The Dying Year's Sermon.

BY J. DENOVAN.

"The door was shut."—Matt. 25:10.

I. *What* DOOR *does the Saviour refer to?* "I am the door; by Me if any one enter in he shall be saved." The gospel of God's grace in Christ presents an open door to all mankind, offering a way of escape, a place of shelter, a free welcome to the enjoyment of divine hospitality and friendship to everybody and anybody, and if people do not enter it is because they will not. Yes, we believe and proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ, "good tidings of great joy to all people"—good news that ought to be published at every street corner and in every open field, that ought to be flung out on the broad wings of every breeze and borne away on every billow to every shore—the glorious doctrine of the angelic anthem which rung over Bethlehem's plains.

Like the open door of a hotel near steamboat wharf or railway station, Jesus Christ is an open door offering a warm welcome to all comers, the weary and worthless, the hungry and the poor. Down then, down with all prohibitions and restrictions, with all the fences, gates and toll-bars of creature qualifications and creature conditions. If you will put up a public notice, please don't write, "Trespassers and tramps will be prosecuted," but "Tramps and trespassers are cordially welcomed." Come to Jesus, "the door"; come *through* Jesus Christ into God's favor; come as you *now are* in all your sin and hardness of heart; don't wait for what you suppose are the right kind and quantity of faith or penitence, but

> Just as thou art, without one trace
> Of peace or purity or grace—
> Oh ruined sinner, come!

The marriage supper is spread, the oxen and fatlings are killed and all things are ready; into the streets and lanes of the city, into the highways and hedges of the country the King of Grace has sent us to gather guests. Not goodness He wants, but *guests*; not good clothes, nor good manners, nor respectability, nor money, but *guests*. Jesus saith, "I am the door, by Me if *any one* enter." Mr. Anyone, where are you? Mrs. Anybody, I hear an urgent invitation to you. In everything my Lord is rich, *but guests.*

> "Jesus sends me to declare
> All is ready, all is free;
> Nor need any one despair,
> Since he saved a wretch like me!"

But II. *The text tells about this open door being "shut."* Ah, it is hard to believe this terrible text—"And the door was shut."

The doors of glory, the gates of New Jerusalem are not shut at all by day, and there is no night there; but let us remember those doors are shut for those of us whose day of grace here is passed. When the little, lowly door, Christ—the one door of justification and acceptance has been shut against us, we have no way of approaching the open gates of pearl "when once the Master of the house hath risen up and shut to the door." Over the door of free grace I can see in our text these awful words written, "*Divine patience wears out.*" Last Sabbath evening thousands of those that assembled under the sound of the gospel have already found this terrible sentence true. When they entered the sanctuary door THE DOOR CHRIST stood wide open before them, but when they left their pews that Door was forever shut. *That* was *their* last opportunity.

The God of grace has always acted in this way. Year after year, as the Lord of the vineyard, He came seeking fruit on the barren fig tree of the Jewish nation, until, even His divine patience exhausted, He commanded, "Cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground?" Once and again the voice of the intercessor successfully interposed, "Lord, let it alone this year also." But at last the axe of retributive judgment fell, and oh, what a blow was that by which the Jewish nation was severed from its gracious privileges and scattered like the withered leaves of a fallen tree, before the blast of God's vengeance! At this season of the year, how many of us now resemble the Jews when the long suffering of heaven was nearly worn out? "This year also"—oh, fruitless professor, consider what these words mean to thee. Backslidden one—unconverted soul, "this year also" has sped away, carrying with it the record of God's gracious forbearance and your rebellion! "This year also" the fields of nature have been reaped, the leaves have all fallen, the dark cold shadows of short wintry days and long wintry nights silently and solemnly remind you of all you have neglected and lost. Is not this the last day of your gracious visitation? But a few breaths more till the hour strikes that shall shut the door of saving mercy in your face forever.

It is now some thirty years ago that a commercial crisis in New York fell like a thunder bolt on the city of Glasgow, and I can well remember that day when the Western Bank of Scotland, with millions of liabilities, suspended payment. That dark disastrous day a shut door preached a silent sermon under which thousands trembled. Before the bank door stood a terror-stricken multitude: the old gentleman, check-book in hand, *too late* to get a draft cashed; young men and maidens clutching Western Bank bills *too late* to get them exchanged for gold or silver; the widow whose little all had been invested in Bank Stock standing with her two orphans beside her gazing in speechless despair at the bank door. Along the streets many were running in the direction of the bank, while others were returning from it slowly as in a dream, with these words on their lips, "The door is shut!" Before the bank door still lingered thousands far on into the day, apparently paralyzed with the calamity and unable to realize that *that* handsome door could really be shut. But the door *was shut*; against all knockings, tears, entreaties and remonstrances in broad day that door remained shut. The splendid hall, the broad mahogany counters, the busy clerks and obliging tellers, the abundance of wealth that for years had flowed there in a steady stream of notes, gold and silver,—all, all seemed now but a dream of the past—a mere bright vision that had suddenly vanished. The play had ended, the curtain had fallen, "the door was shut." Consternation and despair stood pale before that shut door.

Would to God I could at this season make some feel one-half as much concerned about *this shut door* of which the text speaks! Oh, conscience, arouse thee! it is Jesus Christ who speaks about the door being shut. Oh, thoughtless soul, the hour is fast drawing nigh, if it have not already struck, when the door of the Bank of heaven's grace shall be shut to thee forever. "And many will come in that day, saying, Lord, Lord open unto us." Yes, many have come, and many more will yet come too late to present God's promissory notes—too late to draw golden gifts of rich free grace—*too late—too late*, for the door shall be shut. With sinking, hopeless hearts, I see them turn away—away out into a dark eternity, forever ruined! "*The door was shut!*"

III. Who *shuts the door?* "The Master of the house," the Lord Jesus Himself. Just think of this.

Saddening as it is for any weary homeless one, when the cold shadows of night are settling down, to meet a shut door where he hoped to receive a kindly welcome, such sadness may be greatly deepened because of the person who has shut the door, especially if it was shut *intentionally* to bar the wanderer out.

A thoughtless, ignorant servant may rudely slam the door of his old home in a returning prodigal's face. But what cares the poor fellow for that; he will knock till the sound reaches his father's ear; he will shout till his voice reaches his mother's heart, and then the officious menial will be taught better manners. But, oh think how the perishing prodigal's heart must sink within him when it is no mere servant's, but his own father's or brother's hand that bolts the door of home against him—when it is his own mother's voice he hears saying, "I cannot and I will not see him." Now, *who* shuts the door of gracious approach to God? An angel? No. A priest? No. Jesus Christ Himself, "the Master of the house." "He that is holy, He that is true, He who hath the key of David, He who openeth and no man shutteth, and who shutteth and no man openeth," for He Himself is "the Door." Read these statements, ye priests and Pope of Rome, and then tell us what your Latin masses, your holy water and extreme unction are worth. Read them, ye deluded Protestants who hope that, at the eleventh hour, when death is filming your eyes and paralyzing your mind, the devout prayers of a pious minister will give you a passport to heaven. Read these terrible words, all ye that boast you can pick God's lock with the crooked key of your own free-will at your own "convenient season," or bribe heaven's door-keepers with the spurious money of your own righteousness. Try, for experiment—try to unlock the fountains of the great deep; to unfasten the winds and open the windows of heaven; to unbar these fetters of ice by which the Almighty chains the waves of the Arctic seas; but even after having done these little things in this little world, then dream not that human skill or power shall ever open that door Jesus hath shut.

This leads us to the question, fourthly, How *is the door shut?*

When Jesus withdraws from any soul, that soul has really no door to enter. When the Father ceases to draw us, come we cannot. "No man *can* come to Me except the Father which hath sent Me draw him." In short, when the Triune God simply *lets us alone*—gives us our own will and our own way, then to all intents and purposes the door is shut. Yes, my friend, when Jesus stops knocking at your heart ("Behold I stand at the door and knock"), then you will contentedly fall asleep in your sin and never awake again spiritually. Any "means of grace" in operation without the Divine Power of grace is like the mechanism of the galvanic battery without contact with the chemicals that generate the electric power. When Jesus saith to the Holy Ghost, "They are joined to their idols, let them alone," then indeed He shuts the door. When He allows us to sit at ease in Zion abundantly contented with our share in the perfunctory services of religion—when the minister's voice soothes like a lullaby, and the voice of song is an entertainment to us—when our deepest convictions take the form of evanescent "good resolutions" only, *then* it does seem as if "the door were shut." For 5,000 years God hath declared, "My Spirit shall not always strive with man."

Let me give you two specimens of *how* the door may be shut very quietly. For years a devoted minister has pled with, wept over, and prayed for a church and congregation, but the people only feel annoyed at his importunity and earnestness. By-and-bye, the Master lays him aside or calls him away, and so the church is *relieved* of his unacceptable ministry. Soon his place is filled by some smooth-tongued moderate, whose settled principle is to say, "Peace, peace!" What a pleasant change is this! but it is the deep peace of spiritual death. No loud cry of warning, no threatening denunciation of sin and sloth now bursts from the preacher; "he is such a genteel and considerate man, he would not for the world hurt anybody's feelings, or say a word to make anybody miserable!" saith Mrs. Grundy and her daughters. No tear now falls on the pulpit Bible. "Our new pastor never could so far forget himself!" The troubler of Zion is away—yes, and "*the door is shut.*"

Again. A godly mother has long laboured by counsel, example, correction, instruction and prayer, for the conviction and conversion of her children, and the children have been barely able to bear it all. But at last she sickens and dies; and these children, carefully arrayed in appropriate mourning, lay her gray hairs softly in the grave. What a relief! The restraint is gone, and they now, "like other respectable people," can run with the world both in fashions and pleasures without incessant disagreeable remonstrance. Ah, ye thoughtless boys and girls, little do ye know that *your greatest mercy* was buried in your sainted mother's grave. It was her hand that kept "the door" ajar for you; and when her eyes were sealed in death the door of God's special grace to you was shut; and you must now knock *for yourselves* "when you feel like it."

This is *how* the door is shut, by sinners just getting their own wishes gratified. Let to ourselves, oh how true the solemn words are, "Ye will not come unto Me that ye might have life"!

V. WHEN *is the door shut?* Considered critically the parable in which stands our text answers, When the Bridegroom comes; but at this season especially the text may be profitably used to teach that when our day of grace terminates, as it certainly will do at death, if not long before then, the door is shut. No hope can be vainer than the hope multitudes build upon their death-bed repentance. Death-bed preparations for eternity are a snare of the devil.

Oh ye souls who purpose, in the quietness of a sick chamber and amid the solemnities of approaching death, to make preparation for eternity, let me beseech you seriously and closely to look at this parabolic picture drawn by the Master's own hand. See those five virgins (if you *can* see them in the midnight gloom,) standing before that fast-closed door. Only an hour ago they were in high expectation and eager hope; less than an hour ago the joyful marriage party crossed the threshold, but now the door is shut and these five are shut out. Hark! the song and dance *within*, but *without* darkness and silence. Within the door lights are flashing, wine cups of joy are flowing and happy faces are smiling, but without the door five bitterly disappointed creatures—too late. Poor foolish girls! fit emblem of those that never set about seeking salvation in right earnest until death is closing the door of the faculties with iron hand. When the eyes have become so dim that they cannot see the promises, then *that* door is shut; when the ears have become so dull they cannot catch the words of prayer, then *that* door is shut; when the brain is so bewildered with fever and oppressed with pain or weakness that it cannot think consecutively, then *that* door is also shut. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God," but where can God's word enter when every door that leads to mind and heart is shut?

This is no fancy sketch, I assure you, but grim and sad historical verity. Alas, how many (like these five virgins) hurry to the market of grace to buy oil when they have barely time to trim their lamps and march away! Yes, sinners generally feel their need at last, and earnestly try to supply it, sending for priest or pastor, elder or pious deacon. Aye, when the voices of earth are gradually sinking into silence and the voices of the eternal world are waxing louder (as through the gloom of a forest I once heard the waves warning me that I was approaching the sea shore), when the lights of this world are waxing dim because the distant lights borne by the bridegroom's advancing company are now flashing upon the midnight gloom, when the curtains of time are being drawn aside revealing the stupendous realities of eternity, *then* the dying man bestirs himself. Just look at him. And think you that man is not in downright earnest to get salvation? Yes, indeed he is. But delude not yourselves with the idea that all those who thus *sincerely seek* shall find. Hath not Christ said, "Ye shall seek me and shall not find, and where I am thither ye cannot come?" Sincerity and earnestness sometimes come too late. Sincerity is not redemption. Earnestness is no passport into the family of the Firstborn. No one ever enters into God's favor or God's home but by Jesus Christ "THE DOOR." Many have come to that door to find it shut; "for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, but shall not be able." We can come only when the Father draws. We certainly cannot enter after the door has been shut, for when HE "shutteth no man openeth." When the flood was rising multitudes fled to the mountains honestly endeavouring to escape the judgment of heaven, and devoutly crying to God to pity and save them; nay, doubtless many might then be seen swimming round the ark, knocking at its very door and imploring rescue; but neither sincerity, earnestness nor prayer could open *that door* that awful day. "The door was shut." "The Lord shut it, we are expressly told, shutting in certain persons and shutting out all the rest. No one can question the earnestness, sincerity and importunity of those five virgins to gain entrance to the marriage. Had they not dressed for the occasion? Had they not waited the bridegroom's arrival patiently for hours? Had they not hastened away even at midnight to replenish their lamps with oil? But these most honest endeavours of theirs, these very sincere desires of theirs did not open the door the Master had closed. Mark this, I pray you.

And this is the obvious and simple application of my sermon. It is your business and mine to seek the Lord *while He may be found.* For why? It is our business to "Call upon Him *while He is near.*" Why? O let us take His sovereign mercy now when we can get it, for the time is coming when His mercy shall be clean gone forever. It is only *when He shines on us* we can see the way; *while He is drawing* we can ascend the hill of holiness; *when He is knocking at our heart's door*, we can knock at His door; *when He is working in us*, we can work out our own salvation.

Infant Baptism.

That Baptist views are prevailing largely in pedobaptist churches is very evident. This is seen in the large number of persons who, in uniting with these churches, insist on Scriptural baptism. The baptisteries of our churches are often used by pedobaptist ministers, who to retain their converts, or with the more worthy desire of pleasing them all in their power, baptize them in the gospel way. The number of baptized persons in pedobaptist churches is getting to be large, and the fact is very significant.

And that infant baptism in pedobaptist churches is declining is also a very significant fact. A thorough pedobaptist holds to infant baptism with the utmost tenacity. To the Christian mother brought up in that way it seems a sacrilege to withhold her infant from that rite of Rome which has been so generally adopted by Protestants. Doubtless in some quarters the doctrine of infant baptism will be denied. Men who have no accurate statistics of their churches will scout the idea that this ceremony, which to them is a divine institution, the substitute for ancient circumcision, is losing its hold on evangelical communities. But facts and figures show that such decline is actual and increasing. It cannot be denied by any one who has taken the pains to collect the figures.

Mr. Henry C. Vedder has collected some statistics on the subject which are very convincing. Mr. Vedder is an accurate statistician, and is pretty sure to be well informed on any subject on which he may write. He takes up first the Episcopal figures:

"Taking the year 1850 as our standard and point of departure we find sufficiently full reports from the dioceses of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Ohio, Louisiana, Alabama and Wisconsin. They report in all 38,467 communicants, 5,236 infant baptisms and 1,028 adult baptisms. This is a ratio of one infant baptized to every seven members, and one adult to every thirty-eight. The following table will show the relation of these facts to those disclosed by the subsequent history of the church:

Year.	Communicants.	Infant Baptisms.
1850,	38,467	5,236
1863,	122,955	22,092
1865,	134,170	21,781
1870,	176,563	21,749
1875,	272,174	30,580
1880,	322,713	29,368
1885,	398,098	38,430

It will be seen the baptisms in 1885, with 398,098 communicants, are less than in 1880 with 322,713 communicants. The Reformed church is then taken in hand, and the same result shows. And this state of things is so well understood that men have been appointed by the classis of the Reformed church to prepare papers on the subject, and show the reason for such decline. Figures like the following are quoted:

Classis.	Churches.	Churches Reporting no Infant Baptism.
Geneva	17	9
Michigan	9	4
Montgomery	23	10
Orange	26	9
Saratoga	14	7
Schoharie	14	8
	103	47

Mr. Vedder next looks at the Presbyterian church, and finds the same or a worse state of things. He takes the largest churches in New York, Brooklyn and Philadelphia, and their figures, which look peculiar to us, must look ghastly to Presbyterians:

"The Fifth Avenue church, Dr. John Hall, pastor, reports 1,730 members and but 21 infant baptisms; the University Place church, Dr. R. R. Booth, pastor, has 1,195 members, with 46 infant baptisms; the Fourth Avenue church, Dr. Howard Crosby, pastor, has 1,384 members, and reports only 17 infant baptisms; the Brick church, Dr. Bevan, pastor, has 1,100 members, and baptized 23 infants, and the Madison Square church, Dr. C. H. Parkhurst, pastor, with 777 members, reports not a single case of infant baptism during the year. . . . Then take the Brooklyn Presbytery: Dr. Cuyler's church reports 1,761 members and only 31 infant baptisms, and Dr. Talmage's 2,471 members and only 49 infant baptisms."

Among Methodists and Congregationalists the facts are more significant and suggestive. Those two great denominations show such a falling off of infant baptism as indicates an extreme of laxness and indifference. All these things prove very conclusively that infant baptism is being neglected by thousands of honest Pedobaptists, who, after searching, have found no warrant for the rite in the word of God, and justifies the statement of the *Congregationalist*, as quoted by our author, viz:

"The simple fact appears to be that the doctrine of the evangelical churches as to infant baptism is in a transitional state, and has, at present, a materially loosened hold upon the popular conviction. . . . Congregationalists—under the attrition of Baptist friction on the one side, and the force of their own principles of individualism on the other—have become a good deal demoralized in this particular."

The little treatise of Mr. Vedder's is a reprint from the *Baptist Quarterly Review* of April, 1882, and nobody should thank the author for it more candidly than the pedobaptists themselves.—*Christian Enquirer.*

Toiling Women.

A shirt-makers' strike! These working women, driven by hard poverty, became desperate, and actually refused to work sixteen hours a day making shirts at thirty-five or fifty cents a dozen. Unreasonable mortals! It is impossible to live on these earnings; they are merely sufficient to starve on. The wolf is always at the door, whining for entrance, and the enfeebled toilers have scarcely strength enough to keep him back. This is a picture well worth our pondering. Philanthropy may be puzzled to find a solution of the problem, and religion may feebly sigh that such a state of things can exist in a great Christian city like New York; but facts are facts, and sooner or later they must be faced. Immeasurable wealth on the one side, poverty as dark and hopeless as the pit on the other; the impossibility of earning an honest livelihood and the temptation to lead a life of sin and plenty overlap each other. Then when the girl, half starved and poorly clad, shivering with cold and utterly friendless surrenders to fate, we say, "Shame!" deplore the infidelity of the times and marvel that so many of our blooming youth betake themselves to evil ways. If tears can flow at human suffering they will not withstand the sorrows of a shirt-maker's life, but fall like heavy rain. Between the upper and nether millstones of fierce and ruthless competition these half paid women are being ground—thousands of them—to powder. Their homes are but caricatures of what the word implies—dingy, dark, sunless, barely furnished rooms, whose stove cries out for fuel and is fed so sparingly that heat is almost a stranger to it. They stitch, stitch wearily, from daybreak until "flaky darkness" drives away the light, and then renew the monotonous labor in their unquiet slumbers. Can such things be and remain unnoticed? Well, such things are and within pistol-shot of your own house. And not only this throng of shirt-makers, but other throngs of both women and men are engaged in the hard battle of life, bearing burdens so great that a Christian civilization should come to their relief with reforms and new laws and more brotherhood and less indifference to our struggling fellow creatures.—*N. Y. Herald.*

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Things to Be Deplored.

Whether a man liveth or dieth he is of God. Man is more than that which is incorporated in his mere body, although the fact is not recognized as it should be. In this nineteenth century man is not willing to be led, but demands more than anything else personal freedom. With personal liberty there has grown a materialistic sentiment, a mere recognition of things corporal and seen, that has completely overshadowed the higher, nobler and more Christ-like feelings. Even the home has been subjugated by this feeling. There is a lack of that sentiment which made it customary in former years for the entire family to assemble daily together, bow in humble prayer and supplication to the Heavenly Father, a loss which we deeply deplore. There is a lack of the predominance of religious feeling among the every-day life of many of the present generation that is deplorable, and which is being superseded by something entirely different. There is a lack of that higher and purer friendship that once existed between friends, that we deeply regret. A great many friendships there are which are based upon mere personal charms. But few nowadays have that pure and high affection for one another that results from an appreciation of the nobler and more Christ-like characteristics of a person.—*Phillips Brooks.*

Too Busy to Pray.

In the chapter entitled Christ as a Man of Prayer, in Rev. James Stalker's Imago Christi, occurs this helpful passage for those who consider themselves "too busy to pray":

Jesus appears to have devoted Himself specially to prayer at times when His life was unusually full of work and excitement. His was a very busy life; there were nearly always "many coming and going" about Him. Sometimes, however, there was such a congestion of thronging objects that He had scarcely time to eat. But even then He found time to pray. Indeed, these appear to have been with him seasons of more prolonged prayer than usual. Thus we read: "So much the more went there a fame abroad of Him, and great multitudes came together to hear and to be healed by Him of their infirmities; but He withdrew Himself into the wilderness and prayed."

Many in our day know what this congestion of occupations is—they are swept off their feet with their engagements, and can scarcely find time to eat. We make this a reason for not praying; Jesus made it a reason for praying. Is there any doubt which is the better course? Many of the wisest have in this respect done as Jesus did. When Luther had a specially busy and exciting day, he allowed himself longer time than usual for prayer beforehand. A wise man once said that he was too busy to be in a hurry; he meant that, if he allowed himself to become hurried, he could not do all that he had to do. There is nothing like prayer for producing this calm, self-possession. When the dust of business so fills your room that it threatens to choke you, sprinkle it with the water of prayer, and then you can cleanse it out with comfort and expedition.

More Air, Mr. Sexton.

One of the secrets of Mr. Moody's great success in conducting meetings is his practical good sense in caring for the necessary and healthful condition of the body. Any and every one who is at all familiar with his mode of work must have realized this fact. An abundance of fresh air is always provided, if possible, (and he makes and will leave it so), first of all; then there is a change of position and variety in the exercises that is a constant and refreshing change, thus affording rest in the midst of the exercises, that continues and maintains the interest throughout. We have sometimes thought this lack of necessary provision for fresh air for audiences in churches—especially at evening services—is the principal reason for the small attendance on their services. Churches that have been heated for morning service and closed until evening, without ventilation, to retain the heat, are then opened for the evening, and closed again as soon as the audience are gathered and seated. The close heat, with the gas, united with the exhalations unconsciously but surely emitted, soon render the atmosphere of the place a most noxious compound, dangerous for any one to inhale, and enervating in the extreme to any nervous or delicate organization, and dangerous for all. A Paul or Apollos couldn't long withstand such an influence, and the audience are all hoping it will soon be over. Florence Nightingale, out of her vast experience, said if she were to prescribe one remedy for all ailments, it would be an abundance of fresh air at any and all seasons of the year; indeed, that was all that some ailments required. Christianity should not be denied this most beneficent provision of its Author for all mankind.—*Religious Herald.*

— A man may go to the mountains for beauty or grandeur; true, but he goes to the mountains for something more. Nature is not only beautiful, flowery; nature is medicinal. The sea is the doctor, the mountain is the physician. Old, loving mother Nature has her own drug stores; frequent them and you will seldom go elsewhere. There is not a mountain in the world that is not helping the health of the world. The great Atlantic or any of the great seas are so many great sanitary powers. They are not merely so many miles long or broad, they are sanitive agents. All the little flowers are doctors. If you were to go out ever so heart sore, you might get better by talking to a primrose. Lift up your eyes, behold who created these things, suns and stars and systems. He who rolled the stars along counted the hairs of your head.—*Dr. Joseph Parker.*

— Mr. Thos. Bell, of Messrs. Scott, Bell & Co., proprietors of the Wingham Furniture Factory, writes: "For over one year I was not free one day from headache. I tried every medicine I thought would give me relief, but did not derive any benefit. I then procured a bottle of Northrop & Lyman's Vegetable Discovery, and began taking it according to directions, when I soon found the headache leaving me, and I am now completely cured."

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