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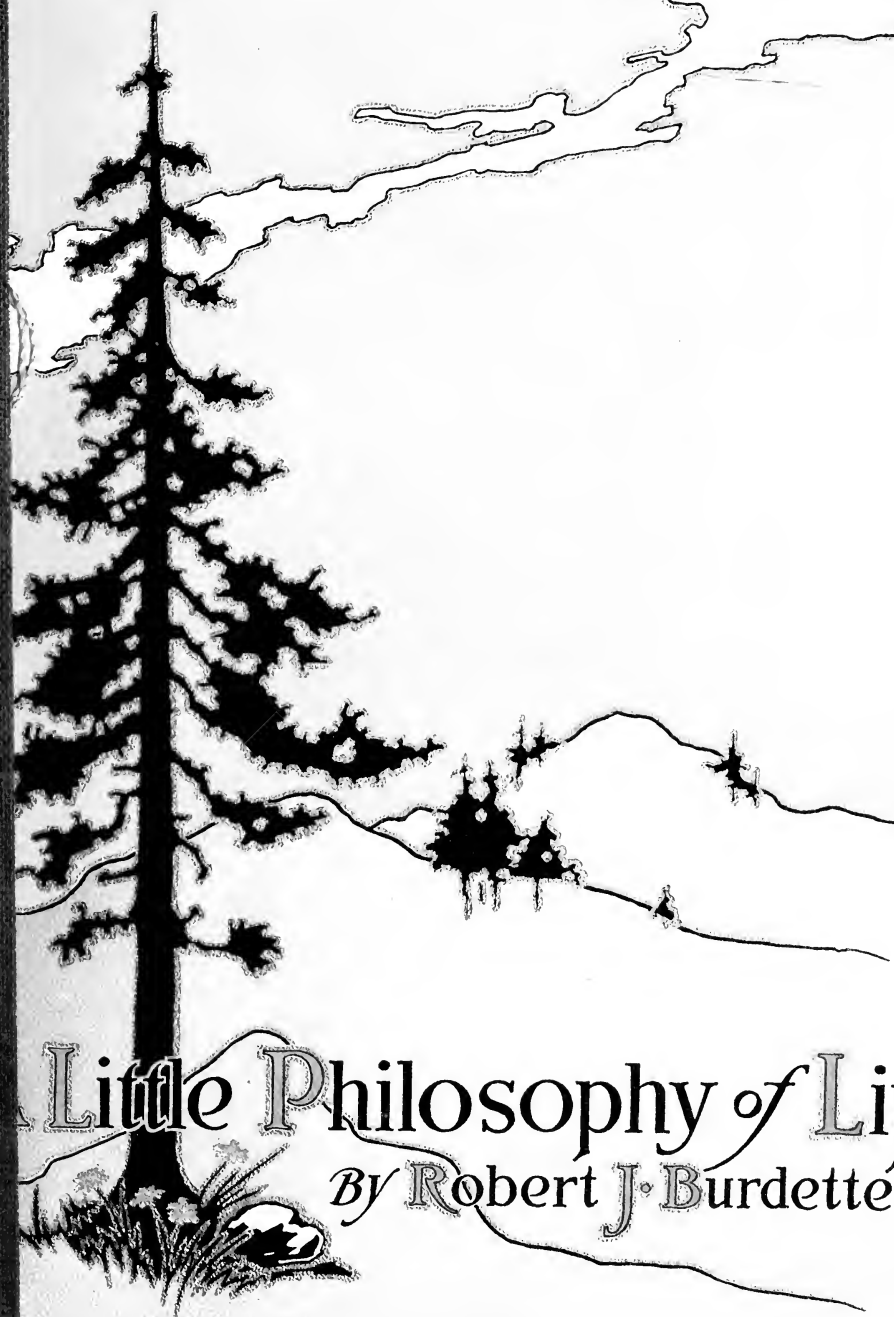
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A Little Philosophy of Life

By Robert J. Burdette

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A LITTLE PHILOSOPHY *of* LIFE



A LITTLE PHILOSOPHY of LIFE

[By ROBERT J. BURDETTE]

*"For what is your Life? It is even
a vapour, that appeareth for
a little time, and then
vanisheth away."*

— JAMES 4; 14.



TO THE
MEMBERS OF THE





A LITTLE PHILOSOPHY of LIFE

IS THERE such a thing as a "philosophy of life?"
Life is the philosophy of everything; the study
of all things; the testing of all things.

✿ THE LUCKY man is he who despises luck.
The unlucky one is the fellow who worships it.

✿ GREAT inventions may be wrought out in the brain.
Great thoughts are born in the heart.

✿ ONE of the best ways to find trouble, my boy, is to carry
a revolver without knowing how to use it.

✿ MEMORY may be a hell or a paradise. It depends on
whether you spend your youth manufacturing brimstone or
planting roses.

✿ WHEN I hear a man trying to do all the talking for the
crowd, I remember that a drum makes more noise than a
cask of sugar, because it is empty.

✿ A MAN is a fool to worry about his "past," if he has one.
A man or woman with a "past" isn't half so badly off as the
sinner who yet has "something coming to him."

✿ I DON'T believe in rejecting and despising a man because of his faults. Make them useful to him. For example, a conceited man is like a tire, which is of no earthly account until it is inflated.

✿ ONE of the meanest things about sowing wild oats is that the profligate scatters about half the seed on some good man's wheat field. And more than half the wild oats turn out to be rye.

✿ WHENEVER you begin to complain that you are not appreciated, you are plainly off your job. When a dog is chasing a rabbit he doesn't care whether you call him pet names or throw stones at him.

✿ VERY few men are vain, I think. But all men love comfort as their chief joy. There isn't one man in a thousand who would exchange his good digestion for a handsome face. Now, a woman——

✿ MONEY talks—yes, my son. But only while it's working. When it goes on strike, or is loafing on general principles, it loses interest in everything and becomes as silent as a log on a mudbank.

✿ A MAN can hardly be so bad that he will not have some friends who believe in him and who stick to him. But the trouble with a bad man is, that his friends are so much like himself he would be much better off without any.

✧ IT IS pleasant to have people love you who do not know you. But oh, the immeasurable love of a friend who has found you out, who knows you through and through, and still loves you. Well, that's the way God loves us.

✧ IT HAS been a good world to me. I have always had more friends than I could count and more good fortune than I could measure. I have always got everything I wanted. When I couldn't get it, I didn't want it, which is the same thing as having it. Sometimes it is better.

✧ No, religion does not give—it does not promise a man immunity from misfortunes. Neither does an accident policy promise or protect the holder from a railway smash-up or an automobile accident. But it is a beautifully comforting thing to the insured while he's in the hospital.

✧ WHAT you wish you were, that's your ideal. What people say you are, that's your reputation. What you know you are, that's your character. To paraphrase Abraham Lincoln, you may fool some other people part of the time, but you can't fool yourself a little bit of the time.

✧ THE heart always has ruled the world, and it always will. Love is the best teacher in the universe, because it is the most patient. The race of mankind is wise and strong, as it is today, only because ten thousand years of our stupidity, our obstinacy and our ingratitude haven't wearied God.

✧ IF THE uses of adversity are not sweet—and Paul says they are not—they are most efficacious. You have to hit a nail on the head half a dozen times before it will comprehend its perfect destiny. Well, God has to deal with some men—fellows like you and me—in the same manner, sometimes.

✧ LIFE has never presented many “problems” to me. I have been too busy. Working people do not evolve “problems.” They are invented by the learned idlers, gossiping about the market place like Paul’s Athenians, “who spend their time in nothing else, but either to tell or to hear some new thing.”

✧ I HAVE lived a busy life. I entered the newspaper grind early, and I have never been out of the old mill. Whether I abode at home or went on long journeys, around the town or around the world, I carried my work with me. My vacations were merely “assignments.” The nearest postoffice was a copyhook. People and things were “stories.”

✧ IT is a good world. Five times in the story of Creation the historian pauses to say as new things were made, “and God saw that it was good.” And the seventh day—the day of completion and rest, He made holy forever, “blessing and sanctifying it.” So the cornerstone of creation is goodness, the final holiness. How could a better world be made?

✧ IT ISN’T enough to be good nor to do good. It is quite essential to do good in the right way. A prayer for many

of our Best Sinners would be—"Dear Christ of the Leper, Savior of the Publican, Lover of the Unlovely and Friend of the Hateful, forgive me in that I have done good spitefully, that I have given alms scornfully, that I have done a kindness savagely, and that I have loved a friend grudgingly."

✿ WHENEVER I have done right, it has always seemed to me that somebody or something helped me. But when I have gone wrong, I have sinned through no one's fault but my own. No man ever made me do wrong. The man who has the headache next morning is the fellow who transgressed the night before. The sinner can no more shift his responsibility than he can wish his headache off on the other fellow.

✿ WELL, I have always loved to work. It has been pleasant in the old mill, with its rafters bronzing by the years, its shadowy corners, its far views from the dormers up in the loft, the mysterious gurglings and murmurings of hidden waters down deep among the foundations, the quiet pond and the earnest rush of the race, and the merry laughter of the "tail race." For I ground my finest flour from the grist the people brought me. The best of my work might have been done much better; the worst of it had better been left undone; all of it has been mediocre. But I ground the grist that was brought me, and took only fair toll. And some day, in a better mill, with improved machinery, with finer material, with choicer grist, a steadier power and a better light I will do better work.

✿ A GOOD father and a good mother—"old fashioned?" Well, yes; about as old-fashioned as fathers and mothers have been ever since the birth of Cain—taught me from a Good Book that the way of life and the plan of salvation is so simple and plain that not even the philosophers could muddle it—"He hath showed thee, O man, what is good, and what doth the Lord require of thee but to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with God." That's plain enough until some learned man begins to explain it. If that's all that God wants of me, I don't care what the "Apostle's Creed," or the "Thirty-nine Articles," or the "Confession of Faith" demands of me. But that seems to include about everything. And yet I believe in "creeds." How can a man live without a standard?

✿ I NEVER worry about the Day of Judgment. That there will be one I am positive. That it will be as dreadful as John of Patmos describes, I believe. But terrible as it will be to have all one's sins uncovered and set before God and the world, naked and in the light of day, that won't be one-half so terrible as it was to have committed them. And yet that we rather enjoyed. And another most dreadful thing about the Day of Judgment is the fact that somebody knows all about our sins now. There never was a "secret sin" since the serpent invaded Eden. There have been at least three living eye-witnesses to every offense—the sinner, the victim, who is frequently only the other sinner, and the Judge who is going to try you both. The best time to get

scared about the Day of Judgment is about ten minutes before you make a fool of yourself.

✿ LIFE has been to me a pilgrimage of joy. I've never had very much trouble, and what I have had has been of my own making and selection, and when I went to the hospital I took my medicine without making faces or asking for "sympathy." I was ashamed to. Like "Peter and the Pain Killer," I knew I was only getting what I had asked for. But up one hill and down the other the pilgrimage had lain through pleasant places—good roads, safe trails, fine pasturage, sweet water and beautiful camping places. A few giants, mostly wind-mills; millions of midgets and mosquitoes, troublesome but not fatal; occasionally a mean man, so ashamed of himself that he lied about it; now and then a liar; once in a while a hold-up man, with a subscription paper; and all along the way a horde of beggars. But in the main good people; kind-hearted, generous people, honest people. Lots of houses build close "by the side of the road." The world is full of friendly people for friendly men. And I'm fond of people. I believe in them. I love them. I sympathize with them. I like to meet them, and to walk with them, and to have them about me, so long as they can stand me.

✿ A YOUNG disciple one day asked me, when I was pastor of the Temple, "Pastor, how can I learn to trust God? How can I acquire faith?" And I said, "That is easy and simple. Just lie down at night and go to sleep. You are helpless and

defenseless as a dead person. You do not see the storm gathering above your home, with black destruction in its whirling wings. You cannot see the tiny tongue of flame catching at the corner of the room in which you sleep. You do not hear the robber stealthily unfastening the fancied security of lock and bolt. You know absolutely nothing of the score of evils that may be threatening your peace and safety. The night may be ghastly with perils all about you. But you sleep sweetly, safely, and you awake in the morning refreshed and strengthened. Protecting love has enfolded you like a garment. And you believed it would when you lay down, else you never could have gone to sleep. Well, that's trust. That's perfect trust. Just hold on to it while you are awake. Who takes care of you while you sleep? Not father and mother. Not the servants. Nor the watchdog. Nor the policeman a mile away. "Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." You trust in God, that's all.

✧ Do I believe in laughter as much as ever I did? A great deal more than ever I did, even in the days that were ripples of dimples on the sunlit eddies of a river of laughter. How could life be best lived without it—God's exclusive gift to his human children? Laughter is a good servant. But don't overwork him or he will sulk, and maybe strike for shorter hours. Don't smile so much all day that the corners of your mouth droop with weariness when you come home

at night. "Always leave them with a laugh" is the axiom of a commercial traveler who has no home. Laughter is cheery, good-natured, willing, but wearies easily. He is a poor hand at "day's work" and tires at a continuous job. He is a thoroughbred, and must be humored and well groomed. You can't work him like a plow-horse. He shines most brightly at "piece work." He must needs have intervals of quiet meditation; sober reflection; tranquil introspection. He must have the inspiration of earnest purpose; the repose of a little minute of prayer. Don't mistake the everlasting barnyard cackle that emanates from between the roof of the mouth and the glottis for Laughter. Unless there is brain and heart—intellect and love in it—it isn't the laughter that I know anything about. The thing on the face of a skull is a grin, but it isn't a smile. It used to be, but the smile died when it became perpetual. No matter what the empty-headed philosophers say on the postcards, don't try to smile all the time. Unless you want people to hate the sight of you.

✧ LIFE is a book in which we read a page a day. We can't read a page ahead; we can not turn clear over to the last chapter to see how it ends, because we write the story ourselves, setting the type, as a good compositor can do, from the copy of our own thoughts and actions, till the evening of each day runs off the edition. The best compositor is he who sets each day's page with the fewest errors, and wastes the least time correcting a "dirty proof." Even with the best

of us, much of each day's page is an "errata" correcting the mistakes of yesterday. Unsinkable ships—the bottom of the sea is covered with them. Invulnerable armor—it cumbers the reefs, full of holes. Incontrovertible arguments and incontestable theories—they lie dusting in the scrap-heaps of history and philosophy, answered, contradicted, disproved and thrown away. But the pages are—or should be—growing cleaner every day. The compositor learns. The child is fearless, knowing nothing. So he grasps the flaming candle. The old man is cautious, knowing too much. He knows that ice burns like fire. And another thing to be remembered about this book of life which every one of us is writing, each for himself. The pages are all the same size—twenty-four hours, brevier measure. "The evening and the morning was the first day." That established the standard. And every morning the inexorable office boy with the intolerable name stands at your door shouting "copy!" And you've got to furnish it. Got to. Got to. Got to. Kill your grandmother once a week to get to the ball game if you will—that goes into your "story" and fills up that day's page. That's life.

✧ IS THE world as funny as it used to be? Funnier, my son; a great deal funnier. It grows "funnier" as you grow older. But it doesn't know it, because it is apt to be "funniest" when it thinks it is wisest. Laughter grows more serious as it contemplates the funny old world. The tragedies of the years temper the jests. Yes; I understand. I read

a paragraph about myself in a critical editorial the other day, saying that "ten years of the ministry had taken much of the ginger out of old Bob's fun." It was written by a young man, of course. The things that are funny to him were uproariously funny to me fifty years ago. I used to write funny sketches about sudden death and funerals. But during ten years of the ministry I have sat beside many deathbeds, and have stood beside many caskets trying to speak words of consolation for breaking hearts. Today, I can't laugh over "Buck Fanshaw's Funeral"—the funniest mortuary narrative ever written. Misfortunes used to be my principal stock in trade for mirthful sketches. Ten years in the ministry have made the sorrows of thousands of people my own. What a rollick there used to be in a good poker story, told in rattling phrase. I have seen too many homes broken up and too many lives wrecked by the gamblers to appreciate the humor of the cards. Twice I have seen men murdered at the gaming table—and each murder was followed by a hanging. Hard to write funny poker stories with those grisly phantoms of blood and strangling leering up into your face from the white sheet under your pen. Eh? And when there was nothing else to write about on a dull day, the drunkard was always an unfailing figure for comedy. What could be funnier than a drunken man? Well, now I can no more appreciate the drunken man, even on the comic stage, than the wife whose face he bruised with his clenched fist could appreciate the antics of her drunken husband. I have seen the brute too

often at close range, with all the old manhood gone, and not a thing but the brute and the devil left. Oh, I enjoy life better than ever I did. I can assure my critic that "ginger is still hot i' the mouth." The world is just as funny as ever. But the fun has changed with the point of view. Don't you understand, son? It's the old story of the frogs and the boys. Humor is a matter of personal taste, to a great extent. What sends your neighbor into convulsions of mirth may disgust you to the very soul.

✿ IT HAS been such a good world that I'd be sorry ever to leave it, if there wasn't another one, as much better than this, as this one is better than the chaos out of which it was born. No; I don't just "believe" this; I know it. That's one of the few things I do know—positively, absolutely, certainly, and I didn't have to wait for Sir Oliver Lodge to tell me about it, either. I knew that when I was a boy, just as well as Sir Oliver knows it now, and for the same reasons, and with the same proofs. All this summer and late into the autumn days we have been living in our seaside home, "Eventide,"—so named by Mrs. Burdette because it faces the sunset. "Afternoon land" is very pleasant in spite of broken health and increasing weakness. Every evening I sit in the sun-room and watch the sun creep down the western wall of the sky, sinking to its rest beyond the farther rim of the blue Pacific. I know what is over there, because I have journeyed in those lands, and can follow the sun as he fades out of sight and begins to illumine the Orient. There, just where he drops

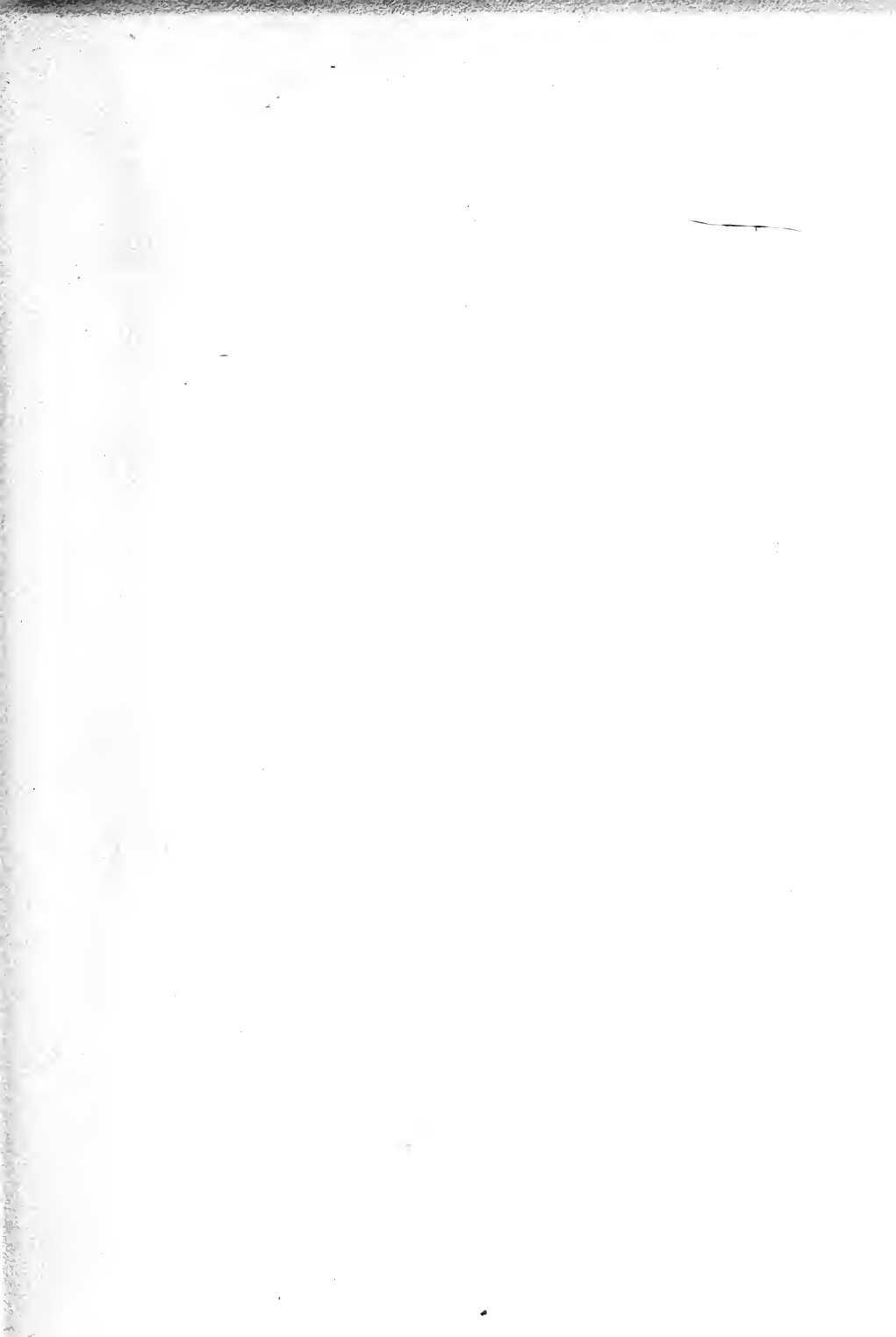
below the waves, rise the green shores of picturesque Japan. Yokohama, Tokyo, Nikko, snow-crowned Fujiyama, the beautiful Inland Sea,—I can see them all. There where that silver star is shining through the crimson bars of the clouds, is China. Over there, where the clouds are white as snow banks—there is Manila. Yonder, where the black cloud is tipped with flame, is Port Arthur. I know them all. I have been there. Well, beyond the gates of the sunset, farther away than the stars, away past the bars of the night, there is another land. I have never seen it. I have never seen anyone who has been there. But all that I know about the oriental lands in which I have journeyed is mere conjecture with my positive belief in that Blessed Land which eye hath not seen. That Fair and Happy Country I do know. Know it with a sublime assurance which is never shadowed by a cloud of passing doubt. I may become confused in my terrestrial geography. But this Heaven of ours—no man, no circumstance can ever shake my faith in that. As the sun sinks lower and the skies grow darker in the deepening twilight, the star of Faith shines more brightly and Hope sings more clearly and sweetly. Every evening, when the sun goes down, I can see that land of Eternal Morning. I know it is there, not because I have seen it, but because I do see it. The Shadowless Land, “where we shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; where there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain;

where God shall dwell with men, and they shall be His people, and He shall wipe away all tears from their eyes."

✧ THE shadows are deeping around the pond and the stream is singing itself to sleep. But there is yet a little grist in the hopper, and while the water serves I will keep on grinding. And by the time the sun is down, and the flow in the race is not enough to turn the big wheel, the grist will have run out, and I will have the old mill swept and tidied for the night. And then, for home and a cheery evening, a quiet night, lighted with stars and pillowed with sleep. And after that, the dawning, and another day; fairer than any I have ever seen in this beautiful world of roseate mornings and radiant sunsets.







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