heckmated: A Linnæus of the Hindu Kush.

A Thrilling Story of the Afghanistan Border.

The relentless August sun beat down | he set to work to think matters out. | against us. Now, this I must prevent at on the old native fortress, which had This was the 17th, and on the 21st the all hazards; and if such a man as you, lately been converted into the British Russian agent was expected to leave whom I have trusted with this secret, frontier of Fort Chardagh; down on Reshat; and here Armstrong spread out were to go to Reshat and return within the dusty little barrack-square, where a his map of the district and endeavored five days, bringing me accurate knowlsmooth-faced English boy, aided by a to calculate distances on it-no very easy edge of his route, I might be able to do native Jemadar, was drilling a levy of task, as neither in Russian nor in Dilti so." huge black-haired Pathans; down on territory were British topographers ex- The Pathan's eyes flashed for a mothe stuffy little office, where a Babu actly welcome guests. It was evident ment, and then drawing himself togethtelegraph clerk, terrified by the uncon- that any person going from Reshat to er, he answered proudly: "Captain Sahib, genial surroundings to which he had Dilt must at a certain point pass very you did me a great service once, and been translated, squatted half asleep, close to the imaginary British frontier wondering if he would ever see line; but then the Diltis might have ar- honor do you do me now in speaking to Chandni Chowk again, but keeping a ranged a meeting somewhere outside me thus, and this also I will remember. drowsy eye on the needle of the instru- their own country, and even if he found This much only can I say, that if by the ment, which seemed to him his only link the Russian trespassing on territory favor of God I am able to get to Reshat with civilization; down on the meagerly- claimed to be under British influence, he other than by the usual path, within five furnished little room in the officers' quarters, where, cursing his lot even forcibly would be rather too arbitrary a sire, and that without the knowledge of more vehemently than the telegraph proceeding. If he could only have got any other man." Then with a sudden clerk, sat Captain John Armstrong, D. S. some reliable information from Reshat! change of manner he asked deferentially O., the political officer of the district. It But it was fully a week's journey diswas only quite recently that Fort Char- tant, and there was no direct road furlough leave from the Lieutenant Sahib dagh had risen to the dignity of possessa ing a political officer and a telegraph clerk. This district it controlled was, in the summer time. For a time he acfor that part of the world, a singularly peaceful one, and it commanded none of the great passes leading into India. True, it was pushed so far forward into the Hindu Kush as to be the nearest British outpost to the Russian sphere of influence in Central Asia: but it was less on this account than because of its proximity to the powerful khanate of Dilt that the government had suddenly thought fit up and down the bare little room, re- ed, a little thin and fine-drawn about the to station a political officer there. England was on the verge of undertaking one of her "little" frontier wars, which might easily develop into a big one, if the Diltis elected to throw in their lot with the recalcitrant tribes it was thought necessary to punish; and although no European had ever been permitted to enter Diltistan, it was considered advisable to keep a watchful eye on it from our near- finished his inspection of it. Armstrong est point of vantage. Armstrong, than whom none of the younger officers of the years without learning that one should day possessed a better knowledge of never seem in a hurry. Then he raised favor of God have found out this. For either the frontier tribes or their dialects, his eyes, and saw the man he had sent had been selected for the post; and thus for standing motionless at attention in it was that on that breathless August the doorway. afternoon he was sitting cursing the fate which had consigned him to such a Godforsaken spot, for he felt that the three months he had already passed there might just as profitably have been passed in the Highlands of Scotland as in those of Pathanistan. Never, no, never, had he been in such a beastly hole! True, Pargir, where he had last been stationed on similar work, was bad enough; but there, at all events, the natives played polo, whereas here they seemed to and an outcast from his own district on care for nothing except tilling their wretched fields, and had not furnished had, like many of his compatriots, drifthim with matter for even one little re-

oughly bad temper. But relief was even now at hand. A discreet cough and tap on the door presently announced Mohan Lal, the telegraph clerk, bearing a freshly-arrived dispatch, which, as he opened it, Armstrong saw was in official cipher code, and therefore of importance; and so, dismissing the salaaming Babu, he hastily got out his code book and proceeded to decipher it. It was from the political officer at Peshawur, and when translated read thus:

port to the foreign office at Simla. As

he lay listlessly smoking, and listening

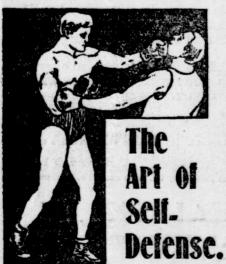
to the sounds vaguely floating in through

the open window from the parade ground

below, Captain Armstrong felt in a thor-

"From Simla. Reported Russian political agent leaves Reshat (the nearest Russian post to our frontier) on 2ist. Secret mission Dilt. Watch frontier. If found on Russian territory, turn back. Use every possible effort prevent success. Important. Acknowledge. Braid-

wood. Peshawur." So! here was work at last, and pretty ticklish work too, as Armstrong well knew. Many a man in his place would have telegraphed back for more explicit instructions; but he was not one of that sort, and merely sending a curt acknowledgment of the receipt of the message,



The popular idea expressed in the hrase, "the art of self-defense," shows the opinion that the chief enemies a man has to defend himself from are visible and external. But the real danger of every man is from minute and often invisible foes. In the air we breathe and the water we drink are countless minute organisms leagued against the health of

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Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets cure con-Dr. Pierce's Pleasant Pellets cure con-

could but warn him off, as to detain him days, you shall know your heart's dethither, merely a sheep-track, occasionally used by Uzbegs bringing down salt tually thought of making a dash for puzzled even one of his comrades to have Dilt himself, on the off-chance of forestalling and outbidding the Russian man the smart, well-set-up havildar of agent; but had to dismiss this idea, as the Chardagh Rifles. he knew the government would never sanction such a course, which, moreover, would probably only result in the murder of himself and his escort. For fully twenty minutes Armstrong walked but towards evening Daoud Shah returnvolving plans in his mind and puffing out huge volumes of smoke, until an the best part of a week had been almost idea struck him, and summoning a ser- incessantly traveling over the worst vant, he bade him find the Havildar parts of the Hindu Kush, but otherwise Daoud Shah, and tell him that Captain Sahib would speak with him at once. Presently a shadow fell across the map over which he was still poring; but he manner, though his heart was throbbing did not look up until he had leisurely had not lived among natives all these

> Now Armstrong had been agreeably surprised on his arrival at Fort Chardagh to find in the havildar of the newlyraised native levy an old acquaintance in the shape of Daoud Shah, who some years previously had acted for three seasons in succession as his shikari when be on the road, on which horses travel ibex-stalking in Baltistan, when a strong feeling of mutual regard had sprung up between the two men. A Pathan of the Pathans, recking nothing of human life, account of a blood-feud, Daoud Shah ed into the British service, prepared to be true to his salt; but probably equally ready to fight against it when his term of service was over if inclination prompted him to do so. None the less he had a great respect for the English sirkar and its officers, and above all for Armstrong Sahib, who at the risk of his own life had once rescued him from what seemed certain death on a treacherous snow-slope. Daoud Shah had sprained his ankle, and Armstrong had bound up the injured limb with strips torn from his own putties, and stayed by his shikari all night on a ledge of rock fifteen thousand feet above sea-level, until morning dawned, and he was able to get down to the valley below, and return with help for the disabled man.

"Come in, havildar, and shut the door,' said Armstrong; and then, as the Pathan obeyed, he continued, unconcernedly, "Have you ever been in Reshat?"

The havildar replied that he had, and that, moreover, he had kinsmen living there at the present time. This was news indeed, and Armstrong's eves could hardly prevent a flash; but he went on quite coolly: "And in how short a time could a strong man, knowing the mountains, go from here to Reshat and re-

The havildar paused ere replying, and, striding to the open window, gazed eagerly forth at the great range of the Hindu Kush, which blocked the northern extremity of the valley. Then, as though satisfied with his inspection, he replied: "By the favor of God, in such a season as this, while the snow lies high on the summits, and in good weather, a man"-he paused, and looked his officer in the eyes-"such as you or I, sahib, who is not afraid of the mountains, could go to Reshat and return in five days; but such as those"-and he jerked his head disdainfully at the Chardaghi levy in the barrack-square below-'would be fifteen days on the journey.' Five days, and today was the 17th? There might yet be time; but Armstrong betraved no emotion as he went quietly on: "And from Reshat to Dilt. how long for a party, probably of mounted men? surprise; but he, too, betrayed none, as he slowly answered: "That, Captain Sahib, I cannot truthfully say; for I do not know the path, nor can I say whe-

ther it be practicable for mounted men; but not less than four days." Armstrong asked no further questions,

but paced once or twice thoughtfully up and down the room. Should he take the Pathan into his confidence or not? John Armstrong had not been born on the northern slopes of the Cheviots for nothing, and few men had the bump of cautiousness more fully developed than he: but experience had taught him that there are exceptions to every rule, even to that of never trusting a Pathan. Moreover, he had a real liking for Daoud Shah, the liking which one strong man ly within his grasp. A smart young offihas for another who has cheerfully risked life and limb by ledge and iceslope and snowslide, with him for weeks at a time, and then, too, he instinctive- general fast living and consequent negly felt that the Pathan had the same feeling for him. His mind was quickly ally dared to indulge in the heinous ofmade up, and suddenly halting and looking Daoud Shah straight in the eyes, he said: "Havildar, I am minded to intrust; in high places, would probably have been you with a more than common service. transferred to Siberia, instead of, as was It has come to my ears that an agent of the case, to Central Asia.

the Russian sirkar goes from Reshat to

that have I not forgotten, and much "if the Captain Sahib would get him the whilst he went to change his uniform?' and within half an hour he had left the fort so disguised that it would have recognized in the dirty, unkempt tribes-

The fifth morning after his departure came without any news of him, and Armstrong, despite his belief in the man. was beginning to feel a little anxious; face, as a man might well be who for showing no signs of fatigue.

"Well, havildar, what news?" asked Armstrong, in his usual unconcerned violently, as the man sprang to attention at his approach. "My news is this, sahib," he answered.

"I have been to Reshat, and by the the past year there has been a Russian officer going and coming between Reshat and the north. But three days since he came again, and though he would fain keep it secret, yet it was known in the bazar that he rides to Dilt with four of an escort; Turcomans be they, not Russians, as dark as an Afridi, but not so strong. Five days must he it is believed, but this I cannot say for certain, he meets certain of the tribesmy blood, and he will lead him so that tomorrow evening he will pass along the hollow path which is three miles from the ruined tower where the sahib slept' last month when he went to look for ibex."

Armstrong nodded to show he remembered the place, and then asked if Daoud Shah had seen the Russian officer. "I did," sahib," was his reply; "he is of your height and shape, but older, and of weak vision, wearing blue chash-

maks" [spectacles]. "Good; you have done well, very well, havildar," said Armstrong, approvingly, 'and this service neither the sirkar nor will easily forget. Say nothing to any man of where you have been; and go and get food and rest; but first tell the Lieutenant Sahib I would speak with him."

Ten minutes later the Lieutenant Sahib -a sandy-haired, smooth-faced English lad-was listening, wholly delighted and half incredulous, to certain instructions from the political officer. Indeed, he could not repress a chuckle of ecstatic admiration when Armstrong dismissed him with the final injunction, "Then you quite understand that if I have not returned by Thursday morning, or if you have not received a message in writing from me by the same date, you will send this cipher telegram to Colonel Braidwood at Peshawur"; and before sunrise of the next morning Armstrong, accompanied by Daoud Shah and a little band of twelve picked men, all specially selected by the havildar, and clad alike in mufti-Afghan mufti, be it understood-had left the fort and were already many miles away among the northern mountains.

Late in the afternoon of the same day a little company of five men on horse back was slowly making its way, under the guidance of a sullen-faced Pathan, through one of the most desolate and uninhabited districts of the Hindu Kush. The mounted men, consisting of four swarthy-visaged Asiatics, and a European officer wearing blue spectacles, all dressed alike in dark-green uniforms, with cartridge-bandoliers crossing their It was now the havildar's turn to feel | breasts, and baggy trousers stuffed into high boots, rode leisurely along. The men, wearied by their long day's march.

a great part of which had perforce been done on foot, leading their horses, lolled in their saddles, thinking hopefully of the time, now close at hand-so their guide assured them-when they would reach their halting-place for the night. Even their officer seemed to have relaxed his usual vigilance, riding bent forward in the saddle, and absorbed in his own reflections.

For ten long years Major Alexis Stephanoff, despite occasional more or less exciting interludes like the present, Emulsion of cod-liver oil. had been exiled from all that, in his opinion, made life worth living, and at last the chance of regaining this seemed faircer in the Preobajensky Guards he had fallen into disgrace at St. Petersburg. inasmuch as not content with high pay, lect of his military duties, he had actufense of dabbling-very mildly, be it said -in politics, and but that he had friends

Here, however, he had done his best Dilt within the week to stir up the Diltis to purge himself of his youthful betises, BABY'S OWN TABLETS

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a zealous and useful officer. He soon developed a marked aptitude for dealing with Asiatics, having naturally a pretty talent for diplomacy of the Russian order, which simply consists in secretly doing what you have openly promised not to do, and possessing in addition a marvelous gift of acquiring tongues. By dint of these accomplishments he had successfully engineered one or two rather delicate operations, so that in course of time he had risen to be secret intelligence officer on the Himalayan border-a post he had filled so well that it had been almost officially notified to him that if he proved successful in his present mission of adding to the British complications on their frontier, he would be re-

called to Europe and reinstated in his

old regiment. Stephanoff had not the slightest doubts as to his success: he knew well enough fer-one thousand breech-loading rifles, escort than four men, he felt no misgivings on the score of his personal safety. He was accustomed to dealing with lawless Asiatics and was besides. a brave man, rather enjoying a spice of danger in his work. Even now, although file-a track, moreover, with high banks densely fringed with pine scrub on either side - Stephanoff rode unsuspiciously along, following the plodding shoulders of the Pathan guide, while his mind, wearled like his body by four long days

in the saddle, had ceased to take note

of the present, and was occupied with vague considerations of the future. "This time six months hence," he thought, "I shall be back in St. Petersburg with the rank of colonel, and, who knows, perhaps aide-de-camp to the czar, Ah, how good it will be to find oneself once more among civilized people, and away from the savages with whom I have mixed for the last nine years! Then I will marry my cousin Olga, who must be of age now, and whose estates must have increased enormously in value since her father's death; and I will obtain long leave, and go to Paris, and Monte Carlo, and Biarritz, until the time when our government thinks fit for us to take India. By then I may perhaps be a general of division, and-" Crash! to this day Stephanoff can hardly explain what happened. He had a momentary awful glimpse of a great black-bearded man leaping on him from the top of the bank, with such impetus as to nearly bear him and his horse to the ground, and the next moment he was seized from behind in a vise-like grip, a sack was drawn over his head, and his hands were bound behind him. Blinded and powerless to move, and absolutely bewildered by the suddenness of the attack, he could only sit still and listen, as in a dream, to the sound of struggling men and trampling horses behind him, but this soon ceased. Once a rifle cracked, and he heard two or three cries from his men, and then in the comparative stillness that followed he vaguely recognized that they had been overcome and were being bound like himself; and presently his horse, evidently led between

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and his feet bound under his horse's and descended to where the strangers belly, he can hardly be blamed for se- were awaiting them. A short parley cretly giving way in despair. He recog- ensued, while the leader of the latter nized that he had been tricked by the explained that his guide, for private ings, on their character, notorious even amongst Afridis for treachery and cruelty, and on their boast that no white man had ever entered their country since Alexander the Great, and he cursed the ill fate that was to rob him, possibly of life, and certainly of success, at the very moment when the latter had seemed fairly within his grasp. Perhaps his bitterest reflection was that he had a number of important papers about his personsecret instructions and dispatches, his although he always took the simple prewith ammunition for the same, and one caution of copying these into French-a slower than men, and on the fifth day, thousand rupees a month as long as they language by no means current in Central continued offensive operations against Asia-yet he was sufficiently conversant the English-the Diltis would have pro- with the Afridi character to know that ish official was almost more than the wretched man could bear, and he prom ised himself that he would make a supreme effort at all costs to destroy them when opportunity might offer.

But it seemed as though there was to the road lay along a track so narrow as be no end to his ill-luck; for when, after only to admit of their riding in single about an hour's painful ride, they came to a halt, and he was lifted off his horse and carried into a building, his captors' first act was to carefully divest him of his uniform, even down to his boots, and the unhappy Stephanoff felt instinctively that his papers were lost to him for-

Then and not till then was the covering removed from his head, when he found himself seated on a pile of rugs and sheepskins, in a large, empty room, apparently forming part of one of the ruined towers not uncommon in parts of Afghanistan and the neighboring countries. Around him was a group of beetle-browed Pathans, who regarded him with the most stolid indifference. and turned an absolutely deaf ear to the remarks which he addressed to them in every eastern tongue, from Pushtoo to Persian, of which he was master. Very soon, however, another native entered, bearing a bundle of fairly clean native clothes, including a huge wadded caftan, in which the unfortunate Russian, who began to feel his underclothing rather an airy dress for the Hindu Kush, was fain, not without an inward shudder, to dress himself. The last comer, who appeared to be a person of some authority, having previously ordered the others to leave the room, then addressed Stephanoff, and, finding himself understood, assured him that no harm would be done to him or his men, who were all unhurt, provided they did not attempt to escape. He paid not the lightest attention to the Russian's remonstrances, and in answer to his inlignant question of why he had been brought there, and how long he would be detained, merely replied piously, "God knows," until at last Stephanoff, who who a sufficiently old campaigner to accept the inevitable, relapsed into silence, first, however, asking for some food. This was promptly supplied, of better quality and better cooked than he could have expected: and his captors having generously added a box of his own cigarettes, which apparently had no charms for him, he presently rolled himself up in his rugs, and, wearied alike in mind and body, applied himself no unsuccess-

fully to wooing sleep. Twenty-four hours later a band of Pathans, who had been lying idly all day on the ridge of the Kangi Pass, by which alone Dilt can be approached from the east, suddenly woke to activity. Far away in the gut of the pass their keen remedy, which is Scott's eyes had noticed a little cloud of dust and the glint of a rifle-barrel, and each looked to the priming of his jezail, and snuggled closed down among the rocks in which they lay hidden. Presently a little company of five mounted men hove in sight, slowly making their way up the pass, and one of the watchers on the hillside grunted out: "This must be they. Five men on horseback, in green, and one a Feringhi wearing blue chashmaks." "Peace. O impatient one," rejoined another older man; "let them give the

signal, and then we will see whether they be the true men or not. Besides, they lack one in number, having no

But it soon appeared that this was the party they were expecting, for as it reached a ruinous bridge spanning a

and gradually acquired the reputation of two men, began to move slowly forward. | mountain torrent, it halted; and the sian sirkar, which, moreover, could not Stephanoff was a brave man, and had white man, riding forward by himself to entirely overlook the fact that, odious faced death many times, yet as he was the middle of the bridge, fired six shots as they were, the English were Chrisled helpless along, blinded and half from a revolver, three to his right and tians, and believers in the same God as stifled by the sack in which his head was three to his left, and simultaneously the the Russians. After a few more reenveloped, his hands tied behind his back | tribesmen rose from their hiding-place | marks, showing that, however much the Diltis; he reflected, not without misgiv- reasons, had refused to accompany him their crops, and not to run the risk of to Dilt, and had gone back to await his return, half-way to Reshat; and then, among them the first white man who had entered the country for over two thou- proverbial hair, a fact of which he was sand years, the whole party moved slowly on into the heart of Diltistan.

enough in Afghanistan and on the northwestern frontier of India. Of large ex- promise of sending them rifles and amtent, and surrounded by precipitous mountain ranges, it is thickly studded that the bribe he was empowered to of- own notes and diary, and so forth; and with fortified villages, further protected by squat-looking castles or fortresses, round which lie stretches of rudely cultivated land and occasional groves of trees; and chief among them is the vil- especial animosity against the English lage which not only gives its name to more than any other infidels; but they men at the bridge over the Pashkend claimed war against Mohammed himself; they never destroy documents, and the the district, but is the residence of the had rather looked forward to fighting River, who lead him to a durbar at Dilt. and although they had forbidden his en-Moreover, the man who guides him is of trance into their country with a larger drift into the hands of some stray Brit- sway over the same. It was from the ite humor of this had specially appealed trance into their country with a larger drift into the hands of some stray Brit- sway over the same. It was from the ite humor of this had specially appealed to the british and lat roof of this potentate's castle that a to them) other unbelievers were willing gentleman in a green uniform, and wear- to supply them with rifles and money for ing blue spectacles, surveyed, not without inward misgivings, the numerous jirgahs, which, under the leadership of the various maliks of the valley were making their way to an adjoining grove of walnut trees, where the day's durbar was apparently to be held. He and his escort had arrived so late on the previous night that he had not been able. as he had hoped, to gain a private interview with the khan, and a further effort to do so that morning had been met by the hint that all negotiations must be conducted in open durbar, a course which the blue-spectacled officer and been particularly anxious to avoid, However, he was not one of those who turn back after putting their hands to the plow; he fully recognized that he must go through with his appointed task and having had a final interview with one of his own men-a great, strapping fellow, more like an Afghan than a Turcoman-it was with an unmoved face, whatever his inward thoughts, that he presently took his seat in the durbar, the cynosure of a thousand scowling eyes, and in the course of time rose to address it in fluent Pushtoo. For the sake of brevity his speech shall be summarized in parliamentary form. It was

> The sirkar of his master the great White Czar, had sent him to counsel the Khan of Dilt and his tribesmen not to make war on the English sirkar. (In- it again." credulous astonishment.) Moreover, the czar could not send them either the in the green uniform desired more arrifles or the money they had been led to expect, as when the English sirkar came to hear of it, it would make war on him, and-here the speaker spat on the ground with apparent disgust-who could withstand the English? (Sensation.) True, they were dogs and sons of dogs, but they were more countless in number than the sand of the desert, and possessed in addition all the riches of the earth. Then, too, they were devils incarnate, knowing not fear: why, in the last war they had made against Russia, but six hundred of their accursed cavalry had ridden down a whole army of his master's, the czar. (The speaker's emotion probably prevented him from adding that nearly half a century had passed since then.) (Derisive murmurs.) In fine, the Diltis were to understand that neither now nor in the future were they to expect any assistance from the Rus-

to this effect:

czar's sirkar disliked the English sirkar. it was equally afraid of it, and was, moreover, much rent with internal strife at home, the speaker advised his hearers to return to the reaping and storing of provoking the might of the English.

For some time after the speaker had resumed his seat his life hung by the perfectly aware. The Diltis felt they had been grossly tricked and deceived; The morrow's sun broke bright over they had only reluctantly allowed this the Valley of Dilt, one of a type common | infidel to come amongst them as a guarmunition, with which they were less supplied than other and more civilized-if such an expression can be used-Afrid! tribes; and, behold, in the place of bread he had offered them a stone, and advised them to be good boys and attend to their sowing and reaping. They had no doing so; but, on the other hand, they were not prepared to embark on such an undertaking armed only with their own clumsy jezails and a few Kabulmade Martini rifles. Their rage and disappointment knew no bounds, and many of them seemed inclined to take the loudv expressed advice of one of their mullahs to at once slay the infidel, who sat still, outwardly calm and unmoved, but nervously fingering the revolver in the low many of his assailants he would be able to account for before they cut him down. At last, however, the khan and some of the maliks managed to restore some semblance of quiet while the for-

> mer addressed the stranger. "Now, by Allah al Munit!-by God. the Dispenser of Justice!" he said "were it not that thou hast eaten of my salt and dipped in the same dish with me. and hast, moreover, shown thyself a man, in that thou hast not feared to come among us with such a pitiful tale would send thee back to the hound thy master with thine ears and thy nose in thy hands to show him how much we Diltis regard the aid of such whitelivered infidels as he. Infidels, too, are thy sirkar so greatly dreads; but they at least be men, fearing no others, and keeping their promises. Now begone, and tell thy master what things thou has seen in Dilt, for of a truth none of thy accursed breed shall ever set foot in

Now there was nothing that the man dently, now that his business was at an end, than to get himself and his men out of Dilt with whole skins, though he privately entertained but small hope of being able to do so, seeing that the khan held but nominal sway over most of the consistencies so common in the Afridi character, the very men who but a short time before had been clamoring for his death allowed him and his escort to leave, with no worse accompaniment than the jeers and mud flung after them by the children; none the less, it was not until after many hours' hard riding that they were able to feel themselves in omparative safety.

The fourth morning of Major Stephan



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