

Education and crime.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
BUREAU OF EDUCATION.

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Wickersham (J. P.)

EDUCATION AND CRIME.

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR,
BUREAU OF EDUCATION,
Washington, September 12, 1881.

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EDUCATION AND CRIME

REPORT OF THE
COMMISSIONER OF THE BUREAU OF EDUCATION
FOR THE YEAR 1901

THE BUREAU OF EDUCATION, DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR, HAS THE HONOR TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE RECEIPT OF THE FOLLOWING REPORTS FROM THE COMMISSIONERS OF THE BUREAUS OF EDUCATION IN THE SEVERAL TERRITORIES AND POSSESSIONS OF THE UNITED STATES:

ALABAMA, ARIZONA, ARKANSAS, CALIFORNIA, COLORADO, CONNECTICUT, DELAWARE, DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, FLORIDA, GEORGIA, ILLINOIS, INDIANA, IOWA, KANSAS, KENTUCKY, LOUISIANA, MAINE, MARYLAND, MASSACHUSETTS, MICHIGAN, MINNESOTA, MISSISSIPPI, MISSOURI, MONTANA, NEBRASKA, NEVADA, NEW HAMPSHIRE, NEW JERSEY, NEW YORK, NORTH CAROLINA, NORTH DAKOTA, OHIO, OKLAHOMA, OREGON, PENNSYLVANIA, RHODE ISLAND, SOUTH CAROLINA, SOUTH DAKOTA, TENNESSEE, TEXAS, VERMONT, VIRGINIA, WASHINGTON, WEST VIRGINIA, WISCONSIN, WYOMING.

EDUCATION AND CRIME.

The committee which I have the honor to represent was raised at the Philadelphia meeting of the association in 1879. It grew out of a discussion on a paper by Hon. J. W. Dickinson, of Massachusetts, on the "high school question." As against high schools, the assertion was boldly made that a very large proportion—60 per cent., I think—of the convicts then confined in the prisons of Philadelphia were high school graduates. This assertion was as boldly denied, and a committee was at once appointed to ascertain the truth by an immediate inspection of the institutions indicated, and report before the association adjourned. To perform the allotted task in the appointed time was found to be impracticable, and under a more formal resolution of wider range the committee was authorized to inquire not only into the special question then mooted, but to collect general statistics showing the relations of education and crime and report at the next meeting. The chairman of the committee was Dr. J. A. Paxon, of Philadelphia, the gentleman who had made the statement that brought about the issue; but, for some unexplained reason, he neglected to call the committee together or to make a report on his own responsibility. The association was therefore disappointed at Chautauqua in not receiving the expected report, and, in the hope of securing an investigation of the question, changed the order of the names on the committee, and, against his protest, placed the writer at the head of the list. These words are sufficient to explain how the matter first came before the association and at the same time define the line of investigation which it was intended the committee should follow.

First, then, we must report specially the facts as regards the number of high school graduates in the Philadelphia prisons; and, secondly, discover, if we can, in a general way, how education affects crime.

The statistics of the Eastern Penitentiary of Pennsylvania are probably compiled with more care and presented in more detail than those of any other similar institution in the country. During the year the association met in Philadelphia (1879) there were received at this penitentiary 487 convicts. Of these, 82 had never attended schools of any kind; 5 are reported to have attended college for an average length of time of 6 years, one of them having attended 10 and another 7 years; 7 are said to have attended a public high school for an average length of time a little over 2 years; 12 had been at private schools who had never attended public schools, the average time spent in school being $7\frac{1}{2}$ years; 390 had attended public schools, 169 of them advancing to the grammar grade, the average age at leaving school being 14, and the average time they remained in school is set down at about 5 years. These are the exact official figures; and instead of there being a large percentage of high school graduates in the penitentiary, it appears that there were only 7 of all the convicts received in 1879 that had ever attended a high school, and not one of these had attended long enough to graduate. True, 5 are said to have attended colleges, but they must have been colleges of a peculiar kind to permit attendance for 5, 7, or 10 years, as stated in these cases.

The statistics of the same penitentiary for 1880 repeat those of 1879: 13 convicts out of the 463 received are said to have attended American high schools, but of these 8 attended only 1 year and but a single one attended as long as 3 years. There is

no reason to think any one of them graduated. Five are said to have attended college; but 3 of them attended too short a time to graduate, and the other 2, who are set down as having attended 7 years each, both left school at the age of 16.

We have been unable to obtain reliable statistics of the kind wanted from Moyamensing, the Philadelphia city prison; but instead we present, from the combined statement of the State board of public charities, a most important fact bearing on the case, viz, statistics showing the educational relations of all the convicts sentenced to the jails and workhouses of the State for the year 1879, including Moyamensing prison. Of the 2,307 persons convicted and sentenced to these institutions during the year, only 13 are said to have possessed a superior education, and it is not at all likely that there was a graduate of either a high school or college among them.

To add further weight to this evidence, it may be stated that out of 571 convicts received at the Western Penitentiary of Pennsylvania during the years 1879 and 1880, only 3 are set down by the prison authorities as possessing what they call a superior education.

These statements dispose of the question in the hands of the committee so far as it relates to the number of high school graduates in Philadelphia and Pennsylvania prisons. It may be added, however, that the same showing is made by all the prisons in the country. The number of liberally educated native born Americans, whether graduates of high schools or colleges, found in our jails and penitentiaries, is exceedingly small; not more, we think, than 1 in 500 of the whole number. Such a fact must more than satisfy the most ardent friends of higher education.

But the hardest task imposed upon the committee remains to be performed, viz, to find out, if we can, in a general way, the effect of education upon crime. The question is, taking education as we have it in this country as a whole, higher and elementary, public and private, does it tend to diminish crime; and, if so, to what extent?

We are free to acknowledge at the threshold of our inquiry that there are causes of crime other than ignorance, but it is no part of our present purpose to search them out. We shall endeavor to confine ourselves strictly to the question submitted to us, in the hope that in this narrower field we may be able to discover the truth, and that the truth when discovered will justify us in holding that the education our people are receiving, imperfect as it is, does something to prevent crime. We would be rejoiced if, as the result of our inquiries, we could say to the educators of the country, "In proportion as you improve your schools and your teaching, crime will decrease."

First, then, let us see what light the statistics of our prisons throw upon the question before us. The population of our States and communities is made up of two classes: those who are wholly illiterate and those who can read and write and possess various degrees of knowledge above these acquirements. The census returns draw a sharp line between these two classes, and we may know the number of each in any county, city, or State. The convicts in most of our prisons are classified in a similar way, into illiterates and those who possess more or less education. Now, if among the convicts in our prisons there is a larger proportion of illiterates than there is in the States or communities from which they come, the conclusion would seem to be inevitable that education has an influence in preventing crime. In applying such a test, we are well aware that education is at a disadvantage, because large numbers of the convicts in our prisons who are set down in the reports as being able to read and write can do so very imperfectly, and in reality are about as ignorant as those classed as wholly illiterate. Still, the statistics shall be presented as we have them.

The two Pennsylvania penitentiaries in 1879 received 799 convicts, and of these 114 were wholly illiterate; in 1880 they received 722 convicts, of whom 151 were wholly illiterate; in two years, 1,521 convicts, with 265 illiterates. Thus there is committed by illiterates more than one-sixth of all the crime in Pennsylvania for which punishment is inflicted by incarceration in penitentiaries; while the persons of this class of an age to be sent to the penitentiary for crime do not constitute one-thirtieth of the population. It appears, therefore, that one-sixth of the crime in the State is com-

mitted by the illiterate one-thirtieth part of the population. But this is not all. In addition to the illiterates there were received at the two penitentiaries, in 1879 and 1880, 272 convicts who could barely read and write and had no education beyond that point. If we class these among the uneducated, as we clearly have a right to do, the number of illiterates in the penitentiaries would be swelled to 537, and the astounding fact would appear that more than one-third of all the penitentiary offences in the State are committed by this small but unfortunate class of our people.

Such is the story told by the penitentiaries of Pennsylvania; its purport is scarcely modified in any degree if we combine with the statistics of the penitentiaries those of the county jails, workhouses, and houses of correction. In 1878, of 4,023 admissions into these institutions, 1,209 could not write, and in 1879 612 could not write out of 2,307 admissions. A majority of those who could read and write with more or less facility were otherwise grossly ignorant.

So far we have taken our statistics from Pennsylvania, because they were most easily obtained. Those of other States and other countries show like results and lead to like conclusions. We have before us the reports of the penitentiaries and prisons of some twenty States. As a whole, they tell substantially the same story of the relations of education to crime as the reports of the penitentiaries and prisons of Pennsylvania. With this testimony before us, we reach the following conclusions:

(1) That about one-sixth of all the crime in the country is committed by persons wholly illiterate.

(2) That about one-third of it is committed by persons practically illiterate.

(3) That the proportion of criminals among the illiterate is about ten times as great as among those who have been instructed in the elements of a common school education or beyond.

These conclusions correspond in the main with those arrived at by other inquirers. S. H. White, an ex-president of this body, in his valuable essay on "Education and crime," makes the following statements:

Speaking of New York City, he says that "among the illiterate there is 1 crime to a fraction over 3 persons, while among those not illiterate there is 1 crime to about 27 persons; or, the chances for crime among those who cannot read and write are 9 times as great as among the rest of the people." Of the State of New York he says: "Seven per cent. of the people commit 31 per cent. of the crimes. A person not able to read and write is 6 times as apt to commit crime as one who can read and write." In Massachusetts, he states that, in 1871, "among the ignorant population 1 in 20 committed crime, while among those who had a greater or less degree of education there was 1 crime to about 126 persons." In Illinois, Mr. White found 1 out of every 137 of the illiterate in prison, while of those with more or less education there was only 1 to 566.

Dr. Edward D. Mansfield, in a report to the Bureau of Education in 1872, on "The relation between education and crime," with the criminal statistics before him from nearly all the States, reaches the following conclusions:

(1) That one-third of all criminals are totally uneducated, and that four-fifths are practically uneducated.

(2) That the proportion of criminals from the illiterate classes is at least tenfold as great as the proportion from those having some education.

Rev. Charles L. Brace, at the head of the Children's Aid Society of New York, states that nearly one-third of the crime in New York is committed by the illiterate six-hundredth part of the population. He adds: "Very great criminality is, of course, possible with high education; but in the immense majority of cases a very small degree of mental training or intellectual tastes is a preventive of idleness and consequent crime."

The late Dr. E. C. Wines, one of the highest authorities on the subject under consideration in this or any other country, in his great work on the "State of prisons," presented his conclusions in the following words: "Taking the entire mass of the inmates of all classes of prisons in the Northern and Western States, the proportion of these wholly

illiterate to those that have received a moderate degree of education, often very moderate indeed, may be stated with substantial correctness at about one-third. In the Southern States the proportions are just about reversed, being two-thirds illiterate to one-third partially educated. The number of prisoners who have received a superior education in either section is small indeed."

The criminal statistics of foreign countries add weight to these statements. Of 147,073 persons committed to prison in 1872 in the British Islands, 49,345 could not read or write, 92,126 could read or read and write imperfectly, leaving only 4,892 who could read and write well and 223 who had received a superior education. The number of women and girls arrested and punished for crime in London in 1877 was 20,018. Of this number, 4,206, or 21 per cent., could neither read nor write; 13,665, or 68 per cent., could read only; 2,000, or 10 per cent., could read and write tolerably well; 141, or 7 per cent., could read and write well, and 6 had received a higher education. A late number of the *Journal des bibliothèques populaires*, Paris, contains a table of criminal statistics embracing 63 of the 87 departments of France. From this statement¹ it appears that, of 3,354 persons arrested for crime, 1,480 were unable to read or write, 1,362 could read and write imperfectly, and only 512 could read and write well. And Dr. Wines is authority for stating that in Belgium one-half of the prison population is wholly illiterate on commitment, and in Holland one-third.

Some notice must be taken here of a class of writers who have not found in education, as we think we have, a cause tending to diminish crime. They are willing to admit that education may change the direction of crime, perhaps remove some of its most revolting features, but cannot lessen the actual amount. Certain of these writers reach this conclusion by contrasting the criminal statistics of countries differing in the degree in which education is diffused among the masses of the people. Countries in which education is general, they allege, show as great an amount of crime as countries in which a much larger proportion of the people are illiterate. Prussia, it is said, where elementary education is almost universal, has proportionally many more convicts in her prisons than France, only about one-half of whose adult population can read and write. In view of statistics of this kind which he presents, Alison, in his *History of Europe*, pronounces the doctrine that education in a large sense tends to prevent crime a fallacy. He is followed by others less noted. Herbert Spencer, in his *Social Statics*, and Buckle, in his *History of Civilization*, arrive at the same conclusion from somewhat different premises. They find, or think they do, that the criminal statistics in a country for a series of years show that the amount of crime is a constant quantity, proportionate to the number of people and apparently unaffected by educational or moral influences. A nation may grow, these cold philosophers maintain, may rise in the scale of civilization, but the amount of crime it commits will remain a fixed quantity, governed by unalterable law, and can be predicted with the same certainty as the death rate. Says Buckle, "It is decisively proved that the amount of crime committed in a country is, year after year, reproduced with the most startling uniformity."

In answer to the first phase of this argument, it may be stated that it does not follow, because statistics seem to prove that more persons proportionally have been found guilty of crime in some well educated country than in one more illiterate, that education does not tend to prevent crime. The statistics may have been compiled on different bases. There may have been differences in the efficiency of the criminal administration. The laws may recognize offences as crimes in one country that are not so recognized in another. One country may punish certain offences by imprisonment, while another may do so by fines. Besides, there may be differences in race, in climate, in political and social condition, that should be taken into account. Ignorance, of course, is not the only cause of crime. No one asserts that education is an antidote for all criminal propensities. Prussia may have more convicts in her prisons proportionally than France, but if so, and the matter be probed to the bottom,

¹ This statement may be found by reference to the bulletin issued by this Bureau under date of April 12, 1881.

it will be found that the cause is not in her schools, but exists in spite of her schools; for in Prussia, as in all other countries, an illiterate man is many times more likely to commit crime than one who is educated. If, therefore, the average German is more likely to commit crime than the average Frenchman, it is because there is a crime-producing factor in his nature or in the circumstances that surround him which his education has not been able to eliminate.

It is probably true, as stated by Spencer and Buckle, that in a particular country crime is about uniform from year to year—that is, a certain percentage of the population became criminals last year, about the same percentage will become criminals this year and the next, and this uniformity may cover a period of many years. But if the question were examined closely it would be found that in the same country the amount of ignorance is about as uniform from year to year as the amount of crime; and, therefore, no fair-minded person would expect crime to decrease. But suppose a nation could be named whose percentage of criminals has remained uniform for the last fifty or a hundred years, and suppose that in such nation during the same period education has become more general, does it follow necessarily that education has no effect as a preventive of crime? Is not crime more apt to be detected and punished as a nation advances in civilization? Are there not many acts considered as crimes in a highly advanced condition of society that are looked upon with less severity in its earlier, illiterate stages? As population grows more dense, as the struggle for life becomes more intense, as the gates of remunerative employment are closed against famishing thousands, as temptations multiply, is it not reasonable to expect crime to increase? Were it not for the restraining effect of intellectual, moral, and religious influences, our opinion is that it would completely disrupt society and resolve its broken fragments into chaos. The philosophers we have named may reason well in many things; in this their inferences are certainly not justified by the facts.

This discussion has prepared us to take notice of an attack which has recently been made upon our public schools, based on the statistics of education and crime contained in the reports of the census for 1860. These statistics, it is alleged, show that in certain States where education is most general crime is very much more prevalent than in certain other States where a large proportion of the people cannot read and write. They are quoted as proving that the moral condition of the New England States, in particular, with their more than two centuries of free schools, is decidedly worse than the moral condition of the States of the South, where until recently free schools were almost unknown. This is the weapon used against the public schools by Mr. Z. Montgomery in California, Mr. Richard Grant White in New York, and by others in various places throughout the country.

It is perhaps a sufficient answer to give to these critics to say that the census of 1860 is not considered reliable as regards the statistics of crime and pauperism, that the reports are acknowledged to be full of errors by those who compiled them; but even if otherwise, even if there were at the time the census of 1860 was taken more convicts in the prisons of Massachusetts in proportion to population than in those of Virginia, more in those of Connecticut and Pennsylvania than in those of South Carolina and Georgia, it does not follow that education does not tend to prevent crime or that an effective public school system is not a boon to society. Other circumstances calculated to affect crime and the criminal statistics of the two sections, must be considered before the question can be settled. Without doubt, in the years that are gone, the machinery for the detection and punishment of crime was more effective in the North than in the South. Certain offences recognized as crimes by the codes of the former section were not so recognized by those of the latter, and imprisonment for offences was comparatively more common. The population of the South was mainly agricultural and thinly scattered over a large extent of territory, while that of the North, especially in the New England States, was crowded into manufacturing towns and villages, and subject to all the temptations such places afford. The South was almost wholly free from the influence of the foreign element, which at the North not only furnished a large proportion of convicts for the prisons, but did much to demoralize those born on the

soil. Besides, in the old slavery times, many petty offences for which persons were sent to jail at the North were punished at the South, if punished at all, on the plantation. It was the interest of the masters to keep their slaves out of the courts. For these reasons there may have been more convicts proportionally, in 1860, in the prisons of the North than in those of the South; but the cause is not to be found in the public schools, for in both sections it is the ignorant that curse our communities with crime and fill our prisons with wretched human beings. And, apart from all misleading statistics, it is an undeniable fact that wherever in this country you find public schools long and well established there you find in the highest degree comfort, thrift, intelligence, culture, and whatever else goes to make happy homes and a prosperous people.

No inquiry into the relation of education and crime can be complete without taking into consideration the effect of education upon erring or neglected children, as shown by its results in our houses of refuge, schools of reform, and homes for the friendless. If the worst of children gathered into institutions of this character—children who, if left to themselves, would almost certainly follow a life of crime and end their days in prison—can be made by education and favorable surroundings, in large proportion, useful citizens, no one can doubt that a most effective mode of preventing crime has been discovered. It may seem marvellous to those who have not given attention to the subject, but the results of our reformatories for the young lead to the conclusion that if the population now filling our penitentiaries and prisons had been properly cared for and educated when young, at least three-fourths of them would have been saved to society and themselves. Let the plain facts be stated.

We have before us a table carefully compiled by the best authorities and contained in the proceedings of a convention of managers and superintendents of houses of refuge and schools of reform, held in the city of New York in May, 1857. This table shows, among other things, the whole number of inmates, their average age, the average period of detention, and the per cent. of reformed in some 17 institutions of the class represented, located in eleven different States. The whole number of children admitted was 20,658, their average age $12\frac{3}{4}$ years, the average period of detention about 20 months, and the percentage of reformed *seventy-five*. Seventy-five per cent. of these incorrigibly bad children, these young criminals, reformed in 20 months! Such is the official record.

The late Dr. E. C. Wines, in his work on the "State of Prisons and Child Saving Institutions," estimates that of the 12,000 children now in the reformatories of the country 60 per cent. at least will be trained into good citizens. "Some would claim," he says, "75 or 80 per cent., but statistics do not bear them out." "Perhaps," he adds, "the percentage of worthy citizens trained up among the whole 25,000 in preventive and reformatory schools would be as high as 75 per cent."

The State Public School of Michigan is known all over the country. Its object is "to save children who are in danger of becoming criminals before they have actually become such." It is a school for pauper and vagrant children, children of evil tendencies, and children whose circumstances and surroundings would almost certainly keep them in ignorance and lead them into vice. Hear the cautious statement of results as contained in the report of the superintendent for 1878: "Considering," he says, "the heredity of these children and the influences which surrounded most of them previous to entering the institution, I am myself surprised at the results. There is no doubt that a large majority of them, left where they were, would have become criminals or chronic paupers; but it looks now as though 80 or 90 per cent. would become respectable if not ideal citizens. Coming years can alone determine what the complete results will be." In a paper prepared two years later the superintendent says: "Enough is known to satisfy us that there are very few of the children who go through the school who will not prove as good in morals and life as the average children in the community. I could not place the loss as low as 5 per cent."

One of the nineteenth century miracles is the work of the Children's Aid Society of

the City of New York, whose head and inspiring spirit is Rev. Charles L. Brace. The children gathered into the schools directly under the charge of Mr. Brace number many thousands. They are children without home or friends, picked up by policemen on the streets or hunted out of cellars, garrets, or dens of vice—the sons and daughters of paupers, beggars, drunkards, and criminals. Can anything be done for this mass of youthful depravity? Many of them have already been initiated into criminal ways or taken the first steps in vice. All of them are extremely poor, and their hard life has blunted their sensibilities and dwarfed their moral nature. Are they not past help? If virtuous men and good citizens can be made from this unpromising material, will any one longer doubt that we have found the new elixir that can transmute the basest of human metal into the purest of gold? Mr. Brace receives these children into his schools, feeds, clothes, and cares for them. Under his charge they enjoy a pleasant home, have kind friends, and are given an opportunity to learn and to work. Their self respect is cultivated, their conscience quickened, and they are filled with a purpose to be somebody and accomplish something in life. As soon as it can be safely done, they are placed in good homes, mostly in the country, out of the reach of the temptations that might allure them back to their old ways. What is the result? Mr. Brace says not more than three children out of a thousand leave his schools to become paupers and criminals. Thus is proven the wisdom of the much quoted but much doubted sentiment of Solomon: “Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it.”

The State of Pennsylvania at the close of the late civil war undertook the task of providing education and maintenance for all the destitute children of her dead and disabled soldiers. In this benevolent and patriotic task the State became the guardian and caretaker of 12,000 children. The children thus provided for must in all cases be in destitute circumstances—in many cases they are found to be in a condition of actual suffering. Their home surroundings in the main could hardly be worse. Orphaned by the war, their poor mothers in most cases were unable to send them to school, to give them employment, or even to keep them out of bad company or prevent the formation of bad habits. When they come under the charge of the State they are generally very ignorant for children of their age, and about as unpromising morally as any children that can be found. What is the result? Of the 12,000 children admitted into the soldiers' orphan schools, nearly 9,000 have been discharged after remaining in school an average length of time of 6 or 7 years. Probably one-half of these have now reached the age of manhood and entered upon the active business of life. Means are at command of ascertaining where they all are and what they are doing, and a careful canvass of the matter shows that not 2 per cent. of the whole have turned out badly, and at least 90 per cent. have become useful men and women. This is a strong statement, but not stronger than the facts warrant. It shows the wonderful uplifting power of educational influences when properly directed with a fair chance to operate. Pennsylvania has expended in this good work nearly \$7,000,000, but she has more than saved that amount from the lessened cost of her poorhouses, prisons, and penitentiaries.

In the face of facts like these, can any one claim that education does not tend to prevent crime? It is true that our public schools do not accomplish all in this direction that ought to be accomplished. They work at great disadvantage. There are hundreds of thousands of children throughout the nation that they have never yet been able to bring within their reach. A very large proportion of those who do attend school remain under instruction but for a short time, scarcely long enough to acquire the merest elements of knowledge, much less to complete an even moderately liberal course of study or to form a stable moral character. And, at the best, the pupils in the public schools of the United States are under the care of their teachers, on an average, only about one-fourth of the hours of the day, and scarcely more than one-fourth of the days in the year. It frequently follows that the good influences of the school are neutralized by the bad influences of the street, and that vicious com-

panions pull down quite as fast as the best of teachers can build up. Then, the popular demand is for intellectual results; and to produce them teachers tax themselves to the utmost, forgetting that moral instruction, the formation of character, the shaping of life, is the grand purpose of all education. With these and other drawbacks that might be named, it is too much to expect the public schools to rid us of all the evils that afflict society; too much to expect attendance at school for a week, a month, a year, with ability to read, write, and cipher a little, to keep men out of prisons and penitentiaries who have had no home training in their youth, who have been allowed to associate with the bad, taking from them daily lessons in vice and crime, and who have grown up idle and without restraint. But with all its defects, we are well convinced that the system of public schools is the most potential agency, by all odds, at work among us to-day, to root up vice, to lessen crime, to lift up the people to a higher plane of civilization, and to save the sacred principles of republicanism our fathers planted on American soil and bade us cherish with our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor.

On behalf of the committee.

J. P. WICKERSHAM, *Chairman.*

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