

time easily at home among the lowliest. Now you find him flirting with a *Bhatiari* girl for purposes of his own and again you find him admitted to the harems of the highest in the land without any introduction but his good looks and smooth tongue. There is much in him that is shocking to one's sense of the congruous and the possible, but no one can help liking him as much for his own sake as for the sake of his faithful attendant and companion, *Khoji*. In *Khoji* we have a bundle of weaknesses, physical as well as intellectual a pigmy unconscious of his dwarfishness, always boasting of his past deed of valour which are anything but real, exciting ridicule and laughter at his own expense wherever he goes and deeming the world somehow or other intentionally shutting its eye to his excellences. In his own way *Khoji* is a unique creation in the whole range of Urdu literature and would have done immense credit to the genius of Pandit Ratan Nath, if he had been more sparingly introduced. As it is he excites a good deal of interest in the beginning and affords real amusement, but as the reader gradually finds himself deeply concerned as to the fortunes of the chief characters in the story, *Khoji* begins to appear an intrusion, till he becomes quite tiresome. The reason of this shortcoming has been referred to already, that is the want of artistic excellence due to the hurry natural in case of stories written for newspapers. On the whole, however, the *Fisana-i-Azad* is a work of exceptional merit and entitles Ratan Nath to a permanent place among the best and most original novelists of the present day in the Urdu language.

#### MAULVI ABDUL HALIM, SHARAR.

In *Sharar* we have, in a way, the most characteristic writer of the modern age of Urdu literature. Maulvi Abdul Halim, hails from a place near Lucknow and was till recently not so largely known outside the capital of Oudh. He seems, however, to have been qualifying himself for the work he completed, till all of a sudden he surprised the literary world of India by a monthly magazine which he issued some ten years ago and took it, as it were, by storm. The monthly paper called "*Dilgudaz*" (The Melter of Hearts), which proved his making, was really an imitation of some English periodicals in its plan, but periodicals were till then so rare in this country and that particular kind was so novel, that it was welcomed by the public with a zeal which had not fallen to the lot of many a good Urdu book. The secret of its success was that the editor had grasped firmly the inclination of the modern taste as to style as well as subject matter. The spread of a knowledge of the English language and literature, and the contact with European modes of thought and speech had made people dislike the old laboured bombast of the *Fisana-i-Ajaib* days and a simple, easy flowing style was becoming the fashion. The *Dilgudaz* of Sharar came out with interesting and readable essays of the *Spectator* and *Rambler* type, on historical, social, and moral subjects and with a novel based on the history of the crusades. Essays exactly of the type referred to were, in the first place, never known in Urdu and in the second place their adaptation to native taste by the writer was so complete that every body began to read the magazine very eagerly and there were many who used impatiently to wait for the next number. The writings of Hali, and Sir Syed Ahmad Khan and energetic workers of the Aligarh school had by

that time awakened a warm interest in the past history of the Muhammadans and Maulvi Abdul Halim *Sharar* judiciously took advantage of that awakened spirit by not only writing many of his essays on historical subjects, but basing his first novel on a chapter of Muhammadan history, which for the glorious chivalry of its heroes has few parallels.

The first novel which brought him name and fame was "Aziz and Vergina," which first appeared in instalments during the first year of the existence of the *Dilgudaz*, and was published separately afterwards. The novel deals with the crusading campaign between Richard, Cuer de Lion, on the one side and Sultan Salah-ud-Din on the other. The hero *Aziz* is a young man of great valour and promise, gifted with a most winning appearance and charming manners, as formidable in war as sociable and agreeable in peace. Vergina is described as a favourite niece of Richard who was with him in the campaign. A chance of war brings the two youthful persons in contact and they both get enamoured of each other. The story then relates the love of these two royal personages and thus softens the effect of descriptions of stern war, which are painted too vividly to be indulged without this softening effect. The novel, in the main, deals with accounts of military tactics and bravery of both the armies fighting in the name of religion, which inspire one with admiration. The beauty of it is that the writer sticks to history as much as possible, quoting authorities in foot-notes for the statements made in his book. The only episode which is unauthenticated, introduced to conform to the traditions

of a novel, is the love between the Prince 'Aziz' and the Princess Vergina. This book was followed by a number of historical novels, which appeared like the former, first in the magazine and were reproduced afterwards in book form. The essays in the magazine continued to be appreciated as long as the periodical lasted. Though we cannot afford to give a brief resume of the plot of each one of the beautiful novels produced by *Sharar*, at least one more historical story of his deserves a passing allusion. The "Mansur and Mohina" has its scene laid in India, at the time of the invasion of Somnath by Sultan Mahmud of Ghazni. History of India can hardly boast of a more stirring struggle for the sake of religion. Mahmud professed to undertake numerous invasions of India in the name of religion, though spoil too he got in plenty. The invasion on the Somnath was the severest. Somnath seems to have at the time been the centre of Hindu devotion at least for Western India and Rajputana. Hoards of Rajput princes with their combined forces engaged in a final struggle with Mahmud, before the ancient temple of Somnath, for their life, liberty and religion. The description of heroism displayed by both the armies, the one fighting for their honour, house and home, and the other removed at a distance of thousand of miles from the place of its nativity, with parched deserts and waterless saharas intervening, desperately contending for supremacy are so realistic, that one passes through all he reads while perusing the book.

To *Sharar*, I believe, belongs the credit of being the first novelist in Urdu, in the true sense of the term. No doubt, we had stories like the *Fisana-i-Ajaib* the *Tilsim-i-Hosh Ruba*, the *Bostan-i-Khyal* or smaller ones of less importance which with the Urdu translation of the Arabian Nights' tales, satisfied the common passion of the human mind to be amused

by accounts of strange and exciting adventures of others. Excellent in points of literary merit as all such books have been in their own times, there was one thing about them that they never aimed to be true to life. In the Arabian Nights, no doubt, we see a picture of Bagdad life as it was in the palmy days of the Caliphs and it is no doubt the source and prototype of many a novel in Asia and Europe and is therefore one of those few books which are, so to speak, the common property of all mankind. But with reference to the *Tilisms* and the *Fisanas* above alluded to, it may safely be said, that wonderful as the imagination displayed in them is, they cannot suit the present taste, being entirely alien to facts and based on things which have no reality in the world. They are, in fact, if over-read, calculated to turn a man's head like Don Quixote, and make him seek adventures, conquering by the force of wonderful Talismans, destroying and rebuilding imaginary castles at will. In addition to these books of the old type, India had recently produced some books very much like novels, but not novels strictly speaking, Maulvi Nazir Ahmed's books, which, as has been seen, are stories written with an earnest and serious purpose, are too classical in language for a novel and the one chief feature of a novel, a certain amount of sensation and excitement is absolutely wanting in them. They are novels inasmuch as they are drawn from real life and one feels as he reads the *Mirat-ul-Urus*, or the *Taubat-un-Nasuh*, that each one of the fictitious characters in the story has a prototype in real life in Hindustani homes. The books, however, are meant mostly for women, to supply the greatly felt need of providing a wholesome literature for females and the learned Maulvi has indulged in no love scenes in his books, as conservative India, where there are still persons opposing female edu-

cation, could not think it proper to place love stories in the hands of the female world. So we may say that absorbing though the stories written by Maulvi Nazir Ahmad are in interest they have but little claim to be classified as novels. The only other writer contending for rivalry with *Sharar* as the originator of the Urdu novel can be his own Lucknow contemporary, whose works have been considered in the previous chapter i.e., Pandit Ratan Nath. He called his *Fisana-i-Azad* a novel and all his subsequent writing great and small bear the title. In simplicity of style, in picturing real life in Lucknow and in sensation and excitement, the Pandit's books deserve to be called novels. The trouble, however, is that they are so unwieldy in length, that the plot, though capable of being interesting, grows obscure and leaves no impression of a continued story upon the mind. No language of the world, I can daresay, boasts of a book professing to be a novel so voluminous as the *Fisana-i-Azad* and thus if we call it a novel, it must be beyond the ordinary run and we are concerned here with the ordinary class. *Sharar's* novels are about the usual length of those of Sir Walter Scott and seem to be more like his works than of any other writer in the English language. Now the *Fisana-i-Azad* could be broken into at least a hundred novels of *Sharar* or Sir Walter Scott and surely if a novel means that, it is something tremendous. It is thus clear that *Sharar* holds the first place as a writer of novels in Urdu but if there be any hesitation in giving him this distinction, no one can take away from him the distinction, of being the first writer of novels of chivalry in Urdu like Sir Walter Scott in English.

Coming back to his career and that of his magazine we lose sight of both for some time. Maulvi Abdul Halim was offered some situation in

Hyderabad, which is a place having great attraction for literary men from the early periods of its history. In an account of the life of the great poet Zauq of Delhi, we find, that he was invited to go to Hyderabad and offered very good prospects, but he contented himself to remain at Delhi, on the pittance he could get from the Delhi Durbar. Our present literary men are all more or less connected with the State and have in one way or other felt the bounty of the appreciative rulers of the State. *Dag*, one of the best poets of India was enjoying a very handsome salary there as the Poet Laureate. *Girami*, another poet, whose Persian verses may do credit to a born native of Persia belongs to the Hyderabad Court. We have seen that Maulvi Nazir Ahmad, served and rose to eminence in the State though in another capacity. Pandit Ratan Nath also found a home there and lived at Hyderabad during the last years of his life. The two Bilgrami brothers, models of learning and scholarship, have been the ornaments of the Hyderabad State. Nawab Muhsin-ul-Mulk was one of the brightest gems of the Deccan Court. Sir Syad Ahmad Khan, though not wanting in anything personally, got a munificent and princely help for his College from the State. Maulvi Shibli was endowed with a respectable pension for continuing his literary work of compiling books on Islamic history. In short every branch of learning and every literary man with any real worth to boast of can find an appreciation and reward in Hyderabad and *Sharar* also went to take the reward of the name he had made for himself. He might have benefitted by this arrangement from a pecuniary point of view but he greatly disappointed his readers. Literary labour in India, is not yet very paying and anybody taking to literature as a profession must be prepared to make some sacrifices. To be a writer has, as a

rule, with certain very rare exceptions, been synonymous with want and poverty. Go to Persia, you find the same complaint among the authors, go to England before the latter part of the nineteenth century and you find scholars like Johnson living in penury, Goldsmith selling his best work for sixty pounds, living in debt and in constant fear of the debtor's prison. India has been no exception. With the nineteenth century, there has dawned upon Europe and America an era when the sales of popular books have brought in fortunes to their writers, but that stage is yet far distant in India. The present generation of writers in the west, is reaping the fruits of the labours of their predecessors, and flourishing days for literature can never come for India, unless the present writers undertake some risks, though not so large as those related about the past. The yielding to temptation of gain of a man like *Sharar*, and his giving up his literary productions for a time, therefore, was felt as greatly disappointing by the reading public. Certain circumstances last year had led us to hope that the Maulvi had returned to the field of his work more fitted than ever for it. His knowledge of English, formerly was not very vast and he relied more on his acquaintance with Arabic and Persian historical literature for his writings. In Hyderabad he found an opportunity of accompanying the son of His Excellency the Prime Minister to England, whence he came back, perhaps enriched with higher notions of blending the beauties of English literature with Urdu and producing a unique effect upon the latter. He again issued his magazine under the same name, with apologies for an estrangement from the public for some time, and the novel begun by him related to life in Pre-Islamic Arabia which could not but have a special interest for students of Muhammadan history. The study in this novel of the pictures of

life in the darkest days of Arabia could show how tremendous was the task which Islam had to perform in reforming the degenerate Arabs of those days and how successfully it performed it. But he plunged again into the whirlpool of State politics, and it is but irregularly that his magazine has appeared even since his return from England. If *Sharar* could have earnestly taken to literature again and made some further improvements in Urdu writing engrafting some useful English methods in composition on it, his interval of absence, could have proved a blessing, instead of being regretted.

As regards *Sharar's* style, it is as new to Urdu as the plan of his writings. It is crisp and racy and the best proof of the fact that it has taken well with the public is that it has found a large number of imitators among whom many have succeeded to a large extent. It is not inimitable like that of Maulvi Nazir Ahmad or Professor Azad. Many magazines of the same description and many novels of the same type, but not of the same merit have followed the publication of his books. This means that he has made a mark on Urdu literature which will not easily be forgotten. As the saying goes, a prophet is not valued at home, so *Sharar's* style is the least appreciated in Lucknow. Other parts of India admire it. The conventionalism in Lucknow finds in it a revolt against itself. But masters of the language as the Lucknow people can claim to be; they must remember that they devote too much attention to mere discussion about words, and their pride as to their being the sole possessors of the language is a serious bar to their making any real progress. Anybody belonging to a village at some distance from Lucknow, no matter if he is educated in Lucknow and brought up there is stigmatised as a *Ganwar* and is given no right to claim to know the Urdu language. This spirit of criticism harms

more the critic than the person criticised, as intrinsic worth in a book cannot fail to be recognised by the Urdu-knowing public at large, because some Lucknow critics have to find fault with an expression or two, shutting their eyes to all the beauties of the production.

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