

## Landmarks of Genealogy

*Vicissitudes of families : and other essays*

Sir Bernard Burke  
Ulster King of Arms

(1859)

I AM well aware that to many the genealogical tree appears to be little better than a barren trunk, producing no fruit, or none of any value. Such, however, is not my conviction. If it be a natural and laudable feeling for the living to glory in the fame of their dead ancestors—if such recollections serve as a spur to good and a check to evil in ourselves. Genealogy is a valuable and important science : if truth of persons as well as of facts be all-essential to history, if without the accuracy so obtained, the actors of one age are liable to be confounded with those of another, to the obscuring of facts themselves, then again is Genealogy a valuable and important science. And can any one doubt that such is the case, even in its fullest extent ? Can any one, for a moment, doubt the influence—the beneficial influence—exercised upon most minds by the noble pride of lineage ? What else is Genealogy, even in its driest form, denuded of all story—what else is it but the record of persons, as history is more peculiarly the record of events ? In their more perfect shapes, the two are seen to blend with, rather than to encroach upon, each other. History relieving the dryness of Genealogy by the attractive narrative of events, and Genealogy, by its minute description of persons, imparting a deeper, and, as it were, a more dramatic interest to History. Biography, too, perhaps the most pleasing branch of literature, owes a heavy debt to my favourite pursuit. What would it be but for the Genealogist's labours ?

If I have not exaggerated—as I trust I have not—the uses to be drawn from genealogical pursuits, little apology will be needed for the following essay, which may, perhaps, add something, however little (derived from my peculiar course of study), to the general stock of knowledge. Nor do I believe that Genealogy will prove, upon a closer acquaintance, so barren of amusement as it is by some imagined. On the contrary, I have no doubt that, reversing the effect of the desert-mirage, while it seems from a distance to promise nothing but arid sands, it will be found on a nearer approach to be a pleasant land, wherein neither streams, nor flowers, nor green leaves are deficient.

One of the greatest impediments a genealogical inquirer encounters at the onset of his researches, arises from a want of acquaintance with the public and private records necessary to assist him on his dubious and perplexing way. The perusal of mouldering deeds and crumbling parchments, the discovery of facts long gone by and forgotten, and the investigation of events and connexions, trivial at the period of their occurrence, but all-important in future times to pedigree-elucidation, must ever require the most determined energy and perseverance ; but still, though toilsome may be the labour, it becomes comparatively light, and the prospect of final success far more certain, when a knowledge is acquired of the principal archives and authorities wherein are contained the evidences of family history. To supply the requisite information, and to conduct the reader over paths little frequented, and ground almost untrodden, I propose to indicate the various landmarks which may safely guide him to his journey's end, by affording a brief and concise description of the numerous important records which abound in public and private repositories ; and which, when once indicated, can be easily referred to.

The repositories of genealogical information in Ireland, though far from being as rich in materials as the English, claim a higher antiquity.

The genealogical pretensions of the Milesians or ancient noblesse of Ireland, rival those of the Imperial house of Austria, or the Ducal family of Arcot, where pedigrees, it is said, reach back to the Deluge. The Scoto-Milesians trace their descent to the same epoch ; and in many of the older pedigrees, the compilers, not content with the remoteness of Noah, pass on to the father of mankind,—Adam himself !

The Milesians were most particular in preserving and recording the genealogies of their families. The office of “ Antiquary” somewhat analogous to that of the modern English herald, was created to preserve a knowledge of historical events, and genealogies of families. The compilations of the antiquaries were duly examined in the Fez or National Assembly, and were recorded in the great register or Psalter of Tara. This practice of chronicling events and genealogies continued to be observed to a late period ; and was kept alive in Christian times by a succession of Monastic chroniclers, to whom we owe those various volumes of Psalters and annals with which the ancient literature of Ireland abounds. The larger part of the genealogical contents of those numerous and voluminous works are collected and compiled in five great works in folio, which contain detailed pedigrees of Irish families ; but, without the services of those great masters of the Gaelic, Dr. O’Donovan and Eugene Curry, the ponderous Works of the learned Seanachies and Scribes of ancient Irish Literature will be “ sealed books” to the English reader.

These Works are,

I. The *Book of Leinster*, containing about 300 pages, which was compiled about the year 1150, and is to be found in the library of Trinity College, Dublin.

II. The *Book of Ballymote*, about 600 pages, compiled in the year 1391, now in the Royal Irish Academy. These two works are written on ancient vellum, and in the Irish character.

III. The *Leavar Lecain*, about 700 pages, compiled in the year 1416 ; a beautifully written paper copy of it in clear, bold, and legible modern Irish characters, is now in the library of the Royal Irish Academy.

IV. The *Book of Peregrene O’Clery*, one of the four masters, compiled about the year 1650, and now also in the Royal Irish Academy,

And V. The *Book of Duaid Mac Firbis*, compiled in the year 1650, and continued in part down to the year 1666. There is a very accurate and complete paper copy of it in the Royal Irish Academy. These works contain the sources of genealogical information, concerning the native families of distinction, or ancient *noblesse* of Ireland prior as well as subsequent to the Anglo-Norman invasion, extending down to the middle of the seventeenth century. The Anglo-Irish sources of genealogical learning in Ireland since the English *regime* are chiefly to be found among the public records, deposited in the repositories of the official departments. They are, generally speaking, arranged in sub-divisional compartments, in the order of the reigns of the different sovereigns of England.

The first and most legitimate source of genealogical information is to be found among the records of the office of Ulster King of Arms, Dublin Castle. They consist of twenty-four large folio volumes, in manuscript, of tabular pedigrees of the nobility and gentry of Ireland, of native, and English, and Scottish descent, with their arms. These were compiled from public and private sources, and registered at various times. Two of these books are peculiarly interesting and valuable ; one written by Roger O’Ferrall at the beginning of the 18th century, which traces the Pedigrees of Irish families with all their ramifications and collateral descents from the three sons of Milesius, Heremon, Heber, and Ir, and his uncle Ith ; and the other by the Chevalier O’Gorman, a little later, which is equally interesting. Most of these pedigrees

commence in the remotest ages, especially those of the native families. The genealogies of the Anglo-Norman families in general extend no further than the battle of Hastings, starting from the Norman Conquest. Among the other important sources of genealogical information in Ulster's office are the following :

I. "*Visitation Books*," which contain Pedigrees and arms of the nobility and gentry, and were taken by the Ulster Kings of Arms, on their Visitations of Counties, under Commissions ;

II. "*Lords' Entries* : " these consist of volumes of Pedigrees, and arms of the peers of Ireland, made pursuant to an order of the Irish House of Lords of the 12th August, 1707, for the purpose of facilitating proof of their descent, and right to sit and vote.

III. "*Baronets' Books*," which contain the Pedigrees and arms of the Baronets of Ireland, under a royal warrant dated 30th September, 1789, for correcting and preventing abuses in the order of Baronets.

IV. "*Funeral Certificates*," or attested returns of the names, arms, time of death, place of burial and marriage, and issue of the nobility and gentry, whose funerals were attended, according to ancient custom, by the officers of arms or their deputies, from the year 1595 to about the year 1698.

V. "*Books of Peers*," being lists of Peers as they sat in parliament at various periods, and also of creations of peers, baronets, and knights from the time of Queen Elizabeth to the present time.

VI. "*Books of Royal Licenses*," containing entries of the Royal Licenses for changes of names, and arms, and other incidental matters. VII. " Book of Registration of Grants of Arms," to various persons from the time of Edward VI. to the present time.

These are the ordinary records of the office, but there are beside many volumes of manuscript ordinaries, and collection of arms—Books containing the arms of the ancient nobility of Ireland, that is to say, creations by the Kings of England, whether as Lords, or Kings of Ireland, and Pedigrees and arms of the Peers of England—Copies and abstracts of various matters relative to genealogical and antiquarian research—also copies of Visitations of some of the English Counties—Vellum Rolls and numerous paper Rolls of Pedigrees of ancient families in Ireland. The Library of Ulster's Office will, it is expected, be enriched shortly, through the liberality of the government, by the purchase of the late Sir William Betham's splendid collection of MSS.

The Ulster King of Arms, as Keeper of the Tower Records, Dublin Castle, has also in his custody numerous documents which are ancillary aids to the genealogies of families. These consist of Plea Rolls of the several courts, of Parliament, and of the Crown, from the year 1246 to 1625 ; Rolls of pleas, and of the Crown, before Justices in Eyre, and gaol delivery—Rolls of the Pipe, or public accounts of the Exchequer from the year 1240 to 1760—Rolls of Sheriffs' accounts—Attornments of Estates—Recognizances—Recusants' pardons—Books of orders and decrees of the Exchequer on matters of public revenue, and tenants to the Crown—Advowsons—Presentations to church benefices—Charters of towns and boroughs—Inquisitions post mortem—Grants of office—Settlements and other deeds arranged in Counties—Commissions—Kings' letters, &c.—Also records of the Houses of Lords and Commons of Ireland, including the whole of the published and unpublished statutes of Ireland—Also transcripts of proceedings of the late Record Commission, consisting of books of reference to grants of manors, lands, tenements, fisheries, advowsons, tithes, ferries, markets, and other hereditaments, passed by patent under the great seal of Ireland—Also

claims of suffering loyalists in 1798—and papers and returns connected with the yeomanry—and the census of 1831. In these several records of the Dublin Tower numerous references occur to names and descriptions of persons of every degree and calling, and are therefore of very considerable genealogical importance.

The other records, auxiliary to genealogical information, are those of the *Paymaster of Civil Services*, Custom House, Dublin, and consist of Books of Survey of forfeited estates—Regrants of forfeited lands—Rent Rolls of Crown lands—The Registrar of forfeited estates—the Down Survey and Maps—returns of Ecclesiastical preferments—of the Census of 1831, and emendation of it in 1834, and Census returns of 1841.

The *Registry of Deeds Office, Henrietta Street*, contains original memorials of deeds, wills, and other instruments connected with landed estates from the year 1708. The *Prerogative Registry*, in the same building, contains original Wills, commencing about the year 1530—entries of grants of probate and administration, marriage licenses—pleadings and depositions relating to contested Wills—regal Visitations—faculties for clergymen to hold pluralities of livings, and for appointment to the office of Notary. *Diocesan Registries*, in the different Dioceses throughout the Kingdom, contain records somewhat similar to those in the Prerogative Registry. A great portion of them will be transferred under a recent Statute to the Prerogative Registry, Dublin. Connected with the ecclesiastical registers are the records of the *Cathedrals*. There are a few in the Cathedrals of Clogher, Leighlin, Limerick, Killaloe, Tuam, and Killala. Christ Church, Dublin, contains several thousand in number, which consist not only of those connected with the Cathedral, but of many matters outside, and of general interest. The *University of Dublin* has a most numerous and valuable collection of manuscripts, and is particularly rich in the history, antiquities, and topography of Ireland, and the genealogy of families. Many of the records of the council, of parliament, of the courts, of ecclesiastical houses, and of Birmingham Tower, Dublin Castle, have in the course of time found their way there, and render the collection very general, and varied, and of much value. The *College of Armagh* contains some MS. papers, namely. Rent Rolls, and surveys, and maps relating to the Church lands of the Diocese. The *King's Inns' Society, Dublin*, contains records relating to the Benchers, and officers. Barristers, Attorneys, and Students, as they became connected with it. *Marsh's Library, Dublin*, has several manuscripts, some of which might also be profitably consulted. In the *Royal Dublin Society* there is a numerous collection of manuscripts, relating to the civil and ecclesiastic affairs of Ireland and other matters, through which are interspersed much genealogical information. The *Royal Irish Academy* is peculiarly rich in genealogical lore. There are, besides those books of Irish pedigrees already noticed, various other rare and valuable works, in which are to be found matters of pedigree, and biography of families. The *Borough Towns of Ireland* have also records of a local nature, which contain much useful information. But the records of the Courts of Law and Equity are by far the most numerous, and contain the most extensive materials for genealogy. The *Court of Chancery* Records consist of the Pleadings, Bills, Answers, Affidavits, Depositions, Reports, and Decrees, which set forth minute details of family affairs, connected with the descent and settlement of property, and adjustment of rights; also Inquisitions, Convent and Catholic Rolls, letters of guardianship. Commissions of various kinds,—of lunacy, and of the peace licenses and pardons—The palatinate Rolls of Tipperary—Parliament Rolls—Cromwell's Rolls, election writs of Commoners, grants of offices, of lands, and a variety of other miscellaneous matter. The *Law Courts* of the Queen's Bench, Common Pleas, and Exchequer, have records of judgments. Rolls of Attorneys, and other matters of general interest. In the *Queen's Bench* are records of outlawry and attainder—On the Crown side, enrolments of Indictments and presentments.—In the Exchequer, numerous Inquisitions, Outlawries, Memoranda Rolls, Certificates of persons transplanted into Conn aught in the time of Cromwell, Inquisitions on surrenders of Monasteries, and estates of attainted persons, Certificates granted to adventurers and soldiers, the “Red Book of the Exchequer,”—Informations on bills for discovery of Estates, by “Protestant discoverers” and answers thereto; and in the

*Common Pleas*, records of fines and recoveries to bar estates tail, names of persons who took “the oaths” Tipperary palatinate records and extracts of outlawry.

The other sources of genealogical information are the records kept by the Clerks of the Crown for the Circuits—the city, town, quarter sessions, manor, and other Courts of inferior jurisdiction. The Manor Courts have been abolished by a recent act of Parliament. Lastly, much information may be gleaned from the last civil confiscation by the Encumbered Estates’ Court. In the numerous volumes in manuscript of books of sale will be found the names of the owners, and of the three or four thousand purchasers, and of the lands purchased. If the Judges of the present Landed Estates’ Court could be prevailed on to unlock and unseal the multitude of tin boxes of title deeds and abstracts of title to those estates deposited in the registry of the Court, a vast quantity of genealogical information and materials for the histories of families, and former proprietors of estates in Ireland, would be disclosed.

The general landmarks of Genealogy already noticed in the observations respecting the English sources, are equally common to Ireland, namely, monuments, tomb-stones, coffin plates, parochial registers of births, marriages, and burials—grants of marriage licenses, heraldry, entries in Bibles, letters and manuscripts, registers of Dublin University, college admission books, and matriculation papers. There are also in private collections numerous manuscripts and pedigrees of families of a valuable and interesting kind, scattered throughout every part of the kingdom.

In connection with the subject of family bearings, I may not inappropriately, perhaps, refer to family entries in Bibles, letters, and manuscripts. These documents are so familiar to every one, that no description is required ; but although their importance is universally acknowledged, it is surprising how irregularly the entries are generally kept. Every family should preserve a record of births, marriages, and deaths ; and thus the confusion and litigation in which the inheritance of titles and property are frequently involved would never occur. Those that already possess old Bibles containing these entries and family MSS. cannot be too careful of them ; for, owing to the destruction of many parish registers, they may, in all probability, contain the only proofs in existence by which their descents can be traced. Letters,\* and the innumerable documents treasured up in families, afford very valuable assistance to pedigrees, and have at all times been used and received in evidence.

Another important repository of genealogical information must not be left unnoticed,—the Registers of the Universities, the College Admission Books, and the Matriculation Papers, affording, as they do, the Christian and surnames of the student, and of his father, the latter’s station in life, his residence, the student’s birth-place, his age, and school wherein he received his education. At Cambridge, the Matriculation Papers commence in 1544, twenty years before those of Oxford.

### Kings of Arms and Heralds

“ Heralds and pursuivants, by name  
Bute, Islay, Marchmont, Rothsay, came  
In painted tabards, proudly showing  
Gules, argent, or, and azure glowing,  
Attendant on a King-of-Arms,  
Whose hand the armorial truncheon, held.  
That feudal strife had often quell’d,  
When wildest its alarms.”— *Marmion*.

The office of “ King of Arms” is of feudal origin, and was one of the attributes of the pomp and splendour annexed to feudal sovereignty. There is no trace of such an institution anterior to the Norman invasion, which overturned the preexisting system in England, formed as it had been by a fusion of the usages of the ancient Britons, Saxons, and Danes. Having so overturned it, the Normans introduced the military and chivalrous code of feuds, with its homage, and fealty, and services. Sir Henry Spelman is of opinion that the title of King of Arms was attributed to such heraldic officers in England as belonged immediately to the person of the king’s majesty, while those who appertained to princes of the blood royal, or to the nobility, were styled simply Heralds. Another learned author states that the title of “King of Heralds (of later times called King of Arms) was given to that personage who was the chief or principal officer presiding over the heralds of any kingdom, or of any particular province usually termed *the marches* or of any order of knighthood.”

The primary duty of the English Kings of Arms and Heralds, at the time of their establishment, corresponded with that of the Heralds of foreign princes ; they carried and delivered all messages of importance to allies, enemies, and rebels, gave solemn defiances and denunciations of war ; summoned cities, castles, &c. to surrender; made propositions of peace, truce, and accommodation, and offered mercy and pardon to rebellious subjects and insurgents. They had also the cognizance, inspection, marshalling, and regulation of coats of armour, and the several marks of distinction connected with them ; they received all foreign nobility and others coming to England to perform feats of arms, and gave safe conduct to them from their arrival to the time of their leaving the kingdom ; assisted at tilts, tournaments, and feats of arms, and attended to the honour and reputation of military persons, and to the safety, welfare, and defence of the king and his realms. They had also the arrangement, order, and progress of legal combats ; were likewise employed in marshalling and conducting coronations, marriages, baptisms, funerals, interviews, and other august assemblies, processions, pomps, and solemnities of the ancient monarchs, and took care that the orders, rites, and ceremonies established for those ceremonials were duly observed ; and that the rules of precedence were strictly adhered to.

The pride and ambition of the nobility prompted them to imitate, and oftentimes to vie with, their monarchs in state and magnificence. Hence it is that we find the Heralds attending at the funeral rites and ceremonies of the nobility, as well as at the celebration of their marriages, christenings, and other festivities, and practising the same forms and grandeur as were observed at those of the royal family.

Noble and illustrious descent having also been held in high esteem, strict attention was paid to the observance of a just and exact distinction between the different ranks or classes of the people. The ignoble never presumed, in those ancient times, to arrogate a participation in the rights annexed to eminence of parentage, or to claim honours to which their superiors alone were entitled. And the nobility and gentry, cautiously jealous of their dignity, avoided mixing with the vulgar, and were sedulously careful for the preservation, on all public and solemn occasions, of that purity of rank and precedence which was due by the feudal system to their birth and station in life. Family arms being the general criterion which distinguished the gentleman from the peasant, no persons were suffered to enter the lists to tourney, or exercise any feats of arms, unless they could, to the satisfaction of the Kings of Arms, prove themselves to be gentlemen of “ Coat Armour.” And the ancient gentry took particular care to have their arms embroidered on their common-wearing over-coats, and would not suffer any person of the lower class, although become rich, to use such tokens of gentle birth and distinction ; nay, so jealous were they of any infringement of the armorial rights to which they were entitled, that whenever the arms which they and their families had borne happened to be claimed by any other gentlemen, they vindicated their rights in the military courts, and very often by duel. Under those circumstances it became essential and was a necessary part of the duties of Heralds, to draw out, with accuracy and exactness. the authentic genealogies of

noble families, and families of “gentle birth,” to continue, and from time to time, to add to and preserve their pedigrees in direct and collateral lines ; and to have a perfect knowledge of all hereditary arms, ensigns, badges of honour, and the external marks as well of personal as of family rank and distinction.

Some portion of the ancient duties of the Herald has become obsolete with the decay of the feudal system, but enough remains to render the office important and useful. That branch of his labours connected with genealogy is valuable in the highest degree. Genealogical tables and authentic pedigrees, regularly deduced, contain memorials of past transactions and events, and from them chronologers and historians have drawn very considerable assistance ; they have operated to the detection of frauds, forgeries, and impostures; cleared up doubts and difficulties; established marriages ; supported and defended legitimacy and purity of blood ; ascertained family alliances ; proved and maintained affinity and consanguinity; vindicated and corroborated the titles of lands to their possessors; and have been of essential use in settling claims and rights of inheritance without litigation, by furnishing effectual evidence. Such has been, and ever must be, the utility of genealogies, when they are framed with integrity and authenticated by evidence.

The *heraldic Authority* over England and Wales is delegated by the Crown to the Earl Marshal, and to three Kings of Arms, *Garter*, *Clarenceux*, and *Norroy*, who form, together with the Heralds and Pursuivants, the College of Arms. Of these, the principal is “Garter King of Arms.” In his Patent he is styled Principal King of English Arms, and Principal Officer of Arms of the most noble Order of the Garter. To him immediately belongs the adjustment of arms in England and Wales, and likewise the power of granting arms within his jurisdiction to persons qualified to bear them. “Clarenceux King of Arms,” so named from the Dukedom of Clarence, has authority over the south-east and west parts of England ; and “Norroy King of Arms,” the most ancient of the heraldic sovereigns, possesses as his province, England north of the Trent. He is the North King—“Norroy.” The English Heralds bear the designation of “Chester,” “Lancaster,” “Richmond,” “York,” “Windsor,” and “Somerset ;” the *Pursuivants* are known by the names of “Portcullis,” “Rouge Dragon,” “Bluemantle,” and “Rouge Croix.”

The Chief Officer of Arms in Scotland is “The Lord Lyon :” and under him is a Lyon-Depute and several Heralds.

In *Ireland*, *Ulster King of Arms* has the sole heraldic jurisdiction : he is, *ex officio*, Knight Attendant on the most illustrious Order of St. Patrick.

The title of “Ulster King of Arms” was created in the reign of Edward the Sixth. But the office itself, under the designation of “Ireland King of Arms,” had its origin in more remote times,—as early as the introduction of the feudal system into Ireland by the Anglo-Normans.

The first express mention of Ireland King of Arms is in the sixth year of King Richard the Second, 1482; Froissart, vol. ii., calls him “*Chaundos le Roy d’Irelande*,” A regular succession of officers by the title of “Ireland Kings of Arms,” continued from that time to the reign of King Edward IV., who promoted Thomas Ashwell to that office.

This title of “Ireland,” as Sir Henry Spelman and Sir James Ware say, was afterwards, by Edward VI., altered into that of *Ulster*. That King himself, in his journal, takes notice of it as follows —“Feb. There was a King of Arms made for Ireland, whose name was Ulster, and his province was all Ireland.” The patent passed under the great seal of England with an ample preamble, in testimony of the necessity and dignity of the office, which was given to Bartholomew Butler, York Herald.

The general precedence of Ulster King at Arms was affirmed by his Majesty King William IV. by royal warrant, dated at St. James's, 17th day of May, 1835, which was issued for revising and making alterations in the statutes of the Order of St. Patrick. After reciting that, by the Act of Union, Ireland became part and parcel of the United Kingdom, and "our King of Arms of all Ireland has not had, *since that event*, any specific place or precedence assigned to him among our Kings of Arms by special ordinance or royal authority ; We do hereby direct and command that in all ceremonials and assemblies Ulster King of Arms shall have place immediately after the Lord Lyon, King of Arms of Scotland." Hence, the general precedence of the Kings of Arms for Great Britain and Ireland stands arranged thus : 1st. Garter King of Arms of England ; 2nd. the Lord Lyon, King of Arms of Scotland ; 3rd. Ulster, King of Arms of all Ireland ; 4th. Clarenceux King of Arms ; and 5th. Norroy King of Arms. The local precedence of Ulster King of Arms at the Irish Court was established at the institution of the office in Ireland, and the place assigned him the head of the officers of state, and next the person of the Viceroy. This order of precedence was afterwards confirmed by successive Lords Lieutenants and Lords Justices. In an ordinance of the Earls of Orrery and Monrath, Lords Justices, dated at Dublin Castle, 18th April, 1661, the programme of precedence of the officers of state at the Irish Court was set forth in detail, and stated therein to have been "what had formerly been used" by the "lords deputies or lords justices," and the place of the King of Arms was therein set forth as first in order, and next to the lords justices as representatives of the sovereign.

The Duke of Bolton, by an ordinance dated at Dublin Castle, 17th day of August, 1717, confirmed that order of precedence, and assigned the place of Ulster King of Arms to be next to the person of his Excellency ; and after Ulster, the other official personages of the Court.

By another order, of Lord Carteret, dated from "his Majesty's Castle of Dublin, the 29th day of October, 1724" the same roll of precedence was affirmed and ordered. The last order upon the subject of the precedence of the person holding the office, was the royal warrant of his Majesty King William IV., already mentioned.

Very considerable powers and duties, in addition to the due control and registration of arms and pedigrees, were from time to time conferred and imposed upon the Ulster King of Arms, in matters of official proceedings and courtly duties, which he regulates, whence the archives of his office present not only an interesting record of the various ceremonials observed from time to time at the Irish Court, but are also landmarks of genealogy, and consist not merely of genealogical materials and references, but in a great measure of genealogies of families, full, ample, and complete.

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