

literature. There is always room at the top, and India stands badly in need of good vernacular journalists, essayists or orators, and any one who accomplishes something really substantial in these directions will not have reason to repent his efforts.

THE WRITINGS OF HALI *

کوئی ملتا نہیں ہے محترم راز
مجھ کو کہنا ہے کچھ ایسی زبان میں

The significant line from the pen of the distinguished writer whose works are to furnish the subject of this evening's discourse expresses exactly the state of mind in which I was when I took up pen to write this paper. Were it not for the possession which that state of mind had taken of me I would fain have refrained from attempting the risky business of criticising a living writer of Maulvi Altaf Husain Hali's position and ability. Interesting as literary criticisms may be to some minds, I, for one, have no unmixed admiration for them, as critics in general, who sit on judgment on men far abler than themselves in every respect, retard instead of advancing the progress of true learning. Good criticism is as rare as good writing. There are those who understand by criticism the ability to pick as many holes as possible, to expose the flaws and to hide the beauties of a literary work. There are others who, being admirers of a writer, will hold up everything of his as perfect. The position of a just critic, however, is truly critical. He is sure to give offence to passionate admirers for not admiring to the same extent that they do, and he is sure to lose

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the good graces of opponents for thinking the man capable of even the slightest good; and if, to add to his other difficulties, the subject of his criticism is a living writer, ten to one he is sure to displease the author himself, who, of course, liking, nay loving, his own productions, is resentful if any of them are made light of. What, then, has led me, in spite of my consciousness of the above difficulties to attempt an estimate of Hali's writings is that very feeling to which I have referred, of finding a few sympathetic souls who could feel just the same way about Hali and his work as I do, who could be called محترم راز, that is capable of understanding the language of my heart, and if by this ventilation of my views I succeed in causing even one heart to appreciate Hali as he ought to be appreciated, or if one heart goes home this evening thinking better of Urdu poetry and modern poets than before, I will not repent having run the risk of incurring the displeasure of some parties.

A biographical sketch is, of course, beyond my scope at present, as a record of Hali's life is not yet ready; but also because he has hardly been a man of action, and consequently the story of his uneventful life cannot present anything more than an account of careful application to work, steady efforts after attainment of learning, a youth of continued routine work for making a living, enlivened occasionally by flights into the higher atmosphere of poetry, a strong feeling for the good of his community all the time engaging his innermost thoughts, an old age crowned with comforts and the satisfaction of well-earned fame, and his touch with the still more patriotic and strong mind of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan to whom he had been attracted by affinity. These few words might well summarise the whole course of a quiet, peace-loving life. As to those details which form

the beauty and perfection of English books on biography, it is a pity we have no material for them here in India. The day is yet distant when India shall produce Boswells to follow at the heels of our Johnsons, to put in black and white every utterance of a great man, and to leave a permanent record for posterity. No one, for instance, unless he himself would feel inclined to do so, can give us those little details of Hali's life which are the secret of interest in reading about the lives of others, those touches of nature which make the whole world kin and lead our hearts to beat in union with that of the man whom we read about.

Thus I can do no more than introduce Maulvi Hali to you as a writer, in which capacity my acquaintance with him is of pretty long standing, and justifies the liberty I am going to take with him; and we will try to see the man through the writer. Belonging to Panipat, Hali spent most of his early life at Delhi, and there had the privilege of coming in touch with one of the greatest masters of Urdu language and style. Mirza Asad-Ullah Khan *Ghalib* was not a character whose personality could be easily effaced from the mind of anyone who once came in contact with him, and he has left a stamp on the temper of his distinguished pupil and friend. I say pupil and friend, because the relations of Ghalib with his pupils, unlike the usual custom of Oriental poets, were friendly, and more so with Hali. Hali, though recognising him as one of the greatest masters of Urdu verse, and acknowledging him as such was no less valued by the master himself. Excellence, as a rule, can never be satisfied to remain unappreciated, and therefore can by no means be indifferent to true admiration. Ghalib, too, at once found the promise of future greatness in Hali's looks, and knew, by instinct as it were that he was a born poet, and was as fond of him as

if he were the gainer by the intercourse. It gave him a pleasure to recite his compositions—I could hardly call them compositions, but out-flowings of his nature—to Hali, and to read admiration and appreciation written in his face. On occasions of his visits to Ghalib, Hali for the first time seriously tried his hand at writing *Ghazals*, with pretty fair success, and got them improved by artistic touches from his pen. What his *ghazals* then were it is difficult to ascertain, but it is probable that he indulged in the free venting of pent-up ideas of all kinds like others, and yielded to none of his position in this respect. In recently giving his collection to the public he has marked some *ghazals* as belonging to those days, but it is impossible that he could have given all to the public. He has given only those which, according to his present ideas of fitness and propriety, might find a place in his *Diwan*, and seems to have carefully shut out those representing the older strain. The germs of poetry thus developed in so genial an atmosphere as Delhi, with Ghalib in it, were destined to bud and put forth shoots, and even to give fruit under the invigorating sunshine of Syed Ahmad Khan's influence. In fact, the best and most memorable work of Hali is so blended with the history of Sir Syed's work that a word or two regarding him cannot be out of place here. Sir Syed, though memorable as a socio-religious reformer, will be more immortalised as the pioneer of education among the Muhammadans, because his services, though questioned in some quarters in the former respect, are admitted on all hands in the latter. Not only has he been the pioneer of English education, but he has championed Urdu literature as well, and our language owes him a debt of gratitude which will be remembered as long as it lasts. He did not simply furnish us with valuable essays on moral social and religious subjects but set others a working

to enrich our literature. Most of the writings of Hali, Nazir Ahmad and Zaka-Ullah would have been nowhere had there been no Syed Ahmad. So coming in contact with this great man another side of Hali's nature began to open out. Patriotism, which is the God-given gift of every poetic soul, nay of every true heart, generally gets stifled in some for want of congenial influence for its development. Hali must have possessed a good deal of it, ready waiting for the moment it was needed, and the touch of Sir Syed acted just like a lighted match to a train of gunpowder. Out burst the innermost heart of the poet in strains unheard of before, yet so beautiful, so touching, so mournful, so rousing, so truly poetical, that for once at least they roused even the most lethargic of the Muhammadan community from their sleep. I am sure you understand what I refer to. Even now I could feel a thrill passing through some of you present here at the very mention of that wonderfully sincere poem the مسدس We read it in our school-days, we read it when we grow up, we recite it in our clubs, we listen to it in our Anjumans, we see the best of the land recurring to it in our conferences, we hear it sung with music and without it, again and again and again, and yet without a trace of weariness. Monotony seems to have made an exception in its effect in this particular case, as with our poet in his fondness of recurring to the subject of the condition of his ق each and every moment.

I have seen men, destitute of principle, almost dead to a sense of religion or brotherly feeling, and given up entirely to pleasure seeking, who used to avoid the mention of sorrow in their pleasure meetings and abused the singers if they happened to sing a mournful piece, letting the مسدس pass without objection and finding a pleasure in weeping while it was recited. I have observed our fellow-

countrymen of other faiths being melted to tears, genuine because spontaneous, by its pathos. I have heard the harshest critics of Hali acknowledging his superiority in the مسدس. The most unmistakable sign of all is that no meeting now-a-days among us is complete without compositions in imitation of Hali, and that some of the best hands among us are trying to reach as near him as possible, of course taking it for granted that we can never hope to excel him, in this line at least. To prove the truth of any statements regarding the style of a book, it is necessary that specimens from it should be given to enable the audience to judge for itself, but I believe the مسدس must remain an exception to this rule also. Its worth is so universally admitted, and its verses so well-known to you all, that I shall not take up your time in quoting from it.

I feel bound, however, to remark in passing that in thus giving the credit of the inspiration to such an extent to Sir Syed as I have, I am not detracting in the least from the service done by our worthy poet in giving this work to the public. This alone has been one of the chief instruments of influencing Musalmans. It must be freely acknowledged that this band of energetic old workers for the good of our community is as connected together as if they were members of one body, all going together to make a perfect existence and each defective without the other. There would have been no Hali and Nazir Ahmad and Zaka-Ullah had there been no Sir Syed, as I remarked; but it is equally true that without them Sir Syed would never have achieved what he has been the moving power, but they have been the most useful instruments. But this is by the way.

For a long time after this Hali wrote very little, except occasional small poems for special occasions. His increased fame, however, brought with it increas-

ed responsibilities. Before this he was a comparatively unknown man, his poetic genius unrecognised except by his immediate acquaintances, as but few of his verses had been printed before. But this exalted poem gave distinct proof of genius and power, and people began to form all sorts of expectations. Some who had been taken by surprise by a successful rival in the world of poets began to expect that as a poet he would give them a challenge on their own ground. He would enter the arena of writing *ghazals*, and *qasidas*, and *masnavis*, some of them thought. But Hali did nothing of the kind. He kept quiet over remarks to the effect that he was unable to write *ghazals*, or would fail even if he attempted them; having all along a distinct idea of his own, careless of the rest. He saw that the *ghazal*, in spite of its manifold attractions, was not the thing just wanted by the country, but was more likely to be injurious to the youth of the land began to think of reforming our poetry. After years of continuous thought he has at last produced a book, giving his ideal of a poet in prose, and accompanied by illustrations of his ideal in a collection of poems. "*The Diwan-i-Halli*." I call this book an epoch-making book. I feel that it is destined some day to be recognised as the book marking the epoch when Urdu poetry shook off the trammels of convention by which it was bound and began to soar higher than the limits prescribed for it by a characteristically conservative people. But let us see what has been its present fate. Its merit is denied by the majority of the Urdu-knowing public who are quite ignorant of English and conservative in their tastes of Urdu poetry. Even the English-knowing few have not all come forward to appreciate it. Those among them who, dazzled on the one hand by the purity and high moral tone of modern English poetry, which is the only one they have

generally access to, and filled with aversion by the degradation to which some poetasters are taking our poetry, have given Urdu up as a useless waste of time and have never condescended to look at Hali, and these form no minority. It is a pity that our young men forget the value of poetry in forming national character, and giving a feeling of unity and strength inspired by common possession. In England there is as much diversity of sects in religion and as great difference of parties in politics as anywhere else, yet the nation is united in its esteem of its great poets and authors. Had we such an appreciation of real and true poetry in our land, had we some names among our writers commanding universal honour, had we any national poets and national poetry, the great question to-day of union between Hindus and Muslims would have been a solved problem. The moment you find a man admiring the same man whom you admire or having the same tastes as yours, or the same antipathies with you, or at one with you on any one point, you feel strongly attracted towards him and for the time forget all points of difference. It would therefore have been infinitely better if our Hindu friends, instead of taking it into their heads to pay more attention to reviving Sanskrit and corrupting and weakening Urdu by administering to it undigestible doses of Hindi and Bhasha, had lent their efforts to promoting Urdu, and thus establishing at least one common platform for all classes of Her Majesty's Indian subjects to shake hands together.

Leaving aside this tempting question we find that even those of our educated countrymen who still retain some taste for Urdu literature have not all given Hali his due. I have known several gentlemen, for whose talents and sound judgment I have the highest respect who confessed to me that they had not intentionally read the *Diwan*, as they

hardly expected Hali to write good *ghazals*, but have been afterwards agreeably surprised to find in it much worth admiring. In the case of the *Diwan* it has been with Hali as with Wordsworth—"Select audience find, though few." In spite of all this unpromising beginning there is that in his verse which shows that it is wonderfully adapted to the times, and rise it must, no matter when. I will briefly discuss the changes which he has introduced in his own verse and wishes to introduce in general. The first necessary qualification of poetry, according to him, is its capacity to move the heart, and in his lines addressed to poetry he has shown that he fully realises the difficulties which the acceptance of his ideal will involve for the public, yet, confident of the usefulness of his plan, he is determined to act up to it at any cost:—

اے شعر دل فریب نہو تو تو غم نہیں
پر تہیہ حیف ہے جو نہو دلگداز تو
صنعت پہ ہو فریفتہ عالم اگر تمام
ہاں سادگی سے آئیو لہئے نہ باز تو

[Charm the heart thou may not O Muse! but move it thou must as thy prime duty. If the whole of the world admire thy arts, let artless simplicity be thy chief concern].

This ideal he has fully carried out in his latest compositions. Poetry cannot move the heart unless possessed of the beauties detailed in the above lines, unless it be true to nature, unartificial, simple in thought as well as in language. Besides this change in the essence, Hali has introduced another change in the form. He has got rid of the conventional rule that the *ghazals* ought to be composed of several couplets, each couplet with a distinct idea, and has produced *ghazals* containing one and the same thought all through. He has shown that قافیہ and ردیف are unnecessary shackles, preventing that

freedom of expression which is the essential feature of poetry. As long as one cares for قافیہ he has to search up the قافیہ first and to fit an idea afterwards into it, which is quite the reverse of the natural process; poetry ought to be nothing but "impassioned thought in numbers." To crown all this he has adopted the novel method of administering advice by means of *ghazals* which used to contain anything but monitory injunctions. He is right in doing so as he knows how effective a line giving an excellent bit of advice can be when thrown in as it were by chance among other pleasantries, and by this means a bitter medicine is unconsciously swallowed which alone could never have been, but he has been very much taken to task for it by the representatives of the old school, especially by the conservative Lucknowites. Their indignation, however is also excusable, as radical a change to those who are used to the old state of things cannot but be disagreeable. As time lapses on people will become more accustomed to it and will perhaps not feel so much about it.

One other marked feature of this *Diwan* is that every now and then, as it were unconsciously or without being able to help it, Hali falls into the mournful bewailing of the fate of the community, which one might excuse, or even commend in him, but which should scarcely be adopted as a model by our young aspirants, as it would be but tame imitation and very easy to do, and hence would even destroy any originality they might by nature possess. It is allowable in his case, as he is so totally occupied and mastered by that one idea that he can find no room for other thoughts.

His *ghazals* in the *Diwan* may be divided into two classes. First those which have been produced after the reform idea got into his head in which he has tried to act upto the rules laid down by himself.

Secondly, those produced before this, which even, as I said before, seem to have been selected according as they approached the new ideal. We would take first the earlier ones. Among them will be found lines which deserve pretty high estimation even according to the old school tests and which show that had he persisted in that line, or had not purposely avoided it, perhaps at great sacrifice of his inclinations, he might have vied with the best. Simplicity of course is the predominant feature in both cases. In fact in his new verses he has carried it to an extreme, while in the earlier ones it is mingled with a certain raciness which has a charming effect.

(The lecturer here illustrated the above statements by quotations from the new as well as the old *ghazals* of Hali, drawing a line of comparison between the two and then went on as follows:)

You can, however, gather nothing of his value from so meagre a number of detached lines as I have presented, and can only realise his sublimity if you read him for yourself.

Hali has also attempted prose, but it does not seem to be his special line. He is essentially a poet by nature, and a poet he must content himself to be acknowledged. One of his prose works is a life of Sadi, and another attempt at prose is in the *مقدمه* of the *Diwan* itself which covers more than two hundred pages. It is correct, idomatic, simple prose, and this is all that I can say of it. It has nothing of the racy, brusque and piquant style of Azad's prose, nor can it pretend to the quaint humour and versatility of Maulvi Nazir Ahmad. His prose works are valuable indeed in their own way, but more for their matter than for the outward form in which they are clothed. In his "Life of Sadi" he has to the best of his ability tried to supply a distinct

want, while in the *مقدمه* he has fully explained what true poetry is, and in doing so has done a service to literature for which we cannot be thankful enough. He has furnished the Urdu-reading public with something which was beyond the reach of the majority, that is, ideas of Arabian poets, of the Greeks, and of the English as to what constitutes poetry. A new life can be infused into our language if our educated men with better advantages and knowledge of English were to take up Hali's suggestions and provide for their brethren translations or adaptations of stores of western learning. This *مقدمه* of Hali's more than anything else goes to show how deeply he has studied the folk lore of our country, ancient and modern, and how well he can appreciate even the old school, and that it is not for want of taste or inclination that he has struck a new path, but on purpose, for what he regards the good of his country. [His latest prose work is a biography of Ghalib and a criticism of his Urdu and Persian works, which is a valuable addition to the store of Urdu literature, and the portion of which dealing with criticism, must be studied with special care by all anxious to understand Ghalib. He has also written a life of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, which is probably the best of his prose works.]

As to his position as a poet, it is a question by no means easy to be decided. If a truly poetic heart be the criterion of excellence, and if natural and spontaneous flow of verse be the mark of distinction, Hali yields to none in the land of the living, but if, as agreed upon all over India, we regard the capacity of writing in the hundred different little varieties of poetry, possessing something in each, and dealing in artificialities and metaphors, as necessary qualifications for a poet, then I am afraid his claims will be only second-rate.

Whether his writings will be regarded as classics in the language, can only be decided by time, but they possess one sure and unmistakable sign of having that fortune. You will notice in almost all languages that the proverbs, the household words of every language, are taken from its standard writers, and the writer who presents more detachable lines excels others generally in popularity. You will find this true in the case of Hafiz and Sadi in Persia, and in that of Shakespeare in England. Judged by this standard Hali again claims a place among the best, even inclusive of the ancients, for almost every verse of his new *Diwan* seems to be fitted for a quotation, in a speech, talk or lecture. It is so easily detachable. It is so useful and full of practical lessons. His other charm of being true to nature I would illustrate by two quotations: one is a definition of *love*, one of the simplest, the truest, and the most natural that I have come across:—

عشق سننے سے جسے ہم وہ یہی ہے شاید
خود بخود دل میں ہے اک شخص سما یا جاتا

The other is a description of his feelings over his brother's death. (This was recited at the lecture but is too long to be quoted here.)

With these passages before you I leave you to decide whether Hali deserves to be classed among the highest of poets which India can boast of, and while admitting that on the whole he can not come up to some of the ancient names, he can quite hold his own in comparison with living authors and without exaggeration has the right to sing:

گو کہ حالی اگلے استادوں کے آگے ہیچ ہے
کاش ہوتے مذک میں ایسے ہی اب دو چار ہیچ

AZAD AND HIS WORKS.

The name of the writer whose works are the subject of this evening's discourse hardly needs an introduction from me. Every young man in the Punjab, student or ex-student, has been familiar with it from the early part of his life, and that period of one's educational career in the Punjab with which the best memorable associations are connected is to a greater or a smaller extent associated with Maulvi Azad or his works. Outside the Punjab he is comparatively less known, or, if known, not sufficiently appreciated, for reasons which I will notice later on. But on the Punjab he has claims not only as an eminent writer who has exercised considerable influence on Urdu literature, but as one of the energetic band of pioneers of education in this Province, a co-worker with scholars like Dr. Leitner and Colonel Holroyd, and one of those chosen few who, though belonging to the old school of thought and brought up under the influence of ancient traditions, were acute enough to see the advantages of modern education, and did all they could to facilitate its spread. On Lahore especially he has still more particular claim, as this place has been the home of his adoption, the scene of his useful labours, and the centre of literary activity in the congenial atmosphere of which his best works were produced. It is fitting, therefore, that the Muhammadan Young Men's Association, Lahore, should pay him the tribute of including his name among the illustrious literary men of modern India on whose life and work it was

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