

Without Purse or Scrip: A 19-Year-Old Missionary in 1853

By Eugene England

Article written for a young Latter-day Saint audience that draws on journal entries to chronicle the faith and adventures of a very young Joseph Millett as he served a mission in Nova Scotia, Canada, in the mid-nineteenth century.

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J OSEPH MILLETT, CALLED a few months before his 19th birthday by Brigham Young to go to Nova Scotia as a missionary, made his way, essentially alone and literally penniless, across a continent that was still mainly wilderness or frontier. He learned the gospel and how to teach it successfully in the face of language differences and great persecution and developed his gift for being directed by the Spirit to the point that he was not only able to heal the sick and to be guided to those he sought but was inspired with a courageous ingenuity that enabled the Lord to use such things as ducks and whales and even antagonistic ministers to further his success. While still 19—and forced by circumstances to work mostly alone—he baptized dozens, organized new branches, strengthened the members throughout Nova Scotia and then New England, and helped them prepare to gather to Zion. And finally, the next year under the direction of Orson Pratt of the Council of the Twelve, he found his eternal companion among the New England Saints, married her, and took her west with him upon his release.

In some ways an unusual missionary story, perhaps, but an appropriate and motivating example: Elder Millett was called at the age of most young missionaries today, and like most he came from good, faithful, but not high-placed or well-known Latter-day Saint parentage, and he served, as most do, with a humility and inspired vigor that brought success and satisfaction but not great fame. And in this time when we are all striving to respond fully to President Kimball's exciting prophetic call to redouble our missionary effort and literally fulfill Christ's assignment to us to take the gospel to the whole world in preparation for his coming, it is good for us to look back and be encouraged and instructed by the devotion and achievement of one early Latter-day Saint missionary with whom we can all identify.

Joseph Millett's father, Artemus, was a mason living in Canada when he was taught the gospel by Brigham Young in 1834 and later called by Brigham to move to Kirtland and take charge of the mason work on the temple. He served so well, inventing an extraordinarily hard exterior plaster that shone with the china dishes broken up in it, and feeding many of the workers on the temple from his own

resources (a trait of generosity inherited by his son), that he was later called by Joseph Smith to do the masonry for the Nauvoo Temple, where that same marvelous exterior plaster was used.

One of Joseph Millett's unforgettable early memories was of the day he and some young companions were herding cows along the Carthage Road. Several members of the mob from Carthage dashed by in a carriage and yelled out, "Dig a grave for Joe Smith for he is dead," and young Joseph ran the six miles to Nauvoo with the news. His family was driven from Nauvoo with the Saints, and they lived for a time in Iowa, helping others move on until they themselves went to Salt Lake in 1850 and settled, under Brigham Young's direction, in Manti.

Elder Millett's remarkable journal* begins its day-by-day account in this way:

Aug. 28, 1852 At the August Conference my name was put in as a missionary for Nova Scotia and BNA Provinces. On the 28th of August, 1852, my name with about 100 other names called for different parts of the world.

Aug. 30, 1852 I received Endowment in the old Council House, Salt Lake City. I started for Manti; got there on the 4th.

Sept. 1, 1852 My father (Artemus Millett) blessed me and said that I would live to do his work for the dead in the Temple. Isaac Morley gave me a Father's and a Patriarchal Blessing.

Sept. 11, 1852 On the 11th of September I received an Apostle's Blessing. Jedediah M. Grant was mouth. I then made ready for the journey across the Plains.

That special August conference was an incredible occasion. Only three years into a colonization effort that had barely escaped disaster and still existed on the bare edge of survival, Brigham Young called together 2,000 of the elders of Israel, and together with his counselors and the other members of the Council of the Twelve, reminded them of their greater task—to take the gospel to all nations. He then called 98 of them, including a number of the General Authorities, to missions in "the four quarters of the earth"—including Europe, Africa, the West Indies, China, Siam, and India. Orson Pratt was called to preside over the Church in the eastern United States and Canada, and the young Joseph Millett was thrilled to be able to be in his company, along with Orson Spencer, William Clayton, and others, as they traveled back along the Mormon Trail to Iowa. There Elder Millett took the northern route, starting out on foot in December across Iowa, alone and "without purse or scrip," walking over the Mississippi (using a long pole to distribute his weight where the ice was thin), staying occasionally with relatives and members but mainly depending on the Lord's direction, which never failed him, to the homes of strangers where he would, as he said, "find a welcome." He finally walked into Kirtland, Ohio, on March 3 and found an old acquaintance of his father still living there:

Mar. 3, 1853 Says he, "If your father had stayed here, him and me would have owned all Kirtland now. I own the temple," says he. It began to get dark. Says he to his wife and daughter, "Mother and Lilly, you did not ask Joseph if he had been to dinner." Says he,

"Where did you eat last?" Says I, "At Brother Nelson's in Racine, Wisconsin." Says he, "Three days ago? Why didn't you tell us when you first came in?" Says I, "I had been without eating so long I forgot that I was hungry."

He visited the temple, sorrowfully noting its deterioration from lack of care, and looked out over the city, where many homes that had been wrecked by a tornado were being left to decay. The town seemed to him to have declined much since the Saints had left.

As he continued his journey a friendly train conductor, whom he asked to let him ride as far as he could on his last dollar, told him he would need the money more farther on and let him ride free across New York. A railroad section hand offered to trade clothes with him and then gave him two dollars besides, by which means he made his way to Stockbridge, Massachusetts, where his father's brother William, who had not joined the Church, was "somewhat cool" to him but helped him along to Boston. There he was directed by the Spirit to a man who gave him work sufficient to earn two more dollars plus enough to get his clothes mended.

With utter trust but completely out of money, Elder Millett arrived by train in Portland, Maine, and went to the dock to find out how the Lord would provide him a way on the steamer to New Brunswick. A stranger asked Joseph to watch his baggage for him and, upon learning of the young elder's situation, offered to pay his way.

In St. Johns, New Brunswick, Joseph found a schooner captain willing to take him across to Nova Scotia for working on board en route. While crossing in a storm the young missionary saw what looked like a star and immediately told the captain, who recognized it as the Digby Lighthouse. The captain was barely able to change course in time to avoid the rocks and make it through the narrow passageway (called "Digby Gut") and on into port at Digby. But now let Elder Millett again speak for himself, this 19-year-old just arrived in the field:

Apr. 13, 1853 I went to Cranberry Head, near to Yarmouth. Here I found Brother John Robinson and Brother Benjamin T. Mitchell at Mr. Moses Shaw's. The Brethren (Robinson and Mitchell) said that they were going to travel together. The Brethren both said that I was too young and inexperienced to travel with either of them. They said I had better go to Halifax and see Brother A. D. L. Buckland and get counsel from him.

Apr. 14, 1853 I went into Yarmouth. Came back to Mr. Grace's. He treated me kindly. I stayed until Saturday. Started for Halifax. Left Cape Sable to my right hand. Traveled two hundred ten miles around the coast capes and bays to get to Halifax. I had to rely upon Him whose business I was on. I felt my weakness. A poor, ill-clothed, ignorant boy in my teens, thousands of miles from home, amongst strangers. The promise in my Blessings, the encouraging words of President Young to me, with the faith I had in the Gospel, kept me up. Many a time I would turn into the woods and brush in some des-

olate place, with a full heart, wet eyes and face, to call on my Master for strength and aid. I believed the Gospel of Christ. I never had preached it. I knew not where to find it in the scriptures. I had to give my Bible to the boatman at the Digby Gut for passage across.

Six days later he arrived in Halifax, found the branch president, John Skerry, and upon learning that Elder Buckland had returned to Yarmouth, missing him en route, he decided to stay there and spend some time studying a Church list of Bible references and other publications given him by members. He had to use a Bible provided by a nonmember captain from a vessel in the port. On May 5 he received a letter from Elder Buckland in Yarmouth reporting that the missionaries there had all decided to go back to the States because "the way had hedged up before them." Elder Millett reacted with a growing self-confidence:

May 5, 1853 He advised me to foot it around by the Isthmus into New Brunswick ..., thence on into the state of Maine. Or he would give me my own agency to do as I thought proper. My answer was that I had been sent on a mission [to Nova Scotia], and I would do the best I could to fulfill that mission.

Consequently the young elder went to Gabarouse on Cape Breton Island, which is just off the eastern end of Nova Scotia but required then a rough trip of eight days by schooner. There he visited members, blessed children, held meetings, and tried to teach the predominantly Gaelic people by pointing to references in their Bibles on the apostasy, the Restoration, and basic gospel principles taught by Christ and his apostles. His journal daily evidenced a growing sense of strength and direction:

May 26, 1853 I went to Fourchu, a place 6 or 7 miles from Gabarouse. On my way along the beach I saw a large duck on the waves, picking among the kelp. This was a desolate place, no houses for 6 or 7 miles. The Spirit said to me, "You are going among strangers. No Saints there. Take the bird with you." So I sat down right where the wave broke and the bird floated straight towards me, picking among the kelp and sea weed. When it got close to the shore it put its head under its wing, so I jumped and caught it. It was lively enough then and tried to get away. So when I got to Fourchu I went to a house, asked if that was Mr. Cann's. They said yes. I told them I had come over from Gabarouse to preach the Gospel to them. I had forgotten the duck. I then happened to notice them looking at it. Says I, "Here is a bird. I saw it out on the water and I thought I would bring it along, that it might be good to eat." Says he, "Is it hurt?" "No, Sir." I handed it to him. Heexamined it very close and said it was all right. It was cooked. We ate it. It was fat and good. A few came in. We had a meeting. The sectarian minister had poisoned the minds of the people, but Mr. Cann and family treated me very kindly ... and spoke favorably to others of me.

On June 3 Elder Millett's first companion arrived. He was a Scotch convert who had been living in Halifax and was sent over by President Skerry as a kind of local missionary to help Joseph. They soon had very good results as they held meetings

for the public and preached "by the Spirit." By June 14 Elder Adamson, the Scot, had baptized the first converts, and by June 15, 11 were confirmed, and the Gabarouse Branch was organized. More meetings, baptisms, ordinations, and healings of the sick followed, with an occasional extra assist like this one:

June 30, 1853 At the Brothers Bagnal's they were starting out to fish. I said, "Success to you; you must catch a whale," just in a foolish, joking way, and thought no more about it until I went down to Brother John McGilvery's. After a while one of the girls came down and said that Brother Millett had promised that Uncle Joseph's folkswould get a whale and the Gentiles said that now you see he is a false prophet, for any fool would know that they can't get a whale. I overheard the girls talking about the whale. It then came to my mind what I had said. I then ran to the woods and thought how foolish I was to say such a thing. I prayed the Lord to forgive, that I desired to do right. I felt the position we were in. I couldn't keep back the tears. I called on the Lord to help me in his cause.

About one o'clock p.m. the people noticed six boats coming in the Bay towing something. Some said it was the hull of a schooner; others said no, that it was the whale that the Mormon promised about.

The brothers Bagnal's was the first boat going out of the Bay. They heard the report of a cannon and saw the flag and topmast of the packet steamer circling around, [which] fired their third gun as soon as they saw that the fishermen were coming; the steamer went on and Brother Bagnal was the first to the prize.

And it was a lucky day for all of them that assisted in getting the prize in. The whale I believe was above 70 feet long, the biggest fish I ever saw. ... I never have ceased to thank the Lord for his goodness.

In July the missionaries tried to open a new field of work in Sydney at the eastern end of Cape Breton Island, but opposition from the Protestant clergy was very severe: The missionaries' handbills were torn down, schools and halls were closed to them for meetings, children threw stones at them, and adults cursed and threatened them, even spitting in their faces. Occasionally, however, they had a lighter moment:

July 27, 1853 Elder Adamson and myself went to Mr. Gibbon's, a rich infidel. He said he was an astronomer and philospher. Said that Mormonism was more reasonable than the rest of the religions and as for polygamy it was the only thing to regenerate the human family. And sometimes they took a day for renewal:

July 14, 1853 Brother Adamson and myself held fast and prayer today. And I wrote to Brother Campbell and one to L. W. Hardy, one of the Presidents of my Quorum (3rd). We had a little meeting at Mr. MacMurrin's in the evening and stopped there all night.

And even had some opportunities to teach:

July 17, 1853 *Went to the Methodist Meeting. The preacher said if*

God had done right he would have swept the people off the face of the earth ages ago. I would hate to accuse God of being so unjust.

Mr. Campbell invited me home with him to supper. I related the vision of Joseph Smith and many of the trials we had to pass through and our beliefs in short. I went and stopped at Mr. Zedekiah Williams's. He treated me kindly and gave me my breakfast.

But when the elders tried to visit and reason with the ministers, the ministers refused to talk with them or only engaged in slander. At this low point Elder Millett's journal records an additional trial:

July 31, 1853 Brother Allen Adamson says he must go to Halifax and perhaps on into the States. Wants to make fitout for the Valley. Anxious to gather with the Saints. He was from Dundee, Scotland. So I will be left alone with almost every door closed against me. Elder Adamson has been with me pretty near 2 months. ... Some was ready to be baptized. So when he came we were ready to commence. After I saw him baptize, I could then baptize. Oh, must I part with a good companion in him.

Aug. 1, 1853 Elder Allen Adamson left me for Gabarouse after I blessed him and he blessed me. I went about 3 miles with him. Then we parted not to meet again in this land.

In the last two weeks I have held two meetings in private houses. I have to depend upon the Lord, not on Brother Adamson. I have felt rather shy about asking favors of people; had rather go into the woods, pick blueberries, bless them and eat, and felt myself welcome. I find myself in rather straitened circumstances, although I have some friends.

Those friends included the son of a minister who was opposing him and the editor of *The Cape Breton Island News* who interviewed him and wrote favorably of him and the Latter-day Saint history and teachings in his paper. But despite an occasional good meeting in such places as the Temperance Hall, opposition increased, and finally a Reverend McLeod came directly to the home of Mr. Archibald McArthy, where Elder Millett was staying, and confronted him:

"Are you that imposter that has come to lead the people astray?" "No sir, I am a servant of the Living God and I am preaching His Gospel." Says he, "Brother McArthy, what does the scriptures say? Though we or an angel from Heaven preach any other gospel than that we have preached, let him be accursed." Says Brother McArthy, "This young man has preached the same gospel that Paul did. But you are preaching another gospel."

The dinner was just ready. ... As he went to sit down he said, "There is a sick woman in the other room and you people profess to do miracles. Heal that woman; then I will believe in your doctrine." Just then the door opened and the woman came out and said, "I am healed." He said, "Yes, the devil can do miracles."

As you might imagine, after that the minister "tried to eat but shook so bad he could not" and left, telling Mr. McArthy he should drive the missionary from his home.

Elder Millett continued the struggle, sometimes being helped with money and food, sometimes being able to teach a family after working with them in their fields all morning. But at times he got discouraged and sought help from the Lord:

Sept. 1, 1853 I was very tired of walking so much. Today is Thursday. I fast and pray for wisdom and the spirit of the Lord. I spend many an hour reading the Bible and Church works (and have fasted a good deal, the whole day when I fast). I feel like I am alone. Oh, why has the Comforter left me, as well as my traveling companion? Oh Lord, send it back. What have I done to feel this way? The desire of my heart is to do thy will, Oh Lord. Grant me a good degree of thy spirit to lead, me aright.

But the mature capabilities and self-confidence he had already achieved, in just the few months from the time of those plaintive prayers in the woods on his long walk from Yarmouth to Halifax, are evident in the following encounter that occurred while he was waiting for a man who had agreed to take him in his boat across a bay:

Sept. 13, 1853 I was stopped by ruffians. They said they would sink me in the Bay. (It made me mad.) I asked them if I could say a few words and I commenced to talk. I told them it was their religion that slew righteous Abel, killed the prophets, crucified the Savior and put his disciples to death, persecuted the Saints, martyred the Prophets Joseph Smith and Hyrum, and drove the Latter-day Saints, men, women, and children, into the deserts and mountains among the hostile Indians to suffer death and starvation. Then I told something about the religion of Jesus Christ. The sun was just setting when I stopped, as I saw the man of the sloop coming toward me. He wanted to know if I was ready to go. I told him yes. Says I, "I thought you would have been gone long ago." "No," says he, "there has been no wind." We started for the boat. (Some of my persecutors begged me to forgive them. Says I, "Repent of your sins, be baptized, and get forgiveness of them.")

Says I, "How long have I detained you in talking to them people." He said, "About one hour and a half, but there has been no wind." The wind then began to rise. We made a quick trip over (in silence). As soon as we landed I started to go to Mr. P. Lewis's. Says he, "Hold on, you must take supper with me." I was surprised as he had always been my enemy. Says I, "I do not want to be late to meeting." Says he, "You will not have to wait long. I am going to your meeting." When we got in the man went in the kitchen. I heard his wife say, "What have you brought that fellow here for?" Says he, "To supper." And says to her, "I never heard such preaching before as he gave the sailors and roughs. ... They were going to drown him and he talked

to them by the power of God; and I am going to his meeting and I want you to go. Hurry up the supper."

Elder Millett finally decided that staying through the severe winter without better clothes would be unwise, and he was authorized by Orson Pratt (presiding in Washington, D.C.) to travel back to Boston, where he found work of various kinds and had a great variety of experiences:

- **Dec. 1, 1853** I was walking on Nashua St. in Boston, Mass. I saw a man that seemed to be a stranger. I wanted to know if he was L. D. Saint. He said he was. I asked him where. Said he was from Utah, going to Europe on a mission. I asked to see his papers and presented my own and read his (Jesse B. Martin). The tears came into his eyes. I believe he had 3 cents cash. Brother Israel Evans came soon after. We helped to get the means to pay the passage to Europe on the ship Daniel Webster.
- **Dec. 12, 1853** Mrs. Eliza Gardiner took Brother Martin and myself through the Boston Museum. At night in the theater.
- **Jan. 26, 1854** A woman came from River Street, Boston, after me to go and see a sick man. ... I went. He said he had faith. I administered to him and got him up.
- **Jan. 27, 1854** I went again (took my bottle of oil). After performing the Ordinance, he got up, walked around the house. I told him to come to South Boston on Sunday and be baptized, expecting him to take a cab.
- Jan. 29, 1854 My friend Brother Joseph Bull of the Steamship Niagara was a welcome visitor with me every time they made port (in East Boston pier). The ship was in Saturday night. I gave Brother Bull an invite to the meeting. We were expecting to see a cab, but to our surprise the man came afoot with a bundle of clothes. We then went to the Bay near the Asylum. The ice cracked and opened wide enough (scarce) to perform the ordinance and the water was deep enough above the second layer of ice, and I baptized George H. Pay. Brother Bull confirmed him; then Brother Bull gave us a good discourse.

I received a letter from Brother O. Pratt, then in Washington, D.C., giving me a mission to hunt up and visit Saints and encourage them in the good work.

Feb. 19, 1854 ... Went to the Advent Meeting. The minister gave privilege, so I rose up and spoke some and said I was looking for the coming of the Savior when the prophecies were fulfilled: the rebuilding of Jerusalem, the gathering of God's people from all nations that God would have a people prepared to meet him. So that I had left my home, traveled thousands of miles without purse or scrip among strangers to preach the Gospel, to help to prepare a people to meet

the Lord. A big whisper all over the congregation: "What is he? What is he? What is he?" At length another big whisper: "He's a Mormon. He is a Mormon." Many rose up to go, so I thought I would go.

In February and March Elder Millett traveled through snowstorms on foot and by cart and whatever way he could throughout Massachusetts and part of New Hampshire and Vermont, baptizing new members and encouraging the Saints to faithfulness, using the power of the priesthood to heal and to ordain and set apart members to new responsibilities, and often calling on his special gift of recognition:

Mar. 4, 1854 I saw a man on a sled coming into the road that I was on. He hollered to me to hurry and ride with him. I asked him if he wasn't a L.D. Saint. He said he was (he was the man I was going to see) and his name was Solomon Mack [Joseph Smith's cousin on his mother's side]. I showed him my papers. He said he received me as an Angel. I rode with him to his home in Gilsum. I was well treated by the whole family.

But then, while he was in the process of baptizing new converts in Lowell, Massachusetts, and organizing a branch there, he received a momentous letter from his mission president:

Mar. 18, 1854 *In Lowell. Received letter from President O. Pratt. Said as I was single I could marry a wife with his approbation.*

Elder Millett responded enthusiastically to this new opportunity. He completed his work in Lowell and then went to Manchester, New Hampshire, where he had some time before met a young woman who had been the only person in her family to join the Church (in fact, the others were strongly opposed to it). Acting decisively but with very evident propriety and consideration, he invited her to the home of some members to talk with him; he apparently found in her a person of similar decisiveness, because she returned and packed her trunk and traveled with him to Lowell to stay at the home of the branch president. This is how Elder Millett describes the following Sunday:

Mar. 26, 1854 Sunday. Meeting forenoon at Sister Brook's. President Davis appointed a meeting at his house in the evening. I ordained Brother Thomas Bricker to the office of Priest. Then President Eliakim S. Davis read a chapter in the Doctrine and Covenants on Marriage. Sarah Elizabeth Glines and myself stood up and were married. Elder Davis sang and dismissed the meeting and the cake was passed around. The evening was agreeably passed by the Saints.

At the end of Joseph Millett's journal are recorded two poems that Joseph and Sarah wrote for each other in those few days at the Davis home before they were married. The poems are both acrostics (the first letters of the lines taken in sequence spell out their names), and they are unsophisticated verse but very moving, considering the circumstances. Joseph's is a kind of testimony to her of the work he has been devoted to and is taking her to participate in with the gathered Saints. Sarah's is a poignant expression of her fears at leaving home and family for a strange new life, and yet demonstrates her Ruth-like faith in him and in the Lord.

Joseph, dear Joseph, as thou art my friend,
Oh here is my people, I'll cheerfully leave
Since thou hast sworn thou wilt me defend
Even my all from the world of deceit.
Please do as thou has cheerfully said;
Had I but a danger to fear
My heart it would throb, I would feel sad.
I then had better be here.
Let all of thy words be faithful and true,
Let nothing turn you from the right way.
Even I am thy friend, to the Mountains I'll go,
The word of the Lord I'll obey.

The young couple traveled to Boston, where they visited "places of note"—such as Bunker Hill Monument, the Atheneum, the Glassworks at East Cambridge—and then Sarah accompanied Elder Millett to Peterboro and stayed there with her aunt while he continued his missionary work alone. He again visited the branches and the scattered Saints, returned to Boston to help a group of members from Nova Scotia prepare to leave for the West, and traveled into upper New York and Vermont, baptizing 11 converts. In October he returned to Manchester with Sarah to bid her family goodbye, and then traveled west with her by train to Chicago, and on foot out into Iowa; there they stopped to work and prepare for the journey across the plains and to give rest to Sarah, who was pregnant and ill during the spring and summer:

She was confined on the 28th of June, 1855. For months I hardly got an hour's sleep in 24. Our little boy Artemus died 7th of August, 1855. The Saints did all they could for us.

After again working through the winter, they started for Salt Lake in June of 1856, driving Dr. John Bernhisel's team and goods west for him. They moved to Manti, where a daughter was born in December, later moved to Sevier Valley, were called to the Dixie Mission in Southern Utah by Brigham Young in 1866, and then were called in 1868 to the Mormon settlement in the extremely harsh Spring Valley, Nevada. In the meantime, four more daughters and four sons were born to them.

One of those sons, reviewing his father's records after his death in Cedar City, Utah, in about 1919, paid tribute to him in these words:

He lived a faithful life, was kind and benevolent to all, full of charity and sympathy, ever seeking where he might do good to the poor and fatherless and those in need, denying himself the comforts he might have enjoyed had not his means been spent helping others.

But for our last impression of this lifelong servant of the Lord, who learned on his mission, and never forgot, what it is like to be in need and how to give, we should turn back to an entry in his own journal dated 1871 in Spring Valley. His oldest daughter had died of typhoid and many had suffered great sickness and hunger:

One of my children came in, said that Brother Newton Hall's folks were out of bread. Had none that day. I put ... our flour in sack to send up to Brother Hall's. Just then Brother Hall came in. Says I,

"Brother Hall, how are you out for flour." "Brother Millett, we have none." "Well, Brother Hall, there is some in that sack. I have divided and was going to send it to you. Your children told mine that you were out." Brother Hall began to cry. Said he had tried others. Could not get any. Went to the cedars and prayed to the Lord and the Lord told him to go to Joseph Millett. "Well, Brother Hall, you needn't bring this back if the Lord sent you for it. You don't owe me for it." You can't tell how good it made me feel to know that the Lord knew that there was such a person as Joseph Millett.

NOTES

The journal and a microfilm copy for use are located in the Church Historical Library; for ease of reading here, I have modernized and regularized spelling, punctuation, and a few grammatical idiosyncrasies. The Journal will be published in its entirety in the near future.

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