

Traveling across the prairies of the southwest back in roundup days, Colonel John Alley, head of the University department of government, became acquainted with the country during that transitional period of the early nineties. With his father, an Irish immigrant, adventurer and cattleman, Colonel Alley became a part of the southwest before the opening of those famous "last round-ups"

Memories of Roundup Days

By JOHN ALLEY

MY radio has made me reminiscent.

As I listen evening after evening, to the various and oft repeated renditions of "I'm Heading for the Last Round-up," a memory-picture of boyhood experiences persistently returns.

I see again through a vista of more than four decades the vast stretches of verdant prairie land, over which our covered wagon crept hour after hour, day after day, through the richest portion of the greatest of all "roundup countries" the world has known: the most prized area of that great cattle Baronage of six million acres controlled by the powerful group of cattlemen known as the "Cherokee Strip Live-Stock Association."

Of course I did not then realize that this great corporation was in the process of holding its "Last Roundup," preparing to surrender its princely domain, in sullen submission to an edict of President Harrison. The persistent and relentless pioneer homeseekers had shortly before won their bitter and long drawn-out battle with the "Cattle Barons." The greatest of all feuds between the "Nesters" and the "Punchers" had ended as usual, in victory to the former. The Congress of the United States had spoken. The ranchmen's lease with the Cherokee Indian Nation had been terminated. By December 1, 1890 all cattle must be removed. The famous "Cherokee Strip" must be thrown open to settlement. Let the "Last Roundups" begin!

It was a crispy, sunny, autumn day in 1890, when our horses splashed through the shallow ford of the Arkansas River, topped the low rise of ground which was the southern extremity of the wide sandy stretch of river bottom and headed southwestward into the open country.

Before us, as far as the eye could see, lay the unbroken sweep of the "Cherokee Strip," spoiled by human abode.

I was charmed and thrilled with its vastness. Here, in very truth, were spread out before me—

"The gardens of the desert, the unshorn fields, the boundless, the beautiful, for which the speech of England has no name—'The Prairies'—They stretched, in airy undulations far away, as if the ocean, in his gentlest swell, stood still, with all his rounded billows fixed, and motionless forever."

Our progress continued throughout the day in a general southwesterly direction. As the sun bent its course toward the western horizon we approached a wooded valley of a stream which offered an inviting camp site. We turned aside from the prairie trail into a grove of trees near the margin of the water, unharnessed our tired horses and lead them to the gently sloping bank of the clear stream, which we recognize as the Chikaskia River. The horses splashed boldly out into the current, thrust their noses well down into the water and drank greedily. From time to time they would blow up breath bubbles as they expelled the air through their submerged noses.

Having drunk their fill each horse, in turn, raised his head slowly, filled his lungs in a deep drawn sigh, gazed intently up the tree lined stream, then turned his head for a similar survey down stream. Being fully domesticated farm animals, rather than natives of the open range, the pervading Sabbath stillness seemed to puzzle them: they could not understand the utter absence of human, or other forms of animal life in an environment so inviting to life.

Content with their survey of the strange, quiet scene, each horse in turn retraced his steps up the bank, selected a suitable spot in the sandy loam, dropped to his knees, then to his side and indulged in a satisfying roll. They wallowed and grunted and wriggled, first

on one side then on the other to their hearts content: then lunged to their feet, shaking the sand and dust from their tired bodies and made straight for the wagon in quest of their evening grain.

Our horses provided for we gathered dried branches, built our camp fire and cooked our supper. Then we, in turn, stretched out on the soft cushiony grass and watched the twilight gray turn into the blue of the night. The stars moved down close to us in the clear, crisp atmosphere. The stillness brooded upon us, broken occasionally by the owl's hoot or the plaintive call of the whip-poor-will.

We enjoyed our camp that night on the banks of the Chikaskia more than any we experienced during the four weeks of our trip. As I recall the charming setting after more than four decades, I am reminded of the lines of Robert Louis Stephenson—

*"The bed was made, the room was fit
By punctual eve the stars were lit,
The air was pure, the water ran,
No need was there for maid or man,
When we put up, my Ass and I,
In God's green caravanserai."*

The next day we drove through miles of low, level, prairie land, which stretches out to the southwestward from the Chikaskia to the Salt Fork River. This area, covered with luxuriant grass was the most prized portion of the six million acre pasture of the Cherokee Strip Live-Stock Association. It was soon to become the garden spot of Oklahoma's most fertile farming country, with Blackwell in the northern area, Tonkawa to the south, Lamont and Nardin to the west.

That night we camped on the sandy waste of the Salt Fork bottoms. The river is rightly named. Our horses did not seem to mind the taste of the brackish water but to us it was bitter and unsatisfying. Our coffee was a total loss. The prospect of a night with our thirst



unslaked was dismal in contrast with the previous one. We longed for the clear, sweet waters of the Chikaskia that we might wash out the bitter, briney taste from our mouths.

As the night began to settle down upon us we heard the clanking sound of heavy wagon wheels approaching down the trail from the north. A lone driver of a four horse team soon appeared over the rise of ground which skirted the bottoms. He pulled in near us and proceeded to make camp. My father invited him to use our fire for his cooking which he willingly did. After inquiring how we had enjoyed our coffee, he laughingly produced a heavy jug from his wagon and invited us to help ourselves. That water jug was a Godsend. He remarked that "the Salt Fork bottoms would never catch an old freighter unprepared."

We sat about the fire and listened to the strange and interesting experiences of this "freighter man," covering a long period in the "Territory." He deplored the fact that the days of the overland freighter were being brought to a close by the coming of the railroads, just as the day of the ranchman was already ended through the pressure of the farmer and homeseeker. The good old days were about over!

He told us the tragedy of his freighter friend, Pat Hennessey, killed by Indians some years before, his body tied to his wagon wheel and the wagon burned. He told us of the town of Hennessey, Oklahoma, situated some forty miles or more to the southwest of our camp, which had been laid out near the scene of the Indian fight. Just twelve years later I taught my first school in this same town, on the outskirts of which I found Pat Hennessey's grave enclosed by an iron picket fence, his name over the gate.

From this freighter I got my first intelligent conception of the now famous "run" which had marked the opening of the Oklahoma country to settlement the previous year. But the part of his story which most appealed to me was his experience as a deer hunter in the territory. The coming of the white man had ruined his happy hunting ground. But "it is an ill wind," he said, "that blows no one any good." The rush of the homeseekers had driven all the game from the open country into the wooded bottoms of the streams and he with his partner had killed thirty-seven deer the first week after the "opening."

That night I dreamed I was hunting deer. They were all about me so thick that I could not decide at which one to shoot!

The next forenoon as we proceeded along the trail, over the low rolling hills in the country between the tributaries of the Salt Fork and Cimarron Rivers, I

talked with my father of my ambition to kill a deer. He laughed at my boyish enthusiasm for the hunt, remarking that all the sporting blood of his Irish ancestors seemed to have been transmitted to my veins: game hunting had never interested him, notwithstanding abundant opportunities which had come to him during a life spent in pioneering days along the Missouri Valley and westward. He told me stories of his own experience, hauling flour from Omaha, Nebraska, to the village of Denver at the foot of the Rocky Mountains in the later "sixties;" of how the plains swarmed with buffalo and occasional herds of antelope; how he had become acquainted with a great game hunter, one William F. Cody, before that now famous plainsman had earned his soubriquet of "Buffalo Bill" as a result of his contract with the Union Pacific Railway to supply its construction gangs with fresh meat, as it pushed its line westward, across the great plains. The fresh meat his outfit provided was supplied by the simple process of rounding-up and slaughtering the buffalo which ranged along either side of the railway survey, from the Missouri River to the Rocky Mountains. When his wagons appeared across the prairie, loaded down with freshly killed animals the graders along the right-of-way would sing out, "there comes Buffalo Bill!"

Later in the day my father pulled the team to an unexpected halt, turned to me with the remark, "well, my boy, here's your chance to kill a deer." He pointed off across a tree lined draw to the slope a half mile beyond, where a small dun-colored animal could be plainly seen. "There's your deer," he said. Excitedly I scrambled back from the wagon seat, extracted from the bedding my father's "Spencer" carbine which he had carried as a cavalryman in the Civil war, and jumped to the ground.

My father admonished me to calm myself and follow his directions. I was to move off to the left until I reached the trees in the draw, then follow this depression under cover to the right and I could get within easy range of my quarry without being seen by it. Warning me to be calm was futile. I was able, however, to move with circumspection until I gained the screen of trees, then I broke into a run, my heart beating a high tempo and my breath coming hard. Having proceeded up the draw to what I estimated the proper distance, I threw myself on my belly and crawled up the bank. Raising my head I peered breathlessly over the ridge and immediately located my victim quietly cropping the grass some distance farther to the right and well up the prairie slope. I noted another clump of trees a couple of hundred yards further up which furnished me a desirable screen at an easy range. Wriggling back to the low

ground I hastened on up the depression to the spot I had located.

The deer must certainly be mine now for the taking. With little success I struggled to suppress my excitement in order to steady my aim. Walking slowly well doubled over, I reached the clump of trees. Again I threw myself on the grass and repeated my former crawl toward the rim of the draw. I thrust the cocked carbine forward, adjusting the butt to my shoulder, drew a long breath and raised myself on my left elbow, training my formidable weapon in the proper direction. Slowly I raised my eyes above the obstructing grass. There was the dun-colored animal not more than seventy-five yards in front of me and still apparently oblivious of danger; still cropping away at the grass. It was too glorious to be true.

Dropping my head back upon my left arm, I drew another long, steady breath preparatory to firing. My confidence returned. I raised my head again, attempting to concentrate my gaze on the most vulnerable spot, just back of the left shoulder blade. My great moment had arrived.

As I trained the forward sight of the barrel at the spot selected, something in my sense of proportion sounded a warning note. The color scheme tallied, but instead of the graceful, curving, slender neck of a deer, I was aware of a straight, unartistic upper line of neck, covered by a fringe of coarse, shaggy hair of darker color; the neck slowly straightened, the head turning in my direction. What should have been the graceful contours of a deer now suddenly changed to the unhandsome lines of a raw-boned, saddle marked, undersized, cow-pony!

My "greatest moment" faded! I let the carbine fall, buried my face in the grass, and drank my cup of bitter disappointment to the dregs! Slowly I rose to my feet, crossed the draw and dejectedly returned up the farther slope to the wagon. I explained to my father that "his deer" was nothing more than a jaded cow pony which the horse wrangler of some near-by roundup outfit had turned out to die, after a heartless cow-boy had ridden the guts out of him.

The next day we crossed the line into what was soon to be known as "Old Oklahoma," the area of the "original opening" of the previous year. We bore southwestward until we struck the old "Chisholm Trail" just north of Kingfisher and camped that night on "Kingfisher Creek" in the northern outskirts of the straggling town of board shanties and tent houses. I had assumed that the creek had been named from the Kingfisher bird which is indigenous to the area, but I learned that this was not the case. The town lies just south of the junction of two small streams, the larger one coming in from the southeast known

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*Patronize the hotels which
patronize you!*

as "Uncle Johns Creek." The smaller one heading into it from the southwest had no name until the well known cattleman, King Fisher, established his ranch in the valley between the two forks. Whereupon the western branch became known as "King Fisher's Creek," from which the town was named.

Coming into Kingfisher from the northeast, the most of our route lay through the "Black Jack," sandy hills, north of the Cimarron River largely homesteaded by Negroes. These Negro settlers had flocked into this sandy cotton land after the rush of white men had passed it over, preferring the open prairie or wheat land. For this reason Kingfisher and Guthrie got more than their share of the Negro overflow from the Black Jack hills, as compared with El Reno and Oklahoma City. I remember a story of those early days, bearing on the rivalry between Guthrie and Oklahoma City. A travelling man from the latter town, getting his shoes shined in a barber shop in Guthrie, asked the porter how many people were now in the town. The prompt reply was "about 10,000, suh!" The travelling man said "now look here, you know there are not 10,000 people in Guthrie." The negro stoutly replied "yas suh, ten thousand—countin' de whites!"

From Kingfisher we followed the Chisholm Trail southward to Minco, at that time the southern terminus of the Rock Island railway, where we crossed the South Canadian River and again entered the Indian country—the "Chickasaw Nation." The following night we camped in the timber which grew luxuriantly along the bottoms of the Washita River. This river country was a pleasant relief from the wind swept prairies we had passed over the previous days, and the clear streams likewise reminded us of the Chikaskia, after the dreary, sand swept bottoms of the Salt Fork, the Cimarron, the North and South Canadians. The night was cloudy, the air damp and the temperature was falling. We built a wonderful camp fire from the abundance of dry timber along the bottoms. The next morning when we peered from under the sheltering canvas of our wagon we saw a blanket of snow several inches deep, weighting down the trees covering the landscape. An early Oklahoma blizzard had swooped down upon us while we slept. The sheltering timber and the high bank rising from the river bottom broke the force of the wind and we soon had a merry fire crackling around which we hovered.

As we were cooking our breakfast a noisy whirr of wings startled us and we saw a great flock of prairie chickens swoop in from the snow covered prairie and light in the trees below our camp. Immediately suffering another attack of the hunting fever I got my double-bar-

relled, muzzle-loading shot gun from the wagon, envisioning a mess of fried prairie chicken for breakfast. I approached the chickens which seemed to number up into the hundreds. They appeared utterly oblivious to danger. I got within easy range under cover of the trees but as I prepared for the slaughter I noted that my gun was still "uncapped." I drew my box of percussion caps from my pocket, but my bare fingers were stiff with the cold and I was shaking with the "buck ague" which frequently afflicts marksmen in critical moments. The cover of the tin box came off with a jerk, the box flew out of my shaking fingers and the caps were scattered through the four inches of fleecy snow around my feet. As I wildly scraped into the snow searching for the elusive caps a wary chicken gave a warning cry and the whole flock sailed off down the river, leaving me fuming, shaking and scratching in the snow.

My second effort as a wild game hunter in the "territories," ended in humiliating disaster. The Gods of the hunt were against me!

The trip through the Chickasaw Nation to the Red River was full of interest, but devoid of further excitement. Patches of prairie land interspersed with wooded hills and streams, presented little evidence of Indian population. Occasionally we would encounter a cotton farmer, an Indian lessee, in his log cabin on a fertile stream bottom; again we would pass a squaw-man's ranch house on an open prairie stretch. But real Indians were few and far between.

We crossed into Texas at the Big Bend Chisholm Trail ford, to the eastward of the present town of Ringold and drove into Belcher, the first "white man's town" we had seen since leaving Minco, some ten days earlier. From here we turned westward toward the Texas Panhandle and my father established himself on a six hundred and forty acre tract of virgin prairie land some miles eastward of the town of Wichita Falls. Here we remained for some three years engaged in the unprofitable, hybrid occupation of Farmer-Ranching.

During this period which merged my boyhood into youth, I became a full-fledged cowboy, in the game of riding bucking bronchos, throwing the rope with a skill comparable with the best of the cowpunchers, and following the roundups. The experience had its thrills, but as I look back over the period I think of these critical years of my life as largely wasted.

To me the life of the cowboy was essentially brutal and barren. The cowboy does not have "his mount" as the cavalryman or jockey does. He has his "string of poneys." Such a practice as "grooming" or "feeding," is foreign to him. The use of a currycomb is a me-

nial job, for which he has only contempt. "I curry 'em with my spurs" is his conception. When he has ridden down one pony he strips off his saddle and lets the pony shift for itself on the open range until it is ready to be ridden down again. Probably days will pass before this pony is rounded up for another hitch by the "horse wrangler," who accompanies each outfit, in the capacity of a lackey.

In his contact with range cattle the same impersonal element of brutality characterizes the cowboy's attitude. Cattle are not "God's creatures" to him; they are merely "beef on the hoof." At the round-up he deals with them with the rope, the branding iron and the knife. A horn is frequently broken off in the "throw," (sometimes a neck). The hide is burned to a blister with the hot iron; the ears are cropped or slit with the knife. Then the bewildered animal is released to his battle with the flies, the larvae, and the elements. In the seasonable summer months when grass and water are plentiful they thrive, grow fat and beautiful. But with the approach of the cold fall rains, the blizzards and snows of winter their fate is an unhappy one. Winter forage and sheltering sheds are unthought of; they hunt the branches, huddle behind creek banks or bunch up and share each other's body heat. Of course some of them will starve and freeze; that's part of the game.

The intellectual range and cultural appreciation of the cowboy are scanty. His songs and rhymes have been resurrected, assembled, retouched, polished off, and made quite respectable. Those of us who heard them "in the raw," have also caught the glamor of their lilt and swing. The vulgar ones have been cast aside and the better ones censored. When I first listened to the unmusical wail of, "Oh, bury me not on the lone prairie-e-e" I was unable to catch the spirit of the theme or appreciate the sentiment. Why should the cowboy, enured to the lonely range repudiate its environment for his last long sleep? "Where the coyote howls and the winds sport free" seemed to me under the circumstances to be an entirely appropriate sepulchral situation. However, the wording was quite inaccurate. Whatever the coyote does, he certainly does not howl—he yips and yees and wails. In my nights on the prairies I learned to appreciate his lamentations. They appear quite apropos as a funeral dirge.

But the rollicking type more nearly struck my fancy:

*"With my foot in the stirrup,
And my hand on the horn,
I'm the best damned puncher
That ever was born,
Cum a ki-yi-yupie, yupie, yea, yea, yea
Cum a ki-yi-yupie, ea!*

My life among the cowboys ended

abruptly soon after the opening of the "Cherokee Strip." The call of the "promised land" stirred the wanderlust which afflicted the blood of my pioneering Irish father. He answered the call. I followed him some months later, making the return trip in a covered wagon as usual.

I was not sorry to leave the cow country of Texas. The urge for an education was upon me. Cowboy life and the glamor of the range were beginning to pall. As I look back over those years I still feel that they were largely wasted—precious years which should have brought richer returns. I was glad to get them behind me—to forget them.

It is said that Dr. Oliver Wendell Holmes once remarked before a medical audience that, "if the entire materia medica were dumped in the middle of the sea, it would be all the better for humanity and all the worse for the sea." To my mind the passing of the range cattle industry is all the better for the cattle, all the better for humanity and all the worse for nobody.

The mania for restaging the most brutal and barbarous phases of the ranch cattle era in the form of modern "Rodeos" is, to me, an evidence of the appeal to primitive and savage instincts. How a community that considers itself civilized can condone such demonstrations of inhumanity toward dumb animals, in order to make a "Roman Holiday," has always puzzled me. When Governor Rolph condoned his California lynching, he was probably thinking about the voting power of the mob and the rabble which opposed its action. At any rate the victims in that case were neither innocent nor dumb. Why shouldn't a community round up a group of undesirable citizens and stage a good old fashioned multiple lynching in lieu of a Rodeo?

We returned to the Cherokee Strip and settled at Perry. The "Round-Ups" were a thing of the past. The wide stretches of the "strip country" were all blocked off by quarter section lines, a home on each square of 160 acres. The trails were fenced up; the cattle were gone. The Cherokee Live-Stock Association had passed into history. The final meeting of its Board of Directors had been held in Kansas City in April, 1893, and in the following September an hundred thousand eager home seekers had swarmed across the lines, changing the great cattle Baronage in a day into farms and cities. During this past September (1933) the fortieth anniversary of the grand opening was celebrated at Enid, now a thriving city of some twenty thousand souls.

Soon after my return I took up the long, bitter fight for an education dependent upon my own resources. But that is another story. However an in-

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teresting incident later happened. Less than a decade after the pasture lands of the strip became the most substantial agricultural area of the enlarged Territory of Oklahoma, the Territorial Legislature established a state secondary school in the heart of the richest portion of the former grazing lands, through which we drove our covered wagon in the fall of 1890. The institution was named the "University Preparatory School" and located between the Salt Fork and the Chikaskia Rivers, at the town of Tonkawa.

In the summer of 1909 I returned to the scenes of the most interesting portion of our "covered wagon trip." The Board of Regents had made me President of the University Preparatory School. During my two years residence at Tonkawa I would frequently take a horse-back ride out along the banks of the Chikaskia River, trying to locate the site of our attractive and lonesome camp. The scenes had all been wonderfully changed; the prairie was gone; the trail had been ruthlessly blotted out. Prosperous farmers plowed the fields where the grass had grown and the cattle had grazed. Fences enclosed these fields and the graceful curves of prairie trails had given place to accurately surveyed, fenced-in, section line roads which followed rigidly and relentlessly the cardinal points and disdained the sweeping contours of gently sloping hills and lovely valleys.

I utterly failed to re-discover that sylvan dell which once had welcomed us on that sunny afternoon of a year that had passed with the passing of "The Last Round Up."

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Miss Mary Ruth Holbrook, '31fa, is teaching in the English department at Chandler high school. Miss Holbrook, who was outstanding in Playhouse performances at the University, notably "The Beggar on Horseback," is director of Chandler high school plays and debate coach.

Virginia Nelson, '29as, star feature writer for the *Oklahoma City Times*, visited the campus recently and addressed journalism students on "The Adventures of a Feature Writer." Miss Nelson has tried everything from shooting ducks to driving a locomotive in her wide range of experiences on special assignments.

Miss Nina Stone, '25as, who was a reporter in Guthrie has become society editor of the *Wewoka Times-Democrat*.

Ivar Axelson, '28M.A., former University faculty member, has been appointed director of the research bureau of the Retail Code Authority in the New York City NRA administration. Axelson, until recently, was executive secretary of the NRA labor mediation board of New York which settled one hundred fifty strikes during three months.

Roy Earl Mourer, '24pharm, is a pharmacist with the Evans Drug company in Enid.

Mrs. Mary Ann Staig Abernathy, '32fa, and Jack H. Abernathy, '33eng, are living at 1828 Oliver, Whiting, Indiana. Abernathy is employed by the Development Department of the Sinclair Refining Company.

Delmar P. Anderson, '28bus, recently became associated with the General Finance company at Enid.

Sooner roll call

Miss Empo V. Henry, '19as, who makes her summer home in Sulphur, is teaching during the school term at the McMurray College for Women at Jacksonville, Illinois.

Miss Ruth Moyer, '22as, is teaching at Enid high school.

Oliver Benson, '32as, '33M.A., Guthrie, is working toward a teacher's certificate at the Central State Teachers' College at Edmond.

Mrs. Marguerite Van Dyke Shaw, '26as, has been appointed assistant supervisor of charity relief for the City of New York. She has been connected with the New York School of Social Service for the past three years.

Owen Acton, '08ex, Guthrie, has been appointed CWA administrator of Logan county.

Mrs. Glowrene Gentry Hoehn, '18as, is serving this year as president of the Junior Welfare organization at Enid.

T. A. Chesney, '01pharm, is employed as municipal auditor at Norman. He has a son, Woodrow, who will enrol at the University next year.

Spencer Norton, '28as, Oklahoma City, was guest soloist at a concert of Paul Carpenter's University symphony orchestra in December on the campus. Norton, who is considered one of the finest pianists ever graduated from the University, has a studio in Oklahoma City.

"Rinsland-Beck Natural Test of English Usage" has just been accepted by the Public School Publishing Company. The validation and determination of the reliability of this test was the subject of Dr. Beck's dissertation completed under Dr. Rinsland. The test will be published under a joint authorship. The authors, Henry D. Rinsland, '20as, '24M.A., is associate professor of education, University of Oklahoma, and Roland L. Beck, '26M.A., '32Ph.D., is associate professor of education at Central State Teachers College, Edmond.

Reben E. Gilmore, '25M.A., is president of Northwest Nazarene College, Nampa, Idaho.

Kathleen M. Ryan, '30as, is assistant county supervisor of Federal Emergency Relief Administration for Kay county. Her office is in the Kuhl building, Blackwell.

Hazel E. Wright, '23as, is employed in the personnel department of the schools of Tulsa. Home, 1155 North Boston Place, Tulsa.

Mrs. Frances Gorman Risser, '24ex, 203 G street, S. W., Ardmore, has had stories published recently in *Child Life*, *Playmates*, and the *Etude*.

Four members of the Swartz family are graduates of the University in four consecutive years: Merle D., 1929, now pharmacist at the Oilman Drug, Earlsboro; Lyle K., 1930, pharmacist at A. & C. Drug, Anadarko; Richard M., 1931, 2411 West Park Place, Oklahoma City; and Rachel, 1932, now Mrs. C. F. Moran of Norman.

Rene Love Stone, '32ex, recently went to New York City to study voice. He is located at the Allerton House. Stone has sung in numerous programs including the leading part in "Faust" presented here and in Oklahoma City last winter under the direction of William G. Schmidt.

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