

EDWARD HENRY PALMER.

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THE LATE PROFESSOR PALMER.

The intelligence received at the Admiralty from Colonel Warren leaves, unhappily, no room for any further hope. Palmer and his party have been murdered. They were surrounded, captured, taken into the mountains, and then, after two or three days of captivity, they were done to death. For a long time his friends sought comfort in the gleams of hope afforded by possibilities and by conflicting rumours. There was a persistent report that two Englishmen had been killed—where, then, was the third? Alas! the third Englishman was the Sheikh Abdullah, Palmer himself, whom the murderers took for a Syrian effendi. Then it was reported that an Englishman had been seen in the Northern Desert: this Englishman might be Palmer; then it was argued that because Palmer had just gone through the desert alone and unprotected, relying on his knowledge of the people and their language, no harm would happen on a second visit. "It is impossible," said one who had witnessed his power of managing natives, "that any Arab should kill Palmer." There was also the report that he had escaped with the Sheikh Meter Abu Sofieh, and had been carried into Arabia. It is now, however, certain that he is dead; he was not betrayed by any of the Arabs whose friendship he had gained on his first journey, nor was he murdered for the money he had with him, for the murderers knew nothing of it, and the money escaped them. The authors of the crime have to be sought in Cairo, Nakhel, and El Arish. That they will be duly sought and punished we entertain no doubt. The matter has been placed in the best hands; Colonel Warren is no stranger to the wily Oriental. Meantime, the only consolation for this most terrible misfortune is the thought that no soldier ever died more bravely for his country than Palmer; that no more gallant achievement has ever been recorded in history than that first journey of his in which, alone and unprotected, he turned back the tide of fanaticism, and persuaded the countless hordes of the desert to sit down in quiet and become the friends of the Feringhee. A brief record of this journey, drawn up from day to day in letters to his wife, has arrived in England. An official report was drawn up by Palmer for Admiral Seymour, and will, perhaps, some day see the light.

Edward Henry Palmer was born at Cambridge on August 7th, 1840. His parents both died when he was quite young. He was educated at the Perse Grammar School. There was no place for him at Cambridge, while an opening seemed possible in London, probably through family interest. He therefore left Cambridge and came to town, with the view

of entering upon a mercantile career. One knows little of his London life; there can be, indeed, little to tell of a young man's early work in a City house. He learnt, however, French and Italian during these years of City life.

It was in the year 1860 that he determined to give up whatever chances he had in the City of the Golden Pavement, and returned to Cambridge, where after two or three years of study, he entered himself at St. John's, Cambridge. He spent his undergraduate time in reading a great deal of Arabic and Persian, and as little Latin and Greek as possible. A third class in the Classical Tripos marked the extent of his attainments in those languages. Indeed, he never professed at all to be a classical scholar. He took his degree in the year 1867, and it is very greatly to the credit of the Society of St. John's that they recognised his Oriental studies by electing him a Fellow in the same year. This election was, indeed, an endowment of research. The first chance of visiting the East occurred in 1869, when Captain (now Sir Charles) Wilson went out on the Sinai Survey Expedition, accompanied by Captain Palmer, R.E., the Rev. F. W. Holland, and E. H. Palmer. The business of the "pundit" was to investigate the traditions, dialects, and antiquities of the Sinai peninsula. He developed during this journey a wonderful power of quickly apprehending and acquiring dialectic differences, and took his first lessons in the art of managing the difficult tribes of Sinai. Soon after his return in 1870 he made arrangements with the Committee of the Palestine Exploration Fund for a journey of exploration in the very little known Negeb or South Country and the desert of the Th. This he accomplished at very small expense in company with the late Mr. C. F. Tyrwhitt Drake, who was assisted by a grant made by the University from the Worts Travelling Bachelors' Fund. His report of the results of the journey was published in the *Quarterly Statement* of the Palestine Exploration Fund, and has been republished in the book of special papers belonging to the "Memoirs of the Survey of Western Palestine." He also wrote a popular account of the same expedition called "The Desert of the Exodus." In the same year, by the resignation of Mr. Theodore Preston, who had long been non-resident, the Lord Almoner's Professorship of Arabic became vacant, and was given by the late Dean of Windsor to Palmer. This preferment, although only worth 40*l.* a year, enabled him to keep his Fellowship and to marry. The stipend of the Professorship was also increased by the University to 300*l.* a year on condition of his giving lectures in Persian and Hindustani. In the year 1874 he was called to the Bar, and although he never seriously considered the law as a profession, it was one of his chief pleasures to go on circuit, to conduct an occasional case, and to study the curious phases of life presented by a county assize. I believe, however, that he showed considerable power in the exercise of advocacy.

Between 1871 and the present year the real work of his life was done. It is wonderful to consider how vast a quantity of work he got through

during these ten years. It must be remembered, too, that the work was accomplished in the face of ill health—he was always suffering from asthma—and domestic affliction caused by the long illness and death of his first wife. A revision of Henry Martyn's translation of the New Testament into Persian; an Arabic grammar; an Arabic manual; a Persian dictionary; a report on the Bedawin of Sinai; a translation into Arabic of Moor's "Paradise and the Peri"; an edition, with an English translation, of the Arab poet Beha ed Din Zohair; a translation of the Koran; a history of Jerusalem; a life of the Caliph Haroun al Raschid; the "Song of the Reed," chiefly from Arabic and Persian sources; a volume of verses in Romany, written with Miss Janet Tuckey and Mr. Charles Leland; and a translation of the Swedish poet Runeberg (with Mr. Erik Magnusson), make up together a goodly show of work in a short ten years. But besides these books he wrote occasionally for the *British Quarterly Review*—one of his papers on "The Secret Sects of Syria" was a very remarkable article—for the literary journals, for the *Saturday Review*, and for several of the monthly magazines. He translated and transliterated the long lists of names procured by Captain Conder during the survey of Western Palestine, and he was appointed joint editor, with me, of the memoirs of that great work. He was also engaged in preparing a set of manuals and grammars for Messrs. Trübner & Co. at the time when he consented to go out to the desert for the Government. It is impossible for any one to be actively connected with the Palestine Exploration Society without being forced to take an interest in the manifold topographical questions which agitate the minds of the members. Palmer, who took strongly from the beginning a view antagonistic to that of Mr. James Fergusson, contributed for his share of the controversy an account, from the Arab historians' descriptions of the building, of the much disputed Dome. Concerning his linguistic attainments, it is difficult to enumerate the languages which he had acquired, because he was continually learning new ones. Arabic, Persian, Hindustani, Urdu, are some of the Eastern tongues with which he was familiar. He knew Turkish, but not, I think, so well. As regards European languages, he knew French, German, Spanish, Greek, Italian, and Swedish, with its cousins of Denmark, Norway, and Iceland. He knew some Polish and some Russian, but I do not know how far he could be called a master of these languages. He could talk Romany as well as any gipsy on the road. It is a curious fact that he once came across Romany-speaking gipsies in Moab. A striking illustration of his facility and mastery of language occurs to me. We were going together to visit the Foreign Sailors' Home at Limehouse. In the road, just before we arrived at that institution, he espied a friend in charge of a cart filled with baskets—one Stanley or Smith—with whom he exchanged five minutes of question and greeting in Romany. On the steps of the Home were two men basking in the sun: one of these was a Lascar from Calcutta, the other a burly negro who hailed from the Soudan, and talked some kind of Arabic. In the conversation which followed, both men

having a budget of grievances to unfold, it was evidently little or no effort for Palmer to pass from Arabic to Hindustani and back again, turning from one to the other while both talked at once. It is not uncommon to find scholars who have so far mastered languages as to be able to read the literature of many tongues with ease and pleasure, but it is rare indeed to find a man who can speak with equal ease in all or any of the languages he has studied. Palmer was by no means a mere man of books; there was nothing in his ordinary speech, except his extraordinary flow of anecdote, to show that he was a scholar at all. He was a man of small stature, quiet manners, and gentle voice. Yet he was a man who at once impressed every one with whom he came in contact. Perhaps it would not be too much to assert that he had no business or private relations with any man who did not straightway become his friend. Therefore, because he was concerned in many things, he was a man of many friends. It is beyond any power of words to express the loss which those who enjoyed his intimate friendship have suffered by his untimely death.

Another thing: this rare linguist, this extraordinary scholar, possessed to a remarkable degree that power which enables men to become conjurers, thought-readers, so-called spiritualistic mediums. The science of legerdemain had no mysteries for him; he could cheat the senses so that you saw, and steadfastly maintained that you saw, the thing which was not. No doubt the possession of this extraordinary sympathetic faculty stood him in the greatest stead in dealing with the Arabs of the desert. No one else, in fact, could do with these wild people what he could do. He had many methods: he laughed with them or at them; he refused to be moved by their threats; he ordered them; he assumed that they were going to do what he wanted; if necessary he cursed them.

Again, he was an excellent actor: he could "render" a scene with the greatest fidelity and skill, he could multiply himself and personate alone a play with many characters, he could represent to the very life any man he chose to study. And latterly he developed a new power, that of drawing caricature portraits. There exists at his house a portfolio of water-colour drawings in which the features of many friends are depicted with the most good-natured and truthful satire. Another remarkable thing was that although he read very little English literature, and professed to be entirely ignorant of English poetry, he wrote verse with great ease and fluency, both translations and original verse. I hope that when his papers are examined there will be found the materials for giving a glimpse of this side of a many-sided man.

These few words are weak and feeble indeed. Had the man been of lesser power, of lower nature, I could doubtless have spoken more firmly. One wonders whether he ever knew or suspected in the least how great and rare a man he was—how much his friends respected him, and with what bitter hearts they would mourn his loss.

WALTER BESANT.