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THE PURGING OF JERUSALEM

SERMON by Mr J H GOSDEN

Preached on Tuesday evening, March 20th 1934 in Priory Chapel, Maidstone

And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment, and by the spirit of burning. Isaiah 4 v. 3-4

It is unutterably solemn to be a professor of religion. A terrible thing God does with His people: they are called out of the world by an invincible power, and they are dealt with solemnly in this life; so that at the last they are found of God "in peace, without spot, and blameless" (2 Pet. 3 v. 14). But to be in religion is to be under the teaching and under the power of the Holy Ghost; and all that is not of the Holy Spirit, sooner or later, will be lost. "The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is" (1 Cor. 3 v. 13). The text appears to show this, that evidently comparatively few will be left in Zion, that is, the true church of God. In the parable, when the Lord spoke of the tares and the wheat, you will remember the disciples said to the Lord, should they root up the tares? The Lord said, "Nay, lest ye root up also the wheat with them; let both grow together until the harvest" (Mat. 13 v. 29). Very solemn to be a professor of religion! Very solemn to believe, as we must believe, according to Scripture, that many are in a profession of religion, growing as the tares among the wheat, left among the wheat until the final audit, until the assize, until the final burning, until the wind drives away the chaff into the oven to be burned up root and branch.

These things are before me much in these days, for the ministry is ordained, and men are commissioned to it. A painful, and sorrowful and solemn work it is. No light-hearted plaything, to be a minister; and it is no little thing ostensibly to wait on God, under the ministry. Jeremiah was commanded, and promised a blessing in fulfilling the command to "take forth the precious from the vile" (Jer. 15 v. 19). That scripture is often misquoted, and the misquotation spoils the proportion of the truth. I have often heard people say, 'Separate between the precious and the vile.' The scripture does not say that, but says, "Take forth the precious from the vile," which among other things implies this: that there is a great deal more 'vile' than 'precious'. It also implies, or infers, this: that a minister, while he has to show and set out what and who are vile, yet has mainly to do with the precious. If you take out from a big quantity, say, a grain; if you take out the good, you have to touch the bad, but mainly you touch the good. This is the command of Christ to his disciples, and a true minister has before him the awful pronouncement of the Word of the Scripture, to him who "keepeth back his sword from blood" (Jer. 48 v. 10). The clamour today for a nice sweet teacher is an unwholesome clamour. We hear often, 'Oh, he is a nice, sweet preacher.' Well, my friends, if the sweetness is the honey of Canaan, it is good; but a false sweetness, and skinning over wounds, and deceiving people, is not good; and may you and I look to it. I would rather risk the enmity of empty professors than deceive one child of God. "It shall come to pass, that he that is left

in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy" (Isa. 4 v. 3). This has no attraction for an empty professor. Escaping trouble, the indulgence of self-pity, ease, comfort, pleasure and joy, and sweetness, are all he knows. Holiness he does not delight in, though he covers his own sins, and pretends that he is religious.

No, my friends, holiness can never be attractive to an unregenerate professor; but I believe it is one of the greatest attractions in the gospel, to the child of God. The Lord has promised both to make his people holy and to present them before the throne of glory "not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing," "with exceeding joy" (Eph. 5 v. 27; Jude v. 24). If you are a child of God, and were compelled to receive the error that you must always be a sinner, but escape punishment, I am sure your very best hopes would be spoilt:

"In holiness the saints delight," (Burnham; Gadsby's . 16)

and being unholy, feeling their deep pollution and depravity, is one of the greatest troubles of their lives. But the Lord can accomplish what no creature can accomplish; He will accomplish what He has promised. According to this text it would seem that there shall be very few left, and those remaining ones are said to be "written among the living." It expresses a very great and solemn truth, namely this, that every person whose name is in the book of Jehovah's electing decree will sustain, will endure, and will be remaining in Jerusalem when all empty, false professors shall turn back, and be offended. "Written among the living" – "written to life," as the margin says. Says Luke, writing in the Acts of the Apostles, "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed" (Acts 13 v. 48). This ordination to eternal life is the decree that is written in the text and throughout the Scripture - a decree of God, the sovereign purpose of God, the great will of Jehovah, to save some men unto eternal blessedness. But the proof of being "written among the living" is in the effect of what God does among professors. Isaac Watts, speaking about the volume in which is written the fates of all men, says:

"His providence unfolds the book
And makes his counsels shine;
Each opening leaf, and every stroke,
Fulfils some deep design."(Watts; Gadsby's . 4)

This makes providence very solemn; it makes our lives fraught with great importance. Do not think lightly of changes of providence, my friends; they are inside God's decrees. The book which was "written within and on the back side, sealed with seven seals," which none could open but "the Lion of the tribe of Juda," but which he prevailed to open (Rev. 5 v. 1, 5), is that awful, great unfolding of the divine purpose of Jehovah. Truths so bright, so glorious, so unspeakably awful as this, may well make a dying mortal tremble; the Lord help us to look at it; for we shall soon be in our graves. We shall soon be, as to our spirits, either in heaven or in hell; either among the holy spirits of the redeemed, or with the fiends in an endless state of misery and perdition.

This holiness is accomplished by the work of God, in this world - a washing away of filth. People are not holy when they are born. The Scripture declares of the whole human race, being sinners: "There is no difference: for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3 v. 22-3). We are polluted in our nature, in our

lives, in our practice; in many things we are polluted - nothing clean. God deals with His people to wash the filth away. That which atones for sin is the blood of Christ; that which cleanses the conscience from guilt is the atoning blood, which was shed to take away the sin and pollution of His people. It is the dealing of the Holy Ghost with people, "by the Spirit of judgment and by the Spirit of burning" (Is. 4 v. 4), that purges and cleanses experimentally. Now we have much need of cleansing - not only pardon, but cleansing, as David desired: "Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin" (Ps 51 v. 2). The Lord does this, and he does it by solemn dealings. He lights a fire in the conscience; He lights a fire in the circumstances; He sends storms into the lives of people. He brings about certain solemn providences, upon which hang a very great deal in His secret purpose, and the effect of what he does, both inwardly and outwardly, manifests whether that person is merely an empty professor of religion, or one of the living in Jerusalem. The manifestation is not made at once. Judas passed current a long time among the eleven apostles, before he was manifested. Many professors remain perhaps all their lives to their dying day, and pass current as the children of God. But the day declares it.¹

The effect of trouble is one of two kinds. Trouble either causes a person to fear God who sends the trouble, to turn to Him and pray, and to fall before Him and submit to Him; or it hardens the heart in impenitency, as it did in the heart of Pharaoh. Pharaoh relented many a time when he had trouble on him; when the plagues were on him, how he repeatedly relented! And this is the effect of trouble on the hypocrite, the empty professor; it never softens his heart, it never lays him before God, and never makes him ask the Lord why He contends with him, but as an easy, happy, empty professor, he says, 'It is all for the best.' No prayer, no repentance, no faith, no love - he has his religion; it is all on his finger-ends; and all the judgment only hardens him, and it is his condemnation. Very solemn, but very true! You cannot open your eyes - if you have spiritual eyes - and observe professors of religion up and down the land, and not know the truth of this. It is very awful. God make it a warning! Affliction, losses, temptations, persecutions, disappointments, in the hand of the Spirit of Christ on a child of God, through grace have an opposite effect. Through grace, I say; that is, *grace operating*. This is a way in which a spiritual man can judge where an empty professor is; he knows in his own experience that when the Spirit of Christ is *not* operating and he is in trouble, what the effect of that trouble is. But, blessed be God, the final effect of sin is never realised in the child of God. No, it was finished in the sacrifice of *Christ*, in his infinite compassion for him,² and therefore it is to be purged from the sinner. But in order for this to be, it has to be laid on his conscience. Largely, the Lord brings sins onto the conscience by means of trouble, which as a fire in the conscience melts, or like a hammer breaks the rocky heart to pieces. This is a solemn hour. Said the Lord Jehovah to Moses concerning Israel: "It is a terrible thing that I will do" (Ex. 34 v. 10); and you, if you look out for, and get, an easy religion, the Lord give you grace to suspect whence it came. But if you find that from the time you were born again, as you hope, it is mainly a fight, and a struggle, and a labour, that will not prove anything in itself; but when from time to time you have a victory, when you are granted

¹ "Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it" (1 Cor. 3 v. 13).

² i.e. for the sinner (and again at the end of the sentence)

deliverance from the power of some sin, and when occasionally the Lord looks down upon you in your struggles and promises you final conquest, *that* has something in it that is very positive, and it will be a great encouragement for you to hope that the end of the struggle will be final victory and eternal rest.

“When the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion ...” Filth! Filth is our depravity; filth is the fruit of our corrupt nature; filth is the exercise of infidelity in us. Oh what a dreadful thing it is to be unacquainted with a sense of our sin, to whitewash yourself with religion, and say, ‘I am clean’! The Lord saw some in his day who whitewashed themselves, and he said, “Inwardly they are ravening wolves” (Mat. 7 v. 15). ‘Oh,’ says a professor, ‘I am not like that. I am a very quiet, docile, kind individual.’ You may be, but when God *shows* you what you are in His sight, there will not be a word in scripture too severe to adopt for yourself against your own nature. When the Lord sends trouble to his people, they come to know what they are. The beginning of trouble usually discovers to the man something that he little thought was in him. It is one thing to be a Christian in the sunshine; it is another thing to be a Christian with the painful process of attrition, wearing you out. “The waters wear the stones: Thou washest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and Thou destroyest the hope of man” (Job 14 v. 19). It is said in Daniel that they “shall wear out the saints of the Most High” (Dan 7 v. 25). I believe the devil and his emissaries, in these days, are largely occupied in seeking to wear out the saints of the Most High. Attrition is a slow process, but it is very effectual. “The waters wear the stones.” Many little trickles of water through a course of years will make a great impression upon hard stones. Thus the effect of exercise, by more or less continual trouble is noticeable. We may notice it. Do you find that trouble, sooner or later, brings you to fall flat before God? It may be some of you know this, that when trouble comes on, in unexpected directions, you feel your rebellion and enmity and stubbornness and wicked unbelief rise. Now that fills you with weakness and darkness and fear, and it is a great addition to the trouble itself. We have no submission, no faith respecting the end, when troubles come. If our submission and our faith are real, they must come from God. When the fire is put to the crucible in which the metal is placed for refining, final separation is not complete until the gold is unseen, until the scum covers the whole. When that is removed, the refiner sees his image reflected in the pure gold. I am afraid that a good many professors have never had the scum discovered to themselves; they see little places, at least, where they are better, holier, and where they have some hope; but when God deals with people he shows them their filth, and that the filth extends from head to foot through every faculty of the whole being. And such a man cannot without special help even *hope* that he will ever be holy. And yet he wants it; he cries out, and wonders why he should be such a huge monster of iniquity.

We have pride to be purged, to be cleansed away; it sticks to us; it is in our nature. Pride results from ignorance of God, and ignorance of self. Many people think a good deal of natural humility, as it is called - nice, meek, gentle, kind dispositions; but that does not come into spiritual things at all. Pride, I say, is ignorance of God and ignorance of self. It is a whole and unbroken heart. It is the man who, like the Pharisee, can thank God that he is better than someone else. He would not do so in words, but in his spirit and life. The Lord will purge that away, and cleanse that away. He does so by making the person see the blackness of his

pride, making the man see that his foundation is in the dust, and by making him realise a little, a very little indeed, what he is, as a black sinner in the sight of God. He cries out, "Woe is me! For I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6 v. 5). A sight of a holy God, by the Spirit, in the heart, and consequently a sight of your own nature, will make you lose your pride; it will lay you low before God, and you will say, "O wretched man that I am!" (Rom. 7 v. 24). A vile creature! "Behold, I am vile," said Job. "I will lay mine hand upon my mouth" (Job 40 v. 4) - I will hold my tongue. He knew what he was, when God spoke to him. We have that terrible principle of independence. Independence is unbelief; independence is the delusive but comfortable feeling of creature strength. We would not lose it if we could help it; but God will make his people lose it, and see the pollution of it. Independence of God is one of the filthiest things we can be guilty of; it really is; and dependence upon Him, I believe, pleases God, as it is a fruit of the Spirit.

When we think we can stand alone, and lean on an empty arm of flesh, we have creature pride. That comes into many things; for instance, our own understanding. Oh, vain man would be wise. He thinks he knows God; he thinks he is quite capable of acquiring a working knowledge of religion; he can manage to make the best of both worlds, he thinks - enjoy himself in this life, and escape the cross, and yet get the crown at last. The dreadful independence of God we have! The Lord will purge this. He will cleanse it away, and very solemnly He does this. He burns up idols. He removes props to show a man that his own understanding is just a broken stick, that the light of carnal reason is just gross darkness, that his strength is utter weakness, and that he cannot climb one hair's breadth heavenward in his own wisdom. When the Lord shows a man this; He brings him to his wits' end, and He makes him see, if ever he knows that God who dwells in His own inaccessible light and eternity, he must know Him by his own sovereign self-revelation.

Oh my friends, we are dependent utterly upon the Holy Ghost for every right thought of God, for any knowledge of God, for any real sense of sin and sorrow for it, for the least breath of prayer, and for any spiritual understanding in the Scriptures. We are dependent on God the Holy Ghost for everything in religion that will not at last fail us. Do you believe it? Do you know it? Is God teaching you this? Has He set a fire to burn up some of your knowledge? Has He made you see that the natural light that is in you, in some particulars, is darkness, and how great is that darkness? Has He made you discern between life and death, and made you feel that you have a great deal more death than life? Well, it is very solemn work, when eternity is concerned, when you look into the Scriptures and feel your ignorance and that unless the Spirit teaches you, you must remain ignorant; and when you would pray, you find you have not a breath of prayer, and when you would believe God, the awful power of infidelity makes the condition well-nigh hopeless. Oh what a burning there is! Natural religion - it may stand a man in good stead until the end of his life, but then it will fail him. I do not wish any of you to have unnecessary trouble, but if you are wrapped up in natural religion, I do desire that God may, in his mercy, burn it up, and make you feel you have none, and then bring you to his footstool for mercy. That is infinitely better than being left to go on, and on, and on, and then at last find you have nothing at all.

"It shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion ..." Now the work of God is secret and sovereign work. He works by circumstances, He works by his Word, and He works through the ministry. He works directly, at times, by his Spirit upon the heart, according to the Scriptures. But this comes to pass, that many go back and walk no more with Him.³ Offences come; when troubles come, men are offended with religion and with God. When afflictions come, men's hearts are hardened and their rebellion overcomes them, and they prove that they never had eternal life. When a true doctrine, a close precept, comes, men deafen their ears, rebel, defy God, and prove themselves to be just reprobates. My friends, it is very solemn, very solemn. Providence - the providence that has brought you few people here - is solemn; and that which has brought me here is solemn. God permitted me to come as pastor, now nearly ten years ago, and has permitted me, and I believe has inclined you, to come here. Dear friends, what has He done in your hearts? Rebellion - has it always risen, and never been subdued? Has there never been a falling down under the word of God, searching and trying, emptying and stripping, and a coming to the Lord in prayer and confession of sin, asking for mercy?

"It shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem ..." I believe that when the end of time comes, there will be very few who will then believe the truth in its simplicity and in its solemnity. We are told by the apostle Paul, speaking under divine inspiration and writing to Timothy, that "in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous ..., having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof." They want to be tickled, "having itching ears" (2 Tim. 3 v. 1-2, 5; 4 v. 3); they want something that is nice and smooth, easy and comfortable, or something novel in religion; anything that prevents them from being troubled and searched - something that lulls them to sleep. But that is a peril, my friends. Beware of it! To be asleep in religion is terrible; but to be dead in religion is worse.

"Every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem" - this book of life has another record in it. The book of life was written in eternity by the sovereign fingers of Jehovah. The living people in Jerusalem are to be the subjects of such a work, as that work, being acceptable to God, shall be recorded in heaven. Just as these books, in which are recorded every act of every creature, will be brought out at the great Assize, and out of which the dead shall be judged according to their works, so there is another book which shall be brought out. That book is spoken of in Malachi. It is called a "book of remembrance." God remembers the work He has done in His people. Why, my friends, He records every tear, every sigh; He knows every panting desire, every breathing after holiness, mercy and salvation; for it is His own work. The fear of God operating in the soul, through the solemn dealings of God with a man, sanctifies him. This fear of God is marked in heaven. "And a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name" (Mal. 3 v. 16). Whatever your religion is, however short you may feel to come, however solemnly you may tremble at the word of God, or however much you may dread being wrong, if there be in your heart the fear of God, when troubles come you will turn to Him and ask Him wherefore He contends with you.⁴ Taught by the Spirit, you will pray that the troubles, bitter though they may be, may

³ "From that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him" (John 6 v. 66).

⁴ "I will say unto God, Do not condemn me; shew me wherefore thou contendest with me" (Job 10 v. 2)

turn to a good account for the furtherance of the gospel in you, and for the conformity in you to the will of the Lord. That fear of God in you is marked by the Lord. It is not something that is intrinsically good in your nature, but it is His own work, concerning which it is written, "Thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands" (Job 14 v. 15). If He works in you "to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2 v. 13), that He accepts. Only His *own* work will He accept; everything else is spurious. He will make his people dread being deceived by spurious religion. Perhaps when you have felt the tremendity of eternity and religion, some of you have solemnly prayed to God,

"Detect, destroy what's not thy own." (Kelly; Gadsby's 974)

It is a solemn prayer, but I believe if honestly prayed under the sense of the solemnity of things, it will prove to be a prayer that God will graciously hear; and He will bless the man who thus prays.

"And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy." Now some of you may fear that you will be left, not in Zion, but in the congregation of the dead. Oh what a dread I have had of that! He "that wandereth out of the way of understanding shall remain in the congregation of the dead" (Prov. 21 v. 16). What is the "congregation of the dead"? Why, it is a congregation where God is not. Where does God presence himself? With His own people; and when the people of God are taken away from the place, whatever numbers are left, there is the congregation of the dead. Did you ever dread it - ever dread being left, all the saints of God being taken away? Or do you ever dread lest you should be offended, and so overthrown by your own sin and the devil's temptations, as to turn back and walk no more with the saints? Did ever that word come to you with solemn yet encouraging enquiry, "Will ye also go away?" I believe that question, put to the eleven, encouraged and strengthened them; and Peter said, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God" (John 6 v. 67-9). That is where love is: a knowledge of God in Christ. It will keep you clinging to Him, whatever comes:

"Jesus, immutably the same,
Thou true and living Vine!
Around thy all-supporting stem,
My feeble arms I'd twine," (Toplady; Gadsby's . 939)

says the poor sinner who dreads being separated from Christ.

Well, if that is your language, it is the language of faith, and may the Lord enable you still to cleave to Him, even if it brings trouble - and it will. "In the world ye shall have tribulation" (John 16 v. 33). Why? To separate you from your sins, to separate you from the love of the world, to detach you from sublunary joys, to bring you off self-dependence to confidence in the Lord Jesus. Trouble is not joyous to us naturally, but it is good if it be turned into tribulation and gracious chastisement. "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby" (Heb. 12 v. 11). The Lord chastens His people that they "might be partakers of his holiness;" so we are taught by the Spirit of God through Paul to the

Hebrews (Heb. 12 v. 10-1). And what is that but the same truth as in the text: "And it shall come to pass, that he that is left in Zion, and he that remaineth in Jerusalem, shall be called holy, even every one that is written among the living in Jerusalem: when the Lord shall have washed away the filth of the daughters of Zion, and shall have purged the blood of Jerusalem from the midst thereof by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning." This may look very unattractive to some. You may well say, 'Judgment and burning! That looks terrible!' It is solemn, but just look at this point: there is another fire, different from this spirit of judgment and burning which is brought to pour upon the daughters of Jerusalem. In Malachi, after the Lord had declared that He would sit as "a Refiner and purifier" of Israel (Mal. 3 v. 3), he says, "The day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud and all that do wickedly shall be stubble ... saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch," (Mal. 4 v. 1). It is better, if God will mercifully grant it to us, that we may have the spirit of judgment now in our conscience, and be brought to know what it is to be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire, than to be left to that oven. Did you ever pray to be saved from that oven? When troubles come, do you pray that they may prove to be to you the Refiner's fire? We are most apt, some of us, to forget the Refiner, and to conclude because we are kept in fires, and encounter so many storms and strange providences, that God is about to make an end of us. And that fear is very solemn. I have wondered sometimes what would come next, and from what quarter. I am persuaded (I have told God so more than once) that whatever comes, even if it be hell, I deserve it.

But then when He reminds you that these things are in the hands of the blessed Redeemer, when He gives just an inkling of that sacred truth, that the Lion of the tribe of Judah prevailed to break the seals, and to open the book and look thereon (Rev. 5 v. 1-5) - when, I say, in other words, the blessed Holy Ghost gives you to see the Son of God incarnate, the Man Christ Jesus, working out the purposes of Jehovah concerning you, and bringing you from time to time to His footstool with contrition, with prayer and with hope, then, your eye being on the Refiner, you will submit to the Lord's work. You can say,

"Accomplish in me all thy will;
Only remember I am dust,"

(J. Hart; Gadsby's 873)

and the Lord *will* remember it; He will never lay upon a man more than is right. Some of you may say, 'If I get a straw more, I shall be utterly overcome.' I well know what you feel, but you will not be overcome if you can go to the Lord and fall flat before Him. To refuse the yoke, to reject the chastisement, to stout it out with God, is more a sin of infidelity than anything else; but if (and oh, it is blessed to be able to do it, and to feel the sacred influence of the Spirit causing you to do it!) you can fall flat before the Lord, make an unreserved surrender of the whole of your circumstances, and confess your sins, as it were, in bulk, and commit all to Him to pardon, and save, and undertake for you, for Christ's sake, you will find you will come out well. You will be among the holy ones, the living ones of Jerusalem, because *this* is the work of the Holy Ghost.

May the Lord grant that we may be the subjects of this solemn work. There may be yet before us more trouble than we have now. If so, we shall need our minds to be prepared, and as we anticipate more trouble - there may be some

immersed in it now - it will be our mercy to follow the Scripture: "Take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand" (Eph. 6 v. 13). Now one of the principle weapons of that armour is the shield of faith. Another is the weapon of all-prayer, and another is the sword of the Spirit. We need strength, we need grace, to use this armour in the evil day, not fighting against God, "not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers" (Eph. 6 v. 12) - and faith will save you. What did Luther say? He said, "I will not detach myself from thee." Job said, "Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him" (Job 13 v. 15).

Well, my friends, such a person does not possess much religion to boast about, but he has faith, and that is the work of God, and it purifies the heart; and such a person will remain among those who are written to life in the eternal decree of God, and whose names are in the Lamb's book of life, as fearing His name. They shall be owned by Him. "They shall be mine, saith the Lord, in that day when I make up my jewels" (Mal. 3 v. 17). Nothing whatever is worth considering in comparison with this. May God grant us grace to consider and seek it, and obtain such a rich portion.

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