S. S. Literature.

BY REV. E. J. GRANT, DARTMOUTH.

When asked to write a paper on S.S. literature, I thought the task quite an easy one but the effort to write has shown me that it is not so easy a matter as it appeared to be. Not that it is difficult to find something to say, but the subject is so broad that one is at a loss to know where to strike in, or what particular phase of the question to take up.

The few words I have to say shall be concerning the Library, the books that are handed out from week to week and read by the young people composing the school. I need not say that the library is a matter which has not always received the amount of painstaking attention and care which it unquestionably merits.

The use of the Bible in the school is, of course, the question of prime importance; but next to it, in my mind, comes the matter of books. For, more than the words of the teacher—more, I believe, than the Scripture lesson even, the vast majority of the young people in our Sabbath Schools come under the influence of the library.

The teacher's personal contact with the pupil; what is the measure of it? Why, as a rule, it is less than one hour a week, and in most cases he finds it no easy matter to hold the attention of his class closely to the Scripture lesson even for that little time. But not so the books; they go into every family represented in the school, and for many hours each week they are the companions and teachers of the young. Nor is their influence confined by any means to the members of the school; it reaches out more or less to every member of the families into which they go. We can scarcely over-rate the influence for good which it is possible to wield by means of the Sabbath School library. The schools embraced in this Covention represent at least between two and three thousand families. In many of these families the Sunday School books constitute about the only literature to be found. Perhaps no class of books secure a more general reading. They come as visitors to remain only for a week, and you know that we usually pay more attention to visitors than to members of the family; and so on the same principle, the Sabbath School books are likely to receive more attention than do those which have come to stay.

They go week after week into all these families with their message, giving coloring to the mind and direction to the thoughts of all who peruse them. They stamp upon the mind their own spirit and character, whatever these may be. They will be beneficial or injurious, elevating or lowering, inspiring or depressing, helpful or hurtful, according to the spirit which they breathe.

Of all the influences brought to bear upon the fixing of mental habits, and the formation of character in general, perhaps none is more potent than that which comes through the channel of our reading. This is especially true of those for whom Sabbath School literature is particularly intended. Coming into their hands as it does at a time when they are most susceptible of impression, a time when the impressions made upon the mind are likely to remain and influence to a greater or less extent the whole course of the after life.

It is all important that the start should be in the right direction, for then it is likely to continue so, and who does not know that a very trifling circumstance may, and often does, give direction to the whole course of a human life. History is not wanting in illustrations of men and women who have been started in a right or a wrong direction by the reading of a single book. The reading of "The Dairyman's Daughter," "The Pilgrim's Progress," and other books of the same high character, has been the turning-point in many a young life.

If we have ever attempted to do anything in the way of influencing and turning young people, we cannot have failed to notice how greatly they are under the control of the books they read. Give the boy food of a poor quality—food that is not pure, wholesome, nutritious, and what are the results? A lack of physical vigor, of muscular strength, and of consequent inability to perform physical functions. This is an immutable law in the realm of matter. We have all witnessed painful illustrations of its working. The same law obtains in the higher realm of *mind* and *heart*. Its operation may be less noticable, but it is no less absolute and certain. You cannot feed the mind on trashy books and have a healthy normal development of the mental powers, any more than you can feed the body on trashy food and have a healthy development of the physical functions.

Literature is one of the most important staples in the stock of mental food. We may read books for pleasure, and go on with our work thinking but little more about them; but all the same they make their impression; they enter into the mental constitution; they will influence the mind for good or for evil according to the tone and spirit which characterize them.

We may live and move in an atmosphere that is more or less unhealthful, and not be conscious of the fact; but it is nevertheless constantly enervating and undermining the physical life and health. So is it with the literary atmosphere in which the mind lives. If it is *pure* and *bracing*, it will help to regulate, elevate, and purify thought and sentiment; but if lacking these qualities it cannot fail to injure the mind.

Now the point I wish to make, and to emphasize with all possible force is this, the Sabbath School library, in a very large measure, controls the thinking of the young people in the school. The quality of this thinking will depend upon the quality of the reading matter furnished them; and the thinking not only regulates, but also helps to create desire and emotion, and these again determine character, and character decides destiny. In other words, the library is either helpful or hurtful; a source of good or of evil; a means of blessing or of cursing.

Wherever you find great possibilities in a right direction, there also you will find equally great possibilities in a wrong direction. If a book of the right character may be the means of great good, it is equally true that a book of the opposite character may be the means of great harm. In purchasing books for the use of the school, we assume, of course, that these books will have an influence for good. But we should not take this for granted. We should not assume that because a book seeks admission to our Sabbath Schools, it is therefore a proper book to be there; nor is the fact that a book has found its way into the library any guarantee of its good character.

One does not need a very extensive acquaintance with Sabbath School literature to convince him that much of it is *not* of the highest order. Now, I have no sympathy with those who can see nothing good in current S. S. literature, and who deal in wholesale, indiscriminate denunciation. I know that a great deal of it is excellent, written by men and women who love Christ, and desire that the whole world might be brought to a knowledge of His saving power. We may justly rejoice in the fact that so much able, sanctified Christian talent is now being consecrated to this department of the Lord's work. This is comparatively a *new* department of Christian enterprise, and its growth and development during the last few years have been exceedingly gratifying. The crusade is but begun, and will doubtless continue its grand march, gaining in scope and power as the years move on.

But to be a little more practical let us enquire, briefly, what style and character of books should find a place in our Sabbath School libraries, and by what means worthless books are to be kept out. For the fact that good books are so rapidly multiplying does not render wise and careful selection unnecessary. I think it is safe to say in general that the most popular books are not as a rule the most suitable for Sabbath School purposes. When we find that certain books in the library require new binding every few months, I think we may have some misgivings as to their real worth. If the principal thing to be attained is the reading of the greatest possible number of pages, then we may furnish the school with the most popular books in the market; or, in other words, we may fill our shelves with books of fiction and fancy, rather than with books of practical truth and fact. But I hold—as I am sure you all do—that the reading of the greatest possible number of pages is not the object for which the school exists, and popularity is not the thing to be thought of in selecting books.

We know that the majority of young people—and, I am sorry to say, many older people too—*prefer* fictitious, sensational reading; but we must not forget that the members of the school are not always the most competent judges of what they most need, or what is really best for them. The responsibility of guiding them in this matter rests largely with parents, and with earnest Sabbath School teachers; and in view of this responsibility it is ours, not to cater to a wrong taste and desire, but to use every possible means in our power to create and foster a truer and better taste, a taste for the best things. I am perfectly aware of the fact that it is much easier to stand up and talk about what should be done than it is to do it. We may fail in this matter, as we do in *every* noble undertaking, to accomplish all that we desire, all that we conceive to be possible; but that is no reason why we should not aim at and strive for the highest and best possible achievements along this line. I believe that a great deal *can* be done to create in the minds of young people a taste for the best and most elevating literature. But be that as it may, of this one thing I am sure, we *dare* not place in the hands of the children literature about which there can be a single question. Infinitely better that they should read nothing than that they should read what is injurious to mind and heart. With even my limited knowledge of Sabbath School literature, I am prepared to say that, in my judgment, much of it is not of the highest order.

We may argue as learnedly as we please about the beauty and the power of fictitious tales, to interest and influence for good as well as for evil; we may talk as we will of the importance of cultivating imagination and sentiment; but we cannot deny the fact, nor argue away the fact, that the tendency of fiction is to destroy the taste for wholesome matter-of-fact reading, and whatever lessens a boy's love and appreciation of the best literature, that is of biblical literature, I contend should never find a place on the shelves of our Sabbath School libraries. I know it is a difficult matter to draw the lines tightly, and say just what books should be admitted and what should be excluded, but we must do one thing or the other—we must draw the lines, or else we must admit to our library every book that may seek admission without regard to its character or fitness. If we are prepared for that, all right; but if we are not prepared to welcome books without regard to their character, then some one must assume the responsibility of saying what the qualifications for admission shall be. I believe that the weight of this responsibility has not been felt by Sabbath workers in the past as it should have been, and as it is more and more coming to be.

Of course it is not possible here to go into details, but I may say in general that I do not believe it is wise to swallow a ton of romance for the sake of the ounce of moral which it contains, or rather, which it is supposed to contain.

How about denominational literature, or, to use a term which I think much preferable, biblical literature? We claim that the doctrines held and practised by us are more biblical than those held and practised by any other body of Christians. Should our Sabbath School books then teach these peculiar doctrines and no other? This question is answered by another. Is our claim a just one? Is it justified by the Book? If it is not, let it go to the winds; let us give up the long-cherished delusion. But if we are justified in claiming what we do, then how can we be justified in not teaching what we believe? If our fathers were wrong in defending these principles at the stake, then let us not continue the wrong by teaching them to our children; but if they are right, if they are biblical, if they embody and formulate the teaching of Christ, how can we dare do anything else than teach them? I know it is objected that literature of this character is not popular with the young people. Of course it is not as interesting to most young people as books of romance and fiction. The worthy and the good are never as attractive to the unrenewed heart as the worthless and evil; but shall we for this reason encourage them to embrace the worthless and reject the worthy?

In conversation with an earnest, warm-hearted Sunday School worker a short time ago, he was lamenting that though they had many books of this type in their library they were seldom if ever asked for, and when offered they were not received. I asked him what style of books he found most in demand, and the answer was, of course, story-books—books of romance and fiction; but suppose there were no such books in your library, what then? Well, he said he presumed the biblical literature would be more in demand. Now, what I want to ask is, should any Baptist Sunday School be prepared to supply a confessedly wrong demand? The question answers itself. If we desire to create a demand for the best literature, the first step toward its accomplishment, in my opinion, is to exclude from our libraries every book of questionable character.

It might not be fitting for me to say what books in my opinion should be absolutely excluded from our libraries, but I may be permitted to say a word as to what style of books I think should be there. Certainly they should be characterized by nothing else than the purest and highest moral tone. They should not be wholly destitute of useful and helpful information. They should treat more or less of real, practical, and not altogether of ideal fanciful life. They should teach, in no uncertain language, the evil and the wrong of sin in any degree and in every form. They should, with vigor and force, show the corruption of the human heart, and the absolute necessity of the new birth. In a word, they should breathe the spirit of the gospel; they should hold up Christ crucified as the only hope of the ruined soul, and force upon the reader his need of cleansing from the guilt of sin. If our Sabbath School libraries fail to teach the whole gospel of the grace of God, they will certainly not help to realize the grand end for which the school exists—the salvation of souls.

Now how shall we secure books of this character? They do not come into our libraries without effort, that is to any great extent. Things that are worth having, can be had only by heedful, intelligent, painstaking effort.

If, therefore, we are to have a library of the right stamp, from which every book of questionable merit is to be excluded, the churches must take a deeper interest in the school than they are accustomed to do.

The school must be under the control of the church. The church should appoint not only officers and teachers, but also a committee of its most intelligent and devoted members—which would of course always embrace the officers and teachers of the school—that committee to be held responsible for the character of every book in the library. I believe that no book should be admitted to our shelves without first being carefully examined by some person or persons competent to pronounce upon its character and worth.

Until some such method is adopted and insisted upon, we may be sure that not only worthless, but positively harmful books, will find their way into our libraries, and the church must shoulder the responsibility of the evil which they work among our young people.

Confession by Baptism.

BY REV. A. J. GORDON, D. D.

A Christianity which rests avowedly on the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, must have ordinances which exactly correspond to these ideas. Read, now, the confession of the mouth which the Scriptures require, and then compare it with the symbol which the Scriptures give, "If thou shall confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and believe in thy heart that God hath raised Him from the dead." The death and resurrection of Christ is the confession, "I believe that Jesus Christ died for my sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He rose again from the dead, according to the Scriptures." This is the verbal confession. Now comes the symbolic. "Buried with Christ by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." You see how the picture conforms in every line and shade to the original. You see, then, what baptism is for.

It is, first, a declaration of faith for all time. Amid all the unbelief and doubt and denial to which the Gospel is exposed, there is great danger that its cardinal truths may be perverted or misread in the course of time. They cannot be entrusted to the stream of tradition, in whose depth so much truth has been engulfed, and on whose current so much error has been floated down. They must be stereotyped into unchanging forms, and impressions must be struck off from them every year and every month for the book of Church history. Do you ask me what I am doing in administering the ordinance of baptism? I am doing what the printer does with his types. I am striking off impressions of our creed, that Christ was "buried for our offences and raised again for our justification." Upon every mind this impression will be stamped more or less deeply, and be hung up in the chambers of memory for influencing the faith and determining the creed which we hold. If this ordinance had been maintained in the Church in its primitive form, the doctrine of the resurrection would not have been forgotten or denied so largely as it has. There can be no doubt that in those churches where this symbol has been kept most constantly before the eye, the blessed faith of the Redeemer has kept its hold most strongly upon the heart. Do you say that it is only a form, and therefore not essential? The picture of your dead child is only a form. It is a shadow thrown upon paper; there is no substance of life there. But will you, on that account, permit anyone to throw it away? Or will you consent that it shall be changed for the picture of some other child on the plea that it is only a form? Neither will we consent that this graphic picture of our Lord's dying and rising again shall be set aside or modified, because it is among the mightiest forces in the world. The pictures of Raphael and Michael Angelo have influenced humanity more than the battles of Napoleon. The battles were acts of realities indeed, while the pictures are only shadows.

But these shadows, becoming reflections of Divine things, are living just as truly to-day as in the year when they were painted. Let us see to it that we do not slight the ordinances of God, however, because they are only shadows.

And, then again, we hold baptism to be the seal of a covenant. Here the agreement between God and the soul is ratified and confirmed. God says, "I give you pardon and peace on the ground of Christ's death and resurrection." You say, "I accept pardon and peace on the ground of Christ's death and resurrection." Thus there is atonement and reconciliation. But you know it has always been the custom for the contracting parties to confirm this bargain by some seal or signature. You know that in legal terms a contract is always called an indenture. The word suggests a very striking custom from which it originated. In olden times it was the usage for the contracting parties to have two copies of this agreement written on the same parchment. Then they were cut apart by a zigzag line. One party took one copy, and one took the other. These two parts you see, would exactly correspond when brought together. They would fit into each other as my two hands do. And this was the pledge and symbol of the perfect agreement of the two parties. My brethren, baptism is the indenture which seals the contract between Christ and the forgiven soul. See how exactly the two parts correspond. One is in heaven and one is on earth. Of one it is written, "Who died for us and rose again;" of this one, "buried with Christ in baptism, raised again to newness of life." Jesus Christ speaks from the throne, saying, "I am He that liveth and was dead, and behold I am alive for evermore." The disciple speaks from this baptizing, "if I be dead with Christ, I believe that I shall also live with Him." Oh, glorious indenture, telling for all the time, and in all languages, and in all climes, that Christ and we are one, that as He is, so are we in this world; that as He is, so shall we be in glory.

Mr. Spurgeon's View on Communion.

The following statements from Mr. Spurgeon on the subject of communion have been furnished the *Baptist Courier* by one of its correspondents and we reproduce them for the benefit of our readers. Baptists are often twitted with the rejoinder that "Spurgeon is an open communion Baptist." Even if this statement were true, it is worth very little because we derive our doctrine not from Mr. Spurgeon, but from the New Testament. But the following utterances of the famous preacher will show that he cannot be justly cited as an advocate of close communion:

WESTWOOD, MARCH 26th, 1884.

Dear Sir: I do not know who the "sainted gentleman" may be, but he did not speak the truth if he reported me as saying that I hated a close communion Baptist as I hate the devil. I never even thought of such a thing, and assuredly it is not and never was true. The saint must have dreamed it, or mistaken the person.

The most unaccountable statements are sometimes made by men of known integrity, and they can only be accounted for by misunderstanding or forgetfulness.

I know my own mind and views, and I can say without reserve that the expression could not have been made by me. As compared with the bulk of English Baptists, I am a *strict communionist myself*, as my church fellowship is strictly of the baptized.

Yours heartily,
C. H. SPURGEON.

In speaking of a conversation, had with Mr. Spurgeon by the editor of the *National Baptist*, the editor says:

"Mr. Spurgeon said to the writer: 'We occupy a conservative position among our churches. If an accredited Christian comes among us, and asks the privilege of communing, we admit him for three months. Then we say to him, 'You have now had an opportunity to know us and our views; if you choose, we shall be glad to have you join us by baptism; if not, we advise you to join those with whom you are in sympathy.' And three times out of four, they are baptized, and join us.'"

Perils of the Dance.

In any society where the amusement is sought to restore the balance between the mental and physical system it is not to be denounced. It is right and good to seek results in this form. The lurking evil comes by indulging impure motives and feelings. Is it possible for a person possessing some delicacy of feeling to surrender his or her individual self to another of the opposite sex for the time being to be whirled around in the various evolutions of the square and round dances? Can one come off unharmed in their thoughts and feelings? The fascinations must not be regarded as evil, if the sensual tendencies do not stimulate beyond control. We have heard of the refiner's fire and the beaten brass, and they imply passion in the work; and the true basis for the dance will not be found which does not take into account the need and desirability of the play of the passions among the individual representatives of the sexes. When only respectability is allowed to govern animal appetite the cry for satiety is tantalized and provoked, and instead of becoming more easily and readily satisfied grows more hungry and cruel with each contact. What are friendly relations and conditions. Consider what benefit comes from mingling the sexes under complexity of circumstances. There is the gush of music, the confusion of the mingled mass, the bewildering glare of light, the heated blood, the glancing dart of the eye, and the expression of feature answering to feature, the unspoken but recognized language of the finger-tips, the fine flush of electricity passing to and fro stimulating and exciting. Young persons love the happy flood of life that comes on them at such a time. The flesh and spirit struggle, bringing knowledge followed by the rememberance of the joy and happiness of the time. To go to excess is to bring on exhaustion. The diversion will lose its charm. Satan will claim a wicked place, and will turn the enthusiasm to some other association.

Who ever heard of a dancing club of men or women alone that could be kept up for even one season.

No instances of dancing are found recorded in the Bible in which the two sexes were engaged, either as an act of worship or lawful amusement. Hence the present mode of dancing is utterly unscriptural, and there are no instances on record of social dancing for amusement except that of vain fellows devoid of shame to whom Michal alludes in the book of Samuel, and the irreligious families described by Job, who are represented as saying to God, "Depart from us," and the case of the daughter of Herodias which ended in the murder of John the Baptist. The Scriptures are often made the final appeal for the practice we here condemn. Consulting every passage in the Bible on this subject, and the only conclusions we reach are these: That dancing of some kind was practiced as a religious act, expressive of grateful joy, and exclusively on joyful occasions, such as national festivals or great victories, and only by one of the sexes. It was performed usually in the day-time—in the open air. This was observed in true worship and the worship of idols. But the men who perverted dancing from a sacred use to purposes of mere amusement were deemed infamous, But then it is said, "*There is a time to dance.*" If this passage is anything more than a simple expression of joy in contrast with "*a time to mourn,*" to what kind of dancing does it refer? The worshipful and religious kind practiced by only one of the sexes, or the style of present day? We are not considering it as a religious act, but as a social amusement. If this passage applies to this kind of dancing, it cannot imply either a command or permission even, but can be only a declaration of what is done by men. Yet it is in the same category with "a time to lose," and certainly no one would say that this commended the gambler's hazards by which he loses all. The only instances of social dancing in the Bible are mentioned as indicating the [illegible] of such conduct.' Chosen pleasures reveal the state of the heart, but we cannot say that one who is truly pious may never pursue this pleasure. It may check the current of spiritual life, chill the affections and tear the heart away from Christ. Like the fabled flower of antiquity it may cause pleasant laughter upon the lips, and at the same time convey deadly poison to the vitals. But who does not know that those who delight in revelry, in the wine cup, in the various forms of gambling, in the sickening senseless trash of light literature, in looseness of morals, are all strong advocates of the dance? Does anybody ever claim the dance as a school of morality? Some to pretend, as we have claimed, that it is a school of refinement, wherein is taught elegance of manners and a becoming style of gracefulness. But how is it possible to have true refinement of feeling—and delicate sensibility to another's welfare!—*Ex.*

Change of Pastors.

A change of pastors often is attended with unfortunate results. Friends are apt to be alienated, wounds made that heal slowly; thus strong churches become disabled for a time, if they are not made weak; the feeble are helped on to extinction. Great caution is needed by all parties when a change is to be sought. Very easily a minister may spoil years of his labor by countenancing parties, divisions in the church, berating those not edified by his preaching. Dr. B. was worried, fretted, by two or three brethren, greatly to his discomfort, while his congregations were large, the church prosperous. Unsolicited, a call to a church near by came to him, and he accepted it to get rid of those splinters in his fingers, as his prospects of usefulness were as good in the one place as in the other, and of comfort greater in the church to which he removed. For years the church, after he left, floundered, unable to agree upon the best of men, unable to do its great work for Christ and the perishing. The few brethren did not know the harm they were doing when they so annoyed their pastor. Union is strength, division is weakness, especially in a church. Woe to them that cause divisions and offences.

Years since the richest man in a church expressed his want of interest in the labors of his pastor, and said that he wished that he would leave; but the people seemed satisfied, so he still gives his money freely for his support, and attends meetings as regularly as ever. Probably very few have any idea of his want of interest in his labors. Thus great evils are avoided. Long time ago a certain church called a man to become its pastor, and one of the leading brethren, one of the heaviest payers, and one of the most active in prayer-meetings, felt that he was not the man for the place, but, as he saw that the friends wanted him, he kept still. For five years he sustained the pastor in all ways he was able, and when he left, in accord with the desires of some who were so urgent to have him come, he did not know but that Mr. W. wanted him to remain.

By imprudence, want of forbearance, many churches are in hot water no small part of the time, and that by reason of a few individuals who seem unable, or unwilling, to control their desires, or appreciate the judgment of the many. Brethren, if your pastor is not as good a man as he ought to be, or is not doing as well for the cause as possible, just pray for him by night and by day, help him in every way you are able. Thus the weak will become strong, the inefficient often very efficient. Pray do not trig his wheels, discourage his friends, or sack his spirits in any way. You may be troubling one of the Lord's anointed if you do so.

In changing, ministers need great wisdom and forbearance lest they leave a sting behind them.

I have been young, but now I am old, yet were I young, I would spend from two to six weeks with a people before I would consent to become their pastor. I would endeavor to understand them, and give them all the opportunity they desired to understand me before they made a decision. An engagement that is mutually agreeable is worth many that are forced. A church of Christ, united, earnest, laborious, under the lead of a godly, earnest pastor, is an invaluable blessing in any community. A church divided in feeling and counsel, under the lead of the unwise, is the joy of the enemies of the cross of Christ.

Brethren, if we all intently sought direction from God, the lead of the Holy Spirit, there would be less dissatisfaction with the labors of pastors, far less unpleasant feeling between the members of some churches.—*F. M., in Watchman.*

How to Succeed.

Every healthy, promising boy or girl, is ambitious. They long to take a front rank among their fellows. The purpose to succeed must follow their desire. Decide carefully and prayerfully what your vocation shall be, and then determine that all your ability, strength, and brain shall be exercised in the effort to succeed. Let nothing discourage you. Are you only a butcher's boy? So were Daniel De Foe and Cardinal Wolsey. A grocer's boy? Howard, the great philanthropist, began his apprenticeship in that business. Are you so unfortunate as to have a whiskey-dealer for a father? Oliver Cromwell was the son of a brewer, and George Whitefield the son of an inn-keeper. You cannot begin lower in the social scale than many illustrious men began. John Bunyan was a tinker, Terence, the Latin comic writer, was a slave, and Homer was a beggar. Never mind where you begin.

Be true to your love and your country—
The dastard wins never a prize;
But the earnest are ever the victors,
And he who on justice relies,
Who wins the good guerdon by labor,
Will garner sweet rest as his crop,
And find, as the hills sink below him,
That there's room enough at the top.

O! let not the evil disturb you,
There's good if you but search it out;
Make pure thine own conscience my brother,
Nor mind what the rest are about.
And whether your work may have fallen
In sanctum, or coffee, or shop.
Remember the low grounds are crowded,
But there's always room at the top.

Room for you if you will earn the right to it. Be true. Be industrious. Be thorough. Be polite.

Do not seek honor, nor fame, nor wealth for its own sake. See that your motive is pure. Decide whatever God gives you shall be used to his glory. There can be no true success which does not look further than the things of this world.

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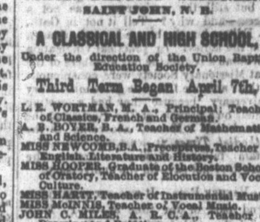

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