

❁ Chapter 7 ❁

1858: the Aftermath

The crushing of the revolt brought changes in the life of Delhi which could never be reversed. Yet with the new year elements of normality were beginning to return. On December 5, 1857 Ghalib had written that while the Muslims were still excluded from Delhi, 'some of the Hindus, it is true, have returned to their homes'. The British held that it was the Muslims who had been mainly responsible for the revolt, and though Hindus and Muslims were penalized indiscriminately in the period immediately following the re-taking of the city, the Hindus were later freed from the most drastic of the restrictions which had been imposed. Those to whom Ghalib refers must however have been exceptional, for it was not until January 1858 that a general return of the Hindus to the city was permitted. He himself writes of this in *Dastambu*:

'In the early days of January, 1858 the Hindus' freedom was proclaimed, and permission was granted them to return to their homes in the city. From all quarters they hastened back. But on the walls of the homeless Muslims' homes the grass grows green, and its tongues whisper every moment that the places of the Muslims are desolate.'

Ghalib had some cause to rejoice that he was a man who formed sincere friendships in all communities. His Hindu friends were now able to send him wine and to help him in other ways. He writes in *Dastambu*:

'To tell the truth—for to hide the truth is not the way of a man free in spirit—I am no more than half a Muslim, for I am free from the bonds of convention and religion, and have liberated my soul from the fear of men's tongues. It has always been my habit at night to drink nothing but French [wine], and if I did not get it I could not sleep. But these days in Delhi foreign wine is very dear and my pockets are empty. What would I have done had not my stalwart God-fearing . . . friend, the generous and bounteous Mahesh Das sent me wine made from sugar cane,¹ matching French in colour and excelling it in fragrance? Had he not with this water quenched the fire in my heart, life would have left me, and the raging thirst of my soul would have laid me low.

Long had I wandered on from door to door
Seeking a flask of wine or two—no more.

¹ Presumably rum.

Mahesh Das brought me that immortal draught
Sikandar spent his days in seeking for.

Justice is not to be denied, and what I have seen, I cannot fail to speak. This virtuous man has spared no effort that the Muslims might be allowed to return to their homes. But heaven's decree was against him. . . . The Hindus' freedom to return, all know to have come from the kindness of kind rulers, though in this too the works of this man, who loves good and does good and wishes the good well, have played their part. In short he is a good man, who does good to his fellow men and leads a good life amid music and wine. Our acquaintance is not of long standing; yet we talk whenever we chance to meet, and from time to time he sends me a gift; and for both these things I am indebted to him; indeed he does all that kindness could demand. Amongst my other friends and shagirds is Hira Singh, a young man of good heart and of good name; he is very kind to me. He comes to see me and beguiles my sorrow. Among others in this half-desolate, half-peopled city, is that wise young man of illustrious birth, Shiv Ji Ram Brahman. He is like a son to me. He knows my stricken heart, and seldom leaves me all alone, but serves me with all the resources at his command and prospers all my works. His son too, Balmukand, is at one with his father, ever ready in service and unequalled in sympathy. Among the friends who are far from me is that full moon in the sky of love and kindness, that sweetly-speaking poet Hargopal Tufta, my old friend, a man of one spirit and one voice with me. Since he calls me his master in poetry, his verse and all its God-given excellence is a source of pride to me. In short, he is a man free in spirit, love embodied, and kindness incarnate. Poetry is the source of his fame and he the source of poetry's flourishing. In my abundant love for him I have taken him into my heart and soul and dubbed him "Mirza Tufta".¹ He has sent me money from Meerut, and is always sending me letters and ghazals.

'I had no need to record these things, but I have been at pains to do so, for I wished to render thanks to God for my friends' love and human kindness. . . .'

The other source of comfort to him during the first six months of the year was the steady successes of the British in crushing the revolt in its remaining centres. He records his satisfaction at every fresh victory—on February 20th, when a salute of twenty-one guns 'roaring like the giants of the land and the monsters of the deep', celebrated the success of a major attack on the rebels at Lucknow; on Wednesday, February 24th, when the Chief Commissioner, ' . . . upright cypress of the garden of justice, bright moon of the skies of splendour . . . commander of forces bright and innumerable as the stars, rode into Delhi . . . while the voice of thirteen guns brought to men's grieving hearts the news of coming balm of mercy and kindness, and the universal rejoicing made one think that the days of Shahjahan had returned;' on Thursday, March 18th, when 'the

¹ Mirza is strictly speaking the form of address appropriate to men of Mughal (Turkish) stock, such as Ghalib himself. It was also conferred as a title by the Mughal emperors.

azure vault of the sky rang with the voice of the guns, bringing the glad news of the expected recovery of Lucknow'; in early May, when Muradabad was taken and handed over to Nawwab Yusuf Ali Khan [of Rampur]; and with special satisfaction on June 22nd, when Gwalior was taken from the rebels.

'On June 22nd, a Tuesday, which is the day of Mars, the hours of that planet's influence had not yet passed and the lord of day . . . had not yet risen a lance's height from the eastern horizon, when the furious voices of the guns that roar to heaven—guns equal in number to the days of June already passed—caused the hearts of their friends to leap in their breasts from excess of joy, and rained on the heads and faces of their enemies ashes more hot than blazing fire. [They announced] the taking of the city of Gwalior, that fort of stones . . . carved from the mountain's heart.'

Ghalib seems to have seen this as sealing the fate of the revolt.

'It seems that all signs now proclaim the evident end of these lost men, who had fled from all directions to gather in Gwalior, and have now suffered such patent defeat. For some days more, broken and desperate, they will range the land, raiding and robbing on the roads, to meet in the end at every point, degradation and destruction. You will see their horses coursing the grassless deserts until they stumble and their breasts scrape the ground as they breathe their last. You will find their equipment weltering in the mud of flowing watercourses. Then Hindustan will be swept clear of thorns and straw, and every corner of the waste will bloom with luxuriant verdure, and every by-lane shine with the radiance of prosperity.'

But the over-all tone of *Dastambu*, and of most of his letters of this period, is not one of rejoicing. The passage of *Dastambu* quoted above, in which he says that he has written about the kindness of his Hindu friends because 'I wished to render thanks to God for my friends' love and human kindness' continues without a break,

' . . . and because I desired that when this tale reached my friends they should know that the city is empty of Muslims. No light burns in their homes at night, and no smoke rises from them by day. Ghalib, who knows this city, who had a thousand friends, who had a friend in every home and an acquaintance in every house, now dwells in loneliness with none but the voice of his pen to speak with him and none but his shadow to bear him company.

My face is pale; only the tears of blood
Bring colour to the cheeks whence colour fled.

My soul and heart are grief and fear entire
And briars and thorns the texture of my bed.

Had not these four men [i.e. the Hindu friends mentioned earlier] been in the city there would have been none even to witness my helplessness.'

His letters express his feelings more fully—his grief for the loss of his dead friends, the loneliness which oppresses him in his enforced isolation from those who still survive, and (what receives little or no emphasis in *Dastambu*) his continuing fears for his own position. On January 19, 1858 he tells Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan:

'So far we are still alive—I and my wife and the children—but no one knows what may happen from one hour to the next. When I take up my pen there is a lot I should like to write. But I cannot write it. If we are fated to meet again I will tell you about it all. And if not, then "Verily we are for God and verily to Him we shall return." I heard about [the death of] the little girl. May Almighty God keep her mother safe, and give her patience to bear her loss. I look upon it as the little girl's good fortune. . . .'

A letter to Tufta dated January 30, 1858 speaks of his position *vis-à-vis* the British authorities. It is still the same, he says: the authorities know that he is in Delhi, but he has not been sent for. He goes on:

' . . . and I on my side have made no move either. I have not been to see any of the authorities, or written to them and made any application to them. I haven't received my pension since May. Judge for yourself how I have passed the last ten months. I cannot tell how it will all end. I am alive, but life is a burden to me. Hargobind Singh has come here, and has visited me once.'

But now Tufta was able to send him money from time to time. In a letter written only four days later he acknowledges a gift of a hundred rupees:

'Late in the afternoon of Wednesday, February 3rd the postman brought me a registered letter. I opened it and found your draft or bill, or whatever you call it, for Rs. 100 inside. I sent off the servant with the receipt with my seal on it, and in little more than the time it takes to get there and back, he was back with a hundred rupees in coin. I had borrowed twenty four . . . so I repaid that, gave fifty to my wife, and put the remaining twenty-six in my box; and as I had to open the box to do so, I wrote this letter at the same time. Kalian [Ghalib's servant] has gone to the shops. If he is back soon I will send him to post this letter today. Otherwise it will be tomorrow. May God reward you and keep you. These are evil days, my friend, and I cannot see them ending well. In short, everything is finished.'

Only two days later he had fresh cause to feel alarmed and depressed. *Dastambu* tells us:

'It seems to have occurred to the ruler of the capital [the Commissioner], perhaps at the prompting of black-hearted informers, that the houses of the physicians of Raja Narendar Singh had become a rallying centre and place of refuge for the Muslims. (And indeed it may well have been that this concourse harboured one or two fugitive rebels.) Accordingly on Tuesday, February 2nd, he came with a band of soldiers, and without doing them violence, took away the owners of the houses along with . . . some others. For several nights and days they were held in custody, but without dishonour to honourable men. On Friday, February 5th, orders were issued that Hakim Mahmud Khan and Hakim Murtaza Khan, with their cousin Abdul Hakim Khan, known as Hakim Kale, should be permitted to return home. On the Friday following, February 12th, a few more, and then on Saturday 13th three more, also returned. But more than half of those who had been taken were still detained.¹ My wounded heart could not be proof against my neighbours' troubles . . . and though in these arrests I was not questioned, I have not slept soundly by night or lived carefree by day from that day to this; and my care is not without cause.'

His anxiety is reflected in the letters which he wrote during these days. On February 7th he writes to Majruh:

'Today is Sunday, February 7th—i.e., I think, the 22nd of Jamadi us Sani 1270 AH. About midday Shaikh Musharraf Ali, who lives in Ustad Hāmid's Lane, came to bring me your letter dated 15th Jamadi us Sani. The letter you sent through the post never reached me; and yet I have not been out of the city, and am still living just where I was. God knows why your letter was returned to you. I ask you, is it possible that I should get a letter from you and send it back? You say yourself that "Addressee not here" was written on it. If it had reached me would I have written on it that I was not here? I regularly receive letters from Agra and Alwar and Aligarh.

'I was very distressed to hear of your mother's death. God grant you patience to bear it, and forgive her her sins. My brother too, Mirza Yusuf Khan, died insane.

'My pension? What prospect have I of getting that? I shall be lucky to survive—

A raging sea of blood lies in my path—
would that were all!

Time may show perils more than this
rise to confront me still.²

¹ The remainder were ultimately released, but not until April.

² Ghalib here quotes a couplet from one of his own ghazals.

If I live, and the day comes when we can again sit together, you shall hear my story. You write that you want to come here. If you do, don't come without a permit. You write that Mir Ahmad Ali Sahib is here. I don't know where. He would have done well to come and see me. I am not in hiding or living here secretly. The authorities know I am here; but I have neither been interrogated nor arrested; nor have I made any attempt to see them. All the same I am not out of danger yet. We must wait and see how it will all end. . . .

'Maikash¹ is enjoying himself, using his plausible tongue as he wanders around. He was in Sultan Ji; now he is in the city, and has been to see me two or three times. But he hasn't been for the last five days or so. He told me he had sent his wife and boy to Mir Wazir Ali in Bahrapur. He himself goes around buying up looted books. I was glad to hear that Miran Sahib is safe and sound; but you didn't say whether his family is with him or whether he is on his own there. If he is on his own, where is his family? Your younger brother, I know, is here and is well. Why didn't you write any news of your elder brother? I have not had much to do with him, but I regard you and him alike as my own sons. Don't hesitate to write to me, or have any qualms about sending your letters by post.'

On February 8, 1858, he wrote to Saqib:

'I got the letter you sent by Hakim Mahmud Khan's servant, and was glad to learn that you are safe and well. Be reasonable! Where would I find any books? The loot has been sold off in holes and corners, and even if it had been sold in the street, where would I have had the chance to see it? Be patient and say no more about it. . . .

'People are entering and leaving the city now. God grant that you get news from time to time of what is happening here. If we survive it and are fated to meet again I will tell you everything. Otherwise, to put it briefly, everything is finished. I am afraid to write anything, and what is there, anyway, that one would feel any pleasure in writing about? . . .'

In a letter to his old friend Hatim Ali Beg Mihr, undated, but written perhaps about this time, he suddenly breaks off and exclaims,

'Alas for Major John Jacob! What a fine man met his death. . . . He too is one of those whom I mourn. Thousands of my friends are dead—I cannot bear to think how many—and none is left to hear my lamentation. If I live, there is none to share my sorrow, and if I die there will be none to mourn me.'

February 27th brought a faint gleam of hope in that on that day, it seems, the authorities announced their readiness to receive petitions. But hope is hardly the keynote of Ghalib's entry in *Dastambu*:

¹ Cf. p. 129 above.

'The order to "Stand back" was withdrawn; sorrowing men who sought justice . . . were permitted to draw near. Know that in Delhi now the cells within the city and the jails without are so swollen with men that it seems that they meet and merge. None but the Angel of Death can tell the number of those from both jails that have . . . gone to the gallows. You will not find more than a thousand Muslims in the city, and of that thousand the writer of these words is one. Of those who took to flight some have fled so far that one would think that they had never inhabited this earth. Many men of high rank encircle the city four to five miles off, and lie waiting in mounds and pits and huts and houses of mud, half-sleeping like their fortunes.¹ Of these dwellers in the wilderness some are those who wish to enter the city, some the kinsmen of those in custody, some who like pensioners live on scraps. In all their petitions they beg for nothing more than the alms of release from jail, or return to their homes, or re-issue of their pensions. Already there are two to three thousand petitions before the courts. The petitioners' eyes are on the road and their ears alert to see and hear what may befall.'

Ghalib was one of them. In February, when the news came that the Chief Commissioner, Sir John Lawrence, would shortly visit Delhi, he had written:

'It has always been my custom to present an ode in his praise to every ruler who comes to govern this country, and especially to this city. I therefore wrote in the praise of this man of high splendour a ghazal on the theme of spring, congratulating him on his victories and singing of the freshness of the breezes of the unfolding season, and sent it off by post on Friday, February 19th.'

Hence he now writes:

'And my heart too is not pure of the desire for reply to the humble petition which I despatched by post. Sundry misgivings have so far prevented me from presenting myself at the Commissioner's house and seeking a meeting with him. In short, sorrows beset me like piercing thorns. . . .'

He at length received a reply to his letter of humble submission. First, on March 8th, it was returned to him, with instructions to re-submit it through the Commissioner of Delhi. He complied, adding a note asking that his pension be restored to him. 'On Wednesday, March 17th, from the Commissioner's headquarters came his command—that there was no call whatever for a letter comprising nothing but praise and congratulation.' One cannot help thinking that it was with his tongue in his cheek that he wrote the words which immediately follow: 'And I too reflected, "In these turbulent days what room indeed is there for kindness and humanity and praise and congratulation?" I am a slave to my belly; I need to eat. Let us see what response my second petition is thought to merit.'

¹ Cf. note to p. 139 above.

A little later he writes,

'Since March 22nd a sadness haunts my distraught soul: the world once held a month of Farwardin¹ and a day of Nauroz,² and that radiant day used to dawn among the todays and tomorrows of this time of year. But this year this city is perhaps a city of the silent,³ for I do not hear the cries of welcome to greet the coming of spring. . . . But the sun has not forgotten to sojourn in the mansion of the Ram, that the grass may not grow and the flowers may not bloom. No, the order of nature does not change and the heavens may not revolve in any path but that ordained for them. My tears are for myself, not for the garden; my lamentations for my fate, not for the spring.

The rose's scent, the tulip's colour,
fill the world
While I lie pinned beneath the heavy
rock of care.
The spring has come, but what have
I to greet it with?
Helpless, I close my door, that none may
enter there.

I weep and think to myself how heedless is my fate, that I must sit sorrowing in a corner, with my face turned to the wall and may not see the greenery and the flowers, nor let the fragrance of the rose pervade the senses of my soul. Yet the radiant spring is not less radiant for that, and I may not claim recompense from the breeze.'

All the same, not all the letters, even in this period, reflect anxiety and dejection. While some were clearly written under emotional strain, others show that there were times when Ghalib's troubles weighed less heavily upon him. The letters themselves show his varying moods, and little or no comment is called for. On March 5, 1858 he writes to Mihr:

'Complaint itself bears witness that the
pain has passed.
The heart's pain comes out through the
tongue, and finds release.

My friend, your humble servant does not take your complaint ill. But complaint is an art which no one knows but I. The excellence of a complaint consists in this: not to turn one's face from the truth, and not to leave the other person any scope for a rejoinder. Can I not make rejoinder to you that I had

¹ The first month of the Persian calendar. The 1st of Farwardin falls on the 20th, 21st, or 22nd of March.

² The Persian New Year's Day.

³ The regular metaphor for a graveyard.

been told that you were going to Farrukhabad and so did not write? Can I not say that I wrote you several letters during this period, and all of them were returned to me? What you write is no complaint against me; you are simply laying your own sins at my door. When you left you sent me no word of where you were going, and when you got there you sent no word of where you were staying. Yesterday your kind letter arrived, and today I am sending you one in reply. Do I not then live up to my claims? It is not well to harrass the afflicted too much. You are displeased with Mirza Tufta simply because he has not written to you. I do not even know where he is these days, but I have today put my trust in God and written to him at Sikan-darabad. Let us see what we shall see.'

Somewhere about the same time he writes to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan:

'Wake up, brother? When did I ever enclose a letter? And when did I ever write that I was forwarding a letter from Sher Zaman? It was just a joke. Sher Zaman in his letter to me had asked me to pay his respects and I said I was enclosing them in my letter. That was all. You have received his respects, wrapped up, so to speak, in my letter to you. So put your mind at rest.'

Tufta had evidently written to enquire whether he might send his verses for Ghalib to correct. Ghalib replies on April 12, 1858:

'Why do you ask whether you should send me your verses? Send them and think nothing of it, no matter whether there are four folios¹ or twenty. I am no longer a writing poet—only a poet-critic. Like an old wrestler who is only fit to teach others the holds. Don't think I am posing. I have altogether lost the ability to write, and when I see what I wrote in former days I am at a loss to understand how I could do it. But anyway, send me the folios soon.'

Tufta must have done so, for Ghalib writes again on April 25th:

'The postman brought the packet you sent me. . . . I am on my own, and have nothing to do all day long. I read it all attentively and thoroughly enjoyed myself. I tell you truly, your verses have delighted me. Long may you live! . . .'

On April 20, 1858 he writes to Majruh:

'The post brought me two letters from you. Yesterday shortly after midday a stranger—a dark-complexioned man, with a trimmed beard and big eyes—came with a letter from you. In due course I asked him his name. He told me, "Ashraf Ali". I asked his community, and was told he was a Sayyid.² His

¹ The Urdu word usually means a section of a book, consisting of eight leaves.

² A descendant of the Prophet through his daughter Fatima.

profession? He was a hakim. In short, Hakim Ashraf Ali. I was very pleased to make his acquaintance. A nice man, and a resourceful man too. What a mean fellow you are! "*Mustalihat ush Shuara*", "*Mustalihat ush Shuara*"! Yes, brother, the book is yours. I haven't misappropriated it; I've borrowed it; when I've finished with it I'll return it. Why do you keep pestering me for it? . . .'

In April 1858 he writes to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan:

'Hakim Sahib¹ was kind enough to call upon me one day. I cannot express the heartfelt pleasure it gave me. May God grant him long life! Practically none of my friends and acquaintances survived this upheaval; and for that reason those that are still left are very dear to me. And now I pray to God that none of them may die before me. For if I die there should be someone left in the world to remember me and weep for me.'

About the same time, he writes to his young friends Shihab ud Din Khan and Ghulam Najaf Khan; it seems they had been planning to bring out a fresh edition of his diwan, and had sent specimen verses for him to see. It produced an explosion:

'Brother Shihab ud Din Khan, what in God's name have you and Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan done to my diwan? God knows what child of adultery has inserted the verses you have sent me. After all, the diwan is printed. If these verses are in the text they are mine, and if they are entered in the margin they are not mine. And if they do occur in the text the explanation is that some pimp has scratched out the original verses and written in this trash. In short, curses upon the scoundrel who wrote these verses, and on his father, and on his grandfather and on all his bastard ancestors back to the seventieth generation. What more than that can I say? What with you, and the boy Miyan Ghulam Najaf, misfortune has come upon me in my old age that my verse has fallen into your hands.

'After I had written these lines your letter came. I had already heard of this second misfortune. It is all the doing of fate, and leaves no room for complaint. Let us hope that permission will soon be granted you to return to your estates so that you may all be re-united and live in peace. Tell your calligrapher not to include that trash in his text, and if he has already written these two pages, make him take them out and substitute new pages, written out afresh. You had better send someone to me with the diwan that your calligrapher has written, so that I can look through it and send it back. Well, that's all. I am sorry, but today I haven't got either a stamp or the money to buy one. . . .'

Having vented his wrath, he did not harbour any malice. In his next letter,

¹ Hakim Ahsanullah Khan.

dated April 12th he writes, 'I got your letter. There was nothing in it that called for a reply, but then I thought you might be upset if I didn't write, so today I am writing to you. . . .'

The same month he writes to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan:

'I expect you have heard about Mustafa Khan [Shefta]. God grant he may be released when the sentence comes up for review; for how can one who has lived in luxury stand a seven-year prison-sentence? Have you heard the news about Ahmad Husain Maikash? He has been hanged—as though there was no one else of that name in Delhi.'

The implication of the last sentence is, perhaps, that someone named Ahmad Husain (which is a common name) had been wanted for a capital offence, and that because this was Maikash's name, the authorities had assumed it was he. Ghalib continues in the same despondent tone:

'I have applied for my pension to be renewed. But even if it is, how far will it go? True, there are two points about it—first, it will mean I am cleared of suspicion, and secondly, as the people say, "I shan't starve". . . . I get some pleasure from Bedil's lines:

Our evenings bring no tidings of a coming morn;
Our mornings show no glimmer of the dawn's white grace;
When all our strivings end in nothing but despair
Take the earth's dust and fling it into heaven's face.

I felt like talking to you, and I have told you what I was feeling. I have nothing more to write now.'

In April 1858 he fell ill. On May 24th he writes to Tufta:

'After I had sent you my last letter I fell ill, so ill in fact that I thought I should die. It was the colic, and so bad an attack that it had me writhing in pain the whole day long. In the end I took gamboge and castor oil. For the moment I am better, but this is not the end of the story. I will put it briefly. You know the sort of meal I eat when I am in good health? Well, in ten days, on two occasions only, I ate half that amount—in other words, I regaled myself on one full meal in ten days. Mainly I lived on rosewater and essence of tamarind and juice of Persian plums. Yesterday I no longer felt that I should die, and it began to look as though I might survive. This morning I have taken my medicine and written you this letter, and I am sure that today I shall be able to eat my fill. . . .

'Well, are brother Munshi Nabi Bakhsh Sahib and Maulvi Qamar ud Din

Khan Sahib still absorbed in their fasting, or have they recovered consciousness now? Today is the 10th of Shawwal,¹ 1274 A.H. Even the day to break the Shasha fast² has gone by. For God's sake write and tell me how they are. And submit this epistle to our brother's radiant gaze. Perhaps he'll write to me.'

To Majruh he writes in May:

'Well, my friend, what do you say? Am I a man to reckon with or am I not? When I read your letter I recited this verse two hundred times:

The time when we shall meet draws near;
Affection's flame burns brighter.

I sent Kallu [Ghalib's servant] to Maulvi Mazhar Ali Sahib with a message not to go out anywhere, as I was coming to see him. That was a smart move, wasn't it? After all he's not my father's servant, to come when I send for him. But he sent back word that I must not trouble myself, and that he would come to me. And so he did, within an hour or so. . . .

'Listen, I've discovered the knack of living without eating, so put your mind at ease on that score. During Ramzan I ate every day; and for the future, God will provide. If I can't get anything else I'll feed on sorrow. Well then, so long as there is something to feed on, even if it is only grief, why should I grieve?

'Give Mir Sarfaraz Husain a hug and a kiss for me. Give my blessing to Mir Nasir ud Din and my greetings to Mir Ahmad Ali Sahib. To Miran Sahib I send neither greeting nor blessing; give him this letter to read and then send him on his way here. I've just had a good idea. There is no need for him to stay outside the city and wait for me to send for him. He can come in a carriage, a coach, a conveyance—that is, by the mail, and get off right by my house in Ballimaron muhalla. Maulvi Mazhar Ali lives in Mirza Qurban Ali Beg's house, and there is only Mir Khairati's mansion between his house and mine. Nobody dares to hold up the mail. If he acts on this plan and sets out as soon as this letter arrives he can still be here in time for Id.'

However, he seems to have had second thoughts about this last suggestion, for in a letter to Sarur—undated, but almost certainly written shortly after this—he says:

'I learned of how you had proposed to come here, and how at your uncle's advice you had postponed your intended visit because of the great heat. Your uncle's dissuasion was something of a miracle. If you had travelled by the mail you would have reached my house, but it would have been dangerous to stay

¹ The month which follows Ramzan.

² A period of six days in Shawwal when some Muslims fast.

in the city without first obtaining permission from the authorities. Had the matter not come to their knowledge, then of course all would have been well; but if they should come to know of such a thing, there would be trouble. On no account should you make the mistake of thinking that things are run here as they are in Meerut and Agra and the eastern areas. This comes under the Panjab, and there is neither law nor constitution. Anyone in authority may do exactly as he thinks fit. But anyway:

I grieve because I cannot see my friends
And for no other thing.

God willing, there will be peace and order here too in another two or three months. . . .¹

We may note in passing that he speaks later in the same letter of the care he takes with verse sent to him for correction: 'I have, as usual, noted by each correction the reason I have made it.'

On June 19, 1858 he writes to Tufta:

'Well, what is it, Sahib? Why are you angry with me? It must be a month since I heard from you—or it will be in a day or two. Work it out for yourself. You know how many friends I had, and how I was never without two or three of them around me. And now there are only two—Shiv Ji Ram Brahman and his son Balmukand, who visit me from time to time. Then I would always be getting letters—from Lucknow, and Kalpi, and Farrukhabad and I don't know where else. And now I don't even know what has happened to all the friends who used to write them; I neither know where they are nor how they are faring. The old stream of letters has dried up. There are only you three¹ that I can expect to write, and two of you only occasionally. You, it is true, usually favour me once or twice a month. Listen Sahib, make it a binding rule to write to me once a month. If you have occasion to, write twice or three times. Otherwise just post off a line to tell me how you are. . . . If you are not cross with me answer this letter the day after it reaches you. Let me know how you are, and how Munshi Sahib [Nabi Bakhsh Haqir] is, and how Maulvi Sahib [Qamar ud Din Khan] is. Also be sure to tell me, in words suited to the needs of the times, whatever you know about the disturbances at Gwalior . . . and what the situation is in Agra. Are the people there afraid at all, or not?'

At the end of June—immediately after an entry for June 22nd—comes an entry in *Dastambu* recording his feelings as he enters his sixty-fourth year reckoned by the Muslim calendar:

¹ Ghalib means Tufta, Nabi Bakhsh Haqir, and Maulvi Qamar ud Din Khan.

'Sixty-three years of my life have passed, and the infinite woes which ceaselessly beset me proclaim the impertinence of looking to fate to grant me many more years of life; and involuntarily I hear the pleasing voice of the poet of Shiraz [Sadi], on whose shining spirit be all my blessings, singing the lines of his enchanting verse; and as one mourner draws consolation from another, his melody brings me, not happiness to be sure, but a moment's release from the bonds of grief:

Alas for all those springs and all those flowers
The world will look upon when we are gone!
Springs, summers, winters—all will come and go
When we are mingled in the dust and stone.'

On June 26, 1858, he writes to Tufta, who was busy at this time, it appears, with getting his diwan printed:

'God give you long life and happiness! . . .

God give you joy, because you gave me joy!

What gives me most joy is that you have made writing perform the function of speech. I already knew of all your busy activities in getting your diwan printed and so on. All your money in the bank will go on paper and calligraphy.

'Well, God preserve you! People like you are precious these days. I am very fond of the verse which Rajab Ali Beg Sarur puts at the head of his story *Fasana i Ajaib* (The Tale of Wonders):

Men such as we bring glory to an age.
Remember us, the story of an age!

. . . I'd already heard of the birth of a son to Munshi Abdul Latif [Nabi Bakhsh Haqir's son] and sent a letter of congratulations . . . Things with me are just as usual:

The same old heart, the same old bed,
the same old pain.'

On July 18, 1858 he again writes to Tufta:

'Why haven't you written all this time? . . . I liked our friend Qasim Ali Khan's verse very much. By a lucky coincidence the letter came at an auspicious time. A few days earlier I had given a man a Persian cloak and a two-and-a-half-yard shawl to sell, and he brought me the money just as the letter arrived. I took the money and read the letter and had a good laugh to think at what a happy time it had come.'

To Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan, probably in July 1858, he writes:

'Have you made any plans to come to Delhi? . . . My dear boy, you know my position. It's not as though I were here without the government's permission; and I cannot leave Delhi without a permit. So what can I do? How can I visit you?'

On August 8, 1858 he writes to Majruh:

'Mir Ashraf Ali gave me your letter. You write that the letter I wrote you was delivered to someone else of the same name. That's *your* fault. Why do you live in a city where there's another Mir Mahdi?¹ Look at me. In all the time I've lived in Delhi, I've never allowed anyone else of the same name, or nickname, or takhallus to live here. That's all there is to it.'

We have seen that as soon as circumstances permitted, Ghalib had raised the question of his pension with the British authorities. A letter to Tufta on March 12th adds a little to the account already quoted from *Dastambu*:

'Let me tell you what has been happening. My petition came before the Chief Commissioner, Sir Henry Lawrence. He wrote on it that it should be returned, with the documents attached, to the petitioner, who should be instructed to submit it through the Commissioner of Delhi. Now the proper course would have been for the office superintendent to write me a formal letter. This was not done, but the petition, with the Chief Commissioner's instruction written on it, was returned to me. I wrote a letter to Mr Charles Saunders, the Commissioner of Delhi, and enclosed the petition with it. The Commissioner sent it to the Collector, with orders to send him particulars of my pension. The case is now before the Collector, but so far he has not carried out his instructions. The matter came before him two days ago. We must wait and see whether he makes any enquiry of me or just sends his own personal opinion. There can hardly be any past papers there for him to consult. At all events, thanks be to God that nothing has been found in the royal papers which implicates me in the disorders, and that I have a clean enough record with the authorities to warrant their asking for the particulars of my pension. . . .'

But the months passed by, and nothing more happened to encourage his hopes. His last entry in *Dastambu*, made at the end of July, shows to what straits he was reduced. Not only had every regular source of income ceased, but his wife's jewellery—traditionally the very last reserve of an Indian family—was gone. He writes:

'I marvel at the varied wonders of Fate. In the days of killing and looting, when

¹ Majruh's name. (Majruh is a takhallus.)

it seemed that every house in the city was emptied even of its dust, my house escaped the looters' grasping hands. Yet I swear even so that nothing but clothes to wear and bedding to sleep upon was left to me. The answer to this riddle and the key to this false-seeming truth is this: that at the time when the black rebels seized the city, my wife, without telling me, gathered her jewels and valuables and sent them secretly to the house of Kale Sahib.¹ There they were stored in the cellar, and the door of the cellar blocked up with clay and smoothed over. When the British soldiers took the city and were given leave to loot and kill, my wife revealed this secret to me. Now there was nothing to be done; to go there and bring them back was impossible. I said nothing and comforted myself with the thought that we were destined to lose these things and that it was well that they had not been taken from our own home. And now it is July—the fifteenth month—and I see no sign that I shall again receive the pension which the British government formerly granted me. And so I sell the clothes and bedding to keep body and soul together, and a man might say that where others eat bread, I eat cloth. I go in fear that when all the cloth is eaten I shall die naked and hungry. Of the servants who had long been with me there are some few who even in this tumult did not desert me. These too I must feed, for in truth, man may not turn his back on man, and I too need them to serve my needs. Besides these are those suppliants who in former days laid claim to a share in the gleanings of my harvest. Even in these bad times they cry to me, and their cry, more unwelcome than the cock's untimely crow, pierces my heart and adds to my distress. And now that these raging sicknesses and sorrows which oppress my body and soul have sapped all my strength and spirit, the thought comes suddenly to my mind, "How long can I occupy myself adorning this toy I call a book?" For this distress must end either in death or in beggary. In the first case, this tale must needs for evermore lack an ending . . . and so sadden its readers' hearts. And in the second case, the one clear outcome is that I must raise the beggar's cry from door to door, here gathering a crumb, there driven with abuse from the lane and humiliated in the open street. And for how long should I tell such a tale, myself spreading the fame of my disgrace? Now even if my pension is restored it cannot wipe clean the mirror of my heart, and if it is not, that mirror will itself be shattered, as by a stone. And . . . whichever may befall, the air of this city will be noxious to such ruined ones as I, and I must go and live in some strange land. From May of last year to July of this I have written what has befallen, and from the 1st August I stay my pen.'

He then expresses the hopes which even now he entertains, of a title, a robe of honour, and a pension granted by Queen Victoria's grace, and adds thirty-four lines of verse in her praise. The final paragraph reads:

'After completing this book I named it *Dastambu* (A Posy of Flowers), and

¹ Cf. p. 71 above.

sent it from hand to hand and from place to place to sustain the souls of the learned and steal the hearts of the eloquent. And it is my hope that this handful of the flowers of learning may be a posy of colour and fragrance in the hands of the God-fearing, and a globe of flame in the sight of them that are of Satanic nature. . . .'

However, on August 7th something happened which raised his hopes once more. He tells Majruh in a letter of August 8, 1858:

'The position about my pension is that the chief of police had been asked to furnish particulars. He reported favourably. Yesterday, Saturday August 7th, Mr Edgerton sent for me and put a few simple questions to me. It looks as though I may get the pension. The only question is, shall I get the fifteen months' arrears as well, or shall I only get it from now on?

'There has been some progress in the case of Ghulam Fakhur ud Din Khan, and the outlook seems favourable. God willing, he will be released. Sahib, I have got tired of that Persian work [*Dastambu*] and have brought it to a close. I have written that it contains an account of the fifteen months to August 1st, 1858, and is now concluded.'

The mention of the pension and of *Dastambu* in the same letter is significant. We have seen that whatever Ghalib's original intention may have been when he started writing it, he had at some stage conceived the idea of using it as a means of inclining the British authorities favourably towards him. It was after all a work of great virtuosity, such as a poet aspiring to win the patronage of the great could present with justified pride, and most of Ghalib's letters in which he refers to it regard it in this light.

Now having completed the book, he became increasingly keen to put his plan into effect. From August to early November his letters are full of it, and it is clear that the more he thought about it, the more important he thought it to be as a means to the recovery of his pension. By September 3, 1858 he is writing to Tufta, whose help he had sought in this connection, that the task with which he has entrusted him is 'one in which my whole being is involved, so many are the aims which I hope to achieve through it. In God's name I beg you not to regard it indifferently; put your whole heart into it.' During these months he is quick to note every sign that his standing with the British is improving. In a letter of September 29, 1858 he writes to Mihr:

'I do not know Mr Edmonstone by sight, as I have never seen him; but I have made his acquaintance by letter, because whenever a new Governor-General comes I send an ode to be presented to him. . . . When Lord Canning was made Governor-General, I posted off the customary ode, and when the Chief Secretary Mr Edmonstone replied, I found that despite the fact that we had never met, he had addressed me with greater honour than before. Up to then

I had been styled "Khan Sahib, our most kind well-wisher"; but Mr Edmonstone, true judge of worth that he is, had written "Khan Sahib, our most kind and affectionate friend". Shall I not then count him my patron and benefactor? I would be an infidel not to recognize where gratitude is due.'

Unfortunately for Ghalib, and perhaps still more unfortunately for his friends, conditions in Delhi in August 1858 were still so far from normal that there could be no question of his having *Dastambu* printed there under his own supervision. He therefore entrusted the task to his friends in Agra, and in the first place to Tufta, writing them repeated letters full of the most detailed instructions, and experiencing every kind of apprehension whenever they neglected to inform him at once how his instructions were being carried out. Extracts from these letters tell their own story.

On August 17, 1858 he writes to Tufta in terms which show that he had not previously told him that he had been writing a book, for he begins by telling him what the book is, and what sort of language it is written in. He goes on:

'I have written in it in the same hand as I am writing this letter—not too closely-written, but not with over-much spacing either, and it is on unlined paper, so that the number of lines to the page varies between nineteen and twenty-two. There are forty pages—i.e. twenty leaves. Closely written, at nineteen lines to a page, you might get it into a book of two sections.¹ There is no press here—or rather, I am told that there is one, but that its calligrapher doesn't write a good hand.² If arrangements can be made to print it in Agra, let me know. Short of money as I am, I could pay for twenty-five copies; but no press is going to print as few as that, and anyway we ought to print at least five hundred, if not a thousand. I feel sure that a print of five- to seven-hundred would work out at three or four annas a copy. Only one manuscript will be needed. As for paper, it won't need much. I've already explained about the writing of the text; true, the meanings of words will have to be written in the margins. Anyway, if possible get an estimate and work out the costs and write to me. . . . Be sure to let me have your answer on these points *without fail*. To impress this on you, I am sending this letter unstamped.'

Tufta apparently approached their mutual friend Hatim Ali Beg Mihr about this. Ghalib writes in his next letter:

'Why did you speak to Mirza Hatim Ali Sahib about it? All I had expected was a letter from you telling me that you had shown the work to Mirza Sahib and that he had liked it. As it is, give him my regards, and tell him I express my thanks to him for expressing his thanks to me. I understand what you say about the printing. When you read this letter you will understand. I want it

¹ The standard number of pages to a section of an Urdu or Persian book was sixteen.

² Urdu books were, and for the most part still are, produced by lithography from a text prepared by a professional calligrapher.

printed carefully and quickly, because I intend to present a copy to the Nawwab Governor-General Bahadur, and, through him, to send another to Her Majesty the Queen of England. . . .'

On August 28, 1858 he sends him good news:

'This letter will be sent to you by my great benefactor Rae Umid Singh Bahadur. As soon as you have read it, go and call on him, and as long as he is there continue to attend upon him, and to carry out all his commands with regard to *Dastambu*. Get him to read it and come to an understanding with him about the price per copy. He will pay the cost of fifty copies. Get that from him, and when the book is printed, send ten copies to him at Indore and forty to me, in accordance with his instructions. Be sure to tell me how matters stand with regard to the five *de luxe* copies I wrote to you about.'

In the same letter he gives him detailed instructions about inserting a rubai which he had inadvertently omitted from the manuscript.

The arrangements which Tufta and his friends were making on his behalf brought him into contact with Munshi Shiv Narayan Aram, an enterprising young man in his twenties who published a newspaper from Agra and owned a press. It appears that Aram's first letter to Ghalib was a request to see what he could do to get subscribers to his paper in Delhi; he also asks Ghalib to write an ode which he wants to present to an English official, and says that, hearing that Ghalib makes his own envelopes, he is sending off a packet to him to save him the trouble. Ghalib replies:

'I received your letter, and the newspaper, and the news of the envelopes you are sending me. You should not have troubled. Making envelopes keeps me amused. What else has an idle man to do? But, anyway, when they arrive you shall receive my grateful acknowledgements. For:

Whatever comes to us from friends, is good.

Where would I find anyone here to subscribe to your paper? The money-lenders and merchants who inhabit this city go around finding out where they can buy grain most cheaply. If they're exceptionally generous men, they'll weigh you out full measure. What do they want with a paper at a rupee a month?

'Your letter reached me yesterday. All last night I sweated blood to compose your ode, and managed one of twenty-one lines in fulfilment of your order. My friends—Mirza Tufta especially—know that I can't compose chronograms. But in this ode I have found a way of expressing "1858". I hope you will like it. You yourself appreciate poetry, and you have three friends [Tufta, Haqir, and Mihr] who are masters of the art. So my efforts will receive their due meed of praise.'

In his next letter he gets down to business. Aram's letter has just arrived, and he is replying at once. He proceeds to give the most detailed instructions:

'The point is I don't want the book to be of two or four sections only. There should be at least six. There should be ten or eleven lines to the page, with wide margins on three sides and a rather narrower one towards the binding. I have already written all this to Mirza Tufta, but, heedless fellow that he is, he's probably told you nothing. Also the text should be correct; there must be no need for a list of errata; you please attend to this yourself.'

Then follow instructions on what kind of paper is to be used and much more. Then:

'Someone who will buy fifty copies has come to Agra. For God's sake tell Mirza Tufta to go and see him—Raja Umid Singh Bahadur of Indore. He lives in Chali Int, at the back of the police station. It's surprising that your letter has come but that Mirza Tufta hasn't acknowledged receipt of the parcel. . . . Please tell him to go and see Raja Umid Singh; and oh yes! impress upon him to be sure without fail to insert the rubai I sent him—[here he repeats the detailed instructions which he had given Tufta only three days earlier]. You remind him, and see that he writes to me without fail.

'I was astonished to read in your letter that the Sahib¹ had liked it when you read it to him. ["It" presumably means *Dastambu*.] I can't think what part of it you must have read to him, because I can't imagine that he would understand this kind of writing. Write to me about it in detail.'

The tone of anxious impatience becomes stronger in succeeding letters, and, along with it, an anxiety not to offend the friends on whom he is depending and an occasional panic fear that he *has* offended them and that all is lost. On September 1, 1858 he writes to Tufta:

'Sahib, this is a strange state of affairs! I wrote to Munshi Shiv Narayan Sahib at your instance, and yesterday received a letter from him acknowledging the receipt of *Dastambu*. He can't have received it through the post. *You* must have sent it to him. So how is it that *you* didn't acknowledge receiving it and didn't answer my letter? Even if I assume that you were waiting until after you'd called on Raja Umid Singh, you must have done that too by now. It looks to me as though you've withdrawn from it all; you've handed over the book to the press and aren't concerned any more to see that it is printed correctly and nicely produced. If that is so, I give this edition up for lost, and all I hoped to attain by it will vanish. But why should you behave like that? I can only think

¹ Presumably some English official—perhaps the one for whom Ghalib had written the ode.

you must be cross with me. For God's sake write and tell me why. I am sending off this letter this morning, Wednesday, September 1st. If I get a letter from you by this evening, well and good. Otherwise I shall feel convinced of your displeasure, and because I shan't know the cause of it, I shall be in misery. I on my side can't think of any reason for it. For God's sake write quickly, and if you are cross, tell me why.

'I know you won't even have called on Rae Umid Singh. God forfend! I am put to shame. I had told him that oh, yes, Mirza Tufta would give him all the help he needed in reading *Dastambu*.

'Since I suspect you are cross and want to be rid of the whole affair, I ought not to ask you to do anything else for me. But what can I do when I have no choice? I have to tell you. The proprietor of the press addressed his letter to me "Mirza Nosha Sahib, Ghalib". For God's sake! What an incongruous phrase! I'm only afraid that he'll put the same thing on the title page of the book. Hasn't my Persian diwan or the Urdu one, or *Panj Ahang* or *Mihr i Nimroq* or any other of my printed books ever reached your city? He could have seen my name on them. And you too haven't told him. It's not just because I hate this nickname that I am wailing about it. The point is that the Delhi authorities know it, but from Calcutta to Britain—that is in Ministry departments and in the Queen's entourage—nobody is acquainted with this confounded nickname. So if the proprietor of the press puts "Mirza Nosha Sahib Ghalib" I am lost, finished, and all my efforts will have gone for nothing. They will think the book is by someone else. I write this and think to myself, "Let's see whether he'll pass on the message to the press or not."

His much-harassed friend must have replied at once, for two days later, on September 3rd, Ghalib writes: 'Thank God you wrote to me and put my mind at rest'—after which he at once goes on to complain! 'You don't read my letters properly. I certainly never said that it should be a book of thirty-two pages. What I said was that it would go into thirty-two pages, but that I wanted it to be bigger.' Small wonder that, judging by a later passage in this same letter, Tufta seems to have asked him whether it was really impossible for the book to be produced in Delhi under Ghalib's own supervision.

On two other occasions the question of the name and style to be entered on the title page was discussed. On September 3, 1858 Ghalib writes to Tufta:

'Make it clear to Munshi Shiv Narayan that he is not on any account to use my nickname. The name and takhallus are enough. To write my titles [i.e. those conferred on him by the Mughal King] would be not only inappropriate but harmful. But he can put in the word "Bahadur" after my name, and my takhallus after that—"Asadullah Khan Bahadur, Ghalib".' Tufta then asked him whether he should not use his full name—Muhammad Asadullah Khan—and whether the name should be preceded by 'Mirza', 'Maulana' or 'Nawwab'. Ghalib replies on September 17, 1858:

'Listen, sahib; for every letter of that blessed word—*mim, ha, mim, dal*¹—I would sacrifice my life. But since none of the authorities from here to Britain uses it in addressing me, I too have dropped it. As for "Mirza", "Maulana" and "Nawwab", you and our brother [Hatim Ali Mihr] can use your discretion and write what you like.'

These and other details continue to keep them fully occupied. Ghalib wants two more lines inserted at one point in his manuscript; he discovers that he has inadvertently used an Arabic word; this must be erased and a pure Persian one substituted; and so on and so forth. As one reads his letters one feels that he too deserves sympathy. He gives his instructions in the utmost detail, often taking the precaution of repeating them to two, or even to all three—Tufta, Mihr, and Aram, and regularly closing his letters with a point-by-point recapitulation of what he wants done. And despite all this he cannot get them to tell him whether they have received and understood his directions and acted upon them; while sometimes it is quite clear that they have overlooked or ignored them. Still, their joint efforts have succeeded by mid-October in the book being produced to Ghalib's entire satisfaction. Among the Indians to whom he must have sent it shortly afterwards was the Nawwab of Rampur. From a letter dated November 7, 1858 we gather that he sent him a copy of his Urdu diwan about the same time. Of this he speaks with characteristic indifference; it is *Dastambu* that he urges the Nawwab to read:

'I learned from your letter that my Urdu diwan, and the book, had reached you. It is for you to decide whether you wish to read the diwan or not; but please be sure to read the book. . . . It is in ancient Persian, and has both beauty of meaning and skill in artistry. And along with these, I have used the utmost care and circumspection in everything I have written.'

The last sentence is significant.

Ghalib was particularly gratified by the care which Mihr had taken with the *de luxe* editions. On October 16, 1858 he had written about them to Tufta: 'Tell Mirza Sahib that my ears have heard of their beauty, but my heart will believe it more readily when my eyes have seen it.' Then, on November 20, 1858:

'Yesterday, Friday 19th November, I received a parcel of seven books from Maulana Mihr. My tongue cannot find words to praise them, they are so regally embellished. . . . It worries me to think that he may have spent his own money on it. You find out about it, there's a good fellow, and let me know.'

He wrote to Mihr himself on the same day:

¹ In the Urdu script short vowels and the doubling of consonants are represented by diacritical marks, not by letters. Hence the letters of the word 'Muhammad' are simply those which Ghalib names—equivalent to 'm h m d'.

'My dear brother, yesterday—blessed and auspicious day—was a Friday, and one which brought me all the joys of Id.¹ An hour and a half before sunset your letter of good tidings came, and an hour and a half later, at sunset:

'A parcel came, containing seven books. . . .

A man can hardly ever hope to attain all that his heart desires, but I have attained it beyond anything I could conceive of. I could never have imagined such a beautiful get-up. . . . As long as the world lasts, may you live on in it! . . . Now I am at a loss to know whether you have invoked the twelve Imams and they have imparted miraculous increase to the twelve rupees I sent, or whether you have spent money of your own. Postage on two parcels, two registration fees, three books with the titles in gold lettering—how could Rs. 12 run to all these things? And how can I find out? Whom am I to ask? God grant me that you will not stand on ceremony and will not hesitate to tell me the position. . . . When men love each other truly, with a religious and spiritual love, there is no room for ceremony. I am most grateful. Your kindness puts me to shame. What more can I write?

Silence alone can praise a thing that is
beyond all praise.'

Even the harassed weeks and months which had preceded this satisfactory result had yielded their moments of pleasure. Ghalib enjoyed even the sheer volume of the correspondence involved. He writes to Nabi Bakhsh Haqir on September 22, 1858:

'Amidst all these troubles, how I laugh to think that you and I and Mirza Tufta have turned correspondence into conversation.² We talk together everyday. By God above! these will be days to remember. What letters upon letters we have written! I spend half my time making envelopes. I am either doing that or writing a letter. It's a good thing that postage is only half an anna. Otherwise we'd have seen what this conversation cost us!'

But there were deeper satisfactions than this. In 1857 Hatim Ali Mihr, with his uncle's help, had saved the lives of seven of the English by giving them shelter in his house. He was now rewarded by the British authorities with an estate of two villages and with other honours. It was probably in this period that Ghalib heard the news and wrote to express his sincere pleasure:

'You showed real courage, and staked your life on it. It is your manly and resolute conduct which has brought you this reward. What more can the world give than wealth with good repute? . . . How well I remember the time when

¹ The great day of rejoicing celebrating the end of the month-long fast of Ramzan.

² The idea and the turn of phrase clearly appealed to him. He repeats it in a letter of about this time to Mihr.

Mughal¹ spoke to me about you, and how she showed me the verses in praise of her beauty which you had written with your own hand. Now a time has come when letters pass between us. But if God Almighty wills it, the day will come when we shall sit and talk together and lay our pens aside.'

In October he discovered that there had been a long-standing connection between his family and Shiv Narayan Aram's. On October 19, 1858 he writes to him:

'Munshi Shiv Narayan, my son, I had no idea who you were. When I discovered that you were the grandson of Nāzir Bansi Dhar I felt I had discovered a beloved son. From now on if I address you formally I'll count it a sin. You won't know about the relations between my family and yours. Let me tell you.

'Your [paternal] grandfather's father and my [maternal] grandfather Khwaja Ghulam Husain Khan were companions in the days of Najaf Khan². . . . When my grandfather retired from active service and returned home your great-grandfather also retired. This was further back than I can remember. But I can remember when I was a young man seeing my grandfather and yours, Munshi Bansi Dhar, together, and when my grandfather laid his claim for his estate . . . before the government, Munshi Bansi Dhar acted as his agent and managed the whole thing on his behalf. He and I were about the same age—there may have been a year or two's difference one way or the other. Anyway I was about nineteen or twenty and he was about the same. We were close friends and used to play chess together; we would often sit together until late into the night. His house was quite near mine and he used to come and see me whenever he liked. There was only Machia the courtesan's house and the two by-lanes between us. Our big mansion is the one that now belongs to Lakhmi Chand Seth. I used to spend most of my time in the stone summer-house near the main entrance. I used to fly my kite from the roof of a house in one of the lanes nearby and match it against Raja Balwan Singh's. There was a big house called Ghatia Wali, and beyond that another near Salīm Shah's takiya³ and then another adjoining Kale Mahal and beyond that a lane which used to be called Gadariyon Wala and then another lane called Kashmiran Wala—that was the lane where the house was. Your grandfather had a man named Wāsil Khan who used to collect the rents for him.

'And listen! Your grandfather had made a lot of money. He had bought land and acquired a big estate which paid something like ten or twelve thousand rupees in land revenue to the government. Have you inherited all that? Write to me soon and tell me all about it.'

Of the three most directly concerned with seeing *Dastambu* through the press, it was poor Tufta who came off worst. Ghalib's friendship with him was

¹ A courtesan whom Ghalib and Mihr had both known, cf. p. 203 below.

² The last imperial minister of any distinction. He died in 1782.

³ The abode of a faqir.

already of long standing and could bear the greatest strain; and moreover he was Ghalib's pupil in the art of poetry and, as a dutiful pupil, must carry out his master's commands. When Ghalib scolds him he does so bluntly—despite an occasional fear that he may have gone too far. When he addresses Mihr, on the other hand, he is more tactful about it, and adopts a humorous tone. He had asked Mihr to arrange for the regular dispatch of an Agra newspaper to Hakim Ahsanullah Khan, but Mihr had apparently neglected to carry out his instructions. Ghalib writes on September 20, 1858:

'Was it such a difficult matter, that you should not have done as I asked? And if it was, was it difficult to inform me that it was? At present I am not complaining; I only ask you whether you don't agree that these things warrant a complaint? I have written all about it in a letter to Mirza Tufta. Didn't he show you the letter either? I have racked my brains for some explanation of the delay, but I can't think of one, and now, leaving aside whether my request is carried out or not, I think to myself "Let's see whether I get a letter from Mirza Sahib [Mihr] in the next six months, or the next year, and, if so, what he has to say on the matter. I too am a poet, like him, and if a suitable theme had suggested itself I too would have thought of it." I can't think of any excuse worth listening to: let me see what *you* will think up when you write.'

On this occasion he must on the next day have felt profoundly thankful that he had been so tactful. On September 21, 1858 he writes:

'Forgive me that in my simplicity
I sin against you and still ask your praise!

Yesterday morning, Monday 20th September, I wrote a letter reproaching you, and posted it off unstamped. At midday the postman came and brought a letter from you and one from Mirza Tufta. I learned that the letter to which I was demanding a reply had never reached you. I felt ashamed of myself for complaining, and, equally at a loss to understand why my letter had not reached you. In the afternoon I opened my box to get a stamp for a letter I had written to Mirza Tufta, and saw a letter addressed to you lying there. I saw what had happened; I had written you the letter, but forgotten to post it. I cursed my forgetfulness and realized that there was nothing I could say. I hope you will forgive me.'

The publication of *Dastambu* seems to have suggested to Shiv Narayan Aram and Tufta the idea of collecting and publishing Ghalib's Urdu letters too. It is interesting to note his reaction. He writes to Aram on November 18, 1858:

'As for your wish to publish the Urdu letters, that too is unnecessary. Hardly any of them were written with proper thought and care, and apart from these

few the rest are just what came on the spur of the moment. Their publication would diminish my stature as a writer. And leaving that aside, why should we let others read what only concerns us? In short, I do not want them to be published.'

Tufta must have tried to persuade him, for two days later, on November 20, 1858, he writes again both to him and to Aram. He tells Tufta: 'I don't want the letters to be published. Don't keep on about it like a child. And if nothing else will satisfy you, why ask me? Do as you like. I am against it.' And to Aram, a little more politely: 'I have already forbidden you to publish the letters, and you and Mirza Tufta must respect my wishes in the matter.' It is interesting that the reason which Ghalib puts first is that his letters are not good formal prose—which still meant, in his day, the elaborately contrived, rhythmical and rhyming prose based on Persian literary models. This, as we have seen, he could write extremely well; but it never seems to have occurred to him to have attempted anything similar in Urdu, and now he thinks about it, he wonders whether Urdu is capable of producing really good prose at all. In another letter to Aram on December 11, 1858 he refers to a request made to him by Mr Henry Stuart Read to write a book in Urdu prose for use in the schools. (Read was Director of Education in what was later to become United Provinces.)

'But, friend, you can imagine for yourself—if I write in Urdu how can my pen wield its full power, and how can I express the niceties of meaning? I am still wondering what to write. . . . If you have any ideas, write and tell me.'

Later on he was to be persuaded of the literary value of his Urdu letters, and helped to collect copies of them for the collections published in 1868 (the year before his death) and 1869. And there is no doubt that these collections helped to win the battle to make the colloquial Urdu of educated speakers the standard literary language also.

Ghalib's attitude to his Persian prose was different. Here too one can gather from his letters that Aram was trying to collect his past writings, perhaps with a view to publication. In the same letter of December 11, 1858, Ghalib writes to him:

'You must have been wondering why I did not answer your letter. The thing is that I cut my hand badly near the thumb when I was cutting a pen, and it swelled up so badly that for four days I had difficulty even in eating. Anyway, I am all right now. You did well to buy *Panj Ahang*. It was printed twice, once at the royal press and once at Munshi Nur ud Din's press. The first is defective, and the second full of mistakes. How can I tell you? Ziya ud Din Khan of Loharu is related to me and is my pupil in poetry. Whatever I wrote in prose and verse he used to take and keep. He had spent about a hundred and fifty

When you become his friend why should
the sky¹ become his enemy?

And if—which God forbid—it is more mundane griefs that beset you, then my friend, you and I have the same sorrows to bear. I bear this burden like a man, and if you are a man, so must you. As the late Ghalib says:

My heart, this grief and sorrow too is
precious; for the day will come
You will not heave the midnight sigh, nor
shed your tears at early morn.²

He goes on to speak of verses about which Mihr must have written to him, recalls and quotes three couplets of a ghazal of his own with the same rhyme as one of them, but in a different metre, and by the metre of another is reminded of a short poem in the same metre which he had composed extempore during his stay in Calcutta years ago.

'The occasion of it was this: I had a friend, Maulvi Karam Husain. We were sitting with some of our friends when he put on the palm of his hand a polished betel-nut and said to me, "Can you write a poem describing this in various similes?" I sat down there and then and wrote a poem of nine or ten couplets, which I handed to him; and I received the betel-nut as my reward. I am trying to remember the couplets and am writing them down as they come back to me.'

He succeeds in recalling seven couplets—the full poem has twelve—and ends: 'Well, there you are, Sahib, I've answered your letter. . . .'

In a second letter, dated December 20, 1858, he tells Mihr that he has sent off copies of *Dastambu* in various directions, but has so far had no response. Then he quotes his own verse:

The seven heavens² are turning night and day:
Something will happen—set your mind at rest.

This sets him thinking of the other verses of the same ghazal and he writes out as many as he can remember, and for good measure follows it up with another. He ends his letter: 'It's Monday morning, December 20th. I have a brazier burning and am sitting by it warming myself and writing this letter. These verses came to mind, so I wrote them out and am sending them to you.'

With Aram he is by this time on sufficiently informal terms to tell him something which in his first letter to him a few months earlier he had politely kept to himself:

'Your letter with the package of envelopes has just come. Friend, I can't help

¹ i.e. fate.

² Whose movement determines men's destinies. Cf. p. 107.

it, but I don't like these envelopes with "From . . ." and "To . . ." and "Date . . ." and "Month . . ." printed on them. The lot you sent me before I also gave away to friends. I'm sending back this package of envelopes so that you can send me plain ones instead—without "To . . ." and "From . . ." printed on them—(like the ones you send your own letters in)—and take these in exchange. And if you haven't got plain envelopes, it doesn't matter. I don't really need them.'

Ghalib had promised to get a seal engraved for him, and Aram must have asked if it could be done on an emerald. Ghalib's letter continues:

'As for the seal, where in this desolate city can you get an emerald?—and that too the size of chick-pea, and eight-sided. The seal will be of cornelian, and of a good colour—black or red, as you wrote in your earlier letter, and eight-sided. I shall be sending you this seal—what concern of yours is it whether it cost four annas a letter or six annas? If you want to get a seal engraved yourself, do—on an emerald or a diamond or what you like. I'm giving you one on cornelian. . . .

'Read Sahib is playing the sahib with me. How can I produce my best if I am to write in Urdu? . . . At the most, my Urdu will be more elegant than other people's. Still, I will do something. . . . Vomiting and diarrhoea? It sounds as though you've been drinking some inferior kind of wine, and too much of it. Take some sort of cooling medicine, and don't drink so much. . . . When I wrote to Tufta that he was cross with me I did it in the same spirit as I once wrote the same thing to you. Good heavens, he is like a son to me: I know very well he wouldn't be cross with me. I have had two or three letters from him since then, and am posting one to him by the same post as I send this letter to you.'

Tufta was indeed 'like a son' to him, and he had the satisfaction of knowing that Ghalib relied on him more than any other to help him feel that life was worth living. On December 27, 1858 he writes:

'Well, Sahib, are you still angry? And are you going to keep it up? Or will you cool down? And if you won't cool down, then at least tell me what has upset you. In this solitude it is letters that keep me alive. Someone writes to me and I feel he has come to see me. By God's favour not a day passes but three or four letters come from this side and that; in fact there are days when I get letters by both posts—one or two in the morning and one or two in the afternoon. I spend the day reading them and answering them, and it keeps me happy. Why is it that for ten and twelve days together you haven't written—i.e. haven't been to see me? Write to me, sahib. Write why you haven't written. Don't grudge the half-anna postage. And if you're so hard up, send the letter unstamped.'

The light-hearted tone half hides Ghalib's pitiable position. What he had written to Tufta six months earlier was still true. A man whose house had never been empty was forced to spend his days in loneliness, and depend on a handful of correspondents to help him feel that his links with his friends were still there. He was still without any regular income; Delhi was still closed to its former Muslim inhabitants, and no-one knew when they would be allowed to return. Some were waiting in nearby villages. Others had dispersed further afield. Majruh, for example, was in Panipat. Ghalib sometimes felt that he and his friends would never be able to meet again. On September 7, 1858 he writes to Majruh:

'In short I fear that parted friends will never be reunited, unless it be on Judgement Day. And what chances are there even then? The Sunnis will assemble in one place, the Shias in another, the good on this side and the bad on that.'

In his financial straits he felt his wife and adopted children more and more a millstone round his neck. Already in April he had written to Ghulam Najaf Khan:

'Family cares are the death of me; they are a bondage in which I have never been happy. God had kept me childless, and I returned Him thanks. But my thanks were not pleasing and acceptable to Him . . . out of the same iron from which my collar of servitude was made He forged two fetters for my hands. Oh, well, it's no good crying over it. This imprisonment is for life. . . .'

Later in the same letter, speaking of the possibility of getting his pension back, he writes:

'If I had been on my own, how well and how carefree I could have lived, even on this small income! But it is madness to talk like this. *If* I were single, and *if* my pension were renewed, I *might* live in comfort. . . .'

In July he is even more depressed: 'Delhi is no longer a city, it is an inferno,' he writes to an unknown correspondent. By August he had actually decided to try and get his wife and the children taken off his hands. His relatives were now confirmed in the possession of their Loharu estates, and Ghalib writes to Alai, the son of Nawwab Amīn ud Din Ahmad Khan (on August 23, 1858):

'I have already explained fully to your father and to your grandmother and your uncle what I want of them. In brief, it is that my wife and children are their kinsmen and they should take them off my hands, for I can no longer shoulder the burden of supporting them. . . .'

This makes it virtually certain that an undated letter to Nawwab Amīn ud Din Ahmad Khan belongs to this time. In it Ghalib writes:

'My brother, for sixty years your forebears and mine were in close relationship to one another, and as for our own personal relations with each other, for fifty years I have given you my love, regardless of whether or not you also gave me yours. For forty years our love has been mutual; I continued in my love for you, and you in your love for me. And does not the general closeness of our families and our special closeness to each other demand that we begin to love each other as true brothers? Is that closeness and this regard any less than the bond of blood-relationship? How could I hear of your distress and not be myself perturbed and want to come to visit you? But what can I do? Do not think I exaggerate: I am a body from which the spirit has departed . . . and I grow worse with every day that passes. My cooling drink at morning, my meal at midday, my wine in the evening—the day that any one of these is not ready on time, I am prostrate. By God, I cannot come. I swear by God, I cannot. What beats in my breast may not be a heart, but it is not a stone; I may not be your friend, but I am not likely to be your enemy. I may not love you, but I am not likely to hate you. Today you two brothers occupy the place of [your ancestors] Sharf ud Daula and Fakhur ud Daula. I am a childless man, "neither begotten nor begetting".¹ My wife is your sister, and my children your children, and so are my niece and her children. Not for your own sake but for these defenceless ones I pray for you and for your long life. It is my heart's desire—and if God Almighty wills, it shall be so—that you may live, and I may die before you both, so that this tribe may receive its bread at your hands. And if you cannot give it bread, you will at any rate give it parched gram. And if you don't give even that, and take no thought for them, well, it will mean nothing to me. As I conceive it, grief for these wretched ones will not trouble me as I die.'

In the letter of August 23, 1858 to Alai, Ghalib continues:

'And they [Nawwab Amīn ud Din, his brother, and their mother] have agreed to my request, provided that they [the wife and children] go to Loharu. I intend to travel, and if my pension is restored I shall use it for my own needs. When I find a place I like I shall stay a while, and when I tire of it I shall move on.'

But nothing seems to have come of these plans. At the end of the year (December 19, 1858) in a letter full of rather grim humour, he writes to Tufta:

'Your letter has come and told me all I wanted to know. I feel sorry for Umrao Singh, and envy him too! Wonderful are God's ways! There is he, who has twice had the fetters struck from his feet,² and here am I hanging for the last fifty-one years with my neck in the hangman's noose—and the rope doesn't

¹ A quotation from the Quran of a verse which, in the Quran, describes God.

² i.e. he had twice been married, and both wives had died.

break, and I don't die. Tell him, "I'll look after your children; why do you let your troubles get the better of you?"¹ The line you quoted is one of Hakim Sanai's and the story is in his *Hadiqa*: "A son came weeping to his father and said, 'Please arrange my marriage' The father replied, 'My dear son, live in sin with some woman, but do not talk of marriage. Learn sense, not just from me, but from all the world. If you are caught in fornication you will still be released in the end. But if you marry you are bound for life, and if you leave your wife you are disgraced.'" [The original is in Persian verse.]

'So you've stayed in Sikandarabad. Why not? Where else would you go? You've spent all you had in the bank, and what will you live on now? My friend, nothing that I suggest and nothing that you think of will make any difference. The heavens keep turning and what is to be, will be. We have no power, so what can we do? We have no say in it, so what can we say? Mirza Abdul Qādir Bedil is right:

Why should you covet power and wealth?
And why forsake the world?

Do this or that—it makes no odds,
For all will pass away.

Look at me—neither bond nor free, neither well nor ill, neither glad nor sad, neither dead nor alive. I go on living. I go on talking. I eat my daily bread and drink my occasional cup of wine. When death comes I will die and that will be an end of it. I neither give thanks nor make complaint, and all my words are no more than a tale. But, after all, wherever you are and however you fare, write me a letter once a week.'

Not all of his troubles were so serious. On November 18, 1858 he writes to Sarur:

'My kind friend, your kind letter of November 15th reached me today, Thursday, 18th November. If a letter from Marahra [Sarur's town] reaches Delhi in four days, how is it that a letter from Delhi to Marahra takes longer? See, to please you I am sending this letter unstamped. ['From this,' notes Mihr, 'it seems that Sarur had himself asked Ghalib to send his letters unstamped.'] But let me know what day it reaches you.'

He then goes on to explain the circumstances in which he wrote *Dastambu*, and continues:

'So I am sending you a copy. As a matter of fact I am presenting it to my most revered and respected master, Sahib i Alam. Since he is your elder I could not

¹ Hali, in a note on this letter, says that Umrao Singh had argued that for the sake of his children he should marry a third time.

have the temerity to present it to you, telling you to give it to him to read too.

'Alas, what havoc these scribes play with the works of the masters! Well, you can expect anything of them. But I could not have thought that you and my master [Sahib i Alam] would have failed to recognize a scribe's mistake.'

He then quotes, in the scribe's incorrect version, a verse of the Persian poet Urfi and after some detailed comment continues:

'God save us! Even if Urfi had drunk a great mugful of Indian hemp or a full bottle of wine, he could never have written that. His line goes like this, poor fellow. [He then quotes it and explains its construction.]

'What I write next is addressed to my master, Sahib i Alam. Though we are of the same age, I am his disciple; though we practise the same art, he is my master; and I trust he will forgive my shortcoming. I am sixty-three years old; I have gone deaf; but there is no defect in my sight, nor do I wish to resort to spectacles. But if my sight is keen, my understanding is dim, and I cannot read your handwriting. In my two previous replies I had gone by guess work; I had not been able to read your letters properly. After all, Chaudhri Sahib [Sarur] is your devoted admirer, and as close to you as any of your kin. Let *him* write down faithfully whatever you command him. I will reply to everything as soon as I hear from you that you have received the book and when I receive your letter, re-written in Chaudhri Sahib's hand.'

This was not the first time that he had had to complain of Sahib i Alam's hand, and it was not to be the last. In an earlier letter (undated) he had written to Sarur, 'I am forced, in my complete perplexity, to return the enclosed letter to you. For God's sake copy out the revered words of my spiritual lord and master on another sheet and send it back to me, so that a miserable wretch can see what he wrote.' From another letter to Sarur dated December 1, 1858, it seems that Sahib i Alam had ignored the request he had so politely expressed in his letter of November 18th:

'I had requested [Sahib i Alam] to get you to write whatever he had to communicate. He has ignored this and has again written me something in his own special hand. I swear to God that neither I nor anyone else could read it. Don't say a word to him, but copy it out in your own hand and have it sent to me. Be sure to do this, and do it quickly.'

Burdened as he was by personal troubles, he was still alert to note what was going on in the wider world around him. On September 21, 1858 he writes to ask Mihr whether it is true what people are saying, viz. that 'in Agra proclamation has been made, and it has been announced at the beat of the drum, that the [East India] Company's contract has been ended and India brought under the British Crown.' If so, he says, it is good news. About a month later he writes to Aram:

'Let me tell you the news from this city. An order has been issued that on the night of Monday 1st November all well-wishers of the English are to illuminate their houses, and there are also to be illuminations in the bazaars and on the Deputy Commissioner Sahib's bungalow. Your humble servant, even in this state of penury, not having received his appointed pension for the last eighteen months, will illuminate his house, and has sent a poem of fifteen couplets to the Commissioner of the city.'

The purpose of this, which, it seems, was not revealed until the night in question, was to proclaim the end of the Company's rule and the bringing of India directly under the Crown.

On November 20, 1858 he tells Tufta of 'the general amnesty now proclaimed'. And finally, in a letter of December 22nd to Majruh, he surveys the Delhi scene, and calmly and humorously, if without much hope, speculates on what the new year will bring:

'Bravo, Sayyid Sahib! What distinguished prose you've started writing; and what a distinguished pose you've started striking! For several days I've been intending to answer your letter, but the cold has put me out of action, and today, now that it's cloudy and the cold less intense, and I've decided to write to you, I'm at a loss to match the enchantment of your style. You've lived so long by the watercourse in Urdu Bazaar that you've yourself become a river of eloquence—Urdu's Mirza Qatil,¹ in fact! But never mind all that. I'm only laughing at you. Come, let me tell you what's happening in your beloved Delhi.

'The well near the pool in front of the Begam Bagh gate in [Chandni] Chauk has been filled up with stones and bricks and rubbish. Several shops near the entrance to Ballimaron have been demolished, and the road widened. There is still no order permitting anyone, rich or poor, to return to his home in the city, and as for pension-holders, the authorities are not concerned with them. Taj Mahal, Mirza Qaisar, the wife of Mirza Jawan Bakht's brother-in-law Mirza Wilayat Ali Beg Jaipuri—all of these have been released in Allahabad. The King, Mirza Jawan Bakht, Mirza Abbas Shah and Zinat Mahal have all reached Calcutta and will be embarked aboard ship. Let us see whether they will be kept at the Cape or sent to London. People here have hazarded a guess—you know what Delhi's inventors of news are like—and spread a rumour which has now spread throughout the city that in January 1859 there will be general permission for people to return to their homes in the city, and bags and bags of money will be given to pension-holders. Well, today is Wednesday, December 22nd. Saturday will be Christmas Day and the Saturday following January 1st. If we live we shall see what happens. Let me have a reply to this letter, and soon. . . .'

¹ A very left-handed compliment! Qatil, to Ghalib, typified all that was objectionable in Indian 'authorities' on Persian.