The Spiritual Life.

BY REV. C. H. SPURGEON.

"Lay hold on eternal life."—1 Timothy 6:12.

"Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life."—1 Timothy 6:19.

"Lay hold on eternal life." Observe that this precept is preceded by another—"Fight the good fight of faith." Those who lay hold on eternal life will have to fight for it. "Contest the good contest of the faith" would be an accurate rendering of the passage; and a contest it is against the world, the flesh, and the devil. If we live unto God we shall need to war a daily warfare, and tread down the powers of death and hell. We fight the good fight by firm faith in the Lord our God: "This is the victory that overcometh the world, even your faith." That fight is the fight of faith, fought for the faith, and by the faith. The article should be inserted, and then the words are, "Fight the good fight of *the* faith." "Contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints." "Hold fast the form of sound words." It is worth fighting for, even it we come to resistance unto blood.

My brethren, there is a higher and a better life than that which is known to the most of men. There is an animal life which all possess; there is a mental life which lifts us up above the beasts; but there is another life as much above the mental life as the mental life is above the mere animal life. The bulk of men are not aware of this, and when they are told of it they do not believe the statement. Men whom they would believe upon any other subject, honest and true men, are, nevertheless, regarded as a sort of madmen when they begin to talk about a spiritual life. How should the carnal mind discern that which is spiritual? For it can only be spiritually discerned. But there is such a life, as many of us know assuredly, and this is the life eternal, which we are bidden to lay hold upon.

Dream not that any of you will ever obtain eternal life hereafter unless you receive it in this life. Where death finds you, eternity will leave you. The only laying hold on eternal life that can be practiced by us must be commenced now; it is now brought to light by Christ Jesus in the everlasting Gospel; beware how you put it from you. Grip it now, lay hold of it now; and hold on to it. "Lay hold on eternal life."

I. "Lay hold on eternal life," that is, believe in it. You cannot lay hold on it unless you know it to be a reality. We do not lay hold on shadows, or fictions, or fancies; there must be something substantial and tangible for us to lay hold upon. It is needful, therefore, to begin by a realizing faith. That we may believe in this life, let me say that Holy Scripture constantly describes men unreawed by divine grace as being dead; they are "dead in trespasses and sins." They "shall not see life, but the wrath of God abideth on them." The natural life of fallen men, though it be cultivated to the highest degree, so that they become sages and philosophers, is nevertheless nothing better than death, as compared with the finer life which is called eternal.

This life is produced by the operation of the Holy Spirit within the heart. The Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." It is by the new life, wrought of the Spirit, that we enter the kingdom. The infusion of the new life is the new birth, and the entrance into the kingdom. We are created anew in Christ Jesus; or, to use another expression, we are quickened and raised from among the dead.

I want you all to get this idea into your heads—I mean all of you who have not learned this fact as yet; there is a life superior to that of common men—a life eternal, to be enjoyed now and here. I want this idea to become a practical force with you. Stephenson got the notion of a steam-engine into his brain, and the steam engine soon became an actual fact with him. Paliesy, the potter, had his mind full of his art, and for it he sacrificed everything till he gained his end; so may you, by the teaching of the Holy Ghost, lay hold upon eternal life as being a blessed possibility; and may you be moved to seek it! Oh, that the Lord himself would convince you this morning that the life spiritual and eternal is no fancy of enthusiasts, but a literal fact, a matter worthy of your very best consideration! In this way you will begin to "lay hold on eternal life."

II. But this is not enough; it is merely the door-step of the subject. "Lay hold on eternal life," that is to say, possess it. How eternal life grasped? Well, it is laid hold of by faith in Jesus Christ. Jesus saith, "He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" By faith we have done with self, and all the conflicts that can ever grow out of self; and we rely upon the full atonement made by the Lord Jesus, whom God has set forth to be a propitiation; it is thus that we come to live. Faith and the new life go together, and can never be divided. God grant that we may all lay hold on eternal life by laying hold of God in Jesus Christ!

This life once laid hold upon *is exercised in holy acts*. From day to day we lay hold on eternal life by exercising ourselves unto godliness in deeds of holiness and loving kindness. Let your life be love, for love is life. Let your life be one of prayer and praise, for these are the breath of the new life. We still live the animal and mental life, but these must be the outer courts of our being; our innermost life must be spiritual, and be wholly consecrated to God. Henceforth be devotion your breathing, faith your heart-beat, meditation your feeding, self-examination your washing, and holiness your walking. Let your best life be most thought of, and most exercised.

In laying hold upon it, remember that it is increased by growth. Zealously grasp more and more of it. Christ has come not only that we may have life, but that we may have it more abundantly. My brethren, we are some of us what we might be; let us reach after something higher. "To him that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance;" let us not forget this encouraging word of our Lord. You that have much life have the promise of more. Let us lay hold of the fullest measures of eternal life, and go from strength to strength.

III. Thirdly, "Lay hold on eternal life." Watch over it, guard it, and protect it. Most men will preserve their lives at any cost. Unless they are drunk or mad, they will do anything for dear life; "Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life." Let every believer regard the life of God within him as being his most precious possession, more valuable by far than the natural life. It is infinitely better to suffer than to sin, to lose property than purity. God has given us this priceless jewel, let us guard it as the apple of our eye.

Brethren, if we starve at all, let us starve our bodies and not our spirits. If anything must be stunted, let it be the baser nature. Having the divine life within us, let us not neglect to feed it and supply its wants. Here is a man that gives up attendance upon religious services in the week because he hungers to increase his business; he buys brass with gold. Another quits the place where he enjoys a Gospel ministry to go at a larger salary to a place where his soul will be famished; he barters fine flour for husks. Another goes into all sorts of evil company, where he knows that his character is injured and his soul imperilled and his excuse is that it pays. O sirs, is it so after all, that this eternal life which you profess to possess is of trifling value in your eyes? Then I protest before you that you do not possess it at all. How could you thus play the fool if the Lord had made you wise unto salvation? "Lay hold on eternal life," for this is the chief good, for the sake of which you may quit inferior things. To that end the apostle bade Timothy flee things which are detrimental to that life. "Thou, O man of God, flee these things." You who profess to be men of God must flee these things which are injurious to purity, to truth, to godliness, to communion with God, for these are detrimental to your best life.

IV. But now, fourthly, "Lay hold on eternal life," that is, fulfil it. Labor that the time of your sojourning here shall be occupied, not with this poor, dying existence, but with the eternal life. Fulfil the higher and the eternal life in every position of society. The chapter opens with advice to servants, who then were slaves. Their earthly life was wretched indeed, but the apostle bids them live, not for this present life, but for the eternal life. Inasmuch as they could glorify God by continuing to bear the yoke, and would not glorify Him by raising an insurrection against their master, he bade them remain in their position until better times might come. And this is what the Gospel says to every one of us: Honor your station by glorifying God in it. When the famous Spartan warrior Brasidas complained that Sparta was so small a State, his mother replied to him: "My son, Sparta has fallen to your lot, and it is your duty to adorn it." Christian man, adorn the doctrine of God, your Saviour, in all things. Wherever you are found, endeavor in that place to live out eternal life. Be not so anxious to change your position as to use it for eternal purposes. Lay hold on eternal life all the more eagerly if in this temporal life thou hast little to lay hold on.

Further, the apostle bids us do this so as to surmount *the temptation of selfishness*. No man can serve two masters; and if Mammon be his master Christ is not his master. To live for this world is to be dead to the world to come. As the alchemist was said to transmit brass and copper into gold (though he did no such thing), so there is a real alchemy which can sublime gold and silver into everlasting treasure. These talents are not to be despised, but put out to interest for the Lord. We can use them for helping on the work of the Lord, and by distribution to the poor and needy. I would that all men at this hour abounded in almsgiving, but specially those who are followers of the loving Jesus.

V. Last of all, expect it. By the two hands of faith and hope lay hold on eternal life as the great reward of the righteous. Look for the crown of life which fadeth not away. The time comes when this mortal life shall be utterly swallowed up in life eternal. Let me suggest to you, my beloved brothers and sisters, that we think much about the life to come. We shall soon be there in the endless home; let us send our thoughts thither like couriers in advance.

"Ah!" says one, "I wish I were already in heaven." Do not be in a hurry. The best expectancy is that which doth with patience wait. Our esteemed brother, Mr. Lockhart, tells a story of one of his members, of the name of Carey—a royal name *that!* She was very sick and near to die, but she expressed a desire to live, at which he was somewhat astonished, for he knew her to be well prepared to depart. She wished to stay here a while for a good and laudable reason. There was one thing which she could see here on earth, which she could not see in heaven, and she wished to remain here to *see* it again and again. "What is that?" Mr. Lockhart asked. "It is the tear of repentance on the sinner's cheek; I want to see a great many more of those before I go home." And so do I. Oh, my uncovanted hearers, I would willingly stop out of heaven to weep for you till you weep for sin.

My brethren and sisters around me would be willing to wait also, even until Jesus comes, if we could, by our waiting, help to give you repentance. Tears of repentance bedewing the cheeks of sinners are the diamonds of angels and the jewels of saints. Oh, that my beloved helpers may see many drops of the dew of repentance this morning when they come round among you; and may Jesus see them, and speak peace to repenting hearts. Poor sinners! we would stop out of heaven for such as you, even as Jesus came out of heaven for such as you. Believe on the one appointed Saviour, and enter into eternal life, and we will dwell in heaven together. The Lord grant it. Amen.

Quotable Thoughts from Living Authors.

BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN, D. D.

The following extracts are taken chiefly from the volume entitled, "The Secret of Power."

How to deal most effectually with unbelief:

You may hammer ice on an anvil, or bray it in a mortar. What then? It is pounded ice still, except for the little portion melted by the heat of percussion, and it will soon all congeal again. Melt it in the sun, and it flows down in sweet water, which mirrors that light which loosed its bonds of cold. So hammer away at unbelief with your logical sledge-hammers, and you will change its shape, perhaps; but it is none the less unbelief because you have ground it to powder. It is a mightier agent that must melt it—the fire of God's love, brought close by a will itself ablaze with the sacred glow.

Christ himself, the substance of Revelation, is clearly set forth in the following:

It is, therefore, to be reckoned as a distinct gain that one result of the course of the more recent thought, both among friends and foes, has been to make all men feel more than before that all revelation is contained in the living person of Jesus Christ. So did the church believe before creeds were. So it is coming to feel again with a consciousness enriched and defined by the whole body of doctrine, which has flowed from him during all the ages. That solemn, gracious Figure rises day by day more clearly before men, whether they love him or no, as the vital centre of this great whole of doctrines, laws, institutions, which we call Christianity. Round the story of his life the final struggle is to be waged. The foe feels that, so long as that remains, all other victories count for nothing. We feel that if that goes, there is nothing to keep. The principles and the precepts will perish alike, as the fair palace of the old legend, that crumbled to dust when its builder died. But so long as he stands before mankind as he is painted in the Gospel, it will endure. If all else were annihilated—churches, creeds and all—*leave us these Four Gospels*, and all else would be evolved again. The world knows now, and the church has always known, though it has not always been true to the significance of the fact, that Jesus Christ is Christianity, and that because he lives, it will live also.

There is a Book which survives all books:

Why, who knows anything about the world's wonders of books that a hundred years ago made good men's hearts tremble for the ark of God? You may find them in the dusty rows on the top shelves of great libraries. But if their names had not occurred in the pages of Christian apologists, flies in amber, nobody in this generation would ever have heard of them. And still more conspicuously is it so with earlier examples of the same kind. Their work is as hopelessly dead as they. And the Book seems none the worse for all the shot—like the rock that a ship fired at all night, taking it for an enemy, and could not provoke to answer nor succeed in sinking.

Heaven's grace is constant—always full:

The light in the beacon tower is steady, and the same, but the beam it throws across the waters sometimes fades to a speck, and sometimes flames out clear and far across the heaving waves, according to the position of the glasses and shades around it. The sun pours out heat as profusely and as long on the 22nd of December as on midsummer day, and all the difference between the frost and darkness and glowing brightness and flowering life, is simply owing to the earth's place in its orbit and angle at which the unalterable rays fall upon it. The changes are in the terrestrial sphere; the heavenly is fixed forever the same:

It is impossible to uplift and reform if we stand aloof:

It is of no use to stand at the mouth of the alleys we wish to cleanse, with our skirts daintily gathered about us, and smelling-bottle in hand, to preach homilies on the virtues of cleanliness. We must go in among the filth, and handle it, if we want to have it cleared away. The degraded must feel that we do not shrink from them, or we shall do them no good. The leper, shunned by all, and afraid of himself because everybody loathes him, hungers in his hovel for the grasp of a hand that does not care for defilement, if it can bring cleansing.

Character is built slowly up out of patient attention to little things:

The microscopic creatures, thousands of which will go into a square inch, make the great white cliffs that beetle over the wildest sea and front the storm. So, permanent and solid character is built up out of trivial actions, and this is the solemn aspect of our passing days, that they are making *us*.

If we would prevail with men, we must first prevail with God:

If, after many a weary day, we seek to hold fellowship with God as he sought it on the Mount of Olives, or among the solitudes of the midnight hills, or out in the morning freshness of the silent wilderness, like him we shall have men gathering around us to hear us speak when we come forth from the secret place of the Most High.

Prayer gives us an impervious environment:

Such constant communion will further surround us with an atmosphere through which none of the many influences which threaten our Christian life and our Christian work can penetrate. As the diver in his bell sits dry at the bottom of the sea, and draws a pure air from the free heavens far above him, and is parted from than murderous waste of green death that clings so closely round the translucent crystal walls which keep him safe, so we, enclosed in God, shall repel from ourselves all that would overflow to destroy us and our work, and by his grace lay deeper than the waters some course in the great building that shall one day rise, stately and many mansioned, from out of the conquered waves. For ourselves, and for all that we do for him, living communion with God is the means of power and peace, of security and success.

We must lift up our eyes "unto the hills, from whence cometh our help."

Our Master has left us an example, in that, when the night fell and every man went to his own home, Jesus went to the mount of Olives; and thence, after his night of prayer, came very early in the morning to the temple, and taught. The stream that is to flow broad and life-giving through many lands must have its hidden source high upon the pure snows that cap the mount of God. The man that would work for God must live with God. It was from the heights of Transfiguration that he came, before whom the demon that baffled the disciples quailed and slunk away like a whipped hound. This kind goeth not out but by prayer.

The personal touch is needful:

We must be ready, like our Master, to take blind beggars by the hand, if we would bless or help them. The despair and opprobrium of our modern civilization, the gulf growing wider and deeper between Dives and Lazarus, between Belgravia and Whitechapel, the mournful failure of legalized help, and of delegated efforts to bridge it over, the darkening ignorance, the animal sensuousness, the utter heathenism that lives in every town of England, within a stone's throw of Christian houses, and near enough to hear the sound of public worship, will yield to nothing but that sadly forgotten law which enjoins personal contact with the sinful and the suffering, as one chief condition of raising them from the black mire in which they welter.

Not the machinery, but the power, is lacking:

What we want is not less organization, or other sorts of it, but more force. Any organization will do if we have God's Spirit breathing through it. None will be better than so much old iron if we have not.

The paralyzing influence of doubt upon churches and individuals explains why the work languishes:

We cannot help seeing that the creeping paralysis of hesitancy and doubt about even the power of Christ's name is stealing over portions of the church, and stiffening the arm of its activity. Lips that once spoke with full confidence the words that cast out devils, mutter them now languidly with half belief. Hearts that were once full of sympathy with the great purpose for which Christ died, are growing cold to the work of preaching the Gospel to the heathen, because they are growing to doubt whether, after all, there is any Gospel at all: This icy breath, dear brethren, is blowing over our churches and over our hearts. And wherever it reaches, there labor for Jesus and for men languishes, and we recoil baffled with unavailing exorcisms dying in our throats, and the rod of our power broken in our hands. "Why could not we cast him out?" "Because of your unbelief."

Belief, even in an error, is mighty; in truth, it is triumphant:

The most ignorant and erroneous "religious sentiment"—to use a modern phrase—is mightier than all other forces in the world's history. It is like some of those terrible compounds of modern chemistry, an inert, innocuous-looking drop of liquid. Shake it, and it flames heaven high, shattering the rocks and ploughing up the soil. Put even an adulterated and carnalized faith into the hearts of a mob of wild Arabs, and in a century they will stream from their deserts and blaze from the mountains of Spain to the plains of Bengal. Put a living faith in Christ and a heroic confidence in the power of his Gospel to reclaim the worst sinners, into a man's heart, and he will out of weakness be made strong, and plough his way through obstacles with the compact force and crashing directness of lightning.

Our Lord will use us as the channels for his grace, if we will let him:

"The help which is done upon earth he doeth it all himself." We and our organizations are but the channels through which this might is poured; and if we choke the bed with turbid masses of drift and heavy rocks of earthly thoughts, or build from bank to bank thick dams of worldliness compact with slims of sin, how shall the full tide flow through us for the healing of the salt and barren places? Will it not leave its former course silted up with sand, and cut for itself new outlets, while the useless quays that once rang with busy life stand silent, and "the cities are solitary that were full of people?"

The sweetness of our pity should not be wasted in mere sentimentalism, but expend itself in action:

Pity is meant to impel to help. Let us not be content with painting sad and true pictures of men's woes—of the gloomy hopelessness of idolatry, for instance—but let us remember that every time our compassion is stirred, and no action ensues, our hearts are in some measure indurated, and the sincerity of our religion in some degree impaired. The Lord's Gospel Pity is meant to guide the strong powers of practical help to their work. She is to them as eyes to go before them and point their tasks. They are to her as hands to execute her gentle will. Let us see to it that we read them not apart; for idle pity is unblessed and fruitless as a sigh cast into the fragrant air, and unpitying work is more unblessed and fruitless still.—*Zion's Herald.*

The Fence o' Scripture Faith.

"It a' cam' richt at las', juist as I ken'd it wad, i' God's ain gude time.

For ten lang years, I was sair fashed about Douglas, oor ainly bairn. He rin awa' frae hame, when but a laddie o' twelve-an-six-months, an' fayther, i' his hard, cauld way, bolted the hoose door after him.

"Let him gae!" he cried, i' anger. "He's nae lad o' mine, frae this day oot!"

"Dinna say that, mon!" I pleaded. "The lad's bound to return!"

"If he cam' bac' noo, he canna enter!"

My empty arms were roun' his neck i' a minit, but he flung me frae him, wi' nair bitter words. It was a' my wark; I had set the bairn against his fayther, an' he hated me for it.

It was a' unco sair to bide. Wi' bleeding heart, I turned frae him who should hae comforted, an' lookt up to the Fayther aboon. An' his gude promises cam' doon i' heavenly gittie. It seemed his ain voice sayin', "As thy days, sae shall thy strength be."

But frae the mirk nicht o' Douglas's ootgaein', my gude mon an' I were pairted. We still shared the same cot, yet he wad hae nae speech wi' me; puir Douglas's name wasna spoken. He might be miles awa', but he pu'd at our heart-strings, as i' happier times together. An' ilka day I pray'd, "Bring the laddie safe hame! He is my earthly a'! I canna gie him up."

Sae I juist built a fence o' true Scripture faith aroun' my puir weak bodie, an' waited. My expectation was alane frae Him. I ken'd that his ear wasna heavy, an' that he heard my cry. Owre and owre again, I sang the auld hymn,

"Lord, I canna let Thee go
Till thou blessing thou bestow,
Dinna turn awa' Thy face,
Mine's an urgent, pressing case."

But my gude mon wad sit by wi' scrutin' looks. They made my hinid rin cauld. He was hardening mair and mair, as the years crept by. Anes, when he saw me placin' a candle i' the west window, he snuffit it oot, sayin':—

"I'll hae nane o' that, women! The auld mon left us nae langer hae a hame."

"The bairn's hame is his mither's heart," I answered hotly. "You canna forbid his entrance. I'm keepin' the door wide open, an' the light o' my love will shine out an' guide him bac' to me an' lae'. It's a sma' matter whether you candle burns or nae. I'm hedged i' by the gude fence o' Scripture faith. It is growin' higher an' higher. A' things are possible to him that believeth. I hae cast my burden upon the Lord, an' he is sustaining me. I dinna fear. God is takin' gude care o' Douglas, an' suner or later he will bring him hame."

It was a long speech for a puir, weak woman, but my faith i' God's promises made me bold as Daniel o' auld.

"You maun forgie the laddie," I went on. "He was ainly headstrong like your-sel'. He wanted to gae his ain way at his ain gait, juist as you hae done a' your life. You canna blame him. But he will return: I ken it weel! Pray for grace to gie him a true hame welcome."

My gude mon gazed at me i' astonishment. "It's a bra speerit you hae, lass; I didna think it. But Douglas willna return; I daurna hope it. It's nine years an' mair sin' he left us. He's a mon, noo, wi' sma' love for you an' me an' the auld hamenest."

"Nay, nay, mon! Dinna believe that! You maun get bein' the fence o' Scripture faith. I hae been there through a' these weary years o' the laddie's absence. I hae pray'd nicht an' day that God may bring him bac'. An' he *will*. The hymn-book says,

'Prayer an answer will obtain,
Though the Lord a while delay,
Name sha' seek His name i' vain,
Nane be empty sent awa'.'"

But my puir mon hadna the faith to believe it. Six months after, he was ta'en doon with fever. When oot o' his mind, he wad juist ca' an' ca' for Douglas. An' I cud ainly say, "The laddie's awa'. He'll sune be hame. Dinna greet." That wod rest him for a minit, an' then he wod spier again.

"Is Douglas hame yet, lass?"

"Nay, nay!" I wad mak' answer. "But he's comin'! juist wait a wee."

Sae, ane lanely nicht, as I sat by his bed, fearin' he might leave me afore the mornin' licht, the door softly opited, an' a strange mon cam' i'. He was ta' an' beardit, an' I thocht him the new dochter frae Aberfoil. Wi'out speekin', he sat doon.

"You canna' help my gude mon," I began; "he's gaein' fae!"

The stranger bow'd, an' bent ower the low bed. "He is sinking. Ha'e you tried to rouse him?"

"I canna'," I cried, bitterly. "But oor missin' bairn might."

"Has he bin awa' lang?" inquired the stranger.

"Juist ten years."

"But he may return."

"Ay, when too late! His fayther's face will sune be hidden aneath the heather." "But the sic mon's e'en suddenly cam' opit. There was a glint o' reason i' them. "Lass," he ca'd, "are you there yet?"

"Yes."

"Still behind the fence o' Scripture faith?"

"Yes, mon."

"An' Douglas is comin' hame?"

"Yes, yes! Dinna doot it."

"Will he be wi' us sune?"

"I hope sae."

His thin han's trembled. "I maun see him afore I dee. If I shouldna' gie him my blessing. Kiss me, lass."

I touched his white cheek, for the first time sin' Douglas left us. I lookt up to find the stranger's e'e on us baith.

"Save him if you ca'," I whispered, "for oor laddie's sake. He luv'd his fayther ance, an' he will be hame at las'."

The strange mon cam' forward wi' outstratcht arms. "Mither," he cried, "I hae cam' hame. Dinna you ken? I am Douglas!"

It was a' true, for he caught fayther an' me i' one embrace, while oor tears o' happiness fell i' a triple shower. Ay, there was a reunion worth recallin'! It's a' cam' bac' a score o' times. Fayther began to mend frae that nicht. He cudna bear Douglas oot o' his sight, for weeks after. Together we shared the laddie's love, tho' he sae a mot his tenderer wi' my sincel'. An' weel I ken'd the reason!

"Mither," he said, while father snoe slept, "your prayers brot me hame, nae thing else. When far awa' across the ocean, I cud still hear your low, sweet voice, an' see your dear, sad face. You were wi' me a' the time. I fancied I cud hear the words you uttered. Nicht an' day you pray'd for my safe return. But I was ane o' the stubborn sort, an' thochts o' fayther's harshness kept me awa'. Those ten years were a lang, lang time, but they were years o' discipline. I made a mon o' myself, an' then startit for hame i' answer to your ca'. But mither, dear mither, I'll never leave you again!"

An' the laddie hasna. Later i' life, he wedded, as a' laddies should, but he bro't his bonnie gude wife to fayther an' me, instead o' gaen awa' wi' her, an' for twenty years we hae bin a united family. Douglas's ain bairns fill the auld hame-nest to ower flowin'!

Frae my safe shelter behind the fence o' Scripture faith, I pray that, ane by ane, we may a' be gathered into the gude Shepherd's fold aboon.—*N. Y. Observer.*

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