

BRIEF ADMONITION TO THE CHURCH OF
CHRIST, CONTAINING COUNSEL, EN-
COURAGEMENT AND WARNING
AGAINST DANGERS

In view of my advanced age I desire to present a few thoughts for the edification and encouragement of all believers, those organized into Church Fellowship, and those scattered here and there, and especially the aged and infirm who are nearing the boundary that separates time and eternity.

OUR HIGH CALLING AS CHILDREN OF GOD

First, I address my fellow-believers, without regard to age or condition, with this salutation :

May the peace of God be with you through Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. Beloved brethren and sisters, we occupy high ground. God's people will ever be as "a city set on a hill," "the light of the world and salt of the earth," and the true and faithful witnesses. They are

the purchase of Christ, and the fruit of his love. They are symbolized by the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth. The Apostles' testimony is confirmatory of our high calling and responsible position: "Ye are not your own, for ye are bought with a price." The price is the blood of the only begotten Son of God, who loved the church and gave himself for it. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we were healed" (Isaiah 53: 5). No human mind can fathom the depth of redeeming love. The Apostle John emphasizes the love of the Father in the following language: "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God."

OUR OBLIGATIONS IN CONSEQUENCE OF OUR HIGH CALLING

"He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (Jno. 2: 6). "If ye love me keep my commandments." "He that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he [God]

is pure." Faith that works by love, and gives the promise of eternal life, is the true ground of all self-denial and obedience. This fact emphasizes the importance of having a true knowledge of ourselves, and of the way of salvation by faith in Christ. The language of the Saviour confirms this doctrine: "This is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou hast sent." A knowledge of God as revealed through the law given from Mount Sinai is essential to a knowledge of our unsaved state, and to a consequent knowledge of ourselves as to our sinfulness and helplessness, without the benefit, by faith, of Christ's redemption. We cannot fully enough realize that Christ is a complete Saviour, and is made unto us of God, wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption. To such He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end. His promise is: "I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world."

DUTIES DEVOLVING UPON US, AND THE DANGER OF NEGLECTING THEM

The church is a body and not a sect, therefore it cannot be divided. Unity is a

fundamental principle of the Christian religion. Believers are called to peace. Agreement in all things where a Gospel principle is involved, is necessary to spiritual peace. The way of salvation in Christ Jesus is very plain, and as self denial is an effect of salvation, the duty of self denial is also plain. Self denial includes the mortifying of our evil desires, reaching to the thoughts of the heart and the actions of the body. As long as we are willing to deny ourselves for one another's edification the peace and unity of the church will be perpetuated, but if we give license to our natural reason, it becomes complex and difficult, and gives occasion for the springing of questions that lead to debating and unrest. Liberty under the Gospel may easily be mistaken for license to violate the law of love. Love unites while self divides. There are customs in the church now, and no doubt always have been, that have no direct Gospel authority, among which is uniform plain dress; but when they are helpful in way of self denial and promotive of unity, they are an outgrowth of the Christian religion, Christ not now on earth in person, but in spirit. He is with His

church in spirit and preserves it from adoption of customs that are in conformity to the vain pursuits of the world. Christ's doctrine is one of self denial, the practice of which is beneficial to the soul when promoted by love to Jesus and to His church.

“Let us therefore follow after the things that make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.” Rom. 14:19. We are under obligation to our brethren not to cause them to stumble nor to cause weakness. Love and submission are characteristics of the Christian life and when these are possessed there will be no contention, though there be differences of impression in matters when no Gospel principle is involved. Many things may be lawful, but not expedient because they do not tend to edification. As no one lives to himself (as a Christian), we are therefore placed under the most solemn obligation to edify one another in conversation, faith, and conduct. The love of Jesus is essential to unity. The church at Ephesus had lost this indispensable grace and was threatened with the removal of the candlestick out of its place. We may have com-

mendable practices, but if we have not love in our hearts, we have only the form of godliness, without the power; and are like the foolish virgins who had the vessels but no oil. The duty of loving one another is plainly indicated in the command: "Owe no man anything, but to love one another" (Rom. 13: 8.) This scripture teaches love to all men. If we walk in love toward the world, they cannot bring a charge against us; but when we do not walk in love, they can justly accuse us, as we make ourselves their debtor and from this obligation it is our duty to absolve ourselves without delay, by confessing our fault, and by making such reparation as the case may merit. When we do not walk in love toward our brethren, we also make a debt which it is our duty to pay. Every unchristian act committed against anyone is a debt. Such debts we are admonished to avoid. But the debt of love is a perpetual obligation as it is renewed every day. We do not wish to be absolved from this debt. The discharge of it elevates our affections to things above. The manifestation of love is described in Matthew 18: 15-18, Galatians 6: 1-2, James 1: 27 and 2: 15-16. Mem-

bers should be kind to the poor, willing to give as the Lord has prospered them.

SEPARATION FROM THE WORLD

We will consider our position in the world, and our relation to it. For a basis: the testimony of Jesus as recorded in John 15:19 is evidence. "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own; but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, the world hateth you." Here is taught the doctrine of separation. It is as old as the world, and is taught and prefigured throughout the Bible. In the beginning, God by virtue of the power of his word, brought natural order out of chaos saying, "Let there be light; and there was light." He divided the light from the darkness, and the waters from the waters, by the firmament, the day from the night and the dry land from the sea. God separated his people from those who were not his people. Cain and Abel could not have fellowship together. Noah and his family were separated from the unbelieving antediluvians. Abraham was separated from his paternal home, and its idolatry. Moses was separated from the

King's Court, and fled into the land of Midian. Through him the Hebrews were separated from the idolatrous Egyptians. Israel was separated from the heathen nations. The Levites were called to come over on the Lord's side, when all the Israelites had gone over to idolatry in the worship of the golden calf. Daniel and all the faithful Jews, who were captives, in Babylon, separated from and protested against the idolatry of that time and country. The prophets from Samuel to Malachi separated from and protested against the idolatry of their times. The principle of separation was typified to Israel by the seed they sowed and the garments they wore. "Thou shalt not sow thy field with mingled seed: neither shall a garment mingled of woolen and linen come upon thee" (Leviticus 19:19). This injunction is figurative. Its underlying principle is spiritual, impressing our minds that we cannot serve God and the world at the same time. We cannot consistently justify in our neighbor what we condemn in ourselves; neither can we justify ourselves in doing what we condemn in others. We cannot justify ourselves when our actions are at variance

with New Testament teaching. "Come out from among them and be ye separate." Separation as taught by Christ and the Apostles is not retirement from bodily or mental labor; it is not entrance into a monastery or a convent, but it is separation from the evil practiced in the world and from the spirit of the world. It is not a Pharisaical separation from the company of open sinners in the world through a self-righteous spirit. The separation to which we are called is the separation of the heart from sin. It has its beginning within, and manifests itself in our lives. It consists in the regeneration by the Holy Spirit, and the consequent love of God shed abroad in the heart. This love is the most powerful incentive to separation from sin of which we can have any conception.

Here is where we find our ground and basis for separation; and we cannot be too much impressed with the importance of keeping the fire of love enkindled and burning upon the altar of our hearts. This we can only do by diligent attention to prayer, reading, exercising faith and yielding faithful obedience to our enlightened conscience in humble submission to the work

of grace in the heart. The spiritual separation was prefigured, typified, symbolized and foreshadowed from the beginning of the world by the natural and figurative separation to which allusion has briefly been made. The ground of the spiritual separation and separation from all forms of worship not in accord with the New Testament teaching is the same that impels and empowers us to separate from all private or open sins in our lives. The prompting is love, and we cannot consistently encourage any one in living a life in which we would feel condemned. If we do not keep our hearts pure, it is inconsistent for us to separate from others who are no more guilty of sin than we. "For wherein thou judgest another thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things."

DANGER OF TOO MUCH READING OF POPULAR LITERATURE

I invite attention to some habits that are attended with danger, to the believer, such as much reading of popular literature as found in books, journals, magazines and newspapers; such a habit tends to weaken the desire for reading the Bible, and such

books as are in agreement with Bible teaching. Much that is published is fiction. The advocates of this kind of literature claim that it is instructive; that it stores the mind with useful knowledge; although there is an absence of reality, yet the narrative is drawn true to life, and what is portrayed is continually occurring and, therefore, serves to the enlightenment and instruction of the inexperienced as to the dangers that lie in life's pathway, etc. *The danger to the believers mainly lies in this: such literature is well written, is attractive, and weakens the desire for reading the Bible and other spiritually instructive books.* I advise not only against the reading of fiction, but against the too general reading of popular literature as weakening the desire for Bible reading. Much newspaper reading is not helpful to the believers; the matter read will more or less occupy the mind and thus divert it from spiritual exercises. I encourage reading, and advise our younger members to cultivate a taste for reading, and make the Bible and other good books life companions. We should endeavor to cultivate such love for reading and writing, that will fit us to entertain

ourselves and others. It may be to our advantage to obtain a certain amount of information pertaining to civil enactments, the laws under which we live, of science, and events, by reading, but care should be taken that the reading of the Bible is not neglected.

There is a kind of literature that aims to elevate the standard of life, by developing perfect character, through man's inherent power without dependence upon the grace of God. Such literature is dangerous for some minds, since the arguments and sentiments seem to be logical and forceful, and appeal strongly to certain mental organisms. The danger is that through such appeals the plan of salvation may be undermined and a belief in personal righteousness based upon conformity to the laws of nature, and the moral life unduly fostered. The Scriptures highly recommend the proving of all things by the standard of spiritual truth. To be capable of doing so, we must have the word of God dwelling in us; hence the counsel of the Apostle: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." "The entrance of thy words giveth light" (Ps. 119:130).

CONFORMITY TO THE WORLD TO BE GUARDED AGAINST

The Scriptures warn against evil, of conforming to the world. What is conformity to the world? It is imbibing the spirit of the world, and manifesting the fruit of it in our lives. "In the world is the lust of the eye, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life." The origin of these is within us. "From the heart proceed evil thoughts." To overcome the evil in the world we must overcome the evil in ourselves. We find the world within us to overcome. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life." A very subtle and dangerous kind of conformity may work within us, in our feelings and aspirations, which may not be plainly manifest in our actions. That we may shine as lights in the world, *moderation must characterize us in all we do and say, in manners, dress, building and furnishing of houses, and in eating and drinking.* By "moderation" we mean the moderate use of lawful things. Simplicity, plainness and moderation adorn the Christian character. There is much danger of conforming to the world in business methods. It is not edifying to enter

into partnership with the world unless we have control of the business. It is an unequal yoking together that should be avoided, except in cases where it is plainly understood that the business will be conducted according to what is just and right and according to gospel teaching. There is much complaint by the employees against the employers. We, as employers, should be duly impressed with our responsibility, and be careful to give the laborer what is due him, and as employees, we should not be unmindful of our duty toward the employer. We should keep free from the spirit of the world in this matter. In building and furnishing houses, we should not go beyond what is common among the plain class of people, who reside in our community. While customs and usages change, in Christianity there are fundamental principles that do not change with time, but remain the same, yesterday, today, and forever. The fact that some of us have means to use liberally in building expensive houses, and in furnishing them does not justify extravagance or luxury since there is always opportunity of doing good with our worldly means; and further-

more, such practices do not evince a disposition toward self restraint, nor do they comport with the spirit of the Gospel.

The parable of the unjust steward forcibly impresses us with the obligation to make ourselves friends of the unrighteous mammon. The principle designed to be impressed upon believers, by the parable, is that their gifts and means are not their own, and that they are under the most solemn obligation to glorify God in the use they make of all gifts conferred upon them by their Creator, whether worldly means, ability to teach, to sing, to entertain by conversation, or in the application of time and all opportunities. We dare not get away from what is fundamental in the Christian religion, viz., to love God above everything else. Under the Mosaic law the animals offered in sacrifice were required to be perfect, not diseased, lame nor deformed, typifying that our offering or service must be a perfect will, not half-hearted, with divided affections. Undue attention to business cares may hinder us from bringing a perfect offering before the Lord. The language of Scripture is, "Let your moderation be known unto all men." To

keep in agreement with this precept we should not avail ourselves of worldly inventions and products as long as they are not in common use; except when no offense is caused. We must also avoid being too much influenced by extreme advanced theories about health regulations. In every generation there are extreme views advocated as to eating, drinking, and for the regulation of the body generally.

A knowledge of hygiene and sanitation is very good and the laws of health are being better understood; but within my recollection many theories have been vigorously advocated for the regulation of man's physical and temporal well-being—for the promotion of health and long life; but many that were advanced a quarter or perhaps half a century ago, have been abandoned for something new. It is not edifying for believers to fall in with these new theories until they are fully tested and approved, but it is well for us to consider, and follow what is good and helpful. In this time of liberty of conscience and opportunity to go here and there, without hindrance, there is much danger of becoming worldly minded, of looking upon the

things that are seen, to think about them and talk about them. Those who have the duties and responsibilities of life resting on them are inclined to talk about their interests; those younger, are naturally inclined to talk about the happenings among those of their own age, and about the day's doings; and if not guarded, will indulge in gossip. I desire, in a true fatherly spirit, to admonish the young to cultivate and cherish a meek and quiet disposition and to edify one another by such conversation and conduct as is promotive of purity of heart and loveliness of character, so that in years to come they need not suffer from pangs of conscience for wrong doing. There is a time for everything; so there is also a time to speak of and consult about our natural affairs, but they should not claim our chief attention. The word of God is a very safe rule to be governed by. "Let your conversation be as becometh saints." Growth in grace is a duty, but it will not be attained without effort. It will not avail us to excuse our coldness and manifold failings on the ground of our natural disposition. It is our duty to strive to overcome an unfortunate disposition. An

effectual means of improvement is to watch and pray and not neglect the reading of the New Testament. During the middle and dark ages the ecclesiastics or clergy forbade the common people to read the Bible; claiming the priests alone were capable of reading and explaining it. If anyone disobeyed he was punished. Now we have the liberty of conscience. No one forbids us to read the Bible. Let us be careful that we are not prevented from reading it by worldly literature and by engaging in light, worldly conversation. We are very responsible as to the impression we make upon the world by our conversation and conduct while in association with them. It is in vain to ask them to accept the faith in Christ when they are impressed that we do not live it. It has been charged that the world has gone pleasure mad. In these days of opportunities for travel there is danger, we may partake too much of the spirit of the world. How careful we should be when we visit, that our motive is not too much natural enjoyment. Believers should be guarded in speaking injuriously of anyone. The Apostle's Counsel is speak evil of no man. To speak of another person

when no one is benefited is always wrong. In speaking of anyone we should be careful that we speak the truth. If it is from report, it may be one-sided, and is unjust. The language of the Psalmist is pertinent to such a case: "Who shall abide in thy tabernacle? Who shall dwell in thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbor nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbor" (Ps. 15:1-3). We owe a duty to those of our friends not of the faith. In Acts 17:26 we read: "And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." From this Scripture we learn of our common origin and of our relationship. We owe the duty of service to our neighbor in time of need, since we are bound to him by the ties of a common humanity. According to these ties we owe sympathy and service, and necessarily get into association with him; notably so with our kindred. A responsibility devolves upon us to reflect a good light. We can be sociable and courteous, but should not be lightminded. In our dealings our yea should be yea and our nay

should be nay. Should we be imposed upon and wronged, let us be very careful to avoid unbecoming reflections, and strive to bear the injury patiently. The Saviour testified that "Wisdom is justified of all her children." We profess to be children of wisdom, therefore, we should manifest the fruits of wisdom. "The wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruit, without partiality, and without hypocrisy" (James 3:17). In closing the subject of dangers to be guarded against, and of duties to be performed, I would warn against lightmindedness in word and conduct. Our conversation and conduct probably appeal more forcibly to the conscience of our fellow men than does our preaching. If we indulge in foolish talk, are too penurious in our dealings, or are guilty of other failings, it is in vain that we labor for the conversion of our friends. I earnestly advise against repeating reflections upon the conduct of others, under the excuse that such conduct is known to the public whether they are believers or not. In case of believers, it does not promote unity and love and does

not edify those who encourage such practice. As affecting others they may be offended and a serious wrong may be done. To report the failings of others without just cause is not according to love.

TO THE AGED, THE SICK, THE INFIRM, AND
THOSE WHO ARE BEREAVED AND FEEL
DISCOURAGED

We who are aged realize that we are nearing the boundary that separates time and eternity, and that we will soon be summoned to pass from temporal scenes to those which are eternal. We reasonably think seriously of the great change. It is fitting that we should do so. Eternity! how fraught with meaning! We should not, however, be in doubt as to the end of our labor here. "To die is gain." We have during many years enjoyed spiritual comfort, attained by faith in Him who by the grace of God tasted death for every man, which comforting truth is confirmed by his own testimony: "God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We embraced the offer of salvation, and were

by faith adopted into the kingdom of God's dear Son. By virtue of adoption we became heirs of God and joint heirs with his dear Son. This relation is one that our manifold failings and weaknesses will not change. It has the seal of God upon it. Many of us have been most seriously, if not painfully, exercised about our salvation; and even now have fear and trembling at our advanced age, notwithstanding the advantage of many years of experience. This anxiety arises from a deep sense of our fallen and corrupt nature, and of its deceitfulness, intensified as we view ourselves in God's holy law, which requires a perfect righteousness. It is no wonder we are anxious as we look into the mirror that reflects holiness. We ask in the language of David, "Lord, who shall abide in thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in thy holy hill?" The Apostle recognized that such exercises would exist among the Lord's people, therefore he wrote, "Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth." During the time that all mankind were under a covenant of works, no one was justified. All were under condemnation, but through the fulfillment of the

law by Christ, a way was opened for the justification of every one that believes in him, for, "He is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." Thus God justifies every believer, and yet remains just, pure and holy. How grand and glorious is God's plan! Legally no man stands justified before either a Divine or human law while he transgresses it; but now through Christ we are justified before God, since he accepts Christ's service in paying the debt for us. We are now justified from all that from which the law of Moses could not justify us. We are now under grace in a saved state. "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ," who was the fulfillment of all the promises, the substance of all the types, figures and shadows, and the center of all the doctrines. In Him, "Mercy and truth met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other" (Ps. 85: 10). God is pure and holy, therefore, to attain salvation, these attributes of the Almighty demanded recognition. Of the race of Adam there was no one capable of honoring truth and righteousness by perfect obedience. Hence the need of Him

who was pure and holy, who in our form and in our stead rendered the great service of reconciling God's attributes of righteousness and mercy. Thus mercy and truth are met together and peace and righteousness have kissed each other. Therefore, the Apostle could write, "It is God that justifieth. Who shall lay anything to the charge of God's elect?" Although we know we are reconciled to the Father through the blood of the everlasting covenant, yet we at times are disquieted by the anxious question, whether we are the elect. We are the elect, if we have accepted the election through Christ. The spirit of Christ is the spirit of election. If we accept that spirit, we accept Christ, and if we accept him, he will by his spirit dwell in us, and confer power to overcome the evil. This is the election. For the further encouragement and comfort of the believers the Apostle wrote, "Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us" (Rom. 8: 33-34). This scripture embraces the work of redemption and also presents the ground of our surety and salvation.

Christ was delivered for our offenses, and was raised again for our justification. He clothes us with the garment of salvation and covers us with the robe of his righteousness. His resurrection assures us of that resurrection which will clothe us with incorruptible and immortal bodies, adapted to heaven. Christ at the right hand of the Father as intercessor maintains our saved relation. As he said, "Neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand." The consideration of this wonderful provision for our salvation should lead us to ask, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" This great salvation, made possible for us, should be the most powerful incentive to urge us to obedience in all things: which involves submission to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, and obedience to all of God's commandments. The obedience is a fruit of a saved state, and a saved state cannot exist without this fruit. Those who are discouraged and weak in faith should take courage from the above cited scriptures. You may be discouraged and weak in faith, and suffer gloom and despondency from different causes. One cause may be ill health; another may be

peculiarity of temperament, involving a tendency to gloomy feelings with imaginary troubles, but the most probable and most general cause is a conviction of unfaithfulness in duty. Connected with the last named cause is often a troublesome nature difficult to control. My sympathies go out for this class of believers. During an experience of almost fifty years in the ministry, my deepest sympathy has gone out for believers who suffer much from bodily indisposition, for those who suffer mental depression, and for those who have failed to overcome their hard, obstinate and perverse natures. I have much knowledge of the discouragement of such and of their pleadings for mercy at the throne of grace.

To the discouraged believers I will say, strive valiantly against your natural disposition. Do not be satisfied with yourselves by being at ease, do not yield to despair. Think of the fulness and freeness of the grace of Christ, remembering that a bruised reed he will not break, and smoking flax he will not quench; and that he is able to save unto the uttermost all who trust in Him.

A word to the widow and to bereaved families. In past time Death has cast his

dark shadow over many hearts and homes ; so he will in time to come. Truly, the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now, and not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body. As it pertains to bodily suffering and natural misfortune, all stand alike. It devolves upon us to so exercise our faith and mind that we may be able to say "Thy will be done" in the firm belief that the Lord Omnipotent reigneth, and, therefore, all things shall work together for good, including sickness, suffering, loss and death.

Finally, I turn to the aged, with their manifold infirmities, to which class I belong. As we are in the evening of life, it is especially fitting that we trust in the One, only true living God ; in Him who has been the dwelling place of his people in all generations, and who is from everlasting to everlasting. May we have grace to make all our requests known to the Lord ; casting all our cares upon Him, knowing that he careth for us. A grave responsibility rests upon the aged, that of being a good exam-

ple by being patient under affliction, and striving to overcome the weakness incident to old age; and to encourage appreciation of the services of those who minister to our wants, and thus make a good impression upon all with whom we associate. There is a moderation in conduct, a sobriety of mind, a gentleness of spirit, and a sweetness of expression, that should especially be cherished and cultivated by the aged. They should give evidence by word and conduct that they have a hope of endless joy and peace in the world to come, of which they have here a foretaste.

In Isaiah 26: 3 is found the following beautiful and soul-cheering message: "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on thee, because he trusteth in thee." The petition of King David is so fitting to us, seeing that our earthly house is decaying, "Lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for thou has been a shelter for me." Ours is the period of life for retrospection. While calmly and hopefully awaiting our appointed time, we turn to the past, we review the days of our years with more sorrow than joy, because of our many failings. How often we

think of neglected duties, of misspent time and of dark shadows that came over our pathway. How many of the companions of our youthful years, as well as those of our more mature years, are no more! We realize that there is but a remnant of time left us; and soon the summons will come, and we shall be required to pass through death. O solemn thought, to bid adieu to loved ones to pass beyond the scenes of earth, to reap eternally what we have sown. May we be able to say, "In the shadow of Thy wings will I make my refuge." May his everlasting arm of love encircle us; and when our day is ended, may we have a pleasing sunset.

As a church, may God in mercy care for us. May He ever provide a faithful ministry, who will give meat in due season, and be true watchmen over the flock. May the God of love keep us in his holy keeping, and grant us an inheritance among all them that are sanctified.

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