

❁ 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.'

In March 1863 he received a quite unexpected piece of good news. The fullest account is in a letter to Bekhabar dated only 'March, 1863':

'In hopelessness hope still sends forth a ray—
The black night's end brings in the white
of day.

Reverend sir, today for your pleasure and happiness I write you the record of what has befallen me. Preamble: In 1860 the Lord Sahib [Governor-General] came . . . to Delhi. I went . . . and sent in my name to his Secretary. . . . The reply came, "During the Mutiny you spent your time flattering the rebel king; now the Government cannot agree to receive you". I am a persistent beggar, and was not to be put off by this prohibition. When the [Governor-General] returned to Calcutta I sent him an ode, in accordance with my old custom. It was returned to me with instructions that in future I was not to send these things. I gave up hope and stopped calling upon the Delhi authorities.

'Event: At the end of last month, February 1863, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Panjab [Sir Robert Montgomery] came to Delhi. People here ran to the Deputy Commissioner and the Commissioner to get their names on the list. I was outside all this, a man under a cloud in the eyes of the authorities. I stayed in my corner and called upon no one. The durbar was held, and all attained their wishes. On Saturday 8th February I went on my own account to visit Munshi Man Phul Singh in his tent. I sent in my card to the Secretary and was called in. Finding him well disposed towards me, I asked if I might meet the Lieutenant-Governor. This request too was granted, and these two distinguished officials showed me more kindness than I could ever have contemplated.

'Digression: I had had no previous dealings with the Lieutenant-Governor's chief clerk, on the strength of which I could hope to meet him. But he indicated, without saying it in so many words, that he would like to see me; so I went. When the two high officials had immediately acceded to my requests to see them, I can well imagine that it was on their prompting that he indicated his wish to see me. "God sends his blessings by stealth."

'Conclusion of the record: On Monday 2nd March the Governor encamped on the outskirts of the city. Towards evening I went to see my old friend Maulvi Izhar Husain Khan Bahadur. In the course of conversation he said, "Your attendance at durbars and robe of honour have been restored." I was astonished, and asked him, "How can that be, my good sir?" He replied, "The present Governor-General [Lord Elgin] on his arrival from England examined all the papers in your case, both in English and Persian, and gave orders in council that Asadullah Khan's [Ghalib's] attendance at durbars, and order of precedence, and robe of honour was to be restored in accordance with previous practice". I asked him, "Sir, what gave rise to this decision?" He said, "I do not know. All I know is that fourteen to fifteen days after the order was minuted, it was sent on here." I replied, "Glory to God",

He who achieves our ends devises means to
them
While *our* devisings for our ends increase
our pains.

'On Tuesday 3rd March at twelve o'clock the . . . Lieutenant-Governor sent for me, presented me with a robe of honour and told me that my place and my robe of honour at the Governor-General's court too had been restored, and that if I went to Ambala I should be called to the durbar and receive the robe. I replied: "I have looked upon your honour's feet and received my robe at your hands. I have heard the Lord Sahib's [Governor-General's] order and rejoice. What need to go to Ambala now? If I live, I will attend his durbar another time and receive honour at his hands:

No man has yet completed all life's tasks:
Let all you undertake be of small compass."

A letter to Tufta written earlier, on March 4, 1863, a day after his meeting with the Lieutenant-Governor, shows that he had not in fact at once excused himself from attending the Governor-General's durbar at Ambala. After telling him the good news he goes on: 'I was delighted, but at the same time at my wit's end. Where am I to get the things I need to travel to Ambala? And the enormous sum it will cost me? And on top of all this, my accustomed offering at the durbar is an ode. So on the one hand I have to compose the ode, and on the other think of some way to raise the money. I don't know where to turn. I need all my wits and all my concentration to write the ode; and both are exercised with the money problem. The Lord my God will solve this problem for me too, but these days I can neither rest by day nor sleep at night. I'm sending off these few lines to you and a few more to the same effect to the Nawwab Sahib. If I live I will write to you after I get back from Ambala.'

The 'Nawwab Sahib' [of Rampur] responded by sending him on March 11th the sum of Rs. 200, which Ghalib gratefully acknowledged in a letter of March 16, 1863. But now some uncertainty arose. In the same letter he tells the Nawwab:

'After the [Lieutenant-Governor's] departure the rumour went round the city that Delhi people were prohibited from going to Ambala. I felt concerned at this and went to the Commissioner, and personally delivered a letter to him. Verbal enquiry brought a verbal reply, and then, in reply to my letter, came a letter from him dated 7th March. So as not to make extra weight, I am not sending the envelope, but I forward the letter to your honour just as it is.

'Since yesterday another rumour is abroad that . . . the Lord Sahib [i.e. the Governor-General] is indisposed, and will not be holding a durbar at Ambala

but going off to Simla instead. Now . . . I am uncertain whether I should make the journey or stay where I am. . . .'

The Nawwab replied on March 19th saying that in his view it would not be advisable to go.

On March 27, 1863, he writes to Mir Sarfaraz Husain: 'I shall probably not be able to write again for some days. . . . During the month of Rajab I got a spot on my right hand, which developed into a boil, which burst and formed a wound, which got worse and became a great cavity. Now the flesh has putrefied over an area as big as the palm of my hand. That is why I couldn't go to Ambala. For the last two weeks I've been under English treatment. A black¹ doctor comes every day, and he's decided that today he'll cut away all the putrified flesh. He'll be here any time now. So I've written this in a hurry and sent it off before I get to work on my hand and send the pieces flying.'

A letter to Aram—the last to him which we possess—dated May 3, 1863, shows how long his hand continued to trouble him:

'It is six months now since a spot on my right hand turned into a boil . . . Indian surgeons treated me, but things got worse and worse. A black doctor has been treating me for the last two months. He has been cauterizing the wound and cutting the flesh away with a razor; and for the last twenty days it looks as though it has begun to mend. . . .'

In this year we find for the first time evidence that Ghalib had now revised his earlier opinion about his Urdu letters. In 1858 he had strongly opposed suggestions from Tufta and Aram that they should be collected and published. But now he writes to Alai in a letter dated only '1863' but placed by Mihr between March and May:

'I write to tell you that some of my friends want to get together my Urdu letters and publish them. They have asked me to send such letters to them, and have collected others from various quarters. I don't keep copies of what I write. I just write the letter and send it off to its destination. I am sure you must have a lot of my letters. If you will parcel them up and send them by post or by anyone who may be coming here during the next few days I shall be grateful to you. And I think you too will be pleased to have them printed. . . .'

Alai, however, raised objections, and Ghalib's next letter reproaches him very bluntly:

'What you wrote about sending my Urdu letters was something I could not have expected from a man of your good nature. I am very upset about it, and

¹ I.e. an Indian practitioner of modern medicine.

if I were to write and tell you all the reasons why, it would probably cover a whole sheet of paper. So let me say just this, in the fewest possible words: Listen, my friend. If you want to keep the letters to yourself and the idea of their becoming generally known goes against the grain, then don't send them—not on any account. That will be an end of the matter. And if you are afraid they may be lost, then keep the originals by you, get some clerk to copy them, and either send the copies off by post or give them to someone to bring by hand. But for God's sake don't get angry and send the originals in the spirit of "I throw your gift back in your face". That's not at all what I want. I tell you, my friend, I'm afraid of what you might do.'

It seems that Alai did not respond immediately, but that in spite of this Ghalib did not raise the matter again. At this Alai seems to have felt concerned, thinking that Ghalib might be cross with him. Ghalib's next letter, of May 30, 1863, reassures him:

'Nothing exists but God, and in the name of that God Whom I think of in these terms and in Whom I believe, and besides Whom I hold all else to be non-existent, I swear that it was not because I was cross with you that I didn't press you again to send me the letters. I dropped the matter for the time being because I found that the man who wanted them had cooled off somewhat. His intermediary was a man of high rank, while he himself is only a dealer in books, concerned with estimating what he'll gain or lose, what he'll have to pay out and what he can save. I'd been under the impression that his intermediary was the man who was going to manage the whole affair, and thought it was he who was going to have them printed. I collected thirty letters from one source and sent them off to him. When he wrote to acknowledge them he as good as said that he had asked for them at the instance of a bookseller, and that the bookseller had now disappeared. Presumably he's gone off somewhere to sell his books or to get fresh supplies. The twenty-three envelopes and the thirty-four letters you sent me are still safe in my box. If the intermediary starts pressing me for them, I'll send copies of them to him and the originals back to you. And if not, then all the papers will go back to you.

'My friend, when you sent the letters you did the same to me as I did to you in Dujana. Well, I'm a doddering old man, and at my age absent-mindedness is to be expected. But what were you thinking of when you wrapped the letters in cloth and sealed the parcel with your seal? You could have wrapped them in a piece of paper and sent them off. If Munshi Bihari Lal had not been a friend of mine and Shihab ud Din's, you'd have set me back fifty rupees.

Calamity befell me, but all ended well.'

On June 11, 1863 he writes to Alai again:

'To lose one's life is bad, but just as bad
Is to fall prey to your suspicious mind.

I have twice written to you that I never kept a copy of the ode. I have twice written that I can't remember which quatrains you want. And again you write, "Send the quatrains; send the ode". My friend, I swear by the Quran and by the Gospel and by the Pentateuch and by the Psalms and by the Hindus' Four Vedas and by the [holy books of the Zoroastrians], and by the Guru Granth [of the Sikhs] I haven't got the ode, and I can't remember the quatrains. As for my [Persian] collected verse, I have already told you

So this is our position; here we stand,
And here we shall continue in our stand.

'When I order fifteen to twenty copies I'll present one to your father and one to you. And if your father is in a hurry, he can order as many copies as he likes from Lucknow, from the *Avadh Akhbar* Press, proprietor, the famous Munshi Newal Kishor. Anyway, I will send two copies as soon as I get the opportunity.'

On June 19, 1863 he writes to Junun:

'Both your letters reached me. I am alive, but half dead. I lie here for twenty-four hours of the day, confined to my bed in the full sense of the words. For the last twenty days my foot has been swollen. It began with the sole and the instep, but the swelling has gone beyond that now and reached the calf. I can't get my foot into my shoe, and it's difficult for me to get up and go to the lavatory. But leave all that aside: the pain is torture to me. I was not allowed to die in 1277 [the year in which he had foretold he would die] so that I should be proved a liar; but for these last three years I have tasted death anew every day, and I am at a loss to know why I live on when I lack all the requisites of life.

'My soul dwells in my body these days as restless as a bird in a cage. I find no joy in any pursuit, nor in any man's company, nor in any gathering or assembly. Books I hate, poetry I hate, my body I hate, my soul I hate. There is no exaggeration in these words: I state a fact:

Happy that day when I set out
to leave this barren wilderness.

If in this distracted state I fail to answer your letters I must be forgiven.'

On June 21, 1863, he writes to Alai:

'My dear boy, Mirza Ali Husain Khan has been here, and came to see me. I gave him all the letters that you had sent me; now it's up to him whether he sends

them to you or not. Of course I shall be waiting to hear that you've received them. I asked him what had brought him here and how long he would be staying. He said he'd taken forty days' leave; his wife was ill and he wanted to arrange treatment for her. If it were any good to him I'd give my life for Ali Husain Khan. Well, that's an exaggeration—hyperbole, in fact; no doubt about it. But I would not stop far short of that; anything within the bounds of possibility I would do. But what does sympathy and fellow-feeling demand of me? He doesn't go astray, that he should need my preaching. He has no case pending in any department, that he should require my counsel and advice. And as for his family affairs—his dealings with his wife and her elders and her brothers—that is a field where neither you nor I can intervene. . . .'

About the same time he writes to Tufta: 'Two days ago, in the morning, I put all your papers [presumably, corrected verses] in an envelope and sent them off to the post office. "Now I shall have some peace for a day or two", I thought; but the same evening I got another letter from you. Well, I'm sending that off too. I told you all about myself in my letter of two days ago. It's enough to say that now I do all my writing lying down. And it's diverting to see that you don't believe my own account of myself and *do* believe what somebody else tells you about me: "The swelling on Ghalib's leg has gone now; and he drinks wine in the day time too". And your lordship believes it! Twenty years ago the position was that during the rains I used to drink three glasses either before lunch or towards evening, and that without making any reduction in the amount I drank every night. In these last twenty years twenty rainy seasons have passed by, and torrents of rain have fallen; but let alone drinking [during the day], the very thought of it has never crossed my mind; and in fact I've reduced the quantity I drink at night. The swelling on my leg has increased beyond all measure. It turned out that it had not reached the stage where the matter can be drawn off, and inflammation set in. Two or three hakims are attending me, and on their advice a poultice of neem leaves will be applied from tomorrow. When that brings things to a head they will think about lancing it. So I have open wounds in the sole of my foot and in my calf too. If the hard-hearted eunuch who gave you that news [that I was better] is a liar, then curses upon him; and if *I* am lying then a hundred thousand curses upon me.'

On July 3, 1863 he tells Alai the history of the trouble:

'More than a month ago my left foot began to swell, and the swelling spread from the sole to the instep and from there to the calf. If I stand up it feels as though the veins in the calf are going to burst. Anyway I would get up; but instead of going to the zenana for my food I had it sent here. I *had* to get up to make water, but I had a chamber-pot kept here. I can't manage without squatting down. I pass a motion only every second or third day, but, anyway, the time comes when I do have to go. Imagine all these different occasions and

think for yourself what I must be going through. And over and above all this it looks as though a hernia is developing:

Old age, a hundred ailments, as they say.

I repeat my own line to myself again and again:

O sudden death, why do you still delay?

And it's not "sudden death" any more. For all the signs and accompaniments of death are there. Ah, what a wonderful line the late Ilahi Bakhsh Khan wrote:

Let me once die, and I can breathe again!

No point in writing any more.'

A number of undated letters to Sarur—the last to him which we possess—clearly belong to this time, for there are references to his illness in words almost identical to those of dated letters to other correspondents. These need not be repeated here. Their main subject-matter, as usual in his letters to Sarur, is Persian, and poetry, and other literary themes. In one of them he responds to praise of his poetry with the remark that he must regard it as appreciation higher than it deserves.

'There is a verse of Naziri (God's mercy be upon him) which you may write on a piece of paper, and tie round my neck, and then expel me from the company of poets. This is the verse:

The brightness of my vision is all rusted
over now.
Alas! that He who made my mirror did not
cherish it!

In former times, mirrors were made of polished steel. The metaphor recalls the passage which Ghalib wrote about himself and which was quoted in chapter one: "The love of poetry which I had brought with me from eternity assailed me and won my soul, saying, "To polish the mirror and show in it the face of meaning—this too is a mighty work."'

And the complaint is the familiar, deeply felt one that God, who granted him his poetic powers, did not also grant him to live in an age where true appreciation of his verse would have acted as a constant stimulus to them, so that they would not fail. The letter continues:

'Pretension is one thing, and accomplishment is another. . . . Jalalae Tabatabai (God's mercy be upon him) wrote a letter to Sedaya Hindi. I forget his exact words, but the gist is that one day Maulana Urfi (God's mercy be upon him) and Abul Fazl¹ were disputing together. The Shaikh [Abul Fazl] said to Urfi,

¹ The great minister of the Emperor Akbar, 1556-1605.

"I have prosecuted my studies to the furthest limit and brought my knowledge of Persian to perfection". Urfi replied, "How can you match my experience? Ever since I was old enough to understand, every word that I have heard from the old men and old women of my house was spoken in Persian." The Shaikh replied, "I acquired my Persian from Anwari and Khaqani;² and you learnt it from old women." Urfi replied, "And Anwari and Khaqani too learnt it from old women".'

Another letter discusses the wording of a sentence in a preface written for a collection of Ghalib's letters to him which Sarur proposed to publish. It ends on a despondent note:

'Today I got another letter from my lord and master. I have not read it yet, but Shah Alam Sahib has written on the back of it, "You have not replied to my letter"—although . . . I have already written to say that I no longer have the strength to write or the quickness of mind to correct verses. Why should I repeat the same thing a dozen times? I conceive two possible ends to my present state: recovery, or death. In the first case I will inform you myself; in the second, all my friends will know of it from others. I write these lines as I lie in bed.'

In the same despondent, even bitter mood, he writes to Tufta on July 23, 1863:

'I wrote to you that I was well, and you believe it and offer thanks to God. I wrote what I had said about the severity of my illness was poetic exaggeration, and I expect you believe that too, although both these things were said ironically. I am sick of lies, and heartily curse all liars. I never tell a lie. But when all my attempts to persuade you I was telling the truth had no effect, then I wrote and told you I was well. And I did so after I had sworn to myself that so long as there was breath in my body, so long as my hand could hold a pen, and so long as I could contemplate correcting your verse, I would send back the very next day every sheaf of papers you sent to me. Briefly, I am near to death. I have boils on both my hands and my leg is swollen. The boils don't heal and the swelling doesn't subside. I can't sit up. I write lying down. Your double page arrived yesterday and today I have corrected it lying here and sent it back. Take care that you go on thinking of me as in good health, and send sheet upon sheet to me. I shall never keep it more than a day. If I am near to death, well, what of that?'

Ghalib's despondency is perhaps due in part to a sense that the quality of Tufta's output did not match its quantity. Two undated letters of about this time indicate a general impatience. In the first he writes: 'It was I who told you to write in the qasida form. Now I forbid you to use it for love poems. Use it for panegyric as need arises, but compose with due thought and care.' Tufta

² Two celebrated classical Persian poets.

apparently asked in whose praise he should write, for Ghalib rejoins: 'That's a good one! "Before I decide on a theme I must look for someone to address it to." If I could have told you in whose praise to write I'd have got a panegyric to him out of you long ago and seen that it was presented to him.'

It is significant how even in such distress Ghalib usually felt that he owed it to his friends to go on correcting their verses. Sometimes indeed he tells them that he has had to give up verse-correcting, and perhaps he did indeed resolve to do so. But again and again we find him in fact performing this service for them. Thus, in this period he actually offers his services to his young friend Zaka, a poet of whom he seems to have been very fond. Zaka belonged to Nellore, in South India, where he was born in 1828-29. In his youth he developed such an admiration for Ghalib that it became one of the main objects of his life to meet him. Knowing that there were men in Hyderabad who knew Ghalib, and hoping that they might be able to help him in his quest, he left home without so much as taking leave of his relatives and journeyed to Hyderabad on foot, reaching there in 1855 or 6. He found employment there and spent the rest of his short life there, for he died in his early forties, only five years after Ghalib's death. Mihr says that he was an excellent humorous and satirical poet. His correspondence with Ghalib, says Mihr, began after he reached Hyderabad. The first letter we possess is dated July 30, 1863. When we consider that it was written only a week after the bitter letter to Tufta quoted above, it is evident how deep was Ghalib's feeling for him: 'I number you as one of my true spiritual brethren,' he writes. 'You are the light of my eyes, and a part of my living heart.' In what follows, the references are not quite clear, but the tone is the same:

'See the trust I have in you: I cannot keep the secret myself, and yet I expect you not to waver in keeping my secret and my confidence.

'The reward of a lyric or an ode is what fate and fortune prescribe, not what the worth of the poetry deserves. Had he in whose praise it was written been a judge of poetry, then one might have suspected one's intermediary of failing to exert himself. But what have the great and rich to do with the taste for poetry, and where do they find the leisure to study poems? . . .

'I do not think myself worthy to correct your verse. . . . It is as a friend, not as an *ustad*, that I shall write such things as occur to me. But if your mind is made up and you insist that I correct your verses, do not pass on to others what I have written about them until you get the verses back from me [with my written corrections]. If you like to send me the verse you have written hitherto, I will go over that too and return it to you. It will be a pleasure; there was no need to ask my permission.'

A fortnight later, on August 16, 1863, he writes to Sayyah:

'I humbly acknowledge the justice of your complaint, but none of your letters

called for a reply, and I have given up correcting verses. For the last year I have been a prey to ailments due to disorders of the blood. There are boils all over my body, and I feel as though I have no strength left. . . . In a year's time I shall be seventy, and I pray for my release. . . .'

In the same letter he encloses a chronogram which he has composed for the birth of a son to Sayyah's patron, Mir Ghulam Baba Khan.

He writes again to Zaka on August 26, 1863. After telling him of his illness he goes on:

'I sent an ode to Nawwab Mukhtar ul Mulk, but he has shown no appreciation. . . . I sent one of my early *masnavis* in refutation of the Wahhabi sect to Muhi ud Daula. He has not even acknowledged it. Now I am told that Maulvi Ghulam Imam Shahid, pupil of Qatil, is beating the drum of "I and no other" and showing off his prowess to men who do not know literary worth when they see it. In a year's time I shall be seventy years old. Apart from a dry fame my art has brought me nothing. Cries of "Well done!" and "Bravo!" have assailed my ears. Well, praise is recompensed with praise; but Mukhtar ul Mulk has not even done that. My eulogy has brought me neither gratitude nor reward. Heaven knows what the Nawwab Sahib thinks I am. As for Muhi ud Daula, all I can say is may God give him his deserts. . . .

'Write and tell me all about Ghulam Imam Shahid and what his position is there. Someone here tells me that he got no encouragement from Mukhtar ul Mulk, but that Muhi ud Daula had secured him a Court appointment at four hundred rupees a month.'

On September 1, 1863 he writes to Maududi:

'Bountiful master, do you think that Delhi still prospers, and that the Fort thrives and that the Empire continues, that you ask about the writings of Hazrat Shaikh [Kalimullah Jahanabadi] and for news of Sahibzada Shah Qutub ud Din, son of Maulana Fakhr ud Din (God's mercy be upon him)? "The cow ate all this up, and the butcher killed the cow, and the butcher died on the road." [i.e. all this is gone beyond recall.] All these things lasted only so long as the King reigned. Even the house of Kale Sahib (whom God has pardoned) has been razed as though a great broom had swept it away; not a scrap of paper, not a thread of gold, not a wisp of wool remains. The tomb of Shaikh Kalimullah Jahanabadi (God's mercy be upon him) stands desolate. The area once held the population of a good-sized village, for all his descendants lived there. Now it is barren waste; a tomb standing in open ground, with nothing else there. If the people who lived there survived the bullets, God alone knows where they are now. It was they who preserved the Shaikh's writings and some of his relics; when they have gone, of whom am I to ask? What can I do? Your wish is one that cannot be realised.

'Why does my revered Sayyid Sahib put himself to such trouble? If he really wants to send me something, let him not think in formal terms of gifts and presents. I am a beggar who does not beg: if he sends me something I shall not reject it. Let him not bother about how little or how much, but enclose whatever note he pleases and send it in his letter.'

On September 2, 1863, he writes to Alai: 'I have no sense of shame. Instead of dying, I began to get better. My ailments are on the wane and I feel my strength returning.' But it seems that the improvement was not maintained, for in the first of two undated letters to Tufta belonging to about this time he writes again of his illness:

'The swelling in my leg and the boil on my hand are killing me. I tell you—and my servants and the friends who visit me daily can testify to it—that I lie here from morning to night and from night to morning. My letters are written lying down. Many people used to send in their verses for correction, but I have told them all not to. The only verse I correct is the Nawwab of Rampur's and yours.'

The next letter bluntly corrects one of Tufta's recurring misapprehensions:

'God save us! what cursed fool agreed to correct your verses "out of love for poetry"? I tell you I am sick of poetry—or may my God be sick of me! . . . But a good wife determines to stand by her worthless husband through thick and thin; and that is how things are between me and you.'

On November 24, 1863 he writes again. It seems that he had suggested to Tufta a promising patron to eulogise, but that his efforts had brought him nothing. Ghalib writes:

'Light of Ghalib's eyes, . . . Mirza Tufta, God keep you well and happy! My friend is no miser and I am no liar. But in the words of Mir:

These are the chances of the age we live in.

Anyway, we will devise something, and God willing, something will come of it very soon. I am surprised that your journey brought you no gain.

Kindness has vanished from the world—
or else

In this age there is none to practise it.

Cease singing the praises of the great ones of the world. Compose your verses of love in lyric form, and be happy.'

On the same day he wrote to Qadr Bilgami. He seems once again to be in better health; he writes about the wedding of his nephew's daughter:

'He [my nephew] is the pride of his parents' family, and since his mother and I are of one flesh and blood and bone and community and tribe, I too may feel that pride. He must be saying to himself, "My uncle didn't come to my daughter's wedding; he couldn't bring himself to spend the money." I hold money of less worth than dust and straw, but what could I do? I hadn't the strength to go. If only I'd been as well then as I am now! I'd have been the first to arrive. I would very much like to see him. Let me see when I shall get the chance. I'm well again now after a whole year confined to my bed. [He then describes his illness.] Traces of my illness are still visible. Two toes on each foot are crooked, and swollen on top of that. I cannot wear shoes. And my weakness defies description, except by my verse:

My soul strives feebly on to break the
body's bonds.

I live: it lacks the strength to struggle
free.

On the 8th of this Rajab—that is, next month, I shall enter my seventieth year:

Seventy years have passed and strength has
left my limbs.

So it's stupid to complain of the weakness I feel. May God preserve my faith unwavering.'

On December 3, 1863 he writes to Alai: 'Why have you decided to exemplify the saying, "Like father, like son"? It's true that hypochondria and melancholia are the born slaves of your family, but they haven't been in attendance on you to this day. Why should they come to you now? If they have, you're on no account to let them stay. Drive them on, and see to it that you don't let them stay near you.

'My kind and considerate benefactor, that man of kindness incarnate Munshi Newal Kishor came by the mail. He met me, and your uncle, and your cousin Shihab ud Din Khan. The Creator bestowed upon him the beauty of Venus and the qualities of Jupiter. He is himself the conjunction of two auspicious stars. I hadn't said anything to you, and accepted that ten copies of [my Persian] collected verse cost fifty rupees. But now when I mentioned it to him he agreed to accept the price that had originally been advertised in the newspaper—three rupees, four annas per copy. At this rate ten copies come to thirty-two rupees, eight annas, and thirty-two rupees, eight annas is what you are to pay. In all, sixty-five rupees will have to be sent to the *Avadh Akhbar* Press. I shall be

ordering on the 10th or 11th of December—this month. I'll give the thirty-two rupees eight annas to Ali Husain Khan, or I'll send it to Lucknow—whichever you say. Let me have an answer to this letter quickly. . . .'

He then dates the letter and goes on 'Kya ghazab hai hai!' ['Alas, alas! what a calamity!'] and remarks that this gives the date of 1863, and is a chronogram for the death of the Viceroy, Lord Elgin.

On December 8, 1863 he writes to Majruh, apparently for the first time in some months:

'Ah! His Honour Mir Mahdi Majruh of Delhi! Come in, sir! It's many a long day since you last came to see me. Where have you been? And how are you after all this time? And is Mir Sarfaraz Husain well? And Miran Sahib too?' He goes on to comment on verses which Majruh had sent him. Of one Persian verse he says, 'It's of such a verse that they say "The meaning is in the poet's mind!" This line is not from any of the acknowledged masters. Some gentleman who wanted to astound people wrote it and then quoted some master's name and said it was his.'

He goes on to discuss gender. 'There's no regular rule can be applied to determine whether a word is masculine or feminine. A man says what sounds right to him, what his mind accepts.' He admits that he uses *rath* [a kind of carriage] as masculine in the singular but feminine in the plural!¹ After giving a number of other examples he concludes, 'My friend, I can't set myself up to issue edicts and decrees in this matter. I write what I think, and people must accept it or not as they please.'

On December 13, 1863 he writes to Shah Karamat Husain explaining some of the conceptions of the mystic love of God:

'Read my verse:

Till a man bears a wound whose mouth can
speak for him
Difficult is the path to hold converse with
Thee.

The meaning is that you cannot speak to the Divine Beloved with these ordinary lips and mouth. For this you must provide yourself with the mouth of a wound; that is, until your heart is wounded by the sword of love, you cannot attain to this rank.

'The dealings of the Divine Beloved with those who do not truly love Him are called "indifference" and His dealings with His lovers are symbolized by the "glance" [which slays them].' He quotes a Persian quatrain in illustration and continues,

¹ Cf. p. 41-2.

'And now read my verse:

We went to make complaint of His indifference:
A single glance has laid us in the dust.

The meaning is that, wearied of His "indifference" we went to complain to Him and to crave His attention; and when He turned His attention to us a single glance annihilated us.'

On the same day, December 13, 1863, he wrote again to Alai:

'I don't remember the day or date, but today is the fourth, or may be, if my memory's failed me, the fifth day since Munshi Newal Kishor left by the mail for Lucknow. He must have reached there yesterday, or else he will today. Today's Sunday, 13th December. One day he was sitting with me, and my young friend Shihab ud Din was there too. I turned to Saqib¹ and said, "If I were a wordly man I would say that I am in service; but since I am a darwesh who keeps to his own humble abode I will say just that I have three sources of sustenance. Sixty-two and a half rupees a month I get from the British government—i.e. seven hundred and fifty rupees a year. Twelve hundred a year come from Rampur, and twenty-four a year from our respected friend here. To elaborate the point, he has for the last two years been sending me his newspaper four times a month, and he doesn't charge me for it. True, I send forty-eight stamps every year to cover the postage. . . ."

"The day before yesterday Maulvi Sadr ud Din Khan Sahib [Azurda] had a stroke. His right hand is useless and his tongue has swollen, so that he finds it difficult to speak, and you can understand very little of what he says. I am crippled, and can't go to see him; I have to ask after him from people who have been to visit him. The day and date I have written above. The identity of the writer you will probably recognize from the handwriting.'

In the original, the word for 'probably' is 'ghalib'.

¹ Shihab ud Din—'Saqib' is his takhallus.