



The DEAF LUTHERAN



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THE CHRISTMAS EVE TABLECLOTH MIRACLE

By RICHARD BAUMAN

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You might think you've heard all the great Christmas stories that are worth hearing, but unless you know about the Christmas Eve Tablecloth Miracle, you've missed one of the best.



The Reverend Howard Schade first told this story 30 years ago when he was pastor of the First Reformed church of Nyack, N.Y. Although Schade omitted the names of those involved, and the exact location where this incident took place, he did say it occurred at Christmas time in 1948, and is the factual account of a truly remarkable event.

It was mid-November, 1948, when a young enthusiastic minister received his first pastorage. At one time his new church had been a glorious edifice situated in one of the

best neighborhoods of a well known city in the eastern United States. Time, however, had taken its toll on the church and surrounding area. Things weren't as grand as they had once been. The minister and his wife realized there wasn't a lot they could do about the community, but they knew that soap and water, paint and polish, coupled with a generous supply of elbow grease and the church could regain some of its elegance in time for Christmas.

With only about a month to accomplish so much, they poured out their energies. They scrubbed and waxed floors, washed accumulated grime from the pews and painted the walls. The church seemed to take on a glow of pride as Christmas crept closer. The couple couldn't help feeling a measure of pride in what they had accomplished.

It was just two days before Christmas when an incredible storm struck. The howling storm pounded the area dumping nearly two inches of rain before it moved on. The church's old roof could not take, and it sprung numerous leaks. Most were minor and hardly dampened the interior, but one massive leak had devastating results. Right behind the altar the old plaster walls became saturated, soaking up water like a dry sponge. An enormous

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THE THREE MIRACLES OF CHRISTMAS

By DR. A. L. BARRY, President
Iowa District East, LCMS
Cedar Rapids, Iowa

I recently made a very interesting observation while reading in Dr. Martin Luther's writings. Speaking of the festival of Christmas, Dr. Luther surfaced what he called, "The Three Miracles of Christmas." First, God came in the flesh. Second, a virgin gave birth to a child. Third, through faith in that Saviour Child, you personally have forgiveness with God.

1. **God came in the flesh.** How can our simple human minds ever comprehend a truth so profound? That He was without beginning and without end, that He who is the Creator of the ends of the earth should now take upon Himself flesh of our flesh, be born in a manger and come to save us--what love, what fantastic, forgiving love.

2. **A virgin gave birth to a child.** Without a doubt, this was a once-in-the-universe

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section of plaster fell from the wall, leaving a gaping, ugly hole.

There was no time to repair the damage before Christmas Eve services, and the minister and his wife couldn't help but feel all of their backbreaking labor had been for naught. In their eyes the church looked worse than it had when they started. What was the use, they thought, as they cleaned up the soggy plaster.

The benefit auction they attended that evening didn't do much to raise their spirits, either, until an old tablecloth was put up for bid. The instant the pastor saw it, he was ecstatic. Here, he reasoned, was the solution to his problem.

The tablecloth was gigantic, more than large enough to cover the hole in the sanctuary wall. And it was beautiful, too. Obviously handmade from lace with gold thread running through it, it would look spectacular hanging on the church wall. He was determined to have it, and six dollars and 50 cents later, it was his. Christmas Eve day was clear, but windy and cold. As the minister happily unlocked the church he spotted an older woman standing at the curb, apparently waiting for a bus. Knowing the next bus would not be there for at least a half hour, he invited her to wait in the church where she would be warm.

In halting English she thanked him for his kindness, and casually mentioned that she lived across town. She was only there that day because she was trying to get a job. A well-known family in the area was looking for a housekeeper/babysitter, but she didn't get the job, she said, because of her poor English. She'd only been in America a few years, she explained, she was a war refugee.

The minister said he had work to do, and headed for the sanctuary to cover that unsightly hole in the wall. She thanked him again and slipped into a pew near the back of the church. As he unfolded the tablecloth, stretched it to its full width, and started fastening it into the wall, the woman suddenly shouted, "that's mine. That's my banquet cloth. She hurried to the front of the church and showed the stunned minister her initials embroidered on the cloth. Breathlessly, she told him the story of the tablecloth.

"My husband and I lived in Vienna, before the war," she said, forlornly, "We hated the

Nazis, and we were going to flee to Switzerland." In order to avoid suspicion, she went on, her husband sent her ahead. He promised to send their belongings, and then follow soon. Their worldly possessions never arrived in Switzerland, nor did her husband. "I later learned he had died in a Nazi concentration camp," she said, fighting back the tears.

Nearly in tears himself, the minister insisted she take the cloth that obviously meant so much to her. She hesitated a moment, then said no, it looked beautiful on the church wall, and besides, living alone she didn't give banquets any more. And without another word she turned and slowly left the church to catch her bus.

At Christmas Eve services the church looked spectacular. The tablecloth seemed to glow, and the gold threads sparkled like diamonds in the candle light. As the congregation left the church that night the minister received nothing but praise about how the church looked.

The minister noticed one old man, though, lingering in the church virtually enraptured by the altar. As he finally left he, too, told the pastor how beautiful the church was. Then almost as an afterthought, he said, "it is strange. Many years ago my wife had a banquet cloth like that one," nodding toward the altar. "But that was so long ago when we lived in Vienna. My wife is dead now, killed in the war."

It was a frigid night, but the goose bumps the minister suddenly felt all over and the chill running up his spine weren't caused by the night air. Taking several deep breaths to steady himself, he told the man about the woman who had been in church that morning.

"Can it be," gasped the old man, grabbing the minister's hands; tears rolling down his cheeks, "that she is alive? Where is she? How can I find her?"

For an instant the pastor felt panic. How, indeed, could they find her? He had no idea where she lived. For an instant his heart sank, but then he remembered the name of the family she had been interviewed by that day. Rushing to the phone he called the family residence and hastily explained that he had to have the woman's name and address that instant. Minutes later in the minister's beat up old car the two men drove quickly as pos-

CHRISTMAS EVE MIRACLE (continue on page 3)

A LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

(The following letter was received by ILDA President Ahls which illustrates some of the problems which our church faces in other areas of the world. It is being shared with our readers in the hope it will facilitate better understanding of how other deaf people live.--Editor)

September 1, 1987

Dear Lester Ahls, ILDA:

My name is Brent Hample. Last winter, I went to a small Christian orphanage on the S.E. coast of India. For two months I worked with the native pastor who ran the orphanage, Pastor Babu. My home church, Central Lutheran church in Eugene, Ore., sponsored the trip.

While in India, Pastor Babu introduced me to his son, Joshua was born in July of 1975 with one leg shorter than the other, and deaf. In the fall of 1983, the family sent

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sible to the woman's apartment house.

With a mixture of apprehension and excitement together the two men knocked on her door. The few minutes it took her to answer seemed like hours. When she finally did open the door the minister saw the culmination of what was to him, miracle.

For an instant the husband and wife, separated for nearly ten years stared at one another, not believing their eyes, and almost afraid to blink for fear the vision they were seeing would vanish. In another instant they were in each other's arms, tearfully, joyfully and excitedly clinging to one another. All the heartache and loneliness of a decade was wiped away; the moment each had dreamed about, but never really expected to see fulfilled, had miraculously come true. They were together again, and nothing was ever going to be able to drive them apart again.

Was it a miracle, fate on a string of incredible coincidences that came together at just the right time and place? It's a question that can't be answered positively, so you'll have to form your own opinion--as for me, coincidence and fate tie for a distant second place as the answer.

* * *

(It has often been said that the truth is stranger than fiction. The chances of something happening like the foregoing story are so remote, it truly has to be a miracle! Ed.)

him to a deaf school 150 kms. away in the city of Hyderabad. Within one month, Joshua was kidnapped from the school and was held for \$250 ransom. The family had to take out a loan using the orphanage as collateral, or the kidnapers would have killed Joshua,

They traveled to the kidnapers' temple and paid the money, but the boy that they released was not Joshua. They didn't even have Joshua. Against all odds, and through much prayer, they found Joshua bleeding and scared in a crowded train station. They were so happy to find him alive and they took him home.

Joshua is now 12 years old. He is a somewhat frustrated child. Pastor Babu loves Joshua, and wants Joshua to be able to communicate, learn and work. But they are scared about what happened. They want a safe school for Joshua.

Do you have any information concerning deaf schools around the state of Andhra Pradesh, India? Or do you know of any exchange programs where Joshua could be enrolled in? If you or your organization has any information or ideas, please send them to me at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary in Berkeley, Calif.

Sincerely,
Brent Hample.

P.S.: I was referred to you by Eugene Tjarks, chaplain/ director of Heartland Ephphatha Services of Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota.

(The letter has been answered and also referred to the office of Dr. Rodney Rynearson, LCMS Services to Deaf/Blind in St. Louis, --Ed.)

Only 11% of French Attend Church

A new poll conducted by the Gallup organization found recently that only 11 per cent of French adults say they attend religious services regularly. In comparison, about 40 per cent of all Americans say they attend weekly. The same study found that 53 per cent of French adults consider themselves religious, but 36 per cent of that same group would prefer to keep their preferences to themselves. Sixty-three per cent feel a need to pray sometimes, but only 26 per cent feel it is possible to have a personal relationship with God.

'SWINGING AROUND THE REGIONS . . .

Faith Lutheran church, Spokane, Wash., where Rev. Martin Hewitt is pastor, celebrated its 60th anniversary with a banquet at the Chuckwagon restaurant at E. 9621 Sprague Ave. Saturday evening, Sept. 12. Guest speaker was Dr. Rodney Rynearson, counselor for DEaf/Blind ministries of the LCMS, St. Louis. Pastor Rynearson is well known by the congregation, having served as its pastor from 1959-1967.

-oOo-

The Northwest Regional ILDA Conference was held at Concordia college, Portland, Ore. Aug. 28-30 with approximately 30 attendees present. This year's theme, "Your Life as Witness" was led by Rev. David McIntyre, with former deaconess Grace Baranski as interpreter. In addition to regular business, new regional by-laws were discussed.

-oOo-

Emmanuel Lutheran church, was dedicated with an open house Sunday, Oct. 11. The church recently moved to its new building at 2306 South 98th St. in West Allis, Wis., a suburb of Milwaukee. Improvements are needed to the new building, including remodeling and putting on an addition. Approximately \$9,500 has been realized to date, with the congregation actively seeking additional funds for its project.

-oOo-

Do you remember Rev. Omahr Mork, the young man from Norway, who ministered in Nebraska and Ohio before returning home a few years ago? We have obtained his current address for interested persons who may wish to write to him: De Doves Menighet, Fagerbond GT 12, Oslo, Norway.

-oOo-

The vacancy at Bethel Lutheran church, Denver, has been filled by Rev. Darrell Matthews of Duluth, Minn., who accepted their call. Also a new vacancy has been created in northern Wisconsin with the departure of Rev. Phil Pledger who has accepted a call to southern California.

-oOo-

Rev. Don Zuhn of Minneapolis tells us that Labor Day is a good time to thank God for the blessings of work and having a job, which in turn provide the necessities we need. Working gives us a feeling of being useful, a feeling of serving others and giving glory to God, our heavenly Father. He also adds a reminder that even a mosquito doesn't get a slap on the back until he starts working!!

The next meeting of the Central Regional Conference will be on the dates of April 15, 16 and 17, 1988 at the Holidome in northern Indianapolis. More information later.

-oOo-

A new pastor will be filling the current vacancy at Silent Lutheran church, Madison, Wis., sometime in November. He will be someone called from a seminary whose name is not presently known as this goes to press.

-oOo-

Dr. Rodney Rynearson has been on the road so much since he assumed his new duties in St. Louis, it is hard to know where he may be at any given time. On Aug. 30, he was in Sioux Falls, S.D.; Sept 12, in Spokane, Wash.; Sept. 19-20 in Des Moines, Iowa; Oct. 20-25 in Milwaukee, Wis.; Madison, Wis. Oct. 27- Nov. 1 and in Delavan, Wis. Nov. 2-8. If that isn't enough, he also was in Los Angeles earlier, in Texas before that as well during the ILDA and Ephphatha conventions in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

-oOo-

Dr. Rynearson, who is the new counselor for the Deaf/Blind Ministries of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, plans to visit all the churches for the deaf in the United States and also intends to see what needs to be done at all the various locations to upgrade services to the deaf. We are certain to hear a lot more about this servant of the Lord in the future.

-oOo-

The members of the Chapel for the Deaf in Charlotte, N.C., began worship services in their newly remodeled chapel, although all the work that is planned is not completed yet, on Sunday, Aug. 16. Dedication of the new chapel will take in Feb. 1988. the second anniversary of the church.

-oOo-

ILDA President Lester Ahls and his wife, Betty, motored to Pittsburgh, Pa. Sept. 18, then boarded the Amtrak to New York City, where Lester attended the final meeting of the Inter-Lutheran Commission on Ministry with the Disabled at the Lutheran Council Offices there. The commission wound up its work on Church accessibility for the disabled after being in existence since 1980.

If there is one thing I can't stand,
it is someone who talks while I'm inter-
rupting!

ST. JOHN DEAF LUTHERAN CHURCH, FORT WAYNE, INSTALLS REV. LAWRENCE LIEDER JULY 26

The Rev. Lawrence A. Lieder was installed as pastor of St. John Lutheran Church for the Deaf, Fort Wayne, Ind. in a 9:15 a.m. service at Holy Cross Lutheran church, 3425 Crescent Ave., where the deaf hold their services.



Rev. Lawrence A. Lieder

The installation was performed by Dr. Elwood Zimmerman, president of the Indiana District of the Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod. Officiating was Rev. James Stalder, senior pastor of Holy Cross and the Rev. John Westra preached the sermon.

A May graduate of Concordia Theological

Seminary, Rev. Lieder was ordained into the Holy ministry on June 14 at St. John's Lutheran church, Cypress, Texas, with the Rev. Alvin Musgrove performing the rite of ordination.

Rev. Lieder graduated from Concordia senior college with a B.A. degree majoring in psychology and following a 10-year break in his studies to assist his father in establishing a steel fabrication business in Texas, returned to the seminary to conclude his studies.

He and his wife, Elaine, are the parents of three children, Matthew, Heather and Amber.



Lee Ann McLane, Charles Kotal Exchange Vows in Las Vegas, Nev. Aug. 22

Establishing a home at 9345 Cedar St., No. 204 in Bellflower, Calif. are Mr. and Mrs. Charles J. Kotal, who are announcing their

marriage at the Little White Chapel in Las Vegas, Nev. on Aug. 22.

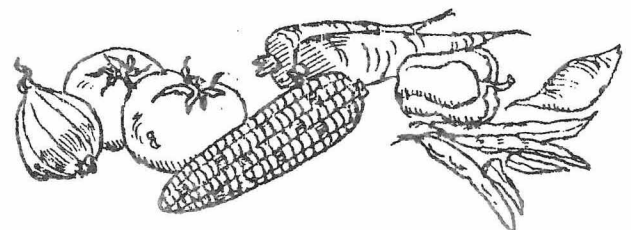
The former Lee Ann McLane and Mr. Kotal will be honored at a reception at their church, Pilgrim Lutheran church, Los Angeles, at 1 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 20, following church services, with members of the congregation invited to attend.

The bride is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Junior McLane of Portland, Ore. Mr. Kotal is a past president of the International Lutheran Deaf Association and is supervisor of the Drafting Department of Johnson Controls in Los Angeles.



MR. AND MRS. CHARLES J. KOTAL

The HARVEST is great, but the LABORERS are few . . .



ANGELS

During Christmas, we hear about the blessed angels many times. There is the Annunciation, where the angel Gabriel informs Mary about the birth of Jesus. Later, the angels appeared to the shepherds. Yet, many of us

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event. So simply expressed in the Scriptures and confessed in our Creeds, "Born of a virgin." Yet, so absolutely needed if He was truly to be our Saviour. In order for this child to be our Redeemer, His birth had to be free from all traces of original sin. He must truly come as the sinless Son of God born of a virgin!

3. Through faith in that Saviour Child, you personally have forgiveness with God. What good news! What fantastically good news! I certainly don't have to tell you what each of us have deserved because of our lives. All we have to do is take a quick look at them in the light of God's Holy Ten Commandments to see that.

I. Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

II. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord Thy God, in vain.

III. Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.

IV. Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother that is may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.

V. Thou shalt not kill.

VI. Thou shalt not commit adultery.

VII. Thou shalt not steal.

VIII. Thou shalt not bear false witness againts thy neighbor.

IX. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's house.

X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor's wife nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his cattle, nor anything that is thy neighbor's.

But deserving as each of us are of God's wrath and damnation, thanks be to God, our Saviour has now come and for this great gift of Bethlhem's manger we praise His name.

As you, your family and fellow members once again these Advent days draw near to Bethlhem and behold "The Three Miracles of Christmas," may our gracious Lord mightily bless! A joyous and blessed Christmas to each of

you in the Miracles of Christmas. really know very little about them. These helps will explain a little about these messengers of God.

Angels are spirits: Psalm 104:4.

Angels can look like people: Gen. 19:1; Matthew 28:3; Hebrews 13:2.

Angels do not die: Luke 20:36.

Angels are swift and powerful: Luke 2:13; Psalm 103:20.

The angels were created. by God during the six days of creation because God created all things during those six days: Gen. 1:31; Col. 1:16.

Angels are holy: Matthew 25:31.

They do God's will: Psalm 103:20, 21; Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2.

Angels are innumerable (cannot be counted): Psalm 68:17; Hebrews 12:22.

Angels have different ranks (Angels and Archangels): I Thess. 4:16; Jude 9.

Angels worship God: Phil. 2:9-11; Hebrews 1:6.

Angels are in heaven: 2 Chron. 18:18.

Angels do these things: Guard the tree of life: Gen. 3:24; Give the law: Acts 7:53; Hebrews 2:2; Give God's word to prophets: Dan. 4:13-17; Acts 8:26; Revelation 1:1. Help believers: Gen. 16:7; Isaiah 63:9; Luke 16:22; Acts 15:19; 10:3; 12:7, and Hebrews 1:7.

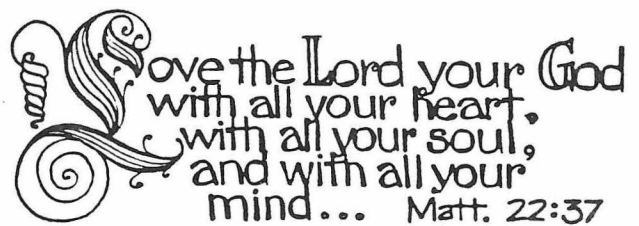
Angels give God's punishment to the wicked: Gen. 19:1; 2 Kings 19:35; Psalm 35:5; Matthew 13:41; Jude 14; Rev. 7:1; 9:15; 15:1.

Angels will be with Christ when He comes again: Matthew 25:31; Mark 8:8; 2 Thess. 1:7 and Jude 14:15.

They will be present at the Judgement: Mtthew 13:39; 16:27; 24:31; Mark 13:27 and Daniel 7:10.

THE SANCTITY OF HUMAN LIFE

"Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations."
Jeremiah 1:5



APPRECIATING OUR PASTORS

With Thanksgiving and Christmas rapidly drawing near, we cannot help but marvel at how fast another year is coming to a close.

It seems like it was just yesterday we were celebrating the last Holiday Season.



Editorial

Thanksgiving is a time of remembering all the blessings our Father bestows upon us, His children, and we come before Him with thankful hearts. One of those blessings we often thoughtlessly overlook, perhaps without intending to, are the gift

25 YEARS AGO

Dr. John A. Klein, Executive director of the Lutheran School for the Deaf, Detroit, announced his retirement in June, 1962, after 54 years as superintendent of the school, principal and teacher. He was succeeded by Walter Bellhorn, a staff member.

Christ Lutheran Church for the Deaf in Montana meeting in Great Falls Oct. 21 elected the following persons to office: Victor Lyon, president, Great Falls; Newton Shular, first vice president, Great Falls; Walter Herbold, second vice president, Hingham; Ed Lappin, third vice president, Lewistown; Jack Hagerman, fourth vice president, Thompson Falls; Ernest Cundy, fifth vice president, Billings, and Elmer Francisco, treasurer, Missoula. Rev. Rodney Rynearson is pastor.

Pastor William Ludwig has announced that Holy Cross Lutheran church, Columbus, Ohio, has raised approximately \$1,450 towards a chapel for the Columbus congregation. Pastor Ludwig said the amount was about \$550 short of its goal of \$2,000 by the end of 1962, but the fund had received support throughout the Columbus field.

A long awaited Bible dictionary for the deaf with approximately 2,000 difficult words from the King James version of the Bible become available for purchase for \$1.50. The work was done by Dr. George Gaertner and Rev. Theo. Delaney.

Rev. Daniel Pokorny spoke to two groups interested in the deaf, to the Federation of Lutheran Women in Fort Wayne, Ind. Oct. 9 and as guest speaker at the mission fair of Our Redeemer Lutheran church, Indianapolis, Oct. 21.

of faithful pastors. Most of us just take our pastors for granted, assuming he "is always there" when we need him. One such pastor remarked recently, when questioned about his work, had this to say: "I don't mind working long and hard hours for the Lord. I recognized that this was part of the task before I entered into full time church work. But I do kind of wish that somewhere along the line at least someone in my congregation would come up to me and say, 'Ypu are doing a good job, pastor. Thanks! We appreciate it.'"

This particular man isn't someone seeking praise on glorification for himself. All he wanted to hear was a simple "Thank you." But he was not hearing it.

Professional church workers, which include not only pastors, but directors of Christian education DCE's, parish assistants, deacons, Sunday school superintendents and a host of others, have difficult and demanding tasks. LCMS President Ralph Bohlmann suggested that one way we can show our appreciation is to take a church professional out to lunch on dinner. Or invite him and his wife over.

Let us show them that we care.

Joy to the World

Joy to the world, The Lord is come!
Let earth receive her King;
Let ev'ry heart prepare Him room
And heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth, the Saviour reigns!
Let men their songs employ,
While fields and floods, rocks, hills
and plains
Repeat the sounding joy.

He rules the world with truth and grace
And makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness
And wonders of His love, and wonders of
His love
And wonders, wonders, of His love.



"That's a Real Sacrifice!"

The story is told about two wealthy Christians who visited Korea where they saw a boy pulling a crude plow across a field, while an old man held the plow handles. One of the Christians, an attorney, was amused and took

a snapshot.

"I suppose they are very poor," he said later when he showed the picture to a local missionary interpreter.

"Yes," was the quiet reply. "That is the family of Chi Noui. When the church was being built, they were eager to give something, but they had no money so they sold their only ox and gave the money to the church. That is why you saw them plowing that way.

The attorney and business man were silent. Then the business man said. "That must have been a real sacrifice."

"They did not call it that," said the missionary. "They thought it was fortunate they had an ox to sell."

When they reached home, the attorney took the picture to their pastor and told him the story. "I want to double my pledge to the church," he said. "And please give me some plow work to do. I have never known what sacrifice for the church meant. A converted heathen taught me. I am ashamed to say I have never yet given anything to my church that cost me anything. Have you?"

Deaf Person Edits Supplement to the Lutheran Witness

Janet Gehlbach, a member of the Lutheran Church of the Deaf, West Hartford, Conn., has been serving as the editor of the New England District supplement to THE LUTHERAN WITNESS, having been appointed in February, 1986. Janet is presently the only known deaf person serving in such a capacity.

Her husband is Pastor Daryl Gehlbach, of the Lutheran church in West Hartford. The accompanying picture shows her at her typewriter during the 1986 Synodical convention in Indianapolis, Ind.



JANET GEHLBACH



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