

❁ Chapter I I ❁

1862

Ghalib's first letter of 1862 was that to Aram already quoted in the previous chapter—the only one to Aram in this year. A second, dated January 19, 1862, to Maududi tells the welcome news of the release of Ghalib's old friend Azurda:

'Our revered Maulvi Sadr ud Din [Azurda] had been in detention for a long time, but he was brought before the court for trial, and at the end of the proceedings the court ordered that his life be spared. He lost his employment, and his property was confiscated. Willy nilly, in his penury he made his way to Lahore. There the Financial Commissioner and Lieutenant-Governor, as an act of clemency, returned half his property, and he now has possession of it. He lives in his own mansion and lives on the rent which he receives [from his other property]. He can manage on it, for he has thirty to forty rupees a month coming in, and there is only himself and his wife. But Imam Bakhsh's children are closely related to him, and there are about ten to twelve of them. So he doesn't live very comfortably. He is old, and very infirm, and getting on for ninety years old. May God preserve him. We must be grateful for such as he these days.'

Most of February and early March are taken up with letters to Alai, dealing with the real or imagined ailments of Alai's father, Amīn ud Din Khan, and, side by side with this, a delicate diplomatic matter in which Alai wants Ghalib's help. For some reason Alai is anxious that his father should take the two brothers Qurban Ali Beg Salik and Shamshad Ali Beg Rizwan into his entourage, and he wants Ghalib to put in a good word for them. Ghalib writes on February 1, 1862:

'On Friday morning I wrote you a letter, which I sent off right away. About nine in the morning I heard he [your father] had had another turn the previous night. I went to see how he was . . . and was told by Muhammad Ali Beg that this attack had been lighter than previous ones, and he had felt relief more quickly. Yesterday Mirza Shamshad Ali Beg told me that Ali Husain had told him, "The Nawwab Sahib is asking whether you will consent to come to Loharu and eat his bread". He had replied, "I want to eat your bread, provided I can eat my fill".' Ghalib draws the conclusion from this that the Nawwab is

not favourably inclined to Salik [Qurban Ali Beg] and that 'his head is full only of Shamshad Ali Beg.

The secrets of their states are known to kings alone:
Sit in your corner, Hāfiz. Why bestir yourself?

Alai must have expressed concern over his father's health, and even a fear that some enemy had cast a spell on him. Ghalib replies reassuringly on February 15, 1862:

'Your father is ill in the sense that he is not feeling entirely fit, and this depresses him; but there is absolutely nothing to fear. I had quite forgotten, but now that he tells me, I remember that twelve to thirteen years ago this feeling quite suddenly overcame him one day. He was young in those days, and not accustomed to use opium. He was treated at once with an emetic and a few days later with a purgative. Now he is getting on in years, and moreover he uses opium; and he has had several turns in quick succession. But my concern for him is based on my love for him; there are no medical grounds for concern.'

He goes on to list some of the famous Delhi hakims, remarking that some of them are no longer in Delhi, but that all the same there are still excellent hakims who will be in attendance upon him. And what more does he want?

'True there are one or two doctors, who have a reputation because they are of the same race as our rulers, and an obscure *baid* or two [a man who practises the ancient Hindu system of medicine] lurking in holes and corners.

'God save us! You think it necessary to commend Amīn ud Din Khan to my attention? Have I no heart in my breast? Or is the faith—otherwise called love—in my heart no more than an ant's head or a mosquito's wing? The hakims will take care of the treatment, and I will not fail in companionship or sympathy, or I shall stand convicted.'

He then goes on to describe the standard treatment which the hakims will be applying, and goes on:

'The names of God and the verses of the Holy Quran used in effecting recovery, breaking spells, and driving out spirits are all established, and may be expected to exercise their due effect. (True, the maulvis and reciters know nothing and introduce all sorts of complications to impress people.) And who would want to put a spell on your father? Poor man, he lives in such an out-of-the-way corner of his own that no one ever passes that way unless he specially decides to. You can dismiss that idea. Yes, and he can give alms to the poor and ask them to pray for him, and ask the saintly for their succour. Well, there are more poor in Delhi than a man can count, and one saint—Hāfiz Abdul Aziz. So that is

that, and all will be well.'

A second letter written the following day, February 16, 1862, shows that his letter had crossed with one of Alai's. He begins in the same tone:

'I have already replied to your letter yesterday; it must have reached you by now. I went to see your father this morning. Ziya ud Din Khan and Shihab ud Din Khan¹ were there too, and Maulvi Sadr ud Din [Azurda] came while I was there. It has been settled that he is to be treated as Hakim Mahmud Khan prescribes—that is, he has written the prescription, the pills have been made up, and the materials for the medicines sent for so that they can be put in soak today ready for use tomorrow immediately after he has taken the pills. But it looks to me as though the noble patient and his well-wishers are in two minds about going through with the cure. They are weighing the prescription in the balance of scrutiny. Master Mir Jan was also there, and so was that half-fool Mirza Asad Beg. Everything is all right.'

Then a remark in Alai's letter evokes a more serious theme:

'At two separate points in your letter yesterday I see that you have written that Delhi is a big city and there must be plenty of people with all sorts of qualifications there. Alas, my dear boy, this is not the Delhi in which you were born not the Delhi in which you got your schooling, not the Delhi in which you used to come to your lessons with me to Shaban Beg's mansion, not the Delhi, in which I have passed fifty-one years of my life. It is a camp. The only Muslims here are artisans or servants of the British authorities. All the rest are Hindus. The male descendants of the deposed King—such as survived the sword—draw allowances of five rupees a month. The female descendants, if old, are bawds, and if young, prostitutes. Count the number of Muslim nobles who are dead: Hasan Ali Khan, the son of a very great father, who had once drawn an allowance of a hundred rupees a day, died in despair, his pension reduced to a hundred rupees a month. Mir Nasir ud Din,² descended on his father's side from a line of pirs and on his mother's from a line of nobles, was unjustly put to death. Agha Sultan, son of Paymaster Muhammad Ali Khan, who has himself held the rank of Paymaster, fell ill; without medicine, without food, at last he died. Your uncle provided for his shroud and his burial. Then let me tell you of my friends: Nāzir Husain Mirza, whose elder brother was numbered amongst the slain, is left penniless—not a farthing comes in. He has been granted a house to live in, but let us see whether he is left in possession or whether it will again be confiscated. Buddhe Sahib sold off all his property, lived on the proceeds while they lasted, and has now gone empty-handed to Bharatpur. Ziya ud Daula had properties returned to him that brought in a rent of five hundred rupees a month, but they have again been seized, and he has left for Lahore in a

¹ The brother and nephew of the sick man.

² Known as Kale Shah—cf. p. 71.

sorry plight. He is stranded there now. Let us see what becomes of him. To put it briefly, the Fort, and the estates of Jhajjar and Bahadurgarh and Ballabgarh and Farrukhnagar—with an income of something like three million rupees, have been wiped out. Where then would you find men of talent here? . . . Set your mind at rest about your respected father, and put any idea of enchantment or possession by spirits right out of your mind. God willing, once he has taken his purgative he will be quite all right. In fact, by God's grace, he's quite all right already.'

On March 1, 1862 he writes:

'Yesterday, Friday, the Nawwab was purged. I left him at eleven o'clock. His pills were made up of ingredients which are rather painful in their effects, and he was in a good deal of distress; he passed nine or ten motions, and by the end of the day was quite recovered. His system has been thoroughly cleansed, and by God's grace he is now quite well again; and it is certain that there will be no relapse.

'Leave it to your father to decide how long to stay on in Delhi. When he decides to leave I shall certainly say as much as I think appropriate on your behalf. But I shall not insist. I know his temperament better than you do. He is a self-willed man, and moreover he doesn't like having people recommended to him. The case of your two Mughal lads Qurban Ali Beg and Shamshad Ali Beg will have to be adjusted to what proves possible. I shall not intervene—unless of course I am asked, or the matter is discussed in my presence, in which case I shall speak, and to effect.

Tear out the tongue that speaks
what it should not.

Don't take offence: if he takes one or both of the brothers as his companion, the companionship *may* well be a happy one for life. But how many years, or months, or weeks can you guarantee them?'

Alai must have continued to pester him on both points, for he writes on March 7, 1862:

'Sir, my exalted brother your respected father is now cured. There are no rational grounds for fearing a relapse. As for irrational fears, even Luqman¹ had no remedy for them. To whatever you've written—and whatever you may write in future—about Mirza Qurban Ali Beg and Mirza Shamshad Ali Beg, my answer remains the same as I have already given you: My part is simply to observe; if your father mentions the matter to me, I will put in a good word for them.

¹ A wise man of legend, sometimes identified with Aesop.

'Your exalted uncle's pronouncements about Ghalib—that he sits there conjuring up all sorts of visions and fancies—shows that he judges me by himself, thinks that since *he* is a prey to illusory and superstitious fears, others too must be caught in . . . their toils. But it's a false comparison. . . . For I have drained the heavy goblet of the pure wine that teaches "Nothing exists but God", and I sit here above the radiance of religion and the fire of infidelity alike. . . .'

Letters in May—to Majruh and to Qadr Bilgrami—show that Ghalib's collected Persian verse, and a prose work, *Qāte i Burhan*, (of which we shall hear much more later) were now published. He had been asked to compose a chronogram of the date of printing of the collected verse, but refused. 'Why should I write a chronogram . . .?', he asks in a letter of May 24, 1862 to Qadr Bilgrami, 'The people at the press . . . can write it themselves. Printing began in '78 [AH] and finished in '79.'

On June 19, 1862 he again writes to Alai:

'Oh, my nephew! . . . May God protect me! I am not what Nayyar¹ imagines me (according to what you have written)—a prey to groundless fears and a victim of my own imaginings; nor am I what Mirza Ali Husain Khan Bahadur must think I am:

'O for just one man who would know me as I am!

To await me at Dujana and think that my coming depends upon the wedding is to fall prey to some of those mad fancies which make your uncle suspect that *I* am mad. I am not a lord, that a lord should invite me; nor a musician, to go along with my gear and tackle and earn a fee for playing at the wedding. Nor would I go to a wedding there in a season when the world is like a ball of fire and *not* go to see my brother at Loharu at the height of the cold season.

'Yesterday Master Mir Jan Sahib showed me your letter. . . . If Ghulam Husain Khan comes some time I will impress upon him the gist of what you wrote. And may Exalted God in His glory give one or both of these two the grace, or me the strength, or you the judgement, to persuade you that it is not any attachment to Delhi that prevents me coming. For I envy the men transported to the Islands, and still more the Lord of Farrukhabad, who was taken by ship and set down on the Arabian shore.² Oh for a place where

If I fall ill there would be none to visit me
And if I die there would be none to weep and wail.

'I cannot see the printing of the collected verse being finished during my life-time. The printing of *Qāte i Burhan* is finished, and I have received the

¹ Ziya ud Din Ahmad Khan, Alai's uncle.

² 'Tafazzul Husain Khan, Lord of Farrukhabad, who was charged with complicity in the Mutiny, and at his own request was sent to Arabia. He died in Mecca.'—Mihir.

one copy which is the author's right. I have sent that to your renowned uncle. Other volumes I have ordered as a customer, and the order is with the publishers. But they can't be sent until I've paid for them. I am trying to raise the money. If I manage it, I'll send it off. If the copy which has reached you is the printed edition, it's correct. Where you're in any doubt, look up the list of errata which is appended, and if you still need clarification write and ask me. If it's a manuscript copy, then it's not to be regarded as my work. In fact you . . . should tear it up. . . .'

In an undated letter that seems to follow this he writes:

'Your father refuses to believe me, and numbers me among the living. . . . Here am I concerned to provide camphor and a shroud for my corpse, and there is he, hard-hearted man, demanding verse from me. Had I been living, would I not have come to Loharu? Relieve me of this burden: write a few verses on this model and send them to me. I will correct them and send them back. . . .'

He ends his next letter, on July 17, 1862: 'Stopped drinking wine on 22nd June: started again on 10th July:

Thanks be to God! The tavern door is open
once again!

He was asked to explain what this was all about, and in his next letter (of July 28, 1862) he does so. But he has something more remarkable to write of first:

'Listen, my dear boy: Thursday to Thursday makes eight days; Friday nine, Saturday ten, Sunday eleven. And not for a single moment has it stopped raining. At this very moment it is pouring down. I have had a charcoal brazier lit beside me, and after every two lines I write, I hold the paper to the fire to dry it out. What else can I do? Your letter demands an answer. So listen. . . .

'Fifty years ago the late Ilahi Bakhsh Khan produced a new metre and rhyme scheme, and at his command I wrote a ghazal in it. [He then quotes what he regards as its best couplet, and its concluding couplet, and continues:] Now I find that someone has added an opening couplet and four more, included these two couplets of mine, and made a ghazal out of them which is being sung all over the place. The last couplet and one other are mine, and the other five some idiot's. . . .

'Pay my respects to your father and tell him that the days are past when I could take one loan from Mathura Das, and touch Darbari Mal for another, and come away with loot from Khub Chand Chain Sukh's house. They all had my notes of hand, sealed with my seal and carefully preserved. Not that it did them any good, for they got neither principal nor interest. More than that, my

aunt paid my living expenses, and the Khan [?Ahmad Bakhsh Khan] would occasionally give me something besides, or would manage something from Alwar, or my mother would send me money from Agra. But these days all I have is the sixty-two rupees eight annas of my pension from the authorities and my hundred rupees from Rampur, and only the one agent from whom I can borrow and to whom I must pay interest and an instalment of the principal month by month. There is income tax to pay, the night-watchman to pay, interest to pay, principal to pay, the upkeep of my wife, the upkeep of the children, the upkeep of the servants—and just the Rs. 162 coming in. I was in difficulties, and could hardly make my way. I found I could not even meet my day to day needs. I thought to myself, "What shall I do? How can I solve the problem?" Well, a beggar's anger harms no one but himself. I cut out my morning cool drink, halved the meat for my midday meal, and stopped my wine and rosewater at nights. That saved me twenty rupees or so a month, and I could meet my day to day expenses. My friends would ask me, "How long can you go on without your morning and evening drinks?" I said, "Until He lets me drink again." "And how can you live without them?" they asked. "As He vouchsafes me to live," I replied. At length, before the month was out I was sent money from Rampur, over and above my stipend. I paid off the accumulated instalments on my regular debt. That left the miscellaneous ones—well, be it so. My morning drink and wine at night were restored, and I again began to eat my full quota of meat.

'Since your father asked why I had stopped drinking and then started again, read this part of my letter to him. . . . He then turns upon one Hamza Khan, a maulvi who had once been tutor to Alai in his childhood and had now been ill-advised enough to have Alai write to Ghalib that it was time to act on the words of Hāfiz:

Hāfiz, old age besets you: leave the tavern now.
Debauchery and drinking go along with youth.

Without even breaking the sentence Ghalib goes straight on: 'and give my respects to Hamza Khan and tell him:

You who have never known the taste of wine
We drink unceasingly

'You see how He vouchsafes me drink? To make a name as a maulvi by teaching the baniyas and brats of Dariba, and to wallow in the problems¹ of menstruation and post-natal bleeding is one thing: and to study the works of the mystics and take into one's heart the essential truth of God's reality and His expression in all things, is another. Hell is for those who deny the oneness of God, who hold that His existence partakes of the order of the eternal and the possible, believe that Musailma shares with the Prophet the rank of the Seal of the

¹ In Islamic observances.

Prophets, and rank newly-converted Muslims with the Father of the Imams. My belief in God's oneness is untainted, and my faith is perfect. My tongue repeats, "There is no god but God", and my heart believes, "Nothing exists but God, and God alone works manifest in all things." All prophets were to be honoured, and submission to each in his own time was the duty of man. With Muhammad (peace be upon him) prophethood came to an end. He is the Seal of the Prophets and God's Blessing to the Worlds. . . . Then came the office of Imam, conferred not by the consensus of men, but by God: and the Imam ordained by God is Ali (peace be upon him), then Hasan, then Husain, and thus onwards until the promised Mahdi (peace be upon him):

In this belief I live, in this I die.

'Yes, and there is this more to be said, that I hold free-thinking and atheism to be abhorrent, and wine-drinking to be forbidden, and myself to be a sinner. And if God casts me into Hell, it will not be to burn me, but that I may become added fuel to the flames, making them flare more fiercely to burn those who deny God's oneness and reject the prophethood of Muhammad and the Imamate of Ali. Listen to me, maulvi sahib. Perhaps you will be stubborn and think it no sin to hide the truth; but if not, you will remember, and confess that you remember, how once in the days when you taught the *Gulistan* and *Bostan*¹ to Ala ud Din Khan [Alai] you slapped the poor boy two or three times. [His father] Nawwab Amīn ud Din Khan was in Loharu at the time, but Ala ud Din's mother turned you out of the house. You came to me with tears in your eyes, and I told you, "My friend, the sons of nobles and of gentlemen may be scolded, but not struck. You were at fault. Never do such a thing again." And you repented your folly. And now you graduate from school-mastering and take up preaching to seventy-year-olds. By dint of repeated fasting you memorize one verse of Hāfiz:

Hāfiz, old age besets you, etc.

and recite it—and that before one who has written twice and three times as much verse as Hāfiz did, to say nothing of prose. And you do not observe that as against this one verse, Hāfiz has thousands which contradict it:

Come, mystic, for the cup is clear as crystal
That you may see the ruby-red, pure wine.

Drink the pure wine and look upon the faces of
fair women
A fig for *their* religion! Gaze upon the beauties
here.'

¹ Works of the classical Persian writer Sadi, commonly used as elementary Persian texts.

He quotes two other couplets of Hāfiz in the same sense and then drops the subject and turns again to address Alai:

'My son, I'm in great trouble. The walls of the zenana have collapsed [because of the continuous rain]. The lavatory is in ruins. The roofs are leaking. Your aunt [Ghalib's wife] keeps saying, "We'll be buried! We'll be killed!" My own apartments are in an even worse state. I am not afraid of death, but I can't stand discomfort. The roof is like a sieve. Where the sky rains for two hours, the roof rains for four. The landlord can't do any repairs even if he wants to. If only the rain would stop he could attend to everything, but even then how can I sit here while the repairs are going on? If you can manage it, get your father, for as long as the rains last, to let me have the mansion where Mir Hasan used to live for your aunt [Ghalib's wife] and the upper apartment and the downstairs sitting-room of the house where the late Ilahi Bakhsh Khan used to live, for myself. Once the rains are over and the repairs are done, then the sahib and memsahib and the babas will go back to their old house. Where your father has so often made sacrifices to help me, let him show his kindness once more and do me this favour in my closing days.'

The next day, July 29, 1862, he writes to Majruh:

' . . . Speaking of the rains, let me first give the over-all picture. First came the mutiny of the blacks, then the wrath of the whites, then the disturbance of the demolitions, then the disaster of the epidemics, then the calamity of the famine; and now the rains have come like all these things rolled into one. This is the twenty-first day. The sun appears as briefly as the lightning flash, and when occasionally the stars appear at night people think they are fireflies. The dark nights are a boon to the thieves, and not a day passes but what two or three burglaries are reported. Do not think I am exaggerating: thousands of buildings have collapsed, and hundreds of people have been buried beneath the ruins. Every lane is like a river. The earlier famine was caused by lack of water. There was no rain, and so no grain. This one is caused by excess of water. The rain has fallen in such torrents that the sown seed has been washed away, and those who have not yet sown their fields cannot do so. So that's how things are in Delhi. Apart from that there's nothing new.'

Ghalib's appeal to Alai had the desired effect. On August 6, 1862 he writes:

'I do not fear death, nor do I lay claim to patience. And I believe not in freewill but in predestination. You played the role of my go-between, and my brother [your father] helped me like a brother. Long may you live, and long may God preserve him! And may we lodge till Judgment Day in this same mansion!

'To clarify the obscure and add detail to the general picture, the position was that the rain fell in torrents. The younger boy was afraid and his grandmother

too [Ghalib's wife] was disturbed. I remembered the door of the private apartment that faces west, and, opposite it, a room with three doors. When you hurt your foot I used that door when I came to see you. With this in mind I planned to make that room the zenana, thinking that carriages and palanquins could come there and the various maidservants, and the tribes of women who come to sell vegetables, and oil, and betel, and what not . . . could use that door, while the children and I could come and go through the drawing room. God protect us if all of them were to come trooping through the drawing room, and we and the visitors were to have the spectacle of these witches forever before our eyes!

'Bi Wafadar¹—you know her a little, and your father knows her well—has had the title of Wafadar Beg conferred upon her by your aunt [Ghalib's wife]. She goes out to do the shopping. At least, she doesn't do much shopping, but she's an affable soul, and sociable, and trots around talking to the people she meets in the street. Once she's out of the house it's unthinkable that she shouldn't take a walk along the canal and talk to the sentries at the gate and pick flowers and bring them back to show to her mistress, with "These flowers are from your nephew's garden."² Alas, alas, that so fine a drawing room should suffer such a fate and that a crazy, sensitive man like me should be so plagued! On top of that, I could not contemplate the idea that the small room would suffice for my servants and for the children to have their lessons in. For could the [children's] peacocks and pigeons and sheep and goat be kept outside with the horses? I muttered the verse "God is recognized in the failure of man's plans",³ and said nothing more. But let your refined mind be at rest: all cause for uneasiness and fear has gone. The rain has stopped; the landlords have had repairs put in hand; the boy is no longer afraid; the mistress is no longer disturbed; I no longer suffer discomfort. I have the open roof, the moonlit night, the cool breeze. All night long Mars can be seen in the sky, and an hour before first light shining Venus comes into view. As the moon sinks in the west, Venus rises in the east: and I enjoy my morning draught of wine amid this radiance.'

Letters to Majruh and Tufta dominate the remainder of the year. Majruh had had fever, and it seems that on his recovery he had written about himself in what Ghalib felt to be quite unnecessary detail. Ghalib replies on September 16, 1862:

'Bravo, your lordship! What a letter! What's the point of writing all that nonsense? All it amounts to is that you're back in your own bed, back in your own bedclothes, and again have your own barber and your own lavatory, that

¹ 'Old Faithful'—nickname of an old maidservant.

² In the original, these words are quoted in the old woman's own peculiar speech.

³ The equivalent of 'Man proposes, God disposes.'

you no longer disturb the night with, "Come quickly! Come quickly!" That your life is saved and your servants too no longer plagued to death.

And now my nights are nights and days are days.

But you haven't said whether Miran Sahib got my letter or not. I suspect that he didn't. Because if he had, you would certainly have seen it too, and he would have asked you for the facts of the matter, and in that case you would surely not have filled your letter with all that trash but would have told me instead what passed between you. So if, as I suspect, the letter never reached him, never mind. But if it did—well, you kept pestering me to answer Miran Sahib's letter: why don't you keep on at him to answer mine? . . .

'You have seen for yourself what things are like here. The water is warm; the breeze is warm; there is fever everywhere; and grain is dear. . . . Don't ask me to describe the rains. God's wrath has descended on us. Qasim Jan's Lane is like Saadat Khan's Canal. The gate of the house I'm living in which opens on to Alam Beg Khan's Katra has collapsed. The stairs are on the point of collapse. The walls of the small room where I sit in the morning are leaning. The roofs are like sieves. If it rains for half an hour, they rain for an hour. My books and writing materials have all been stored in the store-room. Here and there on the floor are bowls and basins [to catch the water that leaks from the roof]. Where can I sit to write a letter? Still, for the last four or five days things have been better. The landlord is seeing about getting repairs done. Today I had the chance of a few minutes' peace and decided to answer your letter.

'Alwar's displeasure, the hardships of your journey, the burning of the fever, the ill effects of the heat, your dejected mood, your overwhelming troubles, your present worries, your concern for the future, your grief at your fallen fortunes . . . nothing you can say exaggerates them. These days everyone is in the same boat. I hear that in November the Maharaja of Alwar's powers are to be restored, but it will be the same sort of power as God has given to His creatures—all power is in His mighty hand, and we mortals are disgraced.

'Tell me more of how you have got over your illness. God grant that your fever has gone for good and that you are quite well again. Mir¹ says:

It is a thousand blessings to be well.

Mirza Qurban Ali Beg Salik has supplied another line to precede it. It's a good one, and I like it very much:

Salik, if you are free from poverty
It is a thousand blessings to be well.'

On November 20, 1862, he writes again:

¹ The great eighteenth-century Urdu poet.

an Urdu poem or its rhyme-scheme before me. All I did was look at the metre, the rhyme and the end-rhyme, and then set to to write a ghazal or ode on the same pattern. You write that I must have had Naziri's diwan open before me when I wrote my ode . . . I swear to God that until I got your letter I never even knew that Naziri had written an ode in this scheme. . . . My friend, poetry is the creating of meaning, not the matching of rhymes. . . .

'Listen, my friend. My fellow-countrymen, Indians who claim to be masters of Persian, invent rules as they think fit. Thus that mongrel cock Abdul Wāse Hansoi says that "na-murad" is an incorrect form. And that son of an owl Qatīl declares . . . [other words] . . . to be incorrect. Do you think I am like them . . .? No, I hold the scales, the balance, of Persian in my hand. Praise be to God! Thanks be to God!'

On November 27, 1862, he writes:

'What you have written is unkind and suspicious! Could I be cross with you? May God forbid! I pride myself that I have one friend in India who truly loves me; his name is Hargopal, and his pen-name Tufta. What could you write which would upset me? And as for what someone else may whisper, let me tell you how matters stand there. I had but one brother, who died after thirty years of madness. Suppose he had lived and had been sane and had said anything against you: I would have rebuked him and been angry with him.

'My friend, there is no strength left in me now. The hardships of the rains are past, but I feel increasingly the full effects of old age. I lie about all day. I can't sit up, and generally write lying down. Besides, I feel now that you're a mature and practised poet, and I feel confident that I shall find nothing in your verse that calls for corrections. More important than that, all your odes are on themes of love, not written to serve any material purpose.¹ Anyway, I'll look at them some time. There's no hurry. There are three things involved: my slothfulness, the fact that your verse stands in no need of correction, and the fact that no particular gain is to be expected from any of your odes. And in view of these things I have left them on one side. A parcel from Lala Bal Mukand Besabr came ages ago, and I have not even opened it. And ten to fifteen of the Nawwab Sahib's [of Rampur] ghazals are also laid aside.

Ghalib, old age has left you fit for nothing,
Else you were once man to reckon with.

This ode of yours came yesterday. Today I've already gone through it, before the sun is really up, corrected it, and given it to my man to take to the post.'

¹ e.g. not to a patron, in expectation of reward.

❁ Chapter 12 ❁

1863

The physical weakness of which he complained to Tufta was to grow worse in 1863, so that in August he had to write to Sayyah: 'For the last year I have been a prey to ailments caused by disorders of the blood. . . .' But it is not until the end of March that he begins to show acute distress. Meanwhile his troubles are lighter ones, and there is even one great piece of good news.

On January 11, 1863 he writes to Ghulam Najaf Khan:

' . . . And now tell me, when are you coming? How many more years or months or days will you keep me waiting? Things here are the same as ever—you saw how it was when you were here:

The earth is hard, the sky is far above.

It's really cold now; the mighty are stiff with pride, and the poor are stiff with cold. The new excise regulations have struck me a heavy blow, and so has the restriction on distilling. On the one hand the prohibitions of the excise authorities, and on the other the high price of foreign wine. "Verily we are for God, and verily to Him we shall return."

' . . . Well, Zahir ud Din [Ghulam Najaf Khan's son], don't you think I deserve a separate letter from you, or a separate note on your father's letter sending me your respects in your own hand? Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan sat down to write to me, and while he was about it sent your respects to me too. And even your guardian angels knew nothing of it! What pleasure can such "respects" bring me?'

About the same time, in a letter to Majruh he writes:

'We've had several showers of winter rain. There'll be a good crop of wheat and gram, and the spring harvest looks hopeful.

The clouds of spring are spread across
the sky,
But in my cup of clay there is no wine.

I have a wound on my right hand, a sore on my left arm, and a boil on my right thigh. That's how it is with me. Otherwise everything's all right.'