

## *South African Memories*

to brave the stranger with something to sell. I admired her pluck, but detested the whole scene. She actually blushed with pleasure when he spoke to her. There was just the same kindness and friendly interest, just the same accursed touch of carelessness and informality, when he drew something from his pocket. Then I saw her dart back to her friend and show something in her unclutched palm and heard a sort of squeal of wonder. It was disgusting!

He wore a brown, well-cut jacket and a coloured tie. Someone said it was an 'Oxford' tie—whatever that might mean—and as I passed near him I saw he was wearing white flannels—at a bazaar! He might have been at a cricket match!

But that was only the beginning. Within a few minutes—seconds it seemed to me—the whole room appeared to have gone crazy. Elderly ladies who should have known better, grown-up girls who should have had more dignity, little flipper flappers and kids who were without shame! It was all the same! They swarmed round him and mobbed him. He refused no one; he must have bought the whole place. And still he smiled and now and then chuckled; he was amused! The elderly gentleman who had brought him there laughed heartily in a little group of onlookers and twice tried to rescue him, but this easy-going, self-possessed, good-natured, friendly young man only smiled back and slowly lounged his way along, refusing no one, treating all alike. An eternity passed like this, and I wanted to get out of the place and worked my way towards the door, only to find it blocked by a surging mass and a medley of gay colours. All had gathered to see him off—and when he did go they waved handkerchiefs and dolls and bits of clothing and lucky bags and any beastly thing they had in their hands. It was like an ovation to a conquering hero—a most ridiculous and undignified display. And he nodded! Nodded, mind you—and smiled with his lips and his eyes at the lot of them. And in the smiling eyes there was that hateful look of friendly interest and indulgence. It made one's gorge rise! Then the girl in front of me turned round with a sigh. It was the same one; and when she saw me she said: "Oh, isn't he splendid?" She just had to unburden to me. She had to say it. Anyone would have done as an audience. I don't know what I answered, but her retort was plain enough: "Well, don't bite me! I don't know what you have done, but I know — told me that he has spent a hundred pounds here this

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afternoon!" Obviously that was rubbish and I said so. No one had as much money as that, and of course it was only said to annoy me. When she asked defiantly: "Do you know his name and what he is? I do." I answered that I did not, and never wanted to hear it: and I got away then.

But he had spoiled my day and I could not forget him. I hated him with that bitter and unreasoning intensity which only the young experience. There was an aura which seemed to emanate from him as a very young man who had already done things, and one who, easy and unharried and confident, looked upon it all as the beginning! And that in a young man will inspire a boy with hatred and idolatry. To the very young all things are personal and this was personally offensive. The calm and wide outlook, the success so easily accomplished and so indifferently accepted, were in themselves a stinging, contemptuous reproach to those who had not even begun to think. An essential truth had gone home, somehow, and like a barbed shaft it hurt and rankled and could not be expelled. So I loathed the thought of him as the very young will hate and remember those who have humbled them by tactless reproof of manners, always hoping that no one knew the truth.

Next morning, glancing through the back pages of the *Cape Times*, I happened to notice a paragraph in which they mentioned that "a sensation had been caused at the bazaar by the unexpected appearance there of Mr. Cecil Rhodes, the rich young man from Kimberley who——" Sickening! I'd never heard of the man before, and did not wish to hear of him again!

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It was a good while after this—in 1884—that I stepped out of that morning train at Cape Town station and found myself one of the crowd walking down the platform. There had been sensation and excitement that morning in the train. The papers told us that the Government had resigned. The Scanlen ministry had been defeated in the House on a minor issue—the eradication of dorthesia, the devastating vine disease. Everyone was talking about it. In front of me walked three men; one was tall and young, and there was something familiar in the look of his back, especially the head. A fourth joined him in front of me and said "Hard lines, I'm awfully sorry you had to resign." The reply came promptly: "I don't mind being beaten; but I

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hate to go out on a damned bug!" And as he turned to say this I saw his face. It was only the second time I had seen him. Somehow I was not as pleased as I had expected to be. Sympathy had gone round to the "young man who had done things!"

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When one thinks of all who came within the sphere of his work and influence—the greatest and the least known; those who have only read of him, and those who knew him personally; the Rhodes scholars to whom he is a providence, an idea or an institution; and the maimed old Matabele policeman whom he sought out and provided for while the general meeting of De Beers shareholders waited and wondered what had become of their absent chairman; it must be that there are thousands and tens of thousands who would like to know what manner of man was this who could make the whole world think and talk! There is—as someone has said—a good deal of human nature in man; and it is not the faultless ones, but those who, like ourselves, have human traits and human weaknesses, who are most beloved and most interesting. Many have written of Rhodes and many more will write from the assumed view-point of history and from the high pedestal of the impartial critic and historian; and that is right. But surely there must be a place for the little things that show that he too—like ourselves—was human; that there was a Rhodes not yet in the printed book, the Rhodes who was known to those about him, who revealed to them the immensity of his genius and all-embracing sympathy, and side by side with these could be, and was so very human; the Rhodes who submitted to the hanging of a pretentious portrait of himself in the board room of De Beers because others wished it, though he hated something cynical in the expression, until one day, getting up and walking about, unconventionally as usual, and battling with some perplexity, he was suddenly arrested by seeing himself sneering at himself, and in a burst of rage cut it to ribbons with the pen-knife which he had been holding.

There was one day when I was sitting with Beit on the back *stoep* of Groote Shuur and he came out trailing a large double sheet of paper in one hand, and flung it on to Beit's knees, saying: "Michell looks after these things for me and sends me this damned thing. Here! You can read balance-sheets. For God's sake, tell me how I stand!"

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There were days when all went wrong; days when, it may be, the last thought of all was already urging him on. "So much to do; so little done!" Then he became desperate, impatient and intolerant. Well, and what of it? Is it not very human? Are we not all the same, especially when stung by the thought that we are working for others? And he could see it too when those in whom he had confidence spoke straight. When floods and troubles of all kinds upset all calculations and he was in desperate need of the railway, he turned on one of the staunchest and most loyal—A. L. Lawley, big and resolute, quiet and competent—always as good as his word. At these times of excitement—indeed at almost any time—his voice would rise to a sort of falsetto and on that day he said more than was just or necessary; but the light in Lawley's slumbrous eyes and the steady look and tone pulled him up; and the words, "Look here, Mr. Rhodes, it's no use your squeaking at me like a — rabbit, 'cause I'm not frightened of you!" Rhodes stopped as if he had been shot; but in an instant broke into a chuckle of enjoyment and finished it off with, "All right. You'll do your best. Now go and do it!"

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In February 1902 he came from England. It was the last voyage. I came by the same boat. Beit had arranged it so. Few, if any, know what he suffered. If he did not know that the end was near, he knew that the chances were slender, and indeed the meaning of almost all he said was the same as he had breathed aloud three years before: "And you'll see it all and I won't." He would sit for hours alone and thinking. Jameson was there too, and the one relaxation was bridge. Only once he asked for a book. I happened to have Lincoln's *Plan of Reconstruction*; but an hour later I saw it lying face down beside his chair, and on asking if he did not care for it, he answered, "I've enough to do thinking of our plan of reconstruction without bothering about his!" But too often it was, "You must do—this! You must remember—that. You will find—the other!" Nearly always, "You." In other years it had been "I" with unquestioned right; but now it came rarely, and was always qualified by the secret that haunted him. "Do you think I should take the Premiership now, or save myself for Federation?" As if it could matter what I or another should think, if only he were himself again!

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The disease of which he died had its grip on him then. Jameson knew, and he, too, must have known. In the tropics he could not sleep, and breathed only with difficulty. A bed was made for him on the table in the chart-room and the portholes all round were left open. First came a choking cold; then, in a storm, he was thrown from the table and badly shaken and bruised and for days was unable to move. But the mental suffering was worst of all. One could see in his eyes the haunt of what was coming, and he spoke like a dying man giving advice and directions as things occurred to him.

"I ought to have told Schreiner! I was very fond of Schreiner. It was not right. I ought to have told him!"

"You get along with the Dutch. They are a fine people and you must work with them. They are wrong in this, but it's natural. We have to work together. We are all South Africans!"

"When it comes your way to do big business for people always put in something for the good of the country. These people won't grudge it and won't even notice it when you do a good deal for them; but they won't offer to do it. It is ransom. They must pay something. They can afford it and it's right!" Of course he repeated these things many times, and often in different words, and once when he was in better spirits and in good form I ventured on a little chaff—camouflaged by grave politeness. "Yes, I remember you saying that!" But he was as quick as lightning; he flashed round at me and with the habitual falsetto said: "Yes, I did say it before, I said it several times! You can remember this; it's no good giving the public an idea. You've got to hit them on the head with it—and keep on hitting. In time you get it in!"

I knew well the uncanny insight and incredible quickness of perception of this man, who seemed so absorbed that he took no notice of anyone. And there was another occasion when I abstained from all comment, yet that did not help; he read the thought. I happened to mention one who had been crippled by wounds and whose name stood in the forefront on the roll of trusted men, and Rhodes took it up as though reproaching me, but it was only his way of expressing himself. "Those are real men. You should look after them. I have told them they must put him on the ——— directorate. Men like ——— want nothing for themselves. They are not out for what they can make. They won't ask. You must look after them!" Then he stopped suddenly. I didn't know I had

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given it away but there must have been something, for he broke into a half-embarrassed laugh—a good-natured, guilty laugh, and answered the unspoken question about the other sort—without troubling to name them. “Yes! I know; but they are so infernally useful at times, aren’t they?”

But of the plans—of the dreams, of all embracing thoughts and hopes, who can tell? Something of what he hoped for and intended had been done; but in this case the dreamer, the architect and the builder were one, and we cannot even guess what might have been. Once on that last voyage a small boy came up and imperiously demanded the presence of his playfellow: “You’ve been talking too long to that man. Come and play with us!” Rhodes shook with silent laughter, and then with one of those strange, swift changes, looked wide-eyed and serious, and with a slight nod towards the child, said: “Yes, go to them,” and added slowly: “You’re a better man than I am.” I turned on him then—“That is not true—you can’t believe that. There’s a whole country that knows we are your children. You are our father.” And his eyes looked almost frightened as though I had looked into his soul. Then he flushed a little and nodded good-bye, with the gentlest of smiles.

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On three occasions during the twelve years following upon Rhodes’s death the writer offered to make notes on matters which were known to a few and nowhere on record—provided Jameson would give his help. These notes were to be available for some future biographer. Nothing was to be published without his consent (as I stipulated) or without the consent of the Rhodes’s Trustees (as he amended it). The first offer—in 1905, I think—was accepted, but circumstances arose which made it impossible for him to do his part. On the second occasion, after several allusions which showed that he had not forgotten or refuted the arrangement, we made a beginning and it was then that the real obstacle became apparent. It was impossible to get Jameson ‘On tap’; and owing to the numbers of guests at all hours there was no chance to start him ‘yarning.’ He closed like an oyster at the sound of a footstep.

By reason of the Raid and Reform Committee movement and years of fairly intimate association both before and after that time, I knew a good deal; but it is only

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when one does know a great deal of anything that one realizes the possibility that there may be grave misunderstandings and even total ignorance of those things which are fundamental and of the very essence of great events, or of the deep down, hidden motives or impulses that have influenced men and movements.

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It was some years later—in 1912 or 1915—that I made the last and most serious effort. The thinning ranks of those who knew; the failing health of several; the lapse of time; these things ruined us both, they needed no urging. He was willing enough because it was a duty, a trust, and there was no thought or excuse for himself—no such word or hint ever escaped him; nor did the bare thought of this seem to have occurred to him. I lived in the house with him for the purpose; there were few visitors and distractions—as health set limits to these. Nevertheless, the effort was barren of result; it was a complete and utter failure from the start as far as the main purpose was concerned. Perhaps it was loyalty to the dead; perhaps the fact that sympathy and friendship failed to draw him where opposition or unbelief might have provoked an outburst; perhaps his lightning and unerring insight, plus his sense of justice, told him that a partisan cannot pose as an arbiter and that silence may be an obligation of loyalty on the survivor; perhaps a half-humorous, half-cynical view—so often expressed in the words, “Oh, what the devil is the use of talking?” Who can tell now? For in the end he said: “Who knows the whole truth? Let it go at that.”

Thus, after many days and nights, there came the realization that it was impossible for Jameson to ‘open out.’ Secretly sensitive and shy; superficially cynical and indifferent, at times almost brutal; intensely loyal, broadminded and sympathetic in big things; yet strangely unconscious of, or indifferent to certain influences which weigh with a good many men—the consideration for persons, principles, conventions or interests which he could dismiss as minor to the great purpose; there he was, unable to speak as nine men out of ten could have spoken, and unwilling or unable to tell what he alone could tell.

Now and again the inner man broke bounds. Once, when he was still at Groote Schuur, the suggestion that Rhodes’s favourite lounge seat on the back *stoep*—where

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he used to look through the old pine-trees up at the great old mountain—should be enclosed with a simple chain and four posts, acted like a match to gunpowder. There was an explosion of passionate anger against desecration by vulgar imitators and of burning loyalty to his friend and chief. It was only on such occasions that one heard with amazement the strong Scots accent that betrayed the intensity and depth of feeling. But it was an explosion. In a few seconds it was gone and a careless shrug and laughing cynicism hid it all again.

It was one night, in his study at Westbrook, when I finally realized that it was all a waste of time and waste of his strength and feelings. He had talked without reserve; and he was honestly trying to tell all the vital points. I remember the question and it seemed to go only a little and an easy step beyond what had been said, "Tell me—how much *did* Rhodes know when you started (*i.e.* the invasion)? Did he go back on us (the Reformers)? What did he mean by 'upsetting the apple-cart?' Was he with you or did you force the pace? And what did Chamberlain know? I want to get the whole thing straight!"

He nodded quite calmly and began—about Rhodes—quite slowly and deliberately. Then in less than a minute he stopped and I saw the blood rise to his face; his eyes began to glow; and suddenly he leapt from his chair. His frail, but intensely nervous frame shaking with the storm of feeling, and with both hands clenched close to his sides he blazed out, "God in Heaven! What is the good of talking?" And in a second he was out of the room.

Yet it was not all wasted. One evening during some desultory talk—designed to make it easy for him to drift along—he spoke laughingly about Rhodes's queer ways and of how he would express himself in a way that some would construe as the very insanity of egoism—and yet not mean it in that way at all, but would in truth appear to be viewing himself and his work and his sphere in the world quite impersonally, as seen from some Olympian height. Jameson, as he spoke to me, hunched in his arm-chair, smoking and laughing, reproduced unconsciously—as it seemed to me—the very mood and attitude in which he had spoken to Rhodes. His face was alight with mischief, amusement, interest and affection as he said—"I asked him how long he thought he would be remembered; and without a pause or a smile he answered, 'I give myself four thousand years!'"

"Four thousand years! I wonder how he got at that?"



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Jameson shrugged and flicked his cigarette—"It was not a boast; he would not have said it at all if I hadn't asked him, and he seemed to be stating a fact—like a fact in history. It did not seem to have any personal bearing."

I remember that part practically word for word. But for the rest I cannot reproduce Jameson's words—still less the little movements, the gestures, and the whimsical changing expression of that slender structure so instinct with vitality—the dancing eyes and the ready laugh, the impatient flick of the cigarette as the hand waved or thrust; the shrug, the little jerk of the head, the sudden brisk walk.

Somehow these more than filled a gap; they gave meaning and fulness to what he said. Words were often few, too few—and seemed at times to play the lesser part.

He went on at some length, very evidently having in mind incidents of which he had personal knowledge, he corroborated what we knew—that Rhodes talked very freely at times in the presence of outsiders—recklessly as it seemed. And reckless though it might appear, he frequently had an object and always knew where to stop. Among intimates he showed no reserve, when he did talk, for he had long spells of silence, but his intimate added: "No one ever knew all that was in his mind."

Sometimes a trifle would bring out some observation that seemed to reveal like a flash a whole new world of thought. One day there would be a suggestion which we knew from Rhodes's manner had more behind it, and presently it would be clear that it was a definite plan which he must have had in mind for years, and one felt that it was one well-thought-out part of his great scheme of life. How much more there was, one didn't know, and couldn't guess. There were times when he seemed to rise to some higher atmosphere where he was quite alone, and no one knew what happened there. He seemed to be there when he gave himself four thousand years!

That was a glimpse of the real Rhodes as his best friend saw him. One wishes that Jameson's own description could be given to do it justice.

When the Raid seemed to have finished Rhodes, a very eminent and reputable journal told South Africa that the problem of how to treat him was perfectly simple—"Just go ahead and ignore him." It was Edmund Garrett who replied curtly, "As well ignore Table Mountain!" and followed with the comment that he was "Being pursued with that pitiless injustice of which only the very righteous are capable!"

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Thirty years have made a difference; not enough, it is true, to warrant anticipating the 'Judgment of History'; but enough to prove that South Africa has not ignored him, nor could she do so and still remember herself!

It will be for others to judge the man and the spirit which said: "I give myself four thousand years!"

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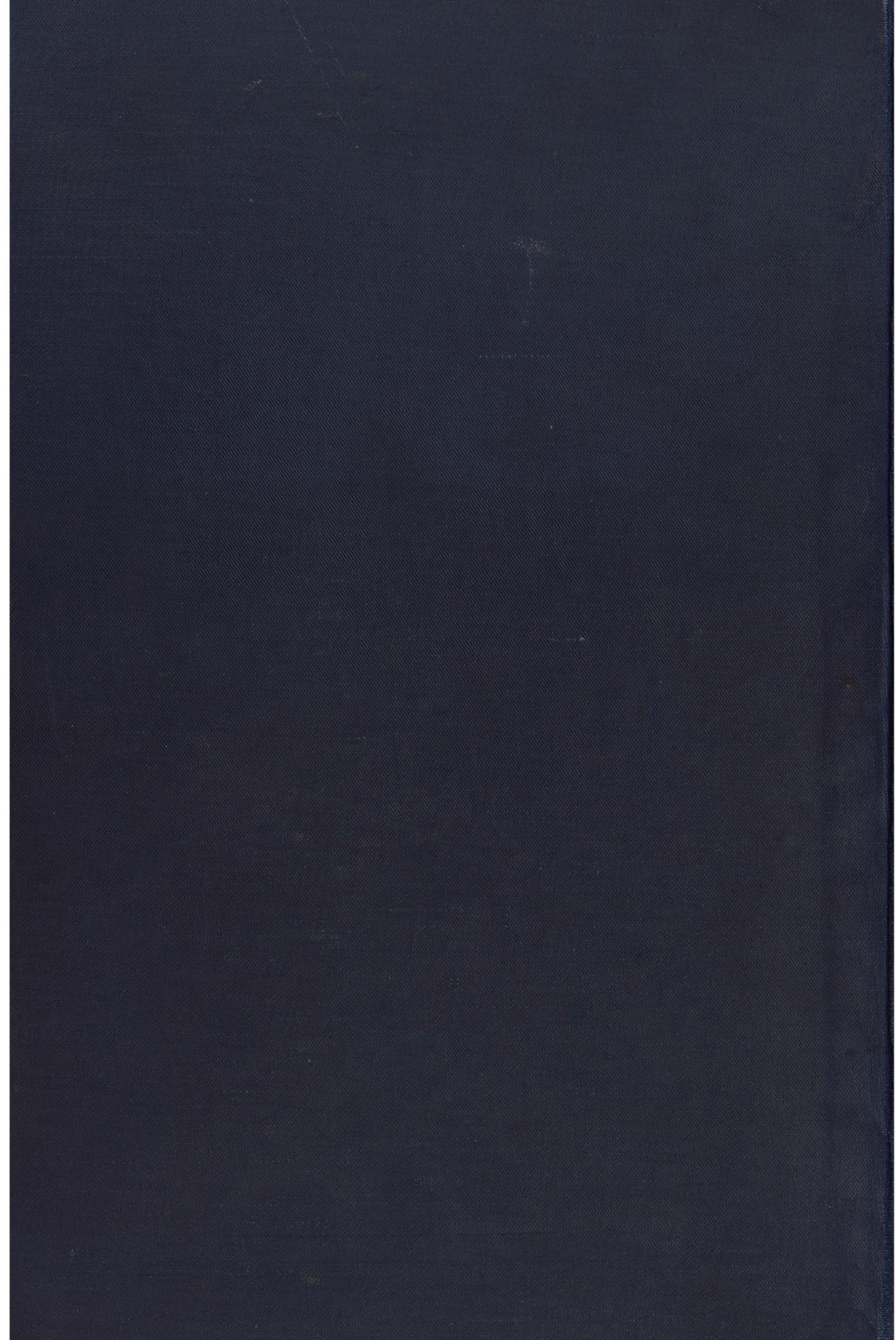
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