



## BICKNELL, HERMAN

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**BICKNELL, HERMAN** (1830-75), a translator of Ḥāfeẓ. Born at Herne Hill, Surrey, England, on 2 April 1830, Bicknell was educated at Paris, Hannover, and London's University College and St. Bartholomew's Hospital. After taking a medical degree at the Royal College of Surgeons in 1854, he served in the army as assistant surgeon for six years, first in Hong Kong in 1855 and then for four years in Mianmir, Lahore, where he also studied oriental languages. After returning to England in 1860, he served briefly on the staff at Aldershot but resigned his commission in 1861 in order to travel and study languages. By the next year, he was residing in Cairo, from where he made the pilgrimage to Mecca undisguised, the first Englishman to do so. In 1868 he traveled eastward through Aleppo and spent some months in Shiraz in 1869, studying and translating *ġazals* by Ḥāfeẓ. His other travels took him to America, the Arctic, Ecuador, and the Far East. He died in London on 14 March 1875 and was buried at Ramsgate.

Shortly after his death, Bicknell's *Hāfiz of Shīrāz. Selections from His Poems* (London, 1875) appeared under the editorship of his brother Algernon Sidney Bicknell, whose biographical preface (pp. xi-xii), rewritten for *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1921-22, pp. 472-73), is the standard source. Over forty of the nearly 200 *ġazals* Bicknell translated were reprinted as "The Diván of Hāfiz" in *Persian Literature* (in *The World's Greatest Literature*) with a special introduction by R. J. Gottheil (2 vols., London and New York, 1900, rev. ed. 1902, repr. Norwood, Pennsylvania, 1986, vol. 1, pp. 363-410).

J. D. Yohannan (*Persian Poetry in England and America. A 200-Year History*,



New York, 1977, p. 175) calls Bicknell's Selections "the accepted translation of Hafiz for that age" and asserts that "until the later versions of Gertrude Lowthian Bell, Bicknell's were universally regarded as the best translations of Hafiz in English."

Bicknell's metered and rhymed translations, some replicating or at least giving the impression of Persian monorhyme patterns, exhibit the translator's belief that Ḥāfeẓ "utters an unbroken strain of joy and contentment" and that the peerless Persian lyric poet is "almost the only poet of unadulterated gladness that the world has ever known" (*Persian Literature*, pp. 365-67),

Although dated in its Victorian diction and verse techniques, Bicknell's work is a significant chapter in the tradition of Ḥāfeẓ translations in English by John Nott (1787), John H. Hindley (1800), H. Wilberforce-Clarke (1891), Walter Leaf (1898), Gertrude Bell (1898, 1928), Arthur J. Arberry (1947), Peter Avery and John Heath-Stubbs (1952), Robert Rehder (1966), Michael Boylan (1987), and others, which demonstrate both continuing interest in Ḥāfeẓ in the English-speaking literary world and the persisting inability of translators to bring the 8th/14th-century poet's verse to poetic life in English.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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Given in the text.