

MONTREAL'S SCHOOL SYSTEM

REPORT OF THE ROYAL COMMISSION

A General Condemnation of the Extravagance of the Catholic Board.

The Expenditure at the Plateau—A fountain that was never erected—What the Commission think of St. Bridget's School—A Hint to Mr. U. E. Archambault—The Protestant Board, its Affairs Economically and Carefully Conducted—Want of Confidence in the Catholic Board—A Change in the Personnel Recommended.

To the Honorable THOMAS BONAVALLE, Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Quebec.

The Royal Commission appointed under and in virtue of the Commissions of the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province of Quebec, bearing date respectively the first day of December, one thousand eight hundred and eighty-two; the fifth day of December, one thousand eight hundred and eighty-two, and the fourth day of January, one thousand eight hundred and eighty-three, and, finally constituted, consisting of Charles Joseph Cousin, Esquire, advocate and Queen's Counsel; Leonidas E. Davidson, Esquire, and Charles J. Doherty, Esquire, advocates, Charles Glackmeyer and Adolphe de Martigny, Esquires, all of the City of Montreal, for the purpose of holding an enquiry into the matters in said Commissions, set forth as follows:—

1st. Into the administration of the Board of School Commissioners of the City of Montreal since their organization; 2nd. Into the pretended necessity for the increase of the tax actually levied for schools in the said City; 3rd. And generally into all matters of public interest in regard to the schools and the school system of the said City of Montreal, have the honor to report as follows:—

Your Commissioners opened their sittings publicly in the hall of the Catholic Commercial Academy, belonging to the Roman Catholic Board of School Commissioners, on the eighth day of December last past, when the said Roman Catholic Board of School Commissioners appeared by counsel, and requested to be allowed to take part in the proceedings. A demand was also made on behalf of the city of Montreal, and of the rate-payers in different quarters of said city, to be represented by counsel, and to have the enquiry conducted openly, to which your Commissioners, after due consideration and in the public interests, assented, and thereafter the City of Montreal was represented by E. J. Ethier, Esq., Assistant City Attorney, and the citizens by Messrs. Bourquin & Jeannotte, Advocates, and also by Messrs. J. X. Perrault, J. O. Robillard and J. P. Whelan, as representatives of the people and as rate-payers. Your Commissioners have heard witnesses summoned on behalf and at the instance of the City of Montreal and of the rate-payers, and also others summoned on behalf and at the instance of the

ROMAN CATHOLIC BOARD OF SCHOOL COMMISSIONERS, and have had adduced before them a large amount of documentary evidence, as well as the testimony of the above-mentioned witnesses, all of which is herewith submitted. Your Commissioners at the conclusion of the enquiry gave opportunity for and had the benefit of a full and able argument by the counsel and representatives above mentioned. The Board of School Commissioners, as presently existing in the City of Montreal, were created by the Act of the Legislature of the Province of Quebec, 32 Victoria, chap. 19, and were to date from the first day of July, one thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine. At the time of the change in the constitution of the Board, the Roman Catholic Commissioners had under their control eleven schools and owned two school buildings. Since one thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine, they have erected or purchased eight school buildings and five dwellings, and have acquired a large quantity of land. The principal of these school buildings are those known as the Commercial Academy on the Plateau, above St. Catherine street, the Polytechnic School, the Oiler School on Boy street, the Belmont School on Guy street, the Champin School on Fullum street, and the Barfield School at Point St. Charles. The Board also grants assistance toward the support of eighteen schools which are not fully under their control. For the purpose of the erection of the buildings above mentioned and to meet the liabilities incurred thereby, the Board found it necessary in addition to their receipts from the school tax and the grant from the Government to raise money by means of the issue of debentures to the amount of

FOUR HUNDRED THOUSAND DOLLARS which they have done. These debentures were issued, presumably, under the following Acts of the Legislature of this province, viz: 32 Vic, chap 16; 33 Vic, chap 35; 34 Vic, chap 12; 35 Vic, chap 33; 36 Vic, chap 16, and 42-43 Vic, chap 14; but your Commissioners do not find in these acts express authorization for the issue of debentures to any greater amount than two hundred thousand dollars. According to a statement furnished by the Roman Catholic Board in the course of the enquiry the receipts from all sources from 1869 to 1892 amount to one million seven hundred and eighty-five thousand three hundred and sixty-seven dollars and thirty-five cents (\$1,785,367.35), of which seven hundred and twelve thousand and forty-seven dollars (\$712,047) are the proceeds of the school tax levied in the City of Montreal, and one hundred and eighty-seven thousand and fifty-one dollars (\$187,051) were received from the Government, and one hundred and four thousand, five hundred and two dollars (\$104,502) from school fees. In this total included the sum of three hundred and sixty-six thousand and sixty dollars, the net proceeds arising from the sale of debentures to the amount of four hundred thousand dollars. It also appears from the same statement that the cost of maintaining the schools during the period above mentioned amounted to six hundred thousand four hundred and thirty-seven dollars (\$600,437), and that the Commissioners have expended during the same period in the erection of buildings and purchase of land five hundred and forty-six thousand five hundred and eleven dollars (\$546,511). Undoubtedly the buildings erected by the Roman Catholic Board of School Commissioners are not only substantial, but are also handsome structures, and are a credit, as public buildings, to the City of Montreal. Your Commissioners have visited all of the schools, erected by the Board; and although in some respects, and in regard

to some particular buildings, there might be improvement in so far as hygienic considerations are concerned, your Commissioners, on the whole, consider the buildings themselves satisfactory. But among the chief complaints against the administration of the Board are:—

EXTRAVAGANCE IN THE OUTLAY UPON THE BUILDINGS, the purchase of a much larger quantity of land than was required, and the placing of the buildings in localities where, in some cases, schools were not required, and, in others, were at too great a distance from the centre of the population to be served by them. Looking at the buildings from this point of view, and taking into consideration the school necessities of the city, the means at the disposal of the Board, and the number of children requiring education, your Commissioners can, with the evidence that is before them, come to no other conclusion than that, handsome though these buildings are and much as they do contribute to the ornamentation of the city, the erection of schools in a style that can safely be characterized as magnificent, and which certainly entailed a magnificent expenditure, was

AN ADF FOR WHICH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO JUSTIFY the Roman Catholic Board of School Commissioners. Only a feeble attempt in reality was made before your Commissioners to excuse or justify this action. It was, in effect, said that these buildings were erected at a time of great inflation and when extravagance in expenditure was almost universal, and that the Roman Catholic Board, sharing the general sentiment, had foolishly, where more were wise. This your Commissioners cannot consider a satisfactory defence on the part of the administration of public funds, since, in allowing themselves to be carried away by the prevalent spirit of extravagance, they have left the rate-payers of Montreal the possessors, it is true, of several extremely handsome edifices, much more ornate than requisite, but insufficient in number to satisfy the needs of the city, and without means to furnish education in these buildings, and still less, to erect new schools in localities where they are urgently demanded.

THE EVIDENCE OF RECORD CLEARLY DEMONSTRATES that an equal number of proper school buildings, substantial and attractive in appearance, might have been erected at less than one half the cost of those actually constructed, and that if the Roman Catholic Board finds itself in a position where it is impossible to carry on its legitimate operations, it is due in great measure, if not entirely, to their want of ordinary business prudence and to their having, apparently from a desire to erect handsome structures, forgotten that their first duty was to see that they provided for the instruction of the masses in, at least a good common school education, and that whether this was imparted in buildings more or less attractive was a secondary consideration. It has also been advanced as one excuse for or justification of the large expenditure incurred for these buildings that the Board wished to erect edifices which would stand as monuments that would do credit to the Roman Catholic population of Montreal. They seem to have overlooked the fact that the most creditable monument to the intelligent and those charged with the management of education in the City of Montreal would be a well trained and well educated growing generation, who by their numbers and the happy results of their training would stamp the Roman Catholic people of Montreal as an enlightened population, appreciating the boon of education, and knowing its value, desirous that it should be within the reach of all, even the poorest of their children. Such a result would have constituted a monument more lasting and more honorable than even the castellated towers or the highly

ORNAMENTED TOWER OF THE PLATEAU ACADEMY. Your Commissioners cannot but regard the erection of a special building for the residence of Principal Archambault, at a cost of eight thousand six hundred and twenty-eight dollars, and on a scale of magnificence in keeping with that of Commercial Academy, as an unwarranted and unnecessary expenditure of public moneys. Your Commissioners deem it their duty to remark that they not only find evidence of this extravagance in the plans adopted by the Roman Catholic Board, and in the style of buildings erected by them, but that when they come to look back into details and to examine the manner in which the plans so adopted were carried out, and to observe the system, or rather utter lack of system, for any adequate control and supervision of the charges and operations of the contractors employed in the work, they cannot fail to remark the prevalence of the same spirit of extravagance, evidencing an absolute absence of any just appreciation on the part of the Commissioners of the responsibility resting upon them as the responsible trustees. Your Commissioners in this connection would instance the expenditure at the Plateau Academy in connection with the contracts of Mr. Louis Archambault, brother of Mr. Principal Archambault. It appears in evidence that he entered into three contracts for the woodwork at the Plateau, amounting in the aggregate to twenty-two thousand nine hundred dollars (\$22,900), and that finally, an account was rendered by him and paid by the Commissioners in connection with these buildings of forty-eight thousand and forty-four dollars (\$48,044) as shown by the statement of the accountant furnished to your Commissioners. Every effort was made to obtain an explanation of

been paid to the said Louis Archambault between 1868 and 1883 no less a sum than ninety-one thousand seven hundred and ninety dollars and fifty-six cents. Your Commissioners would also remark the expenditure, seemingly extravagant, in connection with "TRAVELLING EXPENSES OF DEFECTION AND VIOLENCE,"

the former amounting to three thousand, seven hundred and seventy-two dollars and ninety cents, between 1868 and 1882; and the latter in two items of one hundred and fifty dollars and fifty cents, and six hundred and ninety-nine dollars and ten cents respectively. As evidencing the same spirit of extravagance running throughout all the administration of the Board, your Commissioners cannot refrain from referring to the purchase of a fountain (never erected) for the Plateau grounds at a cost of nine hundred dollars and of a ditch costing two hundred and seventy-one dollars and ninety-one cents. There also appears to be cause for complaint in regard to the quantity of land purchased by the Commissioners and not required for school purposes, and which has been lying idle and has been a source of annual expense in interest and taxes for years. From one of the exhibits filed during the course of the enquiry, it appears that the Roman Catholic Board has become alive to the validity of this complaint, and that at a meeting of the Board held in the fifth day of April last, it was decided to make application to the Superintendent of Public Instruction, for authority to sell a considerable portion of this vacant land, and which, if sold, would yield, or ought to yield, nearly fifty-five thousand dollars. It would, however, appear that even more land than that mentioned in the resolution of the Board, might be sold without doing any real damage to the schools. Your Commissioners are of opinion that in so far as the location of the several schools is concerned, and relatively to fitness for meeting the wants of the population, there is little ground for the complaint made against the Board. But it does appear to them that though in one case the property purchased would seem to have been acquired at a low price, owing to its situation and state, yet that the sites chosen were not in all cases the most desirable, regard being had to the

EXCESSIVE OUTLAY REQUIRED for fitting up, draining, terecing, etc., the properties chosen, the total cost of this work being given in Exhibit 28, as thirty-seven thousand four hundred and seventy-five dollars and eighty-four cents; of which sum, there was expended on the Plateau property alone nineteen thousand four hundred and forty-eight dollars and eleven cents; and on the Boy street property eight thousand one hundred and one dollar. Complaint having been made during the pendency of the enquiry, as well as regard to the giving up by the Seminary as to the accepting of the charge of these schools by the Roman Catholic Board of School Commissioners, a request was addressed to the first named corporation inviting information and a reply to the statements made by Mr. Ferrault on behalf of the people.

The Seminary, acknowledging the receipt of this request, stated in effect that it was not obliged to make any observations in reply to the memoirs forwarded to it, and that it would comply with the law and submit a statement of its affairs to the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province so soon as it was required under the Consolidated Statutes of Lower Canada, chapter 42, section 14. Your Commissioners were of opinion that, under the authority conferred upon them by Your Honor, they could not require the gentlemen of the Seminary to explain before them their position and the motives which induced them to cast off these schools. They cannot refrain, however, from expressing the opinion that in view of the fact that at the time, when several of these schools were so accepted by the board, they had already commenced to be in more or less embarrassed circumstances financially, and inasmuch as the reverend gentlemen of the Seminary, up to that time, carried on and supported these schools and gave so far as your Commissioners can see, no reason for ceasing to do so, save that they had withdrawn from the cure of the parishes wherein they were situated. The Roman Catholic board would have

SHOWN GREATER WISDOM and a more earnest desire to protect the interests of the rate-payers, had they, before taking the burdens of these schools upon their already over-burdened shoulders, formally laid the matter before the authority who had the right to require, and to whom, your Commissioners do not, the reverend gentlemen of the Seminary would have been quite willing to give the reasons which they considered made it necessary for them to withdraw the powerful assistance which they had during so many years, with such good results, given to the support of education in these different parishes. Your Commissioners cannot close their remarks upon the administration of the Roman Catholic Board of School Commissioners without calling special attention to one school accepted by them from the Seminary, and to which they grant assistance, namely, St. Bridget's School. In this case certainly there has been no extravagance in the past of the Board. The condition of the school beggars description. Your Commissioners heard its state fully described and in the strongest terms by several witnesses, but it was only by a personal visit and inspection that they were able to realize how utterly unfit the building and accommodation were and are for the purposes of a school. The former is lacking in every requirement of a proper school building, badly lighted, badly ventilated and in a state of great dilapidation. The children who attend the school and the professors who teach in it, it is no exaggeration to say, do so at great peril to their health, if not at the

RISK OF THEIR LIVES. The Roman Catholic Board seek to avoid the responsibility for the condition of this school, upon the plea that the property does not belong to them, and that it would consequently be illegal for them to make any expenditure upon it. Your Commissioners do not feel it within their attributes to decide questions of law; but in this legal position were correct, and it does not seem so to your Commissioners, surely it was the duty of the Board to find some other local for this school; or if that were impossible, it is doubtful whether, in the interests of humanity, it would not have been better to have closed the school. The present building should, without delay, be removed, and a substantial, well lighted and well ventilated one be erected in its stead; and this your Commissioners consider, according to the evidence of record, could be done at a cost of about twenty thousand dollars (\$20,000). Your Commissioners would also state that it would appear from the examination of the books of the Roman Catholic Board, and from the statements and report of L. Joseph LaRoche, Esquire, the accountant named to your Commissioners, that the books were not kept systematically posted and balanced, and that in order to render them complete to date of his examination a large number of entries

would require to be made. In concluding this portion of their report, your Commissioners feel compelled to say that in view of the evidence that has been adduced before them, in view of the lack of judgment displayed by the members of the Roman Catholic Board, and the

DISASTROUS RESULTS OF THEIR ADMINISTRATION of the funds entrusted to them, they are convinced that it will not be possible to re-establish the confidence of the public in the administration of the Roman Catholic schools in Montreal otherwise than by a complete change in the personnel of the Board. And they would add that, in view of the relations existing between Mr. U. E. Archambault, the local superintendent, and the Board, and who appears to your Commissioners to share their responsibility to a certain extent, and in view moreover of the unfortunate fact of his near relationship to Mr. Louis Archambault, the contractor above referred to, whose dealings with the Board were of such an extraordinary nature, they consider, that it would be desirable that his duties should be so defined, and his powers so restricted as to prevent in future the possibility of there being even a suspicion of his exercising any influence over the deliberations or decisions of the Board of Roman Catholic School Commissioners. While making these observations your Commissioners wish it to be understood that they did not find anything proved during this long enquiry, and notwithstanding the persistent efforts of the representatives of the rate-payers, which could in any way, even in the slightest degree, impeach the honor and integrity of the individual members of the Board, or of Mr. Principal Archambault.

Your Commissioners desire to bear here testimony to the superior quality of the education given in the schools under the control of the Board, a fact abundantly proved by the evidence of record.

PROTESTANT BOARD.

Your Commissioners have also held a separate examination into the affairs of the Protestant Board of School Commissioners, and have visited a number of the schools under its control. Nothing in the nature of a serious complaint was made in regard to the administration of this Board, further than that it was considered by some that the cost of the High School building and ground was too great and the removal from the old Burnside building premature. But, after hearing the evidence fully, your Commissioners do not find any real cause for complaint in these respects. The affairs of the Board appear to be economically and carefully conducted. The books are well kept, and there is no deficit in the account of the Board. It is indubitably established that increased annual revenue is required in order to meet the wants educationally of the different sections of the city and to enable this Board to pay its teachers a fair salary. There is ground for the complaint made by the teachers that not only are they underpaid, in some cases receiving hardly day laborer's wages, but they are also over-worked in consequence of the want of a sufficient annual income to enable the Board to keep up a sufficient staff of teachers. Your Commissioners would further state that they found very strong objection on the part of the Protestant portion of the community to

A SLIGHT INCREASE IN TAXATION.

There was a feeling that the cost of the buildings erected was bearing heavily upon the present generation; but your Commissioners do not find any means of remedying this other than that already adopted, namely, by the issue of debentures payable after the lapse of a term of years.

PRETENDED NECESSITY FOR THE INCREASE OF THE TAX ACTUALLY LEVIED FOR SCHOOLS IN THE SAID CITY.

Upon this question your Commissioners report:—That, as one means of effecting a very considerable reduction in the annual expenditure of the Roman Catholic Board, and possibly of avoiding the necessity for increasing the taxation, it has been suggested that the Christian Brothers might be more extensively employed as teachers in the schools, and a large number of witnesses were called and heard in regard to this suggestion. Their testimony established clearly that the instruction imparted by the Brothers is fully equal to that given in the schools directly under the control of the Board, and that this education, equal in value, could be supplied at less than one-half the cost incurred in schools entirely under lay professors. On the other hand, numerous witnesses of high standing in the community deposed that in their opinion it would not be advisable to change the present system, inasmuch as they considered that the emulation created by the two systems competing with each other produced desirable results in the interests of education; and that, moreover, in their opinion, it was not desirable that the education of the youth of the city should be given entirely into the hands of either

LAY TEACHERS OR RELIGIOUS BODIES.

Your Commissioners consider that the evidence upon this point establishes that there exists among the Roman Catholic citizens of Montreal a decided difference of opinion as to the advisability of confiding the education of their children entirely to any religious orders or order; and, in consequence, notwithstanding the high class of education imparted by the Brothers, and the great saving that would be effected by employing them, your Commissioners do not feel justified in reporting in favor of adopting generally this means of preventing increased taxation. Having arrived at the above conclusion, your Commissioners then examined the obligations annually of the Roman Catholic Board as well for interest and sinking fund on debentures, and on hypothecary claims and loans, as in connection with the direct maintenance and extension of the schools. They found that according to the statement contained in the budget submitted at a meeting of the above board required for interest on debentures, reserve for sinking fund interest on mortgages and loans, a sum of forty thousand two hundred and thirty-seven dollars (\$40,237) per annum—an amount which, to your Commissioners, appears much in excess of the annual reserve from revenue authorized by the acts above mentioned. It would also appear from the statements of these Commissioners themselves that they expended for the maintenance of schools, taxes, etc., for the year last past a sum of sixty-four thousand and sixty-nine dollars (\$64,069). Although the present Board of Roman Catholic Commissioners have decided to close certain schools in order to equalize receipts and expenditures, your Commissioners cannot believe them to be in earnest in such decision, since it certainly would afford most conclusive testimony of their

UNWISDOM FOR THEIR POSITION.

The closing of schools situated as are those referred to, namely, the Oiler and Montreal schools, would be a suicidal act and ought not to have been contemplated. Besides

keeping these schools open, it is also imperative that a new school building should be erected in the parish of Sainte Brigitte; and it would also appear from the evidence of record, that additions and improvements would be required in St. Anne's (Brother Audo's) school as well as in some others. Undoubtedly also there will be required by the Protestant Board of School Commissioners an additional sum in order to erect new school buildings and give increased accommodation in some buildings already in use and whereas overcrowding exists; and to provide for the payment of more adequate salaries to their teachers. After full consideration of the wants of both Boards, and of any objection which has been made to increased taxation, your Commissioners are convinced that an increase in the taxation presently levied for school purposes in the City of Montreal, from one-fifth two-tenths of a cent in the dollar to three-tenths of a cent, is alike necessary in the true interests of education and advisable. Such increase will add to the revenue of the Roman Catholic about thirty-three thousand dollars per annum, at the present valuation of real estate in the city, and will give to the Protestant Board an amount amply sufficient for all its wants. But your Commissioners are also of opinion that with the additional revenue which this increase will afford to both Boards, the necessary buildings should be erected, and improvements made, and the schools carried on with increased efficiency; and further that primary education, at least, should be free to all. Your Commissioners are confirmed in this opinion from consideration of the facts, that if the property now lying idle in the hands of the Roman Catholic Board be sold, their indebtedness, and as a consequence, their annual expenditure may be reduced to the amount of at least three thousand dollars per annum in interest; and that, moreover, in the future, there will be a reduction of three thousand dollars annually, to the amount of city taxes, remitted.

A FURTHER INCREASE IN THE REVENUE

available for general school purposes will result from the withdrawal from the control of the Catholic Board of the Polytechnic school, the management and support of which would seem from its provincial character to appertain to the government. This school has entailed upon this Board an annual expenditure varying from twelve hundred dollars to four thousand dollars; taking from the school revenues since its establishment, no less a sum than sixteen thousand dollars, according to the statement furnished by the Board to the Government. Your Commissioners are further of opinion that much greater economy can be exercised in the work of this Board, and taking all the foregoing facts into consideration, are satisfied that primary education with this increased taxation should be made gratuitous. In making this recommendation your Commissioners would express a hope that by exercising strict economy in administration and avoiding any unnecessary outlay on building it will not be requisite to continue taxation at the increased rate now recommended, for any number of years.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC INTEREST IN REGARD TO THE SCHOOLS AND SCHOOL SYSTEM OF THE SAID CITY OF MONTREAL.

Upon this head of the enquiry your Commissioners beg to make the following suggestions:

1. That the number of commissioners on each school board should be increased to at least nine. This would appear to be desirable in order to meet a want which has become apparent from and in the course of the working of the Boards as now constituted. A very considerable divergence of opinion, however, exists in regard to the manner of appointment to the Board. There is evidence of record and there appears to be a strong feeling on the part of some of the rate-payers in favor of an entirely elective system; but there is also strong objection on the part of others to so radical a change, at one step, in the administration of school matters in the city, and fears were entertained by those most capable of judging in regard to educational matters, that such a change would have injurious results upon education in the city. Notwithstanding that the elective system is in force in other portions of this Province and in Ontario and that it is represented to your Commissioners to work for the most part satisfactorily, they upon the evidence of record do not feel warranted in suggesting

THIS SO RADICAL CHANGE AT PRESENT,

but would respectfully suggest: 2. That the members of both Boards should be appointed as follows:—Three by the Government as at present, three by the City Council, to be chosen one from each of the three electoral divisions of the City of Montreal as defined for the purpose of elections of members of the House of Commons of Canada, and from among the property holders assessed in each said division and not being aldermen; to be Roman Catholics for the Roman Catholic Board; and three to be elected directly at the annual civic elections by the property holders qualified as voters at municipal elections in the several divisions above named, one for each division; the Roman Catholic members being elected by voters of that religion alone, and the Protestant members by Protestant voters alone. The term of office and rotation shall remain as at present. 3. The meetings of the said boards should be open to the public, saving, however, the right of the Commissioners, by a two-third vote of those present at any meeting and for special reasons to hold such meetings with closed doors. 4. Provision should be made for supplying the public as well as the Government and City Council with full and particular information touching the administration and position of the Boards, and your Commissioners would suggest that a half-yearly statement of the expenditures and receipts of the Boards, showing their actual financial condition and the state of the schools in concise form, of the City, in closing their report your Commissioners deem it but just to mention the skill and talent displayed by the gentlemen who represented the rate-payers, as well as the learned counsel, F. D. Monk, Esq., acting for the Roman Catholic School Commissioners. The secretary of each Board deserves the thanks of the School Commissioners, Mr. Demerys, Secretary-Treasurer of the Roman Catholic Board, and Secretary Robbins, of the Protestant Board, having afforded every assistance and devoted a large portion of their time during the course of the investigation to the service of your Commissioners.

THEir WHOLE RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED.

(Signed) G. J. COUSIN, Q. C., Chairman, LEO H. DAVIDSON, D.D. L., CHAS. J. DOHERTY, CHAS. GLACKMEYER, A. DE MARTIGNY, Montreal, 30th June, 1893.

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