

Problems of the ASPR Under J. H. Hyslop

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In the preceding paper (pp. 167–204), Rodger I. Anderson has painted a vivid picture of James H. Hyslop's life and work. The aim of this paper is to supplement that picture by blocking in the background of the ASPR, the problems it faced when Hyslop became its leader after the death of Richard Hodgson, and Hyslop's contributions to the Society.

When the American Branch of the SPR was dissolved, Hyslop went forward with the American Institute for Scientific Research he had organized (Berger, 1985). The new ASPR was to be Section "B" of this Institute ([Hyslop], 1907a, p. 38). One of the Institute's aims was to organize and endow investigations into telepathy, clairvoyance, mediumship, and kinetic phenomena ("Objects of the Institute," 1907, p. 22), and this work—psychic research, or "supernormal psychology," as Hyslop called it—was to be carried on by Section "B."

PROBLEMS CONFRONTING HYSLOP

Office Records

The new ASPR was launched on a "sea of troubles" against which Hyslop, like Hamlet, had to take arms. Hodgson's demise had caught James, Hyslop, and everyone associated with the SPR Branch in America entirely by surprise. No one, except Lucy Edmunds, the Assistant Secretary of the Branch, was familiar with its records. Lucy Edmunds, however, had left the office. "I shall need some rest from this thing for a time," she wrote Hyslop; "there has been so much unpleasantness and injustice in various ways" (Edmunds, 1907). She probably had in mind the bitterness that existed between the (English) SPR and its American Branch over the Piper records and the strained relations between the English and Hyslop (Berger, 1985), but she did not elucidate.

Hyslop was overwhelmed by the crates of records that had been turned over to him—overwhelmed and puzzled. What were these

All reference citations in parentheses under the name "Hyslop" are to works by J. H. Hyslop. Reference citations to works by his son, G. H. Hyslop, are under the name "G. H. Hyslop."—Ed.

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records? Were any missing? Among those he received were clippings of various kinds. When he wrote to the former Assistant Secretary about them, Lucy Edmunds described the office practice she and Hodgson had followed. Newspaper clippings which had seemed worthy of note were placed in an alphabetical file. If, in answer to letters of inquiry, replies showed a case to be promising one, it was placed in the case collection and filed away. If found to be without foundation, it was filed "set-off." Cuttings not worth writing about were placed in scrapbooks. To relieve Hyslop's concern about whether he had received all the boxes of cuttings, Lucy Edmunds assured him: "You have now got them all" (Edmunds, 1907).

Need for New Data

But the cuttings were a meager source of material, and placed the ASPR in a predicament. With the transmission to England of the important Piper records which Hodgson had accumulated, and the departure of Mrs. Piper to England where she was to remain for at least a year to be studied by the SPR, the ASPR was in desperate need of new material and new subjects for investigations and experiments. Hyslop lost no time in appealing for the cooperation of all interested persons to replenish the material that had been lost by the ASPR. It was necessary, he wrote: "to begin the work of collection anew in this country. . . . [I]t may require several years [of] work to arrive at that point of interest which the collection of Dr. Hodgson had established" ([Hyslop], 1907a, p. 35).

Need for Funds

The Institute envisaged by Hyslop involved extensive, as well as expensive, investigations. In regard to funding, Hyslop wrote:

"The time has gone by when we should rely upon the sporadic and voluntary contribution of individuals for the sole evidence of the supernatural and some effort should be made in earnest to place the investigations upon the same substantial basis as is enjoyed by other phenomena. It has been made all the more imperative by the dissolution of the American Branch, which never had funds enough to do its work rightly. I wish in the inauguration of this new movement to keep its financial needs as prominent as the importance of its work. ("Needs of the Institute," 1907, p. 28)

Although a preliminary fund of \$25,000 had been obtained for the work of the American Institute for Scientific Research, the new ASPR needed \$10,000 annually for its investigations. Hyslop perceived that, besides membership fees, an endowment fund was

necessary if the ASPR's work was to continue. In 1907, he campaigned for a permanent endowment fund and devised a scheme of types of membership, the proceeds of which would establish it ("Needs of the Institute," 1907). Seven years later, the financial situation was still grave. Membership fees were not enough to cover all expenses. They fell short of paying the cost of printing and distributing the ASPR's publications, and there was no money for investigations. The small general fund which had had to be tapped to make up for the deficit in membership dues was soon exhausted. Hyslop was compelled to tell the ASPR membership:

[W]e must now emphasize the necessity of an endowment fund adequate to meet the situation, or conclude that the people in this country are not willing to support the work as it is carried on. It must cease unless it is endowed. ([Hyslop], 1914, p. 20)

We cannot think of undertaking this task until we obtain an adequate endowment, one that will enable us . . . to obtain proper assistants in the work, trained scientific minds with experience in abnormal psychology, who will have patience enough to undertake a large task. It is useless to try such work without endowment. ([Hyslop], 1914, p. 22)

THE ASPR UNDER HYSLOP

Hyslop corresponded frequently with Weston D. Bayley. In one of his letters, Hyslop wrote: "I am busy with the preliminary steps for reorganization. I shall send out circulars immediately" (Hyslop, 1906a). But to whom were the circulars to be sent? A good mailing list was needed in addition to the ASPR's comparatively small number of members. Hyslop approached the publisher, Isaac Funk, with an offer to purchase the subscription lists of the popular *Literary Digest*. Funk replied: "You know not what you ask when you ask for the use of the subscription lists Not long ago we refused \$7500 for that identical privilege. I presume our Executive Committee would refuse an offer of \$10,000" (Funk, 1906).

Although there is no reason to believe that the *Literary Digest* mailing list was purchased, the ASPR membership did increase after Hyslop became the ASPR's manager. On June 20, 1906, the ASPR had only 170 members (Hyslop, 1906b). By the end of November, 1907, it had 677 ("Additional Members," 1907, p. 546).

But many more were needed still. One way of increasing membership was via lecture tours; the results, however, were disappointing: "The increase of membership has not been what it ought to have been, judging from the kind of interest manifested in the

lectures" (Hyslop, 1907c, p. 546). A second way was described by Hyslop in another letter to Bayley:

I want especially to consider ways and means of cooperating with local bodies interested in psychic research all over this country. We can not only increase our members in this way, but prevent the scattering of experiments and work generally. We must concentrate the work. (Hyslop, 1906c)

He developed this idea more fully in a subsequent issue of the *Journal*:

In thus encouraging . . . [the formation of local societies] we do not mean that it is advisable to have a number of wholly independent bodies working alone, but groups of members of the central body organized for more serious interest and assistance in the general aims of the Institute. . . . Each independent group should have as much freedom of action as possible. . . . [T]he main reason for general co-operation is the necessity of combining the results of investigation in a way to give them the collective force of which they may be capable and the largest possible scientific interest and form. Phenomena of this kind have too long been allowed to perish or to lose their value simply because they have not received the imprimatur of scientific bodies. ([Hyslop], 1907b, pp. 111-112)

Board of Trustees

Another requirement was an impressive Board of Trustees for the Institute. Funk was quite emphatic about this in a letter to Hyslop: "No man with a reputation for science would risk it in a movement of this kind unless there is a strong board behind it" (Funk, 1906). The Board Hyslop succeeded in putting together consisted of Dr. James J. Putnam, Dr. Minot J. Savage, and Dr. R. Heber Newton. A professor from a large university, however, wondered "why, after twenty odd years in this country, no men better known for psychology and scientific work . . . can be found for your Board" (Funk, 1906).

Within a short time, Putnam and Savage resigned, the former for reasons not disclosed, the latter because of ill health. Newton tendered his resignation because of a "prejudice against clergymen on such a Board" ([Hyslop], 1907a, p. 37), but later withdrew his resignation ([Hyslop], 1907b, p. 108). Hyslop extended invitations to several persons he thought suitable as Board members. The kinds of responses he received can be gathered from his bitter letter to Bayley: "Baldwin declines . . . I have not heard from Sanford of Clarke and Lindley of Indiana. They are too cowardly to try" (Hyslop, 1906b). But surely, Hyslop thought, George B. Dorr, a former Vice-President of the American Branch of the SPR

and one of the administrators of Hodgson's estate, would accept. Dorr replied to Hyslop's invitation: "I dread at the moment undertaking any fresh responsibility . . . I do not like to go upon Committees without taking an active part in their work . . . and that I could not do at present" (Dorr, 1906). Although couched in diplomatic language, it was yet another refusal. And where was William James, who had been a staunch supporter and a leader of the ASPR for two decades? Of all people in America, he should have been on the Board, but he was not.

Hyslop encountered difficulty in finding people willing to go on the Institute's Board primarily because of two factors. First, not many people fully understood the purpose of its Board of Trustees. He was forced to combat the idea that it was to be composed principally of scientists who were to conduct investigations. In order to get rid of this misconception, Hyslop stated that the Board was to

be constituted of men having a national reputation so far as that is possible that it may be the custodian and disbursing officer of the funds contributed to the investigations and practical work of its Sections. . . . The Institute is modelled after the Carnegie Institute in Washington. . . . The Board of the American Institute will simply stand for the importance and respectability of the work and will be responsible for the care of its endowments. ([Hyslop], 1907a, p. 38)

But no such formal explication could remove the second, and probably most important, reason in the way of getting people whom Hyslop desired on the Board. It was his manner. As Funk told him:

If you will pardon me for saying it, it seems to me that you do not try hard enough to conciliate opposition. On the other hand, you antagonize and very largely so by not being considerate of the experiences of other people who feel that they also are able to investigate. (Funk, 1906)

Funk was not alone in his criticism of Hyslop. James, who once confided to Hodgson his own assessment of Hyslop, revealed the most likely reason for his not being more closely associated with Hyslop's Institute: "[Hyslop] has no more notion of policy than a street terrier Hyslop is too crude and hot" (James, 1902).

Relations with the SPR

Apparently, there were some who regarded the Institute and Section "B," now cut loose from the SPR, as a rival of the SPR. Hyslop was at pains to remove this misconception, too. Rivalry in

the field of psychical research would be unfortunate, if not fatal. He made it plain that:

It will be the policy of the American Society to encourage all who are able to remain members of the English Society while they are asked to join the new American Society. Both Societies have the same object and merely occupy different fields in which it is more convenient to do the work independently than in union. There is to be no competition in their organization and investigations. All that are interested and have the means should support both of them, as it is financial assistance that is most needed for conducting their work rightly. With this understanding there need be nothing but goodwill and co-operative spirit in carrying on the investigations for which they exist. ([Hyslop], 1907a, p. 37)

Objects of the ASPR

There were other misconceptions, both among the public as well as ASPR members, about its objects. Some members were angered, or resigned because material was not presented in the *Journal* as propaganda for the spiritistic creed, whereas others fumed whenever material was presented which even suggested a spiritistic hypothesis. The issue of a life after death was unavoidable, "and many people, in their interest and impatience, want that matter settled, in great haste" ([Hyslop], 1909a, p. 199). Hyslop found it necessary to call attention to these misunderstandings of the nature of the new Society. In one of his most important writings bearing on the work of the ASPR, he pointed out:

It is easy to forget that the object of the Society is not to prove any preconceived theory of things. It may find itself forced to accept a theory, but it does not predetermine a view which it will seek to prove. Hence even a future life must take the second place in the work of the Society. The interests of people generally in explanations rather than facts tempts them to always ask for the removal of their perplexities regarding alleged phenomena, but it is only unscientific impatience that persistently asks for theories and explanations where the collective evidence is not sufficient to establish any special claims

The fact is that the object of the Society is not to prove any special theory of phenomena whatever. It is a body for the collection of facts in various fields of the unusual. ([Hyslop], 1909a, p. 200)

Let me then summarize the features which make up the object of this Society and so constitute its problem. They are all parts of one complex plan.

- (1) To collect and preserve against loss all types of human experience that are unusual.
- (2) To subordinate explanation to the presentation of facts and so

to leave to others the duty of forming conclusions, though reserving the rights of criticism and analysis, or even the admission of possible hypotheses.

- (3) To publish all the details of records regardless of what they prove or disprove, having in mind only their importance for understanding the whole group of phenomena claiming to illustrate the supernatural.

- (4) To emphasize the accidents and associations of various phenomena in borderland cases and all types of unusual experiences that may help to explain the nature and limitations of the supernatural. ([Hyslop], 1909a, p. 203)

Our problem, therefore, is primarily the collection of facts and not the proof or defense of hypotheses. They come after the discovery of facts and are the consequence of them. No doubt many individuals feel that they cannot wait for the slow and patient methods of science, but as our object is to influence that inert and biased type of mind we must exhibit patience commensurate with the task or give it up. It required physical science two hundred and fifty years simply to prepare for the last fifty years' work, and physical science has infinitely larger advantages than psychic research ever had or can be expected to have until a differently endowed human race has been evolved. Astronomy had to take time to prove the existence of meteors and physics was slow to admit the travelling ball of electricity. Psychic research may be far longer establishing the simplest of its claims or possibilities. Haste is not possible. ([Hyslop], 1909a, p. 208)

Relations with the Academic World

The publications of the ASPR were beset by a clear absence of articles written by academic people. Hyslop was sharply aware of this deficiency, as well as distressed by it:

The academic world takes no interest in psychic research, or if it has any interest in any quarters is not disposed to take part in it when not a part of the college task. Most of the representatives in the college do not take any interest in the subject at all, unless a casual one. Few see the real importance of the work and in spite of many efforts to induce co-operation on their part we have not succeeded in getting a single man in the universities and colleges to signify any co-operative interest in the subject. Until the orthodox bodies of the world awaken to the importance of the work it will have to be done in the present manner or not be done at all. ([Hyslop], 1909b, p. 249)

On the other hand, some members of the academic world took a great deal of interest in the ASPR and psychical research, although not the kind for which Hyslop had hoped. They regarded psychical

research as a subversive element. As its champion, Hyslop had to defend it against professors of psychology like Joseph Jastrow of the University of Minnesota (Hyslop, 1908c) and Hugo Muensterberg of Harvard University (Hyslop, 1908d). In his defense against the latter, he said that Muensterberg's attack was "the kind of evasion, prevarication and misrepresentation which this subject has to meet at the hands of persons who cannot keep company with the best men in Europe and America," and it was to be the policy of the *Journal* "to show no mercy to men who did not adhere to the strict truth in the treatment of the subject" (Hyslop, 1908d). The *ASPR Journal* did not remain silent, either, when Amy Tanner of Clark University published her *Studies in Spiritism* (Tanner, 1910) as a repudiation of that creed. An introduction written by G. Stanley Hall, President of Clark University and once a Vice-President of the old ASPR, was appended to the book. In his introduction, Hall expressed the hope that the book would "mark a turn of the tide" against the spiritism he despised—a reminder of the specter of the "anti-spiritual bias" that had haunted the ASPR when it was first established (Berger, 1985). But when Hyslop had finished with his crushing criticisms of Tanner's book, what remained was a rubble of factual errors, untruths, and omissions (Hyslop, 1911b).

Internal Conflicts

As though struggles with critics outside the ASPR were not enough, the ASPR was troubled also by interneine conflicts. One involved Eusapia Palladino, the Italian physical medium who had excited great interest in Europe and had been investigated by Lodge, Richet, and Myers (Lodge, 1894) and again at Cambridge by Sidgwick, Alice Johnson, Myers, and Hodgson (Sidgwick, 1895).

Hereward Carrington had become a member of the ASPR Board in 1907 ([Hyslop], 1907b). He was also an assistant to Hyslop, and continued in that capacity until 1908, during which time he established his reputation as an ASPR investigator. His official connection with the ASPR then ceased ([Hyslop], 1908a, p. 409) because the perennial lack of funds made it necessary to dispense with his services ([Hyslop], 1908b, p. 467). The first part of Carrington's book, *The Physical Phenomena of Spiritualism* (1907/1920), was a ruthless exposure of fraudulent mediums. In 1908, Carrington investigated the phenomena at Lily Dale, New York, one of the leading Spiritualist camps in America. His investigation brought to light the fraudulent, and sometimes farcical, nature of the phenomena (Carrington, 1908). It was not surprising,

therefore, that he should have played a prominent part in the case of Eusapia Palladino. Elsewhere I have described Hodgson's role in the decision made by the (English) SPR to dismiss her as a fraud (Berger, in press). Nevertheless, interest in her continued on the continent, and, after further experiments with her, it appeared that she might possess paranormal faculties after all. The SPR decided to reopen its investigation of her. The Committee it appointed to do so included Hereward Carrington. During the autumn of 1908, Carrington persuaded the medium to hold sittings with the SPR Committee at the Hotel Victoria in Naples. At the conclusion of the sittings, the Committee issued a report which appeared in the *SPR Proceedings* (Feilding, Baggally, and Carrington, 1909). In the report, Carrington recorded his "absolute conviction of the reality of at least some of the phenomena . . . the results witnessed by us were not due to fraud or trickery on the part of Eusapia" (Feilding et al., 1909, p. 555). He reaffirmed in the *ASPR Journal* that "some of the phenomena [I] regard as absolutely and finally proved. The phenomena of levitations of the table, raps, and the movement of physical objects without contact are . . . established beyond all doubt" (Carrington, 1909, p. 592). Carrington was ready to bring the medium to America for experiments and asked Hyslop for ASPR funds for this purpose. Hyslop refused, and Carrington sought and obtained money from other sources (Hyslop, 1910). He brought Eusapia Palladino to America, where experiments with her were conducted by Professor Jastrow and others during 1909 and 1910 (Carrington, 1954). Although Hyslop had refused funds for the medium's trip, he supplied a stenographer to make records of the experiments and agreed to attend a few sittings. But, when newspaper and magazine reporters questioned Hyslop, he said that he thought the mode of approaching and investigating the Palladino case was wrong. His conservative attitude was interpreted as "jealousy" and he was accused of being "a dog in the manger" in the case (Hyslop, 1910, p. 170). Hyslop thereupon withdrew from the case. Once again, because it had produced rifts in the SPR and among European researchers, the case of Eusapia Palladino and Hyslop's part in it aroused sharp emotions in the ASPR. "The effect of the Palladino affair," wrote Hyslop, "was a loss of 300 members at one stroke, and we have not more than recovered that number since that time" ([Hyslop], 1914, p. 18). The Palladino affair also created an open disagreement between Hyslop and Carrington over both the methods of investigation and the medium herself which spilled over into the *Journal*.

Hyslop stated:

If the men who essayed to investigate her in this country had first tried to determine whether she was a hysteric or not they would

have saved all the foolish discussion that has centered about her phenomena. It would have offered a scientific alternative between fraud and miracle and the problem taken out of the hands of mountebanks for its solution. (Hamilton, Smyth, and Hyslop, 1911, p. 26)

Carrington was irritated. "You seem to be under the impression," he told Hyslop, "quite common but quite erroneous—that Eusapia Palladino was completely 'exposed' in this country, and her phenomena shown to be nothing but tricks. Nothing could be further from the truth" (Carrington, 1911, p. 487). Hyslop responded: "I have not been under any impression whatever that Eusapia Palladino was completely exposed in this country or any other. I have not believed that there was any 'exposure' whatever except of the people who investigated her" (Hyslop, 1911a, p. 488). But, Hyslop maintained, this did not mean that the phenomena were genuine. It meant only that the investigation was poorly conducted. He held that the medium was an hysteric and that the method of investigation should have been "from [the] position of hysteria" (Hyslop, 1911a, p. 489). Carrington retorted that it made no difference whether or not the medium was an hysteric. The fundamental question was whether she possessed paranormal powers and could move objects without contact (Carrington, 1911, p. 487). Hyslop could not agree. He insisted:

The real question . . . is not whether telekinesis is true or not, but what are the exact facts and all the facts when such claim is made The truly scientific man does not want to prove or disprove anything, but to ascertain the facts and what they mean will be determined later. (Hyslop, 1911a, p. 491)

Hyslop had another internal fight on his hands. For more than a decade, he had personally investigated, chosen, and edited all the material published in the *Journal* and *Proceedings*. He managed the ASPR single-handedly. This situation led to the development of an opposition faction who campaigned against him and tried to oust him from control over the affairs of the ASPR. "One member of this opposition group," wrote George H. Hyslop, "had given generously to the endowment of the Society and apparently assumed that the power of the purse strings entitled the donor to a dominating voice in the scientific program of the organization" (G. H. Hyslop, 1950, p. 134). This opposition faded away, however, when the Board of Trustees supported Hyslop, and the dissidents resigned.

HYSLOP'S CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE ASPR

The charge that Hyslop ran the ASPR "like a dictator" has been re-echoed recently by the historian, R. Laurence Moore (1977, p.

161). Hyslop was no angel. Funk and James thought his manner crude and offensive. His conduct in the Palladino case seems to have been costly to the ASPR. His constant assertions that survival after bodily death had been proven by the evidence were attacked as loose expressions resulting from loose thinking (Jacks, 1918). His writings were criticized not only for some of their inadequacies (Schiller, 1919) and their failure to express thoughts in clear and simple English (Lodge, 1920), but for their dogmatism and combativeness, which Barrett, for instance, thought might have deprived Hyslop of a more respectful hearing (Barrett, 1920). All the same, to describe Hyslop as a "dictator" seems unduly harsh, in view of the support given him by the ASPR Board of Trustees, and in the light of the images of Hyslop conveyed to us by those who were close to him at the time. A Christian clergyman called Hyslop "a secular saint" (Douglas, 1920, p. 456). Gertrude O. Tubby, his secretary, said of Hyslop:

Mankind he loved. . . . To have worked under his direction and training . . . is a privilege as rare as it is desirable. Moral, intellectual and spiritual integrity, scientific understanding and patience, philosophical and religious poise, an appreciation of art . . . these are characteristics of James Hervey Hyslop. (Tubby, 1920, p. 484)

Walter Franklin Prince, who had been appointed by Hyslop in 1917 as ASPR Research Officer, described Hyslop as

the most delightful man to work with We often disagreed and debated, but with the utmost good feeling . . . [Hyslop] was always just Dr. Hyslop knew what rank he occupied in the field of psychical research, but he knew it without elation. Few men who have accomplished anything have been so devoid of vanity. (Prince, 1920, pp. 431-432)

Finally, there is the following from his son: "He believed that each man has his work in the world to perform. He chose his task, and to its completion gave all that he had. His race was well run" (G. H. Hyslop, 1920, p. 481).

When, in 1920, death brought Hyslop's management of the ASPR to an end, where did the Society stand and how did its future appear? The most accurate appraisal had come from Hyslop himself:

The American Society has been handicapped in its work by the need of funds and a laboratory for scientific work, and of cooperators in the field. It has succeeded in raising an endowment of \$160,000 for its work, but the income from this, together with membership fees, guarantees only its publications and the running expenses of its office. It has made no experiments in telepathy, and has had only limited opportunity to investigate spontaneous phenomena.

But it has managed to do some work in the mediumistic field, and maintains its "Journal" and "Proceedings" with such material as it can secure from personal reports and the experiments with a few psychics. It has not yet exercised any such influence over the public as has the English Society. Academic and scientific support, probably on account of the avowed spiritistic sympathies of its secretary, has been weak.

The work, however, is well established, and probably in the future will not be neglected. Enough has been accomplished to make scientific neglect of the problem inexcusable, although much work remains to be done, to overcome prejudices of our materialistic age. When the fact is commonly recognized that psychic research is concerned not with a metaphysical theory, but with the collection of facts which may establish a great truth, the bias of the scientific world will be overcome. The Societies have done much to further this progress; and it is probable that the immediate future will see the barriers of prejudice broken down, with the serious investigation of questions more far reaching than those in any field of physical science. (Hyslop, 1919, pp. 39-40)

In assessing Hyslop's contribution to the ASPR and psychical research, one critic wrote: "Given his original aims, Hyslop accomplished relatively little as head of the ASPR" (Moore, 1977, p. 170). In history, different interpretations of facts are inevitable. But a more careful review of Hyslop's aims and accomplishments discloses this interpretation to be a hasty error of judgment. Hyslop's aim was to organize and endow psychical research to be carried out in America by the new ASPR. He achieved this aim: (1) by becoming its founder and secretary; (2) by becoming, next to James, the foremost American leader in the field; (3) by obtaining, through lectures and articles, an endowment of about \$185,000 for the prosecution of the ASPR's work; (4) by assuring, as administrator of the ASPR, its stability, direction and growth; (5) by presenting, as editor, the fruits of its work in the ASPR's *Journal* and *Proceedings*; (6) by the gathering of facts as the ASPR's chief investigator; and (7) by producing voluminous and detailed records and other writings which never abandoned scientific caution. In the words of his son, Hyslop "had done his best to carry a message to the world" (G. H. Hyslop, 1920, p. 481).

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