

I wait for its appearance. * Coming, however, to our subject, we find that different sorts of prejudices have stood in the way of Azad's getting as much fame outside the Punjab, the Province of his life-work, as he deserved, yet he has succeeded eminently in his objects here, and must have the consolation, if his present sad state allows even of this, to see an earnest prayer to which he once gave utterance in the following lines well realised :—

مجھکو تو ملک سے ہے نہ کچھہ مال سے غرض
 رکھنا نہیں زمانے کے جنجال سے غرض
 ہے التجا یہی کہ کرم تو اگر کرے
 وہ بات دے زبان میں کہ دل پر اثر کرے

* The biography alluded to has now appeared. It is the *Yadgar-i-Ghalib* by Hali. I learn that a similar work is contemplated by Mir Mahdi Majruh of Delhi who was perhaps even more intimately acquainted with Ghalib, than Maulvi Hali.

MAULVI NAZIR AHMAD AND HIS WORKS.

—:—

Shams-ul-Ulama Maulvi Nazir Ahmad of Delhi is one of the few authors who have the satisfaction of noticing unmistakable signs of the appreciation of their work in their life-time. The life of a literary man in all countries and all ages has been as a rule far from a life of wealth and affluence, and troubles have generally been the lot of literary men, and it was by shining in spite of all disadvantages, that they have proved the superior stuff they were made of and have ended their lives leaving the world dazzled by the lustre of genius, and feeling sorry for its failure to recognize and reward merit, when it was time. With the beginning of the present century, there came a change over Europe in this respect, and authorship began to pay. The present century of the history of England, in common with that of other civilised countries, affords remarkable instances of literary men, who were exceptions to the above rule, and amassed great fortunes by literature. In the East, however, before the contact with European civilisation in some parts of it, the only way of encouragement of literary men, mostly poets, had been through the bounty of kings and rulers. The East did not enjoy printing as early as the West, and therefore, books for a long time remained in Asia, the privilege and the luxury of the rich and the great. By the time learning had reached every nook and corner of Europe and printed books on moderate prices were placed within the reach of the ordinary middle class people, Asiatic countries had all the ancient stores of literature pent up in manuscript volumes in the libraries of the great or the learned, and none but a rich man, actuated by a strong zeal for learning, could obtain permission to get any

of those books copied, and after spending what the edition of perhaps a thousand copies of a book costs now-a-days, he was possessed of only one copy of a book, which was again jealously guarded from the rest of the world. This state of things was shared by India in common with other Eastern lands. Thus beginning late, it has lagged behind the world and while the fortunes of literary men of the first rank have vastly improved in England, there are the same old troubles and difficulties still staring one aspiring to a literary life in this country in the face. The wide propagation of literature of all sorts in India, being only about a century old just now, the prospects of a man desiring to live a decently comfortable life, on pure literature, without any outside help and patronage depending solely on the sale and public appreciation of his books, for his name, fame and wealth, are not very alluring. This description of the present state of literature and literary men in India would sound like a digression in the very beginning, but a digression must be excused while writing of an author, one of the chief features of whose style, at least in one class of his writings is a long digression. But the reason why the above description has been introduced is to show that in spite of the fact that books do not sell well here, those of our author have had a remarkable sale for India. One reason for this sale, in addition to the intrinsic qualities of the books which we shall notice later on, was that Maulvi Nazir Ahmad did not depend on literature when he began to write. His services under the British and the Nizam's Governments had earned him a respectable pension and otherwise placed him beyond want. This privilege, enjoyed by so few of the writers in India, has given to his writings a tone of independence possessed by so few of the productions of these days and placed him in a position to guide the public taste and form

it, rather than pander to it in its vitiated condition.

Our object here, is to review briefly his various writings and therefore we will confine ourselves to seeing him as a writer, while as a man, possessed of numerous distinctions as he is, we will have to let him alone. In the first place a biographical sketch of a living author is not quite necessary, and in the second place, as has been said in some preceding essays, materials for biographical sketches are not easy to get. There are few who care to mark and note the lives of our famous men, just as biographers do in England and the personages concerned are, as a matter of course, silent about themselves. Not long ago, I mentioned to Maulvi Nazir Ahmad, that I intended to write something about him, just as I had done about Maulvis Hali and Azad, and hinted to him by way of preparation, that I may have to request him to supply some facts about his early education and subsequent career before he became otherwise known. But as was to be expected, he desired me to let him alone and take up some celebrity more deserving of notice, as he modestly put it. I thought of entering into correspondence with him again, in the hope of moving him to yield and be of some help, but I was afraid lest a second peremptory request urging me not to touch him, may leave these short sketches on the literary men of Northern India incomplete and without a most essential component, and therefore I decided not to consult his wishes in the matter at all. So I am left to fall back on the meagre information as to his life, that can be gathered from his books, speeches and published letters and will manage to look at him through these mediums alone. His published lectures and speeches will, of course, come in for criticism as his literary performances and I hope will help me to impress his personality on the minds of my readers

better than would have been the case, had Maulvi Nazir Ahmad not been gifted with his remarkable power of public speaking.

His figure has of late become a familiar one in parts of the Punjab and the North Western Provinces and people at Lahore must have a very vivid image of him in their minds, as he has amused and enlightened them with his speeches oftner than the people of any other one locality except perhaps, Ali-garh. Every winter, thousands of persons coming together, from various parts of the Province to celebrate the anniversary of the Islamia educational institution, under the auspices of the Anjuman-Himayat i-Islam. Lahore, may be seen in their seats an hour earlier than the time fixed for opening the day's proceedings waiting impatiently for an old gentleman, who has made it a point to make his appearance just at the moment when he is expected to begin and to disappear from the platform as soon as he is done, showing thereby that he realises that public orators in order to be most effective in their speeches must preserve an imaginary charm about them and except for the necessity of moving the public, must be as little in touch with them as possible. Precisely at the appointed hour and minute, you hear a clapping of hands, boisterous like a sea-storm and see emerging from the entrance a man with a simple round cap peculiar to himself, with his grey hair not very attentively arranged, a short grey beard to which nature has given almost the form of an imperial, with an impressive countenance and broad forehead, wearing an *achkan* and *pajama* of a strictly old fashion and with a pair of Cashmere shawls thrown over his shoulders, unique in appearance as well as in dress. On his entrance he gives a courteous bow in answer to the clapping with which his audience received him and walks straight to the platform and is off with his speech. He begins

without any preliminaries—Western or Oriental—without any ladies or gentlemen, but at the same time does not apply straight to a set topic. He appears to be beginning at random, and carries his audience with him in all his ramblings through the vast fields of literature, Arabic, Persian and Urdu, which he quotes at any length, with the greatest ease and facility, and intersperses his speech with brilliant repartees of wit and humour, convulsing the audience, growing serene and pathetic and humorous and jolly at alternate intervals, with his hearers weeping and laughing, till nobody remembers when he began and how long he has been speaking. This revel of learning and wit, which is full of moral precepts and useful maxims, can only be stopped when he is reminded that he has had his full time, which is always about three or four hours and then he knows how cleverly to shift his discourse to the point which he specially means to impress, and at the conclusion of speech one finds out that the speaker had not for a moment given up a line of thought in his own mind and while seeming to ramble, he was driving at a particular point which he has driven home into the hearts of his audience but too successfully. One acquainted with Maulvi Nazir Ahmad simply through his *ابن الوقت* and *ايامى-بنات النعش-موات العروس* could hardly believe that the moralising author of these works or the almost pathetic writer of *توبته النصح* had a fund of humour at his disposal equalled by few in this country and could equal Mark Twain himself in quaint humour. The figure thus familiarised to the Punjabi, though considerably at the expense of his purse, as it is seldom that any one listens to his discourse without loosening his purse strings, when he makes an appeal for funds on behalf of a religious or educational institution, is not the less known in

the North Western Provinces through the medium of the Muhammadan Educational Conference. There in the midst of his modernised co-religionists in European coats and trousers, wearing collars and neckties, among men of liberal and even ultraliberal views on religion, among people whom the orthodox regard as heretics, he stands the same embodiment of simplicity, insisting on bringing in his own old fashioned religious views which he looks upon as those of Islam in its purity, and pronouncing them with a distinctness and emphasis which characterise him and yet without giving his hearers any offence. In religious views siding with the old school, in educational matters he vigorously supports the new and sets forth the wisdom and propriety of the educational policy of Muhammadans being maintained on the lines laid down by Sir Syed Ahmad Khan who has fitly been called the "Pioneer of English Education" among the Muhammadans. A contrast though the assembly of the Conference presents to that of the Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam, inasmuch as it possesses fewer men, yet they are men gifted with high education, men claiming to be masters of the Urdu language, sharp critics ready to catch at the slightest flaw in language, and Maulvi Nazir Ahmad is as much a master of the situation in that assembly of elsewhere. The same weeping and the same laughing at command are the features of the Conference meeting in the course of the Maulvi's speech. The fact that he was a good public speaker seems to have been a comparatively recent discovery. To understand how Maulvi Nazir Ahmad's literary powers have specially been acknowledged in his old age, a bird's eye view of his past career will be necessary. His knowledge of Urdu, except for the cultivation of it in after life, needs no explanation as he belongs to Delhi, the home and the birthplace of Urdu language, and the idiom used there is even

now the test applied to Urdu used or acquired elsewhere. Of course, Lucknow has of late contested the privilege of authority but the balance of opinions is still in favour of Delhi, where the language exists almost in its purest form and has not received the extra gloss of Lucknow, which making it glittering and polished, removes it far from its real genuineness. What strikes one in Maulvi Nazir Ahmad is religious learning combined with a share of the modern which fact goes to make him so much of a favourite. Born in a family in which Islamic learning was hereditary, his very early education has been among learned Maulvis and he has been brought up in the creed of his fathers. This accounts for his tenacious hold of the old doctrines and ways, notwithstanding the various changes of education and society, with which he met subsequently in life. He is probably one of the batch of men produced by the Delhi College, which turned out a number of capable and sound men who have proved successful in various walks of life. The institution known as the Delhi College, in the pre-Mutinaic times did not possess the same amount of English literature, Arts and Science in its curriculum as the present Colleges boast of. Outwardly it was about the same standard as the present High Schools, but it seems, judging by the sort of men turned out by it, that the machinery of education or the men working it then were superior to those of the present day in some respects. After some vicissitudes in life, the earliest of which was coming out on a small salary to the Punjab, we find him a Deputy Collector in the North-Western Provinces. Thus having secured a high appointment in Government service he appears to have found some leisure for literary attempts, as I remember having come across a book of short stories in Urdu by him which must be a production of his earliest days, and from

the impression I have of it I do not think it gave hopes of much literary eminence. We next meet him as one of the translators of the Indian Penal Code, that monumental work of Lord Macaulay. No better man than Lord Macaulay could have been found to be a member of the Commission framing so important a code of laws and though defects as every human work must reveal in itself by the lapse of time, may be found in it here and there, yet there can be no hesitation in pronouncing the Indian Penal Code to be the best and the most comprehensive and distinct of all the big volumes of acts which form the law governing India. For a work of this sort, translators better than Maulvi Nazir Ahmad and his colleagues could hardly be found and the Urdu translation of the Indian Penal Code is distinguished among translations of law books for the appropriateness of vernacular words used for some very difficult expressions and general perspicuity in conveying the commands of the Penal law to those not understanding English.

The book that first gave promise of a good writer in Maulvi Nazir Ahmad, was his *Mirat-ul-Urus*. It was a story of a complete transformation of an uneducated girl belonging to a respectable Indian family by education. It was written as a story to make it readable and attractive, but it was really a complete treatise on female education. The question of female education had at the time come in for a serious consideration in Northern India, and people while admitting that elementary reading and writing in Urdu was at least essential for their women, were looking about for suitable books to be placed in the hands of their girls but could not find them. The *Mirat-ul-Urus* supplied this want and was deservedly appreciated. The first recognition of its worth was from the Government of the North-Western Provinces in the form of a handsome reward in money and the

public followed suit. The book began to have a rapid sale and became favourite in the higher circles of Indian and specially Muhammadan families. The life described in it was the life of respectable Muhammadan family of Hindustan proper, and the secret of its finding favour with women was the faithful exactness with which the language of the *Zenana* was copied by the author. In this respect it was really unique and almost the first of its kind and has, therefore, not only been the means of bringing decent profit to the author, but of doing a vast amount of good to the female world, with whom its heroine has become a very encouraging example for improving themselves. It has by this time gone through several editions. The next book to follow it was *Binat-un-Nash* which was practically a sequel to the *Mirat-ul-Urus* dealing again with the advantages of female education, but on a somewhat advanced scale, by giving useful lessons in general knowledge and physical science through conversation between a girl and her *Ustani* or governess. This met with a similar success in every respect, gaining for the writer the same prize from the Government and the same encouragement from the public. The style in this book began to show a little change in sounding more learned, but otherwise the book was of equal importance and rank with its predecessor and is along with it a *vade mecum* for many a Muhammadan girl. Maulvi Nazir Ahmad's great service to Urdu-knowing India is his supplying it with books specially adapted for female education and it may safely be said that the chief feature of his subsequent writings is that each one of them may be placed in the hands of a girl of tender years by the most scrupulous and conscientious of fathers. Viewed in this light he stands above all the writers of stories and novels in India, past or present, and is to be envied in so much as none but his books form the staple commodity of the

education of Muhammadan females in this country, wherever it is imparted. It may be remarked, in passing, that the above statement is hardly very creditable to the state of female education or complimentary to the sense of its necessity among us, as line chalked out by Maulvi Nazir Ahmad has not been followed by other writers and his books have not been succeeded by others supplying further and higher needs of female education.

Before noticing some of his other books, we may allude in passing to his taking service in Hyderabad as a change for the better from his Deputy Collectorship, where he rose to high rank as a District Officer. The period of his service there was one of responsibilities of a great office which he discharged with great credit, but was not one of literary activity. Of course the discovery of power had been made and perhaps plots of future efforts in the field of letters were already maturing, when he honourably retired on a handsome pension from the Nizam's Government and came back to settle in Delhi, his adopted home. He did not, like other men retiring from service in responsible capacities, retire with his energy exhausted and his faculties blunted. He was in the enjoyment of good health and was gifted by nature with a robust constitution hankering for work and the years of his well-earned rest at home have not been idled away, but have proved of very great value to Urdu literature.

Besides the two books already noticed, we have from his pen *Tobat-un-Nasuh*, *Ibn-ul-Waqt*, *Ayama*, numerous written lectures and speeches on subjects of communal good, poems of different sorts and, last though not the least, a translation in idiomatic Urdu of the Qoran. Most of these valuable productions have been given to the world after the Maulvi's retirement from service. All these are stories, readable and interesting with a peculiarity claimed by

very few other books in India, of being written with some moral or aim in view and not for the sake of amusement of the writer or readers. They do not, like other novels, contain sensational anecdotes of love, its hopes and disappointments and its failures and successes. They are all more or less serious tales dealing with some momentous question of the day. *Taubat-un-Nasuh*, regarded by some as the best of his books taken all round, is a tale of a penitent sinner, whom a serious attack of cholera from which he escapes after hopelessness, brings to a sense of his duty to God and turns his thoughts to the world to come. His reform comes as a surprise to his family. The wife readily joins him and takes up his views, but the children, especially the eldest son, prove intractable. The troubles to which the father is put in reforming his eldest son spoiled by his former habits which had been indulged by the father formerly, are graphically described and show the necessity of the careful training and discipline of children in early life, while the ludicrous in which the spoiled son places himself by his follies, teach youths the rashness and absurdity of disregarding well-meant advice of their guardians.

In the *Ibn-ul-Waqt* the author has portrayed a native gentleman, who rising to position owing to some services in the Indian Mutiny, takes to modern notions of European living and not only adopts European dress but actually joins European society through the favour of an English Official friend. While in European society he is indulged simply through the influence of his English friend, and alienates the sympathies of his Indian friends and relations. On the departure of his English friend for Europe, he finds himself deserted by the society to join which he had spent all his fortune and on falling from the heaven of living in a bungalow in the cantonment to the hell of putting up at an old

house in a street in the city he dearly learns the lesson, that in prosperity while cultivating the society of those to whose level fortune had by a combination of circumstances raised him, he should not have forgotten his real equals and should not have imprudently exceeded proper bounds in his desire to mix freely with Europeans. *Ayama* is an instructive book on widow-marriage, in which the life of an Indian widow is described with her troubles and difficulties. His latest story *Roya-i-Sadiqa* has dreams and their reality for its theme. Another book *Muhsinat* or the adventures of *Mubtila* (one ensnared), which though published under the name of his son, has had a share of his pen also, is a beautiful little story warning people against having two wives, as Mr. Ensnared knows not how to extricate himself from the snare he prepared for himself by marrying two wives at a time. The motto given to the book is an excellent verse in Urdu.

ہم معتقد دعویٰ باطل نہیں ہوتے
سینہ میں کسی شخص کے دو دل نہیں ہوتے

Needless to say that all these books are written in the best Urdu spoken in Delhi, with perhaps the only fault of the style being rather heavy and ponderous. We noticed while reviewing the *Binat-un-Nash* that the style grew learned and this quality has been more and more marked in the works following it, till in the *ایامی* and the *روایہ صادقہ* has reached its climax. The later writings abound in somewhat cumbrous Arabic and Persian words and contain also a large number of quotations from Arabic, though the latter may be excused on account of the nature of the subjects dealt with in his latest books.

In enumerating Maulvi Nazir Ahmad's works, I mentioned his poems. The words must have come as a surprise, as no previous allusion to him as a poet had been made. But the surprise must

cease when it is stated that poetry is one of his latest discoveries about his own capacities and is almost simultaneous with his public-speaking. As described already in his official career in British India as well as in the Nizam's dominions he was not given to speechifying and it is during his retirement that we find him consenting to deliver lectures in public at the request of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and lately for some years at the request of the Anjuman Himayat-i-Islam, Lahore, and of the managers of the Madrassa-i-Tibbya, Delhi on important annual occasions. I remember him breaking into verse, before beginning his lecture in a meeting of the Educational Conference. The lines hardly deserve to be called anything more than versified prose as they expressed his ideas at the time in being obliged to lecture in rhyme and contained no poetry. He said for instance that he could not understand why he was expected to speak at the Conference every year, having lectured once or twice before, and that he had come over for the sake of Sir Syed Ahmad Khan, otherwise the crowded meetings were not much of a fascination to his mind preferring solitude. It will be admitted that there is not much of poetry there. But little did he know, that though resenting the yoke of having to deliver a speech every year, being new to it, the yoke would be permanently on his neck with double and treble force, and that instead of having to lecture at one place, he would be expected at three places every year and that lines in verse instead of being a passionate prelude to that one speech, would come to form almost an essential part of his lectures in all the three places. He did not know that people who thronged to hear his prose would discover some spice in his verse, at least in his manner of reading it, and the demand would necessitate the supply, necessity being the mother of invention from

time immemorial. So we have almost invariably had from him since, long pieces of poetry either at the beginning of his speeches, or at the end, or put in the middle as a variety. Once we had a whole lecture in verse. The verses gradually began to improve in quality, till they showed much of the warmth and passion of his prose and occasional outbursts of true poetry. His subject, of course, was always inspring, dealing now with the always fresh, though beaten, subject of the vicissitudes in the history of his people, then persuading them to advance and improve once more. There is one decided feature of distinction in his verses, that he has an unending variety of rhymes at his command, and the number of lines that can flow from him with the observance of all the restrictions of rhyme imposed by Oriental versification, is perhaps unparalleled. Yet he always disclaims to be a poet, in spite of his evident superiority to hundreds passing by the name of poets in India, and has not got for himself a *nom-de-plume*, the *takhallus*, so essential to poets in this country. While admiring his modesty in disclaiming poesy, with all his power of writing with effect in that line, we cannot help saying that he writes it more by dint of his learning, than by any inner prompting, except in certain pieces which could not but be the production of inspired moments. We need not, therefore give much time to him as a poet, as his *forte* after all is prose. Before concluding, we must say something of the work, which may in all probability be the most memorable of his works and is from a religious point of view the most valuable to Muhammadans. The author himself, at least, wants to be remembered for it more than for any other of his productions. He says that he has devoted the greatest time and labour to its preparation and has done it in the hope that he is doing service to God. We refer of course, to his Urdu

translation of the Quran. For three years he has been at it, with four paid Maulvis to assist him and it has almost totally absorbed his attention during that period. He has tried to make it idiomatic and authentic. By authentic he means that he has taken the meanings given by the commentators acknowledged as authorities on all hands. Translations of the Quran in Urdu, no doubt, existed in numbers already, but the language was so antiquated that in some cases it made it difficult for a reader to catch the real sense of the text, while it was always a labour to read those translations, and one could go through them with facility feeling a pleasure while reading. Maulvi Nazir Ahmad has tried to achieve this end, taking care at the same time to stick to the literal meaning as much as possible, using parentheses to introduce explanatory clauses, and with remarkable success. Speaking of his translation on a public occasion he said that for the present it was likely to find favour neither with Muhammadans of the old school nor with those of the new. The old school, perhaps, may condemn it as coming from one belonging to the new party, while the new may reject it as full of all the old beliefs in the existence of the supernatural which they had rejected as unscientific. But he hoped that a century hence the representatives of both parties would have his translation in their hands. He made this prophecy from his view of the coming times and tastes as judged by watching the present, and its future popularity is not far from probable. It is contrary to his fears becoming a pretty encouraging success with the present generation, and if his attractive style makes study of the Quran common among the Muhammadans Maulvi Nazir Ahmad will have rendered to his community a service which can hardly be repaid.