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THE NECESSITY OF CONTINUED SELF-EDUCATION.

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AN ADDRESS

TO THE

GRADUATING CLASS OF S. C. COLLEGE,

AT COMMENCEMENT,

ON THE FIRST OF DECEMBER, MDCCCLI.

✓  
BY FRANCIS LIEBER,

OF THE FRENCH INSTITUTE.

PRINTED BY ORDER OF THE GOVERNOR.

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COLUMBIA, S. C.

STEAM-POWER PRESS OF A. S. JOHNSTON.

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## A PREFATORY WORD.

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It is not common that so small a publication as this, is preceded by a preface ; but some circumstances connected with the following Address are believed of sufficient weight to ask the reader's indulgence for a few remarks.

Immediately after the delivery of the Address a distinguished member of our College government spoke to the author, of the copy of the Address. The answer was that there was none, and that the speech had been delivered from a mental arrangement and disposition of the subject. When, therefore, that gentleman, at a subsequent period, proposed an obliging vote of thanks to the orator, in the Board of Trustees, he did not insert the request for a copy, because he thought the writing out of a copy would give too much trouble to the speaker, whose time happens to be greatly occupied at this period. His Excellency, the Governor, *ex officio* President of the Board of Trustees, mentioned this fact to the deliverer of the Address, who declared his readiness to write down all he remembered of the remarks he had made to the graduating class ; and Governor MEANS at once politely requested him to do so, that it might be printed. The order could no longer issue from the Board, because it had adjourned.

This has been done. The author, when addressing his young friends, left out several subjects on which he had intended to speak, partly forgetting them in the flow of the moment, partly because he was afraid of occupying too much time. These omitted subjects he has felt at liberty to add, in the copy prepared for the press ; but he has added nothing else. It has been thought necessary to make this explanation for those readers of the Address, if there be any, who have heard it when it was delivered.

The following is the resolution of the Board of Trustees :

“ *Unanimously resolved*, That the thanks of this Board be given to Dr. LIEBER, for the readiness with which, at the request of the Board, he undertook the performance of the duties of President of the College, at the late Commencement ; for the propriety with which he discharged these duties, and especially for the able Address which, at such short notice, he made to the graduating class.”





ADDRESS  
TO THE  
GRADUATING CLASS OF 1851,  
SOUTH CAROLINA COLLEGE.

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YOUNG GENTLEMEN:

The Trustees, your and my superiors, have appointed me to occupy the President's chair for this day, and in this capacity it devolves upon me to address to you those farewell remarks which it is the appropriate custom to deliver to young men in a position in which you now stand before me—with the staff in your hand, as it were, to sally forth into the broad and open fields of practical life, and rugged paths too, there to find your professions, your support, your names, your reputations, and that exact place which you will occupy in the great social system that surrounds you. When this call was made upon me by the Board of Trustees, I thought that it would evince no high degree of public spirit were I to decline it. I readily accepted the appointment, but I did not do so without anticipating difficulties and embarrassments which I now find surrounding me in their fullest extent.

Remarks, such as I am going to address to you, ought to be conveyed with all the impressiveness with which words can proceed from mortal lips to mortal ears; for they are the last words which an affectionate teacher, in the name of an affectionate institution, addresses to youth who have been nursed and nurtured by its care and solicitude. Their impression ought to be lasting and indelible; but the impressiveness of solemn words publicly delivered depends in a measure upon the dignity of the

speaker. I do not refer to that native dignity of thought and word which consists in the fact that ideas worthy of the occasion be presented in simple language—I mean to take care that my words do not lack this species of dignity—but I speak of that incidental yet not inefficient dignity which flows from the plenitude of authority and the fulness of office. In this I am deficient. You know that I do not stand before you fully robed in the mantle of office; but when I consider how long we have walked, hand in hand, on the path of knowledge and in the pursuit of truth, I cannot help thinking that my words will find an entrance into your soul, and there strike some chords that will vibrate long and loud.

But there is another and a greater difficulty. Where, in fact, am I standing? I stand here where an orator has stood of wide and high American repute,\* whose wealthy eloquence has often gushed forth from this very spot in all the native energy of his Saxon idiom, perfumed with the fragrance of a scholar's mind and the aroma of a cultivated taste—a speaker whose oratory is yet fondly remembered by the humblest classes of our people. It is not more than a twelve-month ago that one of them, as they assemble around the house of justice, on judgment days, said, within my hearing, when your late President passed by, with his infirm step, with which, unfortunately, you are familiar—pointing at him, the humble man said to his neighbors: “That man used to talk like a mocking-bird.” And may I not add to this graceful testimonial, spontaneous like our grateful jasmine in the uncultivated woods, the words of the greatest Italian poet, when he addresses Virgil as “the fount whence issues forth a broad, deep stream of speech?” He used to speak so well! He was a master of the breathing word, while to my tongue still cleaves the accent which we receive in our mothers' first and fondest words. I shall suffer from a constant comparison forced upon your minds by the contrast between the words you have heard here, and, humanly speaking, ought this day to listen to; and the words you will hear in reality. It is therefore no phrase of mere civility if I ask for indulgence and that kindly ear which you have often lent me in my lecture room, where no

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\* The Hon. William Campbell Preston.

comparison detracted from your attention. Give it to me fully—I mean the attention of your soul, not only that of your mind. And, without any farther words on myself and my difficulties, I proceed to my remarks, which I think it proper to impress upon you at this, the last hour of our academic relation.

Young gentlemen and friends, when a parent dismisses a child, when friends sever from friends, when a brother leaves his sister, or a son parts from his mother, it is the universal custom, because founded in our nature, to give a token of remembrance to the parting one—a choice book, a bible, a ring, a jewel, a well-wrought style, a fine weapon—something or other which may last and awaken fond remembrances, growing in fondness as the separation becomes longer and more distant. I, too, will give you a precious jewel at this our parting hour. Keep it and let it never be lost by any negligence; keep it bright, and the light which radiates from this precious stone will do good to your soul. I have taken it from this casket,\* which contains multitudes of jewels, in an inexhaustible treasury. My jewel is this passage: “Take fast hold of instruction; keep her; let her not go; for she is thy life.”—Take fast hold of instruction; keep her, let her not go, for she is thy life.

Instruction is your life, and you are bid to keep it, not to let it go, to cling to it, to hug it to your soul like a bridal friend. Whether the original Hebrew word, rendered in English by the term instruction, means instruction proper, or knowledge or wisdom, or chastisement and training with teaching, it is the same for my present purpose. It either means the knowledge of truth, and wisdom flowing from it, or it designates the means to obtain this end, and which can have value only because it leads to that end. Otherwise, instruction could not be called, so forcibly, *our life*.

I leave it to the minister and the priest, or to the silent meditation in the retired closet, to find out the full spiritual sense of this passage. My intention is simply to dwell upon a subject connected with the method of keeping knowledge and instruction, of not letting them go, and of taking fast hold of them.

You could commit no more fatal error than if you were

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\* A bible lying near the speaker.

to suppose that, as you leave these academic walls behind you, and as you pass through yonder gate, never more to return in the same capacity in which you have dwelled among us, you may leave your books, and, with them, all farther pursuit of knowledge, behind you ; that you have now finished your education, and that the diploma I have this moment given you, in the name of the College, constitutes a dividing mark between a period of acquiring knowledge and that of its exclusive application to practical pursuits. All that we, your teachers, could possibly have done, although a very Aristotle had been among us, and a nascent Bacon among you, would still have been no more than to point out to you which way the road lies, to indicate to you what fields are stretching behind the mountain, which you have not yet been able to climb, and to imbue you with a quickening love of truth, as well as to teach you the method of pursuing knowledge. More, no teacher of the young can do. He can instruct, but the acquisition of knowledge depends upon you, and must necessarily form your chief occupation now as you enter the period of manhood. Instruction comes from without, and can be given ; knowledge must be acquired within, and is obtained by each man's own and independent action. For this is, after all, the distinction between instruction, information, learning, and even erudition on the one hand, and knowledge on the other ; that the first come from without, and are acquired by a purely mental process ; but when information is distilled into an essence which becomes part and parcel of our soul and self—when it ripens into a principle of action—when it becomes a foundation of wisdom and a light of essential truth, then it is knowledge, and then only so. Experience must come to aid its progress and maturing ; I mean by experience, not the merely passing through successive events, however remarkable they may be, but the passing through events and changes with observing attention, a discriminating eye, and a truthful disposition. You see, that your self-education, your most essential training, now only begins, and must never cease as long as you live, if you have resolved to be true to yourselves and are conscious that your Maker has not placed you here in order to pass as loitering idlers through an unmean-

ing life, passively determined by the world without, instead of aiding in determining it, as resolute and good men. There is no such demarcating line as is commonly supposed between the so called self-educated man, and him that has had "an education." It is, indeed, of great importance whether a boy has the means of going to school or not ; but as no person can cultivate his mind by his own unaided and spontaneous efforts, and without owing his culture, in a great measure, to the ideas which are constantly exchanging in the society in which he lives, and which reach him in a thousand rays from the institutions and labours, and motive powers of his period, so, on the other hand, is every one that is able, substantial, or distinguished in any sphere, be it in the useful or fine arts, or politics, in literature or the law, so far as he *is* prominent and of substantial value, a self-educated man, and only able or distinguished so far as self-culture has carried him. Without it, instruction glides off as a dew-drop from a glossy leaf. Without it, information is a garment, not a living part of the body. Go then to work and make yourselves men. We have tried to give you the chisel ; now fashion the marble. Every thing henceforth depends upon yourselves. But if I have thus placed knowledge far above instruction, I feel sure that none of you, who know me so well, can think for a moment that I undervalue instruction. Far from it. Very much indeed must now-a-days be learned with unrelaxing perseverance, merely to keep on a level with the active and manful thinkers and actors of our time. Besides, instruction is like virtue. You cannot stand still. Either you keep increasing them with vigilance and zeal, or you fall back. They either grow stronger and wider every day, or they wither, shrink and decay.

Therefore, take fast hold of knowledge, keep it, let it not go, for it is your life. If this behest has been true at any time, and with reference to the young and old of any period, it seems to me to be peculiarly so at our own epoch. For, if I mistake not, we are living in a period of intense and comprehensive activity ; a period which possibly resembles the agitated age of the Reformation in its universal restlessness, yearning and heaving ; in its rearing and acquiring, and destroying and ex-

ploding ; in its doubting, its inquiring temerity, and its reassuring and falling back upon past things ; in its feverish unrest, and lofty, calming comprehensiveness ; in its embittered struggles and its enlarging humanity.

I am well aware that we are ever inclined to consider our own age a peculiar and prominently important one, for the same reason that the present pain is always the sharpest, and the present enjoyment the highest. A mole hill close before the eyes of a resting wanderer on the sward shuts out from his sight an entire alpine chain at a distance ; but after all allowances and due deductions have been made, and reasoning with the assumed impartiality of a historian some centuries hence, I still believe that your lot has been cast in no period of repose, but on the contrary, in one of great agitation in all the spheres of action, knowledge, sympathy and aspiration.

Do you turn your eyes to the natural sciences and philosophy ? There you see the Frenchman who points to the heavens, and says : In that spot you must find a planet, as far beyond Uranus as Uranus is beyond Saturn, at thirty times our own distance from the sun. And you find the planet. Or you see the German who at length establishes the distance of a fixed star—sixty-three billions of miles off, so that it takes thousands of years before the ray of light parting from that orb can reach the tiny retina of the observer. Or you see the geologist reading the rocks in the bowels of the earth like the pages of a chronicle, in which it has pleased the Almighty Chronicler to reveal the periods by which He has chosen gradually to shape and change, and evoke from successive turmoils, this fair earth of His, until it should be fit to receive that being whom He intended to be capable of spelling these records, and decyphering His own hieroglyphics. Or you see the naturalist who discovers millions and myriads of wonderfully organized beings, infinitely varied, in a drop or a single cellule of other animals. You see an Agassiz and a Humboldt, like priests of Nature, revealing some of her greatest mysteries, showing thought, one thought, the thought of God, pervading the universe and its phases.

Do you turn your eyes to the study of history ? There you see the Englishman, a very sapper of History, excavating, and

with rare sagacity and resolution, unveiling that Nineveh, which even to the writers of the old Testament, was a place of gray antiquity. What an entire volume of history, what an epic, what a tragedy in the Sophoclean sense, it seemed to me, when, but a few weeks ago, I daily passed from that Crystal Palace—itsself a type and symbolization of the broad and stirring thoughts, and wide sympathies, which move our age—to the British Museum, where I stood and meditated before the inscriptions, and sculptures, and gigantic images of past, past Nineveh, great and grave as the error was, which made millions prostrate themselves before them in groping worship, seeking a living God of light in soulless, sable stone. Or you see the busy miner of history bringing to light multitudes of cherished objects, from the place where the Athenian market was; for, happily, at last it has been found, that spot, to which of all others on the globe, the intensest interest is attached—a spot which appears to the imagination of the historian, radiant like a diamond among coarser and darker minerals. Or you perceive every archive ransacked, every county, every life of any importance described, and its description made accessible to the public, while in no previous period historic justice, and calm, enlarged views have found so many truthful votaries as in our own.

Or do you turn your eyes to the science of language? Philology, once comprehending two ancient tongues only, now takes within one grasp the Sanscrit, the oldest of all, and the dialect of the savage, made known to us by the pioneering missionary. Philology has risen from the grammar, to a philosophy of the word—the rind which forms around the thought of man when ripening for utterance.

Or do you behold the application of science to the comforts and uses of daily life? There you find the American, who attached the electric spark like a wing to the word, so that we may imagine it like a mysterious glow-worm, flitting through the distance of a thousand miles with a rapidity too swift for human language to express it, and out-racing even the storm; reminding us of the worlds, in which the minds of Milton and Ariosto moved, when they conceived of beings darting through the unresisting ether of the universe, rather than of

the resisting and opaque reality which usually surrounds us, and grudgingly recedes before the boldest and brightest conceptions of constructive genius. How could I enumerate the most important applications only, which in our half century have been made, and through which it enjoys a full measure of humanizing comfort?

How could I with justice, point out to you the rapidity with which many of the most important improvements have advanced? In the year 1830 the first railway was laid; in 1838 the first steam packet crossed the Atlantic; and in about five years later, I left this town to visit my birth place, and from Columbia to Berlin I proceeded on land, river and sea, exclusively by steam. Indeed you might now leave this spot and go to Calcutta, through our own country, across the Atlantic, through England, Belgium, Germany, the Adriatic, the Mediterranean, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean, around Ceylon, and never be carried by any other propelling power than steam, except, as yet, the short distance across the Isthmus of Suez. The word of Gallilei, "And yet it moves," has become true in more than one sense.

Do you turn your attention to the subject of Labour—one of the indicative elements of every stage of civilization? You will find that one of the most characteristic features of our age, consists in the close union, the wedlock of Knowledge and Labour, and the utmost stretch of productiveness to which labour has been carried. Knowledge has become dis-aristocratized, if I may make a word, and Labour has become dignified. So great and searching a change has produced many revolutions in the whole state of human things, and will produce infinitely more—for *certain* weal in the end, for some woe in the transition. I do not maintain that all these changes have been directly for the better; there is no struggle in the course of civilization that does not leave its dead and wounded on the battle field. Nor do I say, that the great idea of the dignity of labour is not carried at times to an extreme, in which it appears as a distorted caricature, even to hideousness. We need only think of the French communism; but remember, how often I have endeavoured to impress upon your minds the truth, that there is



no great and working idea in history, no impulse which passes on through whole masses, like a heaving wave over the sea, no yearning and endeavour which gives a marking character to a period, and no new institution or new truth, which becomes the substantial addition that a certain age adds to the stock of progressive civilization—that has not its own caricature, and distorted reflection along with it. No Luther rises with heroic purpose, without being caricatured in a Carlstadt. The miracle wrought by Him, to whom it was no miracle, is mimicked in toyish marvels for easy minds. The communists are to the dignity of labour, what the hideous anabaptists were to the reformation, or tyrannical hypocrites in England to the idea of British liberty in a Pym or Hampden. There was a truth of elementary importance conveyed in the saying of former ages, however irreverent it may appear to our taste, that Satan is the mimicking and grimacing clown of the Lord. I will go farther and say, that no great truth can be said to have fairly begun to work itself into practice, and to produce, like a vernal breath, a new growth of things, if we do not observe somewhere this historic caricature. Has christianity itself fared better? Was the first idea, which through a series of errors led to the anchorites and pillar saints, not a true and holy one? Does not all fanaticism consist in recklessly carrying a true idea to an extreme, irrespective of other equally true ones, which ought to be developed conjointly, and under the salutary influence of mutual modification? There is truth in the first idea whence the communist starts, as much so as there is truth in the idea, which serves as a starting post for the advocate of the ungodly theory of divine right; but both carry out their fundamental principle to madness, and, ultimately, often run a-muck in sanguinary ferocity. Do not allow yourself, then, to be misled by these distortions, or to be driven into hopeless timidity, which would end in utter irresolution, and a misconception of the firmest truths.

If you direct your attention to the wide sphere of the law, you will discover the same activity and energy in rearing and destroying. Indeed, this too, is a prominent feature of our age. In no period of our race, have so many and so comprehensive changes taken place in so short a time. The penal code of

almost every civilized community has been remodelled. The trial has been made more just and fair. An entire new science, the science of punishment or penology has been struck out. The civil law of the different nations, and their very systems of judicature, are daily mending and remodelling. The law of nations, that strong cement of peoples, which was conceived by the great Grotius, as the science of politics was gestated by one man, Aristotle, has much expanded and been improved in our times, and is daily uniting more firmly the tribes of our race into one fold and one vast commonwealth of nations; and in diplomacy an essential change has been wrought, by discussing the conflicting rights and interests of nations with entire publicity, of which we have the honour of having set the example.

If you examine the diffusion of knowledge, I had almost said the profusion of knowledge, you will find in that sphere, too, an unheard of activity, from the national systems of primary education, to the enlargement of universities and academies, from the analyser in silent retirement, to the boldest expeditions, from the traveller in Africa, and the New-Englander who caused himself to be landed, lone and daring, on the shores of Japan, to the polar knight-errant of science, persevering with divine obstinacy, which seems to become the bolder, the more irrevocably it appears to be written on those piles of bergs: Thus far and no farther. Then, reflect for a moment on the means of spreading knowledge, and of the increased communion between men. It almost appears as if Guttenberg's sublime conception has been only fulfilled in our age; and along with the widely spread printing, and the telegraph, which the other day carried a message from New York to New Orleans and back again—a distance little short of four thousand miles—in a few minutes, we have the penny postage, a quickening agent of civilization, scarcely less important than the type. There is no branch of industry or commerce, which does not receive its beneficial influence, and the affections of men are as deeply indebted to Rowland Hill, as the busiest producers and exchangers. You have parents; I have children; and we know the blessed luxury of freely writing to those we love, without a heavy postage-tax on our affections.

How is it in agriculture and commerce? How in mental philosophy? Every one initiated in her solemn temple, knows full well that here, too, we have reached the portal of a new era.

How is it in the wide domain of charity? The middle ages scattered charity with a profuse, though not always with a judicious hand, like the Mohametan who, with a pious intention, orders bags full of coin to be thrown among a scrambling multitude; but no age, I believe, has equalled ours in a general attention to the toiling masses, and in its varied attempts to help the necessitous—not only the ragged and the starving. The list of charitable societies in London alone, which Lamartine lately gave to the public, furnishes an ample subject for earnest reflection. And if our age had produced nothing but the Ragged School, the Savings Bank, and the Wash-house for the Poor, I should feel warranted in saying that the throb of charity is not unknown to its heart. I told you that I lately beheld the remains of Nineveh's grandeur. In the same city, whither the emblems of Assyrian sway have travelled—a symbolic indication of the direction which the course of history itself has taken, from Asia through the South of Europe, to the northern nations—in the same city where the wonder of our age was erected, the greatest monument of Peace and Good Will, there too I have repeatedly visited the Ragged School and those rescue schools for young abandoned thieves, and offending girls, far more difficult to reclaim than thieves; and I believe that man was never engaged in a more christian and holy cause. If we justly observe that christianity has produced by far the vastest changes in society, government, national intercourse, commerce and literature, simply because it changed the inner man, and, therefore, humanity itself; we ought to add: And it has been able to produce the Ragged School. Kings and governments have in all ages occupied themselves, at times, with high emprizes; but it was left to our day to hear monarchs mention in their pithy throne speeches, addressed to assembled parliaments, the Primer, the Penitentiary, and the Potatoe,—the poorest food for the poorest people. These are signs that stand for multitudes of things.

And how do we find matters in that vast region of politics—the main staple of what is commonly called History? Hardly has

Europe emergèd, we cannot say recovered, from multifarious revolutions, which made her quiver from one end to the other, when everywhere indications are found of a new and far more serious convulsion, in which she will wade, knee-deep, through blood. There is agitation in the whole field of politics in our own country. Every mind, down to the least observing, is occupied with ideas of the last moment. Freedom or unfreedom, change or unchange, progress, stability, or regress, are the watch-words every where. And what is true of politics is no less so of religion. Papacy, protestantism, judaism—all partake of the same stirring, rising, swelling activity. Nor is it different in the fine arts. An age of purer taste and wider production has succeeded a period of false and narrow refinement; and the sculptor and painter, the proud servants of History and brethren of Poetry, are dotting many a land with their monuments, the effects of a high civilization, and the promoters of a higher one.

Over all this straining activity spreads a public opinion, which has never been equalled in extent, distinctness and vigor. In antiquity public opinion was enclosed and limited by the city wall. In the present time it hovers over and unites many entire countries into one community, deeming even the Atlantic as nought, and making the poet's *mare dissociabile* an unmeaning term. It is general, like knowledge itself. It has left the confined spot on earth, and its corruscations are seen by all and felt by king and kaiser as by the plainest citizen that is not wholly insulated within his surrounding society.

I have been able to direct your attention to a few of the most prominent points only, like a guide, when he leads a party of travellers toward the Alps, and points out some peaks of the colossal mountain group. He can show but a few at the time, but between them are lying thousands of no less important details. Yet I believe I have convinced you of the fact, which I was desirous of vindicating, that you have been born in an agitated, and energetic age, in which it is necessary to be awake and resolute, diligent and manly, in order to keep up with the pushing, jostling crowd on the high road; otherwise you will fall back among the stragglers, and your chance will be lost. Whether the jury of historians, which will be empannelled in after

ages, will find a verdict that our period has made out a claim to have been a great age, we must leave to them ; but an active, intensely energetic age, it certainly seems to me ; and you must gather more and more knowledge, in order to be able correctly to observe, and wisely to discriminate, lest the whole will become to you a tumultuous and disheartening confusion—the very opposite to that mental peace, without which wisdom is impossible.

Add to what I have said the two truths which I have spread before you in the lecture room, that all knowledge must be far in advance of its application before it can be applied ; and that you can possess full dominion over any province of knowledge only when you have a considerable acquaintance with adjacent districts—and your own conscience must tell you that your active self-education must be unbroken and unflagging. Willfully to neglect it would be nothing less than levity, and I now solemnly remind you how often, in the course of my instruction in history and political philosophy, I have shown you that, of all corrosives in the whole catalogue of ethical poisons, levity is far the worst—far worse, in the incalculable and wide-spread mischief it produces, or allows to grow in rank profusion, than passion, and even positive, bold political vice.

There are so many thoughts and feelings crowding upon a man's mind and soul on an occasion like this, that it is difficult to choose—and, when the choice of the subject has been made, to end. I will follow the advice of Martin Luther. He gives it as the ninth and last of his serious advices to a minister, that he should know when to stop in good time, and before the subject appears to him wholly exhausted.

I now only add my last adieu, knowing that I speak in the name of all your teachers, and thus say: Be just, be pure, be truthful, be charitable, be resolute, be temperate and void of levity ; and God will bless you.



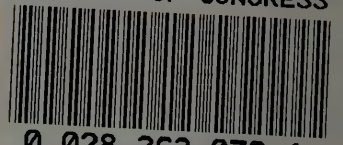








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