

THE FESTIVAL OF THE DEAD¹

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In European Calendars, the last day of October, and the first and second days of November, are designated as the festivals of All Halloween, All Saints, and All Souls.

Though they have hitherto never attracted any special attention, and have not been supposed to have been connected with each other, they originally constituted but one commemoration of three days' duration, known among almost all nations as "the Festival of the Dead," or the "Feast of Ancestors."

It is now, or was formerly, observed at or near the beginning of November by the Peruvians, the Hindoos, the Pacific Islanders, the people of the Tonga Islands, the Australians, the ancient Persians, the ancient Egyptians, and the northern nations of Europe,

¹ At the suggestion of the writer, the above paper was substituted for one read before the Institute, which had been privately printed. In the previous one, on "New Material for the History of Man, Derived from a Comparison of the Customs and Superstitions of Nations," it was endeavored to show that the source of these superstitions, so far from being "absolutely unattainable," as it has been hitherto considered by all who have treated of them, could be arrived at by a comparison of the customs of civilized and savage races; and that those superstitions, being possessed of a marvellous vitality, are valuable historical memorials of primitive society.

As an illustration of the duration and universality of primitive superstitions and customs, those connected with the habit of saying "God bless you!" to a person who sneezes, were selected. This absurd custom, referred to by Homer, and found in Europe, Asia, Africa, Polynesia and America, was traced to a belief found in the Arctic regions, Australia, and Central Africa (and it might have been added, in Ireland), that death and disease are not the result of natural, but of supernatural, causes; and that when a person sneezes, he is liable to be a victim of the spirits, or as the Celtic race express it, "to be carried off by the fairies." It was also argued that this custom, the trivial nature of which precludes the idea that it could have been borrowed by nations from each other, or that nature can everywhere have suggested it to the human race, plainly must have been inherited from a common source, and is a very conclusive argument in favor of the unity of origin of our race. These views have been confirmed by the observations of Captains Speke and Grant (see *Illustrated London News*, July 4, 1863, p. 23). An interesting little work by W. R. Wylde, on "Irish Popular Superstitions," published by William S. Orr & Co., London—which the writer was unable to procure until after the paper was read before the Nova Scotian Institute—supplies very curious facts, which corroborate his conclusions as to the origin of this custom. See from p. 120 to 135; also p. 51 to 58. See also Strada's *Prolusiones—Cur sternuentes salutentur* Lib. iii. Prael. iv.

and continued for three days among the Japanese, the Hindoos, the Australians, the ancient Romans, and the ancient Egyptians.

Halloween is known among the Highlanders by a name meaning the consolation of the spirits of the dead, and is with them, as with the Cinghalese,² the Pacific Islanders, and almost every race among whom the festival is observed, connected with a harvest home, or, south of the equator, with a first fruits celebration.³ An old writer asks why do we suppose that the spirits of the dead are more abroad on Halloween than at any other time of the year³ and so convinced are the Irish peasantry of the fact, that they discreetly prefer remaining at home on that ill-omened night. The Halloween torches of the Irish, the Halloween bonfires of the Scotch, the Coel Coeth fires of the Welsh, and the Tindle fires of Cornwall, lighted at Halloween, are clearly memorials of a custom found almost everywhere at the celebration of the festival of the dead. The origin of the lanthorn festival has never yet been conjectured. It will be found, I believe, to have originated in the wide-spread custom of lighting bonfires at this festival.

The church of De Sens, in France, was endowed by its founder in the days of Charlemagne, for the purpose of having mass said for the dead, and the graveyard visited on All Halloween.⁴ Wherever the Roman Catholic Church exists, solemn mass for *all souls* is said on the second day of November; on that day the gay Parisians, exchanging the boulevard for the cemetery, lunch at the graves of their deceased relatives, and hold unconsciously their "feast of ancestors," on the very same day that savages in far distant quarters of the globe observe in a similar manner their festival of the dead.⁵

Even the Church of England, which rejects *All Souls*, as based on a belief in purgatory, and as being a creation of Popery, devoutly clings to All Saints, which is clearly a relic of primeval heathenism.

On All Souls day, the English peasant goes *a-souling*, begging for "a soul cake for all Christen souls." He has very little suspicion that he is preserving a heathen rite, the meaning of which is not to be found in the Book of Common Prayer, but (as I shall hereafter show) is to be discovered in the sacred books of India, in which country the consecrated cake is still offered, as it has been for thousands of years in the autumn, to the souls of

² See Brady's *Clavis Calendaria*, as to Oct. 31st.

³ See Brand's *Popular Antiquities*, i. p. 388, 396. (Ed. 1853.)

⁴ *Hodie in Ecclesia Senonensi, sit Anniversarium solemne, et generale pro defunctis.*—Thiers' *Traité des Superstitions*, iii. 98.

⁵ *Atlantic Monthly* for May, 1862.

deceased ancestors.⁶ But, though the festival of the dead is so generally observed in November, there are some exceptions. Thus it was observed in February by the Greeks, the Romans, the Persians, and the Algonquins of America, and in August by the Japanese and Chinese. The traces of its being observed in May are very few, and those of its being held at any other times of the year are of exceedingly rare occurrence. Before, therefore, I can attempt to treat of the festival of the dead, or refer to its origin and history, and the influence it has exerted on ancient mythology, it is necessary to confine this paper simply to questions connected with the calendar, and the times when the festival is found to be observed. It is important to trace the ancient November festival to the primeval year, which must have fixed it in that month among races south, as well as north of the equator. This year, I believe I have succeeded in discovering; and, as it appears to have originated in, or at least only now exists in, the southern hemisphere, I have designated it as the Primitive Southern year. It is also necessary to show that the festival of the dead, occurring in February or August, indicates a change having taken place, and a more recent year, commencing in February, having been substituted. As we only find this year north of the equator (so far as I have been able to learn), I have designated it as the Primitive Northern year.

Wherever the festival occurs in November, it is, or at least originally was, the new year's festival of the primitive southern year. Where it is held in February, it is, or once was, the commemoration of the commencement of the northern year.

As the mode of investigation pursued on this point materially adds to the credibility of my conclusions, I may be pardoned for referring to it.

The startling fact that "this feast was celebrated among the ancient Peruvians at the same period, and on the same day that Christians solemnize the commemoration of the dead (2d November),"⁷ at once drew my attention to the question, *how was this uniformity in the time of observance preserved, not only in far distant quarters of the globe, but also through that vast lapse of time since the Peruvian, and the Indo-European first inherited this primeval festival from a common source?*

It was plain that this singular uniformity could never have been preserved by means of the defective solar year in vogue among ancient nations. How then could this result have been produced? It was apparent that the festival must have been regu-

⁶ Maurice's Indian Antiquities, ii. 189.

⁷ Peruvian Antiquities, by M. Rivero and Von Tschudi, translated by Dr. Hawks, New York, 1855, p. 134.

lated by some visible sign, or mark, that nature had supplied, such as the rising of some constellation.

Remembering the ancient traditions as to the Pleiades, I naturally turned my attention to them. Professor How kindly offered to ascertain from an excellent astronomer whether the Pleiades could have ever risen in November in Asia or Europe. I was fortunately, however, able to save that gentleman the calculation. On turning to Bailly's *Astronomie Indienne*,⁸ I found him state that the most ancient year, as regulated by the calendar of the Brahmins of Tirvalore, began in November, and I was much gratified at finding that, in that calendar, the month of November is called Cartiguey, *i.e.*, the month of the Pleiades,—a circumstance which, M. Bailly says, would seem to indicate that that constellation by its rising or setting in that month, must have regulated the commencement of the ancient year in November.

But here a fresh difficulty arose as respects the calendar. To suppose that the Pleiades rose in that month, and commenced the year in the autumn, was not only opposed to ancient traditions respecting them, and to their name as the Stars of Spring (*Ver-giliae*), but also to their actual movements, at the present day at least.

We could not assume that great astronomical changes could ever have produced this result. How then could we account for the anomaly? I discovered the clue in extending my researches to the southern hemisphere, where I found the festival of the dead to occur in November, and to be the vernal new year's festival of a year commencing in November, and regulated by the rising of the Pleiades *in the evening*.

Before concluding this prefatory paper, it may be as well to state that the whole subject, both as regards the primitive new year festival of the dead and the primitive year, has altogether escaped the observation of the learned. De Rougemont, in his *Peuple Primitif*, published at Paris in 1856, has, out of three volumes, not devoted as many pages to "Les Fêtes des Morts," though they are unquestionably the most remarkable memorials we possess of *Le peuple Primitif*. Festivals connected with the seasons, he says, cannot now be investigated, from our ignorance of the primitive calendar; and he therefore only selects those that took place at the time of the vernal equinox and the summer solstice, *i.e.*, associated with a solar year, and hence of a comparatively recent date, and subsequent to those of the two primitive calendars to which I have referred.

"Nous ne pouvons ici faire un étude spéciale de celles, qui se rapportent avant tout aux saisons; les calendriers des anciens nous

⁸ Vol. I; p. 28, 134.

sont trop imparfaitment connus, pour que nous puissions espérer de reconstruire celui du peuple primitif."⁹

The primitive year of two seasons, commencing in November, and the connection of the Pleiades with the primeval calendar, are not even referred to in the latest work on the astronomy of the ancients, published last year in Paris.¹⁰ Though very many remarkable facts in the history of the calendar and of our race, to which the study of the festival of the dead has afforded me a clue, are referred to by Greswell in his learned works on the Calendars of the Ancients, he has attempted to explain them by resorting to the miracles in the Bible—as to the sun having stood still or gone back on certain occasions—events which he contends must not only have disturbed, but have even left their impress on the calendars of the ancients. But they are, I believe, capable of a more common-place solution. I trust that I shall be able to prove that these subjects are susceptible of an explanation, without having, with Greswell, to refer to miracles in the days of Hezekiah, or with Ovid, to leave the knotty point to be unravelled by the Gods—

“Dicta sit unde dies, quæ nominis extet origo
Me fugit, ex aliquo est invenienda deo.”¹¹

THE FESTIVAL OF THE DEAD BROUGHT TO EUROPE AND ASIA BY
A MIGRATION OF RACES FROM THE SOUTHERN HEMISPHERE.

“Mudán de pays y de estrellas.”¹—Garcillasso de la Vega.

“Who can restrain the pleasant influences of the Pleiades?” we are asked in the book of Job, the most ancient production of sacred or profane literature. “The lights in the firmaments of the heavens,” “for signs and for seasons, and for days, and for years,” are supposed to have reference to that constellation, as well as to the sun and moon, for in early ages neither the sun nor the moon could have indicated the length of the year, or its division into seasons. The extreme veneration of remote antiquity for the Pleiades, or *Vergiliæ*, for having marked the seasons, and the beginning of the spring, are amongst the most venerable traditions of our race, and are now only realized among Australian savages,

⁹ Vol. I, p. 523.

¹⁰ “Antiquité des Races Humaines. Reconstitution de la Chronologie, et de l’Histoire des Peuples Primitifs. Par l’examen des documents originaux, et par l’Astronomie,” by Rodier.

¹¹ Fasti, Lib. v.

¹ They change their country and their stars.

who still worship the Pleiades as announcing spring, "and as being very good to the blacks;" and at their culmination hold a great new year's corroboree in November, in honour of the *Mormo-dellick*, as they call that time-honoured constellation. The name given to these stars by the Romans, *Vergiliae*, is plainly connected with the strange tradition of Northern natives, of the Pleiades having marked the commencement of spring. They are popularly known, from France to India, by the same name—a circumstance which proves, says M. Bailly,² that our first knowledge of these stars was derived from the most ancient nations of Asia.

The question naturally suggests itself, Whence arose this veneration for a constellation, that among us, at least, is no longer revered? When and where can they have marked the beginning of spring, and what were those "pleasant influences," referred to in the book of Job, and still celebrated by Australian savages?

So far from rising in Europe or Asia in the spring, they first appear in June, a summer month. How could the *Vergiliæ*, then, have acquired their name, as the stars of spring? It is plain that they could not have marked a vernal commencement of the year, *as the most ancient year commenced in the autumn*, and among most ancient nations we find traces of a traditionary or civil year commencing in the autumn.

We also find traces of a very singular year of six months, the very existence of which Sir Cornwall Lewis has somewhat hastily questioned. "These abnormal years," he tells us, "are designated by Censorinus as involved in the darkness of remote antiquity."³ Dupuis suggests that we must turn to the Pleiades, as well as to other constellations, to account for these "abnormal years," as well as for the ancient year commencing in the autumn,—"*pour expliquer les fictions relatives à ce commencement d'année, soit chez les Juifs, soit chez les autres peuples, qui ont eu le commencement d'année en automne. Tels étaient ceux qui avaient des années de six mois.*"⁴ In confirmation of this conjecture, I have found that in the Arabian calendar of lunar mansions, which is made up of two divisions, one belonging to summer, and the other to winter,—one of the mansions is designated by the name of the Pleiades. Let us see if his suggestion will prove equally correct respecting the autumnal year; and let us endeavour to find in that constellation a clue to the remarkable circumstance of the festival

² This name was the *Hen and Chickens*; among the Hindoos, Pillalou Codi; among the Jews, Succoth Benoth (?); among the Italians, Gallineta, and among the French, *La pousinière*. See Dupuis *De l'origine de tous les Cultes*, ix., 192. Bailly's *Astronomie Indienne*, I., xxxv. 134, 328. See, however Landseer's *Sabæan Researches*, Lecture XL., p. 19.

³ *Historical Survey of the Astronomy of the Ancients*, p. 31.

⁴ *L'Origine de tous Les Cultes*, i. p. 104.

of the dead having been observed in Hindostan, Peru, Ceylon, Egypt, and Europe, in November.

I may here state that the classical nations of antiquity, with whom the influence of the Pleiades was rather a matter of tradition than of practical use, when they spoke of the rising of the Pleiades, referred to the heliacal rising of the constellation in the morning, *i.e.*, the time, when at dawn, the stars were first visible—⁵

“The grey dawn and the Pleiades
Shedding sweet influence.”

This took place in the middle of May, 2000 years ago, and marked the beginning of summer in the south of Europe and Asia.⁶ But we must conclude either that the Pleiades must have once, in some other manner than by their heliacal rising, indicated the beginning of spring, or else that there must have been, by a long lapse of years, a change in their movements, that rendered their rising inconsistent with their very name as the stars of spring. It must, however, have been nearly 5000 years since the heliacal rising of the Pleiades occurred at the beginning of April, and even then it could not have indicated the commencement of seed-time in the south of Asia and of Europe, or marked the beginning of spring. Their name, the *Hesperides*, too, would seem to connect them with the evening rather than the morning. But if, at such a remote era, the Pleiades regulated the seasons by their heliacal rising at that time of the year, they must have left their impress on primitive calendars, and traces of the connection of the calendar with the heliacal rising of the Pleiades, would still be found among many races, either in their names for March or April, or at least in their traditions as to the time when their year once commenced. But this is not the case. There are no traces of a primitive year in general use in remote antiquity, commencing in March, April, or May; the only apparent exception being the solar year, regulated by the vernal equinox, which was of comparatively recent invention.

But on examining the calendars of ancient races, we find in Persia, India, Egypt, and Peru, that the month in which our first of November festival would fall, bears in its very name a singular impress of its former connection, either with the Pleiades or the festival of the dead.

⁵ Pleiades adspecies omnes, totumque sororum
Agmen; ubi ante Idus nox erit una super.
Tunc mihi non dubiis autoribus incipit aestas,
Et tepidi finem tempora veris habent.

Ovid Fasti, Lib. v.

⁶ See as to the cosmical and heliacal risings of stars. Greswell's *Fasti Catholici*, iii. 13.

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The Festival of the Dead

In the most ancient calendar in India, the year commenced in the month of November, which bears the name Cartiguey, *i.e.*, the Pleiades; a constellation which, Bailly suggests, must by its rising or setting at that time, once have regulated the primitive year. We find also that, in the month of October the Hindoos, like ourselves, have three days which are connected with the festival of the dead.

In the ancient Egyptian calendar the same resemblance can be traced between the name of the Pleiades, which among the Hebrews and Chaldeans is Athor-aye, with that of the Egyptian month of November, which is Athor. The Arab name for the Pleiades, Atauria, also suggests a resemblance.

In November took place the primeval festival of the dead, clad in a veil of Egyptian mythology. The Isia, the solemn mourning for the god Osiris, "the Lord of Tombs," lasted for *three* days, and began at sunset, like the Lemuria of the Romans, and the festival of the dead among the Persians and other nations.

The singular custom of counting the day from the sunset of the preceding day, or the noctidiurnal system, was so universal, that Greswell refers to it as a conclusive proof of the unity of origin of our race.⁷ The Bible tells us "the evening and the morning were the first day." Our words "fortnight" and "se'nnight," are traces of this primitive custom. But the first day of our festival of the dead, is a still stronger illustration, as it is called *Halloweve*. The origin of this custom has not been explained by Greswell. Volmer connects it with the word Athor, which means "the night;" and which he therefore supposes represented the first evening of creation. But the most important night, not only in that month, but in the whole Egyptian year, was that of the 17th of Athyr, when the three days of mourning for Osiris (*i.e.*, the festival of the dead) began with an *All Halloweve*. Hence the origin of this widespread noctidiurnal system is to be found in whatever caused the festival of the dead to commence at sunset, or with a *Halloween*.

Let us turn to the primitive races of the southern hemisphere to find a solution:—

1st, For the festival of the dead being connected with an agricultural celebration. 2d, For its being held in November. 3d, For its commencing with a *Halloweve*. 4th, For the primitive year commencing in November. 5th, For the Pleiades being connected with that month. 6th, For their being revered as the *Vergiliæ* and *Hesperides*, the stars of the spring and the evening. 7th, For the "abnormal year" of six months, found north of the equator. A reference to the Australians and Pacific Islanders

⁷ See Volmer's *Wörterbuch der Mythologie*, verb. Athor, p. 371.

will enable us to give a very simple explanation for these various points, without imagining that miracles must have given rise to some, or that we must leave the solution of others to the Gods.

We find that, among these southern races,⁸ when the Pleiades are in the evening first visible at the horizon, which is at the beginning of November, they mark the beginning of the year, and the vernal new year's festival, a feast consecrated to first fruits, and to the dead. As long as at evening they continue visible, they mark a season called *the Pleiades above*. When they cease to be visible in the evening, the second season commences of *the Pleiades below*: these seasons nearly equally dividing the year. Hence we can understand why tradition has connected the Pleiades with November, as the first month of the year, has preserved their name as the stars of the evening and of the spring, and has caused the festival of the dead to commence in the evening, or with a Halloween. We can also understand how the year of six months arose, that has so puzzled astronomers.

In the voluminous report on the Aborigines, by a Committee of the Legislative Council of Victoria, Session 1858-9, we find W. Hull, Esquire, J.P., a gentleman who has written a work on the Aborigines, stating "their grand corroborees are held only in the spring, when the Pleiades are generally most distinct; and their corroboree is a worship of the Pleiades as a constellation, which *announces spring*. Their monthly corroboree is in honour of the moon" (p. 9).

In another place Mr. Hull says, "Referring again to their worship of the stars, I may mention that one night I showed Robert Cunningham the Pleiades, and he said 'they were the children of the moon, and very good to the black fellows.'—a remark that recalls to our mind 'the pleasant influences of the Pleiades.'"

C. J. Tyers, Esq., Commissioner of Crown Lands, Alberton (p. 79), says in confirmation of the foregoing,—“Regarding their religious practices very little is known, so little that Europeans generally believe them to be devoid of any. Yet they do, according to their manner, worship the hosts of heaven, and believe particular constellations rule natural causes. For such they have names; and *sing and dance to gain the favour of the Pleiades* (Mormo-dellick), the constellation worshipped by one body as the giver of rain.” Now the Pleiades are most distinct at the beginning of the spring month of November, when they appear at the horizon

⁸ I have only been able to fix the date of this festival among the Peruvians, the Australians, and the natives of the Society and Tonga Islands. The difficulty of procuring necessary works of reference in a Colony will plead, I trust, an excuse for many omissions.

in the evening, and are visible all night. Hence their vernal festival of the Pleiades takes place in honour of the Vergiliæ, the stars of spring, at the beginning of November, the very month called in the calendar of the Brahmins of Tirvalore, the month of the Pleiades, and among the ancient Egyptians connected with the name of that constellation.

But we are told by another gentleman examined by the committee, that all the corroborrees of the natives are connected with a worship of the dead,⁹ and *last three days*. If this be the case, is it not somewhat startling to find that Australian savages, at or near the time of Halloween, All Saints, and All Souls, also consecrate three days to the memory of the dead, as a vernal new year's celebration, regulated by the time-honoured Pleiades,—and, like the northern festival of the dead, beginning in the evening, or with a Halloween?

“Hinc ubi protulerit formosa ter Hesperus ora,
Ter dederint Phoebos sidera victa locum;
Ritus erit veteris nocturna Lemuria sacri;
Inferias tacitis Manibus illa dabunt.”¹⁰

In the Tonga Islands, which belong to the Feejee group, the festival of Inachi, a vernal first fruits celebration, and also a commemoration of the dead, takes place towards the end of October,¹¹ and commences at sunset.

“The Society Islanders,” Ellis tells us, “divided the year into two seasons of the Pleiades or Matarii. The first they called the *Matarii i nia*, or the *Pleiades above*. It commenced when, in the evening these stars appeared at or near the horizon” (*i.e.*, at or near the beginning of November), and the half-year during which, immediately after sunset, they were seen above the horizon, was called *Matarii i nia*. The other seasons commenced when at sunset these stars are invisible, and continued until at that hour they appeared again above the horizon. This season was called *Matarii i raro*, *i.e.*, “the Pleiades below.” The Pleiades are visible at the horizon in the evenings at the beginning of November. They then culminate near midnight, and are visible till morning. Ellis says that this year began in May; but it is evident that what he calls the first season, “the Pleiades above,” commenced at or near the

⁹ In confirmation of this, a member of the N. S. Institute, who has been at these annual corroborrees, tells me, that as the natives for these occasions paint a white stripe over their arms, legs and ribs, they appear, as they dance by their fires at night, like so many skeletons rejoicing. The custom, however, is peculiar, I believe, to Australia. *White* paint is used for mournful, and *red* for joyful, festivals. See Report on Aborigines, p. 70, 94.

¹⁰ Ovid's *Fasti*, Lib. v.

¹¹ Mariner's *Tonga Islands*, p. 157, 381, 385.

beginning of November, and the second division must have begun towards the end of April, or early in May. If they appear at the horizon in the evening, on the 5th November, they continue visible at that time till the 24th April following. 'But, not only was the month of November connected with the rising of the Pleiades, but also with a festival of the dead, and a first fruits celebration, as among the people of the Tonga Islands.

"The most singular of their stated festivals was the ripening or completing of the year. Vast numbers of both sexes attended it; the women, however, were not allowed to enter the sacred enclosure. A sumptuous banquet was then held. The ceremony was viewed as a *national acknowledgment to the gods*. When the prayers were finished, and the banquet ended, a usage prevailed *resembling much the Popish custom of mass for souls in purgatory*. Each one returned to his home or family marae, there to offer special prayers for the spirits of departed relatives." Ellis does not tell us to what mode of dividing the year he refers (for they appear to have had three); but, as the feast of Alo Alo in the Tonga Islands, as well as the festival of the Pleiades in Australia, took place in November, we may assume that this was the new year's festival of the season of the Pleiades.¹²

Let us turn from the Islands of the Pacific to Peru, and there we find the primitive calendar of two seasons marked by a new year's festival of the dead, occurring in November, and celebrated at precisely the same time as in Europe and Polynesia.

The month in which it occurs, says Rivero,¹³ "is called *Ayamarca*, from *Aya*, a corpse, and *marca*, carrying in arms, because they celebrated the solemn festival of the dead, with tears, lugubrious songs, and plaintive music; and it was customary to visit the tombs of relations, and to leave in them food and drink. *It is worthy of remark that the feast was celebrated among the ancient Peruvians at the same period, and on the same day, that Christians solemnize the commemoration of the dead* (2d November)."

Finding the festival held at the beginning of November, I felt convinced that it never could have been fixed in that month by a solar year, such as was in use in Peru, but that it must have been originally the new year's festival of the year or seasons of the Pleiades, that must have once been in use in that country. Subsequent investigations bore out the conclusion.

¹² It was held at the time of "the blossoming of the reeds." As the winter season lasts from July to October, this festival must have occurred in October or November. See Ellis, *Polynesian Res.* I., 86, 351.

¹³ Rivero's *Peruvian Antiquities*, transl. by Dr. Hawks (New York 1855), p. 134.

(To be continued)

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