

❁ Chapter 14 ❁

1865

But if Ghalib felt that he was 'the lamp dying at morning, the sun setting behind the mountain's crest', the letters for 1865 are none the less as varied and lively as ever. He seems to have kept in moderately good health throughout the year, despite the inevitable weakness of old age. His friend Alai at last visited him in Delhi. His old patron, the Nawwab of Rampur, died in April, and for a while he was uncertain how much he could expect from his successor. But to his satisfaction, the new Nawwab treated him as well as the old. In October he was well enough to travel to Rampur, staying there for the celebrations of the Nawwab's accession and returning only a few days before the end of December.

On January 5, 1865 he writes to Alai. He begins with a complaint that neither the last days of the Muslim month of Rajab nor the first days of Shaban have brought him a visit:

'Well, sir, Mirza Rajab Beg has died, and you did not mourn him. Shaban Beg has been born, the ceremonies of the sixth day have been held, and you did not come to them. . . .

'My son I don't know how I manage to write you these few lines. Shihab ud Din Khan's illness has taken away the zest of life. I tell you, I wish I could die in his place. May God grant him life, and let me not see the day when I must mourn his loss. O God, grant him health! O God, grant him long life! Three children, and another yet unborn—O God, preserve him to watch over them!'

Fortunately, Shihab ud Din survived his illness. In the same month Ghalib writes again:

'God has had mercy on Ziya ud Din's¹ old age and on my helplessness. My dear Shihab ud Din is safe. Piles and dysentery, and fever and migraine—what varied ills beset him! But now at last he is restored to health in all respects. His weakness will leave him in its own good time. And who could call him strong before, that he should think him weak now? An old man was passing along a lane when he stumbled and fell. "Alas for old age!" he said. He looked around, and when he saw that there was no one about he muttered as he went on his way "and youth was no better, either."'

¹ Shihab ud Din's father.

On February 7, 1865, he wrote the only Urdu letter to Shefta which we possess:

'My revered brother, I feel sure that you will have reached the capital of your dominion safe and sound and that in serenity of soul you are keeping the fast [of Ramzan], and that apart from your preoccupation with betel and regret at the absence of Maulvi Altaf Husain [Hali—at this time Shefta's companion] you have nothing to disturb your mind.'

He then goes on to discuss various points of Persian usage.

It seems that Tufta at this time was visiting Lucknow. Ghalib writes to him on February 12, 1865, addressing him in ceremonious style:

'Munshi Sahib, distinguished by fair fortune and prosperity, may Exalted God preserve you! Accept from Ghalib a darwesh's blessing. I thought you were in Qanungos' Muhalla, Sikandarabad, and in fact you are sitting smoking the long-stemmed, Lucknow hookah at the *Avadh Akhbar* Press in Raja Man Singh Mansion in Lucknow, and talking to Munshi Newal Kishor. Well, give him my greetings [and tell him that] today is Sunday and the paper hasn't yet come. I always get it by Thursday, or Friday at the latest.

'Mirza Tufta, what are you saying? What of Mr Rattigan? Where is Mr Rattigan? On Thursday the 19th of January of this year he left for the Panjab. He has been appointed to a post somewhere in Multan district or Peshawar district. I didn't feel strong enough to go and pay him a farewell visit. Anwar ul Haq has got a job . . . at a salary of fifteen rupees [a month].'

The next day, February 13, 1865, he writes to Alai:

'My dear boy, congratulations on the auspicious arrival of your new guest! May Exalted God grant you and the child and its brothers increase of life and wealth! From what you write it is not clear whether the blessed newcomer is a boy or a girl. Saqib¹ thinks it is a boy, and Ghalib thinks it is a girl. Write plainly, and remove our uncertainty. Your letter was addressed to Saqib. But fie upon me! Why do I say letter? It was a long screed and I read it from end to end. . . .

'My friend, this is a field in which I share your inauspicious stars and feel your pain. I am a man devoted to one art. Yet by my faith I swear to you, my verse and prose has not won the praise it merited. I wrote it, and I alone appreciated it. Of all the aspirations my Creator placed in me—to roam in happy poverty and independence, or to give freely from my ample bounty—not even a thousandth part of them was realized. I lacked the bodily strength; else I would have taken a staff in my hand, and hung from it a checkered mat and a tin drinking-vessel and a rope, and taken to the road on foot; now to Shiraz, now sojourning in Egypt, now making my way to Najaf² I would have roamed.

¹ Shihab ud Din, Alai's cousin.

² The site of the tomb of Ali.

I lacked the means; else I would have played host to a world of men; or if I could not feast a world of men, no matter; at least within the city where I lived none would have gone hungry and unclad. . . .

'The target of God's wrath, rejected of men, old, weak and ailing, poor and afflicted . . . a man who cannot bear to see another beg, and must himself beg his bread from door to door—that man am I.'

Ten days later he is in a happier frame of mind. On February 23, 1865, he writes to Alai again:

'I got your letter yesterday and am sending off a reply to it today. Rajab Beg, Shaban Beg, and Ramzan Beg—these famous months have passed without your coming. I haven't heard of Shawwal Beg as a man's name, but Idi Beg is a possibility. So as the auspicious day of Id approaches, what wonder if . . . you find that you can come? . . .

'Congratulations on the arrival of a daughter. Saqib disputed with me. "I have a nephew," he said. "No," I said, "I have a grand-daughter." Well, I've won, and he's lost. . . .'

On March 11, 1865, he writes a letter of recommendation to Hakim Ghulam Murtaza Khan:

' . . . Think hard, and then grant me that I have never troubled you for anything. Now, in a way, I ask a favour of you. The bearer of this letter, Pandit Jai Narain, presents himself before you. His forebears held high position and distinguished rank in the service of Nawwab Ahmad Bakhsh Khan. Now he has occasion to go seeking employment to Patiala. I adjure you by my life to make all possible efforts to get him appointed to some post, some rank, appropriate to his station. I will regard it as a rank granted to me, and will be deeply grateful.'

On April 1, 1865, he writes to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan, who had apparently complained that Ghalib had not written to him:

'My friend, I received your complaint with the utmost respect, but listen to my account and don't go by your own imaginary calculations. First, I had a letter from my dear Zahir [Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan's son]. I answered it as soon as I had read it and sent it to the post the next day. The gist of it was this: "You are always getting boils and pimples. The reason is that your blood and mine are as one, and I am the special favourite of heating of the blood." Then your letter came. I answered it three days later, to this effect: "My dear grandson Zahir ud Din is a better man than you. He came to see me before he left and wrote to me as soon as he arrived." The post office doesn't issue receipts for letters posted. Both letters were stamped. It's out of the question that my two letters are stranded at the post office here. If the Shaikhupur postmen didn't

deliver them, is that my fault? I grant you I wrote only your name and "Shaikhupur" as the address. I didn't write the muhalla, and perhaps that's why the letters didn't reach you. Your letter has just this moment come, and I am writing these lines lying down. Now I'll send Inayatullah to your [Delhi] house and get him to find out and bring me the details of your Shaikhupur address.

'Well, sir, Inayatullah is back with a note. I'm addressing the envelope accordingly, but I shan't have time to catch the post, so I'll send it off tomorrow morning.

'Hakim Zahir ud Din Khan, my blessings on you. Sonny, I haven't the energy to write more at present. You must be content with my blessings. I've already sent off an answer to your letter, as I've written above. A curse on all liars. You say: "And yet more curses."

'Nawwab Mustafa Khan [Shefta] arrived here yesterday. He's brought his family with him. The little boys are to be circumcised in the month of Zi Qad and Muhammad Ali Khan married in Zil Hij.

'Five days ago we had hail in Delhi as big as hen's eggs—in some cases even bigger. The new Lieutenant-Governor came and held a durbar. I was honoured and treated with a kindness more than I could have expected. When you come I'll tell you all about it.'

In the collection of letters to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan this is followed by an undated note clearly written after he was back in Delhi:

'The rice was poor stuff—it doesn't swell up, and hasn't got long, thin grains. Don't go into a long argument about it, but see that I get old, thin-grained rice. Buy and send me one rupee's worth. And remember, my experience is that new rice gives you constipation, while old rice doesn't.

'Last night Mir Majd ud Din was saying that you have a calligrapher. Well, my friend, I have a book—prose—of about ten to twelve sections I want copied. Find out how many sections your man does per rupee and how much he can write in a day. Send me a note about this right away and then after lunch send the man to see me so that I can give him the paper and the thing I want written. Give my blessing to Zahir ud Din and write and tell me how he is.'

On April 4, 1865, he writes to Safir Bilgrami congratulating him on his translation into Urdu of the romance *Bostan i Khayal* ("The Garden of Fancy"), which he is publishing in two volumes. This work was written in Persian in the eighteenth century and is comparable in length and character to the *Tale of Amir Hamza*, with the difference that the author appears to have been a Shia of the unorthodox Ismaili sect, and the doctrines of this sect find expression in his work. If Safir Bilgrami's "translation" could be contained in two volumes, it must have been a considerable abridgement of the original work, which occupies fifteen.

Ghalib tells Safir Bilgrami: 'You have performed a great service to me in particular and to men of mature taste in general. I have written to Mir Wilayat Ali ordering both volumes. . . . Mir Wilayat Ali was the manager of the Patna press which had printed the translation. Ghalib had had occasion to write a letter of apology to him a few days earlier (April 1st):

'For your grandfather's sake, please forgive me for my error. Really, I have committed no sin:

Old age, a hundred ailments, as they say.

I am seventy years old. I have no memory, and absent-mindedness prevails. Yesterday I wrote you a letter ordering the translation of *Bostan i Khayal* by Safir Bilgrami. When I put it in the envelope I forgot to enclose the stamps [in payment], and today when I opened my box I found them there. I was covered in shame and confusion . . . Today I am sending them enclosed in a fresh envelope. God grant that you have already despatched the book. . . .'

On April 13, 1865, he writes to Sayyah to thank him for a photograph:

' . . . Look here, Munshi Sahib. I know that everyone else approves the invention of photography, but your humble servant doesn't subscribe to this. Just look at the gentleman's picture! It goes as far as his elbows, but his forearms and the rest of him are missing. Let alone talking to him, I can't even shake hands with him! . . .'

On April 21, 1865, he writes again to Safir Bilgrami:

'Light of my eyes and joy of my heart (because I love you), master (because you are a Sayyid), Maulvi Sayyid Farzand Ahmad Safir [Bilgrami], God grant long life to you! I was delighted with your pearls of verse. All your verses are good, but these I write down here went straight to my heart. [He then quotes three couplets.]

May you live on and on till Judgement Day
And every day your health and grace increase.'

About the same time—Mihir places the letter, which is undated, between February and May 1865—he writes to Tufta in terms which belie his earlier certificate that Tufta's verse no longer needed correction: 'I'm greatly surprised that after I'd written objecting to the rhymes [of an earlier poem] you've written a ghazal based on those same rhymes. . . . This ghazal's a write-off. Write another and send it to me to correct.'

A letter of May 14, 1865, begins on a similar note: 'Grow old, and learn!

I grant that you write good verse and without effort, but what you call enquiry is nothing but whims and fancies. You go by guesswork, and sometimes your guess corresponds to the facts, and sometimes it doesn't. . . . It ends with the laconic sentence: 'My money for April, and acknowledgement of my letters of condolence and congratulation, have come from Rampur; for the future, what God wills.' Ghalib might well wonder what the future held in store for him. Nawwab Yusuf Ali Khan had died in April, to be succeeded on the 21st of that month by his son Kalb i Ali Khan. Ghalib's relations with the old Nawwab were of long standing, and apart from exhibiting displeasure when Ghalib ventured to make what could be interpreted as an attempt to recommend others to his bounty, the Nawwab seems always to have treated him with consideration. His successor was largely an unknown quantity, and Ghalib's early letters to him, as we shall see, suggest that he felt some apprehension on this account.

Other undated letters to Tufta are placed by Mihr after this one. In one he evidently apologises for some lapse—perhaps for not returning promptly verses which Tufta had sent for correction: 'My dear friend, the shame I shall feel on the Last Day before God, because I did not worship Him, and before the Prophet, because I offended against the Holy Law, is perhaps less strong than the shame I feel before you.'

In a second he speaks scathingly of some highly-placed person unnamed to whom Tufta had addressed an ode:

'Listen to me, my friend. The man to whom you addressed your ode is as much a stranger to the art of poetry as you and I are to the problems of our respective religions. In fact you and I, in spite of our ignorance of religious matters, at any rate have no aversion for them, while this is a fellow whom poetry makes sick. . . . These people aren't fit to be spoken of, much less to be praised. Ah, Anwari!

Alas, there is no patron who deserves
my praise!

Alas, there is no mistress who inspires
my verse!

On May 26, 1865, he writes to Alai's father, Amīn ud Din Ahmad Khan:

'For your entertainment I am sending you a new ghazal I have written. God grant that it please you and you have it taught to a singer.

'Let me tell you the Delhi news. . . . Yesterday, Thursday, 25th May early in the day there was a really fierce dust-storm. Then rain fell heavily, and it turned so cold that Delhi was like a frozen world. The gate to Bara Dariba has been demolished. The rest of Qābil Attrar Lane has been destroyed. The mosque in Kashmiri Katra has been levelled to the ground. The width of the

street has been doubled. God, God! The domes of the mosques are being demolished, while on the thresholds of the Hindus' temples the flags and banners flutter in the wind. A great monkey,¹ strong as a lion and huge as an elephant, has been born. He roves the city, demolishing buildings as he goes. He has seized the little domes on Faizullah Khan Bangash's mansion and shaken them one by one until he destroyed them to their foundations and brick rang against brick. Monkey, the deeds you do! And in the city too!

The next words presumably refer to Amīn ud Din's son Alai:

'From the land of the desert [Loharu] the son of a noble, rich in children and poor in wealth, a master of three languages, Arabic, Persian and English, has come to Delhi. He is staying in Ballimaron muhalla and, as need arises, visits the Delhi authorities. For the rest, his doors are kept closed. From time to time—not every morning and every evening—he comes to the humble abode of the faqir Ghalib. . . . The citizens of Delhi are at a loss to know what he lives on. Some say, "He has turned against his father" but I believe that his father has unreasonably withdrawn his favour from him. Let us see how it will end. Ghalib's . . . watchword is, "Wish well to all".'

By mid-June 1865 he was in the awkward position of having to suggest to the new Nawwab of Rampur that there were occasions when money might appropriately be sent him from time to time over and above his monthly allowance. He had recently sent an ode of congratulation, but this had not produced quite the expected response, and he has to write on June 14, 1865:

'Lord and Master, it was the custom of his late Highness whenever I sent him an ode, to acknowledge it with a letter of praise and appreciation, and—I feel ashamed to say this, but there is no other way—to enclose in the envelope as a gift a draft of Rs. 250. The panegyric odes are included in the volume of my collected Persian verse in Your Highness's library, and you may confirm what I have said about the letters from your files. The practice was not a bad one, and if it could be continued that would be good.'

There is no indication in subsequent letters that the Nawwab responded as desired.

The Nawwab had asked him to come to Rampur. On June 18, 1865, he replies:

'I will certainly come to attend upon Your Highness . . . [but] the heat beats down so fiercely that the very wings of the birds are burning. And after fire will come water [the rains]. In both these conditions a man may be excused the toils of travel, especially when he is old and sick. Let the sun once move into Libra, and the seasons of fire and of water be passed, and I will put on the robes of pilgrimage for the journey to the splendid city of Rampur.'

¹ This suggests the Hindu monkey-god Hanuman.

He was evidently pleased with the new Nawwab's initial treatment of him. On July 7, 1865, he writes to Bekhabar:

'May God preserve the ruler of Rampur! I received my money for both April and May as of old, and, God willing, the money for June . . . will come too. Today is Friday, 7th July. As a rule the Nawwab's letter with the draft comes about the 10th or 12th. I have sent off the ode in celebration of his accession, and received the acknowledgement. I no longer keep copies of my verse and prose. My heart is sick of this art. One or two of my friends have a copy of it. I have sent word to them now. If it comes today then tomorrow, and if tomorrow then the next day, I will send it you. At the insistence of brother Amīn ud Din Khan I have written a ghazal in the same metre and rhyme as one of [Amir] Khusrau's. Ala ud din Khan [Alai] has sent him a copy. . . . I am sending off the original to you. It is so hot that I do not know where to turn. And on top of that are my physical ills and spiritual sorrows.'

About this time he had from Majruh what looked like good news from Alwar. In an undated letter he replies:

'I had already heard of the Raja's generosity. Praise be to Exalted God! . . . Now let's see when he returns and whether he sends for me in accordance with his promise. At the time he left for Calcutta he said he would send for me on his return; and of course, if he sends for me I shall go. It looks as though for you and me the time of troubles is drawing to a close and the days of prosperity are dawning. Now I shall have to play the flatterer to Miran Sahib. It will be he who has access to the Raja if my luck holds. Now you must lay the foundations for my prosperity by keeping Miran Sahib well-disposed towards me. My friend, this Miran or Amiran Sahib is His Highness's favourite. He may choose any man from any group he pleases and get him an interview with His Highness, or choose anyone out of the tribe of poets and get him given whatever he pleases. Give him and [Mir Sarfaraz Husain] my blessing.'

On July 17, 1865, he writes again to Majruh and Mir Sarfaraz Husain:

'The delight of my eyes Mir Mahdi [Majruh] and Mir Sarfaraz Husain must be cross with me. They will be grumbling at me and saying to themselves, "Just see, he hasn't written to us." Well,

I too possess a tongue; if only you
Would ask me, I would hasten to explain.¹

So let me explain that you too have not written, so there was no letter to reply to. When Miran Sahib came I asked after you and told him to send you my

¹ Ghalib is here adapting one of his own couplets.

blessings when he wrote. And that is the most I can manage. He came yesterday. I asked him, "Have you heard from Alwar?" He said, "No, not this week". How shall I describe to you the state I am in? I used to chant this verse of mine to myself:

Back! thronging hosts of black despair,
lest you reduce to dust as well
The one joy left to me—the joy that
unavailing struggle brings.

But now this is a song I can no longer sing, because the joy of unavailing struggle has turned to dust. "Verily we are for God and verily to Him we shall return."

This is the last letter which we possess to Majruh or to any of his circle.

A week later, on July 23, 1865, he writes again to the Nawwab of Rampur:

'Here we need rain, and the wind seems to rain sparks of fire. In the scorching sun men's faces and the rocks of the hills burn. . . . Wherever you turn are hosts of varied sicknesses, and only on men's limbs, which run with sweat, is any trace of moisture . . . to be found. Either the hot wind blows, or the air is completely still. I write these lines because I wonder all the time how Your Highness is faring. The sooner you favour your well-wisher with a reply, the greater will be the boon that you confer on him.'

Three days later, on July 26, 1865, he writes to Amīn ud Din Ahmad Khan:

'I learned from your kind letter that two Persian ghazals I sent had reached you. Did the third one [he here gives the rhyming words] not reach you?—the one I sent at your request. Surely it must have done, and you must have forgotten. Your representative in constant attendance at the court of Asadullah [Ghalib], i.e. Maulana Alai, has, with a view to the pleasure of him who sent him there, kept on at me until I wrote an Urdu ghazal. If you like it, get it taught to a singer. It should go well in the higher ranges of the *jhinjoti* mode. If I live that long I will come in the winter and hear it too.'

In a letter of July 30, 1865, he explains to Sayyah his relationship with Rampur:

'About ten to twelve years ago the late Nawwab of Rampur Yusuf Ali Khan began sending me his verses to correct; and every month he had a draft for a hundred rupees sent me. Judge of his tact and courtesy by the fact that he never demanded receipts for the money. He would enclose his draft with his letter and I would send him a letter in reply. Besides this monthly allowance he would send me other sums from time to time—sometimes two hundred,

sometimes two hundred and fifty. During the time of the troubles my income from the Fort ceased and my pension from the British was stopped. This good man continued to send my monthly allowance and occasional extra gifts from time to time; [actually, the monthly allowance began only in July 1859] and that is how I and my dependants managed to survive. The present Nawwab—may God preserve and prosper him for ever and ever—continues to send the draft for my monthly allowance as of old. Let us see whether he continues the practice of the occasional gifts or not.’

In an undated letter to Shākir of about this time he explains one of his couplets:

‘My home lies plunged in the black night
of raging grief;
Only a burnt-out candle shows that day
has dawned.

“The black night of raging grief”—that is pitch darkness, impenetrable night. No sign of dawn, as though, in fact, dawn had never come to the world. But there is one indication that day has dawned—the burnt-out candle; because the lamp or the candle that burns through the night goes out as morning dawns. The beauty of the picture lies in the thought that the very thing singled out as the evidence of morning is itself one of the causes of the darkness; and the reader is forced to reflect how dense must be the darkness in that house where the very signs of morning contribute to the darkness . . .

‘I have corrected your ghazal and am returning it. You send it as something requiring correction: I receive it as something from which I can learn.’

His next letter to Shākir is dated August 6, 1865:

‘On the envelope of your letter you had written, “Sender: Maulvi Abdur Razzaq Jafri ul Haidari” and [elsewhere on the envelope], “Shākir.” When I read it, for a long time I thought to myself, “Are these two different people?” After a while I remembered that your name is Maulvi Abdur Razzaq and your takhallus Shākir. Just see how absent-minded I have become!’

He goes on to correct some of Shākir’s verses and then to explain at length the meanings of earlier verses of Shākir’s as modified by his corrections. This leads him on to speak of his own development as a poet:

‘When I began to write poetry I took [the Persian poets] Bedil and Asir and Shaukat as the models for my Urdu verse. Thus the concluding couplet of one of my ghazals was:

He writes in Urdu, but in Bedil’s style—
Who could do that but Asadullah Khan?

Between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five I wrote on highly fanciful themes, and in these ten years got together a big diwan. But in the end, when I learned discretion I rejected this diwan—tore it up completely—leaving only some ten to fifteen couplets in my present diwan by way of samples of my former style.¹

‘Kind sir, your [Persian] prose does not require correction. Your distinctive style of writing is lively and without blemish, and you should maintain it. And if you favour me by wishing to model your prose on mine, study *Panj Ahang* and my other writings attentively and with concentration, and practise writing more and more. . . . You are gifted in high degree with a natural aptitude for writing, and I entertain the strongest hopes that, with your keen intelligence and forceful style, you will soon be writing excellently—a source of pride to me and all your friends, and of envy to your enemies. . . .’

On August 21, 1865, he writes to the Nawwab of Rampur:

‘*The Tale of Hamza* is a work of fiction, written by talented men of Iran in the days of Shah Abbas II [1642–1666]. In India they call it *The Tale of Amir Hamza*, and in Persia *The Secrets of Hamza*. It was written something over two hundred years ago, but it is still famous and always will be.’

He goes on to say that he has written an ode in the Nawwab’s praise, which he encloses, incorporating characters and incidents from the Hamza story. He hopes the Nawwab will like it.

No doubt he also hoped that the Nawwab’s appreciation would find monetary expression. He was therefore all the more delighted when a draft for Rs. 200 reached him on the very day he had posted off the ode. He wrote again next day, on August 22, 1865:

‘Your . . . humble pensioner Ghalib is at a loss to know whether he should first thank you for your bounty or first speak of your miraculous insight. . . . These days sundry creditors were dunning me for payment, and in fact were prepared to raise an outcry against me; and your draft for Rs. 200 was like a pitcher of the water of eternal life to me, releasing me from the snare of death. The remarkable thing is that . . . I had sent off an ode at nine in the morning, and at three in the afternoon this miracle occurred. . . .’

His appreciation led him when he heard a few days later that the Nawwab was ill, to offer his friendly advice as to the treatment he should adopt:²

‘I am not a physician, but I am a man of much experience, with the understanding that seventy years of life brings to a man. I would not speak in these

¹ This statement greatly exaggerates what he did—cf. p. 40 above.

² The letter is undated, but the Nawwab replied on August 29th.

terms to others, but I cannot help expressing my opinion to Your Highness. God knows what it was, or what your physicians thought it was, that caused your illness, but in my opinion disorders of the stomach and of the heart both contributed to it. Now in order to safeguard your health it is important that you should take water-coconut from time to time. To strengthen the heart you should take the gold-and-ambergris electuary made up according to the prescription of the late Hakim Babar Ali Khan. Its ingredients are gold leaf, white ambergris, essence of *kewra* [a strong-scented flower], and white crystallized sugar—made to a special recipe in which the use of too many ingredients was deemed inappropriate. (Other electuaries have many more ingredients.) Avicenna's stimulant, conserve of pearls, conserve of ox-tongue and ambergris, essence of meats prepared without intoxicating ingredients, compounded with stimulants and tonics which are neither too heating nor too cooling. . . . [a word or two is evidently missing here]. From time to time you should drink oxymel¹ and rose-water. Your diet should include plenty of fowl, and lightly-done eggs, but you should exercise care not to eat fowl and eggs at the same sitting. With goat's meat, eggs are permissible, and, indeed, delicious and good to eat. Essence of mint and essence of the small cardamon should always be in your medicine-chest. Increase the use of perfumes. Refrain from sexual intercourse after meals. Sheep's foot gravy should always be on your dinner-table, for you to partake of whenever you feel the inclination.

May you live on and on till Judgement Day
And every day your honour and wealth increase.'

He writes again on September 18, 1865 to condole with the Nawwab on the death of his wife:

'I want to write something, but I do not know what to write. I ought to have written a poem of condolence in the Persian language and in eloquent style. But I swear by your feet, I could not bring myself to do so. An ornate style, in verse or prose, is for occasions of rejoicing, when the heart, in the exuberance of its joy, blooms like a flower and the mind expands and words are sought for and themes created. But now I am half dead, and my heart is despondent and my spirit dejected. . . . How fair is my fortune, that before I had done justice to themes of praise and congratulation I should be called upon to write an elegy! . . . At the very outset of Your Highness's reign you have had to suffer the greatest blow that could be imagined. When the outset of your reign brought you such extreme of pain, it is surely demanded now that for ever and ever, as long as you live no sorrow should befall Your Highness. . . .'

He enclosed a four-line chronogram on the lady's death.

Within a month he was himself on the way to Rampur, to be present at the

¹ Vinegar, lime-juice or other acid, mixed with sugar or honey.

celebrations of the Nawwab's accession. He writes of his impending departure in a letter to Alai of October 1, 1865—the first since February, a fact from which we may perhaps deduce that Alai was in Delhi for most of the intervening months. He begins with a verse which shows that Alai and his father were once again on good terms, and continues: 'My friend, you know that I am off to Rampur. All the circumstances are now favourable, and if I live, I shall set off on Friday.' This would have been October 6th, but his departure seems in fact to have been delayed, for he writes in a letter to Shākir dated only 'October, 1865' but evidently written early in the month, that he will be setting out 'either on Tuesday or Wednesday'. He continues:

'The occasion of my going is to mourn the late Nawwab and congratulate the present one. I shall have to stay there two or three months, so from now on address any letters to Rampur. No need to write the address of the house. My name and "Rampur" is enough.'

He goes on to praise a mukhammas (a poem written in stanzas of five lines) which Shākir had sent him to correct:

'I have corrected your mukhammas and am returning it. The truth is that the verses are yours and the delight in them mine. By a fortunate chance, while I was correcting your poem my loyal and loving friend, the wise man of the age and seal of the line of divines profound in learning, Maulvi Mufti Sadr ud Din Khan Sahib Bahadur, Sadr us Sudur of Delhi, whose takhallus is Azurda—may he live for ever and may God raise him to ever greater eminence—was on a visit to me, ennobling my house of sorrow with his presence. He saw your poem, and liked it. He praised your honour's eloquence, drew a senior partner's¹ share of the pleasures your Arabic verses provided, and spoke at length, with fluent tongue and forceful exposition, in praise of the sweetness of your poetry. Then he learnt from me so much of your excellent qualities as my knowledge could provide and my speech express; and this brought him joy and pleasure. I congratulate you. Without ever having seen you, without ever having met you, out of sheer warmth of feeling for you, he commanded me to write to you that he desired the honour of meeting you. Accordingly I do so: be pleased to accept what I write.'

By October 11, 1865, he was well on his way to Rampur, for he wrote on that date from Muradabad to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan:

'It's Wednesday, and it must have been about nine in the morning when I got to Muradabad, travelling alone in a palanquin. . . . The two boys, the two carts, the carriage, and the servants are following on behind. They'll be here any

¹ In Urdu, 'sharik i ghalib'. This is a play on words, for they can mean both 'senior partner' and 'Ghalib's partner.'

time now. If the night passes uneventfully, and if I live, I shall reach Rampur tomorrow. I'm ill at ease. It's three days since I passed a motion. The boys are well. Tell your teacher [Ghalib's wife]. Give Mirza Shihab ud Din Khan my blessing and Nawwab Ziya ud Din my regards. Read out my letter to both of them—mind you do! Zahir ud Din won't be pleased if I send him my blessing, so tell him I send my respectful service.'

From a letter to another correspondent we know that he reached Rampur on October 13th¹. Eight days later, on 21st, he wrote again to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan:

'I learned from your letter that you are worried about my diet. Well, I swear by God that here I am happy and well. I get my morning meal so early in the day that by about nine o'clock my servants have eaten too. [The servants would not eat until after their master had finished his meal.] The evening meal too comes early. Several kinds of meat and vegetable dishes, pulao, mutanjan [meat boiled in rice with spices and sugar] . . . and at both meals both leavened bread and chapaties, with chutneys and preserves. I am happy, and the boys are happy. Kallu is better again. A water-carrier, a scullion and a sweeper are provided from the Nawwab's establishment, and I have engaged a barber and a washerman. So far I have met the Nawwab twice. The honour he shows me and his consideration and courtesy leave nothing to be desired.

'Zahir ud Din Khan Bahadur, my blessings upon you. Take this letter to your grandmother [Ghalib's wife] and read it to her, and tell her that that thing I told her is not correct. There's nothing in it. All is well with us here.'

Three days later, on October 24, 1865, he writes again:

'You're right, no praise is too high for our friend Fazlullah Khan's² sympathy and help; but my fortunes aren't linked with Alwar. Mark my words, I shall get nothing from that quarter—or if, to suppose the impossible, I do, it will be two hundred and fifty rupees, and I owe that much our friend Fazlullah Khan. I shall repay the debt to him. If by any chance, contrary to my firm belief, instructions are given to send me five hundred, and the money arrives, then let me know, hand over two hundred and fifty to friend Fazl [ullah Khan] and write to tell me you have done so. And use the rest as I shall write and tell you.

'Well, my friend, I've . . . built my castle-in-the-air. Now let me tell you what's been happening. The Nawwab Sahib's kindness and consideration increases from day to day. Today is Tuesday, 4th Jamadi us Sani and 24th October. I've received a grant for our food and for the fodder for the horses and the oxen. And I have gained by it, not lost. The celebrations will begin

¹ Cf. p. 326 below.

² Fazlullah Khan was the brother of the chief minister to the Raja of Alwar, and had evidently been sympathetic to Ghalib's aspirations there.

from December 1st, and will last for one or two weeks. After that I shall leave for Delhi. God willing, I shall see you there again by the end of December.'

The next letter, dated November 2, 1865, is not to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan, but to his son Zahir ud Din:

' . . . Tell me, my son, how are you? And how is your brother Mirza Tafazzul Husain? If you see him, give him my blessing and ask after his health. And give your respected father my blessing and tell him that his letter was in answer to mine, so there was nothing in it that demanded an answer from me. And listen, Zahir ud Din my son, go at once to your grandmother [Ghalib's wife] and tell her that both the boys and I are well, and ask her whether Shihab ud Din Khan sent her allowance of fifty rupees for October or not. [Mihr says that Ghalib's wife received a regular monthly allowance from Loharu.] And has Kidar Nath been to the house to issue their pay to Jafar Beg, Wafadar and the others, or not? Well, my son, ask your grandmother these two things and then write to me at once. Mind you don't put it off.'

Two days later, on November 4, 1865, he writes to Rizwan:

'Give my blessing to [your brother] Qurban Ali Beg Khan and write and tell me how he is.

'Today is . . . 4th November. The day before yesterday the Nawwab Sahib went off on tour. He said when he left that he would return in two weeks, spend four days here, and then go to see the exhibition ground at Bareilly.'

Hali says that 'as the Nawwab left, he entrusted Ghalib, in the usual phrase, "to God's keeping". Ghalib replied, "Your Highness, God entrusted me to *your* keeping. And here are you handing me back into His '." Ghalib's letter continues:

'When he gets back from there he will await the arrival of the Commissioner of Bareilly. He will be here by December 5th. Then there will be the celebrations, lasting for three days. Two or three days after that Ghalib will leave Rampur. God grant that he gets to you alive.'

He then gives him detailed instructions about various things he wants him to do and various matters he wants him to find out about. He concludes:

'Remember, I shall be waiting for an answer on all these points. Today is . . . 4th November. It's certain that eight days is long enough for this letter to reach you and your reply to reach me. I'll wait nine days, and if on the tenth I don't get a letter from you, I'll break off relations with you.'

On November 7, 1865, he writes to Junun. Junun was a Bareilly man, and seems to have hoped that Ghalib might be able to visit him from Rampur and see the exhibition. Ghalib replies:

'... What would I be doing visiting Bareilly? I got here on October 13th, and if I live, shall leave for Delhi by the end of December. What would I want with the Bareilly exhibition ground? I have had my fill of even this exhibition ground which men call the world, and I long for the world of light beyond it. . . .'

On November 12, 1865, he writes again to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan:

'Two of your letters came one after the other, telling me all the news—that Zahir ud Din had gone to Agra, that my letter addressed to him had been delivered to you and then sent on to Agra, that Zahir ud Din's grandmother [Ghalib's wife] was ill with a cough, that Kidar Nath was annoyed with me, that permission had been sought to reserve the house, and that Fazl i Hasan had been begged to be lenient with me. Why did you open my letter to Zahir ud Din? He's a hot-tempered boy and he'll be cross with you. His grandmother always falls ill with this sort of thing at this time of year. She has a recipe for strong soup. Get that made up and keep an eye on her. Kidar Nath's just a boy. What's he got to be cross about? After all, he's the one who'll go to get the accumulated money [Ghalib's pension] from the treasury. *I'm* the one who's cross with *him*; I paid him his money in full and he hasn't returned my I.O.U. and hasn't distributed the twenty-three rupees, eight annas. What else am I to write about the reserving of the house? I've written to Shihab ud Din Khan. I've written to Shamshad Ali Beg. And now I'm writing to you. I paid the five rupees, eight annas for September before I left. October, November and December comes to sixteen rupees, eight annas. I'll pay that when I get back; in fact, if I can find the opportunity I'll send the money for the three months by draft from here.

'Give my blessing to Ismail Khan Sahib and tell him to get the steps leading up to the entrance repaired and the lavatory . . . set to rights. What luck I have! A curse on the luck that makes our friend Fazl i Hasan act the role of my patron and benefactor! And alas for my wretchedness that what was needed could not be done! To be obliged to these striplings is sheer poison. Fazlullah Khan¹ is a brother to me. I don't mind being under obligation to him. I've asked him a hundred times to do things for me, and I'll ask him a thousand times more. Anyway, what's done is done. But from now on you're not on any account to ask him [Fazl i Hasan] for anything, or to write for anything either. If you have to speak to someone about anything, speak to Fazl[ullah Khan].

'The Nawwab Sahib will be back from his tour either this evening or

¹ Cf. p. 324 above.

tomorrow. Preparations are in hand for celebrations that remind you of Jamshed's¹ splendour.'

A letter to Tufta of November 28, 1865 praises the Nawwab's generosity:

'Kind friend, dear friend, poetic friend—I learnt from your letter that you had reached Sikandarabad and that my letter had reached you. May you live long and happily! I didn't come here to claim the due reward of my prose and verse; I came to beg. My daily bread comes not from my own pocket, but from the Nawwab's establishment. The date of my departure, my fate and my patron's magnanimity will determine. The Nawwab Sahib is in appearance a soul incarnate and in disposition the expression of God's mercy. He holds the keys of the treasury of bounty, dispensing without delay to each man the sum authorized in the statement he brought with him from the office of eternity. He has remitted well over a hundred thousand rupees a year of the tax on grain. One of his agents had an account of sixty thousand rupees to settle. The Nawwab cancelled this and made him a cash gift of twenty thousand. Munshi Newal Kishor's petition was presented; he listened to the gist of it and it is proposed to make a gift to him on the occasion of his daughter's wedding. I haven't been told how much. Mustafa Khan Sahib [Shefta] is coming . . . to take part in the celebrations, but he hasn't arrived yet. The celebrations begin on December 1st. I hear that a ceremonial robe [from the British authorities] will be presented on December 5th.'

Judging by its content, a letter to Hakim Ghulam Raza Khan dated only '1865' belongs to about this time:

'When I left you, I entrusted you to God's care and set out for Rampur. The weather was good. The hot season was over and the cold had not yet really begun to show its mettle. A moderate climate, with shade and running water everywhere. I had a comfortable journey to Rampur. The present Nawwab is his father's son, as they say—in courtesy and considerateness the equal of the late Nawwab, and in some of his qualities and ways even better.'

He goes on to mention briefly the two instances of his generosity which he had given to Tufta. Then he turns to another theme:

'Listen, my friend. I am a faqir of independent spirit, no worldling, and no deceiver. Flattery is not my way. I describe a man by the qualities I find in him. The Nawwab Sahib sends me a hundred rupees a month without obligation. *You* don't send me anything, so it is not that that persuades me to believe that if I had had a son of my own like you, he would have been my pride and joy and honour. Knowledge, intelligence, kindness, sincerity, rectitude, forbearance

¹ The great king of Persian legend.

—you have them all. The fear of God, sobriety, devoutness—you possess them all. All the moral excellencies of which the masters of the ethical sciences have written in their treatises are found in you. May God cherish you and grant you long life and wealth and prosperity beyond compute, and God willing, it will be just as I wish for you.’

The day after the Rampur celebrations ended, on December 6, 1865, he wrote to Alai to describe them:

‘The celebrations here are of a magnificence which would have astonished Jamshed. There is a place called Aghapur about three miles outside the city. For eight to ten days there were tents pitched there. The day before yesterday the Commissioner of Bareilly, accompanied by a few other Britishers and their wives, arrived and occupied the tents. There must have been nearly a hundred people gathered there, and all were the state guests of Rampur. Yesterday, Tuesday December 5th, his illustrious highness journeyed there with great pomp. He reached there at two in the afternoon and returned at evening, clad in his ceremonial robe. Wazir Ali Khan, his Steward, threw money from the elephant’s howdah as he passed along the route. Over the three miles it can’t have been less than two thousand [rupees] that was distributed. Today the exalted sahibs [the British guests] are to be feasted. They will have their lunch and dinner here in Rampur. The illuminations and the firework display will be on a scale that will turn night into day. There will be hosts of dancing-girls and a great assemblage of British officials . . . Some say that the Commissioner and the other exalted sahibs will be leaving tomorrow, some say the day after. Now let me draw you a portrait of the Nawwab. In stature, complexion, appearance, and good qualities he is just like [your uncle] Ziya ud Din Khan. There is a difference in age, and some diversity of features and the style of beard. He is kind, considerate, mild, generous, courteous, religious and abstemious. He is a man of good poetic taste, and knows hundreds of couplets by heart. He does not himself write verse, but he writes [Persian] prose, and writes it well, in the style of Jalalae Tabatabai. He has such an open, pleasant face that the very sight of him banishes all sadness. He speaks so well that to listen to him speaking is to feel that a new soul has entered your body. God grant him eternal prosperity and increase his glory. When all these gatherings are over, I shall seek leave to depart, and when leave is given, shall return to Delhi. Give your father my regards—provided you are permitted to enter his presence and say what you have to say—and write and tell me such news as you have of how the children are faring. It’s just before eight, on Wednesday 6th December, 1865. The writer’s name is probably [in Urdu, ghalib] known to you.’

The reference to Alai’s father shows that once again the relations between father and son were strained.

It would be at about this juncture that he wrote to Sajjad Mirza, the son of his old friend Husain Mirza:

‘Best of the sons of the Prophet, Sajjad Mirza Khan, the blessings of the faqir Ghalib be upon you! I received your kind letter. . . . Your friend Baqir Mirza [Baqir Ali Khan] kept crying, “A tahsildari! A tahsildari!”¹ When we got here we discovered that there are only six tahsils and six police-headquarters in the whole state. How could they produce a seventh? As for service as a courtier, you can get this only if you are a Sunni, and if you are well-versed in the standard branches of learning, and if you have a facile tongue—and if your luck favours you). In short, Baqir Ali Khan needed to fulfil three conditions. The first, he does fulfil; but you, from the beginning to the end of time, can never do so. [Sajjad Mirza was a Shia.] When the celebrations are over and I am ready to leave, I will speak [to the Nawwab or his officials] about both the boys [Baqir Ali Khan and Husain Ali Khan], and about Nāzir ji [Husain Mirza], and you, and about Muhammad Mirza, son of Saif ud Daula, and Miyan Zaki ud Din and Miyan Abdus Salam:

And let us see what is the will of God.’

This is the last letter to any member of this family we possess. Mihr writes briefly of Husain Mirza’s history from after the Mutiny as follows:

‘When general amnesty was proclaimed he returned [from Lucknow] to Delhi, but his properties had been confiscated. In those days, besides his relatives in Lucknow, Nawwab Ziya ud Din Ahmad Khan . . . did everything for him that the claims of friendship could demand, continuing to help him to the fullest extent he could. I have heard that for a time he (Husain Mirza) held the post of tahsildar in Bikaner. When Sir Salar Jang, the Prime Minister of Hyderabad, came to Delhi, he met, among others, Husain Mirza. Salar Jang expressed his great regret that they had not met before, and pressed him to come to Hyderabad. And he wished to go there, but in the meanwhile signs of insanity had begun to appear—an outcome which could be expected, having regard to the terrible experiences through which he had passed. He remained insane for the rest of his life, dying on April 26th, 1890. Majruh wrote the chronogram of his death.’

Ghalib writes again to Alai on December 22, 1865:

‘Mirza, it’s better to sit face to face than side by side. Come and sit down facing me. At seven this morning Baqir Ali Khan and Husain Ali Khan, with fourteen

¹ The office of chief revenue officer of a tahsil, consisting usually of a small town and the villages adjacent to it. Ghalib means that Baqir Ali Khan had hoped to be appointed a tahsildar in Rampur State.

cocks—six large and eight small—left for Delhi. Two of my servants went with them. One and a half—that is, Kallu and the boy Niyaz Ali—are here with me. When they left, the Nawwab presented each of them with a shawl. Mirza Naim Beg, son of Mirza Karim Beg, has been here for the last two weeks. He's staying with his sister. He says, "I'll come with you to Delhi, and go on to Loharu from there." As for my departure, God willing, I shall be off before the week is out.

'You've made a wrong move. You were writing a letter in Urdu on a single theme and suddenly switched into Persian—and that too the Persian of an office clerk. . . . Anyway, I won't produce the letter, but just convey its contents, and that will serve the purpose. . . .

'I've already written the date above. My name I've changed to Maghlub.' [Ghalib means 'vanquisher', maghlub, 'vanquished']

On December 26, 1865, he writes again: 'Your two nephews [i.e. Ghalib's 'grandsons'] left [today] for Delhi. I shall take the road . . . the day after tomorrow.'

He then makes a laconic comment in an adapted verse to the effect that where honour and kindness were concerned, they were shown to him in such degree that what was the peak for others was only the starting point for him—and that where wealth and money were concerned he came away empty-handed.

❁ Chapter 15 ❁

1866

From letters to various correspondents we can piece together the details of Ghalib's return journey from Rampur to Delhi. The journey was not a comfortable one, and before he had covered the first stage, from Rampur to Muradabad, he was in trouble. He describes some of his tribulations in a letter to the Nawwab of Rampur on January 10, 1866:

'I have reached Muradabad. The bridge collapsed after my palanquin had crossed it and the cart with the baggage—including the bedding—was left in the open [on the other side], along with the servants, in the freezing cold. They alone know what they went through there in the cold with nothing to eat. I went to stay in a small apartment at the inn, wrapped myself in a blanket, and, hungry and thirsty as I was, lay down to sleep. . . . I got up in the morning feeling worn out and in pain. Two angels sent by Sahibzada Mumtaz Ali Khan Bahadur appeared, and carried me off to Said ud Din Khan Sahib's house. Sahibzada Sahib treated me with an honour and a kindness, and Said ud Din Khan Sahib with a kindness and an honour, beyond my deserts. Then, unexpectedly, Maulvi Muhammad Hasan Khan Bahadur, the Sadr us Sudur, came and took me to his house. I stayed there five days. My friend Nawwab Mustafa Khan Bahadur [Shefta] came to see me there. The next day he took the road for Rampur, the city of delight, and I set out to measure the miles to Delhi, city of affliction, and reached the door of my house of sorrow on Monday 20th Shaban 1282, 8th January, 1866. And this too was only thanks to the assistance of Your Highness's auspicious influence; how else could one such as I have reached Delhi alive?'

Actually the Nawwab had already had news of Ghalib's misfortunes from Shefta after his arrival, and he at once (on January 5th) wrote to Ghalib at Muradabad, expressing his sympathy and concern, and suggesting that he return to Rampur where his illness could be properly treated. But by the time the letter reached Muradabad, Ghalib had already left. A further letter to the Nawwab dated January 21, 1866 again speaks of the difficulties and discomforts of the journey. He writes of

' . . . the cold, the rain, constipation, indisposition, loss of appetite, repeatedly having to go without food, and to stay in strange places, no sun all the way