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## R. V. C. Bodley (“Bodley of Arabia”) at Keio University, 1933

William Snell

I lived in the Dutch Indies, in China, Japan, and Manchuria and in the South Sea Islands. I worked as a journalist and wrote over a dozen books. I taught English literature in a Japanese university in Tokyo, became a screenplay writer in Hollywood and lectured in almost every state of North America.

From the Prologue to *In Search of Serenity* (1955)

One of the most remarkable characters to have taught at Keio, albeit only for nine months, was soldier, adventurer, journalist and writer Ronald Victor Courtenay Bodley.<sup>1)</sup> He was the first son of barrister and Oxford historian John Edward Courtenay (J. E. C.) Bodley (1853–1925), author of *France* (1898) and a direct descendent of Miles Bodley, brother of Sir Thomas Bodley (1545–1613), ambassador to Elizabeth I and founder of the Bodleian Library. Called to the bar at the age of 21, John Bodley later became private secretary to the Liberal and reformist politician Sir Charles Dilke (1843–1911), although his career came to an end when Dilke was involved in a divorce scandal in 1885.<sup>2)</sup> In 1891 he married Evelyn Frances,<sup>3)</sup> the daughter of John Bell of Rushpool Hall, Yorkshire, and they had two

sons: Ronald Victor Courtenay, and the future artist Josselin Reginald Courtenay Bodley (1893–1974), and a daughter, Ava (1896–1974).<sup>4)</sup>

Ronald Victor was born in Paris March 3rd, 1892. As the author himself put it: “I was born on a raw March afternoon in Paris, the city of the glorious unforeseen, the center of beautiful nonsense and of the grimmest reality.”<sup>5)</sup> Educated at Eton,<sup>6)</sup> where he was a contemporary of Osbert Sitwell and Aldous Huxley (and the Irish-born diplomat and writer Shane Leslie, later Sir John Randolph Leslie (1885–1971) who would subsequently write favorable reviews of his books), instead of following in his father’s footsteps and going to Oxford he chose a military career, one which he himself acknowledged to have been against his temperament.<sup>7)</sup> After attending the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst he was commissioned into the King’s Royal Rifle Corps and spent three years in India “where I played polo, and hunted, and explored in the Himalayas as well as doing some soldiering” before the outbreak of the First World War. A Lieutenant in the 60th Rifles in September 1914<sup>8)</sup> he served in France where, in 1917, he suffered a breakdown as a consequence of being gassed.<sup>9)</sup> Bodley recorded this time in his memoir *Indiscretions of a Young Man*, published in 1931 (in which he recounts among other things his presiding at the trial for cowardice of a soldier in his regiment who was subsequently executed).<sup>10)</sup> He apparently reached the rank of colonel while in France, but stylized himself as either “Major” or “Colonel” Bodley in later life.

After four years on the Western Front and the armistice in November 1918 Bodley was recruited for his French language skills<sup>11)</sup> as Assistant Military Attaché at the British Embassy in Paris, where he attended the Versailles Peace Conference.<sup>12)</sup> Following the signing of the eponymous

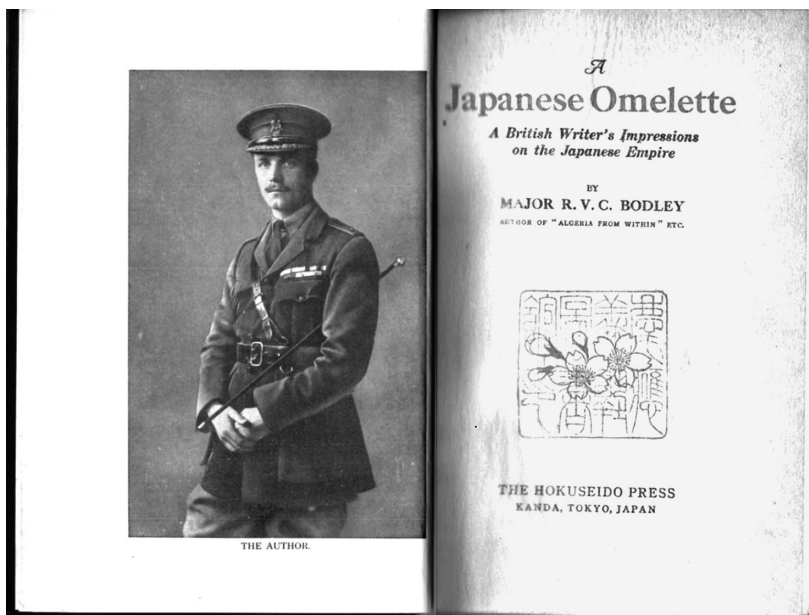


Fig. 1 (Frontispiece and Title Page of *A Japanese Omelette*, 1933)

Treaty he wrote that

...while Paris was dancing itself into a frenzy of unforeseeing merriment....I could not help feeling that out there to the north-east millions of men lay rotting beneath the mud of a great devastated area, and that reparations, to say nothing of the future of Europe, would not in any way be settled by a peace treaty which no government was strong enough to enforce. But no one thought of this, and we danced on, as it were, on a floor supported by corpses, but without hearing the crunching of bones.<sup>13)</sup>

It was at this point that Bodley's cousin, the explorer and writer Gertude

Bell (1868–1926), apparently introduced him to T. E. Lawrence:

I was sick of war, sick of the army, sick of society. For the first time in my career, I spent sleepless nights, worrying about what I should do with my life. Lloyd George urged me to go in for politics. I was considering taking his advice when a strange thing happened, a strange thing that shaped and determined my life.... It all came from a conversation that lasted less than two hundred seconds—a conversation with ‘Ted’ Lawrence, ‘Lawrence of Arabia,’ the most colorful and romantic figure produced by the First World War.<sup>14)</sup>

Lawrence advised him to go live with the Arabs, and thus began his self-confessed “long spell of vagabondage”.<sup>15)</sup> Bodley stayed in North Africa (mainly Algiers) for seven years, seemingly detaching himself completely from all ties with his homeland, making a Bedouin tent his permanent home, wearing Arab clothes and practicing the Moslem faith. Yet the actual truth behind his motivation for travelling to North Africa remains uncertain, as he gives a somewhat more prosaic account in *Indiscretions of a Young Man*<sup>16)</sup> of how he became a sub bank-manager at Barclay’s in Algiers, where he introduced his sister to her first husband Ralph Wigram (“an Eton friend of mine” who had been First Secretary at the British Embassy in Paris). At their wedding he met the Duc de Maillé who both proposed, and offered to fund, a sheep-farming enterprise! Whatever the truth of the matter, Bodley settled down in Algeria (a place which became “a sort of spiritual home for me”<sup>17)</sup>) and in 1927, at the oasis of Laghouat he entered his second marriage,<sup>18)</sup> to an Australian woman called Beatrice (“Betty”) Clare Lambe of Sydney, New South Wales, who happened to be touring North Africa and who is certainly the person referred to in the dedication to *Indiscreet Travels East*.<sup>19)</sup>

We know that Bodley had previously married Ruth Mary Elizabeth Stapleton-Bretherton, (15 Mar 1897–1956) in April 1917.<sup>20</sup> However, the marriage later failed despite the birth of a son. In *The Times*, Tuesday, June 8, 1926, there appears an announcement from the High Court of Justice (Bodley v. Bodley):

In this undefended suit Ruth Mary Elizabeth Bodley, of Avon Carrow, Avon Dasset, Warwickshire, whose maiden name was Stapleton-Bretherton, prayed for the dissolution of her marriage with Major Ronald Victor Courtenay Bodley on the ground of his adultery with a woman named Zenith.

The petitioner... said that she married the respondent on April 30, 1917. Soon after the marriage she found that he drank excessively. She lived with him at his various stations, and in 1918 their child was born. The respondent during that time was often drunk and used to go off with other women. In 1918 he was appointed assistant military attaché in Paris, and shortly after the Armistice she joined him there. She found that he was living with another woman. She (the petitioner) threatened to leave him, but she was not able to do so as she had not much money. He continued to associate with the woman, and to drink: he also began to take drugs. She was very unhappy. In 1920 he ceased to hold his appointment and returned to England, but he went back to Paris some time afterwards.

In 1922 a deed of separation was arranged and she returned to her mother in England. The defendant never carried out his obligations under the deed. From Paris he went to Algiers and came back to England in 1924 when she received a letter from him in which he admitted that he had stayed with a woman at a hotel. In January this

year he wrote to her from Algiers saying that he had lived for six months with a Mlle. Zerath, and intended to go on doing so.

Inquiries were made in Algiers and Paris, and evidence was taken on affidavit which showed that the respondent had committed adultery.

After the affidavits had been read, his Lordship granted the petitioner a decree nisi, with costs, and gave her the custody of the child.

To his son, Mark,<sup>21)</sup> later a Lieutenant Royal Armoured Corps Royal Scots Greys (2nd Dragoons) who was killed in Libya in December 1942, he would dedicate what would become perhaps his best known book, *Wind in the Sahara* (1944). Bodley judged his first marriage to have been an “unfortunate action” one which “proved the folly of very young people ignoring the advice of their parents.... It would be interesting to see how many marriages contracted when the man is under twenty-five and the girl under twenty have proved successful.”<sup>22)</sup>

The author would later place great importance on the idea of fate, and the Arab concept of *Mektoub* (literally translated as “written” but more liberally meaning “that which is pre-ordained”), so it is interesting if not ironic that his father, John Bodley, would divorce and marry again, and that his mother would re-marry an American and settle in France (see later).

The long interlude in Algeria gave Bodley the opportunity to pursue a career as an author which he had long aspired to. He had begun writing early in life, no doubt inspired by his scholar father,<sup>23)</sup> with poetry at Eton, writing for a cadet magazine at Sandhurst, and co-writing skits while in India. Encouraged by the publisher Michael Joseph he wrote *Algeria from Within* (1927) while ensconced at the oasis of Laghouat, the success of which

astonished him: "I didn't anticipate the reviews which the Press gave me" he later recalled in *Indiscretions of a Young Man*. "I was compared with Lawrence and Doughty, my prose was unexpectedly likened to the paintings of Manet...." The book was subsequently published in America.

Nothing could have been worse for me than this unforeseen success, as it gave me the idea that I had a name in literature and in future need only affix my signature to a MS. to make it a sure seller.<sup>24)</sup>

The would-be author soon became disillusioned. Bodley's first novel, *Jasmina* (1927), evidently sold well, going into a second edition, but he did not receive any remuneration from it. *Opal Fire* (1928, which had originally been titled *The Sadist*<sup>25)</sup>) did considerably worse and was "hardly noticed at all." This did not deter him, however, from pursuing a career in writing: "I shall continue writing, in the belief that it is only by persevering that one succeeds and rises above the level of others."<sup>26)</sup>

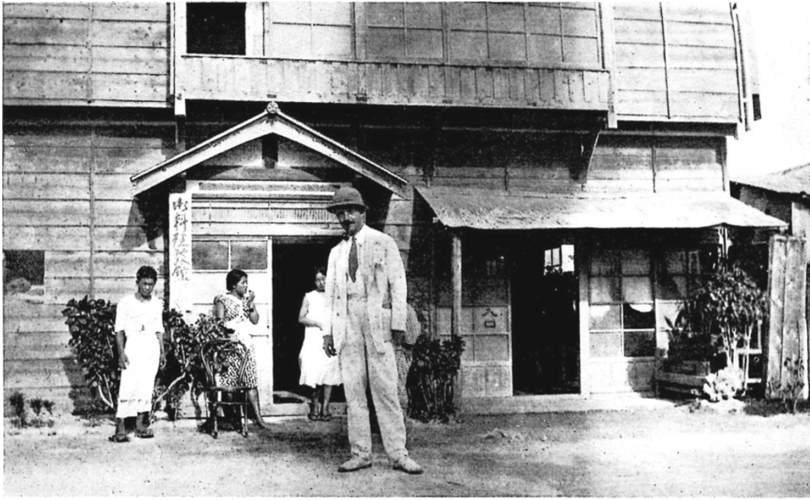
### **Bodley in Japan**

It is difficult to understand from what sources such rumours [that the Japanese were building naval and air bases in the mandated territories] emanate, as, with the exception of a small harbor at Saipan, not yet completed, nothing has been done to improve the lagoons where there is just room for two ships of moderate tonnage to anchor at a time.

"Japan's Influence in the South Seas" in *The Advertiser* (Saturday 9 June, 1934), p. 9.

Perhaps one consequence of the popularity achieved by *Algeria from Within* was Bodley's later employment as a journalist in the Dutch Indies,





THE AUTHOR OUTSIDE A JAPANESE INN, THE ONLY FORM OF RESIDENCE IN THE SOUTH SEAS

Fig. 2 (Frontispiece to *Indiscreet Travels East*, 1934)

China and Japan, working as special correspondent for the London *Sphere*<sup>27)</sup> and the Australian *Advertiser*. In this capacity he travelled through the Japanese mandated islands of the Pacific, visiting the Mariana Islands, the Carolines, and the Marshall islands, which he would record in his book *Indiscreet Travels East* (1934). He arrived in Japan via China, and he remarks on the contrast between dirty and disorderly China and the “cheerful clockwork” of Japan. As with most foreign journalists Bodley’s movements were evidently known in advance by the *Gaimusho* (the Japanese Foreign Ministry) operating under the guise of the Japan Tourist Bureau, which was eager to pamper to him. The result was that he became an inadvertent apologist for the Manchurian invasion and occupation of Korea. In the 1930s, to reduce increasingly hostile suspicion surrounding the Japanese invasion of Micronesia and Japan’s intentions there, the government “if only to delay a buildup of American military and naval

forces in the Pacific",<sup>28)</sup> granted permission for foreign observers to visit the islands. "The Japanese expectation was that these persons would convey their impressions to reading publics in the West that Japan had undertaken no aggressive preparations in the Pacific." Bodley was not alone in being duped.<sup>29)</sup> During this time he visited Saipan and Tinian and other islands of the Japanese Mandates in a carefully choreographed tour organized by the *Gaimusho*. In an article for the *Central Queensland Herald* he asserts that "no stretch of imagination would lead to the wildest scaremongering to suggest that there are naval bases here or at any other islands of the mandated territories."<sup>30)</sup> After being shipwrecked on leaving Tinian, he was rescued and along with other survivors transported first to Yap and then Palau. "Those who believe the Japanese to be arrogant, foreign-hating bullies," he commented, "have never taken the trouble to test the Japanese character and find out that it is just the opposite."<sup>31)</sup>

Bodley would later back-peddle on the stance he took as a journalist while in Japan. In *The Quest* (1947), which Bodley classified as neither "autobiography" nor "travel" literature but "Adventure... Mild adventure? Philosophic adventure?",<sup>32)</sup> and in which he claims to make "a deliberate attempt to explain the Chinese and the Japanese and the Malays and show them as I really believe them to be" he refutes many of the previous assertions he had made in *A Japanese Omellete*. Regarding Manchuria he now asserts that it was part of a "project of Asiatic domination"<sup>33)</sup> and that, having made up his mind to find out what was going on in Mukden, he persuaded the Japanese authorities to give him a permit to visit Manchuria. "After all, I was a correspondent of a reputable British weekly [*The Sphere*] and had a reasonable excuse to go where news was."<sup>34)</sup> He goes on to take a pro-Anglo-American stance: "I have no doubt that if, during this autumn of

1931, a strong Anglo-American fleet had appeared off Dairen, accompanied by a strongly worded Anglo-American protest to Tokyo, the Japanese would have climbed down... and renounced the Manchurian adventure....<sup>35)</sup> Bodley also explains how the Japanese came via their inferiority complex to detest the white foreigner: "They had always felt the white man was looking down on them, was patronizing them, was thinking of them as a backward, uncivilized race, as a kind of ex-pupil. A desire had thus been bred for reprisal...."<sup>36)</sup>

Bodley newly describes how, while staying at the Imperial Hotel, "I know my room was searched every day while I was out, that every sheet of paper I tore up was pasted together and studied, and that my mail went through many hands outside the post office before it reached me. In fact, the Japanese made little pretence about it."<sup>37)</sup> (Indeed *Gaimusho* records do show that Bodley was under observation while in the country.) He suspects that the Japanese were surmising that he was exchanging diplomatic secrets with his brother-in-law at the Foreign Office in London, but defends his former pro-Japanese journalism and the accusation that he was a dupe of the *Gaimusho*<sup>38)</sup> (which, alas, he undoubtedly was):<sup>39)</sup>

By using a little tact I had succeeded where many journalists had failed. I had also made several enemies among the older reporters who had been long in Japan and never obtained any favours. A few of these tried to discredit me by suggesting that my articles were propaganda. Not one of them appreciated that, even in Japan, one did not catch flies with vinegar or obtain favours with sour looks and threats.<sup>40)</sup>

However, more pertinent to this paper is that one other significant consequence of Bodley's sojourn in Japan was that he also found himself

asked to teach at a Japanese university, where he was given the opportunity to "have a thorough insight into the methods of teaching the Japanese University student, which surprised me more than anything else in Japan." In *A Japanese Omelette* (1933), the travel book he wrote while he was in Japan and which was published there, he writes:

A friend of mine who taught English at Keio University in Tokyo wished to go home on holiday, but such an eventuality not being reckoned for in the terms of his contract and the authorized vacation not giving him sufficient time to make the journey there and back, he asked me to fill his place for five months.<sup>41)</sup>

Thus was Bodley thrust into the role of "professor", one which he confessed to being "strange" given his varied career thus far; but "being of an inquisitive nature and not suffering from self-consciousness" he agreed to take on the request.<sup>42)</sup>

The university to which I found myself attached was Keio, one of the oldest educational establishments organized on modern lines in Japan, but without having anything whatever in common with our public schools or universities. In the first place, the student, if he so wished, could eye Keio almost directly from the cradle and, passing through their primary schools and the middle school, finally enter the university proper, from which he would graduate. In other words, he could spend sixteen years of his life being taught in the same scholastic establishment.<sup>43)</sup>

He goes on to relate that because there were no boarding facilities, and no

school life outside the classroom other than football and baseball, “there is none of that intimate daily intercourse as at Eton and Oxford.”

The students all wear a black uniform with the school arms on their buttons and caps, the arms of Keio being, incidentally, a pair of crossed pen-nibs, carved also above the door of the main building which, with its ivy-clad walls, suggests almost a college at Oxford or Cambridge.<sup>44)</sup>

Bodley continues:

Teaching of English is regarded in Japan as essential as an intermediary for keeping in touch with the outer world, but though the student who has passed beyond primary school spends ten years at his subject, the results are inclined to be negative.

This is due to several reasons. One is the quite unbridgeable gulf which separates our two languages, another that the classes are too big (from thirty to sixty boys) to be treated.

He concludes:

I have not the character to be a good schoolmaster, because I always see the boy's point of view and sympathize with him, but I thoroughly enjoyed the few months that I spent teaching at Keio.<sup>45)</sup>

Bodley remarks on the Spartan curriculum which meant that “My pupils had to devote their attention to sixteen different subjects a week, which included English, French, German, Chinese, Economics, Law or Literature, Logic, Mathematics, Philosophy, History of Europe, Asia and

Japan, Ethics etc., so that by the end of a day’s work the muddle in the mind of a student, who had been, ‘learning’ for seven consecutive hours, must have been as mixed up as eggs in an omelette.”<sup>46)</sup>

Truly nostalgically or not, Bodley recalls the above method of teaching was the custom at Eton and Sandhurst meted out by French and German masters. “I felt slightly apprehensive as to the way I would be received when I first took over my duties as a Keio school master,” and Bodley records for posterity a letter from a student explaining his absence from class:

“Having been diseased during the term, I cannot answer this question,” sounds funny to us, but I should be proud if I knew the Japanese for being ill in any form and vain if I could spell it. “Eve stepped out of her delicious bowel,” might sound obscure if one did not know that there was no “R” in the Japanese language and that “L” was the nearest approach to this letter. But remark this student’s knowledge of colloquialisms when he writes to explain why a class was absent from a lecture: “We were all absent except four men when you came to our room. I suppose that you were very angly. You might say, why the devil did they escape ...” and the document ends with, “please excuse this rather scrappy letter.”<sup>47)</sup>

Bodley describes his nine months teaching at Keio thus: “... I had agreed to take over a job for which I was in no way qualified. It was a job at which I had never worked before and at which I would never work again. I had accepted to become a professor at a Japanese university.”<sup>48)</sup> After a brief summary of the education system in Japan, he writes “I never discovered how the Japanese selected their foreign instructors. I suspect that it was done

by personal recommendation. The competition for lectureships was fierce. And the most qualified to fill vacancies were not always appointed.”<sup>49)</sup> This “friend”, wanted to take a holiday but feared that his job would be at risk. ““But what do you teach?” I asked. I thought I had better find out if it was A B C or elegiac poetry.

‘English literature of the late eighteenth-century,’ he replied. ‘I’ve left the books you’ll need at your hotel. And don’t fuss. All you’ve got to do is go to the university at eight o’clock tomorrow morning. The dean’ll tell you what to do.’<sup>50)</sup>

He goes on to recount that

The dean told me nothing! He met me in the Common Room of the university, went through the usual formal Japanese greetings, took me to a classroom, and introduced me to forty young men in black uniforms. He said a few introductory words and left. Knowing not a word of Japanese, I had no idea whether he had told the class that I was an eminent professor, to be respected as a man of learning, or just another beachcombing English teacher from the bar of the imperial Hotel. Neither did my pupils give any indications. They just sat there like a row of dummies.

Bodley proceeded to open his first talk with a lecture on Robert Louis Stevenson:

I did not know much about *him*, but it allowed me to pad things out with South Sea Islands, concerning which I now felt myself to be an

expert. For the reaction which my words produced on the flaming youth of Japan, however, it would have made no difference if I had spoken on the Baduis or Henry Pu-yi.<sup>51)</sup>

He repeated the same lecture five times to successive classes then went back to his hotel.

By the following morning I had read up on Charlotte Brontë. I gave her five times without raising so much as a fidget. A second week passed to the tune of Anthony Trollope, Mrs. Henry Wood, Thackeray, Dickens, Wordsworth, Longfellow, Washington Irving, without any variation in my pupils' respectful silence. By the end of the second week this was beginning to undermine my morale. I was becoming nervous. So before we parted for the weekend I said to the first class to which I had spoken:

"Has what I have been saying during the past fortnight been clear to you?"

The deferential hush never so much as quivered. It swept up from the desks and smacked me in the face. I felt like one dies in a nightmare. Desperately I demanded:

"Does anyone in this room speak English?"

One young man got up. "Yes, I do." He seemed to be rather ashamed of the admission.

"That's fine, "I said. "How do you happen to know English?"

"I was educated in the States."

"Congratulations!" I was trying sarcasm, which no Japanese understands.<sup>52)</sup>



Bodley went on to ask this student if the classes to which he had been lecturing had understood anything over the last two weeks, to which he replied:

“No - *nothing!*” The young man did not hesitate. He did not quibble. He was direct and truthful.

No, *nothing!* I felt baffled. But all I said was, “Oh!” and added suspiciously, “And how did my predecessor teach then?”

Once more the reply came out patly: “He wrote on the board. We can read what you write but we cannot understand what you say.”

(Later on I found out what my friend should have told me... that most Japanese can read one or more foreign languages, but few of them can follow foreign talk which is not very slow.)

Bodley contemplated giving up the job there and then, “But I did not resign. I had handled militarists in Manchuria and politicians in Tokyo. I would handle these college boys. If they could not understand what I said, I would *teach* them to understand.... I would give these Japanese boys plain English without any frills.”<sup>53)</sup> His strategy was to make his pupils buy *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.<sup>54)</sup> “I made them read the stories aloud to me, which they enjoyed. Sometimes I gave dictation. Occasionally I taught grammar. I taught myself too.”

After an episode in which he relates the suicide of a pupil and the Japanese proclivity for ritual self-destruction, Bodley observes that life at the university was “peaceful and, from my point of view, interesting.... My pupils had to wear this black uniform with the college crest engraved on brass buttons and embroidered on the front of the cap. The Keio crest was represented by a pair of crossed pen nibs!” He adds, “...on the whole, these

young men were extremely apt pails. I wished that I might have had their ability to stroll into foreign bookshops in Tokyo and browse through English and French and German literature with an occasional glance into Chinese classics."<sup>55)</sup>

On the professors at Keio he observes that "they looked like professors in any other part of the world."

The Japanese masters and professors I found inclined to be friendly and in a general way much less reserved in the company of foreigners than is usual in Japan. Quite a proportion of my colleagues had been at Oxford or Cambridge or some American university and dressed accordingly, others were officially Japanese of the stiff collar and somber suiting specie, while a few wore kimono, but flannel trouser or otherwise, there was a definite spirit of helpful camaraderie in the Common Room which made me feel at home as soon as I crossed its threshold.<sup>56)</sup>

Bodley observes:

At Keio lunch is gobbled in a kind of cellar, where a big box of rice forms the centre piece of the deal table, into which the professors dig with a wooden spade and, having transferred what they require into bowls; whisk it into their mouths with chopsticks. Pale green tea is the staple drink at lunch, as also in the common room where tea pots and cups are placed on the tables at each of the intervals between classes. These, however, are merely side-lights on university life in Japan and of no importance except as contrasts.

He concludes:

I shall always be glad that I had that experience at Keio. It taught me more about the Japanese than a lifetime of a businessman or diplomat or journalist in Japan. It taught me to like and to understand partially these Japanese young men. It again gave me the idea that if the General Koisos and company were liquidated and replaced by Dairen Rotarians and some of my professional colleagues at Keio Japan might be a good place in which to live.<sup>57)</sup>

Bodley gives an account of having attended the funeral of Admiral Togo, but makes no mention of his “authorized biography” for the writing of which he was evidently allowed access to private as well as official records, and in which Bodley portrays Japan as a first-class modern power. However, given that he admits to having known no Japanese one wonders how much of the biography was actually written by Bodley.

I feel that the interests of Japan would be furthered if her youth concentrated a little less on higher literature and gave up a little more time to learning of the spoken foreign language. Books are valuable up to a certain point, but they express opinions of men and women who are not necessarily infallible, and though of course the mind can be improved by reading, it is more stimulating to discuss matters of interest with people who hold reasoned opinions on a variety of subjects. I cannot read Japanese, I know little about Japanese literature but I have learnt much about this country and its people through conversation with men who could speak my language, and the teaching of English in Japan.<sup>58)</sup>

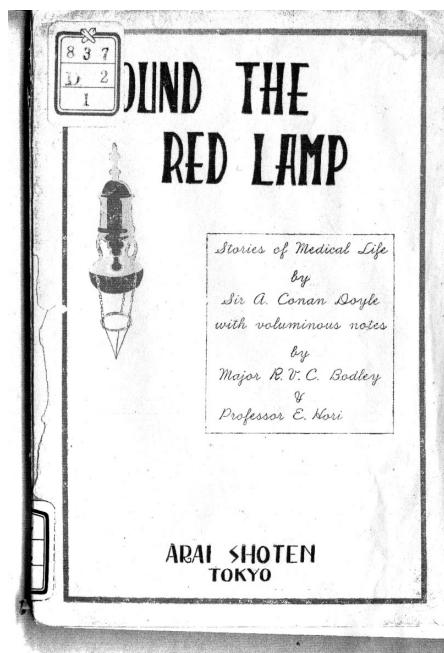


Fig. 3 (Cover of *Round the Red Lamp: stories of medical life* by A. Conan Doyle; with voluminous notes by R. V. C. Bodley & E. Hori (Tokyo: Arai Shoten, 1934))

Apart from the biography of Admiral Togo, Bodley also cooperated in the production of a minor textbook, a collection of stories by Conan Doyle called *Round the Red Lamp; stories of medical life* (Tokyo: Arai Shoten, 1934) with Eishiro Hori (1874–1963), professor of English at Keio from 1916 on,<sup>59)</sup> who provided the notes.

The next step of Bodley’s travels would take him to America, travelling to San Francisco on the *Chichibu Maru* with author and journalist Virginia Cowles (1910–1983).<sup>60)</sup> Bodley ends his recollections of his stay in Japan ambivalently. He is “depressed” at having to leave the country: “The taxi drivers who had exasperated me by their senseless driving, the coolies on

the quay who exploited foreign visitors, the prying customhouse officials, and the insolent little policemen looked like familiar friends. I wanted to shake them by the hand and thank them for their hospitality...”<sup>61)</sup>

He describes the sendoff he received “one of those gusty, drizzling mornings of the Japanese autumn when the rain caresses the wayfarer with soaking kisses” the decks “seething with damp men and women in kimonos and clogs, and I could hardly find the people who had come to see me go” but they included his “three foreign colleagues from Keio” and “a troop of Japanese from all walks of life” “white-haired Mr. Nakatsuchi” of the Hokusedo Press who had been instrumental in the publication of *A Japanese Omelette*, “impassive Mr. Takaku” of the *Gaimusho*, “round-faced Professor Kodama”<sup>62)</sup> the English-speaking Economics professor from Keio who had befriended him, and “students who I had taught. All kinds of unexpected men and women were there to say sayonara.”

The siren of the *Chichibu Maru* gave a final blast as the vessel slipped her moorings and began easing away from the pier.

“Banzai! Banzai!” burst out menacingly exultant from serried ranks of Japanese on shore, as if they would force their personalities on me forever.

The streamers were being played out. Soon they became taut and, one by one, broke. Professor Kodama’s face glistened behind his huge spectacles and faded with the crowd.<sup>63)</sup>



THE AUTHOR

Fig. 4 (Frontispiece to *Flight into Portugal*, 1941)

### **Bodley Goes to Hollywood**

My first “crush” was on Ronnie Bodley, the English writer who’d been a beau of both my mother and grandmother, whose little moustache and very British accent captivated my best friend Marianna Mead, and me. We would prepare his breakfast tray with little vases of Mum’s favorite lilies of the valley, and hover, waiting for his slightest attention. We learned the hard lesson of unrequited love early.

Flora Miller Biddle, former president of the Whitney Museum of American Art and granddaughter of the museum’s legendary founder, Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney.<sup>64)</sup>

An attempt is being made to induce Laurette Taylor to return to the Broadway stage after being absent since the 1938 revival of "Outward Bound." ... On Wednesday night Miss Taylor, Ronald V. Bodley (author of "Miss Brown," a new play) and [producer] Jack Wildberg have a dinner date, at which time the conversation - you can rest assured - will somehow turn to her proposed appearance in "Miss Brown."

*The New York Times* September 18, 1944, p. 16.

There is a photograph taken for *LIFE* magazine by Cornell Capa in October, 1948 of Colonel R. V. C. Bodley, age 56, at a Halloween party. He is dressed in bow-tie and tuxedo, looking debonair but slightly disheveled if not worn, holding a paper plate with the remains of a piece of cake on it. The party more than likely took place in Hollywood, where he had ended up after the war working as a scriptwriter. Now known as "Ronnie" to his friends he was among the thirty-five or so scriptwriters (including F. Scott Fitzgerald) who worked over three years on *A Yank at Oxford* (1938), one of a cycle of pro-British films produced in Hollywood before the United States' entry into the war in December 1941.<sup>65</sup> He was most definitely involved in the preliminary screen adaptation of *Regency*, the D. L. Murray novel about an independent British noblewoman which was intended to be a showcase for Charles Chaplin's protégée and later wife Paulette Goddard, her second starring role under Chaplin's direction. It was around this time in an interview for the *New Yorker* magazine that he was perhaps first referred to as "Bodley of Arabia".<sup>66</sup> In addition, Bodley was involved in several literary projects, including one with Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, which alas, like other collaborations, came to nothing:

Gertude continued revisions of her play *The Hand*. Neighbor and play producer Richard Myers described the story as "perfect" but said the dialogue needed to be gone over "with a fine tooth comb." Once this editing was accomplished, he advised, he would definitely consider taking the play on for production. Toward this end, Gertrude hired a friend, Major Ronald Victor Courtenay Bodley, a slim, blond, charming writer in his late forties. They worked so harmoniously that Gertrude was soon addressing him as "Ronnie" and inviting him to work at Westbury. Despite daily revisions over months, they were unable to correct the fundamental weakness of the work, its inability to give a fresh and vital dramatization of the theme of spirit possession.<sup>67)</sup>

Bodley was in California when war broke out in September 1939, an event which took him by surprise.<sup>68)</sup> Rejected as being too old for service (and having seemingly been sued for divorce by his second wife, Betty), when Britain declared war on Germany he was in Biarritz with Lorna Hearst,<sup>69)</sup> then wife of George Randolph Hearst, the eldest son of the businessman and publishing tycoon William Randolph Hearst, where they were working on a play together: "Whereas in 1914 every patriotic cell in me had sprung into action at the declaration of war and my only fear had been that I should not get to the front in time for the fighting, I now felt dull and dispirited. The whole thing seemed childish and futile...."<sup>70)</sup> When Germany invaded France, Lorna Hearst managed to get back to America by ship from Bordeaux<sup>71)</sup> while Bodley stayed for some time with his mother and American step-father near Bayonne. They refused to leave and so Bodley, along with three British women, made their escape by car, and with the help of an old Etonian friend who worked at the British embassy in Madrid and was able to get them transit visas, they crossed the border into Spain. From



there Bodley ended up in Lisbon, Portugal, eventually reaching the U. S. where he began to make money as a lecturer and tried to kick-start his writing career.

In November 1949 Bodley married an American divorcee, Harriet Moseley,<sup>72)</sup> but this marriage did not last either. He tried his hand at scriptwriting, playwriting and yet again as a novelist, but his book *The Gay Deserters* (1945), a satire on the foreign émigrés (“war guests”) who escaped the war to live in the U.S., was not well received. As one critic wrote:

Privileged émigrés have always been the object of mordant satire.... Ludwig Bemelmans, in his “Now I lay Me Down to Sleep,” has given some delightfully humorous glimpses into the nightclubbing “refugee” world of pre- and post-Pearl Harbor New York. Mr. Bodley’s treatment is much more elaborate and much less delightfully humorous.

In fact, it isn’t even humorous at all. For the author mixes witty and even riotous scenes of legitimate satire with a gravely tender love story and a full share of unctuous editorializing — and thereby kills all three of his themes....<sup>73)</sup>

The review concludes: “Fair-minded people are not likely to judge 125,000 *bona fide* refugees by the tasteless antics of a handful of well-groomed merry-makers....”

### **Conclusion:**

I have read [Charles Kingsley’s] *Westward Ho!* three times—when I was twelve years old, when I was twenty-five, and when I was fifty.

On none of these occasions was I left disappointed. On each of them I closed the book with regret; I do not believe that any other work of fiction can bear such a test.

“My Favorite Forgotten Book” by R. V. C. Bodley,  
*Tomorrow* (October 1948).<sup>74)</sup>

Alas, there the trail goes cold. There is a 1969 article in the *Sunday Times* co-written with his brother, on his father’s connection with Dilke,<sup>75)</sup> but, sadly, little else. He died at the age of 78 on the 26<sup>th</sup> May, 1970, at Birtley House, a nursing home in Bramley, near Guildford, Surrey.<sup>76)</sup>

Suave, debonair, Bodley may have had a tendency to over dramatize and color his life, but it certainly was very much an adventure of sorts. This has been a preliminary and sadly fragmented study of R. V. C. Bodley and it is hoped it will be followed in the future by a deeper and more thoroughly researched quest into his adventurous, if enigmatic, life.

“MEKTOUB!” ....<sup>77)</sup>

## Works by R. V. C. Bodley

*Yasmina* (1927) [novel]

*Algeria from Within* (London: Hutchinson; Indianapolis: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1927)

*Opal Fire* (London, 1928) [novel]

*Indiscretions of a Young Man* (London: Harold Shaylor, 1931)

*The Lilac Troll* (London: A Rivers, 1932) [novel]

*A Japanese Omelette: a British writer’s impressions on the Japanese*

- Empire* (Tokyo: The Hokuseido Press, 1933)
- Round the Red Lamp: stories of medical life by A. Conan Doyle; with voluminous notes by R. V. C. Bodley & E. Hori* (Tokyo: Arai Shoten, 1934)
- Indiscreet Travels East* (Java, China and Japan) (London: Jarrolds, 1934)
- The Drama of the Pacific: being a treatise on the immediate problems which face Japan in the Pacific* (Hokuseido Press, 1934)
- Admiral Togo: The authorized life of admiral of the fleet Marquis Heihachiro Togo, O. M.* (London: Jarrolds, 1935)\*
- Gertrude Bell* (London: Macmillan, 1940) with Lorna Hearst
- Flight into Portugal* (London: Jarrolds, 1941)
- Wind in the Sahara* (Coward-McCann; Creative Age Press, 1944)
- The Gay Deserters* (Creative Age, 1945) [novel]
- The Messenger: the life of Mohammed* (N.Y.: Greenwood Press, 1946; 1969)
- The Quest* (London: Robert Hale; Doubleday, 1947)
- “I Lived in the Garden of Allah” in Dale Carnegie’s *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press), 1948; pp. 242–44.
- The Warrior Saint* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953)
- In Search of Serenity* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1955)
- The Soundless Sahara* (London: Robert Hale, 1968)

\*Translated into German: *Admiral Togo: Leben eines Helden, Aufstieg einer Nation* von R. V. C. Bodley [deutsch von Theodor Lucke]. F. A. Herbig Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1936.

**Notes:**

- 1) I would like to acknowledge the assistance of the staff of the Fukuzawa Memorial Center for Modern Japanese Studies, Keio University, in the researching of this paper. My thanks are also due to my friend and colleague Nick Henck, for pointing out errors in an earlier version, although those that remain are entirely my own responsibility. This paper is for my mother, whose encouragement when I was very young led me to become a teacher.
- 2) R. V. C. Bodley, *Indiscretions of a Young Man*, (London: H. Shaylor, 1931), pp. 8–9 [hereafter cited as *Indiscretions...*]. See also “The Man who Insulted King Edward” by J. E. C. Bodley and R. V. C. Bodley, *The Sunday Times* (London, England), Sunday, 5 January, 1969; pg. 21; Issue 7597.
- 3) They divorced in 1908. See: XXX
- 4) Ava married first Ralph Follett Wigram (1890–1936) and after his death John Anderson, 1st Viscount Waverly (1882–1958) in 1941. He became Lord Privy Seal with responsibility for air-raid precautions in World War II, and the Anderson Shelter was named after him.
- 5) *Indiscretions...*, p. 251.
- 6) “I hated some of the time at Eton and I enjoyed most of the rest.... The majority of the boys regarded me as a bit odd....” *Indiscretions...*, p. 25.
- 7) *Indiscretions...*, p. 46.
- 8) The *London Gazette* Issue 29000, 8 December 1914, p. 13.
- 9) *Indiscretions...*, p. 93.
- 10) “Death sentences have always seemed to me to be relics of a barbarous age and the thought of getting a good chap shot because he had lost his head was unbelievable. I forget how I got out of the quandary, but I left that Court Martial more jumpy than after a heavy bombardment.” *Indiscretions...*, p. 90.
- 11) *Indiscretions...*, p. 103.
- 12) David Dutton ed., *Paris 1918: the war diary of the British ambassador Edward George Villiers Stanley Derby (Earl of)*, the 17th Earl of Derby (Liverpool University Press, 2001), p. 163. Bodley received the *Croix de Chevalier* (*The London Gazette* Issue 31222 (7 March 1919), p. 2) and had conferred upon him the

- Order of Carol I.* by the King of Romania, (Supplement to the *London Gazette* Issue 31812 published on the 5 March 1920, p. 2874.
- 13) *Flight into Portugal* (London: Jarrolds, 1941), p. 14.
  - 14) "I Lived in the Garden of Allah" in Dale Carnegie's *How to Stop Worrying and Start Living*, Bungay, Suffolk: Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press), 1948; pp. 242–44; 242.
  - 15) *Flight into Portugal*, p. 17.
  - 16) *Indiscretions...*, p. 223 ff.
  - 17) *Indiscretions...*, p. 209.
  - 18) *Indiscretions...*, p. 241.
  - 19) "To BETTY, My constant companion during these three years of travel". See also *The Singapore Free Press and Mercantile Advertiser* (1884–1942), 2 May 1927, p. 9: "A marriage has been arranged between Major R. V. C. Bodley, M.C., late 60th Rifles, of Laghouat, Southern Algeria, and Miss Beatrice Clare Lambe, daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Harry Lambe, of Batavia, Java, and Sydney., New South Wales."
  - 20) "Court & Society", *The Sunday Times* (London, England), Sunday, 22 April, 1917; Issue 4907, p. 10: "Major R V C Bodley, M.C. & 5th Rifles, and Miss Ruth Stapleton-Bretherton, daughter of Major F. Stapleton-Bretherton, of Wheler Lodge, Husband's Bosworth, Rugby, are being married on the 30th, and the bride-elect and her mother are at 13, Park Place, St James's. Major Bodley is son of a clever Oxford man, Mr. J. Bodley, author of a brilliant book on modern France. The Stepleton-Brethertons are a Catholic line, related to several families adhering to the Old Faith. An aunt of Miss Ruth Stapleton-Betherton is wife of count Gebhard Blücher-von-Walstadt, eldest son of the late Prince Blücher, who lived at Herm, Channel Islands. Her mother belongs to Lord Mowbray and Strouton's family and as Major Stapleton-Bretherton is related to the Petres and the Granard Forbeses the marriage will be an important event in most Catholic circles."
  - 21) See <<http://www.chch.ox.ac.uk/cathedral/memorials/WW2/mark-bodley>>
  - 22) *Indiscretions...*, p. 94.
  - 23) Although *In Search of Serenity* is dedicated "To My Mother, whose encouragement when I was very young led me to become a writer."

- 24) *Indiscretions*..., p. 230.
- 25) “The theory on which the novel is based is that many women...are Sadists by instinct, and that they deliberately and for their own pleasure make men suffer to a greater degree morally than if they employed instruments of torture.” (!) *Indiscretions*..., p. 231.
- 26) *Indiscretions*..., p. 236.
- 27) *The Sphere: The Empire’s Illustrated Weekly* was a British newspaper, published by London Illustrated Newspapers Ltd. weekly from 27 January 1900 until the closure of the paper on 27 June 1964. It covered general news stories from the UK and around the world; much of the overseas news features were reported in detail as the title was targeted at British citizens living in the colonies.
- 28) Mark R. Peattie, *Nan’yō: the rise and fall of the Japanese in Micronesia, 1885–1945*. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988), p. 245.
- 29) Peattie, pp. 246–47.
- 30) “From Our Canberra Correspondent” (Thursday 1 March, 1934), p. 21.
- 31) In an earlier article for the *Burra Record*, dated 5 April, 1933 (p. 4), he wrote “People talk a lot about the arrogance of the Japanese and his hatred of the foreigner, but I do not agree with this sweeping assertion. Personally I have always met with the greatest courtesy and consideration from the Japanese...”
- 32) *The Quest*, p. ix.
- 33) *The Quest*, p. 206.
- 34) *The Quest*, p. 207.
- 35) *The Quest*, p. 213.
- 36) *The Quest*, p. 216.
- 37) *The Quest*, p. 231.
- 38) See for example “Merrily through Manchukuo” in *Contemporary Japan*, 1 no 5 (April 1933): 667–672, later recycled as a chapter in *Indiscreet Travels East*.
- 39) Peattie, p. 209: “It is easy to criticize these writers for naivety or being duped, but.... there were several stages in the transformation of the mandates for military purposes.”
- 40) *The Quest*, p. 261.
- 41) *A Japanese Omelette: a British writer’s impressions on the Japanese Empire*

(Hokuseido, 1933), p. 157. Who this colleague was remains a mystery but it may have been Oxford-educated John H. Burbank, who was professor of English Literature there from 1932 to 1934. In *The Quest* (p. 324) he writes: “I had a friend who was a professor of English at Keio University in Tokyo, which was the second most important establishment of learning in Japan. The Imperial University, I believe, ranked first. This friend belonged to the better class of foreign professor in that he had degrees and every qualification to teach. This, however, did not make his job any safer than one held by an ex-gas-station employee, if he absented himself for any length of time.”

- 42) In *Indiscreet Travels East* (1934) in a section on “Teaching English to Japanese University Students” he repeats much of what he recorded in *A Japanese Omelette* (especially from Chapter XVI: “The Education of the Japanese with Special Reference to the Teaching of English”) of taking over for a friend at “a Tokyo university” (which later became misunderstood as “Tokyo University”).
- 43) *A Japanese Omelette*, pp. 244–45.
- 44) *A Japanese Omelette*, p. 245.
- 45) *A Japanese Omelette*, p. 247.
- 46) *A Japanese Omelette*, p. 161.
- 47) *A Japanese Omelette*, p. 163.
- 48) *The Quest*, p. 322.
- 49) *The Quest*, p. 323.
- 50) *The Quest*, pp. 325–26.
- 51) *The Quest*, p. 326. Bodley interviewed Pu-yi during his time in Manchuria (see *The Quest*, pp. 292–304).
- 52) *The Quest*, pp. 326–27.
- 53) *The Quest*, p. 328.
- 54) Bodley writes in his preface to *Round the Red Lamp with notes by Keio Professor Eiichiro Hori*: “After the death of his nephew, killed at the front, Conan Doyle became an ardent spiritualist and gave himself up entirely to attempts to communicate with the dead. He wrote two widely read books on the subject entitled *The New revelation* and *The Vital Message*.” He goes on:

On the few occasions when I met Conan Doyle I found him a man of far greater erudition than might have been supposed after reading his *Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and his knowledge of history was extensive. Thick set and powerful he had a rather featured face and a head inclined to be too big for his body. He was convincing when speaking about his intercourse with the dead and, with Sir Oliver Lodge, did much to probe into this obscure problem, but the subject seemed to obsess him and cause him, during the latter years of his life, to pay too little attention to other branches of literature.

The nephew was Oscar Hornung (d. 1915), the son of the writer E.W. Hornung, and would have been a near contemporary of Bodley’s at Eton. See: Martin Booth, *The Doctor, the Detective and Arthur Conan Doyle* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1997), p. 311.

- 55) *The Quest*, p. 333.
- 56) *A Japanese Omelette*, p. 164.
- 57) *The Quest*, p. 335.
- 58) *A Japanese Omelette*, p. 169.
- 59) See *Koudansha Nihon Jinmei Daijiten* 「講談社 日本人名大辞典」(Tokyo: Kodansha 2009), p. 1696.
- 60) “I have never known a way of thinking which appealed to me as much as Virginia’s. I often wish that my life had continued with hers. But it didn’t.... I have a suspicion that Virginia had a quest like mine.” *The Quest*, p. 361.
- 61) *The Quest*, p. 362.
- 62) “...one of my ex-colleagues at Keio. He was a jovial professor of economics called Kodama who had travelled a good deal and spoke good English.” *The Quest*, p. 347. The Kodama referred to is most likely the H. Kodama who provided the biographical and historical notes for *Leaders of the Meiji restoration in America*, edited originally under the title “The Japanese in America”, by Charles Lanman; re-edited by Y. Okamura (Tokyo: Hokuseido, 1931), but I have been unable to obtain any further information about him.
- 63) *The Quest*, p. 364.
- 64) Flora Miller Biddle, *The Whitney Women and the Museum They Made: A Family*



- Memoir* (New York: Arcade, 1999), p. 63.
- 65) Mark H. Glancy, *When Hollywood loved Britain: The Hollywood 'British' film 1939–45* (Manchester U.P., 1999), p. 83.
  - 66) *The New Yorker*: “The Talk of the Town” talk story by Janet Flanner, Russell Maloney, and Eugene Kinkead, 27 February, 1943.
  - 67) Clarice Stasz, *The Vanderbilt Women: Dynasty of Wealth, Glamour, and Tragedy* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 1991), p. 336.
  - 68) *Flight into Portugal*, p. 13.
  - 69) With whom Bodley had collaborated on a biography of his cousin Gertude Bell.
  - 70) *Flight into Portugal*, p. 18.
  - 71) *Flight into Portugal*, p. 19.
  - 72) *Portland Press Herald* (November 20, 1949), p. 46. She is mentioned in the introduction to his self-improvement book *In Search of Serenity* (1955)... Although I have not been able to ascertain when they divorced she seemingly remarried in 1969.
  - 73) “‘Tempest-tost’ Guests of U.S.A.: *The Gay Deserters*, by R. V. C. Bodley,” by Robert Pick in *The Saturday Review* (24 November, 1945), p. 32.
  - 74) Vol. 8, no.2, p. 62. *Tomorrow* was an American magazine published from 1942–1962 specializing in para- psychological and mystical subjects.
  - 75) “The Man who Insulted King Edward,” J. E. C. Bodley and R. V. C. Bodley *The Sunday Times* (Sunday, 5 January, 1969), p. 21; Issue 7597.
  - 76) See *The London Gazette* (26 November, 1970) Issue 13034. He is described as “Colonel in H. M. Army (retired).”
  - 77) “It is written.” Epilogue to *Indiscretions...*, p. 244.

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