humbly and conscientiously labouring as commanded by Christ, will scrupulously regard the limits of his own office prescribed by Christ. He will not enter into other men's labours, without some express positive summons. His own parish, his own family, his own official task, will concentrate and absorb his exertions. Each man has enough to bear in his own burden. God alone is the judge and the corrector of our fellows. And be assured, the first act of a mind bent steadily and humbly upon the full discharge of its own responsibilities, is to resolve firmly and inflexibly to abstain from any assumption of the responsibilities of others.

VI. And this same sense and conviction of our subordinate position as God's servants, will solve one of the most difficult problems in life, the right measure and occasions of our obedience to those other human ministers of God's will, to whom we may be ourselves subordinated—human ministers fallible and corrupt, whom we must often distrust, sometimes condemn, sometimes

think light of, and yet whom we are bound to obey. If we cannot carry our eye beyond them, cannot look up and see through them in Heaven God the all-wise, the all-good, carrying on in his mysterious Providence all the movements of the world, to his own good end, through the imperfect agencies of human servants, we must either sink into a blind abject servility towards our earthly rulers, or in heart we shall become rebels. No human authority, however wise, however good, can approve itself in a majority of cases to the conscience and the reason of its subjects. No human authority can escape from doing in some cases what is positively wrong, what as subjects we are bound to disobey. Where shall the line be drawn? I answer, as the Apostles drew it, as Moses, as Elijah, as David, as Daniel drew it, by a constant recognition of that supreme authority, which rules the whole machinery of government—by referring to the positive commands of God delivered to us as his servants; and, let me add, not to human fancies, or to human interpretations and perversions of those commands, but to their clear, positive, express meaning demonstrated as a matter of fact. 'Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye[a]. For we cannot but speak the things,' not which we think, not which we feel, not which we have reasoned out by our own fallible conclusions, but 'which we have seen and heard'—which have been delivered to us under

[a] Acts iv. 19.

God's injunctions, with the same evidence, on which reposes the great fabric of human belief, the external testimony of the senses. Feel that you are a servant only charged with the commands of God—cast away all personal feelings and selfish imaginations—and the single eye of faithful duty will at once discern when to obey, and when to refuse to obey the earthly ministers of God's hand. Cast into prison unjustly, you will quit it without consent of the oppressor, if the Angel of the Lord strikes off your fetters, and leads you forth[b]. Though an earthquake burst open the doors, and loose your bands, you will remain like Paul and Silas to die, if no such summons be given[c]. Now you will remove from city to city as the magistrates bid you depart[d]. Now though they oppose and blaspheme[e], you will continue and hold not your peace when the vision of the Lord commands it. Now you will refuse to plead before the Pilates of the world, and now obey the call to reason before Felix and Agrippa; now refuse to come forth from prison, except the magistrates bring you out; and now escape by the wall; now circumcise Timothy, and now withstand Peter. Positive express commands of God, delivered to you as his servant, will be the test to distinguish where obedience and where resistance is a duty. And thus will be united in your character that bold and manly independence, that freedom of advice, that openness of expostulation and remonstrance, that steady resistance to the

[b] Acts xii. 10. [c] Acts xvi. 26. [d] Acts xvi. 36. [e] Acts xviii. 5.

faults of our earthly rulers, and at the same time that reverence to authority, and that scrupulous exact submission to all their lawful commands, of which, if you would study an earthly model, seek it in the communications of that great man, whose memory is now resting on our thoughts, with the Rulers and Sovereigns of the world, of whom he was at once the Subject, the Servant, the Colleague, the Protector, and the Guide.

VII. And so in our government of others. They are men, they are fallible and frail. Look on them as the mere instruments of your own will, and on yourself as irresponsible to God, and how will you bear with their failings; how continue patient, and long-suffering, and gentle amidst hourly provocations; how learn to guard your punishments from cruelty, and your indulgences from weakness, and your intercourse from undue familiarity or undue pretension! Absolute irresponsible power is a fearful temptation to man; a temptation in the ruler to abuse, and in the subject to resist it. Limit it by the limitations of God, employ it as delegated by Him, and then indeed you can govern, and then only. Then you will forgive others as you hope to be forgiven yourself; then you, the debtor to your God of ten thousand talents, will not bear hard upon your fellow-servant who owes you a hundred pence; then your intercourse will be one of simple unpretending considerate dignity; then your commands will take the form not of capricious exactions, but of patient laborious instruction. Your

confidence will be at once cautious and generous, strict and unsuspecting, because free from personal jealousy, and the fear of resistance. Above all, you will then be able to exercise with firmness and with boldness the necessary discipline of government; discipline, if need there be, stern and inexorable, and terrible as the vengeance of God Himself,—discipline from which the weakness of man's nature shrinks, unless supported by the sanction of Him in whose hands alone are the keys of life and of death. Elymas! Ananias! Sapphira! think of the tenderness, and gentleness, and long-suffering of the lips, from which fell the sentence upon those victims; and ask what spirit could have nerved them, but that dread Spirit, speaking as to Samuel when he hewed Agag in pieces,—as to all the saints of the Lord, when they have gone forth at his command 'with[f] a two-edged sword in their hands, to execute vengeance upon the heathen, to bind their kings with chains, and their nobles with fetters of iron.'

VIII. And once more, what will give you strength—real courage, genuine heroism—in your battles for God against the world, except the deep conviction, that you are in his hands but his trumpet to blast the walls of Jericho, and his rod to divide the Red sea. Look to yourself only; trust to your own arm, and to your own wisdom; and though the morning of the battle of life opens full of spirit, and hope, and confidence, and vigour, be assured, before the darkness comes, you

[f] Psalm c. 5.

will have sunk and fled. Courage is easy for a time. Pride, passion, shame, emulation, enthusiasm, even physical excitability will kindle it for an hour, kindle it like fire among the stubble. But the war, which we have to wage in fulfilling the work of the Lord, is a war from morn to night, and from night again to morn, day after day, month after month, year after year, through suffering, through defeat, through alarm, through anguish, often through despair. And how will you sustain it? What can plant you calmly and coolly upon the field of battle in the face of a mighty enemy, his troops victorious and veteran, your own untried and weak, not to rush wildly into conflict, but to stand beneath his vollies and his charges, the dead falling all around you, and one prayer burning upon your lips that night may come, and one fixed resolve in your heart to die rather than abandon your post,—what but that which has been the soul of courage to all the hosts which have defied the world,—faith in His hand who employs you, certainty that victory must come, where He commands and He disposes, though it may be purchased by your death? Calm, patient, thoughtful, enduring, unwearied courage, the courage of an English soldier, the only courage worth the name, can it be found severed from the faith and the humility of a servant?

IX. And when that courage has triumphed, (for triumph it will at times even upon earth,) and men gather round in wonder to applaud and

crown with glory, (for even to the saints of the Lord this trial and temptation may be permitted,) where shall we look for that even and balanced temper, which without vanity, or intoxication, or arrogance, receives each proffered homage in unpretending simplicity, neither coveting, nor despising, but accepting each as the will of his Sovereign, as due rather to that Sovereign than himself, and rather as an example to encourage others than as a gewgaw for his personal enjoyment? Must it not be to one whose eye is ever fixed on the great Hand, in which he has been but an instrument and a servant; and whose thought has ever been not fame, or popularity, or glory, but those two mighty words, the words which can remove mountains, which would to God we could inscribe upon our hearts, as they should be graven on the coffin of the dead, Obedience and Duty!

X. And one more feature may I touch on in this character of Christ's faithful soldier and faithful servant, which can scarcely be shaped into a precept, which may seem even fanciful and far-fetched: but which, seen in connection with others, possesses a deep significance, and will at least be congenial to our hearts. It occurs again and again in the lives of Christian heroes, who have most thoroughly realized their subjection to the service of their Master in fighting his battle upon earth. It is found in the greatest heroes and statesmen of the world, wherever they have given themselves up with the most pure and unselfish

abandonment to obedience and to duty. Minds wearied and worn out with labour prescribed and not sought, covered over in the secresy of the breast almost with sores and ulcers from the offences and collisions and exasperations of their conflict with man, too pure to find relief in indulgences of sin, indifferent to paltry occupation, careless of self-aggrandisement, forced into coldness and reserve by their official responsibility, distrustful of the hearts of others from long experience of mankind, and yet needing some living thing on which to vent affection, and find repose, are always found to turn as their chief relaxation and enjoyment, there where our Lord turned, when beset with the jealousies of his Apostles; there where He dwelt in prayer, when rejoicing that he beheld Satan falling as lightning from Heaven[o]; there where the affections of the Apostles again and again seem to throw themselves; there where the face of God Himself in heaven rests, ever unclouded and unveiled among the myriads of his angels,—to the tenderness, the innocence, the docility, the affection of little children. It is known of the greatest statesman of this empire, when brought almost to the brink of the grave by the terrible anxieties of that struggle which he was conducting in the last century against the despot of the earth, that almost his only recreation was to fly from the city into the country, and fling himself on the grass to play with the little children of his friends. And so it was with him whom we have lost. When the

[o] Luke x. 21.

mightiest of the land trembled to provoke his rebuke, and almost to approach his presence, he was found with little children. He nursed them, played with them, sat by their sick bed and told them stories of his battles, fondled them, kept for them his little store of childish memorials, delighted to be present in their school, and to stand by and gaze on their amusements; and the eye which at the call of duty could face unmoved and stern the horrors of the battle field, and the launching of thousands to destruction at the bidding of his word, would melt and soften into tears at witnessing the joyousness of children.

He is gone; and we are preparing to lay him in the grave by the hands as it were of this whole empire, in the midst of the mournings of Europe.

And the world, as it gazes upon that funeral pomp, will think of fame and victory and glory; of the liberties of Europe, of vengeance upon tyrants, and of the salvation of this great Empire. And those of deeper thoughts will look beneath these vanities of earth, and dwell with reverence and affection on the glorious features of that character, the true object of our gratitude and homage. But our eyes must look still deeper; the eyes of those who would judge as God will judge, and who tremble at the horrible mockery of heaping honour upon the ashes of the dead, while the spirit all trembling and condemned may be cowering at the judgment-seat of Heaven. And therefore I have offered these suggestions. It is

something in these solemn moments to recall those many acts by which he exhibited in relation to God, the same spirit of obedience and duty, so striking in his relation to his Sovereign,—in public prayer, in daily study of the Scriptures, in recognition of the authority of God's ministers, in submission, whether in the doctrine, or discipline, or order of the Church, (I am alluding to facts not yet generally known,) to whatever was commanded, whatever was law. It is something to follow in our thoughts that great departing spirit into the regions of the dead; to picture to ourselves with the Prophet, 'the grave[p] moved at his coming, stirring up the dead, even all the chief ones of the earth, and raising from the thrones all the kings of the nations,' with whom he sat in council and fought in battle; and to think of all those potentates and princes, all the thousands whom in the shock of battle or of siege his voice had plunged into destruction, and who may gather to meet the man who 'made the earth to tremble, that did shake the kingdoms,' no one can taunt him with the cry, 'How hath the oppressor fallen, how is he brought down to hell, who had exalted his throne above the stars!' What hero, what conqueror of history, could face that terrible encounter with an eye so single and unblenched! But there is a comfort still beyond. God is training and disciplining us upon earth not so much to outward acts, as to inward principles and habits. And those prin-

[p] Isaiah xiv. 9.

ciples and habits may be deeply sunk, and be indirectly developed in other spheres and relations, and on objects far lower, and meaner, than those on which they are hereafter to be exerted, when we stand face to face with God, and are to serve Him in the courts of Heaven. The child may be fit at once to be transported to the face of his heavenly Father, who as yet has only practised faith, and obedience, and love towards his father upon earth, if he has practised them aright. And St. Paul, the persecutor of Christ, persecutor from honest zeal, and unfeigned love to the law of God, only required to hear the voice of Christ, and to see his light, at once with the same zeal and earnestness to become the great Apostle of the Gentiles.

So may it have been with the dead. We know not what secret guidance, what inward knowledge never revealed to man, God's Spirit may vouchsafe to a soul struggling with simplicity and earnestness to do its duty, so far as that duty is discerned. But this we do know; that unto whom much has been given, of them shall much be required. Not to have been plunged into camps and bloodshed from our earliest youth; not to have been withdrawn from the chastening purifying influence of home, and friends, and the Church of Christ, when all our passions most needed their restraints; to have been called every day to prayer, urged every day to repentance, warned every day against sin; to have been surrounded with all the lessons of religion and asso-

ciations of holiness, and clear distinct enunciations of God's truth and will, and solemn prospects of a future summons to minister more immediately at his altar—surely, surely such mighty blessings will be treasured in condemnation against ourselves, if we in our service to Christ fall short of that model which has now been given us in the service of our Sovereign and our country; if our soul when released from the body appears before the judgment-seat of Christ, less stamped and dignified and hallowed with the symbols of Obedience and Duty.

THE END.

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