

The Necessity of Prayer

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PRAYER AND FAITH--Chapter 1

"A dear friend of mine who was quite a lover of the chase, told me the following story: 'Rising early one morning,' he said, 'I heard the baying of a score of deerhounds in pursuit of their quarry. Looking away to a broad, open field in front of me, I saw a young fawn making its way across, and giving signs, moreover, that its race was well-nigh run. Reaching the rails of the enclosure, it leaped over and crouched within ten feet from where I stood. A moment later two of the hounds came over, when the fawn ran in my direction and pushed its head between my legs. I lifted the little thing to my breast, and, swinging round and round, fought off the dogs. I felt, just then, that all the dogs in the West could not, and should not capture that fawn after its weakness had appealed to my strength.' So is it, when human helplessness appeals to Almighty God. Well do I remember when the hounds of sin were after my soul, until, at last, I ran into the arms of Almighty God." -- A. C. DIXON.

In any study of the principles, and procedure of prayer, of its activities and enterprises, first place, must, of necessity, be given to faith. It is the initial quality in the heart of any man who essays to talk to the Unseen. He must, out of sheer helplessness, stretch forth hands of faith. He must believe, where he cannot prove. In the ultimate issue, prayer is simply faith, claiming its natural yet marvelous prerogatives -- faith taking possession of its illimitable inheritance. True godliness is just as true, steady, and persevering in the realm of faith as it is in the province of prayer. Moreover: when faith ceases to pray, it ceases to live.

Faith does the impossible because it brings God to undertake for us, and nothing is impossible with God. How great -- without qualification or limitation -- is the power of faith! If doubt be banished from the heart, and unbelief made stranger there, what we ask of God shall surely come to pass, and a believer hath vouchsafed to him "whatsoever he saith."

Prayer projects faith on God, and God on the world. Only God can move mountains, but faith and prayer move God. In His cursing of the fig-tree our Lord demonstrated His power. Following that, He proceeded to declare, that large powers were committed to faith and prayer, not in order to kill but to make alive, not to blast but to bless.

At this point in our study, we turn to a saying of our Lord, which there is need to emphasize, since it is the very keystone of the arch of faith and prayer. *"Therefore I say unto you, What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them."*

We should ponder well that statement -- "Believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Here is described a faith which realizes, which appropriates, which *takes*. Such faith is a consciousness of the Divine, an experienced communion, a realized certainty.

Is faith growing or declining as the years go by? Does faith stand strong and four square, these days, as iniquity abounds and the love of many grows cold? Does faith maintain its hold, as religion tends to become a mere formality and worldliness increasingly prevails? The enquiry of our Lord, may, with great appropriateness, be ours. "When the Son of Man cometh," He asks, "shall He find faith on the earth?" We believe that He will, and it is ours, in this our day, to see to it that the lamp of faith is trimmed and burning, lest He come who shall come, and that right early.

Faith is the foundation of Christian character and the security of the soul. When Jesus was looking forward to Peter's denial, and cautioning him against it, He said unto His disciple: *"Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you, to sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fall not."*

Our Lord was declaring a central truth; it was Peter's faith He was seeking to guard; for well He knew that when faith is broken down, the foundations of spiritual life give way, and the entire structure of religious experience falls. It was Peter's faith which needed guarding. Hence Christ's solicitude for the welfare of His disciple's soul and His determination to fortify Peter's faith by His own all-prevailing prayer.

In his *Second Epistle*, Peter has this idea in mind when speaking of growth in grace as a measure of safety in the Christian life, and as implying fruitfulness. "*And besides this,*" he declares, "*giving diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness.*"

Of this adding process, faith was the starting-point -- the basis of the other graces of the Spirit. Faith was the foundation on which other things were to be built. Peter does not enjoin his readers to add to works or gifts or virtues but to *faith*. Much depends on starting right in this business of growing in grace. There is a Divine order, of which Peter was aware; and so he goes on to declare that we are to give diligence to making our calling and election sure, which election is rendered certain adding to faith which, in turn, is done by constant, earnest praying. Thus faith is kept alive by prayer, and every step taken, in this adding of grace to grace, is accompanied by prayer.

The faith which creates powerful praying is the faith which centers itself on a powerful Person. Faith in Christ's ability to *do* and to *do greatly*, is the faith which prays greatly. Thus the leper lay hold upon the power of Christ. "Lord, if Thou wilt," he cried, "Thou canst make me clean." In this instance, we are shown how faith centered in Christ's ability to *do*, and how it secured the healing power.

It was concerning this very point, that Jesus questioned the blind men who came to Him for healing: "*Believe ye that I am able to do this?*" He asks. "*They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you.*" It was to inspire faith in His ability to *do* that Jesus left behind Him, that last, great statement, which, in the final analysis, is a ringing challenge to faith. "All power," He declared, "is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." Again: faith is obedient; it goes when commanded, as did the nobleman, who came to Jesus, in the day of His flesh, and whose son was grievously sick.

Moreover: such faith acts. Like the man who was born blind, it goes to wash in the pool of Siloam when *told* to wash. Like Peter on Gennesaret it casts the net where Jesus commands, instantly, without question or doubt. Such faith takes away the stone from the grave of Lazarus promptly. A praying faith keeps the commandments of God and does those things which are well pleasing in His sight. It asks, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" and answers quickly, "Speak, Lord, Thy servant heareth." Obedience helps faith, and faith, in turn, helps obedience. To do God's will is essential to true faith, and faith is necessary to implicit obedience.

Yet faith is called upon, and that right often to wait in patience before God, and is prepared for God's seeming delays in answering prayer. Faith does not grow disheartened because prayer is not immediately honored; it takes God at His Word, and lets Him take what time He chooses in fulfilling His purposes, and in carrying on His work. There is bound to be much delay and long days of waiting for true faith, but faith accepts the conditions -- knows there will be delays in answering prayer, and regards such delays as times of testing, in the which, it is privileged to show its mettle, and the stern stuff of which it is made.

The case of Lazarus was an instance of where there was delay, where the faith of two good women was sorely tried: Lazarus was critically ill, and his sisters sent for Jesus. But, without any known reason, our Lord delayed His going to the relief of His sick friend. The plea was urgent and touching -- "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick," -- but the Master is not moved by it, and the women's earnest request seemed to fall on deaf ears. What a trial to faith! Furthermore: our Lord's tardiness appeared to bring about hopeless disaster. While Jesus tarried, Lazarus died.

But the delay of Jesus was exercised in the interests of a greater good. Finally, He makes His way to the home in Bethany. "*Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes, that I was not there, to the intent ye may believe; nevertheless let us go unto him.*" Fear not, O tempted and tried believer, Jesus will come, if patience be exercised, and faith hold fast. His delay will serve to make His coming the more richly blessed. Pray on. Wait on. Thou canst not fail. If Christ delay, wait for Him. In His own good time, He *will* come, and will not tarry.

Delay is often the test and the strength of faith. How much patience is required when these times of testing come! Yet faith gathers strength by waiting and praying. Patience has its perfect work in the school of delay. In some instances, delay is of the very essence of the prayer. God has to do many things, antecedent to giving the final answer -- things which are essential to the lasting good of him who is requesting favor at His hands.

Jacob prayed, with point and ardour, to be delivered from Esau. But before that prayer could be answered, there was much to be done with, and for Jacob. He must be changed, as well as Esau. Jacob had to be made into a new man, before Esau could be. Jacob had to be converted to God, before Esau could be converted to Jacob.

Among the large and luminous utterances of Jesus concerning prayer, none is more arresting than this:

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father. And whatsoever ye shall ask in My Name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye shall ask anything in My Name, I will do it."

How wonderful are these statements of what God will do in answer to prayer! Of how great importance these ringing words, prefaced, as they are, with the most solemn verity! Faith in Christ is the basis of all working, and of all praying. All wonderful works depend on wonderful praying, and all praying is done in the Name of Jesus Christ. Amazing lesson, of wondrous simplicity, is this praying in the name of the Lord Jesus! All other conditions are depreciated, everything else is renounced, save Jesus only. The name of Christ -- the Person of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ -- must be supremely sovereign, in the hour and article of prayer.

If Jesus dwell at the fountain of my life; if the currents of His life have displaced and superseded all self-currents; if implicit obedience to Him be the inspiration and force of every movement of my life, then He can safely commit the praying to my will, and pledge Himself, by an obligation as profound as His own nature, that whatsoever is asked shall be granted. Nothing can be clearer, more distinct, more unlimited both in application and extent, than the exhortation and urgency of Christ, "Have faith in God."

Faith covers temporal as well as spiritual needs. Faith dispels all undue anxiety and needless care about what shall be eaten, what shall be drunk, what shall be worn. Faith lives in the present, and regards the day as being sufficient unto the evil thereof. It lives day by day, and dispels all fears for the morrow. Faith brings great ease of mind and perfect peace of heart. *"Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee: because he trusted in Thee."*

When we pray, "Give us this day our daily bread," we are, in a measure, shutting tomorrow out of our prayer. We do not live in tomorrow but in today. We do not seek tomorrow's grace or tomorrow's bread. They thrive best, and get most out of life, who live in the living present. They pray best who pray for today's needs, not for tomorrow's, which may render our prayers unnecessary and redundant by not existing at all!

True prayers are born of present trials and present needs. Bread, for today, is bread enough. Bread given for today is the strongest sort of pledge that there will be bread tomorrow. Victory today, is the assurance of victory tomorrow. Our prayers need to be focussed upon the present, We must trust God today, and leave the morrow entirely with Him. The present is ours; the future belongs to God. Prayer is the task and duty of each recurring day -- daily prayer for daily needs.

As every day demands its bread, so every day demands its prayer. No amount of praying, done today, will suffice for tomorrow's praying. On the other hand, no praying for tomorrow is of any great value to us today. To-day's manna is what we need; tomorrow God will see that our needs are supplied. This is the faith which God seeks to inspire. So leave tomorrow, with its cares, its needs, its troubles, in God's hands. There is no storing tomorrow's grace or tomorrow's praying; neither is there any laying-up of today's grace, to meet tomorrow's necessities. We cannot have tomorrow's grace, we cannot eat tomorrow's bread, we cannot do tomorrow's praying. "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof;" and, most assuredly, if we possess faith, sufficient also, will be the good.

II. PRAYER THAT GETS RESULTS

"The guests at a certain hotel were being rendered uncomfortable by repeated strumming on a piano, done by a little girl who possessed no knowledge of music. They complained to the proprietor with a view to having the annoyance stopped. 'I am sorry you are annoyed,' he said. 'But the girl is the child of one of my very best guests. I can scarcely ask her not to touch the piano. But her father, who is away for a day or so, will return tomorrow. You can then approach him, and have the matter set right.' When the father returned, he found his daughter in the reception-room and, as usual, thumping on the piano. He walked up behind the child and, putting his arms over her shoulders, took her hands in his, and produced some most beautiful music. Thus it may be with us, and thus it will be, some coming day. Just now, we can produce little

but clamor and disharmony; but, one day, the Lord Jesus will take hold of our hands of faith and prayer, and use them to bring forth the music of the skies." -- ANON

GENUINE, authentic faith must be definite and free of doubt. Not simply general in character; not a mere belief in the being, goodness and power of God, but a faith which believes that the things which "he saith, shall come to pass." As the faith is specific, so the answer likewise will be definite: "He shall have whatsoever he saith." Faith and prayer select the things, and God commits Himself to do the very things which faith and persevering prayer nominate, and petition Him to accomplish.

The American Revised Version renders the twenty-fourth verse of the eleventh chapter of Mark, thus: "Therefore I say unto you, All things whatsoever ye pray and ask for, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." Perfect faith has always in its keeping what perfect prayer asks for. How large and unqualified is the area of operation -- the "All things whatsoever!" How definite and specific the promise -- "Ye shall have them!"

Our chief concern is with our faith, -- the problems of its growth, and the activities of its vigorous maturity. A faith which grasps and holds in its keeping the very things it asks for, without wavering, doubt or fear -- that is the faith we need -- faith, such as is a pearl of great price, in the process and practice of prayer. The statement of our Lord about faith and prayer quoted above is of supreme importance. Faith must be definite, specific; an unqualified, unmistakable request for the things asked for. It is not to be a vague, indefinite, shadowy thing; it must be something more than an abstract belief in God's willingness and ability to do for us. It is to be a definite, specific, asking for, and expecting the things for which we ask. Note the reading of Mark 11:23: "*And shall not doubt in his heart, but shall believe that those things which he saith shall come to pass; he shall have whatever he saith.*"

Just so far as the faith and the asking is definite, so also will the answer be. The giving is not to be something other than the things prayed for, but the actual things sought and named. "He shall have whatsoever he saith." It is all imperative, "He shall have." The granting is to be unlimited, both in quality and in quantity.

Faith and prayer select the subjects for petition, thereby determining what God is to do. "He shall have whatsoever he saith." Christ holds Himself ready to supply exactly, and fully, all the demands of faith and prayer. If the order on God be made clear, specific and definite, God will fill it, exactly in accordance with the presented terms.

Faith is not an abstract belief in the Word of God, nor a mere mental credence, nor a simple assent of the understanding and will; nor is it a passive acceptance of facts, however sacred or thorough. Faith is an operation of God, a Divine illumination, a holy energy implanted by the Word of God and the Spirit in the human soul -- a spiritual, Divine principle which takes of the Supernatural and makes it a thing apprehendable by the faculties of time and sense.

Faith deals with God, and is conscious of God. It deals with the Lord Jesus Christ and sees in Him a Saviour; it deals with God's Word, and lays hold of the truth; it deals with the Spirit of God, and is energized and inspired by its holy fire. God is the great objective of faith; for faith rests its whole weight on His Word. Faith is not an aimless act of the soul, but a looking to God and a resting upon His promises. Just as love and hope have always an objective so, also, has faith. Faith is not believing just *anything*; it is believing God, resting in Him, trusting His Word.

Faith gives birth to prayer, and grows stronger, strikes deeper, rises higher, in the struggles and wrestlings of mighty petitioning. Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the assurance and realization of the inheritance of the saints. Faith, too, is humble and persevering. It can wait and pray; it can stay on its knees, or lie in the dust. It is the one great condition of prayer; the lack of it lies at the root of all poor praying, feeble praying, little praying, unanswered praying.

The nature and meaning of faith is more demonstrable in what it does, than it is by reason of any definition given it. Thus, if we turn to the record of faith given us in that great honor roll, which constitutes the eleventh chapter of Hebrews, we see something of the wonderful results of faith. What a glorious list it is -- that of these men and women of faith! What marvelous achievements are there recorded, and set to the credit of faith! The inspired writer, exhausting his resources in cataloguing the Old Testament saints, who were such notable examples of wonderful faith, finally exclaims: "*And what shall I more say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets.*"

And then the writer of Hebrews goes on again, in a wonderful strain, telling of the unrecorded exploits wrought through the faith of the men of old, "of whom the world was not worthy." "All these," he says, "obtained a good report through faith."

What an era of glorious achievements would dawn for the Church and the world, if only there could be reproduced a race of saints of like mighty faith, of like wonderful praying! It is not the intellectually great that the Church needs; nor is it men of wealth that the times demand. It is not people of great social influence that this day requires. Above everybody and everything else, it is men of faith, men of mighty prayer, men and women after the fashion of the saints and heroes enumerated in *Hebrews*, who "obtained a good report through faith," that the Church and the whole wide world of humanity needs.

Many men, of this day, obtain a good report because of their money-giving, their great mental gifts and talents, but few there be who obtain a "good report" because of their great faith in God, or because of the wonderful things which are being wrought through their great praying. Today, as much as at any time, we need men of great faith and men who are great in prayer. These are the two cardinal virtues which make men great in the eyes of God, the two things which create conditions of real spiritual success in the life and work of the Church. It is our chief concern to see that we maintain a faith of such quality and texture, as counts before God; which grasps, and holds in its keeping, the things for which it asks, without doubt and without fear.

Doubt and fear are the twin foes of faith. Sometimes, they actually usurp the place of faith, and although we pray, it is a restless, disquieted prayer that we offer, uneasy and often complaining. Peter failed to walk on Gennesaret because he permitted the waves to break over him and swamp the power of his faith. Taking his eyes from the Lord and regarding the water all about him, he began to sink and had to cry for succor -- "Lord, save, or I perish!"

Doubts should never be cherished, nor fears harbored. Let none cherish the delusion that he is a martyr to fear and doubt. It is no credit to any man's mental capacity to cherish doubt of God, and no comfort can possibly derive from such a thought. Our eyes should be taken off self, removed from our own weakness and allowed to rest implicitly upon God's strength. "Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompense of reward." A simple, confiding faith, living day by day, and casting its burden on the Lord, each hour of the day, will dissipate fear, drive away misgiving and deliver from doubt: "*Be careful for nothing, but in everything, by supplication and prayer, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God.*"

That is the Divine cure for all fear, anxiety, and undue concern of soul, all of which are closely akin to doubt and unbelief. This is the Divine prescription for securing the peace which passeth all understanding, and keeps the heart and mind in quietness and peace.

All of us need to mark well and heed the caution given in *Hebrews*: "Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God." We need, also, to guard against unbelief as we would against an enemy. Faith needs to be cultivated. We need to keep on praying, "Lord, increase our faith," for faith is susceptible of increase. Paul's tribute to the Thessalonians was, that their faith grew exceedingly. Faith is increased by exercise, by being put into use. It is nourished by sore trials.

"That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glow at the appearing of Jesus Christ."

Faith grows by reading and meditating upon the Word of God. Most, and best of all, faith thrives in an atmosphere of prayer.

It would be well, if all of us were to stop, and inquire personally of ourselves: "Have I faith in God? Have I *real* faith, -- faith which keeps me in perfect peace, about the things of earth and the things of heaven?" This is the most important question a man can propound and expect to be answered. And there is another question, closely akin to it in significance and importance -- "Do I really pray to God so that He hears me and answers my prayers? And do I truly pray unto God so that I get direct from God the things I ask of Him?"

It was claimed for Augustus Caesar that he found Rome a city of wood, and left it a city of marble. The pastor who succeeds in changing his people from a prayerless to a prayerful people, has done a greater work than did Augustus in

changing a city from wood to marble. And after all, this is the prime work of the preacher. Primarily, he is dealing with prayerless people -- with people of whom it is said, "God is not in all their thoughts." Such people he meets everywhere, and all the time. His main business is to turn them from being forgetful of God, from being devoid of faith, from being prayerless, so that they become people who habitually pray, who believe in God, remember Him and do His will. The preacher is not sent to merely induce men to join the Church, nor merely to get them to do better. It is to get them to pray, to trust God, and to keep God ever before their eyes, that they may not sin against Him.

The work of the ministry is to change unbelieving sinners into praying and believing saints. The call goes forth by Divine authority, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." We catch a glimpse of the tremendous importance of faith and of the great value God has set upon it, when we remember that He has made it the one indispensable condition of being saved. "By grace are ye saved, through faith." Thus, when we contemplate the great importance of prayer, we find faith standing immediately by its side. By faith are we saved, and by faith we *stay* saved. Prayer introduces us to a life of faith. Paul declared that the life he lived, he lived by faith in the Son of God, who loved him and gave Himself for him -- that he walked by faith and not by sight.

Prayer is absolutely dependent upon faith. Virtually, it has no existence apart from it, and accomplishes nothing unless it be its inseparable companion. Faith makes prayer effectual, and in a certain important sense, must precede it. *"For he that cometh to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of them that diligently seek Him."* Before prayer ever starts toward God; before its petition is preferred, before its requests are made known -- faith must have gone on ahead; must have asserted its belief in the existence of God; must have given its assent to the gracious truth that "God is a rewarder of those that diligently seek His face." This is the primary step in praying. In this regard, while faith does not bring the blessing, yet it puts prayer in a position to ask for it, and leads to another step toward realization, by aiding the petitioner to believe that God is able and willing to bless.

Faith starts prayer to work -- clears the way to the mercy-seat. It gives assurance, first of all, that there is a mercy-seat, and that there the High Priest awaits the pray-ers and the prayers. Faith opens the way for prayer to approach God. But it does more. It accompanies prayer at every step she takes. It is her inseparable companion and when requests are made unto God, it is faith which turns the asking into obtaining. And faith follows prayer, since the spiritual life into which a believer is led by prayer, is a life of faith. The one prominent characteristic of the experience into which believers are brought through prayer, is not a life of works, but of faith.

Faith makes prayer strong, and gives it patience to wait on God. Faith believes that God is a rewarder. No truth is more clearly revealed in the Scriptures than this, while none is more encouraging. Even the closet has its promised reward, "He that seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly," while the most insignificant service rendered to a disciple in the name of the Lord, surely receives its reward. And to this precious truth faith gives its hearty assent.

Yet faith is narrowed down to one particular thing -- it does not believe that God will reward everybody, nor that He is a rewarder of all who pray, but that He is a rewarder of them that *diligently seek Him*. Faith rests its care on diligence in prayer, and gives assurance and encouragement to diligent seekers after God, for it is they, alone, who are richly rewarded when they pray.

We need constantly to be reminded that faith is the one inseparable condition of successful praying. There are other considerations entering into the exercise, but faith is the final, the one indispensable condition of true praying. As it is written in a familiar, primary declaration: "Without faith, it is impossible to please Him." James puts this truth very plainly. *"If any of you lack wisdom," he says, "let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not, and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth (or doubteth) is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind and tossed. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord."*

Doubting is always put under the ban, because it stands as a foe to faith and hinders effectual praying. In the First Epistle to Timothy Paul gives us an invaluable truth relative to the conditions of successful praying, which he thus lays down: "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting."

All questioning must be watched against and eschewed. Fear and peradventure have no place in true praying. Faith must assert itself and bid these foes to prayer depart. Too much authority cannot be attributed to faith; but prayer is the

scepter by which it signalizes its power. How much of spiritual wisdom there is in the following advice written by an eminent old divine.

"Would you be freed from the bondage to corruption?" he asks. "Would you grow in grace in general and grow in grace in particular? If you would, your way is plain. Ask of God more faith. Beg of Him morning, and noon and night, while you walk by the way, while you sit in the house, when you lie down and when you rise up; beg of Him simply to impress Divine things more deeply on your heart, to give you more and more of the substance of things hoped for and of the evidence of things not seen."

Great incentives to pray are furnished in Holy Scriptures, and our Lord closes His teaching about prayer, with the assurance and promise of heaven. The presence of Jesus Christ in heaven, the preparation for His saints which He is making there, and the assurance that He will come again to receive them -- how all this helps the weariness of praying, strengthens its conflicts, sweetens its arduous toil! These things are the star of hope to prayer, the wiping away of its tears, the putting of the odour of heaven into the bitterness of its cry. The spirit of a pilgrim greatly facilitates praying. An earth-bound, earth-satisfied spirit cannot pray. In such a heart, the flame of spiritual desire is either gone out or smouldering in faintest glow. The wings of its faith are clipped, its eyes are filmed, its tongue silenced. But they, who in unswerving faith and unceasing prayer, wait continually upon the Lord, *do* renew their strength, *do* mount up with wings as eagles, *do* run, and are not weary, *do* walk, and not faint.

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