

## EDWARD HENRY PALMER.

THE LIFE AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF EDWARD HENRY PALMER, late Lord Almoner's Professor of Arabic in the University of Cambridge. By WALTER BEZANT, M. A. With portrait. New-York: E. P. DUTTON & Co. 1883.

The Professor of Arabic who met his death during the Egyptian campaign which ended in the occupation of Egypt by British troops seems to have had a true genius for languages. His early life was that of twenty other boys. He was put to a trade; he dabbled in private theatricals, and thought of going on the stage; he liked queer, vagrom people that dwell in tents, whether those of the circus or of the Romany. Probably the chance that he was brought up in Cambridge decided his career, for to Cambridge he returned while still a young man, having brought from his sojourn as clerk in London only such acquaintance with modern languages as his instinct had made him acquire by frequenting French and Italian restaurants and other places where foreigners resort. Yet Romany had been a hobby of his boyhood while at school in Cambridge, and when he retired from London disgusted with clerking he was already provided with a fair speaking acquaintance with more languages than most young men know. The true reason, he always insisted, of the really brilliant failure to teach modern languages which distinguishes our schools is that we only approach them by the aid of grammars modeled after the Latin and Greek manner, and that we mistake the teaching of inflection and syntax for that of language. Any intelligent person, Palmer maintained, can learn to read a language in a few weeks and to speak it in a few months, unless it be his first attempt at an Oriental language. Among other gifts Palmer had that of mesmerism, and at one time devoted a great deal of thought to it. We know from mentions made of him in Mr. Charles Leland's books about gypsies that Prof. Palmer was a delightful companion and able to impart information with wonderful ease and freshness. His biographer has called on Mr. Leland for further particulars, and some of the pleasantest passages of this Life are contributed from Philadelphia by his friend, admirer, and fellow-haunter of the gypsy camps. All sorts of stories are circulated at Cambridge regarding him. It is vouched for as true by his biographer that the Cambridge police found in a house that had been ransacked by burglars a small piece of paper with queer marks. This was brought to Palmer, who read the marks and told the police that it spoke of another place which was to be entered. The language was "Schmussen" or "Yiddish," the language of German and Polish Jews. The burglars were caught at the place and time specified. Palmer had wonderful presence of mind, which at the last availed him nothing when the treacherous Arabs shot him and his unarmed companions from behind. Once during his first visit to the East, writes Mr. Leland, he was led away by a treacherous guide and betrayed into the power of a gang of Arab robbers, who intended to rob and kill him. Very soon his captors—for such they effectively were—began to treat him rudely. He affected to take no notice of this. Then the insults became more pointed, and finally unmistakable. As if it had occurred to him for the first time, he sprang up in a rage and cursed them all. "This to me!" he roared; and, drawing from his pocket a letter from an English lady, he exclaimed as he flourished it. "Down on your knees, you dogs, and kiss the handwriting of the Sultan." And down went the whole 300 of them on their faces. The second appendix to this vivacious biography is perhaps as interesting as any details about the private life of the Cambridge pundit who fell a victim to the demands of British diplomacy. It is full of testimonials in verse and prose in Oriental languages, in Romany, in Polish, Latin, Greek, Spanish, and Italian. German, French, and English tributes are not wanting. Mr. Leland offers four Romany stanzas, "Moir Pal," and translates them into English verse. "My Brother." Rampal Singh sends a quatrain in choice Sanskrit; Arabic, Turkish, and Persian verses by different friends follow, and there are two short stanzas in Hebrew. It is evident that this volume is meant as the first or introductory volume to an edition of his works. The first appendix—"Palmer's Work as an Oriental Scholar"—is by S. F. Nicholl, M. A., and contains a great deal of curious information on Oriental matters while treating of the lamented Professor. Particularly for those interested in Orientalia is this biography likely to prove vivid and instructive.

*The New York Times*

Published: October 8, 1883

Copyright © The New York Times