

Mrs Tytus: Founder of Blackfriars, Oxford

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According to a letter from Fr Bede Jarrett to her dated conjecturally to May 1924 Mrs Tytus ‘found as well as founded the place’, that is to say, Blackfriars in St Giles’, in Oxford (*Letters of Bede Jarrett*, selected by Bede Bailey OP and edited by Simon Tugwell OP and Dom Aidan Bellinger: Downside Abbey and Blackfriars Publications 1989: 90–91).

What we can be sure about, from photographs, is that the three houses 62, 63 and 64 St Giles’ were demolished to make way for Blackfriars. Two of the houses are listed as vacant in 1918–19; the Girls’ Friendly Society Lodge and Hostel occupies the third. The Ministry of Pensions Medical Board briefly occupied one of the two vacant houses in 1921. Mass was said on the property for the first time in June 1921; the foundation stone was laid on 15 August 1921. By 1923 all three houses are listed as owned by the Dominican Fathers, with Rev. Aidan Elrington, O.P, D.Sc., as Superior.

In a letter dated 16 April 1918, from New York, to Lady Margaret Domville, Fr Bede says that he had bought the land at Oxford though needed £6000 to pay for it (*Letters*: 36). On 1 January 1919 he tells her that ‘we’ have bought the three houses. He plans, in a couple of years’ time, to build a Priory, ‘partly by adapting the present 16th century houses (with Queen Anne fronts) and partly by building a wing and a chapel’ — ‘The idea is to convert the young man there by pandering to his love for the picturesque — a Priory to the Holy Ghost, the white forms, the chanted office, lectures, sermons etc. One of the houses turns out to have been the last home of Walter Pater. We are going to have a little *Pater Museum* and have that as an excuse to find the undergrad in; then when he’s least attentive to baptise him. We shall have to have very weak tea always served so weak as to be valid matter for Baptism’ (*Letters*: 37).

From the extant archival material, it is impossible to document precisely when Mrs Tytus ‘found’ the site. Fr Bede seems not to have mentioned her part to Lady Margaret Domville.

According to the biographical notes in *Letters of Bede Jarrett*, Charlotte Jefferson Tytus, who died in 1936, aged 86, ‘was one of BJ’s principal benefactors. She was an American widow, who had been received into the Catholic Church in England. In 1917 she was clothed as a Dominican tertiary by BJ, taking the name of

Benvenuta. She bought the site for the Oxford priory and continued to give large sums of money towards the building of it. She also made a donation to the Dominican house in Edinburgh. At the end of her life, her health deteriorated badly. Her funeral was held at St Dominic's, London'.

Most of this is true. In the fragmentary letter cited above, Fr Bede certainly thanks her as the one who 'found as well as founded the place' — the site in St Giles'.

This letter belongs to a small bundle of his letters to Mrs Tytus given to Fr Bernard Delany OP by her maid when he visited her, by now seriously ill, in her hotel in London, in July 1934. He reported that there were 'loads of others, but stored with other belongings of hers'. The Order did not manage to retrieve any more of Fr Bede's correspondence with Mrs Tytus. According to her great grandson, the family have nothing — now at least — of what she left in store at her death.

This letter says nothing about when Mrs Tytus found the site or bought the property. On 1 April 1928 Fr Bede wrote to Mrs Tytus, thanking her for 'princely width of munificence' — she seems to have given him \$35,000 and again he calls her 'the founder' — when she had 'all sorts of other dreams and ideals as well' (*Letters*: 129–130; he must have known about Merville: see below.) He speaks movingly of the moral support which she gave him during a 'moment of panic and cowardice', when his Dominican brethren were sceptical about the whole project of returning to Oxford.

In a footnote to a letter dated 5 May 1928 the editors tell us that 10 May was the anniversary of Mrs Tytus's reception into the Catholic Church: 'Another birthday!' — 'Here in the new year is always a new hope, a heart reborn' (*Letters*: 131). Writing on 5 May 1929, addressing his letter to her bankers ('dear Brown and Shipley'), since he doesn't know where she is, Fr Bede wishes her 'all sorts of gorgeous things for May 10th' — the anniversary of her reception into the Church, they say again (*Letters*: 145). However, in an unpublished letter, in 1932, he says she will have 'my Mass on February 11th, your anniversary as a Catholic — Cheer up and dance!' — so 10 May must have had some other significance in Mrs Tytus's life, perhaps her reception into the Third Order of Saint Dominic?

In a letter dated 10 August 1928 Fr Bede tells Mrs Tytus that he will say Mass on the 15th, not the anniversary of her husband's death, however, as the editors say in their footnote — he died on 19 May 1881; but that of her son, 15 August 1913: 'His going has somehow given a golden heart to you which is unchangeable in you all these years. His death on the feast of the Mother's love, and its complete fulfilment in her, has made it so that you are now never to be separated and even one day to be more closely associated'. She is not 'settled' anywhere: she lives a 'hotel-existence and all its

wanderings', — 'The whole sense of *home* has gone for you in that human cosy sense: life is a mere *hotel-life*, beggared of him' (*Letters*: 134–135).

It was 15 years since her son died. Married, with two daughters, living in the mansion he built on his estate in Massachusetts, he surely did not share a home with his mother since he left Yale in 1897.

In a letter dated 20 December 1928, wishing her every Christmas blessing, Fr Bede is not sure whether her grandchildren are to be with her for Christmas or to come to her afterwards — 'But your heart will necessarily be with them and you will now be the central home of their lives. It is wonderful thus towards the ending to have inherited at last the love so long deferred, and to you who have been so long an exile that it should be granted to have become yourself a home' (*Letters*: 137–8).

The key to this enigmatic passage lies in the fact that her daughter-in-law, Grace, had just died. The grandchildren, Mildred (born in 1904) and Victoria (born in 1909) were now young women. Her daughter in law remarried soon after her son's death. The marriage failed, and she seems to have returned to the house in Massachusetts, with her two daughters, and the son she had with her second husband. It sounds — but this is only a guess — as if Mrs Tytus was in the United States for Christmas 1928. It sounds, also, as if she had seen little or nothing of her grand daughters for years — as if she was free to visit them, now that her daughter-in-law was dead. It sounds, as well, as if Fr Bede did not know that her grand daughters were young adults. He clearly believes Mrs Tytus had a home to which she could invite her grand daughters.

Interestingly, Fr Bede, who was re-reading *Marius the Epicurean*, thinks it appropriate to ask Mrs Tytus if she had read it 'lately'. Referring to her handwriting, he speaks of 'the determined pen and its sabre strokes and the undeviating and measured solemnity of the letters' — signs, he thinks, of her character: 'gay and sensitive to beauty, with your mature judgment of things and people, and your downright insistence upon the fine niceties of honour'. He obviously also knows of her literary interests (see below).

On 19 May 1929, when there are 'seas and hills between' him and her, he writes (somewhat emotionally) about the consecration of the Blackfriars church, 20 May 1929 — at which she was not present (*Letters*: 146). Perhaps he means the Atlantic Ocean and the Berkshires? On 14 August 1929 he had seen her a week earlier in London, and again assures her that he will say Mass for her son's anniversary — 'its anniversary of sorrow and yet release' (*Letters*: 149–50). On 26 September 1929 Fr Bede writes to Mrs Tytus from Rome, sending his best wishes for 1 October, which, as the editors rightly presume, was her birthday (1 October 1852 — she was

actually only 83 when she died). She was clearly in England, and had been unwell (*Letters*: 153–4).

In a letter dated 18 October 1931 Fr Bede once again celebrates Mrs Tytus's generosity, referring to her as having 'spied out the land' in Oxford: 'And how splendid for us that we had someone to give us the whole site at Oxford, right out as you did, so munificently' (*Letters*: 168–9). He has heard from the Archbishop of [St Andrews and] Edinburgh of a suitable house for the Order 'in the very best centre imaginable for our work, in an old-fashioned centre in the University part of the town, called George Square'. While he does not ask her in so many words for money, his diary records for 24 December 1931 that she had given £1000 towards the purchase of the Edinburgh house.

On 29 October 1932 Fr Bede writes to Mrs Tytus, seemingly suffering from 'aches and pains', somewhere in England, telling her about how badly the Oxford church had been built — 'The expense of re-mortaring it all is not the trouble so much as the horrid thought that our builders should have served us so ill and that we may find defects elsewhere. Moreover with architect dead and the builder's firm dissolved and since bankrupt there is no one against whom we can bring an action and recover damages. What a disheartening world it is after all, when one wants to believe and trust everybody! One doesn't mind troubles, but one does dislike being let down when one has trusted folk' (*Letters*: 184).

In one unpublished letter it is clear that Mrs Tytus visited Oxford, in August 1931, without her doctor but with 'the faithful Harvey in attendance'. Fr Bede advises her to seek out Fr Mungo McGibbon, whom she apparently liked. In another, in July 1932, Fr Bede offers, perhaps jocularly, to chaperone her to the south of France, where it seems that she regularly spent time. Again, in May 1933, he hopes that she may have been well enough to make her Easter communion at Farm Street, and refers to her being received into the Church: 'Carlyle [sic] Spedding pushed you finally in, hastily before the Cardinal was able to fix it up for you'.

Cardinal Vaughan died in 1903; Francis Bourne did not become a Cardinal until 1911. Fr Ian Dickie, Archivist, kindly searched the Converts register for the Westminster Archdiocese, for the period 1908 to 1919, without finding her name — no register exists prior to 1908. Perhaps we may deduce that she was received into the Church in Cardinal Vaughan's time.

Carlisle James Scott Spedding, dead by 1917, unmarried, was a descendant of the famous mining engineer Carlisle Spedding (1695–1755) — famous in the history of coal mining, at any rate, for sinking the first pit beneath the sea, and for many inventions such as blasting with gunpowder and improved ventilation. The prosperity of Whitehaven, in Cumbria, resulted from Spedding's career, with the

Lowther family. By the time of Burke's *Landed Gentry* (1858) the Spedding family were out of coal mining and settled at Summergrove Hall, near Whitehaven. Carlisle Spedding was an undergraduate at The Queen's College, Oxford. In 1894 he was appointed a Chamberlain of the Sword and Cloak to Pope Leo XIII, and in 1903 to Pope Pius X. He functioned as Gold Staff at the coronation of King Edward VII.

According to the London Priory chronicle, the solemn requiem of Mrs Jefferson Tytus — 'the munificent benefactress of Oxford' — took place on 6 April 1936, at Saint Dominic's, Haverstock Hill, with Fr Bernard Delany, Provincial, as celebrant, assisted by Fr Hilary Carpenter (Prior of Oxford), and Fr Hugh McKenna (an American Dominican, studying at Blackfriars, Oxford). The interment was at Kensal Green, St Mary's Catholic Cemetery.

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Charlotte Matilda Davies was born in New Haven, Connecticut, on 1 October 1852, the eighth child of John M. Davies and Alice Sophia née Hopper. She married Edward Jefferson Tytus of Middletown, Ohio, on 24 June 1874. Five years older, he had spent three years at Yale. They presumably met on some social occasion in New Haven.

Her father died on 23 October 1871. She returned to the family home in 1881, after her husband's death, and lived there into the 1890s. Her mother died on 18 January 1898. Her sisters, Louisa, born 4 December 1833, the eldest of the siblings, and Alice Mordant, born 5 March 1847, were still alive in 1898 though the latter died on 10 February 1899. Their five brothers were by then all dead: John May Davies (1835–1887); Robert Kermit Davies (1838–1891); Charles Edgar Davies (1840–1845); Cornelius Cauldwell Davies (1843–1885); and James Jones Davies (1845–1846). Thus, two died in infancy, years before Charlotte was born. The other three died in middle age, aged 52, 53 and 42 respectively, in 1887, 1891 and 1885. (Information provided by her great grandson.)

Charlotte's father, John M. Davies, enters history as the associate of the much more famous Oliver Fisher Winchester (born 1810 in Boston, Mass., died 1880 in New Haven). By 1848 they were in business in New Haven, engaged in the manufacture of shirts. In 1860 Winchester bought the Volcanic Arms Company, turned it into the New Haven Arms Company, and in 1865 reorganised it as the Winchester Repeating Arms Company, selling his interest in the shirt-factory.

It looks as if Davies did not go into rifles but stayed in shirts. By the mid 1860s he was wealthy enough to embark on building a splendid mansion in New Haven, on Prospect Street. He didn't live long to enjoy it.

The house still stands. Under the name of John M. Davies House, 393 Prospect Street, Yale University has owned it since 1972. Renovated recently by the munificence of Roland W. Betts II and his wife Lois Phifer Betts, as the Yale Center for the Study of Globalization and the World Fellows Program, it is now renamed Betts House. Designed by Henry Austin and David R. Brown in the French Second Empire style, the mansion is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. According to the chain of title in the New Haven Land Records, the mansion was owned by John M. Davies 1867–1874; Alice S. Davies 1874–1911; Thomas Wallace, Jr., 1911–1947; and the Culinary Institute of America (Restaurant Institute of Connecticut), until being taken over by Yale.

It seems unlikely that Mrs Tytus ever had a home of her own. Her all too brief marriage was spent travelling in hopes of securing her husband's health. She seems to have lived with her mother, from 1881 until she died. Her son went to Europe in 1897. Davies Mansion was sold in 1911. It seems likely that Mrs Tytus began her wandering 'hotel-existence', with her entourage, in the first years of the century.

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The only famous member of the Tytus family is John Butler Tytus, Jr. (1875–1944), Mrs Tytus's nephew, son of her husband's younger brother (also John Butler Tytus). Born in Middletown, Ohio, educated at Dobbs Ferry and Yale, where he was a contemporary of Mrs Tytus's son, his mechanical skills brought him back to his father's paper mill. However, a new industry had just located in his hometown. The owner of a small iron and steel company in Cincinnati decided to build his own rolling mill at Middletown along the banks of the Miami-Erie Canal. Watching the little plant turning out the long, shining sheets of steel on a hand mill, Tytus asked why steel couldn't be made in a continuous sheet like paper. In 1921 he built the world's first continuous rolling mill, which became Armco, still a name in the US steel industry. The fast and cheap production of quality rolled steel sheets, used in the manufacture of appliances, automobiles, aeroplanes and thousands of other items, made the U.S. into the world's industrial giant.

His grandfather, Francis Jefferson Tytus, Mrs Tytus's father-in-law, was born in Hampshire County, Virginia, in 1806, son of a farmer. In 1827, he migrated to Ohio, and settled in Middletown, then a small village of a few hundred inhabitants. First a clerk in the local dry-goods business, he married the owner's daughter, Sarah, who died in 1840. He moved into the pork-packing business. In 1854 he purchased two mills, one engaged in manufacturing white paper, the other brown wrapping paper. In 1873 the Tytus Paper Company was formed. In the 1880s, the business of the mill amounted to over

half a million dollars annually, turning out twenty thousand pounds of manila paper every twenty-four hours.

A generous and influential member of the Baptist Church, frequently sent as a delegate to the Baptist conventions, F.J. Tytus was active in enhancing the growth of Middletown, contributing liberally toward the building of turnpikes, public school buildings, churches, etc. Streets in Middletown bear the Tytus name.

In 1848 he purchased a farm in the suburbs of the town, 'on which he erected a handsome and commodious residence, where he now resides, surrounded by every evidence of refinement and affluence' (according to the Ohio local history, 1883). Amazingly, this house is still standing, now divided into flats. Built directly above the Miami and Erie Canal, it was, according to local history, a 'safe house' on the 'Underground Railroad', helping runaway slaves from the South to escape to Canada. (The Ohio Anti-Slavery Society was founded in 1839.)

There is a large plot of Tytus burials in the Middletown cemetery, including the grave of Edward Jefferson Tytus, born 22 August 1847, died 19 May 1881, the only one with the XP monogram on the stone cross.

Edward Jefferson Tytus was born in Middletown, Ohio. Educated at home, he was a great success at Yale, socially at any rate, being elected to Skull and Bones in 1868 (the elite secret society, which counts G.H.W. Bush and G.W. Bush, J.F. Kerry and many others as members). He did a spot of farming back home, then went into paper making with his brother. He returned to New Haven to marry Charlotte. The newly married couple went to Europe but soon returned home on medical advice. He died after four or five years fighting pulmonary tuberculosis, first in the Adirondacks and latterly at Lake Saranac, a famous sanatorium for the wealthy, in upstate New York. Edward was a keen photographer; a collection of his photographs is at Yale.

The only child of the marriage was born on 2 February 1876 in Asheville, North Carolina: christened Robert Davies Tytus, his name was changed legally, in 1885, when he was nine, four years after his father's death, to Robb Depeyster Tytus. (We have no idea why.)

Mrs Tytus never lived in Middletown, Ohio. The daughter of an extremely wealthy self-made industrialist in New Haven, a New Englander, she fell in love with a rich young man from Middletown, 'Porkopolis', but never expected to live in Ohio — even if the Tytus family had moved from selling hogs into making paper.

Educated at St Mark's School, Southborn, Massachusetts, Robb went to Yale, where he received the BA in 1897. He then went to Europe, studying art in London, Paris and Munich. In 1899–1903 he conducted excavations under concessions from the Egyptian

government: *A Preliminary Report on the Reexcavation of the Palace of Amenhotep III* was printed by The Winthrop Press, New York, in 1903 (no doubt at his own expense: there are two copies in the Sackler Library at Oxford). He published a few poems, in *Harper's Monthly*, in the *Burr McIntosh Magazine*; a story in the *Metropolitan Magazine*; and the illustrations for a story by his wife in *The Century* 1906; etc.

On 19 May 1903 Robb married Grace Seely Henop, daughter of Louis P. and Alice (Seely) Henop, of New York. He purchased a 1000-acre estate at Tyringham, Massachusetts, 'gateway to the Berkshires', where he raised cattle and sheep. He named his estate Ashintully (Gaelic: 'the brow of the hill'). In 1908 he was elected a Representative to the Massachusetts Legislature. He was a director of the Lee National bank and of the Lee Hotel Company; and a vestryman of St George's church, Lee. Mainly, however, he built the Marble Palace.

Now 120 acres, Ashintully Gardens, Tyringham, Massachusetts, is what remains of the original estate 'assembled by Egyptologist and two-time state representative', as the publicity says, from three farms and additional land in Otis. Between 1910–1912, on a hill overlooking the southern end of Tyringham Valley, Tytus built a white, Georgian-style mansion, which came to be known as the Marble Palace. Its main façade featured four Doric columns and was spanned by thirteen window bays; its interior comprised thirty-five rooms, ten baths, and fifteen fireplaces. The Marble Palace was destroyed by fire in 1952; only the front terrace, foundation, and four Doric columns remain today.

Mrs Tytus must have visited Ashintully. Her son's remains are buried there. If her belongings were conveyed by her servants to her next of kin, her grand daughter Victoria, presumably they ended up at Ashintully; and perhaps were lost in the fire in 1952. By then, however, it was the home of Victoria's stepbrother John Stewart McLennan.

Robb and Grace had two daughters: Mildred Mordaunt born 7 April 1904 in Cairo; and Victoria born 22 October 1909 at Tyringham.

Like his father, Robb Depeyster Tytus died of pulmonary tuberculosis at Saranac Lake, in upstate NY, on 15 August 1913 aged 37. His father died at 34. Whatever else, Mrs Tytus saw her three brothers, as well as her husband and son, die prematurely.

A little over a year after his death, Robb's widow Grace married John Stewart McLennan (1853–1939), a wealthy Canadian, whom she met in London. She gave birth in 1915 to their child, John Stewart, Jr., but the marriage soon failed and she returned to Ashintully with the boy.

An accomplished musician and composer, John Stewart McLennan created, over the course of thirty years, Ashintully Gardens (where his widow lives in the summer).

Grace's second husband, who made a fortune in coal, retired early, enormously rich, and built a vast mansion on Cape Breton, Petersfield, where he played host to many distinguished guests: prime ministers, governor generals, admirals and captains of British and French navy ships, and various American friends. His first wife died in 1912, after a sudden appendicitis attack. Well-known guests continued to visit Petersfield, after his second marriage, throughout the 1920s, including Ramsay MacDonald, Lord and Lady Tweedsmuir, Lord and Lady Baden-Powell. The hostess, however, was McLennan's unmarried daughter Katharine.

According to the McLennan family history, John Stewart McLennan 'met a vivacious and intelligent widow by the name of Grace Seely Henop in London at the outbreak of the war'. Grace, we learn, 'was the widow of Rob Tytus, a famous Egyptologist, and was the mother of two daughters. She was an accomplished linguist and writer with publications in many magazines and papers. Her opinions and her friends were considered somewhat eccentric. She had contacts all over the world and her associates included Alexander Kerensky, the Russian revolutionary, and others of equal renown'. Grace's lifestyle, her friends, and her leftist ideals, did not easily mesh with her husband's traditional sense of dignified service to one's country. 'Though the two made a handsome pair, with J.S. being 6'3" in height and Grace 6', they could not happily live together'. He lived at Petersfield or Ottawa and Grace at Ashintully in Massachusetts. According to their son, they maintained separate homes from 1919 on. As part of the separation agreement, his father was denied access to him except for two afternoon visits a year. The divorce proceedings were protracted; but in 1927 the couple were finally divorced, a few months before Grace died.

It seems likely that her daughter in law was not Charlotte's favourite person.

Grace was buried at Ashintully. Mildred died, unmarried, in an automobile accident when she was 29 in 1933, on her way back from Boston to Ashintully. Victoria married a wealthy Boston lawyer by the name of Coolidge and they had three sons, Mrs Tytus's great grandsons. One of these, a historian, studied at Oxford in the 1970s. He knew that his great grandmother bequeathed a great deal of money to Westminster Cathedral, Brompton Oratory, and the Dominican Priory — but he never realised that Blackfriars, Oxford, was the Priory in question.

Mrs Tytus's father-in-law had no family connection with Thomas Jefferson, the Third President. Jefferson's granddaughter Ellen

married Joseph Coolidge, Jr., from whom the Boston Coolidges are descended, which means that Mrs Tytus's grand daughter married into a family directly descended from him.

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The Dominicans were not Mrs Tytus's only beneficiaries — far from it. Her generosity to the people of Merville, in north-east France, from 1919 to 1924, is well documented. She met Mgr Herzog, the superior of the Sulpicians, in Rome, who was in contact with Fr Lecoeuche, then Dean and Archpriest of Merville, keen to raise money to rebuild, after the devastation of the War. She agreed to give 25,000 francs. Some weeks later, at Lourdes, she met the Abbé Droulers, the parish priest, who established a friendship with 'la marraine de Merville', even describing himself in 1924 as her 'filleul et second fils'. The result of this friendship was that she paid for the rebuilding of the chapel of the Grand Séminaire and a school, described as 'Ecole Saint Robert, fondation américaine, par une mère en souvenir de sons fils'; as well as a gymnasium with rooms for archery, billiards and bowling, a dining hall and a small home for the priest. The total value, including nine workers' cottages, is given as 'plusieurs milliers de francs'.

'Mrs Jefferson-Tytus' is mentioned in 1921 in the archives of the Benedictine convent of Maredret, south of Namur: Droulers bought some of the miniatures they were famous for making to give to her. (The archivist there would like to know what happened to them.) In his account, written at the time, Droulers refers to Mrs Tytus as the 'grand daughter of a President of the US', and speaks of the school as being in memory of her son Robert, 'killed at the Front in 1918'. There is some misunderstanding there.

That Mrs Tytus had enormous wealth is clear. No doubt she inherited some Tytus money, when her husband died (in 1881) — perhaps that was the source of her son's equally enormous, entirely unearned wealth? (Unless his change of name was for an inheritance?) Her wealth, I guess, was inherited from her father; as the only survivor, deprived by death of all her siblings, by 1911, she must have felt free to give it all away as she liked. She left nothing to Victoria, the grand daughter who survived. According to her will she left everything to Catholic institutions in England.

There are many unanswered questions. We don't know where she died, or who was with her at the end, or why the funeral was at Haverstock Hill (Blackfriars might have seemed more appropriate). We don't know if any of her brothers were married. There are leads one might follow up: obituaries in New Haven newspaper files, for example. Only one picture exists: Charlotte in early widowhood. A few copies survive of a small book, *Browning Year Book, selections*

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for every day in the year from the prose and poetry of Robert Browning (New York, E.P. Dutton and Company, 1892, 179 pages; second edition 1903) — by C.M.T., who is identified, by the Library of Congress, as Mrs Charlotte M. Tytus.

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