Unfinished Music.

BY MINNIE E. KENNEY.

I sat alone at the organ,
At the close of a troubled day,
When the sunset's crimson embers
On the western altar lay.
I was weary with vain endeavor,
My heart was ill at ease,
And I sought to soothe my sadness
With the voice of the sweet-toned-keys.

My hands were weak and trembling,
My fingers all unskilled,
To render the grand old anthem
With which my soul was filled.
Through the long day's cares and worries
I had dreamed of that glorious strain,
And I longed to hear the organ
Repeat it to me again.

It fell from my untaught fingers
Discordant and incomplete,
I knew not how to express it,
Or to make the discord sweet.
So I toiled with patient labor
Till the last bright gleams were gone,
And the evening's purple shadows
Were gathering one by one.

Then a master stood beside me,
And touched the noisy keys,
And lo! the discord vanished
And melted in perfect peace.
I heard the great organ pealing
My tune that I could not play,
The strains of the glorious anthem
That had filled my soul all day.

Down through the dim cathedral
The tide of music swept,
And through the shadowy arches
The lingering echoes crept.
And I stood in the purple twilight
And heard my tune again.
Not my feeble, untaught rend'ring,
But the master's perfect strain.

So I think perchance the Master,
At the close of life's weary day,
Will take from our trembling fingers
The tune that we cannot play;
He will hear through the jarring discord
The strain, although half expressed,
He will blend it in perfect music
And add to it all the rest.

BELIEVING AND SEEING.

By Alexander Maclaren, D. D., Manchester, England.

Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he said unto him, Verily, verily I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see Heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.—John i: 50-5].

Here we have the end of the narrative of the gathering together of the first disciples, which has occupied us for several Sundays. We have had occasion to point out how each incident in the series has thrown some fresh light upon the main subjects, namely, upon some phrase or other of the character and work of Jesus Christ, and upon the various beginnings and workings of faith, which is the condition of discipleship. The words which I have read for our text this morning may be taken as the crowning thoughts on both these matters.

Our Lord, in the first of them, recognizes and accepts the faith of Nathanael and his fellows, but like a wise teacher, lets His pupils at the very beginning get a glimpse of how much there lies ahead for them to learn, and in the act of accepting the faith gives just one hint of the great tract of yet uncomprehended knowledge of Him which lies before them: "Because I said unto thee I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these." He accepts Nathanael's confession and the confession of his fellows. Human lips have given Him many great and wonderful titles in this chapter. John called Him the Lamb of God. The first disciples hailed Him as the "Messias, which is the Christ"; Nathanael fell before Him with the rapturous exclamation, "Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel." All these crowns had been put on His head by human hands, but here He crowns Himself, and makes a mightier claim than any that they had dreamed of, and proclaims Himself to be the medium of all communication and intercourse between heaven and earth. "Hereafter ye shall see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

So, then, there are two great principles that lie in these verses, gathered together in, first, our Lord's mighty promise to His new disciples, and second, in our Lord's witness to Himself. Let me say a word or two about each of these.

I. Our Lord's promise to his new disciples. The first words of the former of the two may either be translated as a question, or as an affirmation, and it makes comparatively little difference to the substantial meaning whether we read "believest thou?" or "thou believest." In the former case there will be a little more vivid expression of surprise and admiration at the swiftness of Nathanael's faith, but in neither case are we to find anything of the nature of blame or of doubt as to its reality. The question, if it be a question, is no question as to whether Nathanael's faith was a genuine thing or not. There is no hint that he has been too quick with his confession and has climbed too rapidly to the point that he has attained. But in either case, whether the word be a question or an affirmation, we are to see in it the solemn and glad recognition of the reality of Nathanael's confession and belief.

Here is the first time that that word "belief" came from Christ's lips, and when we remember all the importance that has been attached to that word in the subsequent history of the Church and the revolution in human thought which followed upon His claim for faith, there is an interest in noticing the first appearance of the word. It was an epoch in the history of the world when Christ first claimed and accepted a man's faith.

Of course the second part of this verse, "Thou shalt see greater things than these", has its proper fulfilment in the gradual manifestation of His person and character, which followed through the events recorded in the gospels. His life of service, His words of wisdom, His deeds of power and of pity, His death of shame and of glory, His resurrection and His ascension, these are the "greater things" which Nathanael is promised. They lay all unrevealed yet, and what our Lord means is simply this: "As you have trusted Me, if you will continue to trust in Me, and stand beside Me, you will see unrolled before your eyes and comprehend by your faith the great facts which will make the manifestation of God to the world." But though that be the original application of the words, yet I think we may fairly draw from them some lessons that are of importance to ourselves; and I ask you to look at the hint that they give us about three things,—faith and discipleship, faith and sight, faith and progress.

"Believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these." First, here is light thrown upon the relation between faith and discipleship. It is clear that our Lord uses the word for the first time in the full Christian sense, that he employs it as being practically synonymous with being a disciple, that from the very first, believers were disciples and disciples were believers. Then, notice still further that our Lord here employs the word "belief" without any definition of what, or who it is that they were to believe. He Himself, and not certain thoughts about Him, is the true object of a man's faith. We may believe a proposition, but faith must grasp a person. Even when the person is made known to us by a proposition that we have to believe before we can trust the person, still the essence of faith is not the intellectual process of laying hold upon a certain thought, and acquiescing in it, but it is the moral process of casting myself in full confidence upon the Being that is revealed to me by the thought; of laying my hand, and leaning my weight on the Man whom the truth tells me about. And so faith, which is discipleship, has in it, for its very essence the personal element of trust in Jesus Christ.

Then, further, notice how widely different from our creed Nathaniel's creed was, and yet how identical with our faith, if we are Christians, Nathaniel's faith was. He knew nothing about the very heart of Christ's work, His atoning death; he knew nothing about the highest glory of Christ's character, his divine Sonship, in an unique and lofty sense. These all lay unrevealed, and were amongst the greater things which he was yet to see; but though thus his knowledge was imperfect, and his creed incomplete as compared with ours, his faith was the very same. He laid hold upon Christ, he clave to him with all his heart, he was ready to accept his teaching, he was willing to do his will, and as for the rest: "Thou shalt see greater things than these." So, dear brethren, from these words of my text here, from the unhesitating attribution of the lofty emotion of faith to this man, from the way in which our Lord uses the word, are gathered these three points which I beseech you to ponder. No discipleship without faith. Faith is the personal grasp of Christ himself, and the contents of creeds may differ while the element of faith remains the same. And I beseech you, let Christ come to you with the question of my text, and as He looks you in the eyes hear him say to you "Believest *thou*?"

Next notice how in this great promise to the new disciples, there is light thrown upon another subject, viz.: the connection between faith and sight. There is a great deal about seeing in this contest. Christ said to the first two that followed Him, "Come and see." Philip met Nathanael's thin film of prejudice with the same words, "Come and see." Christ greeted the approaching Nathanael with "When thou wast under the fig tree I saw thee." And now his promise is cast into the same metaphor "Thou shalt see greater things than these." There is a double antithesis here: "I saw thee," "Thou shalt see Me." "Thou wast convinced because thou didst feel that thou wert the passive object of My vision. Thou shalt be still more convinced when illuminated by Me. Thou shalt see even as thou art seen. I saw thee, and that bound thee to Me; thou shalt see Me, and that will confirm the bond.

There is another antithesis between believing and seeing. "Thou believest, that is thy present; thou shalt see, that is thy hope for the future." Now I have already explained that in the proper primary meaning and application of the words the sight which they promise is simply the observance with the outward eye of the historical facts of our Lord's life which were yet to be learned. But still we may gather a truth from this antithesis which will be of use to us. "Thou believest, thou shalt see." That is to say, in the loftiest region of spiritual experience you must believe first, in order that you may see.

I do not mean what is sometimes meant by that statement that a man has to try to force his understanding into the attitude of accepting religious truth in order that he may have an experience which will convince him that it is true. That is by no means my meaning, but I mean a very much simpler thing than that, and a very much truer one, viz.: this, that unless we trust to Christ and take our illumination from Him we shall never behold a whole set of truths which, when once we trust Him, are all plain and clear to us. It is no mysticism to say that. What do you know about God? I put emphasis on the word "know." What do you know about Him, however much you may argue and speculate and think probable, and fear, and hope, and question about Him? What do you know about Him, apart from Jesus Christ? What do you know about human duty apart from Him? What do you know about all that dim region that lies beyond the grave, apart from Him? If you trust Him, if you fall at His feet and say "Rabbi! Thou art my teacher, and mine illumination," then you will see. You will see God, man, yourselves, duty; you will set light upon a thousand complications and perplexities; and above all you will have a brightness above that of the noon-day sun, streaming into the thickest darkness of death and the grave and the awful Hereafter. Christ is the light: in that "light shall we see light." And just as it needs the sun to rise in order that my eye may behold the outer world, so it needs that I shall have Christ in shining in, my Heaven to illuminate the whole Universe, in order that I may see clearly. "Believe and thou shalt see." For only when we trust Him do the mightiest truths that effect humanity start up, plain and clear, before us.

And besides that, if we trust Christ, we get a living experience of a multitude of facts and principles which are all mist and darkness to men except through their faith; an experience which is so vivid and brings such certitude as that it may well be called a vision. The world says, "Seeing is believing." So it is about the coarse things that you can handle, but about everything that is higher than these invert the proverb, and you get the truth. "Seeing is believing." Yes, in regard to things. Believing is seeing in regard to God and spiritual truth. "Believest thou? thou shalt see."

Then, still further, there is light here about another matter, the connection between faith and progress. "Thou shalt see greater things than these." A wise teacher stimulates his scholars from the beginning, by giving them glimpses of how much there is ahead to be learnt. That does not drive them to despair; it braces all their powers. And so Christ, as His first lesson to these men, substantially says, "You have learnt nothing yet, you are only beginning." And that is true about us all. Faith at first, both in regard of its contents and its quality, is very rudimentary and infantile. A man when he is first converted—perhaps suddenly—he knows, after a fashion, that he, himself, is a very sinful, wretched creature, and he knows that Jesus Christ has died for him, and is his Saviour, and his heart goes out to Him, in confidence and love and obedience. But he is only standing at the door and peeping in yet. He has only got hold of the alphabet; he is but on the frontier of the promised land. He has got something that has brought him into contact with Infinite power, and what will be the end of that? He will infinitely grow. He has got something that has started him on a course to which there is no natural end. As long as his faith keeps alive he will be growing and growing, and getting nearer and nearer to the great centre of all.

So here is a grand possibility opened out in these simple words, a possibility which alone meets what you need, and what you are craving for, whether you know it or not, viz.: something that will give you ever new powers and acquirements; something which will ensure your closer and ever closer approach to an absolute object of joy and truth; something that will ensure you against stagnation and guarantee unceasing progress. Everything else gets worn out, sooner or later; if not in this world, then in another. There is one course on which a man can enter with the certainty that there is no end to it, that it will open out, and out, and out, as he advances, with the certainty that come life, come death, it is all the same. Like a tree growing in some greenhouse, they cut a hole in the roof for it, and up it goes. Whether you have your roots down in this lower world, or whether you have your top up there, in the brightness and the blue of heaven, the growth is one, the direction is one. There is a way that secures endless progress, and here lies the secret of it: "Thou believest! thou shalt see greater things than these."

Now, brethren, that is a grand possibility, and it is a solemn lesson for some of you. You professing Christian people, are you any bigger than you were when you were born? Have you grown at all? Are you growing now? Have you seen any further into the depths of Jesus Christ than you did that first day when you fell at His feet and said, "Thou art the Son of God, Thou art the King of Israel!" His answer to you then was, "Thou believest! thou shalt see greater things." And if you have not seen greater things it is because your faith has broken down, if it has not expired.

II. And now let me turn to the second thought that lies in these great words. We have here, as I said, our Lord crowning Himself by His own witness to His own dignity. "Hereafter ye shall see the heavens opened." Mark how, with superb, autocratic lips, He bases this great utterance upon nothing else but His own word. Prophets have ever said, "Thus saith the Lord." Christ ever said: "Verily! verily, I say unto you." "Because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself." And He puts His own assurance instead of all argument and of all support to His words.

"Hereafter." A word which is possibly not genuine, and is omitted, as you will observe, in the Revised Version. If it is to be retained it must be translated, not "hereafter," as if it were pointing to some indefinite period in the future, but "from henceforth," as if asserting that the opening heavens and the descending angels began to be manifested from that first hour of His official work. "Ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending." That is a quotation from the story of Jacob at Bethel. We have found reference to Jacob's history already in the conversation with Nathanael, "An Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile." And here is an unmistakable reference to that story when the fugitive with his head on the stony pillow, and the blue Syrian sky, with all its stars, rounding itself above him, beheld the ladder on which the angels of God ascended and descended. So says Christ, you shall see in no vision of the night, in no transitory appearance, but in a practical waking reality, that ladder come down again, and the angels of God moving upon it in their errands of mercy.

And who, or what, is this ladder? Christ! Do not read these words as if they meant that the angels of God were to come down to help, and to honor and to succor Him, as they did once or twice in His life, but read them as meaning that they are to ascend and descend by means of Him for the help and blessing for the whole world. That is to say, put it into short words, Christ is the sole medium of communication between heaven and earth, the ladder with its foot upon the earth, in His humanity, and its top in the heavens. "No man hath ascended up into heaven except He who came down from heaven, even the Son of Man which is in heaven."

My time will not allow me to expand these thoughts as I meant to have done; let me put them in the briefest outline. Christ is the medium of all communication between heaven and earth, inasmuch as He is the medium of all revelation. I have spoken incidentally about that in the former part of this sermon, so I do not dwell on it now.

Christ is the ladder between heaven and earth, inasmuch as in Him the sense of separation, and the reality of separation are swept away. Sin has shut heaven; there comes down from it many a blessing upon unthankful heads, but between it and its purity and the earth in its muddy foulness "there is a great gulf fixed." It is not because God is great and I am small, or because He is Infinite and I am a mere pin-point as against a great continent, it is not because He lives forever, and my life is but a hand-breadth, it is not because of the difference between His Omniscience and my ignorance, His strength and my weakness, that we are parted from Him. "Your sins have separated between you and your God." And no man, build he Babels ever so high, can reach thither. There is one means by which the separation is at an end, all objective hinderances to union, and all subjective hinderances alike swept away. Christ has come, and in Him the heavens have bended down to touch, and touching to bless, this low earth, and man and God are at one once more.

He is the ladder or sole medium of communication, inasmuch by Him all Divine blessings, grace, helps and favors come down angel-like, into our weak and needy hearts. Every strength, every mercy, every spiritual power, consolation in every sorrow, fitness for duty, illumination in darkness, all that any of us can need; it all comes to us down that one shining way, the mediation and the work of the Divine-Human Christ, the Lord. He is the ladder, the sole medium of communication between heaven and earth, inasmuch as by him my poor desires and prayers and intercessions, my wishes, my conflicts, my confessions rise to God. "No man cometh to the Father, but by Me." He is the ladder, the means of all communication between heaven and earth, inasmuch as at the last, if ever we enter there at all, we shall enter through him and through him alone. "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life."

Ah! dear brethren, men are telling us now that there is no connection between earth and heaven except such as telescopes and spectroscopes can make out. We are told that there is no ladder, that there are no angels, that possibly there is no God, or that if there be we have nothing to do with Him, nor He with us. That our prayers cannot get to His ears, if He have any ears, nor His hand be stretched out to help us, if He have a hand. I do not know how this cultivated generation is to be brought back to faith in God and delivered from that ghastly doubt which empties heaven and saddens earth to its victims, but by giving heed to the Word which Christ spoke to the whole race while he addressed Nathaneal, "Ye shall see the heavens opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man." If He be the Son of God, then all these heavenly messengers reach the earth by Him. If He be the Son of Man, then every man may share in gifts which through him are brought into the world, and his manhood which evermore dwelt in heaven even while on earth, and was ever full of angel presences, is at once the measure of what each one of us may become and the power by which we may become it.

One thing is needful for this blessed consummation, even our faith. And oh! how blessed it will be if in waste solitudes we can see the open heavens, and in the blackest night the blaze of glory of a present Christ, and hear the soft rustle of angels' wings filling the air, and find in every place a house of God and a Gate of heaven because he is there. All that may be yours on one condition: "Believest thou? thou shalt see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

Home and Foreign Mission Item.

—During the month of January the American Baptist Home Mission Society received two princely gifts toward the endowment of Richmond Institute at Richmond, Va. The first was a gift of $25,000, from John D. Rockefeller, Esq., of New York, for the endowment of the Professorship of Biblical Theology. The second was a gift of $25,000 from Joseph B. Hoyt, Esq., of Connecticut, for the endowment of the Professorship of Church History. By the action of the Board, these professorships will bear the names of their respective donors.

—The Baptist Home Mission Society of the United States must receive $195,000 between February 1st, and April 15th, to close the year free from debt.

—The colored Baptists of Kentucky have 45,000 communicants and a college with over 200 students.

—These are in New Orleans 35 colored Baptists churches, 25 pastors and 10,000 communicants. A semi-monthly paper is published by these colored Baptists and is a creditable sheet.

—At the end of five months, Missionary Bagby had in Rio. Janeiro, Brazil, a Baptist church with eight members.

ESTHONIA.—On July 1, I preached on the Island of Worms to a large number of people who had assebled in a wood. This place was chosen because no other place was large enough for the crowd which had assembled. The women and children sat down in a large open space, surrounded by a dense throng of men standing; and, as there was not room enough for all, others could be seen behind bushes and trees, while some had found places on the branches. This assembly had been waiting my arrival five hours, for I was much later than had been anticipated. As nine-tenths of the congregation were Swedes, a lady acted as my interpreter. On July 10, I went with my interpreter to the Island of Dagoe. The report of my approach reached every village and every hut. There I baptized twenty-one persons. In October many urgent appeals came to me to go again to Hapsal, whither I repaired, and then on by steamer to the Island of Dagoe. I visited at once Count Ungern Sternberg, as he had expressed a wish that I should do so the next time I came. He received me most cordially, and declared his readness to give to our brethren a site for a chapel and burial-ground on the island if they made the request. This I was immediately empowered by the brethren to present. A large audience was awaiting me, and many pleasing instances of earnest inquiry after the truth were furnished. We have now fifty-seven converts on this Island, and I have received altogether over two hundred up to the present time in Esthonia, besides forty-five in St. Petersburg.—Rev. J. Schiewe, St. Petersburg. (Extracted from "The German Baptist Mission Reports.")

—There are said to be thirty young men in our theological seminaries in the United States ready to devote themselves to the work of ForeignMissions, as soon as means are forth coming to send them.

—The territory of Russian Siberia, one and a half times as large as the United States, has belonged to Russia three centuries, yet of the 4,000,000 inhabitants nearly one-half are still Pagans. Paganism is fostered by the home government. The Pagan priests are allowed to collect and burn the copies of the Bible with which the missionaries supply the converts, and no missionary may baptize without the authority of the Pagan civil authorities, who are allowed to do most anything to drive Christianity from the country.

—Dr. Nevins has made an estimate that there are, or were, in round numbers about 800,000 idol temples in China; and at the rate of ten idols to each temple, there would be 3,000,000 idols!

—These temples he estimates to have cost $1,000,000,000! And the money which is spent annually by this people in worship and the repairs of these buildings as well as the building of new ones, is simply beyond conception. In Soochow, one of the largest temples has recently been overhauled and repaired, at an expense: it is said, of $70,000—largely given by one man, who thereby is supposed to get great merit.

—*The Japan Mail* reports a most remarkable preaching services held in Tokio, in the largest theatre of the city. The audience are variously estimated at from 4,500 to 6,000 each day. The preaching was mostly by native Japanese pastors, and the people listened eagerly for four hours each day while the gospel was preached to them. *The Mail* says: "The large attendance, the earnest attention, with so little dissent or interruption, in so public and free a place as the most popular theatre in Tokio, give evidence of a marked advance in public sentiment in favor of Christianity within the space of one short year."

—The work in all foreign mission fields seems to enjoy a prosperity hitherto unkown. Communicants in these missions increased in 1881-82 at a rate six times greater than in the home field, and in 1882-83 at a rate sometimes greater. And yet, an occasional objector says converts in foreign fields are secured at a "rather high price." What complacent ignorance!*N. O. Adv.*

—A recent letter from France says that reports from different parts of the country are very encouraging as regards the progress of evangelical belief. Among the colliers of the North there appears to be arising a revival not unlike that which came over England, under the preaching of Whitfield and Wesley. Along the Belgian frontier and elsewhere, there is great eagerness to listen to the tidings of the gospel, and the most intelligent of miners vie with each other in opening their houses for reunions, addressed by missionaries and colporteurs, some of whom have been workingmen themselves.

Faithful Rebuke of Profanity.

Frederick the Great had acquired from his French associates the disgraceful and degrading habit of profane swearing. On the occasion referred to, when a large atheistic and scoffing element was present the king was profusely profane. One of his guests was his trusty General Ziethen, who was not only brave in the field, but also loyal to the King of heaven. He was deeply grieved at the unkingly behaviour of his master. Rising from his seat at the table, and bowing respectfully to the king, he said in substance, "Your majesty is aware that with due deference to your majesty's will, I have ever rendered you such service as I was able to perform. My sword has ever been drawn in defence of your majesty's rights and interests, without a murmur. But I cannot sit quietly by and hear the name of my Lord Christ thus irreverently bandied about at this table. I salute your majesty." Amid a deathlike silence of the company the brave old veteran took his seat. The king was visibly moved by the heroic conduct of his noble officer, and, taking him afterward into his private appartment, he acknowledged his fault, begged the General's pardon, and promised never to wound his feelings thus again.

The inexcusable timidity which hesitates to rebuke profanity was once shamed by a king who had been himself rebuked for profanity. Riding along the highway in disguise, and seeing a soldier at an inn, he stopped and asked him to drink ale with him. On an oath which the king spurted out while they were drinking, the soldier remarked:

"I am sorry to hear young gentlemen swear."

His majesty took no notice of it, but swore again. The soldier immediately said:

"I'll pay part of the pot, if you please, and go; for I so hate swearing, that if you were the king himself I should tell you of it."

"Should you, indeed?" asked the king.

"I should," was the emphatic reply of his subject."

Not long after the king gave him an opportunity to be "as good as his word." Having invited some lords to dine with him, he sent for the soldier, and bade him stand near him, in order to serve him if he was needed. Presently the king, not now in disguise, uttered an oath. And deferentially the soldier immediately said:

"Should not my lord and king fear an oath?"

Looking at the heroic soldier, and then at his company of obsequious noblemen, the king severely remarked:

"There, my Lords, is an honest man; he can respectfully remind me of the great sin of swearing, but you can sit here and let me stain my soul by swearing, and not so much as tell me of it."

A merchant and ship owner of New York was standing at the entrance of his warehouse conversing with a gentleman on business. A pious sailor belonging to one of his vessels, came to the warehouse to enter it, but observing that the door was occupied, modestly stepped aside, not willing to interrupt the conversation. While waiting there he heard the name of Jesus profanely used; and on turning to look, he observed that it was his employer who was speaking. Instantly changing his position, and standing in front of the gentlemen, with his head uncovered, and his hat under his arm, he addressed the merchant in this language—

"Sir, will you excuse me if I speak a word to you?"

The gentleman recognized him as one of the crew of his vessel recently arrived, and supposing he might have something to say about the business of the ship, told him to speak on.

"You won't be offended, then, sir, with a poor ignorant sailor if he tells you his feelings?" said he.

"Certainly not," replied the merchant.

"Well, then, sir," said the sailor, with much feeling, "will you be so kind as not to take the name of my blessed Jesus in vain? He is a good Saviour. He took my feet out of the horrible pit and miry clay, and established my going. O Sir! don't if you please, take the name of my Master, the Lord Jesus, in vain! He is your Creator as well as mine; and he has made you, and preserves you, and is always doing you good."

This was said with so much earnestness and feeling that the gentleman was quite touched. His eyes filled with tears, and he said:

"My good fellow, God helping me, I will never again take the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Saviour, in vain."

"Thank you, sir," said the honest sailor; and putting on his tarpaulin, he went away to his work.—*Sel.*

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