

THE BED AND ITS COVERING

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“For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself—and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself.”

Isaiah 28:20.

GOD has so made men that there are two things essential for their comfort, if not for their very existence, namely, sleep and clothing. Had God so pleased it, He might have made man an everlasting watcher, upon whose eyes the mists of night never should descend and upon whose eyelids the fingers of sleep never should be placed. Perhaps angelic spirits never sleep. Day without night they circle God’s Throne rejoicing and ceaselessly they chant His praise. Perhaps their unflagging wings are always stretched for duty and their untiring voices are ever occupied with song. But manifestly it is not so with man. We need “kind nature’s sweet restorer, balmy sleep.” If we could not sleep, should we not even wish for death? Let sleep be long from our eyelids, if we had no other disease our strength must become prostrate and the fire of life would smolder into the ashes of death.

Sleep, therefore, is essential even to the very existence of our bodies on earth. Clothing, also, is needful for our comfort and, at least in some climates, absolutely necessary for our very existence. God has made the animal creation of such a kind that they grow their clothing upon their own backs. For the horse and for the sheep no loom works, nor does the shuttle hasten in its course. Their backs are their own webs and they fashion their own garments, as if to teach us that man alone is imperfect and needs to look beyond himself. Other creatures can readily find their own habitations and produce for themselves out of themselves. But man feels his nakedness and must either seek for the fig leaf of his own righteousness, or else the Lord God must make for him clothing with which he may array himself and stand completely covered. Dress, I say, is essential to man—dress and sleep.

Now, I think it may be readily granted that man’s body is, after all, only a picture of his inner being—what the body needs materially—the soul needs spiritually. The soul, then, needs two things. It requires rest, which is pictured to us in sleep. The soul needs a bed upon which it may repose quietly and take its ease. And, again, the soul needs covering, for as a naked body would be both uncomfortable, unseemly and dangerous—much more would the naked soul be unhappy—noxious to the eye of God and utterly miserable in itself.

Now our text tells us that men have sought for rest and for clothing where they are not to be found. That they have gone about to make a bed for themselves which is shorter than that they can stretch themselves. And that they have also sought to make coverings for themselves which have turned out to be narrower than that they can wrap themselves.

We shall speak, first, of what man has done and of his vain and futile attempts to find rest and clothing for his soul. Afterward, we shall briefly attempt to show how God has accomplished this and has given to the Believer a couch upon which he can stretch to his utmost length and yet find that the bed is long enough, and has given him a garment in which he may grow, and always find that, broad as he shall become in the magnitude of his experience or of his sin, this covering shall always be broad enough to cover him.

I. Well, then, let us take the first figure. The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself. MEN TRY, THEN, TO MAKE BEDS ON WHICH THEIR SOULS MAY REST. One of the most uncomfortable things in the world, I should think, would be a *short* bed—a bed so short that a man should not have room to stretch himself on. I cannot conceive how miserable a poor wretch must be who would be condemned to seek an uneasy rest, an uneasy ease on a couch shorter than his body. But that is just the condition of all men while they are seeking a rest anywhere else but in the “rest that remains for the people of God.” With reference to a man’s present aims and present attainments, all that he can ever get on earth is a bed shorter than that he can stretch himself.

Then, in the next place, we shall notice as to the future world, that all man can do if we come to consider it, is too little to give ease to the heart. First, then, as to the present world—how many beds are there of man's own invention? One man has made himself a bedstead of gold. The pillars are of silver, the covering is of Tyrian purple, the pillows are filled with down such as only much fine gold could buy him. The hangings he has embroidered with threads of gold and silver and the curtains are drawn upon rings of ivory. Lo, this man has ransacked creation for luxuries and invented to himself all manner of sumptuous delights. He gets unto himself broad acres and many lands. He adds house to house and field to field. He digs, he toils, he labors. He is in hopes that he shall get enough, a sufficiency, a satisfactory inheritance. He proceeds from enterprise to enterprise. He invests his money in one sphere of labor and then another. He attempts to multiply his gold until it gets beyond all reckoning. He becomes a merchant prince, a millionaire, and he says unto himself—"Soul, take your ease. Eat, drink and be merry. You have much goods laid up for many years."

Do you not envy this man his bed? Are there not some of you whose only object in life is to get such a couch for yourselves? You say, "He has feathered his nest well—would to God that I could do the same for myself!" Ah, but do you know that this bed is shorter than that he can stretch himself? If you cast yourself upon it for a moment, the bed is long enough for *you*, but it is not long enough for *him*. I have often thought that many a man's riches would be sufficient for me, but they are not sufficient for him. If he makes them his God and seeks in them his happiness, you never find the man has money enough—his lands are still too narrow and his estate too small. When he begins to stretch himself, he finds there is something wanted. If the bed could only be made a little longer—then, he thinks—he could be quiet and have room enough.

But when the bed is lengthened, he finds he has grown longer, too, and when his fortune has grown as big as the bedstead of Og, king of Bashan, even then he finds he cannot lie upon it easily. No, we read of one man who stretched himself along the whole world which he had conquered. But he found there was no room and he began to weep because there were no other worlds to conquer. One would have thought a little province would have been enough for him to rest in. Oh, no—so big is man when he stretches himself, that the whole world does not suffice him. No, if God should give to the avaricious all the mines of Peru, all the glittering diamonds of Golconda, all the wealth of worlds and if He were then to transmute the stars into gold and silver and make us emperors of an entire universe till we should talk of constellations as men talk of hundreds, yes, and talk of universes as others talk of thousands, even *then* the bed would not be long enough whereon we might stretch our ever-lengthening desires.

The soul is wider than creation, broader than space—give it all, it would be still unsatisfied and man would not find rest. You say, "That is strange—if I had a little more I should be very well satisfied." You make a mistake—if you are not content with what you have you would not be satisfied if it were doubled. "No," says one, "I should be." You do not know yourself. If you have fixed your affection on the things of this world, that affection is like a horseleech. It cries, "Give! Give!" It will suck, suck, suck to all eternity and still cry, "Give, give!" And though you give it all, it has not enough. The bed, in fact, "is shorter than that a man can stretch himself."

Let us look in another direction. Other men have said. "Well, I do not care for gold and silver—thank God I have no avarice." But they have been ambitious. "Oh," says one, "if I might be famous, what would I not do? Oh, if my name might be handed down to posterity, as having done something and having been somebody, a man of note, how satisfied would I be!" And the man has so acted that he has at last made for himself a bed of honor. He has become famous. There is scarce a newspaper which does not record his name. His name is become a household word—nations listen to his voice. Thousands of trumpets proclaim his deeds. He is a man and the world knows it and stamps him with the adjective "great." He is called "a great man." See how soft and downy is his bed. What would some of you give to rest upon it! He is fanned to sleep by the breath of fame and the incense of applause smokes in his chamber. The world waits to refresh him with renewed flattery.

Oh, would you not give your ears and eyes if you might have a bed like that to rest upon? But did you ever read the history of famous men, or hear them tell their tale in secret? "Uneasy lies the head that wears the crown," even though it is the laurel coronet of honor. When the man is known, it is not enough. He asks for wider praise. There was a time when the approbation of a couple old women was fame to him. Now the approbation of ten thousand is nothing. He talks of men as if they were but flocks of wild asses and what he looked up to once as a high pinnacle is now beneath his feet. He must go higher and higher and higher—though his head is reeling, though his brain is whirling, though his feet are slip-

ping—he must go higher. He has done a great thing. He must do more. He seems to stride across the world. He must leap further yet, for the world will never believe a man famous unless he constantly outdoes himself.

He must not only do a great thing today, but he must do a greater thing tomorrow, the next day a greater still and pile his mountains one upon another until he mounts the very Olympus of the demigods. But suppose he gets there, what does he say? “Oh, that I could go back to my cottage, that I might be all unknown, that I might have rest with my family and be quiet. Popularity is a care which I never endured until now, a trouble that I never guessed. Let me lose it all. Let me go back.” He is sick of it. For the fact is, that man never can be satisfied with anything less than the approbation of Heaven. And until conscience gets that, all the applause of senates and of listening princes would be a bed shorter than a man could stretch himself.

There is another bed on which man thinks he could rest. There is a witch, a painted harlot who wears the richest gems in her ears and a necklace of precious things about her neck. She is an old deceiver. She was old and shriveled in the days of Bunyan. She painted herself then, she paints, now and paint she will as long as the world endures. And she gads forth and men think her young and fair and lovely and desirable—her name is Madam Wanton. She keeps a house wherein she feasts men and makes them drunk with the wine of Pleasure, which is as honey to the taste, but is venom to the soul. This witch, when she can, entices men into her bed. “There,” she says, “there, how daintily have I spread it!” It is a bed, the pillars whereof are pleasure—above is the purple of rapture and beneath is the soft repose of luxurious voluptuousness—oh, what a bed is this!

Solomon once laid in it and many since his time have sought their rest there. They have said, “Away with your gold and silver—let me spend it, that I may eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow I die. Tell me not of fame, I care not for it. I would sooner have the pleasures of life, or the joys of Bacchus, than the laurel of fame. Let me give myself up to the intoxication of this world’s delights, let me be drowned in the butt of Burgundy of this world’s joys.” Have you ever seen such men as that? I have seen many and wept over them and I know some now—they are stretching themselves on that bed and trying to make themselves happy. Byron is just a picture of such men, though he outdid others. What a bed was that he stretched for himself. Was ever libertine more free in his vices? Was ever sinner more wild in his blasphemy? Was ever poet more daring in his flights of thought? Was ever man more injurious to his fellows than he? And yet what did Byron say? There is a verse which just tells you what he felt in his heart. The man had all that he wanted of sinful pleasure, but here is his confession—

*“I fly like a bird of the air,
In search of a home and a rest.
A balm for the sickness of care,
A bliss for a bosom unblest.”*

And yet he found it not. He had no rest in God. He tried pleasure till his eyes were red with it. He tried vice till his body was sick. And he descended into his grave a premature old man. If you had asked him and he had spoken honestly, he would have said the bed was shorter than he could stretch himself. No, young man, you may have all the vices and all the pleasure and mirth of this metropolis and there is much to be found of which I make no mention here and when you have it all, you will find it does not equal your expectation nor satisfy your desires. When the devil is bringing you one cup of spiced wine, you will be asking him next time to spice it higher. And he will flavor it to your fiery taste, but you will be dissatisfied still, until at last, if he were to bring you a cup hot as damnation, it would fall tasteless on your palate. You would say, “Even this is tasteless to me, except in the gall and bitter wormwood and fire that it brings.”

It is so with all worldly pleasure—there is no end to it. It is a perpetual thirst. It is like the opium eater. He eats a little and he dreams such strange wonders. And he wakes and where are they? Such dreamers, when awake, look like dead men, with just animation enough to enable them to crawl along. The next time, to get to their Elysium, they must take more opium and the next time more and more and all the while they are gradually going down an inclined plane into their graves. That is just the effect of human pleasure and all worldly sensual delights. They only end is destruction. And even while they last, they are not wide enough for our desire—they are not large enough for our expectations—“for the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself.”

Now think, for a moment, of the Christian and see the picture reversed. I will suppose the Christian at his very worst state, though there is no reason why I should do so. The Christian is not necessarily poor. He may be rich. Suppose him poor. He has not a foot of land to call his own. He lives by the day and he lives well, for his Master keeps a good cup-

board for him and furnishes him with all he requires. He has nothing in this world except the promise of God with regard to the future. The worldly man laughs at the promise and says it is good for nothing. Now look at the Christian. He says—

*“There’s nothing round this spacious globe,
Which suits my large desires,
To nobler joys than nature give,
Your servant, Lord, aspires.”*

What, poor man, are you perfectly content? “Yes,” says he, “it is my Father’s will that I should live in poverty. I am perfectly content.” “Well, but is there nothing else you wish for?” “Nothing,” says he, “I have the presence of God. I have delight in communion with Christ. I know that there is laid up for me a crown of life that fades not away and more I cannot want. I am perfectly content. My soul is at rest.”

In the Christian religion there is a rest that no one can enjoy elsewhere. Oh, I can say as in the sight of God, my soul is perfectly at rest. “I know that my Redeemer lives and that He shall stand at the latter-day upon the earth. And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God.” I know that my sins are forgiven, that I am accepted in the Beloved. I know there is nothing more that I want except what I have already, for Christ is All and more than All. What can my soul more desire? As for temporal things, I can leave them in my Father’s hands. As for spirituals I can leave them also with Him. “My soul is even as a wearied child,” resting on its mother’s breast. Nothing more I can ask. And now let me stretch myself upon this bed. Let me think of the largest desire that heart ever had and I find it not at all greater than this bed.

What do I ask for? I ask for immortality, I have it here. What do I pant for? I pant for ceaseless, boundless bliss, I have it here. I pant to be God’s child, I have it here. I pant to be rich to all intents of bliss, I have the promise here and I shall have the fruition of it hereafter. I long for perfection. Is that a stretch indeed? And that I have, “perfect in Christ Jesus.” I have the promise that “the Lord will perfect that which concerns me.” Oh, I wish you would try and stretch yourselves a moment. Come, let your spirits stretch themselves with all their might. Put out your hands till they grasp the east and west and let your head and feet lie at either pole of this round world and is there not room for you in the promise, room in the Gospel? No, reach into the far-off eternity and let your soul desire the utmost it can conceive and still the bed is long enough—“He is able to do exceeding abundantly above what you can ask or even think.” Now, try and think your best and He shall exceed it. Come and ask your most and God shall give you more.

Oh, blessed is the sleep of the Christian. He sleeps in a bed supported by the everlasting arms of the Savior. He sleeps there fanned by the breath of the Spirit and knowing that when he wakes up he shall wake up in the likeness of his Savior, in the likeness of his God. Thus, I think I have given you some idea of the meaning of this text, “The bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself.” Now, just for a moment think of this bed in the sense of another world. And here we may say of all the sinner’s hope, that it is a bed shorter than that he can stretch himself. Sinner, you that are without God and without Christ, ask yourself this question, What is your bed for eternity? What is your rest in another world? Perhaps that is a question you have never asked yourself. Ask it now. “Oh,” says one, “I am no worse than my neighbors.” Is that bed long enough for eternity? No, assuredly not. “No,” says one, “I care not how I shall fare, I shall take my fate.”

And is that long enough for eternity? You cannot draw any consolation from that when you stand at God’s bar. “No,” says another, “I won’t think about it.” And is that long enough for eternity? “Ah,” cries another, “I go to Church and Chapel and so forth and that will do.” Is that long enough for eternity? You have now to stretch yourself. Let conscience strain you, let death put you on the rack and pull you out a little and the bed is not long enough for you. You are obliged to feel that you are uneasy. No, there is not a man out of Christ that is not uneasy at times. Harden your conscience as you may, sometimes it will arouse you. Put Mr. Conscience down in a back street, so that the daylight cannot come to him, but you cannot silence him. He has a voice as loud as thunder and sometimes he will awaken you. I do not care who the infidel is, or what he says—it is mere brag, there is nothing in it.

Men who cannot fight are always very big before they come to the battle. So it is with the Infidel, the Atheist, the Socinian. They are very great men when they talk to us, but they know they have none of the greatness that they pretend to. They have none, really, for their own consciences cannot rest. I do affirm, again, that there is no man who has a solid peace, a perfect satisfaction in his own mind, but the man who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ, trusts Him entirely for

his soul's salvation and puts his hopes and his expectations only in the Lord his God. That man has a bed that is large enough—though he were himself as tall as the heavens and as broad as the earth.

II. Now for the second part of my text. MAN MUST HAVE A COVERING. And here we are told that there are some people who make a covering but it is narrower than they can wrap themselves. There is one garment, Friends, that never is too narrow, though the sinner is the biggest sinner that ever trod this earth—that is the garment of the perfect righteousness of our Lord Jesus Christ. Besides that, there is none other long enough or broad enough.

Now, there are some sinners that think they have clothed themselves when they have only made for themselves a nightcap. Don't smile—that's a fact. There are spiritual nightcaps to be bought in London. "What is that?" says one. Well it is woven in the loom of hyper-Calvinism. It is high doctrine cut off from God's Word, taken away from its connection, taken altogether away from that part of Divine Truth with which we have most to do as sinners and it is made into an antidote for all the twitching of man's conscience and into a soporific whereby souls are sent to sleep, preparatory to their being cast into the arms of Satan. Men get into their heads a doctrinal opinion. That opinion is right, true, good—I will preach that opinion against any man.

But men forget that *opinions* are not evidences of salvation if the walk and conversation are not right. They read, for instance, such a passage as this—"There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus." Well, they say, "I am in Christ Jesus. There is no condemnation for me!" They put that on their heads, they go to sleep in it and they think they are covered, because they have simply wrapped this false covering about their heads. They have a blindfold about their eyes and they cannot see their nakedness. They think there is no such thing. Oh, I am grieved to think that there are men who flatter that craving of corrupt nature after something that is not salvation by Christ.

You may as easily be destroyed by trusting in good doctrine as by trusting in good works. For remember, Beloved, that *believing* right, will no more save you, (if it is only believing right doctrine) than *doing* right will save you. It is believing in the Lord Jesus Christ and receiving His Spirit and being made like unto He which is the only salvation that will stand the test of the Day of Judgment. I used to have a man sitting in front of the gallery, (not in this Chapel,) but he used always to nod his head when I was preaching a doctrine. And I remember once I thought I would cure that old gentleman of nodding his head, for he was about as bad a rascal as ever lived. Whenever I preached about justification, down went his head. Whenever I preached about imputed righteousness, down went his head. I was a dear man, no doubt about that.

And so I thought I would cure him and make his head keep still for once. So I remarked "there is a great deal of difference between God electing you and your electing yourself, a vast deal of difference between God justifying you by His spirit and your justifying yourself by a belief that you are justified when you are not. And this is the difference"—said I to the old man, who then put me down for a rank Arminian, "You who have elected yourselves and justified yourselves, you have no marks of the Spirit. You have no evidence of piety. You are not holy. You live in sin. You can walk as sinners walk. You have the image of the devil upon you and yet you think you are the children of God." And, now, I say to any here present who are indulging in the same abominable hypocrisy, this is a spiritual delusion whereby many believe a lie. And the time will come when some of us will have to speak as sharply against men who preach doctrine without practice, as we have to preach against those who preach not the doctrine of free, sovereign, distinguishing Grace. High doctrine will never cover you. It will only cover your head. It is a logical covering, made of the right sort of stuff. But it is only a headpiece and that is not a complete covering for the naked man.

Now, again—there are some other people who are not content with that. They do not care particularly about this covering for the head—they think they will get a pair of slippers and thus cover their nakedness. "What do you mean by that?" says one. Well, good works. "Ah," they say, "those doctrinal people, they look to the head. I don't care about the head, I shall look to the feet." And so they look to the feet and they make themselves very decent sort of people, too. They keep the Sabbath, they frequent the House of God, they read the Bible, they say a form of prayer and they try to be honest, sober and so forth. Very right.

I do not say a word against slippers, only that they are not a good covering for the whole man. I do not say a word against good slippers—good works are very well—but they are not sufficient. Good works are like a pair of shoes, but do not let a man think a pair of shoes can become wide enough to cover his whole body. Such men are deluded. They think if their outward walks and conversation is good and right and proper, that their whole nakedness is covered. Oh,

never delude yourselves into such an idea as that. Though you walk in the commandments of the Lord, blameless in the eyes of all men, yet so long as sin is in your heart and the past sin of your life is unforgiven, you stand helpless, unclothed souls, in the estimation of God—and your garment is too narrow that you may wrap yourself.

I have seen some poor souls trying to wrap themselves up in good works and they were not long enough. “Oh,” says one, “come here and I will tie on a bit for you.” And so he brings out a yard of good old stuff that is called “Baptism,” and he tags on that. “Stop,” he says, by-and-by, “I will bring out something else made by a Bishop, called “Confirmation,” and another yard is put on. “Wait awhile,” says the man, “you shall have a yard of something else.” And then there is a yard of what is called “Communion,” or “Sacrament,” put on. “Now, hold hard. You know the Catechism and say it often. You know the prayers proper to be used at sea, on land, and the prayers for weddings, Baptisms and Churching. And now,” say they, “by degrees the garment will be made long enough to go round you.” I have seen the poor souls tug and pull it, to make both ends meet, but they could not.

I could tell you the experience of a member of this Church. She says, “I attended a place of worship regularly and tried to work out a righteousness for myself. I could not do it, At last I took to attending daily service in the Puseyite Church. I became the most righteous over-much that you could suppose a person to be. I was never satisfied. I tried sacraments, fasting, private prayer—never good enough. I never could get up to the mark. I never felt that the garment was broad enough in which I could wrap myself.” No and you never will. All the good works in the world and all the ceremonies and all the praises of men and all the almsgiving cannot make a covering broad enough in which to wrap yourself.

Shall I tell you what is sufficient? It is the garment that is “without seam, woven from the top throughout.” A garment woven by the bleeding hands of Jesus and then dyed in His own blood. If by faith you can put this garment on, it is broad enough to cover you. Though you were wide as giant Goliath and though your head reached to the very clouds, it should be long enough for all your needs. So you see that these coverings which men have sought for are not sufficient.

Now, there are some people who are not very particular about the head, or the feet, but they come nearer the mark—they have been more particular about the loins. They gird themselves with a little garment. Their religion is to think they like to sit at home and think over the Scripture, to think over certain doctrinal particulars and meditate upon them. They think, for instance, one Church is not right and they leave that and join another. But they find that is not right. They tithe the mint there, but they do not tithe the cummin. And they go to another, where they tithe the cummin, but where they do not fast six days in the week. The religion of such a person as this is the religion of picking holes in other people’s religion. Do you say, “Are there any people of that sort?” Yes, I know several of them. They are very good souls, if you estimate them by their own opinion, but if you estimate them by the Law and by the statutes of God, you will find them different. They think that all they need to do is simply to *feel* that they are conscientious in what they are doing. It is very proper and right that they should be conscientious. I am not going to speak against the garments round the loins, they are very good. I only speak against a man thinking that is *enough*.

I do not speak against their nightcaps or slippers, or against the garment round the loins—they are all good in their places. I only speak of putting these instead of the *complete* raiment of Christ. You may be baptized and re-baptized. You may go from one sect to another and secede and secede and you will be none the better unless you are clothed in the matchless, spotless, seamless righteousness of the Lord. Now, let us bring forth that robe and let us stand in that. What Jesus did and what Jesus suffered, is the inheritance of the Believer. Now, let the Believer be ever so full of sin, what Jesus suffered covers all his sin. Let him be ever so full of want, the fullness of Jesus supplies it all. Let him be ever so loathsome in his own sight, the beauty of Christ makes him comely. Let him be cast down in his own experience, the exaltation of Christ makes him to sit together with Him in heavenly places.

There are times when the convicted sinner grows great in sin. He feels as if he were bloated with iniquity. But even then the garment of Christ is wide enough to wrap him about. Sometimes he grows so tall in his sin he feels as if he were proud as Lucifer. He casts the hood of the Savior’s righteousness over his head and it covers him even then. His feet sometimes seem to tread the very bottom of the ocean, but the long robe of the Savior’s righteousness sweeps the bottom of the sea when the feet of the Believer are standing there. All is longer, all is higher, all is broader than all the height, depth and length and breadth of our backslidings, our iniquities and sins.

What a glorious thing, then, it is to be a Christian—to have faith in Christ, to have the Isaac born in our hearts—the new nature put there. Come, my Soul, take your rest, the great High Priest has made full atonement. You have much

goods laid up, not for many years, but for *eternity*—take your ease—eat spiritual things—drink wine on the lees and be merry. For it cannot be said of you, “tomorrow you shall die.” You shall never die. “Your life is hid with Christ in God.” You are no fool to take your ease and rest—for this is legitimate ease and rest—the rest which the God of Sabbath has provided for all his people.

And then, O Christian, march boldly to the river of death, march calmly up to the throne of judgment—enter placidly and joyfully into the inheritance of your Lord—for you have about you an armor that can keep you from the arrows of death, a wedding garment that makes you fit to sit down at the banquet of the Lord. You have about you a royal robe that makes you a fit companion even for Jesus, the King of kings, when He shall admit you into His secret chambers and permit you to hold holy and close fellowship with Him. I cannot resist quoting that verse of the hymn—

*“With your Savior’s garment on,
You are holy as the Holy One.”*

That is the sum and substance of it all. And on this bed let us take our rest and during this week let us make Christ’s work our only garment and we shall find it long enough and broad enough for us to wrap ourselves up in it.

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