SOCIAL CHANGE IN AMERICA,¹

THE first thing to which the mind of the English student in America has to adjust itself is the fact of the many Americas of which, during even the briefest period of inquiry, he becomes conscious. And it must be realised that only a fragment of one region can be seen. The visitor may spend his time along a chain of the great cities, or in the academic groups of the East and Middle West, or among the men of business and action between the Atlantic seaboard and the Great Lakes; or he may keep, as I have done, within the long-settled area marked at its extreme points by Boston, Pittsburg, Washington and Philadelphia. And his journey will end, inevitably, in a chaos of memories and impressions and more or less unrelated facts. He will quickly learn that there are other Americas: the new West, with its wide spaces lately brought under the hand of man; the Pacific slope, with its people looking in profound misgiving across to the teeming lands of the yellow races; the old South, becoming here and there transformed out of recognition through its late conquest by modern industrialism. We are aware of the immensity of the United States, but we are apt to forget their extraordinary variety. There is here not a single problem of race or government or social structure, but many problems, every one of which is more than sufficiently baffling.

It is now more than two generations since the American Union lost its homogeneous character. Consider, for a moment, the significance of the population figures. In 1790, the year of the first census, the inhabitants of the new republic numbered not quite four millions (less than one-half of the then population of Ireland); in 1910 they were 92 millions. This immense total, of course, has not been reached by the multiplication of the original colonists, but chiefly through successive waves of immigrants from, in turn, almost every European country. First in order came the Irish, driven across the sea by the famine of the 'forties and its results, and the Germans, influenced by the upheaval of the revolutionary year 1848. At the crucial stage in the history of the United States, when the country was in need of men for the development of industry and the settlement of new lands, came the Civil War, with its estimated loss of a million and three-quarters of able-bodied citizens. Under the pressure of the incessant stream of immigrants the older American stock declined, until in 1900 only about one-half the total—or about 35 millions—were classed in the census as native whites. Of these many millions were the children of foreign-born parents, while of the remainder about 10½ millions

1. A paper read before the Sociological Society, March 31, 1914.

were born and brought up in Europe. The negro population at that time was about 9 millions. During the fourteen years that have gone by since this enumeration the stream of immigrants has been enlarged and accelerated. In 1906, for the first time, it brought over a million new citizens into the republic, and the number has been increased year by year until to-day. The population thus composed, to an ever enlarging extent of transplanted groups, is singularly scattered. Some 15 millions are concentrated in about a score of rapidly expanding cities; a further large portion is to be found in new, and hideous, industrial centres of smaller extent. There is still room for agricultural settlers, broad lands in the Western States calling for human labour and enterprise; but, as a young American writer says: "The great social adventure of America is no longer the conquest of the wilderness, but the absorption of 50 million peoples. . . . It means that America is turning from the contrast between her courage and nature's obstacles, to a comparison of her civilisation with Europe."¹ In endeavouring, therefore, to disengage and to estimate the social forces of the United States we find ourselves confronted with a situation hitherto unparalleled in the world.

Plato and Aristotle thought in terms of ten thousand homogeneous villagers; we have to think in terms of a hundred million people of all races and all traditions, crossbred and inbred, subject to climates they have never lived in before, plumped down on a continent in the midst of a strange civilisation. We have to deal with all grades of life from the frontier to the metropolis, with men who differ in sense of fact, in ideal, in the very groundwork of morals.²

There, then, is the first great mass of fact that we have to consider—the material out of which America is being made.

Mr. Zangwill has relieved us in part of the trouble of consulting the recent Blue Books by printing as an appendix to *The Melting Pot* the statistics of immigration during the twelve months ended June 30, 1913. The total is 1,427,227—practically a million and a half. The table contains several surprises. There is a common impression that Great Britain has ceased to contribute to the population of the United States, and that the stream of Irish immigration is drying up. Yet in the last completed year the English immigrants numbered 100,062, the Scotch 31,434, the Irish 48,103—altogether, with 3,922 from Wales, 183,521 from the British Isles. Scandinavia, with its small reserves of population, contributed 51,650; Germany, 101,764; Austria-Hungary, 144,790; Greece and the Balkan States, 70,561; Russia, nearly 100,000; Poland, 185,207; Italy, 318,519 (more than a quarter of a million of these being from the south); while the Hebrews numbered

1. Walter Lippmann, *A Preface to Politics*, p. 189, New York: Mitchell Kennerley, 1913. London: Fisher Unwin.

2. *Op cit.*, p. 104.

105,826. With the exception of the Jews the vast majority are of peasant stock, but all alike tend to be swallowed up in the cauldron of Transatlantic industrialism. The rough American classification divides them into North and South, white men and others¹—those from Northern and North-Western Europe, who come from comparatively free communities and are more or less of our family, and those of more pronouncedly alien blood and type, the overflow of Eastern and Southern despotisms, political and ecclesiastical. The Northerners generally, and the refugees from Russia and Poland invariably, go as settlers: they are cutting themselves off decisively from the past of their race. But this is not equally true of other peoples. Increasingly the Italians and Greeks emigrate in youth with the intention of going back with their gains in early manhood; most often they postpone marriage until their return. Their enterprise, therefore, need not in the end involve the depopulation and impoverishment of the south-eastern European states. Nor does it, apparently, mean the disappearance of nationality. At least 50,000 Greek soldiers in the Balkan War had come from America, and the inquirer in New England or Pennsylvania soon discovers, by talk with the barbers or drug-store assistants, how keen is the national feeling of the immigrant. Now, as we all know, the problem of the hour in America is the relation of this enormous alien population to the developing society and to the institutions of the American Union. The older and simpler policy was embodied in the conception of the Republic as the Mother of Refugees—the conception expressed, for example, in the motto chosen for the Statue of Liberty—some lines from a sonnet by a Jewish immigrant woman:—

Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore,
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me;
I lift my lamp beside the golden door.

There are still representative Americans—for example, ex-president Eliot of Harvard—who cling to the older view, that the United States may without misgiving continue to welcome the immigrant multitude and that the end is assimilation to the American nation; but it is abundantly evident that American opinion is seriously changing. The contrasted views of the question have recently been brought before us by two writers from our own side of the Atlantic. First, as I need hardly remind you, we have Mr. Zangwill, in the play that has lately aroused so much discussion in London,² with his insistence upon the unlimited, and entirely

1. The Southern Italian, said a member of the U.S. Immigration Commission, is not a white man; neither is the Syrian.

2. *The Melting Pot*. By Israel Zangwill. Wm. Heinemann, 1914.

beneficent, possibilities of immigration and settlement. I quote a typical passage :—

DAVID : "America is God's Crucible, the great Melting-Pot where all the races of Europe are melting and re-forming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups, with your fifty languages and histories, and your fifty blood-hatreds and rivalries. But you won't be long like that, brothers, for these are the fires of God you've come to—these are the fires of God. A fig for your feuds and vendettas! Germans and Frenchmen, Irishmen and Englishmen, Jews and Russians—into the Crucible with you all! God is making the American. He is not yet arrived. He is only in the Crucible, I tell you : he will be the fusion of all races, perhaps the coming superman."

And again, in the last scene :

DAVID : " There she lies, the great Melting-Pot—listen! Can't you hear the roaring and the bubbling? There gapes her mouth—the harbour where a thousand mammoth feeders come from the ends of the world to pour in their human freight. Ah, what a stirring and a seething! Celt and Latin, Slav and Teuton, Greek and Syrian—black and yellow—"

VERA : " Jew and Gentile—"

DAVID : " Yes, East and West, and North and South, the palm and the pine, the pole and the equator, the crescent and the cross—how the great Alchemist melts and fuses them with his purging flame! Here shall they all unite to build the Republic of Man and the Kingdom of God. Ah, Vera, what is the glory of Rome and Jerusalem where all nations and races come to worship, and look back, compared with the glory of America, where all races and nations come to labour and look forward? "

Mr. Zangwill sees the new American society as a complete amalgam of all the peoples, at present separate and hostile, with all their prejudices and feuds, physical and spiritual repulsions, consumed and transmuted through the action of the Crucible. Not so, however, Mr. Alfred Zimmern, whose acute and powerful statement of the problem appeared in the *Sociological Review* of July, 1912. Mr. Zimmern rejects the idea of fusion. Transplantation, he argues, even transplantation to the New World, does not mean a fresh start, spiritually. You cannot make the Lithuanian, the Bulgarian, or the Levantine into an American, but what you *can* do is to kill in him his own little spiritual inheritance. If the earlier batches of immigrants tended to merge into the American population—which is doubtful, witness the Pennsylvania Dutch—the process is no longer going on now that each European race has sent enough men and women to form a community in America. The separate nationalisms are perpetuated; the chief thing the alien learns in the United States is the preservation of his own nationalism. The Crucible, Mr. Zimmern contends, is an illusion. "America is not a melting-pot, but a pot of varnish." The one unmistakeable product of the immigration process is a vast

proletariat, living in conditions which repeat and intensify the industrial serfdom of Europe.

I can make no attempt to decide between these two authorities. But it should be observed that Mr. Zangwill presents the problem in extreme form; indeed, his play—as is the way with thesis plays of this type—does not present the problem at all. He evades it by embodying the idea, or the process, of absorption in a musical genius, who is, to be sure, a Russian Jew, but concerning whom the essential fact is not his racial or religious tradition but his creative faculty. The destiny of such individuals is irrelevant to the issue, since they inevitably transcend the racial boundaries. There is, it will be admitted, much evidence in favour of Mr. Zimmermann's view, even if we put aside the Jew, who has so far been thoroughly absorbed only in small numbers, and chiefly into the rich or aristocratic communities. We cannot, however, at present set a limit to the power of assimilation possessed by the United States, with their incalculable economic opportunities, nor to the influences exerted upon the younger generation of immigrants by the common life of the cities, the schools, and innumerable other cultural forces. We have, moreover, to consider the possibilities inherent in this unexampled situation with its gradual turning over of the controlling power in the State to an alien democracy becoming conscious of its destiny. These people have already the power of numbers, of physique, and reproductive capacity; and they take into the civilisation of America a fertilizing stream of intellectual and emotional force which will work out in ways that are impossible to forecast. They come from some of the oldest races of Europe; yet they are in reality among the youngest and freshest. Physically they are unbroken, and for the first time in their history they are free and provided with opportunity: in a position, therefore, to show of what they are capable. The outlook may be and is full of promise; but as to the industrial serfdom of to-day in the industrial centres of the Eastern States and the Middle West, there can be no doubt whatever:

Few older Americans, except politicians and settlement-workers, know this new proletariat. It lives in Ghettos of its own, or in industrial towns, such as Gary and Pullman, created and baptised by some capitalist employer. Those that know it best are either hardened into a callous indifference or sick at heart at its contemplation. "Go to Gary by all means," said a Croatian physician to me in Chicago, "if you would see the Sodom and Gomorrah of my race." Here, and in similar fortresses of capitalism (for they are strategically disposed like fortresses and sometimes even have walls and gates) the big industrial and trading corporations, who are the real rulers of America, keep their machines running by the aid of cheap south-east European labour. Thousands of

young workmen, mere ignorant peasant boys, form the raw material of some of the most highly protected and privileged American industries, while the most influentially protected of them all swallows up their still more ignorant sisters, at the rate of over a thousand a month, into the neighbouring large town. Here they are assimilated indeed into the New World, assimilated into American economic life, into its crude violence and naked brutality, without a taste of freedom or a hint of citizenship. Emerging, if they do emerge, as adults, and flung upon a world of which they know nothing except that it has robbed them of their birthright as human beings, they are the natural rank and file of a labour revolt which alike in its grievances and its methods, will soon put all our European squabbles into the shade.¹

So far, Mr. Zimmern. And we must agree that industrialism in America is more hideous and inhuman than in any European country: consider the labour wars of the last twelve months—particularly, the horrors of the coal-miners' strikes in West Virginia and Colorado. There is no federal regulation of labour, and in the matter of child labour the United States are to-day where we were half a century ago. Moreover, the contrast of the spectacle of luxury with the misery of labour is at least as glaring in an American city as it is in the Old World; and no observer can fail to note the significance of the contrast as it is presented, for example, in the unceasing movement up town in New York City. The peculiarity of the social structure of New York is the concentration of business in the lower end of Manhattan Island and the constant shifting of the frontier between the business and residential quarters. As the private houses are pushed further and further up town, the avenues become occupied by the manufacturer and warehouseman; the sweat-shop is planted alongside the store; and every day at noon you see Fifth Avenue swarming with the men and women released from the workrooms—thousands of workers, nearly all aliens, the as yet unknown and untried New Americans. A visit to the swarming East Side, or to the great forum of the Cooper Union on Sunday evening is sufficient to reveal the moral and intellectual character of this element, the material of the American society that is to be—its children, bursting with vitality, gathered by the thousand into the free common schools and in part further stimulated by the classes and clubs of innumerable social settlements run by the apostles of Uplift; its adults crowding into the libraries, club-houses, and debating centres, organised in fraternities, reading newspapers printed in strange tongues, absorbing in the same languages or in their newly acquired English the hot-and-hot gospel of Anarchism, providing the I.W.W. (Industrial Workers of the World), the American syndicalist organisation,

1. *Sociological Review*, vol. v, p. 207.

with continuous bodies of recruits, and consuming with astonishing eagerness the writings of Nietzsche and Bernard Shaw.¹

It is, of course, in the Eastern and Middle States that the alien has become the decisive factor. So far the European immigrants are not massed in their multitudes beyond the cities of the central industrial region, and it is therefore on the Atlantic side that the native-born are dying out. The older Americans cannot gain comfort from the assumption that the difference is merely relative, for the vital statistics show how vast is the gap between the fecundity of the new Americans and the stagnancy of the old. But there is one consideration which may in a minor degree encourage the older American. The yearly million and a half does not represent a net increase by immigration. As we have seen, some of the European countries at present contributing most largely to the stream of newcomers receive a considerable number of their own people back every year, and it is probable that the numbers of the home-returning peasants and artisans will grow as the power of America to absorb European labour begins, as it obviously must, to diminish.

For the older States, however, there is another important consideration which has been frequently dwelt upon. The East has been steadily depleted of native virility and initiative by the western drift of its more vigorous sons and daughters. A generation or more ago the Middle West was developed by the adventurous pioneers of the Atlantic States, and since then vast regions of the West have been in great part settled by the men and women of the Middle West.² Hence the real native America, once necessarily east of the Alleghanies, is now west of the Mississippi. This is the tract which furnishes for the student of to-day so large a crop of social and educational experiments, which is giving lessons to the world in varied developments of democracy, and is, among other things, demonstrating for the benefit of older communities the vitality of the association that may exist between city and university, laboratory and field or factory, government machine and cultural institution.

A central and highly significant feature of this new society of the Western States is the State University, consciously developed in relation to civic and social needs. The universities of America

1. On the economic aspects of the immigration problem an immense literature has come into being, especially since the U.S. Immigration Commission of 1907. A good survey is contained in *Immigration and Labor*, by Isaac A. Hourwich, Ph.D. Putnams, 1912.

2. See an interesting discussion of this aspect of the problem in *Changing America*, by Professor E. A. Ross, of Wisconsin. Fisher Unwin, 1912.

are of three kinds: the old foundations of the academic tradition, the newer institutions owing their existence to the plutocratic founder, and the State universities, which have shown most energy in the Western region. It is, as a matter of fact, these last which have shown the way in the new and constructive movement of relating the activities of the university to the needs of city, community, and State. There are in the West thirteen state universities, with over 3,000 professors and 35,000 students of both sexes, who are getting their education almost entirely at the public expense, many of them continuing after the first year to work themselves through the course by earning their livelihood in various occupations. The pioneer of the new order of universities, connected with city and state as intelligence departments, was that of Michigan at Ann Arbor, especially in its scheme of student endowment; but the example that has commanded most attention from inquirers in other parts of the world is the University of Wisconsin. It has developed itself as servant of the state—every one I believe, of its leading professors being directly associated with public administration through such bodies as the Conservation or Forestry Commissions, the scientific surveys, or the Board of Immigration. The professors administer or advise on a score of boards and commissions. The university has related itself not only to the cultural departments of the administration, but to the departments of finance and taxation, railways and labour, public health and agriculture. The public office and the public servant have acquired the habit of calling in the aid of academic authority. The university further enlarges its scope by means of extension courses, tuition by correspondence, itinerant teachers, travelling libraries, and local centres each with a staff of organisers and teachers. A bureau of general welfare answers thousands of inquiries on government, economics, public health, education, industry and every conceivable subject; a municipal reference bureau furnishes information upon civic subjects, while a discussion bureau handles every kind of query in relation to current events and controversies. Twenty years ago not more than four state universities in the country had as much money to spend on all their work as Wisconsin to-day spends on its extension side. This is the Wisconsin Idea, so frequently described and discussed, so eagerly and widely imitated and adapted.¹

Wisconsin, we are told by the thoroughgoing devotees of the new spirit of the West, has eliminated corruption and machine

1. See Ross's *Changing America*; and for a suggestive treatment of the whole subject, with special reference to Michigan and other American examples, Mr. Branford's *Interpretations and Forecasts*. (London, 1914: Duckworth and Co.)

politics and has rid itself of the Boss. That declaration, no doubt, reflects an excessive optimism. The state, we suspect, cannot be so entirely paradisaic; and if it were, the progress so far achieved has probably been due, as has been suggested, less to the improvement of the machine than to the happy accident of Wisconsin's producing leadership, social invention, and constructive minds, and a people endowed with the faculty of response. However that be, the most conservative among us may admit the pleasure and stimulus of meeting representatives of the new West, with their infectious belief in all the latest applications of the democratic principle. These take the form, in state after state, of direct Primaries, the Referendum, Initiative, and Recall, and, with accelerated momentum, a measure of women's enfranchisement. For the democrat from this country, commonly an opponent of the Referendum, it is instructive to talk with the Westerner on the subject. To him it is not an expedient of conservatism, a method of confirming the privileged in their vested interests, but a piece of pure democracy, a practical and effective check upon the political boss by a concentration of the common will. The experiments of yesterday and to-day are advanced enough; but it does not follow that the states which have adopted them are destined to become the most democratic in the republic. On the contrary, as Mr. Lippmann has pointed out, "the West may follow the way of all agricultural communities to a rural and placid conservatism," may be in time to come the heart of American complacency, while "the East, on the other hand, with its industrial problem, must go to far more revolutionary measures for a solution."

I come now to a criticism of the United States which is extremely familiar in the writings of European political theorists. America, we are constantly told, has no sense of the State. The American, says one daring generaliser, "adores the flag, but suspects the State." He clings to property, but is hostile to government. He has cherished an almost unparalleled contempt for the public service, and the disrepute into which he has allowed politics to fall is proverbial. There can be no doubt whatever that this feeling is breaking down, that the old American attitude towards public affairs and the public service is undergoing a profound change. The influences bringing it about are manifold. The vastness of the country has been, of course, the greatest obstacle to the creation of a unified political and social feeling: those immense distances which, for example, make it next to impossible that the United States should develop a national Press. The daily newspaper is of necessity regional; even the weeklies can influence only a more or less contracted area, and as a consequence the monthly magazines alone are national in scope and appeal. Nowadays to

some extent the press syndicates tend to alter this condition, and with developing communications the remoter states are drawn towards the centre. Far more powerful, however, than such material forces have been, within recent years, the influences wielded by great national figures, such as Theodore Roosevelt and Woodrow Wilson. Quite apart from questions of personal merit or political ability, it is impossible to deny to Mr. Roosevelt the credit of having done pioneer work in rescuing the office of president from the toils of the political machine, in giving it actuality and making it embody the idea of national unity. This, coupled with the policy of conserving the national resources, may after all be the basis of Mr. Roosevelt's claim to the gratitude of posterity. And in regard to this movement towards making the State a reality, it is equally impossible not to recognise the remarkable position and tendency of President Wilson. By training and temperament he is a Whig, steeped in the knowledge of English law and constitutional history. "We Americans," he once said, "are to keep or lose our place of distinction among the nations by keeping or losing our faith in the practicability of individual liberty." Yet no one can fail to see that, despite this theoretical standpoint, Mr. Wilson has been attempting and accomplishing things which have carried him very far from the conceptions and practices of liberal individualism. He has taken counsel with representatives of all parties, and at every step has acted, seemingly, from a profound conviction of the power and beneficence of state action. And further, in this connection, it would be difficult to exaggerate the effect of the Panama enterprise upon the general American feeling with regard to the State, its powers and reality. The Panama Canal is the greatest single undertaking ever carried through by government agency. In America at this moment (the time of the practical test and of expert or other criticism has not yet come) the Canal is esteemed a triumphant product of engineering skill, administrative efficiency and purity, and the application of science to the destruction of disease and the maintenance of a high standard of life. The future may prove this view to be accurate, or may prove it to be an over-estimate. But in either case the American public has learned from the Panama Canal a lesson of incalculable import: the lesson that, as Colonel Goethals, the chief engineer and executive officer, put it a short time ago, a Government confronted with a task of this kind can command all the resources of technical experience and professional enthusiasm available for a private corporation, and can, moreover, beat the private corporation in the matter of economy. The result need not be, as Colonel Goethals was at pains to point out, an argument on an impressive scale in favour of socialistic schemes of government industry and control. But as to its psychological effect, in revealing to the American mind

the reality and power of the central Government and in strengthening the growing sense of the State, there can be no possibility of doubt.

English students of American society are given to complaining that in the United States the term sociology is commonly applied to matters of practice—to collective effort in social reform or social service. This is so, and if after coming in contact with America, the English observer is tempted himself to fall into the American way, his excuse must be that he cannot detach himself from a sense of the rapidity and challenging variety of the things that are being done on the other side. He notes, for example, the remarkable vigour of the civic revival; the fight, ever reorganised and renewed, against municipal corruption; the merciless exposures of conspiracy and “graft” which have brought into being a new journalistic industry; the schemes of city construction—not seldom, it must be admitted, disappointing in actual result though sufficiently grandiose on paper; the enthusiasm for public health, for the redemption of child life, for the systematic creation of moral equivalents for vicious activity. He watches the making of playgrounds, of park-ways and park-belts; the gradual emergence of the designed civic centre; the extraordinary re-creation of the great railway stations as buildings not only of convenience and efficiency, but of spacious dignity and an almost religious silence. He notes, again, the rapid spread of Commission Government in the cities—an expedient which, started at Galveston, Texas, as an emergency measure, has been adopted by hundreds of towns to the accompaniment of plaudits from the reformers. Civic administration by a paid commission is not what we in England understand by self-government: rather it is a confession of failure on behalf of the established forms of self-government; but it is not difficult to share the American reformist view that the commission may be made a powerful instrument for civic well-being. Allied with this, and with the broader movement for the redemption of politics, is that still more characteristic American enthusiasm for the redemption of business—the conception of business as the essential religion of the modern man. Mr. Lowes Dickinson was, I believe, the first English writer to call attention to this striking development of the American spirit, and he thought it so bound up with the crudest kinds of advertisement as to be almost wholly contemptible. So simple and harsh a judgment, however, is, to say the least, inadequate. The religion of business, as anyone can see, has its vulgar and vicious side, and some would contend that the modern American’s rediscovery of Robert Owen’s principle that honesty and generosity are the highest money power in commerce and industry is not to be reckoned an ethical advance. But the point is that the idea is working out in various new schemes of production and

distribution—witness the striking minimum-wage experiments by a growing number of manufacturing and retail firms—and from such schemes, apart from the vexed question of Scientific Management, there is reason to expect many valuable results. No one can say that the prospect for America is without peril. The complex race and colour problem, the vast concentrations of wealth and privilege, the might of the industrial and trading corporations, the delicate balance of international credit, the menace of insurgent Labour—these and innumerable other problems suggest incalculable possibilities of disaster. But on the other side, the bright side, how many and how encouraging are the signs of the hour!

America leaves upon the mind a multiform and extraordinarily stimulating impression. There is the keen personal delight of meeting crowds of eager and capable people, who show to the English visitor and inquirer a cordiality and helpfulness that cannot be described and that beggars all gratitude. There is the continual challenge of men and women working with gusto in innumerable avenues of study and thought and public service. There is the coming into view of a new ethic of government and people, of employer and employed, of city and citizen. There is a new sense of collective self-criticism and common effort, expanding from city to state, from state to nation; there is the pervading atmosphere of freedom from the shackles of the past and the outworn; the feel of a great community in the making, building the house of humanity on a finer design and with a broader span. "There are nations," says Professor Eucken, "whose problems and difficulties are greater than their ability to solve them; there are others whose human energy is sufficient for the most difficult problems because it makes them rise from overflowing life towards the unlimited." And of these nations, he adds, is America.

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