



Ghalib in a writing mood

Ghalib as a Master of Urdu Prose

Ghalib's name as a poet has so much eclipsed his work and worth as a prose-writer that it is not often realised what great service he has rendered to Urdu prose and how eminent is the position occupied by him as a prose-writer. In the growth of a language it is a curious feature that progress in poetry always precedes advancement in prose. Humanity lags as it were in numbers. The real strength of a literature, however, is often judged by the strength of its prose. Before Ghalib originated a simple, natural and fascinating style of Urdu prose, there was comparatively little of prose literature in the language, except a few books of fiction or theology and the style in vogue was very artificial and unnecessarily encumbered with Arabic and Persian words. Ghalib has not, unfortunately, left for us any book in Urdu prose on a particular subject and all that we have is the collection of his letters, but even in these samples of his off-hand and effortless writing, he shines with a lustre peculiarly his own. He writes as he would speak. He addresses his correspondents as if he was talking to them face to face. He gives expression boldly and fearlessly to the innermost feelings of his heart. He expresses his opinions freely and frankly and calls for similar frankness in reply. There is a certain

amount of flow and rhythm about his prose which is spontaneous and which is not easy for another to imitate, but on the whole, in spite of the lapse of more than half a century, his letters still stand as a model of Urdu prose and seem to be destined to hold that position for a long time to come. Among the best writers to-day there is none who can write a better-worded letter and in spite of the many changes and improvements which have taken place in the Urdu language and literature since the death of Ghalib, there is no essential difference between the style adopted by him and the style which is current to-day.

That he had consciously introduced this style as a much needed innovation, would appear from a letter of his to Mir Mahdi Hassan *Majruh* in which he says: "All the wealth of Delhi in gold and pearls and jewellery has flowed into the Punjab as a result of the loot that followed the Mutiny, but this style of writing was my peculiar property. This wealth has been looted by the cruel hands of a man from Panipat who resides in the Ansari's quarter. However I bear him no grudge for this loot. May God bless him." The allusion in this passage is to Mir Mahdi *Majruh*. It may appear that Ghalib may be referring to Hali, who belonged to Panipat and lived in the Ansari Mohalla. Hali, however, in his *Yadgar-i-Ghalib* (page 159, second edition) interprets this passage as referring to *Majruh*. In fact both deserved such praise, so far as their successful adoption of Ghalib's style in prose was concerned. It is clear from the high quality of the many prose works of Hali during the last

years of his life that he had acquired a wonderful mastery over Urdu prose. He was not, however, the only one among Ghalib's pupils who successfully adopted and made popular the style of their great master, but the style was adopted and more or less successfully imitated by each one of his numerous disciples and thus became the most popular and fashionable style of his period. We find Sayed Ahmed Khan, one of the most brilliant of Delhi's distinguished sons, who afterwards became so famous as Sir Sayed of Aligarh, adopting the ideal of prose writing which had been introduced by Ghalib. In fact none of the great writers who rose into eminence after Ghalib, I mean men like M. Muhammad Husain Azad and M. Zaka Ulla, to mention two only of the latter day celebrities of Delhi, could have possibly remained uninfluenced by Ghalib in the work which stands associated with their names.

The collection of the letters of Ghalib, known as the *Urdu-i-Mualla*, has been widely read and has passed through many editions. The edition that I am using for the purposes of this essay is a fairly good one. I am sorry I have not seen the earliest edition that was brought out by the admirers of the author soon after his death. They knew how fond he was of seeing his books decently printed and neatly got up. That edition may or may not have approached the ideal, but I have no hesitation in saying that for our generation an ideal edition of the *Urdu-i-Mualla* is still needed. The book should be as neatly and as correctly printed and lithographed as possible, for the letters of Ghalib are valuable not only as models of good Urdu

prose, but they are precious also as the best introduction to the personality of the author himself. It is obvious that they do not represent anything like the bulk of all the letters that he wrote to his friends. They must certainly be only a portion of all that he wrote in this form. The two parts of the *Urdu-i-Mualla* have been supplemented by a number of letters from the same pen, which have been collected in a book called the *Ud-i-Hindi*. I have before me the edition of this book published at the Nawal Kishore Press, Cawnpore. This collection was made by one Muhammad Mumtaz Ali Khan and the edition before me is the fourth one of its kind and was published about 1913. This is not as well got up as the *Urdu-i-Mualla* of the Mujtabai Press of Delhi, though the latter too could be improved upon.

I have not said anything above as to the historic value of these letters but it may safely be said that it is not inconsiderable. The information that we get in these letters about men and manners, as they existed in Delhi in the middle and the latter part of the 19th century, the graphic descriptions they give us of some of the events of the Mutiny and the incidents following it, are valuable as they are, but the value will grow more and more as time advances. In fact the letters appear to me to be worth being translated into English to place the information available in them within the reach of those who do not know Urdu.

I now proceed to give some extracts from the letters of Ghalib to illustrate the points

briefly alluded to above and to bring out the special characteristics of Ghalib as a writer and as a man.

In a letter to Tafta,¹ Ghalib tells us in what light he regards the writing of letters to friends and the receiving of letters from them. He says: "Well, sir, would you continue to be cross or would you make peace with me. If you cannot get reconciled to me you should at least tell me the reason why you are cross. In my solitude I live chiefly on letters from friends. When I get a letter from a friend I take it to be as a visit from him. There is not a day on which I do not receive several letters from various directions. In fact on some day the postman brings my letters more than once, a few in the morning and a few in the evening. This keeps me busy as well as amused and I easily pass my day in enjoying their perusal and in having the pleasure of writing replies to them." In another letter² to the same gentleman, Ghalib explains some of his literary ideals, especially with regard to his reluctance to indulge in exaggerations that were customary among Eastern writers. It appears from that letter that Tafta must have sent his book to Ghalib for comments (*Tagriz*). Eastern writers have had a practice of sending their books to their friends for writing eulogistic notes on them and it was understood that whether the friend to whom a book was submitted really thought highly of the composition or not, he must write a review highly praising the work which

1. Page 68, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.
2. Page 68, edition 1899, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

would be published along with the book as a testimony of its excellence. People used, therefore, often to write much undeserved praise on books submitted to them and never thought that such an exaggeration would lower their own reputation as literary commentators in the eye of the public. The public too understood this and attached comparatively little value to such testimonials, a number of which we commonly find attached to every published book, independently of its merits. Ghalib tried to combat this wrong notion and endeavoured to be moderate in offering praise. It appears that he gave some mild praise to the book submitted to him by Tafta, who thereupon complained to him that he had not been treated kindly by him. It is in this connection that Ghalib writes: "I cannot give up my principles. I do not know that style of Indian writers of Persian in which they begin to praise one like professional Bhats.¹ Look at my *Qasidas*, you will find that the proportion of poetical flights on general subjects of a literary nature is much larger in them than the verses devoted to the eulogy of the person praised. The same principle I follow in my prose. Look at the *Taqriz* I wrote on the book of Nawab Mustafa Khan and see how small is the space devoted in it to his praise. See again the preface I wrote for the *Diwan* of Mirza Rahim-ud-Din *Haya* or look at the *Taqriz* I wrote

1. Bhats: A class of singers who committed to memory the genealogies of rich men and wove them into verses and on festive occasions came and recited those verses, giving at the same time highly coloured descriptions of the great deeds and exploits of the ancestors of the men praised by them. They did all this in the hope of getting a little money by way of reward.

at the instance of Mr. John Jacob on his edition of the *Diwan-i-Hafiz*. There is only one verse in praise of him and the rest of the writing, in prose, is on other interesting topics. I assure you if I had written a preface to a collection of poems of a prince I would not have given him more space than I have given to the praise of your work. If you knew this peculiarity of mine, you would have regarded the praise that I have bestowed on your work as enough". This was a much-needed reform and considering the time at which it was introduced, I think it was very brave of Ghalib to introduce it, in defiance of the popular fashion of the time and at the risk of offending the authors, most of whom were his personal friends.

I have mentioned in the essay on Ghalib as a poet, that there were numerous pupils of Ghalib who submitted their verses to him for criticism or improvement. A few words about this peculiar system in the East may not be out of place. It is as true of the East as of the West that a poet is born and not made, so far as the poet in the real sense of the term is concerned, but from very early times it has been customary in Persia and India for well-to-do men of culture and others to write verses and to assume poetical names and for this purpose to submit their verses to some well-known master of their time for correction. Except in the case of princes or noblemen, who used either to fix stipends for this work or make occasional presents to their teachers of poetry, the majority of such pupils paid nothing to the master, who corrected the verses of most of his

pupils in order to encourage literary taste and to enlarge the number of his pupils, which was often regarded as a matter of pride. This entailed a large sacrifice of time and energy on the part of some of our great writers, for which a parallel can scarcely be found in the lives of their Western compeers. Ghalib in his conscientious desire to help his pupils as much as possible, added much more to the ordinary heavy nature of this task by not only making corrections in the compositions submitted to him but by generally writing additional explanatory notes and directions in letters accompanying or following the corrected sheets. Some idea of this labour may be formed from a passage in his letter to Tafta:¹ "The verses of *Rind* were corrected within a week after their arrival and I made additional suggestions and useful notes thereon as I usually do."

To give just a sample of the kind of help that he used to render to the better class of his pupils, a portion of a letter to Tafta giving a detailed criticism of one of his *Qasidas* is given below:²

"Well done. What a nice *Qasida* you have written. The continuity of sense and the simplicity of words are praise-worthy. One of your lines coincides with a line of a verse from *Shaukat* of Bukhara, that is *Chak gardidamo az jaib badaman raftam*. I think you may well be proud of your thought having reached the same height as that of *Shaukat* in this line, but the line preceding this in your poem does not come up to the corresponding line of *Shaukat*. I would

1. At page 64, *Urdu-i-Mualla*, edition of 1899.

2. At page 51, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

have been so glad if you had equalled or excelled him in that line also. I wish God may grant you so much of life as to enable you to write a collection of *Qasidas* extending over some three hundred pages, but we are not to collect *Qasidas* according to the letters of the alphabet." This last advice is very significant. This clearly shows what a literary reformer Ghalib was. The old custom in this respect for poets was, if they were making a collection of *Ghazals*, to write *Ghazals* ending with every letter of the alphabet and to follow the same method in a collection of *Qasidas*. Ghalib realised that this must lead to artificiality. A man may find that he has nothing much to say which would give him a sufficient number of verses ending in a particular letter of the alphabet. The search for words ending in that letter and the effort to compose verses containing such words would lead him away from thoughts that might have elevated his *Qasidas* to a high level. Versification of this kind would be a mere form without any life or soul in it. Ghalib, therefore, warns his friend that he should not aim at writing according to the letters of the alphabet but should try to compress more sense and thought in what he writes and to sing according to the inspiration of the moment. It is further noteworthy that his desire to confine the ambition of a profuse writer like Tafta to 20 *Qasidas* only was a hint that quality rather than quantity should be his aim. He meant to say that 300 pages of good verse were much better than a larger number of indifferent quality.

Like a good artist and a refined scholar with

an established reputation he was very punctilious about the correct printing of his works. He did not allow, so far as he could help it, a single mistake to be made in the copying or the printing of any of his books. From a letter¹ to Tafta, dated the 16th September, 1858, it appears that in a book of his the word *Nahib* got printed by mistake instead of some other word. Ghalib detected this while the book was still in the press but when a large number of forms had been printed off. He wrote at once to Tafta, under whose supervision the book was being published, as follows:—"The two leaves in which the word *Nahib* occurs may be removed and corrected and other leaves substituted for them. It does not matter whether such leaves number 400 or 500. Please get them all changed and whatever expense is incurred for the papers so wasted, I will bear that. If this word stands as it is, the whole book will be disfigured and there will be a blot on my name. It is an Arabic word. I had corrected it in the manuscript. It seems to have escaped the eye of the litho-grapher. I am dying of the *Nahib* (fear) of this word *Nahib*, and would like to have soon the information that it has been corrected". He returns to the same topic in another letter² which need not be quoted, but which shows his anxiety in this behalf. It is painful to observe that in the publication of many of the works of such a writer, subsequent to his death, mistakes of printing have crept in, to a large extent.

1. At pages, 60-61 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*, edition of 1899.
2. Printed at page 86 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

Ghalib's good taste was not confined to a desire for excellence of quality in literature and for its correct publication, but he attached great value to the excellence of get-up also. There are numerous passages in his letters which show that he liked neatly and beautifully got up books and detested the absence of these features. Tafta once sent him two copies of a book of his called *Sunbalistan*, which was badly printed. Ghalib, instead of thanking him for the present, wrote frankly showing his dislike of the get-up of the book. He said: "You have wasted¹ your money and also your composition and my corrections. What a bad copy of your verses this is. You could have understood what relation your verses bear to this bad copy of them, if you had been here in these days and had seen some of the unfortunate Begams from the old Royal fort going about in the streets, whose faces are beautiful as the full moon, but whose clothes are dirty and shabby and whose shoes are torn. I am not exaggerating things when I use this simile, but in truth I regard the *Sunbalistan* as a beautiful sweet-heart in an ugly dress".

In another passage, in a letter addressed to Mir Mehdi *Majruh*, we find an expression of a liking for neat printing and a dislike for the reverse. Ghalib says: "Good printing is done at Lucknow. Whosoever gets his *Diwan* printed there is elevated to the skies by praise and the beauty of calligraphy adorns his words, but curse be on Delhi, its weather and its printing. Pub-

1. Letter dated 19th April, 1861, page 58 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

lishers here do not know how to mention the name of a writer properly. I have been carefully examining every copy as it was sent to me. The caligraphist used to send the copy to me through another man and now that the *Diwan* has been published and a copy of it has been presented to me as its author, I find that the mistakes are all there and the copyist never took the trouble to correct them. So I have had to add a list of corrections and shall have to purchase some copies of the book for distribution, whether I like them or not. I will send you 3 copies for you and both of my other friends. I am not pleased with the book nor will you be". This very letter contains a curious passage to which attention may be drawn as a specimen of the way of thinking of those times and to show that Ghalib was too much of a poet to be a business man and that he considered it far from genteel to sell his own books. He writes: "You tell me that there are many people desirous of purchasing the book and that I should let you know the price. I am not a broker, a bookseller or the manager of a press. The owner of the Ahmadi Press, where it has been published, is Muhammad Hussain Khan. Its manager is Mirza Ammun Khan. The press is at Shahdara. The owner lives at Delhi in Kucha Rai Man. The price of the book is -/6/-, postage extra. You may give this information to intending purchasers, who may send for any number of copies they may like by post. They may remit the price either in cash or in postage stamps to the above address. You and I have nothing to do with the matter."

The above extracts, though not uninteresting from a biographical point of view, are mainly possessed of literary interest. The majority of the letters, however, have an auto-biographic value and would furnish material for an excellent biography. If more letters had been forthcoming and if they had been arranged in their chronological order, they might have furnished material for a life of Ghalib, which could have compared favourably with Cross's life of George Elliot, which consists only of the letters of the eminent lady-novelist, properly arranged.

I will now give, by way of illustration, extracts from some of the letters in which the author tells the story of his own life. A letter to Saif-ul-Haq *Sayyah* thus describes one of the sources of income on which Ghalib depended, for a long period, for his maintenance: "For 12 years the late Nawab Yusuf Ali Khan of Rampur used to send his verses to me and to send a draft for Rs. 100 every month, but never asked me for a receipt for this money. He used to enclose the draft in his letter and he used occasionally to send a lump sum of Rs. 200 or 250 as a present. During the disturbed period following the Mutiny my income from the fort (that is the Red Fort of Delhi) had vanished and the pension from the British Government had been stopped. It was through the kindness of the Nawab of Rampur, who continued sending the fixed salary every month and

1. A biography of Ghalib, based on his letters, coupled with other available material has been recently written and published by M. Ghulam Rasul, *Mihir*, Editor of the *Daily Inqilab* of Lahore.
2. Page 13 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*, edition of 1899.

other sums in addition, that I and my dependents managed to live in those days. The present Nawab, his successor, may God preserve him long, continues to send me my monthly salary as usual, though I do not know whether occasional gifts would continue or not."

In another letter¹ to the same friend, dated the 25th August, 1867, when he was nearing the end of his life, Ghalib tells a pathetic story of his growing disabilities and apologises for being unable to write to his friends as he used to do. He says: "I got both your letters but could not reply to them. Before now I used to write while lying in my bed. Now I cannot do that even. My hands tremble and eye-sight is weak. There is no scribe in my employ. I can only get letters written now by a friend or a visitor to whom I dictate them. You must take me to be one on the eve of departure from this world. How can the newspaper men realise what I am reduced to. The two local papers, *Akmalul Akhbar* and *Ashraf-ul-Akhbar* know something about my present condition, as their editors are on visiting terms with me, and I have asked them to publish a full statement about my difficulties and to request my correspondents not to expect from me either replies to letters or corrections of poems. They published this, but no one seems to have paid any heed to my request. Letters are still pouring in from all sides, followed by reminders for replies and verses are still sent to me to be corrected. I cannot cope with this work and I am put to

1. Page 16 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*, edition of 1899.

shame. Old and decrepit, totally deaf and half blind, I am lying in bed like a block day and night." This very letter contains an allusion to the request which he seems to have received, times out of number, to be photographed and to send his photo to his friends. He writes: "An Indian photographer who was a friend of mine has left this place. There is an Englishman who takes photographs but wherefrom can I find strength enough to get down from the upper storey of my house and to get into a palanquin to go to his studio, to sit and wait on a chair for an hour or two and to return home alive after such a tedious process." His kind nature seems, however, to have found the persistent demands of his friends too hard to resist as he was after all photographed in his old age.

At the end of the letter above cited, Ghalib expresses tender sympathy with his friend in the loss of a child sustained by the latter about that time. He says: "I have learnt with great sorrow that you have lost your recently born son. Ask me what it is to lose a child. During the 74 years of my life I had seven children, boys as well as girls, none of whom lived to be older than 15 months. You are still young and need not despair. May God grant you patience to bear this loss and favour you with a better substitute for the lost one." In another letter¹ to the same correspondent, bearing date 17th September, 1865, there is a reference to a book of the author called *Nama-i-Ghalib*, (in Persian), which shows

1. Page 21, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

that notwithstanding his stinted means, Ghalib could spend considerable sums in the service of literature. He writes: "I got 300 copies of the book printed at my own expense and distributed them far and wide. I cannot send you a copy of it because parcels are not taken by the Post Office on Sundays. I shall send you to-morrow all the copies that are left with me."

Another letter to Saif-ul-Haq, dated the 17th June, 1866, might be produced to show Ghalib's fondness for fruit, particularly for mangoes. He used to get baskets full of them sent to him from various places. The frankness with which he accepted or rejected offers of such presents from friends is something refreshing to read about in these conventional days. He says: "I cannot think of anything which I can ask you to send me from Surat. What is there to be had which cannot be had here. I like mangoes, no doubt, very much, not less than grapes, but how can they reach here safely from Surat and Bombay. The *Malda* mangoes are known here as *Pewandi* and *Vilayati*. They are fine indeed and they would be finer still at Surat, but it seems you would be going out of the way to send them from there to Delhi. The expense of sending mangoes worth a rupee would amount to about Rs. 4 by the parcel post and even then perhaps 10 out of 100 will get here in a sound condition. Please give up the idea of sending me any. Delicious mangoes of various kinds can be had here in plenty. The Nawab of Rampur often sends pre-

1. Pages 23-24 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

sents of fine mangoes from his own garden. While I am writing I have just received two baskets of mangoes from a friend at Bareilly. They have been opened in my presence but all except 83 out of 200 sent to me have become rotten." A specimen of a witty suggestion that mangoes may be sent to him may also be mentioned. Once Ghalib was walking about with Bahadur Shah, the last Moghal Emperor, in a garden full of mangoe trees laden with very tempting fruit. He looked intently at the trees. The King asked what was he gazing at. He recited a Persian verse which says that there is no single fruit in the world which has not got on it the name and parentage of the person who is destined to enjoy it. Ghalib added that he was looking at the fruits to see if any of them bore his name on it. The King was very much amused at this humorous request and sent him a large quantity of different varieties of mangoes from the Royal garden. On another occasion Ghalib wrote a nice little poem on mangoes by way of thanks for mangoes sent to him. This poem is published in the *Urdu Diwan*.

Turning to another correspondent, M. Habib Ullah Khan, there is a letter addressed to him, dated the 15th February, 1867¹, full of autobiographic interest. It reads thus:—"You want to know something about me and the *Khilat* which I am entitled to. As regards my nationality I am a Turk belonging to the Saljuk dynasty. My grand-father came to India in the time of Shah Alam. The Mughal Government was then on

1. Pages 28-29 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

its decline. He got into service as an officer with only 50 horsemen under him and with the distinction of *Nagqara* and *Nishan* and a fertile Parganah was given to him in lieu of the salary of his men and himself. After the death of Shah Alam there was an unsettled state of things and that Parganah was lost. My father, Abdulla Beg, then went and took service at Lucknow under Nawab Asaf-ud-Daula and thence went to Hyderabad where he served Nawab Nizam Ali Khan as a leader of 300 horse. He was employed for several years but owing to some dispute he lost that service and came to Alwar. He got into the employ of Raja Bakhtawar Singh of Alwar, where he eventually died, having been killed in a battle. I was then brought up by my uncle, Nasrulla Beg, who was Subedar of Akbarabad on behalf of the Marhattas. In 1806 the Subedar's jurisdiction changed into that of a Commissioner appointed by the British Government under General Lake. General Lake asked my uncle to get some recruits for the British Government. He got together a brigade of 400 cavalry men. He was to get Rs. 1,700 a year as his personal allowance and a Jagir of more than a *lakh* of rupees per annum for life, but he suddenly died and the brigade was dispersed and some pension in cash was allowed to his heirs in lieu of the Jagir. That pension I am getting now. I was only 5 years of age when my father died and only 8 years old when I lost my uncle. I went to Calcutta in 1830 and got an interview with the Governor-General. I was given a *Khilat* of 7 pieces of cloth, a plumed head dress and a pearl necklace.

Since then a *Khilat* of the same kind was always granted to me when there was a *Darbar* at Delhi. After the Mutiny my *Khilat* and my entry into the *Darbar* were both stopped on the ground that I was one of the associates of the late King Bahadur Shah. My application showing my innocence was then investigated and the trouble ended after 3 years and the usual *Khilat* was restored to me. This was a remnant of the estate which I had lost and not a reward for any service rendered by me." There is a passage in this very letter which repeats Ghalib's own description of his old age and may be quoted, as many of the details given in it were not mentioned in a similar extract already made from another letter. "In Urdu they speak of the age of 70 or 72 as an equivalent for dotage. I am now 73 years old and therefore more than a dotard. My memory now is as if it had never been. My hearing had become very dull long ago, but now the sense of hearing too has disappeared like my memory. For more than a month it has been usual for friends, who come to see me, to write down on paper whatever they have got to say after the usual salutations. My food is now next to nothing. In the morning I take a little of the water of pounded almonds mixed with sugar, at noon I take a little soup, in the evening 4 fried *kababs* and at bed time a little wine, about five rupees in weight, mixed with the same quantity of rose water. Thus you will see I am an absolutely useless old fogey dying under the burden of sins." References to personal anecdotes in these letters are numerous and space does not permit me to

give many more extracts under this heading. Persons interested in these anecdotes must read the book itself. I may, however, give one more passage dealing with an incident of Ghalib's life, which is illustrative of the liberality with which literary men used to be rewarded by some Oriental rulers and the niggardliness with which some greedy courtiers of such rulers used to treat literary men.¹ Writing to Tafta, Ghalib refers to one of his *Qasidas* which fetched him a reward of Rs. 5,000, which he unfortunately never received. He writes: "You have reminded me of a very old story, which has revived a sore spot in my heart. A *Qasida* was submitted through Munshi Muhammad Husain to Roshan-ud-Daula and through the latter to Nawab Naseer-ud-Din Haidar of Lucknow. The Nawab ordered Rs.5,000 to be sent to me on the very day when the *Qasida* reached him. Muhammad Husain, the middleman, never informed me of this order. The late Muzaffar-ud-Daula came to Delhi from Lucknow sometime after this and told me about it, but he asked me not to tell Muhammad Husain that he had given me this information. I wrote to Shaikh Imam Bakhsh *Nasikh* to enquire what had been the fate of my *Qasida*. He wrote back in reply that a reward of Rs. 5,000 had been given by the ruler of Lucknow, but Roshan-ud-Daula himself kept Rs. 3,000 out of the sum and gave Rs. 2,000 to Muhammad Husain, telling him to send Ghalib any sum that he liked out of Rs. 2,000. *Nasikh* enquired from me whether Muhammad Husain

¹ Page 51, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

had sent anything out of the sum to me. I replied that I had not received even five rupees out of the whole sum of Rs. 5,000. *Nasikh* on hearing this wrote to me again that I should write to him a letter stating that I did not know whether any reward for my *Qasida* had been given by the King and he promised that he would manage to place the letter before the King and to get the person who had taken my money to disgorge it. I wrote a letter to the above effect as desired and posted it; but on the 3rd day after the despatch of the letter I heard a report in Delhi that Naseer-ud-Din Haidar was dead. You can see for yourself what could I do and what could be done by *Nasikh* after this misfortune." It is tragic indeed and typical of the disappointments which many a literary man in the East, who used to depend on the patronage of the royalty and nobility, had to face. The day had not dawned yet when good literary work could find a market for itself in the country and when special patronage was to be replaced by the general patronage of the public. Things have improved considerably in this country since the days of Ghalib and there have been many among recent writers of Urdu, who have derived fairly good incomes from the publication of their writings; though their earnings can hardly come up even now to the level of those of the best modern writers in Western countries.

There is another passage which is too tempting to be left out. It possesses a peculiar interest for the Punjab University. There is a reference in Ghalib's letters to a Treasury Officer named Mr. Rattigan, who is described as engaged in

writing a *Tazkira* of Urdu poets in English. I believe the gentleman alluded to is no other than the person who was afterwards called to the bar and became famous in this Province and throughout India as Sir William Rattigan and who for a long time guided the destinies of this University as its Vice-Chancellor. Ghalib writes: "I met Rattigan Sahib. He is writing in English¹ a *Tazkira* of Indian poets and he asked me to help him. I have sent to him seven books which I borrowed from Zia-ud-Din Khan. Then he asked me to write for him an account of some living poets whom I know well personally. I have written for him an account of 16 living writers among whom may be mentioned Nawab Zia-ud-Din Ahmad Khan of Loharu, who writes good verses both in Persian and Urdu and styles himself as *Nayyar* in Persian and *Rakhshan* in Urdu; Nawab Mustafa Khan, who has the *nom de plume* of *Shefta* in Urdu and *Hasrati* in Persian, and Munshi Hargopal Tafta. No translation of the Hindi or Persian verses will be included in the proposed compilation, but only the name of the poet and of his literary master and the poet's address and residence and his *nom de plume*. Mr. Rattigan has now become the Judge of the Small Cause Court." In another letter Ghalib refers to Mr. Rattigan as having been transferred to the Punjab on the 19th January, 1865. I do not know whether the *Tazkira* spoken of as under compilation ever came out or not, but it is interesting to note that the versatile genius of Sir

¹Page 83, *Urdu-i-Mualla*.

William Rattigan had not left the Urdu language and literature out of its sphere of activity.

I hope the translations of some of the extracts of Ghalib's Urdu prose that I have given from his letters, collected in the *Urdu-i-Mualla*,¹ will induce those who have not read the book before, to study it. They will find it interesting as descriptive of Ghalib's personal experiences and useful as a model of elegant and simple prose.

Ghalib's letters show that before he died, a fairly large number of English words had been introduced into the Urdu language, some without any change and some with slight modifications. Ghalib used those words but with the exception of this one indication of the influence of the West on Urdu, Ghalib's writings do not show any traces of contact with the West. His thoughts, both in poetry and prose, are essentially Eastern and are dressed in a purely Oriental garb. It is not till the writings of Syed Ahmad Khan and his co-workers like *Hali* and Nazir Ahmad came into existence that we see a distinct impress on Urdu of its contact with the English language and literature. This impress is gaining in depth and strength every day, in spite of a reaction which is noticeable against the dominating influence of Western culture. Ghalib, however, lived at a time when purely Oriental culture retained all its best features and had not yielded to Western influences and may be regarded as the fittest repre-

1. A better collection, which is in beautiful typed letters, has been recently published in 1941, by Munshi Mahesh Parshad and revised by Dr. Abdus Sattar Siddiqi of Allahabad. It is called *Khutut-i-Ghalib*.

representative of the old school of writers. A man of letters in the fullest sense of the word, he lived for literature and died serving its cause up to the very last days of his life. He died on the 15th February, 1869, and is resting near the sacred shrine of *Sultan-ul-Aulia* Nizam-ud-Din of Delhi, sharing that privilege with no less a personage than the famous poet, Amir Khusro.



Sir Syed Ahmad Khan