

GEORGE SPROTT AND THE REVIVAL OF WORSHIP IN SCOTLAND

Part II: Sprott's Liturgical Work

George Sprott's contribution to the revival of worship in nineteenth-century Scotland was made almost entirely through his efforts on behalf of the Church Service Society. The Society's foundation arose from a suggestion which he made in his pamphlet *The Worship, Rites and Ceremonies of the Church of Scotland* (1863), and he played a leading role in its work for 40 years. In it, and in the Scottish Church Society (formed in 1893), he found a sympathetic group of like-minded men — men who shared his high theological outlook and his liturgical concern.

It was shortly after its formation in 1865 that the Church Service Society divided its work into two areas — eclectic and constructive — and Sprott did much to advance both. His liturgical activities in these fields form the subject of the present paper. Because his constructive work was rooted in his understanding of the history of worship in Scotland, it will be most profitable to examine his eclectic activities first.

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It was always a major concern of the editorial committee of the Society (of which Sprott was an active member) that historic materials used in the worship of the Church be made more readily available. At first, it was thought that the establishment of a library collection was beyond the Society's means, and it contented itself with recommending a list of books for purchase by individual members.¹ In 1884, however, Sprott moved at the annual meeting,

That the Editorial Committee be authorized to procure at the expense of the Society, as its funds admit, a collection of Liturgies and of books on the history and principles of Divine Service, and that the collection be presented to the Library of the General Assembly.²

Sprott's motion was passed, and he was entrusted with the job of gathering books for the collection. Ultimately, he produced a small library consisting of many of the books included in the Society's recommended list. A large number of these were presented to the Society by Sprott himself.³

It was Sprott, too, who, at the annual meeting of 1893, suggested:

That authority be given to the Editorial Committee to edit a cheap reprint of all liturgical books used or proposed to be used in the Church of Scotland since the Reformation, in such a series, annual or otherwise, as their funds permit.⁴

As a result of this proposal, a series of uniform volumes appeared, with the Society's imprimatur, in the early years of the twentieth century. The series was given the general heading, 'Liturgies and Orders of Divine Service used or prepared for use in the Church of Scotland since the Reformation'. It consisted of a variety of liturgies which had some association with the Church of Scotland and which had been edited with introductions by various members of the Society. H. J. Wotherspoon, for example, edited the Second Prayer Book of Edward VI, which had once been used in Scotland, while James Cooper edited the Liturgy of 1637 (Laud's Liturgy). Sprott's good friend and close colleague, Thomas Leishman, was responsible for the edition of the Westminster Directory. Sprott himself edited Knox's Book of Common Order, two liturgies from the reign of James VI, the Liturgy of Comprise used at Frankfurt, and the Society's own Book of Common Order, *Euchologion*. Except for the Frankfurt liturgy, none of Sprott's work appeared for the first time in the Church Service Society editions of 1901 and 1905. Each had been published separately long before. *The Book of Common Order* commonly known as *John Knox's Liturgy* appeared in one volume with Leishman's edition of the Westminster Directory in 1868. The *Scottish Liturgies of the Reign of James VI* was originally published in 1871. The first edition of *Euchologion*, minus Sprott's notes and introduction, appeared in 1867.

In our study of Sprott's eclectic work, it is his historical analysis of the liturgies of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries that most concerns us. Sprott and Leishman shared the belief that worship in the Reformed Church of Scotland had started from a solid base. It reflected Reformed theology, used quasi-liturgical forms, and stood firmly in a Catholic tradition dating back to the early Church. Unfortunately, after the middle of the seventeenth century, the Church of Scotland had begun to go astray with the introduction of puritanical novelties. The Church's present need was to return to the principles of the classical period of her worship and Church order. Sprott hoped that the spirit of the Reformation might be revived and advocated, in general terms, a return to the *status quo ante* 1651, to the days before schism and puritanical worship began to disfigure the Scottish Church. As he said in his introduction to Knox's Liturgy:

. . . it would be in her [the Church of Scotland's] wisdom to make more of her Reformed traditions, and as in time past to claim exemption from sectarianism.⁵

Sprott and his colleagues in the Church Service Society set themselves to correct false impressions of the history of Scottish worship in order to pave the way for future change. The Church, Sprott said, should 'revive a better past'.⁶ A representative of a later generation of Church Service Society members, Norman Maclean, claimed that:

No Society has strengthened and enriched the Church as the Church Service Society has done. It has brought the Church of Scotland to realise that the bare and formless worship offered in the parish churches for over two centuries was not the fruit of the Reformation, but the unhappy legacy of Brownism and of the Cromwell occupation. For a hundred years after the Reformation the Church of Scotland had a liturgy; and the Church Service Society, so far from being innovators, set itself to seek the old paths and walk therein.⁷

Sprott and Leishman's editions of Knox's Liturgy and the Westminster Directory were among the first results of the Society's historical revision. A. K. Robertson has said that these works were ' . . . the first fruits of modern careful liturgical study in the Church of Scotland, and gave the new movement its true bearings.'⁸

Certainly Sprott and Leishman produced their volume with the idea that it might be influential. As they said in their preface to the two orders, 'Our hope is that the book which we now give to the public may be useful in affording information as to the past, and thereby to some extent in guiding opinion in the future.'⁹

At the Reformation, and for 80 years after, Sprott declared, the Church of Scotland used Knox's Book of Common Order — what he described as a "discretionary Liturgy".¹⁰ He and Leishman challenged the popular idea that the Church used a liturgy only briefly¹¹ and insisted that Knox regarded liturgical forms as the normative manner of worship. As Sprott pointed out in his notes on the Liturgy of Compromise used at Frankfurt, Knox had even admired the second Anglican Prayer Book — a book which was used in Scotland during the early stages of the Reformation. ' . . . it may open the eyes and shut the mouths of some people,' he said, 'to learn that Knox used large portions of it before he was embittered by his expulsion from Frankfurt and forbidden to enter England on his return from exile.'¹²

At any rate, the Book of Common Order which Knox drafted on his return to Scotland was the legal form of worship in the Church from 1564 to 1645. The Church enjoined its use for

prayers (i.e. Sunday worship), marriage and the sacraments. The book itself had called for monthly celebrations of the Lord's Supper, but the General Assembly of 1562 had imposed a minimum of four Communion annually in towns and two in the country.¹³ As for prayer, set prayers were the norm — Knox used and encouraged them — and free prayer in Sunday Worship was discouraged.¹⁴ In his own Sunday service, Knox made allowance for only one extempore prayer.¹⁵ And the common posture for prayer, Spratt said, was kneeling.¹⁶

Spratt's claims with regard to Knox's Liturgy are generally valid. It was indeed a set form of worship with some room left for the minister's discretion. Its content, however, was heavy and didactic, and one has to question the authority of an order of service hastily constructed during the difficult birth-pangs of a new Church. This was the point on which most nineteenth-century critics of liturgical worship required most convincing.

In his edition of *Scottish Liturgies of the Reign of James VI* and another book on *The Worship of the Church of Scotland during the Covenanting Period*,¹⁷ Spratt went on to show where he thought Scottish worship had gone wrong. It was the persistent and unpopular attempts of James VI and I and Charles I to impose episcopacy, and with it a modified version of the Anglican Prayer Book, which had been responsible for the decline of liturgical worship in Scotland. It was not the idea of a liturgy itself which alienated the Scots, according to Spratt, but rather the royal tactics in imposing one. The attempted imposition of "Laud's Liturgy" in 1637 aroused particular resentment. It was opposed on the grounds that, unlike Knox's order, it made no allowance at all for free prayer and had certain Romish characteristics.¹⁸ But, Spratt would have said, the semi-legendary Jennie Geddes, if she did indeed throw her stool at the dean of St Giles', did so not because she despised liturgies *per se*, but because of the content and connotations of the particular liturgy which he had presumed to use before her.

In reaction to the royalist attempt to force an alien liturgy on the Scots, some of the more extreme Presbyterians embraced Brownism. The term "Brownism", of course, refers to a certain strain of English nonconformity which originated in the late sixteenth century, but one suspects that Spratt and his colleagues were inclined to use it as a derogatory term for Puritanism in general. Spratt declared that many Scots who had gone to Ulster were "leavened with Brownism" and subsequently returned to Scotland with their 'Irish innovations'.¹⁹ 'Such,' he said, 'was the origin of a party which degraded our worship, and, in the end,

allied itself with Cromwell and his sectaries, and ruined the Covenanting Movement.²⁰

At first, the Church tried to suppress this new influence by passing acts of Assembly against the innovators.²¹ In 1643, a decision was taken to draw up a directory to safeguard the Church's principles of worship. But before action could be taken in this regard, meetings were begun at Westminster.

Sprott regarded the introduction of the Westminster Directory as an unfortunate development in Scottish worship. Not only did it reduce the form of worship to the barest outline, but it marked the disappearance of the daily service, private devotion on entering church, read prayers, the regular reading of scripture, the use of the Gloria, the taking up of the offering during the service, and the use of the Lord's Prayer.²² To be sure, the Westminster Directory itself counselled the maintenance of many of these features, but in practice — especially in reaction to the second episcopacy — more and more of them fell into disuse. The puritanical influence was pervasive, and, before long, anti-liturgical customs had become 'traditions'²³ — sacrosanct practices which were thought to have survived from time immemorial.

As far as Sprott was concerned, the two centuries between the Westminster Directory and the nineteenth-century liturgical revival saw a deviation from the principles of Reformed worship. They were two centuries which he probably wished might be forgotten; but he realised, of course, that any reform of worship in Scotland had to begin by recognising the current state of public worship in the country. The long degenerate period preceding the nineteenth-century revival could not be wiped from the slate of history, but Sprott felt a duty to lead Scotsmen back to their roots, to rediscover their best traditions and to build upon the most solid achievements of the past.

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Sprott himself called the revival of worship in Scotland 'the only conservative movement that has sprung up within the Church for a long period'.²⁴ It was a truly conservative movement in the sense that it looked to the Church's past for inspiration. But this does not mean that the work of the Church Service Society, for example, was totally academic and backward-looking. Sprott and his colleagues believed in a Church which lived *by* the past, but *for* the future.

Sprott's own contribution to the constructive work of the Society was made mainly in the production of *Euchologion* (the Society's Book of Common Order) in 1867, and in his own text-

book on worship, *The Worship and Offices of the Church of Scotland*, published in 1882. The latter volume was, in large measure, a justification of the forms of worship used in *Euchologion*.

Euchologion was produced in response to Sprott's suggestion that a new service book be prepared for use in the Church, and there is no doubt that he played a major part in producing it. William M'Millan lists him as one of the three men who were responsible for most of the work involved. The other two were Principal Tulloch and R. H. Story,²⁵ Story being then convener of the editorial committee. When, in 1905, the Society commissioned an annotated edition of the book, it was to Sprott that it turned for an introduction and notes. He had been intimately involved in the preparation of the book 40 years earlier, and he was fully aware of the source materials which had been used.

In his introduction to the 1905 edition, Sprott traced the early stages of worship reform in his century. He kept a special eye on those new forms of service — such as those of the German Reformed Church in America — which had successfully balanced the principles of set liturgy and free worship. Sprott favoured those orders of service which gave guidance and set examples but which did not impinge on the more gifted ministers' right to pray freely. Accordingly, *Euchologion* took the form of a "magazine" of materials drawn from the great liturgical and devotional literature of the whole Church.

In successive editions, a selection of service for each Sunday in the month was gradually built up, and a number of occasional services were added. The orders for the sacraments included a number of features which Sprott had sought to revive. Sprott worked hard to ensure that the orders and materials used reflected the classical liturgy and theology of the Reformed Church.

The editions of the 1890s, however, marked a significant departure from previous editions. During the preceding decade, the dominant party in the Church Service Society — high Church and conscious of the Reformed tradition — had been challenged in two areas, one theological and the other liturgical.

There had always been, among the members of the Society, a number of men who were theologically more liberal than those whose influence had been greatest. Discontented with the strict orthodoxy reflected in the liturgical work of the Society, these men banded together in 1888 to issue a "Broad Church" manifesto.²⁶

In this document, it was denied that the Church Service Society was a "high Church" institution. The manifesto found the morning and evening services in *Euchologion* too doctrinal and

the confessions of sin unreal. It suggested that the Apostles' Creed should not be used at every service and that the prayers should encourage moral responsibility and work for Christ in the world. Its signatories felt that the benefits of Christianity were connected too directly and mechanically with the Lord's Supper and Baptism — services which they termed "ordinances" rather than sacraments. Their manifesto stated that the importance of extempore prayer should be better recognised. In the light of its criticisms and suggestions, the manifesto requested a revision of the services in *Euchologion*.

As a result, the members of this party were asked to draw up new orders for the services of the fifth Sunday of the month. Their effort omitted the Creed and included more responses but introduced no radical changes.

More significant in liturgical terms was the rise of an Anglicising party in the ranks of the Society. Not only had Sprott and his friends fought long for the cause of orthodoxy, but they had also emphasised how important it was for the Church of Scotland to draw new life out of its own liturgical traditions. This meant fidelity to Reformed principles. However, there had always been, among the less well-informed enthusiasts for liturgical improvement, an inclination to copy whatever attractive forms of worship happened to be at hand, regardless of their theological or liturgical merit of appropriateness. In the 1890s, a group of Society members who were so inclined managed to gain control of the current editions of *Euchologion*.

They did their greatest damage in restructuring the Sunday worship. By copying the Anglican services of Morning and Evening Prayer, they effectively destroyed the ante-Communion structure of the Scottish orders. Previously, the three prayers in Sunday worship had consisted of: invocation, confession, prayer for pardon and peace, and supplication; thanksgiving and prayer for illumination; and the prayer after sermon, intercession, and thanksgiving for the departed. This arrangement had been defended by Sprott in *The Worship and Offices of the Church of Scotland*. In the new order, however, the Lord's Prayer was added to the first prayer, the second consisted of intercessions and thanksgivings, and the third was a prayer for illumination. Except for a collect after the sermon, all the prayers preceded it. Furthermore, the Anglicisers suggested the use of morning and evening canticles, in the Anglican manner. Kneeling was recommended at all prayers, and not just (as formerly) at confession.²⁷

Understandably, Sprott strongly opposed these innovations. He included his objections — in restrained terms — in his introduction to the eighth or special edition of 1905. However, the

conservatives were at least able to have their old eucharistic-style order printed as an alternative. In the special edition, Sprott recommended its use, describing it as conforming to the normative practice of the Church.²⁸

Despite these problems, Sprott was pleased with the effect that *Euchologion* had on worship in Scotland. As he said in his introduction to the eighth edition, the book had

. . . done much to improve the worship of the Church, to check the ignorant inventions of innovators on their own account, and to preserve sound doctrine in a time of unbelief. The [Church Service] Society has kept many in the Church who, but for it, would have gone over to Episcopacy, and at the same time, by building bridges, bevelling distinctions, and levelling up, it has made a large contribution to Christian reunion.²⁹

Clearly, Sprott felt that it was through *Euchologion* that the Society had accomplished its greatest work. While he was not quite its 'onlie begetter', he certainly had a major role in producing it and never tired of pushing it forward and making every effort to extend its influence. Just a year before his death, he was suggesting the publication of a new cheap edition.³⁰

Sprott and his friends were anxious to seize any opportunity of publicising their views. They saw a particular need to increase their influence in the theological colleges and courts of the Church.

In 1890, John Macleod declared to the Society that:

I think a very great deal of importance is to be attached to the suggestion which has been made as to the need in our Theological Colleges of greater attention being paid to the matter of worship.³¹

It was in order to accomplish this that various members of the Society were put forward as candidates for chairs in the universities.

As early as 1872, Sprott applied to fill the vacant chair of Ecclesiastical History at Edinburgh University. It was a position for which he seemed well suited. As a student at Glasgow, he had won the ecclesiastical history prize two years in succession. For years, he had devoted himself to the subject of the history and worship of the Church of Scotland. In a selection of testimonials written in his favour, some of the most distinguished public and academic men in Scotland asserted that he was better qualified than anyone else in his field.³² In the event, however, Robert Wallace, minister at Greyfriars Church and a more liberal thinker than Sprott, was awarded the chair.

Sprott's disappointment must have been keen. Years later, on

the death of his friend, Thomas Leishman, he commented that Leishman, too, had once applied for a chair in Church History. Sprott may have been thinking also of himself when he said:

The few prizes of that sort which are open to our learned clergy are not always given to those who deserve them, and who would be capable of making valuable contributions to the scanty theological literature of the Church.³³

But it was not simply a personal blow. It meant also that he was prevented from having a formative influence on candidates for the ministry. Nevertheless, he continued to devote himself to his writing. Ultimately, many of the students who never heard him lecture did, at least, read and take counsel from his books.

In their dealings with the courts of the Church, the members of the Church Service Society were particularly anxious to get the Church's legal bodies to take responsibility for leadership in the matter of worship.³⁴ As an independent organisation, the Society could be flexible and creative. But it had no power in the Church, no authority by which to guide and direct the conduct of worship in local parishes. This, its members felt, should be the job of the Church itself. It was Leishman who, in an article for Story's *The Church of Scotland, Past and Present*, stated the issue bluntly:

It [the Church Service Society] has published successive books of devotion, showing how our forms of worship may be remodelled in a spirit of loyalty to our own past, and to what is best in the past of Christendom. By the combination of its members it has preserved a uniformity of advance, without sacrificing that measure of liberty which our ministers have always claimed. It lies with the Church to determine whether the changes, which changing circumstances require, shall be left in future to the empirical fancies of individuals or to the united action of a society or whether she will take the work into her own hands.³⁵

As Sprott himself had said some years earlier, the movement for worship reform should be expanded beyond the realm of private individuals and voluntary associations. It was time for the Church to treat worship as a matter of primary importance.³⁶

It is understandable that the Church was long chary of taking on the role which the Church Service Society prescribed for it.³⁷ In late nineteenth-century Scotland, worship was a controversial subject. A general consensus of opinion on any given aspect of it would have been hard to attain. During this period, however, it was important that there should be an association such as the Church Service Society to lay the ground work, to prepare a foundation, and to help the Scottish people accustom themselves once more, if not to a liturgy, then at least to a new

directory or common order. When the national Church finally adopted a Book of Common Order of its own, it had the achievements of the Church Service Society on which to build.

Of the Society's great influence on the revival of worship in Scotland there can be no doubt. Neither can it be questioned that George Sprott played a leading role in all aspects of the work of the Society. As a fellow member said of him, Sprott

has done more true, honest, faithful work for us than any other, and the mark of [his] extensive liturgical culture is visible in our works.³⁸

A generation after he had passed from the scene, another supporter of the Society could still write, "In all this work Dr Sprott was a moving personality; and his death in 1909 meant, and has proved, a serious loss to the Society."³⁹

And in our own day, it is A. K. Robertson who has said that, during the first half century of the Church Service Society's existence, 'G. W. Sprott . . . exercised [d] greater influence than any other single individual upon . . . the form and content of the prayers used in the Divine Service.'⁴⁰

Not only the Church Service Society, but the Church of Scotland owes much to George Sprott. Interest in the improvement of worship in Scotland grew rapidly after the Greyfriars Case. Without a man of Sprott's learning and insight, much creative energy might have been misdirected. Sprott's great contribution — apart from the basic hard work involved in producing and editing service books — was his insistence on placing worship in its proper context. He realised that any helpful changes in Scottish worship had to be based, not on aesthetic taste or whim or fancy, but on a solid understanding of the principles involved. Liturgy has its roots in theology. For Sprott, this meant paying strict attention to the theological principles of his own tradition. This led him into the realm of Church history and to many aspects of worship and theology that had been forgotten. As a result of his researches, he dedicated himself to the task of helping the Church of Scotland to rediscover what he conceived to be its true identity.

Sprott looked both backward and forward. In the field of worship, his greatest discovery was that the use of a discretionary liturgy — one which had room for both free and set prayers — had a place in his Church's past and could have a place in its future. And in terms of the modern ecumenical movement (for which the liturgical movement provided much of the impetus) he discovered that the unity of the Church was a principle for which past generations of Reformed Christians had stood and for which future generations would have to strive. As the rediscovery of the

Reformed Church's Catholic heritage opened the great liturgical literature of the Church to the worship reformers, it might also help to draw the divided body of Christ's Church closer together. This was the ultimate hope which inspired Sprott's work. "If . . . the Church," he said,

. . . is permitted to follow out such lines as have been indicated by the Church Service Society . . . and the Scottish Church Society, she may yet gather into her fold the best traditions of those who have separated from her, and contribute many valuable elements to that wider reunion for which we all long and pray.⁴¹

NOTES

1. John Kerr, *The Renaissance of Worship: the origin, aims and achievements of the Church Service Society* (Edinburgh: J. Gardner Hitt, 1909), pp. 59-60.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 65.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 69.
4. D. Bruce Nicol, "The Church Service Society — A Brief Retrospect", *Church Service Society Annual*, No. 1, 1928-29, p. 18.
5. Sprott, ed., *The Book of Common Order of the Church of Scotland commonly known as Knox's Liturgy* (published with Leishman's edition of the Westminster Directory) (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1868), p. lxvii.
6. Sprott, *The Church Principles of the Reformation: a sermon preached before the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale, 1st May 1877* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1877), p. 16.
7. Norman Maclean, "Introduction", *Church Service Society Annual*, No. 1, 1928-29, p. 4. (The last words are adapted from the motto of the Scottish Church Society.)
8. A. K. Robertson, "The Place of Dr Robert Lee in the Developments in the Public Worship of the Church of Scotland, 1840-1940", *Church Service Society Annual*, No. 28, 1958, p. 32.
9. Sprott (and Leishman), ed., *Knox's Liturgy*, p. vii.
10. *Ibid.*, p. xxiii.
11. *Ibid.*, p. v.
12. Sprott, ed., *The Liturgy of Compromise used by the English Congregation at Frankfurt* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1905), p. 228.
13. Sprott, ed., *Knox's Liturgy*, p. xlii.
14. *Ibid.*, pp. lii and xxvi.
15. *Ibid.*, p. lxi.
16. *Ibid.*, p. lviii.
17. The latter volume was not part of the Church Service Society series.
18. Sprott, ed., *Scottish Liturgies of the Reign of James VI* (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1871), p. lxvii.
19. Sprott, *The Worship of the Church of Scotland during the Covenanting Movement, 1638-1661* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 1893), p. 8.
20. *Ibid.*
21. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
22. *Ibid.*, p. 31.
23. Sprott, ed., *Knox's Liturgy*, p. vi.
24. Sprott, *Church Principles*, p. 16.
25. William M'Millan, "Euchologion: The Book of Common Order", *Church Service Society Annual*, No. 9, 1936-37, p. 24.
26. See Kerr, *op. cit.*, pp. 95ff.

27. M'Millan, *op. cit.*, p. 29.
28. Sprott, ed., *Euchologion — A Book of Common Order* (Edinburgh and London: William Blackwood & Sons, 8th edition, 1905), p. xxi.
29. *Ibid.*, p. xxii.
30. Kerr, *op. cit.*, p. 175.
31. R. Stuart Loudon, "Whither Away", *Church Service Society Annual*, No. 23, 1953, p. 11.
32. "Testimonials. Rev. Geo. W. Sprott, B.A." (a collection of testimonials in favour of an application by Sprott for the position of Professor of Church History at Edinburgh University, 1872).
33. Sprott, *The Character and Work of the Late Very Reverend Thomas Leishman, D.D.* (Edinburgh: J. Gardner Hitt, 1904), p. 7.
34. R. Stuart Loudon, "The Church Service Society: 1865-1965. Centenary Reflections", *Church Service Society Annual*, No. 35, 1965, p. 9.
35. Thomas Leishman, "The Ritual of the Church of Scotland", in *The Church of Scotland, Past and Present*, ed. R. H. Story (London: William Mackenzie, 1891), V, p. 425.
36. Sprott, *Church Principles*, p. 16.
37. The General Assembly did appoint a committee, in 1889, to consider law and practice of the Church in public worship and to report on measures to be taken.
38. Kerr, *op. cit.*, p. 47.
39. Nicol, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
40. A. K. Robertson, "George Washington Sprott: 1829-1909", *Church Service Society Annual*, No. 36, 1966, p. 9.
41. Sprott, *The Worship of the Church of Scotland during the Covenanting Period*, p. 50.

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