

THE NEW SCHOOL

OF

URDU LITERATURE.

A Critical study of Hall, Azad,
Nazir Ahmad, Rattan Nath Sarshar,
and Abdul Halim Sharar.
With an Introductory Chapter on Urdu Literature.

BY

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PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION.

This small book, of which a reprint is now offered to the public, was published more than twenty years ago. Very few English-knowing Indians cared for Urdu in those days and the main object of these essays was to invite them to a study of their own literature. The effort was appreciated at the time but could not, unfortunately, be followed by further work in the same direction. The first edition of the book got exhausted soon, but I did not think it worth while to print a second edition. I have now been asked to deliver a series of lectures on modern Urdu writers and it has been suggested to me that a reprint of my old book may be found useful as a sort of introduction to the series. I am conscious that these essays are not upto date but they may be interesting as a comparative study when read side by side with the lectures to be delivered shortly. Many things have changed since these essays were written. Many of the authors who were then alive have departed from this world. In fact *Shārar* is the only one of them who is in the land of the living. What I then called "the new school of Urdu literature" has given place to a newer school. Urdu is now being more widely and more eagerly read than was the case before and there is a growing interest in the story of its literature and in the life and work of its best writers. To take note of such changes and developments will be one of the objects of the proposed lectures, while this reprint will indicate the stage of progress reached two decades back. I am, therefore, publishing the old book without any attempt at revising it, to give it to the readers exactly as it was then and for whatever it may be worth now.

1921,

ABDUL QADIR.

PREFACE TO THE FIRST EDITION.

The following sketches containing a criticism of the works of the best known living writers of Urdu representing the new school of Urdu literature, now published in the form of a book, were not originally meant for the purpose. The first three of them were read at different meetings of a local Association and were published in local periodicals. In reprinting them I have not had leisure to alter them so as to make them more suitable to the form in which they now appear. I am not sure if they contain much deserving of appreciation further than what they have received, but as an excuse for placing them before the public once more I have added three other sketches which have not seen the light before. I do not claim that the list of the living representatives of what I have called the "New School of Urdu literature" is exhausted by the five authors whose works I have reviewed, and am conscious that this book will require considerable additions before it can be called exhaustive of all that is noteworthy in the new school of writers.

Realising the difficulty of assigning each one of the five literary luminaries of India his respective place in order of merit, I have arranged the sketches in order in which they were originally printed or written and wish clearly to state that the arrangement is independent of any significance as to relative merit. Moreover, so different is the sphere occupied by each one of the five eminent writers, so individual and characteristic is the style of each writing, that it would have been impossible to decide who is best, even if I had the indiscretion to try to pronounce on the matter.

It will be observed that of the five authors reviewed herein four are essentially writers of prose, and in Hali we have the solitary poet of the new school. At first I thought of keeping Hali out of

this collection, to be given with a similar collection of the best Urdu poets of the day, if I ever attempt it, and to have only prose-writers in this book. But the fear that Hali, with his novel ideals of poetry, will not be in keeping with his surroundings if placed side by side with Dag and Amir, with whom he has little in common, inclined me to have all living writers of the new school together. In this galaxy of eminent men, the grandest figure of all, the commanding personality of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan will be greatly missed, but his lamented death has robbed me of the privilege of including his name in the present collection. Besides, his remarkable work as a man of action makes it very difficult to have a purely literary sketch of him unblended with the influence of his activity in other directions, and I do not want just as present to trespass on the domain of his learned biographer and friend, Maulvi Hali, whose "Life of Sir Syed Ahmad" is ready for the press.

In conclusion I have to express a hope that this attempt will lead to further efforts in the direction of original and independent criticism of our literature from pens abler than myself and to state that if I find any appreciation of these sketches, I may try to prepare a similar collection of critical essays on the great masters of the Urdu language of the old school, including the two living poets, Dag and Amir, who, though born in this age, belong essentially to the generation that has passed away, in thoughts embodied in their writings.

1898

S. A. Q.

URDU LITERATURE.

Travelling through a well-trodden path is at once easy and safe, and, had I consulted my own convenience, I would have taken a subject on which much might have been said already and then all I would have required would have been the tact and skill to use the scissors. But I have taken up Urdu Literature for my subject this evening, because I have noticed how sadly neglected it is among those receiving English education. It is with a hope to rouse in your minds an interest in Urdu and to set you at least at thinking about it that I have come before you. Subjects of this kind are hard to deal with, and, in spite of the best efforts of a writer to make them interesting, tax the patience of the audience to not a small extent, because an enquirey into the origin and growth of any literature is rather tedious and, except to a chosen few, often uninteresting. A lecture on literature generally contains a story of that literature, the various kinds of compositions in it, accounts of its most eminent authors, criticism of their styles, enumeration of their works, and quotations to illustrate the peculiarities of every style. A discussion at length of all this would require a volume. Therefore I would content myself with briefly dwelling upon each head and will just clear the way for further discussion of the subject in future.

Before proceeding with the description of the origin of the language, I cannot resist the tempta-

Note.—It was in August 1893 that this paper was read before a meeting of the Young Men's Muhammadan Association, Lahore, and published in the Punjab Magazine for the same month. It is a reproduction from the Magazine, with very slight alteration.