



## COWELL, EDWARD BYLES

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**COWELL, EDWARD BYLES** (1826-1903), polymath, scholar, and translator from Indian languages and Persian. Cowell was born in Ipswich of a liberal merchant family. He became interested in Oriental languages at the age of fifteen, when he found a copy of Sir William Jones's works (including his *Persian Grammar*) in the local public library. Self-taught, he started translating and publishing versions from [Hafez](#) within the year. On the death of his father in 1842 he took over the family business, but continued to read voraciously. He married in 1845, and in 1850 entered Magdalen College, Oxford, where he studied for the next six years and catalogued Persian manuscripts for the Bodleian library. He resided in Calcutta from 1856 to 1867, as professor of English history at Presidency College, and from 1858 also as principal of Sanskrit College. In this year he discovered a manuscript of the quatrains (*robā'iyāt*) of 'Omar Ḳayyām in the Asiatic Society's library and sent a copy to London for his friend and Persian student, [Edward Fitzgerald](#); he also published, unsigned, a seminal introduction to Ḳayyām, with translations of thirty quatrains ("Omar Khayyam, the Astronomer Poet of Persia," *Calcutta Review* 30, 1858, pp. 149-62). Having studied Hindustani, Bengali, and Sanskrit with native scholars, he returned to England to take up an appointment as the first professor of Sanskrit at Cambridge. Here he remained contentedly for the rest of his life.

Though Cowell's scholarship came to embrace comparative philology, Welsh, botany and geology, he remained devoted to Persian poetry. He was made an honorary member of the German Oriental Society (DMG) in 1895, was



awarded the Royal Asiatic Society's first gold medal in 1898, and in 1902 became a member of the British Academy. His essay "Persian Literature" in *Oxford Essays* (London, 1855, pp. 156-76) is a fine example of his profound scholarship. His translations of Hafez are reckoned among the best. Cowell occasionally published his work anonymously, and sometimes over the initials E. B. C. All his writings, however, have been verified and listed by his son George, in his biography of his father.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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*Macmillan's Magazine* 30 (1874), pp. 254-58. (5) *Asiatic Journal and Monthly Register*, nos. 37 (1892), p. 88; 38 (1892), pp. 91, 154, 247; 39 (1892), pp. 112, 169; 40 (1893), pp. 136, 195. The following articles were published in *Fraser's Magazine*: "Hafiz," vol. 50 (1854), pp. 288-95; "The Rose Garden of Sadi," vol. 53 (1856), pp. 281-92; "Jami, The Persian Poet," vol. 54 (1856), pp. 603-10; "Hafiz, The Persian Poet," vol. 63 (1861), pp. 228-34.

(Parvin Loloi)