

ONWARD BOUND: REVEREND TIYO SOGA'S POSSIBLE PEREGRINATIONS

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The Reverend Tiyo Soga of the amaGwali people is an important figure in the cultural and intellectual history of South Africa. The task of piecing together the puzzle of the life of this nineteenth century Xhosa intellectual and the relevance of his extraordinary legacy to his time, to contemporary and to future South African culture, continues. Last year for the first time I had a copy of his marriage certificate in my hand, the only official record of the date Soga used for the year of his birth: 1831. This puts Soga at fourteen or fifteen years old on his first voyage to Scotland in 1846, a younger lad than had he been born in 1829 as previously thought, and the same age, not older than his school peers at his two schools in Scotland. English was, of course, Soga's second language.

Soga's university records, recently located, show that he completed his full undergraduate degree, and that he was the first black South African to receive a full university degree.¹ These records put paid to any question of Soga's outstanding intellect as the reason for his being brought to Scotland for his education. Soga's wholehearted involvement in, and works written on, the translation of the Bible into Xhosa² and the ensuing argument in the press, and in correspondence with the British and Foreign Bible Society and the missionaries of the missionary societies working with Xhosa-speaking people, demonstrate Soga's pride in Xhosa culture and his religious conviction and theology.³ They also highlight his philosophies on race, colonialism and many other aspects of being a modern subject. Once the pall of Anglo-

¹Soga registered for his three year academic degree at the University of Strathclyde, then called the Andersonian Institute, in September 1851 and completed three years between 1851-1852, 1852-1853 and 1853-1854. He passed his courses but he did not graduate. See University of Strathclyde Archives and Special Collections, Glasgow Free Church Training College records, 1845-1998, GB 249 FCTC: Register of Students, 1845-1881, FCTC/2/1. Joanne Davis, *Tiyo Soga: A Literary History* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, forthcoming (a)).

²[Tiyo Soga and others], *The Kafir Bible: Rev. J. W. Appleyard's Version Judged by Missionaries of Various Denominations and Others* (Lovedale: Lovedale Mission Press, 1866).

philia and his truncated education is cast off, Soga's stature grows; he appears as highly educated, a global voice with a particular flair for linguistics and languages, an inter-cultural conduit. The imperative of researching his life becomes even stronger.

Indeed, many aspects of Soga's life remain opaque because of a lack of archival or documentary evidence with which to trace his whereabouts and his perspectives. I continue especially to search for information about his second visit to Scotland between August 1851, when Soga arrived in Glasgow with the specific intention of becoming an ordained missionary, and April 1857 when he left Glasgow to take up this role.⁴ I am particularly keen to see anything for his "missing years," the period between June 1854 when he completed his undergraduate degree, and 23 December 1856, when he was ordained as a minister for the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland (UPC). These two and a half years would provide valuable insight into the formation, development and consolidation of Soga's racial philosophies and his theology which are so visible in his written works throughout the rest of his life, when he touches on slavery, Liberia, racism, and his unwavering belief in Christianity as a means of salvation. What were his beliefs, and who were his influences?

³For discussion of Soga's involvement in this translation, see Davis, *Tiyo Soga*; Joanne R. Davis, "The Audacity of Veracity: Reverend Tiyo Soga's Role and Part in the Translation of the Bible into Xhosa," seminar paper presented for the Christian Mission in Global History group, SOAS, May 2013 [online resource] *Institute of Historical Research* <http://www.history.ac.uk/podcasts/christian-missions-global-history/audacity-veracity-rev-tiyo-sogas-role-and-part>; and Joanne R. Davis, "Tiyo Soga: Man of Four Names," Thesis (PhD)—University of South Africa, 2012.

⁴The Minutes of the John Street United Presbyterian Church Kirk Street Session for 21 October 1851 read: "Appeared Tiyo Soga, along with the Rev Mr. Niven, Mr Niven gave a detail of Mr Soga's conduct and diligence in his work as a teacher during his late mission to Caffraria in that character. He spoke of him in very high terms of commendation. He then gave an account of the reasons which moved him to bring Tiyo home with him to Scotland in fleeing from the desolations of the Caffrarian War. The Session unanimously agreed that when the Sabbath classes undertook the expenses of Mr Soga's clothing, Board, etc, they should undertake to bear the expenses of his being educated at College, the Divinity Hall, and to have him prepared for being sent out again to Caffraria as an ordained Missionary; and expressed themselves as being happy in having the opportunity of aiding in the education of one who promised so fairly to be eminent in the missionary field." CH3/806/1, Glasgow City Archives, Mitchell Library, Glasgow.

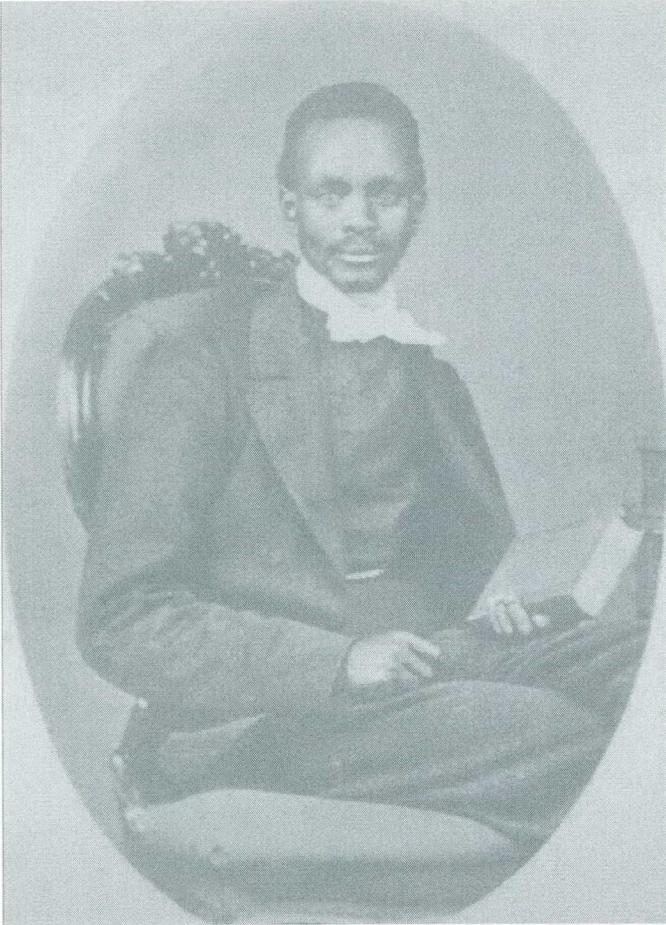


Figure 2-1. Portrait of the Reverend Tiyo Soga
Source: Reproduced with permission of SOAS Library

The most important record of this period would be a journal kept by Soga. His main biographer, the Reverend John Aitken Chalmers, was not Soga's age-mate and had to request information from other friends of Soga's at this time for his own works on Soga.⁵ Chalmers mentions that Soga kept journals and notebooks for this period and even ostensibly quotes from them.⁶

The Reverend H. T. Cousins, who published a biography of Soga with two different titles,⁷ claims to have had access to those manuscripts in the preparation of his manuscript. I remain hopeful that they may yet come to light.⁸ Several documents stored by Soga's son the Reverend John Henderson Soga in his roof in Southampton, England, are thought to have been destroyed by a bomb which killed himself, his wife and son during the Second World War. J. H. Soga had lodged another of Soga's handwritten journals, his handwritten Letterbook and his Bible at the University College of Fort Hare.⁹ Though a tally of the documents destroyed in Southampton was never made, some heirlooms survived and are in the possession of Soga's descendants.¹⁰

We still do not know where Soga lived in Scotland, how he was received by and integrated into Scottish society, his favourite pastimes, his favoured friends, acquaintances; with whom he spent Christmases. Chalmers notes that Soga worked as a Sunday School teacher in "the city" and became a member of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Society at John Street Church.¹¹ A close examination of all church records may provide information about these activities, about Soga's favoured sermons and the Biblical

⁵ John Aitken Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga: A Page of South African Mission Work* (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot; London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1877); Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga: A Page of South African Mission Work*. Second and revised edition (Edinburgh: Andrew Elliot, 1878).

⁶ Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga*, 74-75. Chalmers' works on Soga are not to be taken as evidence of Soga's but of Chalmers' life; see Davis, "Omission and Elision: Missing the Target in the Biographies of the Reverend Tiyo Soga" paper delivered at the conference "African Christian Biography: Narratives, Beliefs, and Boundaries" Boston University, 29-31 October 2015, cited in Davis, *Tiyo Soga in African Christian Biography: Stories, Lives and Challenges*; edited by Dana Roberts (forthcoming (b) 2018).

⁷ Henry Thomas Cousins, *Tiyo Soga: The Model Kafir Missionary* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1897) and *From Kafir Kraal to Pulpit: The Story of Tiyo Soga—First Ordained Preacher of the Kafir Race* (London: S.W. Partridge, 1897).

⁸ Cousins, *From Kafir Kraal to Pulpit*, vi; Donovan Williams, *Umfundisi: A Biography of Rev. Tiyo Soga 1829-1871* (Alice: Lovedale Press, 1978), 23.

⁹ Tiyo Soga, Journal of Rev. Tiyo Soga: Manuscript Journal, University of Fort Hare, Howard Pim Rare Books Library, F001256308; Tiyo Soga, Letter Book, University of Fort Hare, Howard Pim Rare Books Library, F001256365.

¹⁰ See pictures of the Soga family birth and death register and the watch presented to Soga on his departure for South Africa in Davis, *Tiyo Soga*.

¹¹ Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga*, original edition, 1877 and second edition, 1878: 74-75.

passages he found most compelling; any record of his theology classes at Divinity College during this time would also be a valuable site of interest. Soga's activities over the long summer vacation in July/August 1853 alongside his theological education would be interesting. Chalmers records letters sent by friends which mention that Soga had spent time at their farms and on the Scottish western coast during the vacations; these require further corroboration. Details of the courtship between Soga and his wife, local Glaswegian, Janet Burnside, are not known. It may have taken place over many years, given that he had first arrived in Glasgow in 1846, almost eleven years prior to their marriage in 1857, or could also have been a snap decision on his ordination.

The Sogas sent their children to Dollar Academy, in the Scottish town of Dollar, and Janet moved there some years after his death. My research has not revealed their connection with this town beyond its school. I have found no newspaper reports yet of Soga, his sermons or speaking engagements in Scotland. The Scots had a long history of engaging African and African Americans, particularly men, to speak about their lives and their work, especially those involved in the anti-slavery struggle, for Scottish people were concerned that any implication in slavery would harm their chances of everlasting life, comprising as it did a sin against the Bible. African American abolitionist Frederick Douglass and anti-slavery spokesperson the Reverend Dr Henry Highland Garnet had been invited to speak to audiences numbering in the thousands across Scotland and England.¹²

Douglass and Garnet were travellers not bound by nation or borders. They travelled the world, experiencing and documenting for themselves that which they encountered.¹³ Soga too would have had freedom of movement had he had the financial resources to support travel abroad; passports were only introduced after 1914, except in rare instances. Journeys to Amsterdam, Norway and France from Edinburgh were short enough and he could have

¹² Joel Schor, *Henry Highland Garnet: A Voice of Black Radicalism in the Nineteenth Century* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1977), 124; and Davis, *Tiyo Soga*. Garnet's presence in London at the World Peace Conference in 1850 went unreported.

¹³ "The Black Atlantic as a Counterculture of Modernity," opening chapter in Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

travelled there during the two-month summer vacation, or for a two week break to a warmer climate over the Christmas break. It makes sense to me to read Soga as a dapper and debonair adventurer, a person curious about other cultures, other countries and languages; in charge of his life and person, a man, a human being, not lost in the quagmire of history but an agent of history. Despite the prevalence of racism, people led full, interesting and fulfilled lives. But I have no evidence to corroborate any of these possible activities.

Once Soga had completed his degree, he disappears into the wings of the stage, becoming an adjunct to narratives considered more important. Yet latent adjuncts are busy in darkness. When a character defined as “other” by the homogenous perspective of “same” is shown as absent, he or she is usually at his or her busiest and, often, most oppositional. It is a signal of the height of the importance of the work that it is not recorded. When people are at their most invisible in the historical archive, they are at their most active in their cultural milieu. This is certainly true for Soga in the years 1863-1868 when Soga was reportedly too ill with laryngitis or preachers’ throat to work but was at the height of his literary output, writing for his column “Zivela Kubabalelani” in *Indaba*, completing and publishing his translation of the *Pilgrim’s Progress* into Xhosa,¹⁴ and contesting the translation of the Bible into Xhosa, the bulk of which occurred in 1865 and 1866.¹⁵

Chalmers remarked that the editors of his biography of Soga had censored parts of his writing which concerned Soga’s experience of being vilified over his translation of the Bible into Xhosa.¹⁶ Therefore the historical narrative shows Soga as weak and enfeebled during the very years when he was at his intellectual heights, penning complicated letters about the translation of

¹⁴ John Bunyan, *Uhambo lo Mhambi: Owesuka kwe Lilizwe, Waye Esinga Kwelo Lizayo: Imbali Ezekeliswe nge Pupa ...* (Lovedale: Lovedale Missionary Institution Press, 1866).

¹⁵ John Whittle Appleyard, *An Apology for the Kafir Bible: Being a Reply to the Pamphlet entitled, “Rev J. W. Appleyard’s Version judged by Missionaries of Various Denominations and Others”* (Mount Coke: Wesleyan Mission Press, 1867). *Inncwadi Yezibalo ezingcwele eze Testamente Endala ne ze Testamente Entsha, Ziguqulwe Kwezonteto Zanikwa Kuqala Ngazo* (eLondone, kwelamaNgesi: Ishicilelwe Ngu-W.C Clowes Nonyaka Bake, British and Foreign Bible Society, 1864.) See Davis, *Tiyo Soga*.

Xhosa into English which focused on all aspects of Xhosa and English grammar, on theology, on lexicography and orthographic options for the transcription of Xhosa, going head-to-head with the missionary translators in the interests of providing a truly persuasive religious tract.¹⁷

I am keeping an open mind about what I will find for those two and a half missing years during the previous decade between 1854 and 1857, though my search for further information has yielded no concrete results. As with speculation, there is just as good a chance of finding the gems for which one prospects as with finding none; as with prospecting, it is not easy to walk away when one has finished combing an entire area, saying, "Nothing there." Rather, one notes the areas which have yet to be combed, or, finally says, "I must have missed it—let me start again." When I returned to Chalmers' biography of Soga, one sentence jumped back out at me: "He spoke of his marvellous relief on becoming a missionary in the Havannah, and having his salary at his own disposal."¹⁸

This line has inspired me as a scholar and researcher into Soga's life, primarily because it was included in the book where other work was edited and cut by the editors. The fact that they left this line in indicates not only that Soga had been to "the Havannah" as a salaried emissary of a church, but also that this activity was sanctioned by the editors, by those who censor knowledge or authorise its dissemination. Soga's work in "the Havannah" should be verifiable: if he received a salary, it would have been recorded by the society to which he was affiliated; I have yet to find this record.

Where was "the Havannah"? The first of many quirks in researching this possible aspect of Soga's life is the instability of orthography: "The Havannah" as spelt by Chalmers refers to a harbour in a tiny island to the south west of Australia, part of a range of islands then called the New Hebrides,

¹⁶ "My life of Soga is published [...] It has been much compressed... The story of Govan and the Bible Translation controversy which I wrote most carefully and other things are simply cut out. I think the first edition will soon be exhausted, so that if a second is required I shall see to it that it is published entire." Chalmers to Bryce Ross, Cory Library, MS 9278 cited in Williams, *Umfundisi*, xviii. See Davis, *Tiyo Soga* for a full discussion of Soga's experience of his translation of the Bible into Xhosa.

¹⁷ [Soga et al.], *The Kafir Bible*; Davis, *Tiyo Soga*.

¹⁸ Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga*, 74-75.: 436.

and named by Captain Erskine after his ship, *The Havannah*, after they had docked there.¹⁹ The United Secession Church of Scotland, one of the antecedent churches of the UPC, had indeed sent missionaries to this post from 1839, as had the London Missionary Society from the following year. Reverends John Williams, John Inglis and John Geddie were the chief missionaries here, along with Samoan “teachers” who worked both with these European missionaries and ran other stations independently.

There was nothing precluding Soga from travelling there with missionaries from the United Kingdom. However, Soga does not appear in John Geddie’s biography, nor in any other connection with the New Hebrides. Geddie regularly mentions the arrival of new or visiting missionaries and I believe that had Soga arrived, his presence would have been noted, as for other newly arrived missionaries. Their presence signalled a fulfilment of requests for help to extend the reach of this mission, and commentary would have been given on Soga’s involvement across the stations in the region, as for theirs. Furthermore, it seems that owing to the violent reception of the teachers and missionaries in these islands, no visits were made by the Scottish Presbyterian missionaries between October 1854 and July 1858 and their stations were left empty in precisely the years in which Soga would have travelled there.²⁰

If he was not there, a rare eighteenth century English spelling for the town in the then-Spanish West Indian island of Cuba, more commonly found as *Havana*, *Havanna* and *Habana*, is “*Havannah*.”²¹ Could Soga have travelled to the West Indies? Chalmers may have spelt Havana this way because he favoured the Romantic era,²² or he may have used the word as a collective noun for the West Indies, although that would be ironic because Cuba was the one place there where no Protestant ministers could preach. Cuba was a Spanish colony and thus Roman Catholic in religious fervour; “no others but

¹⁹ Archibald Wright Murray, *Wonders of the Western Isles: Being a Narrative of the Commencement and Progress of Mission Work in Western Polynesia* (London: Yates and Alexander, 1874), 194-195, 219-220.

²⁰ Murray, *Wonders of the Western Isles*, 224-225.

²¹ An engraving titled “A Prospect of the Town of Havannah, taken by the Earl of Albemarle & Sir George Pocock on August 13th 1762,” where Havannah refers to “Spanish Havana, an important Caribbean naval base” is available; and “Havannah was taken by the Earl of Albemarle and Admiral Pococke” in George Barnett Smith, *Canada: Its Rise and Progress* (London: S. W. Partridge, 1898), 128.

Roman Catholics [could] be inhabitants of the Island” and “[t]he Protestant Bible was interdicted in the Custom House.”²³ However, almost exactly the same missionary societies were operating throughout the rest of the West Indian islands as those present in the South African context: the Moravian Brethren, the Wesleyan Methodist Missionaries, the Baptist Missionary Society, including the Jamaican Baptist Missionary Society, and the United Presbyterian Church of Scotland.²⁴ The history of colonisation of South Africa and the West Indian Islands contains many interesting congruences, similarities and parities, all of which would have been visible to Soga, had he worked on these islands.

Several prominent African American antislavery spokesmen had been in Scotland during Soga’s two visits as a student between 1846-1848 and 1851-1857; is it possible that they had influenced Soga to work with slave or manumitted populations instead of or before returning to South Africa? Or did he travel for love? Garnet had been accompanied to Glasgow by Stella Weims, a young woman who had escaped from slavery to his home via the Underground Railway.²⁵ Chalmers states in passing that Soga and Weims were engaged to be married, but that she had left Scotland and shortly afterwards had died:

On 27th February, 1857, Mr. Soga was married to Miss Janet Burnside. During the early days of his student life his affections had gone forth to a young girl of his own colour, named “Stella,” who was on a visit to Scotland with her uncle, the Rev. Dr Garnet, from America, but her life was quickly ended after leaving the Scottish shores. Had she

²² Davis, “Representing Soga: Lessons in Romanticism,” Conference for Colonial Christian Missions and their Legacies, University of Copenhagen, 27-29 April 2015 [online resource] <http://www.video.ku.dk/1b-representations-of-self-and-other-in>.

²³ *Standard Guide to Cuba: A New and Complete Guide to The Island of Cuba, With Maps, Illustrations, Routes Of Travel, History, and an English-spanish Phrase Book* (New York, NY: Foster and Reynolds; Havana: Diamond News Company, 1905).

²⁴ *The Encyclopaedia of Missions: Descriptive, Historical, Biographical, statistical: With a Full Assortment of Maps, a Complete Bibliography, and Lists of Bible Versions, Mission Societies, Mission Stations, and a General Index*; edited by Edwin Munsell Bliss. Volume 2 (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1891), 468- 471.

²⁵ For details on Stella Weims see Davis, *Tiyo Soga*.

lived to be united to him, there was every prospect that she would have proved a most excellent wife.²⁶

Garnet was ordained by Soga's church, the UPC, which sent him as a missionary to Jamaica at the end of the winter of 1852-1853. Stella and the rest of his family, who had since joined him in Glasgow, left with Garnet.²⁷ The UPC espoused what appear to be radical philosophies of racial solidarity within the doctrines of Christianity as the key figures of the church saw them. Black people and white people were equal in the eyes of the Christian God, and the UPC refused to admit as church-goers people who owned slaves or benefitted in any way from slave-holding, whether as investors in plantations which employed slave labour, or inheritors of wealth made in these ways. The UPC ordained black ministers and Scottish Presbyterian churches maintained mission stations in the West Indies, specifically in Barbados and Jamaica. In the summer of 1854, when Soga had just finished his studies at Strathclyde, he may well have decided to visit her and Garnet.

That Soga may have travelled for love and considered the world a backdrop to his love is a compelling and enticing idea. A further motivation for Soga to travel to the West Indies would have been the possibility of evangelising and preaching to the slaves who were sold at the slave markets there even despite the Roman Catholic injunction against protestant involvement. Soga would have had few chances to convert slaves: after 1850 it was illegal to preach to slaves or educate them because literacy teachers often used the Bible and the salvation narrative and the message of equality of all were too nerve-wracking for the traders and slave owners.

Though other parts of Cuba and the West Indies and South America continued with illegal slave trading after the 1850s, Havana was the closest to the coast of North America, allowing for slaves to be sold and transferred into the deep south of North America very quickly. Had Soga travelled here, he would have had a unique bird's eye view of the slave trade, of its machinations, players, codes, practices, governments, the amounts changing hands,

²⁶ Chalmers, *Tiyo Soga*, 93.

²⁷ Martin B. Pasternak, *Rise Now and Fly To Arms: The Life of Henry Highland Garnet* (New York & London: Garland Publishing, 1995), 125; and Schor, *Henry Highland Garnet*, 125.

and of the people as they arrived on the ships, were sold and moved on again.

Furthermore, in 1854, Cuba was in the news because the President of the United States wanted to purchase it from Spain, which would have seen Cuba become an American slave state. Havana could equally have become a black state like Liberia; two friends of Garnet, Alexander Crummell and Edward Wilmot Blyden, were founding members of the American Colonisation Society which aimed to found a black nation for manumitted and free persons in the West Indies or northern South America. This knowledge and experience would doubtless have had a profound impact on Soga's philosophies both of race and theology; the impact of this information not only on Soga but on the global developing black nationalism called pan-Negroism, and the development of racial solidarity so clearly visible in Soga's later writings, is indisputable.

Was Soga in the West Indies, specifically Cuba, during his "missing years"? That would take a huge research project to determine. It would certainly have Soga at his most oppositional, and therefore his most silenced. As to the details of a love relationship and even a betrothal between Soga and Stella Weims, a young woman who had lived through the terrors of slavery and the self-redemption of self-manumission, I am aware of no further evidence. Weims died of "bilious fever" in late 1855. Would that we had correspondence to verify this relationship, not least because it would contain dates and places, views and opinions, in addition to declarations of a more personal nature.

Correspondence between Soga and Weims may be in Garnet's effects, which I have been unable to trace. Garnet did not mention Soga in his obituary of Stella Weims for the *Missionary Record of the United Presbyterian Church*.²⁸

The next time we know of Soga was 27 February 1857, when he married Janet Burnside. Two weeks later, Soga was named as a missionary to the Xhosa people and he and Janet left for this appointment the following month, April 1857.

²⁸*Missionary Record of the United Presbyterian Church* CXXIII March 1856 Vol. XI. 36 – 37. See Davis, Tiyo Soga, for a transcript of this letter.



Figure 2-2. Tiyo Soga's grave and memorial at Tutura in Centane (Kentani)
Source: Zinziswa Soga, Bhisbo

Wherever Soga was between 1854 and that time, I hope to find him, or at least traces of his life adventures and his philosophies, and to see how they intertwined with those around him.

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