

“Mr Hutchison Visits Madrid”

Transport and Travel in the late Victorian Era

A Musical History, presented at
El Museo del Romanticismo
Madrid, Saturday 21st May 2016

Introduction

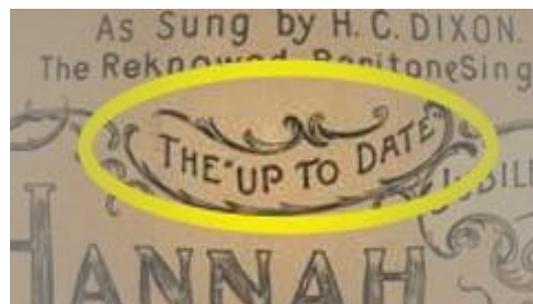
The last years of Queen Victoria's reign were to witness discoveries in science and innovations in technology that would come to define the century that followed: telephony, photography, the typewriter, radio, sound recording,



innovations in printing and duplicating, cinema, electric lighting, among the more significant. But perhaps the most impactful innovations would be in the areas of transport and travel. Up until that time the average working-class person would rarely have traveled more than 25 miles from their home in their entire life. Foot or horse drawn vehicles were about their only means of travel. With the expansion of the passenger rail network from mid-century, the safety bicycle (1885), the first electric railway (1883), the electric tram (1884), the pneumatic tyre (1888), and electric underground train (1890) came an

affordable mobility unimaginable to earlier generations. The great transatlantic steamships (1837), the internal-combustion engine (1864) and first motor car (1885), and just two years after the death of Victoria the first manned flight (1903) would herald in a new era of travel. It is unsurprising therefore that the novel modes of travel should be celebrated in song in the most popular form of entertainment of the era, music hall.

For in a Britain with still high levels of illiteracy (around one-fifth of the adult population according to the 1871 census), few working class people in any case able to afford a daily newspaper, no television, no radio, and of course no Internet, the music hall became both a source and a mirror of much of the news of the day and of the major interests of the day. Such 'topicality' and 'up-to-date-ness' were demanded and expected of music-hall performers.



This evening's entertainment therefore brings you a magic lantern show and medley of Victorian music-hall songs on the theme of transport and travel—concluding with Marie Lloyd's exuberant tribute to “the land of King Alfonso”.

1 Riding On Top Of The Car (performed by George Lashwood, 1905)



Horse-drawn trams on rails challenged the supremacy of the horse bus, providing Londoners with a cheap, efficient and reliable public transport network. London's first tram service, on steel rails laid flush with the road surface, began between Brixton and Kennington in 1870. Being able to carry more passengers than a bus whilst using the same number of horses meant that tram fares could be dropped to 1d per mile (1p per 4km). This, together with early morning workers' tickets at half price on the railways, brought public transport within the reach of many more working people for the first time and enabled them to live further out from their workplaces in the crowded city centre. Not only were trams cheaper; travelling at 6mph (10 kph) they were also slightly faster than horse buses, which managed 4mph (6kph).

Ordinary working-class people could therefore now also afford to travel on public transport purely for leisure. And thus for the city dweller the tram would become one of the places where young couple could innocently meet to court and 'spoon'.

References and further reading

<http://www.ltmcollection.org/resources/index.html?IXglossary=Public%20transport%20in%20Victorian%20London%3A%20Part%20One%3A%20Overground>

2 Salute My Bicycle (performed by Marie Lloyd, 1895)



If any technology stands out for the sheer breadth of its impact in society—on travel, on leisure, on politics, on fashion, and even on the emancipation of women—it is surely the bicycle.

It was John Kemp Starley's invention of the 'Rover Safety Bicycle' in England in 1885 and the Coventry Machinists Company's 'Swift Safety Bicycle' of the following year—with their pneumatic tyres, diamond shaped frame, and equal sized wheels—that provided the catalyst for cycling's Golden Age, the cumbersome and often dangerous designs of the past finally replaced by a safe design suited to all levels of rider skills.

And while cars, gramophones, the home telephone, and later air flight, were very much limited to the wealthier classes, significantly the 'Safety Bicycle' was *economically* viable for many in the middle and lower classes (in other words, for the majority of the population).

The Clarion Cycling Club and the spread of Socialism



Founder-members of Birmingham Clarion CC in 1894, photographed by one of their number, J. Cruwys Richards. Left to right: Steve Muir, W. Baker, W. Powell, Tom Groom, S. Hughes, Chris Thompson, Harry Atkinson.

The affordability of the bicycle made it unexpectedly a vehicle (in every sense) for the spread of socialism. The Socialists' Cycling Club was launched in Birmingham in February 1894. Subsequently renamed the Clarion Cycling Club after *The Clarion* socialist newspaper, it not only

offered healthy exercise for young Socialists; the so-called “Clarion Scouts” used their cycling trips to circulate socialist leaflets and copies of the *Clarion* wherever they visited. By the end of 1894, 22 of the Bradford CCC's 25 members were working as Scouts, distributing propaganda to villages around the town. In March 1895 a new socialist magazine, *The Scout*, was launched for Scouts to read

and circulate. It was subtitled *A Monthly Journal for Socialists* and its first edition included a set of 'Instructions for Scouts' written by *The Clarion's* editor Robert Blatchford. The Clarion Clubs also did much to circulate *The Clarion*, Blatchford's book *Merric England* and the socialist ideas that they expressed.

'Rational Dress' and the emancipation of women



The 'Safety' bicycle was also the first bicycle that was truly suitable for women but those early pioneering ladies had to endure great public outrage. The social lives of most young women in the late 19th century were strictly supervised, particularly those of the middle and upper classes whose relative affluence placed them in the best position to enjoy the new sport of cycling.

The bicycle offered women freedom from the constraints of their daily lives, a freedom that was not universally approved but which was reluctantly accepted as cycling gained in popularity among

women. Even so their numbers greatly increased and cycling became an important expression in the battle for women's emancipation. For the safety bicycle gave women unprecedented mobility; and as feminists and suffragists recognised its transformative power as more women now had access to the personal freedom that the bicycle embodied, so the bicycle came to symbolise—especially in Britain and the United States—the New Woman of the late nineteenth century.

Since women could not cycle in the then-current fashions for voluminous and



restrictive dresses, the bicycle craze fed into a movement for so-called 'rational dress', which helped liberate women from their corsets and ankle-length skirts and other encumbering garments, substituting for these the then-shocking bloomers.

The 'Rational Dress' movement had not initially been linked to cycling but was rather a reaction against the mainstream women's fashion of the mid 1800s: uncomfortable and impractical voluminous skirts over constricting tight corsets.

In 1851 Libby Miller (1822–1911), a New

England activist, designed trousers to be worn under a short skirt that permitted more movement. But the outfit, dubbed ‘bloomers’ after being publicised by Miller’s colleague Amelia Bloomer (1818–1894), attracted ridicule – particularly in England – and the dress reform movement stalled.

In 1881, the Society for Rational Dress was formed in London. The Society’s president and co-founder, Lady Florence Harberton, was herself a keen cyclist and an advocate of exercise for women. Recognizing the restrictive nature of women’s clothes she advocated the wearing of a divided skirt over a pair of bloomers or other under trousers.

Thus thanks to lighter or divided skirts, women participated fully in the cycling boom that followed the invention of the Rover Safety of 1885.

Rational dress as a fashion was finally adopted in 1895 by a handful of socially privileged women, arguably setting the foundation for women's trousers in the 20th century.

References and further reading

http://www.fashion-era.com/rational_dress.htm

<http://www.victorianweb.org/art/costume/nunn2.html>

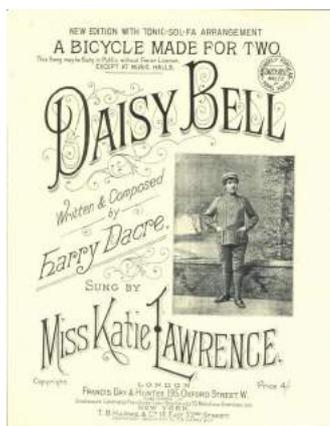
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<https://cyclehistory.wordpress.com/2015/01/30/women-on-the-move-cycling-and-the-rational-dress-movement/>

3 Daisy Bell (performed by Katie Lawrence, 1892)



Owning a bicycle benefitted the love lives of those living in urban communities. Young men in particular visited towns and villages that normally they would never have thought possible. Birth records have shown that family names previously only seen in a particular area suddenly started to appear much further from home. Obviously many long cycle rides were made with amorous intentions!

The links between cycling and romance were recognised in 1895 by John Crook and Fred Bowyer

in their hit for Lottie Collins *A Bicycle Marriage* and more memorably by Harry Dacre in 1892 when he penned ‘Daisy Bell’ with the famous ‘bicycle made for two’. The 1890s also saw ‘cycling courtships’ becoming increasingly common

among members of the middle-classes, as young men and women used bicycle rides as opportunities for unsupervised and unchaperoned meetings. As one female cyclist described,



‘The chief merit of the bicycle in the eyes of the young is that it dispenses with the chaperon. It imparts open air freedom and freshness to a life heretofore cribbed, crabbed, cabined and confined by convention. The cyclists have collided with the unamiable Mrs Grundy and have ridden triumphantly over her prostrate body.’

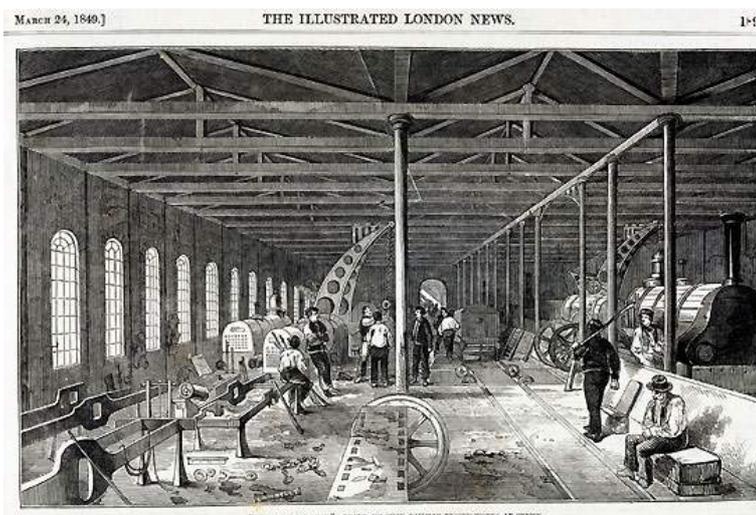
Predictably, therefore, songs about cycling had become popular by the 1890s. Popular titles would include *The Bicycle Girl* by Oddfellow and Meacham, George Le Brunn's *The Bicycle Barn-Dance*, *Pretty Little Scorcher* by Reed and Posey, and Arnold Somlyo's slightly suspect *Hurrah for the Girls in Bloomers* (1894) and *Pretty Girls in Bloomers* (1895).

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4 Oh Mr Porter (performed by Marie Lloyd, 1892)

“they're taking me on to Crewe”



With its origins, in 1830, in the Liverpool and Manchester Railway and the Leeds and Selby Railway as complementary transport to Britain's canals for the transport of goods, the country's rail network expanded rapidly in the following decade.

Between 1840 and 1843 the Grand Junction Railway, under the direction of Joseph Locke, built its locomotive works at the village of Crewe. The town of Crewe was not formally planned out until 1843 to consolidate the 'railway colony' that had grown up

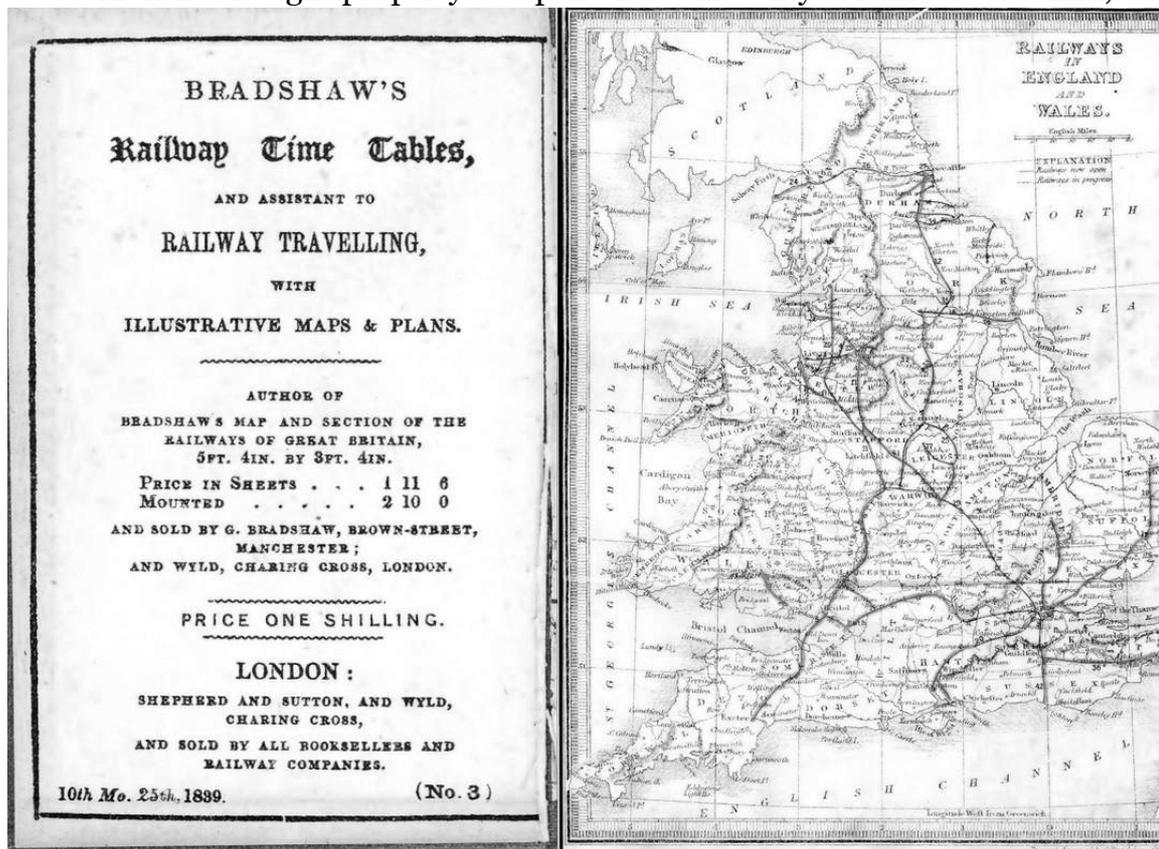
since around 1840–41 in the area near to the railway junction station opened in 1837. So Crewe, the town, was in effect named after the railway station, rather than the other way round.

The passenger railway network and the railway timetable

The late 1830s and 1840s saw an unexpected enthusiasm for passenger travel. In particular, William Gladstone’s 1844 Railway Act, which obliged every company to supply at least one train daily at the cost of no more than 1d a mile, made rail travel accessible to the average working man. A year after Victoria came to the throne there were a recorded 5½ million journeys on the railways of the Britain; by 1845 this had risen to 30 million and ten years after that to 111 million journeys by train.

George Bradshaw (1801-1853) was originally a publisher of maps. On 19 October 1839, soon after the introduction of railways, his Manchester company published the world's first compilation of railway timetables. The cloth-bound book was entitled *Bradshaw's Railway Time Tables and Assistant to Railway Travelling* and cost sixpence (2½p). In 1840 the title was changed to *Bradshaw's Railway Companion*; and in 1847 he published the first *Bradshaw's Continental Railway Guide*.

By the 1850s, many steam-powered railways had reached the fringes of built-up London, a much smaller city at that time. But the new lines were not permitted to demolish enough property to penetrate the City or the West End, so



passengers had to disembark at Paddington, Euston, Kings Cross, Fenchurch Street, Charing Cross, Waterloo or Victoria and then make their own way via hackney carriage or on foot into the centre, thereby massively increasing congestion in the city. The Metropolitan Railway was built under the ground to connect several of these separate railway terminals. It opened in 1863, and was the first line of what was to become the London Underground.

These became more specialised over the years to specific countries; and thus in 1894 the company published *Bradshaw's Illustrated Hand-book to Spain and Portugal*.

References and resources

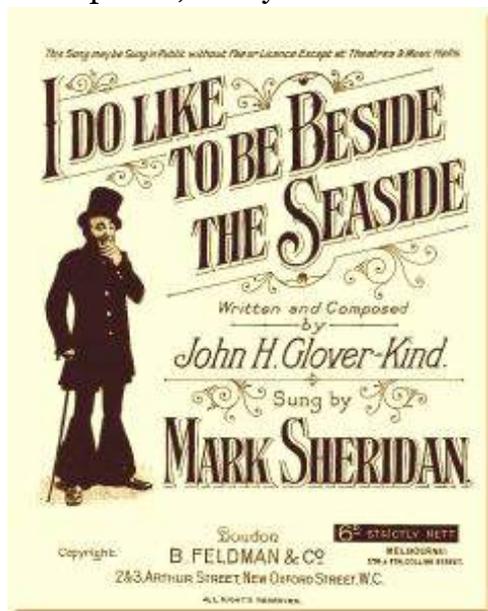
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http://www.musicweb-international.com/railways_in_music.htm

<https://archive.org/stream/bradshawsillust03chargooq>

5 You Can Do Things At The Seaside (performed by Mark Sheridan, 1911)

When Queen Victoria died in January 1901, there was genuine grief on the part of the public, and yet there was also an air of relief and of anticipation for the future.



Edward VII, popular with the public, was—to put it mildly—a *bon viveur*, and his lust for life was enthusiastically shared by his subjects.

Leisure time was on the increase generally, although working hours were still long. Music-hall remained the most important form of popular entertainment, although by the middle years of the Edwardian era it found it was losing its audiences not only to the more respectable and family-friendly variety theatre but also to the new picture houses.

Bank Holidays (i.e., public holidays) had been instituted by act of parliament in 1871 and people made the most of them to enjoy day trips to seasonal fairs and—increasingly—to their local seaside resort.

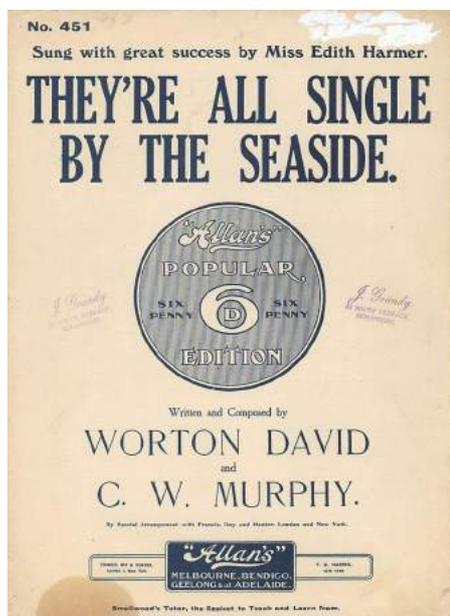
A string of resorts had grown up along the coasts of England in the early decades of the 19th century, ornamented with elegant squares and piers, as sea-water

swimming became fashionable for purposes of health. Ramsgate, Margate, Brighton, Southend and Scarborough were already in vogue by 1817. By the end of the century the quest for health had become a search for pleasure, and hundreds of towns had been developed along the sea. Houses and hotels with balconies and bay windows with sea views replaced the old fishing cottages, while the now affordable railways and steampackets offered a new facility of movement for the masses.



All who visited these coastal towns could, for a brief portion of their lives, play out whatever role they fancied. "Holiday time was a land of pretence," wrote Macqueen-Pope, recalling his late-Victorian childhood. "They all laid claim to a social status they did not possess and nobody believed anyone, but it was part of the fun. The men were all in professions, or were naval or military officers on leave. If they were clean-shaven in an age of moustaches, they said they were actors. The girls were all of great wealth and family." A taste for the exotic, inspired by the Brighton Pavilion, coloured the new style of architecture. Among the jungly ferns and palms of the Winter Gardens, the 'Indian' lounges and kiosks, the bandstands domed like oriental pavilions, the tourists could imagine themselves transported briefly to some tropical paradise. Bands of 'Ethiopian

Minstrels' played along the esplanades and piers that gave the illusion of decks of ships, with their bollards shaped like capstans, their lamps decorated with anchors, sea serpents, mermaids.



In the music halls along the piers they sang of spurious "Swells of the Sea" and "Seaside Sultans", of seaside flirtations and marital indiscretion ("They're all single by the Seaside"). The songs reflected the transient sense of liberation felt by those who led drab lives in the cities. Fantasies were fulfilled. There was even a plea: "Why can't we have the sea in London?" These songs celebrated

the great age of seaside holidays, perhaps few so eloquently as "You can do a lot of things at the seaside that you can't do in town."

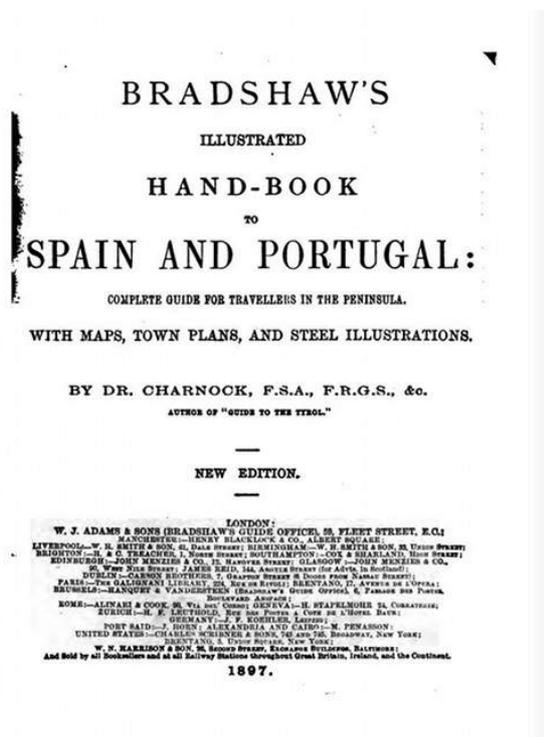
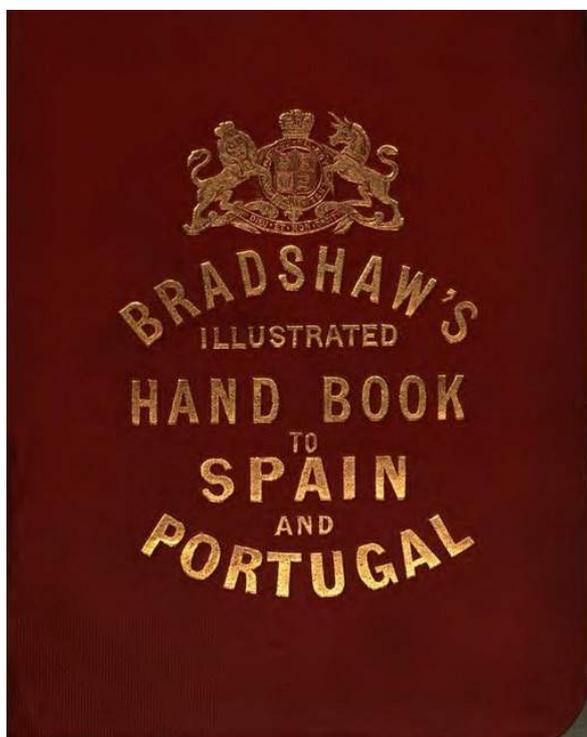
6 Tiddley-Om-Pom (performed by Marie Lloyd, 1907)

The Victorians and Spain



The English have always loved travel. And, of course, the English have always loved Spain. Throughout the 19th century English writers and travellers including Sir John Bowring, Henry Vassall-Fox, George Borrow, John Hookham Frere, and Richard Ford would tour Spain and would write extensively about their experiences of the country and its people, while the stars of music-hall would sing about Spain: Marie Lloyd's “*The Spanish Senora*”, C. W. Murphy's “*Alphonso, my Alphonso*”, Annie Adams' “*Mona from Barcelona*”, Billy Merson's “*The Spaniard that blighted my life*”, and Harry Weldon's “*The Bull Fighter*” among the many such songs of the era.

Earlier I mentioned Bradshaw's railway guides. These became more specialised over the years to specific countries; and thus in 1894 the company published *Bradshaw's Illustrated Hand-book to Spain and Portugal*. The Preface gives an indication of the author's enthusiasm for Spain:



“Few parts of the Continent are so worthy of a visit as Spain. In the beauty and variety of its scenery, it falls little short of Tyrol and Styria; it contains some of

the finest buildings, and has given birth to some of the greatest artists in Europe; while it is at the same time especially interesting for its historical associations.”

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