

THE
NEW BIRTH.



The prayer of the penitent is, Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.—See page 3.

PUBLISHED BY THE

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY,

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SOCIETY, ITS BRANCHES, AND AUXILIARIES, IN
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“What is a man profited if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”

It is not here supposed that it is in the power of any man to conquer or possess the whole world. No man ever yet saw all the world, and life would be too short for that purpose. But it is to gain all the riches, honors, delights, and pleasures that a man can possibly enjoy. It is to have every idea accomplished, every sense gratified. It is to have the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life indulged in the highest perfection. All that can please the palate; the luxuries of all countries collected on the table of the epicure; all the delightful charms of music; all the elegancies and conveniences of a noble palace; all that can gratify the smell and touch; all the pleasures of the imagination, arising from grandeur, beauty, and novelty; and, supposing all this obtained—Solomon obtained it all; and what a poor all it proved! “Vanity and vexation of spirit” was the total amount.

And is this the whole of that for which men risk their souls? Foolish barter! Wretched exchange! Was Esau wise who sold his birth-right for a mess of pottage? Was Judas wise who sold his master, and his own soul too, for thirty pieces of silver? Just as wise as the worldly man who parts with heaven for the sordid and short-lived pleasures of earth. I remember reading of a woman whose house was on fire; she was very active in removing her goods, but forgot her child who was sleeping in the cradle. At length she remembered the babe, and ran with earnest desire to save it. But it was now too late—the flames forbade her entrance. Judge of her agony of mind when she exclaimed, “O, my child, my child! I have saved my goods but lost my child!”

Just so it will be with many a poor sinner who was all his life “careful and troubled about many things,” while “the one thing needful” was forgot. What will it then avail for a man to say, “I got a good place, or a good trade, but lost my soul. I got a large fortune, but lost my soul. I got many friends, but God is my enemy. I lived in pleasure, but now pain is my everlasting portion. I clothed my body gaily, but my soul is naked before God.” Our Lord

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THE NEW BIRTH.

WHOEVER reads the Scriptures with serious attention, will perceive that some kind of *change* must take place in every person, in order to his becoming a real Christian. This change is described by a variety of names, the most remarkable of which is *Regeneration*, or *the New Birth*. The necessity of this change is often insisted on in the Bible, and no where more strongly than in our Saviour's discourse with Nicodemus, recorded in the third chapter of St. John's Gospel, where he says to that ruler, *Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.*

As this change is absolutely necessary to salvation, it is of great importance to know what it is; especially as there is much reason to fear that many mistake its true nature, and take the shadow for the substance. Be it observed, then, that,

1. *The new birth is a GREAT change*; the term must signify so much; it signifies that we must be very different from what we were before; we begin *a new kind of life*. Elsewhere, the same change is described by "passing from darkness to light," and "from death to life." All these expressions strongly denote a very great change. And this ought to be seriously considered; for what a light matter passes for religion in general! a few lifeless forms, a little outward decency, or some faint desires, make the whole of it. But the Scripture expressions of "a new creation," and "a second birth," surely imply something more. They certainly denote *a very great change*.

2. *The new birth is a UNIVERSAL change*.

Many are the devices of Satan. If he cannot keep sinners in total blindness and security, he tries to pervert their views of religion by causing them to mistake appearances for realities; or, by putting a part for the whole. Many are ruined forever, by mistakes of this kind. Most men have, at one time or another, some serious thoughts about their souls, and religion, and eternity; and therefore do some things, and abstain from others, to still their fears and quiet their consciences. But this *partial change*

in point of morals, is often owing to some natural change, in age, temper, and situation. Some men only exchange one sin for another which they love better. And others are very diligent in religious duties, to atone for the indulgence of their lusts, and to cover them from their own observation; and the more unwilling they are to part with a darling sin, the more ready are they to overdo in such duties as do not oppose the present current of unsanctified affections.

3. *The new birth is an INWARD change.* It is far more than a strict and regular course of outward actions or outward duties. It does not consist in partial *Reformation* only, so that a man is less wicked than he was before; but there is a complete and essential change of his whole character. God looks at the *heart*. "My son," says Solomon, "give me thine *heart*." The great sum of the law is, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy *heart*." The prayer of the penitent is, "Create in me a clean *heart*, O God;" and the grand promise of the covenant is, "A *new heart* will I give you." Now the new birth consists in having this new heart. If you ask what a new heart is: It is a heart set on new objects. The affections of the mind are turned from the world to God, and from the supreme love of self to the love of our fellow men, and from living to ourselves to living to the glory of God.

This is very different from an *outward* change, which may arise from mere selfishness. A man may avoid excess in some sins, and practise some duties, for the sake of his health or his reputation among men, or from the slavish fear of hell. Without any real hatred to a sin, as sin, he may forsake it for fear of burning in hell for it; and without any love to God, he may perform religious duties; for though they are a heavy burden to him, he thinks it more tolerable than hell will be.

4. *The new birth is a change, wrought by the operation of the Holy Spirit.* We are by nature in a state of enmity against God, and this is what we cannot of ourselves remove, or overcome, because we love our sins. It is the sinfulness of man that interposes the obstacle to his regeneration; and for this he is criminal and inexcusable. And this is an obstacle which nothing but the grace of God can surmount. Hence the apostle John, speaking of

true believers, says, "They were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John i. 13. This doctrine is indeed greatly disliked by many, because it gives so humbling a view of our own character and state, and so much opposes our own pride and self sufficiency. It is, however, the truth of God; and if we give any credit to the Scriptures, we must yield to it. Real Christians are said to "be born of God;" "born from above;" born of the Spirit. They are also said to be "quickened, who were dead in sin." All which expressions plainly show that Regeneration is the work of God, and not the work of man.

These remarks are intended to caution the reader against wrong notions of the nature of religion. Let us now go a step further, and point out with as much plainness as possible, *what is the change* which is wrought in all the people of God, without exception: what it is which makes the difference between one who *is*, and one who is *not* born again.

The design of this change is to make man holy. Man was made at first in the image of God, in knowledge, righteousness, and holiness; and he then enjoyed the most happy fellowship and communion with him. His duty and delight were the same. But by the fall he became obnoxious to the divine wrath, and disobedient to the divine will in his prevailing inclinations. He became disinclined to communion with God, and preferred the creature before the Creator. The design of regeneration is to restore man to the image of God, and to the exercise of love to him, so that his prevailing disposition may be the same as it was before the fall. The change therefore consists in these two things: that our supreme and chief end be to serve and glorify God; and that the soul rest in God, as its chief good.

1. Our *supreme and chief end must be to serve and glorify God*; and every other aim must be subordinate to this.

All things were made for the glory of God, that is, for the display of divine perfection; and every reasonable creature ought to seek this. But no natural man seeks it. The sin of man consists in withdrawing his allegiance from God, and refusing subjection to his will. The language of his heart and practice is, "Our lips are our own, who is lord over us?" But the renewed person sees and

owns his dependance upon God, his Maker's right to rule, and the obligation of all creatures to submit to his will.

In regeneration, God gives this disposition of mind ; and gives it such force that it will prevail. The natural man seeks his own happiness supremely. This determines his choice of employments, enjoyments, companions. His religious actions are not chosen, but submitted to, for fear of worse. In short, he hath forgotten his subjection : God is dethroned ; and self is honoured, loved, and served, in his room. Hence our Lord so much insisted on self-denial. " If any man, said he, will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me." To honour God in the heart then, and to serve him in the life, is the first and highest desire of him that is born again. And hence we may learn the reason why profane and worldly men are generally self-righteous, while the truly pious abhor themselves, on account of sin. Natural men have no just sense of their obligation to glorify God in their thoughts, words and actions ; and therefore, whatever they do in religion, they look upon as meritorious, and think that something is due to them on that account. On the other hand, those who are born of God, know it is their duty to love God with all their heart, and serve him with all their might. They see that could this be perfectly done, it is no more than their duty, and there could be no plea of merit. But when they consider their sins, and how far short of duty they come in every instance, they ask for mercy, and not for reward.

2. In regeneration, the soul is brought to *rest in God as its chief happiness*, and habitually to prefer his favour to every other enjoyment. The believer sees that those, and those alone, are happy, whose God is the Lord, and that those who are afar off from him must perish. All natural men place their supreme happiness in something that is not God. In this they all agree, though the ways in which they seek for worldly happiness are innumerable. There is but one way to peace, and if that is neglected, the insufficiency of all worldly enjoyments makes them fly from one earthly comfort to another, till they feel by sad experience the vanity of them all.

The change that takes place in regeneration, in no small degree consists in a strong inward conviction of the vanity

of worldly enjoyments of every kind ; and a persuasion that the favour and enjoyment of God is infinitely superior to them all. Whatever other differences there may be, this will be found in every child of God, from the highest to the lowest, from the richest to the poorest ; and from the oldest to the youngest. Every such one will be able to say, with the Psalmist, " There be many that say, who will show us any good ? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon me. Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and wine increased."

Thus it appears that in Regeneration there is a renewal of the moral image of God upon the heart. The renewed man loves him supremely, serves him as his highest end, and delights in him as his chief good. This recovery, however, is but begun on earth. It is gradually improved in the progress of sanctification, and shall be fully completed at the resurrection of the just. The sum of the moral law is, to love the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and strength, and mind. This is the duty of every creature, and regeneration consists in communicating this love to the soul, which gradually gains the ascendancy, and habitually prevails over its opposite.

We may now consider by what steps and by what means this change is brought about. It is true it may be wrought at any time, in any manner, and by any means that to Infinite Wisdom shall seem proper. " The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth : so is every one that is born of the Spirit." John iii. 8. We shall only speak of such steps in the change, as are, in substance, common to all true converts.

I.

There must be a discovery of the real nature of God.

Those who are in a natural state, are often described as lying in ignorance and darkness. They know not God. They have " the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their hearts." Eph. iv. 18. In the change which the Holy Spirit accomplishes, this darkness, ignorance, and blindness, are dispelled. The un-

derstanding is enlightened ; the true character and nature of God are discovered ; and his glorious perfections seen in all their lustre. It will be easily perceived how indispensable is this part of the momentous work ; for it is impossible that should be a man's chief motive of action, or supreme object of desire, of which he has no degree of knowledge. God must be known in his real character, such as he is ; and no false image placed in his stead. He must be seen in his spiritual nature as almighty in his power, unsearchable in his wisdom, inviolable in his truth ; but, above all, he must be seen as infinite in his holiness and hatred of sin, as impartial in his justice, and determined to punish it.

II.

There must be a discovery of the infinite glory of God.

He must not only be seen to be such a being as he really is, but there must be a sense of the infinite worth, beauty, and perfection of his character. It is one thing to know, and another to approve. Men may know things which they hate ; and it must be so, when natures are opposite, the one sinful and the other holy. There are many who cannot endure the scriptural representation of God, as holy and jealous. They oppose it by carnal reasonings, and give it the most odious names. The reason is plain. Such a view of God sets the opposition of their own hearts to him in the strongest light. The consequence is, God or themselves must be held in abhorrence. There must, therefore, be a discovery of the glory and beauty of the divine nature ; an entire approbation of every thing in God, as perfectly right and faultless. No man can love that which doth not appear to him lovely. And this is the very foundation on which this change is built. While men continue in the love of sin, it is impossible they should see the beauty of infinite holiness ; they will hate holiness, and fly from a holy God, as our first parents did in the garden.

III.

There must be a conviction of sin and danger.

If an entire change be necessary, there must be a dissatisfaction with our past character : whoever is pleased with

it, will neither desire nor accept of a change. Those who are not humbled for sin, will treat with contempt a purchased pardon and a crucified Saviour. This our Lord tells us in the plainest terms. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." "I came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." To these his invitation is particularly addressed: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

From these passages and many others, it is evident, beyond contradiction, that there must be a deep humiliation of mind and sense of guilt and wretchedness, before a sinner can be brought unto God. The source of this humiliation is *a sense of the evil and desert of sin*. This is found in true penitents, and it is this that distinguishes repentance unto life from every counterfeit. Many have trembled through fear of punishment from God, who lived and died strangers to this change: they had no just sense of the evil of sin in itself; no cordial approbation of the holiness of God's nature and law, or of the justice of that condemnation which stands written against every transgressor. Here, O Christian, is the cardinal point on which true repentance turns. Without this there may be a slavish terror, but no true humiliation. There is often as great, or a greater degree of terror, in convictions that prove fruitless, as in others which end in a saving change. The passion of fear in Cain or Ahab, was perhaps equal in degree to the fear of any true penitent recorded in Scripture. It is the principle that distinguishes their nature, and produces opposite effects. The one is alarmed through fear of the wrath of an angry God; the other is truly sensible of sin in all its malignity, and feels the sanction of a righteous, but violated law. The one feels himself *a miserable creature*; the other confesses himself *a guilty sinner*. The one is terrified, and the other humbled.

IV.

There must be an acceptance of salvation through the cross of Christ.

This is the last and finishing step of the glorious work. When this is attained, the evidence of the change is completed, the new nature exhibits all its parts. The spiritu-

al seed is implanted, and hath taken root ; and it will arrive, by degrees, in every vessel of mercy, to that measure of maturity which it pleaseth God each shall possess before he be carried hence.

Before conviction of sin, the Gospel of Christ almost always appears to be foolishness. Or, if education and example prompt the sinner to speak with reverence of a Saviour, there is no distinct perception of the meaning, nor any inward relish of the sweetness of Gospel truth. But those who have been wounded in spirit, begin to perceive its unspeakable value. The helpless state of the sinner makes him anxiously inquire, "What must I do to be saved? I have no excuse to offer, nor any shelter to fly to: the works, the word, and the providence of God, seem all to be against me. O, how fearful a thing it is to fall into the hands of the living God! I have awaked as out of a dream, and find myself fast hastening to the pit of destruction. What would I not do, what would I not give, for good ground to believe that my guilt were taken away, and my peace made with God!"

With what eagerness before unknown, does the sinner now inquire after the way of life? With what solicitude does he go forth by the footsteps of the flock? The Sabbaths, and ordinances, and word of God, are now quite different things from what they were before. No more waste of that sacred time, in business or in play. No more serenity of heart because he had been regularly and constantly at church; but an astonishing view of the sins of his holy things; his careless, formal, heartless worship. No more indifferent, slothful, or critical hearing the word, that he may commend the ability, or deride the weakness of the preacher. Now he hears that "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself." The very news of salvation, the bare mention of pardon, is now a joyful sound. It rouses his attention, and he sets himself to weigh the important intimation. He hears that "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." "Is there then," says he, "hope of mercy with God, whom I have so long forgotten, and so greatly offended? Hath he indeed loved a guilty world? Hath he loved them in so amazing a manner as to send his only

begotten Son to save them from destruction? How great is the giver, how wonderful the gift, and how undeserving the objects of his love!"

This is a brief sketch of the steps by which this great change is effected in the heart. It may be proper, before we close, to mention some of the principal

EVIDENCES AND FRUITS OF REGENERATION.

The heart being renewed, the life will, of course, be reformed; and holiness, in all manner of conversation, will be its natural and genuine effect. He who is born again, discovers his new nature and life, by new apprehensions of God—of himself—of the world—of Jesus Christ,—and of the ordinances of his appointment.

The regenerate person has new views of *God*. He really and inwardly believes the being, presence, power, and providence of God. Formerly, God was seldom in his thoughts; now, he can scarcely look upon any thing, without considering its relation to him. What a lustre and glory does his opened eye behold in all the divine perfections? Above all, what an astonishing view he has of the divine goodness and love, which he sees in all his mercies, of the least of which he is not worthy?

He has quite new apprehensions of *himself*. Before, he thought himself his own master; but now he sees that he belongs to God. He remembers his Creator, confesses his obligations, and mourns for his transgressions. A converted sinner stands astonished at his former conduct. He wonders at the boldness of a poor guilty rebel, perhaps cursing and blaspheming, perhaps rioting in sensuality and lust. He wonders that the power of God did not arrest him in his course; and by some signal stroke make him a dreadful monument of his righteous indignation. He trembles to think of his former state; and it excites a lively acknowledgment of the riches of divine grace.

This is connected with, and increased by his views of the *world*, and of *worldly men*. The charm is now broken; the false colours are taken off from the world and all its enjoyments. How ardently did he once love them! How eagerly did he pursue them, and how did he envy the possessors of them! But now, he can never separate the idea of riches from temptation; and often considers the dread-

ful change of those who are clothed in purple and fine linen, and fare sumptuously every day; but will be, in a little time, tormented in hell-fire. Formerly, he valued persons by their station, genius and wealth; but now, a Christian in a cottage appears more amiable than a blasphemer in a palace.

Further; the regenerate person has new apprehensions of *Eternity*. Formerly, the vanities of time engaged his thoughts, and eternity was seldom in view: but now, it is frequently and strongly upon his mind, so as to correct the false representations of sense, and oppose the unjust claims of earthly gratifications. Formerly, unseen things were treated as fabulous; now there is such a discovery of them, as weighs down all created things, and makes them feel light as a feather in a balance.

The regenerate person has also new views of *Jesus Christ*, the great and only Saviour of sinners. Before, he was "without form or comeliness," all the truths relating to his person and offices were treated with indifference; but now the name of a Saviour is precious. The strongest language is too weak to express his gratitude and breathe out his love. "He is the chief among ten thousand; yea, he is altogether lovely."

Again, the regenerate person has new views of the *ordinances* of Christ's appointment. They were formerly his burden; now they are his delight. Before, the Sabbath wore a sable garb, and an offensive gloom; now, he calls it a delight, the "holy of the Lord, and honourable." Now he thirsts after the water of life, esteems, loves, and desires the word of God. He now readily joins the holy Psalmist in the fervent expressions of his affection to the truths and ordinances of God. "O how love I thy law; it is my meditation all the day. My soul thirsteth for thee. To see thy power and thy glory, so as I have seen thee in the sanctuary."

In short, a change takes place in his whole character and conduct. "The love of God is shed abroad in his heart, by the Holy Ghost;" and is the commanding principle of all his future actions. The love of God is the source, the sum, and the perfection of holiness. All other duties naturally flow from it; nay, all other duties are nothing but the expressions of it. The believer is under the

constant influence of gratitude to God. It is not merely thankfulness to a bountiful benefactor for mercies which have not been deserved; but a deep sense of obligation to a Saviour, who "loved him, and washed him in his own blood:" so that his language is, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do? O that I knew how I might repay some small part of my infinite obligations! O that I knew by what means I might magnify and do thee honour. Write thy laws in my heart, and enable me in every possible way to show that I love thee, because thou hast first loved me."

This plainly includes in it, and will certainly produce, the most sincere and fervent love to his fellow creatures. If they are *bad* men, the same love to God, the same concern for his glory, which fills the Christian with grief and indignation at their daring offences, inspires the most ardent desire for their recovery and salvation. And as to *good* men, they are united by the tenderest and strongest ties, and love one another with a pure heart fervently.

Thus we have taken a brief view of this important subject: a subject in which every reader is deeply interested. Let me now earnestly entreat every one who peruses these pages, to bring the matter to a trial with regard to himself. As all men are either regenerate or unregenerate, let him ask, to which of these classes do I belong? We are dropping into the grave from day to day, and our state is then fixed beyond the possibility of a change. What astonishing folly to continue in uncertainty whether we shall go to heaven or hell, whether we shall be the companions of angels, or associates with blaspheming devils to all eternity! Nothing, therefore, can be more salutary, than that you make an impartial search into your present character and state. If you have ground to conclude that you are at peace with God, what an unspeakable source of joy and consolation? If otherwise, there is no time to lose in hastening from the brink of the pit. Be persuaded then, to set apart some time for the duty of self-examination. Let every one, without exception, take up or renew this grand inquiry, "Am I in Christ? That is, Am I a new creature, or not? Am I a child of God? or do I still continue an heir of hell?"

Let me repeat in your ears this solemn truth, and may God Almighty, by his Spirit, carry it to your hearts: "Ex-

cept a man be born again, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." And remember this is a *great*, a *universal*, an *inward*, a *divine* change. It is far more than mere outward reformation. It is far more than Baptism, or any outward ordinance. Every child of Adam is, by nature, at enmity with God; and must either be renewed in the spirit of his mind, or perish eternally. It is of no consequence what you are as to outward station, if you are not reconciled to God: it is of no consequence what you are as to outward professions, if you are not inwardly changed. God is no respecter of persons; and, therefore, whether you are high or low, rich or poor, whether you are of one denomination of Christians, or another, if you have not been the subjects of a renewing and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, you are children of wrath; and if you die in that condition, must "go away into everlasting punishment."

But is there *now* no relief? Yes, there is: Jesus is "able to save to the uttermost, all that come to God by him." Fly to him for refuge. There is no sin of so deep a dye, but the blood of Christ is sufficient to wash it out. There is not any slave of Satan so loaded with chains, but he is able to set him free. If you perish, it is of yourselves. I have given you warning, from a sincere and ardent concern for your everlasting interest; and may God himself, for Christ's sake, by his Holy Spirit, effectually persuade you to comply with it.

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exposed this folly in the parable of the worldly rich man, Luke, 12 : 16, &c. His wealth increased abundantly ; he was about to enlarge his barns ; and then he promised himself a long life of idleness, luxury, and mirth. But God said to him, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee : then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided ?" Here, for the sake of the body, the soul was forgot. While he was dreaming of years to come, death was at the door ; and little did he think "that the next hour his friends would be scrambling for his estate, the worms for his body, and the devil for his soul."

Village Sermons.

THE LOVE OF CHRIST.

Nothing has so powerful a tendency, under the influences of the Holy Spirit, to warm, and soften, and break, the hard, insensible heart of man, as a consideration of the bleeding, dying love of Jesus. This it is that sweetly constrains the penitent believer to make a surrender of himself to that Savior who has bought him with a price.

When the Moravian Missionaries first visited Greenland, they began their efforts to instruct the heathenish inhabitants by preaching in a regular and systematic manner on the divine perfections ; representing the great Jehovah as a being infinite in wisdom and power, majesty and glory. For a considerable time they preached in this way without seeing any fruit of their labor. None of the Greenlanders were converted, and the Missionaries began to despond. At length they thought, "we have long preached about the divine perfections, and with no effect on the minds of these heathen ; let us now preach Christ crucified, and try whether that subject will move them." The trial was made ; the Missionaries discoursed to their heathen audience about the love of God to a sinful world manifested in the incarnation, life, sufferings, and death of Jesus Christ. They had now cast the net on the right side, and soon they had a large draught. The poor Greenlanders heard with amazement ; they were melted into tears ; many of them renounced their idolatry and their sins, and embraced the Lord Jesus as their Savior.

The Necessity of Renewing Grace.

How helpless guilty nature lies,
 Unconscious of its load!
 The heart, unchanged, can never rise
 To happiness and God.

The will perverse, the passions blind,
 In paths of ruin stray;
 Reason, debased, can never find
 The safe, the narrow way.

Can aught, beneath a power divine,
 The stubborn will subdue?
 'Tis thine, almighty Saviour, thine,
 To form the heart anew.

'Tis thine the passions to recall,
 And upward bid them rise;
 And make the scales of error fall
 From reason's darken'd eyes

To chase the shades of death away,
 And bid the sinner live;
 A beam of heaven, a vital ray—
 'Tis thine alone to give.

O change these wretched hearts of ours,
 And give them life divine!
 Then shall our passions and our powers,
 Almighty Lord, be thine!

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