

each player and take two smacks from each, another that I should stand on one foot and dance.

Eventually His Majesty the King said, "We order that a paper dunce's cap be put on the thief's head, his face smeared with black, and in that state he go inside and bring us out a *chilam* filled and ready to smoke."

Everyone remarked what a wonderful brain he had, and what a splendid punishment he had thought out.

"Hip-hip-hurrah!" they shouted.

I was enjoying myself immensely, and said that I didn't mind. "I happen to be the thief-to-day." I said, "It will be somebody else's turn to-morrow."

I submitted my face to them cheerfully. Laughing, I put on the silly hat, and with a devil-may-care attitude, picked up the *chilam*, opened the door of the women's apartments, and went through to the kitchen. The room behind me was echoing with laughter.

As soon as I got into the courtyard, the outside door opened, and a lady clad in a *burga* entered.

43 She pulled aside her veil, and there was Roshanara!

I couldn't breathe, and was attacked with a sort of ague. I couldn't utter a word. There, in front of me was Roshanara, to whom I had sent a wire asking her to come at once as I was so unhappy! Here was I with black smeared all over my face, with a dunce's cap on my head, carrying a *chilam*; whilst shouts of laughter were to be heard from the men's apartments.

My very spirit froze, and my every sense refused to function! For a while Roshanara just stood look-

1. Note Urdu expression.

ing at me without saying a word; and then she said: ..... but how can I describe what she said? I just heard her voice as though I were in a dream.

You must have realised by now that I am, in myself, one of the most noble characters you will find, and if only I am judged by my own entity, you won't find a better husband in the world.

All my in-laws are of this opinion; and this I too steadfastly believe. As a matter of fact, it is these friends of mine who have disgraced me.

Therefore I have made up my mind that in future I will either stay at home, or go to my work; but I will not go out to call on anybody, nor will I let anybody enter my house; except, of course, the postman or the barber and with them I will be as short as possible. For example:—

"A letter?"

"Yes Sir."

"Give it to me: go away!"

"Cut my nails!"

"Buz off!"—and that is all the conversation I will ever have with them—just you see!

#### THE PIR OF MURIDPUR.1

Many people are astonished that I never mention my home, and some are amazed that I never go there now.

Whenever any body asks me the reason for this, I always avoid the subject and turn the conversation, and this gives rise to much speculation. Some surmise that a law suit has been instituted against me

1. *Muridpur ka Pir*: Literally—The spiritual guide of the city of disciples.

at home, and that is why I have absconded. Others say that I was in service locally, and was accused of misappropriating money, and so could not but migrate<sup>1</sup>. Others, that, owing to my bad behaviour, my father won't let me come into the house.

Everyone has his own version of it<sup>2</sup>. Now I am going to put an end to<sup>3</sup> all these mistaken ideas; and may God give you readers the ability to be just!

The story starts off with my nephew. At first sight he does not appear to be different from the ordinary run of nephews. He possesses all my good qualities, and because he belongs to a new generation,<sup>4</sup> over and above those, one sees that he has a few more besides. But he has one characteristic which has never been displayed so strongly in my family before, and that is that he respects his elders, and looks on me as a sort of God of knowledge and skill!

How did he get this foolish idea into his head? I can only explain the reason as follows:—One sometimes sees it in the very best families. I have seen the sons of the most noble in the land now and again, paying such respect to their elders that they themselves are mistaken for low caste people.

One year I went to a Congress meeting, or perhaps it would be more correct to say that the Congress meeting came to me; for the Congress authorities decided to hold their annual session in the very city in which I happened to be living.

1. Note the Urdu expression.
2. Note the Urdu expression.
3. *Iztila*—removal; abolition.
4. *Nai pand*—the rising generation, *Pand* literally means young plants to be transplanted, and secondly, offspring.

I have proclaimed it on many occasions, and am now prepared to state with beat of drum, that it was no fault of mine.

Some people doubt this, and think that I made the Congress hold their meeting near where I was living merely to satisfy my vanity. But that is only the evil nature of those who are jealous of me.

I have often sent for actors to come to the city, and once or twice have invited theatrical parties as well; but my relations with the Congress have always been those of an anonymous citizen. So there you are, I won't tell you any more about that.

When the Congress meeting is being held next door<sup>1</sup> nobody would be pious enough to stay away.

Besides, it was during the holidays, and there was nothing on, and so, having nothing better to do, I went and listened to all the speeches. I used to spend all day at the meeting and when I got home at night, would write a summary of all the speeches, and send it to my nephew as an authoritative record for future reference<sup>2</sup>. From what happened afterwards it appears that my nephew opened each of my letters with the greatest respect, indeed I have reason to believe that before carrying out the opening ceremony<sup>3</sup>, he used to perform liturgical ablutions<sup>4</sup>. He would read the letter first to himself, then aloud to his friends, after which he would repeat it, with many

1. *Ba'ghal*—literally:—an arm pit, side.
2. Note the use of this conventional ending to a promissory note or bond, which is used here by way of a joke.
3. *Ifidhi taqrīb*: the opening ceremony.
4. *Wazu*: Ablution before prayers. It consists in washing the hands, then rinsing the mouth, and cleaning the nose inside; next throwing water on the forehead, and washing the face; then the arms to the elbows, then damping the top of the head, and lastly the feet—all three times.

garnishings, in the newspaper agent's shop, in the circle of the local wiseacres. He would then hand it over to that most parochial editor of the parochial rag, who printed it with great ceremony. The name of the newspaper is the "Muridpur Gazette" of which no one has a complete file. It was only in existence for two months, and then closed down owing to financial difficulties.

The descriptive roll of the editor is as follows:—colour—wheaten; conversation—philosophical; looks like a thief. Will any gentleman who knows his address kindly inform the Muridpur Khilafat Committee, and may God reward him? No gentleman should on any account pay him any subscription (for the Committee) as the Khilafat Committee will not hold itself responsible.

49 I heard too that the newspaper, on the strength of those letters of mine, brought out a 'Congress Number' of which they printed so many copies, that its sheets are still to be seen in some of the druggist's shops<sup>s</sup>.

1. *Lal-bujhakar?*—a wiseacre:—The story goes that while a boy had both his arms round a pillar, his father gave him some gram which he held in both hands joined together. Thereupon the question arose among the people of the town, as to how the boy could be extricated from his uncomfortable position without sacrificing the gram which he held. They summoned to their council their wisest man *Lal Bajhakar?*, who advised that an opening should be made in the roof, and the boy drawn up through it!
2. '*ind Allah najir*'—Literally:—paid by God. This phrase is commonly used by Maulanas and their ilk, and is used here by way of a joke and means, will get nothing.
3. This means that the only use that has been found for the paper is by the druggists who use it to wrap up small quantities of drugs for customers.

Anyhow, even the children<sup>1</sup> in Muridpur fully appreciated my ability, excellence of style, clearheadedness, and patriotism; and, without any reference being made to me, I was set up as the political leader of Muridpur. One or two poets wrote poems about me, which, from time to time were published in the Muridpur Gazette, I was in complete ignorance of my rise to fame. True it is, that "God gives honour to whomsoever he wishes." How was I to know that merely by writing a few letters to my nephew, I should have so endeared myself to my fellow citizens? And how could anyone realise that the ordinary individual who could be seen any day walking unobtrusively through the bazaar, with head bowed down, was worshipped in Muridpur?

After writing those letters, I forgot all about the Congress and all to do with it.

I was not a subscriber to the Muridpur Gazette, and my nephew was so impressed with my importance, that he did not even mention casually to me in his letters that I had become a leader. I admit, of course, that had he told me about it, it would have taken me years to have grasped it; but, at any rate I should have had some idea of the wonderful progress I had made.

After a while, owing to the heated state of people's blood, Congress meetings, like spots, broke out every where. Anyone who could get hold of a table, chair, and a flower vase, gave out that he was going to hold a meeting.

One day during this season of meetings, I got a letter from the Muridpur branch of the 'All India

1. *Broche bachche*—little ones, infants.
2. Note the use of *nikal dana*—to come out (like a rash.)

Young Men's Association, in which I read "The people of your city are longing to see you. Great and small, they are all impatient to see the light of your resplendent countenance, and to profit by your lofty ideas. Although it goes without saying that the whole country is in dire need of your excellent self, still one's homeland has prior claim to all, for, 'The thorn of one's own land is sweeter far than hyacinth or basil.'" After three or four more convincing proofs of this nature, they asked me to come and address the people on the subject of Hindu-Muslim unity.

51 I can't tell you how astonished I was on reading this letter, but when I considered it coolly, the realisation grew on me that the inhabitants of Muridpur were good judges of character. I am a weak individual, and the intoxication of being a leader goes to one's head in an instant. At that instant, I felt that my homeland was very dear to me, and the way in which my compatriots failed to appreciate their unhappy lot filled me with pity for them.

I heard a voice telling me that it was my duty to look after the welfare and guidance of these unfortunate, and that God had given me the administrative ability to do so. Thousands of human beings were awaiting me—"Arise!" it said, "for hundreds will be waiting for you to accept their humble offering of hospitality!"

And so I accepted Muridpur's invitation, and in true leader-like style, I informed them by wire, that I would arrive at Muridpur by such and such a train, fifteen days hence. Nobody<sup>2</sup> was to come to the

1. *Má hazar*: Arabic—whatever is ready, whatever they can afford, pot-luck.
2. *Koi koi* is a misprint for *koi*.

station (to receive me). Everyone should remain at his own work—at this juncture what India needed was action!

After this, I spent every moment of the day, right up to the day of the meeting, in preparing the speech that I was going to make. All day long, all sorts of hackneyed sentences ran through my mind; such as:—

"Hindus and Muslims are brothers!"

"Hindus and Muslims are like milk and sugar!"

The cart of India has two wheels, oh my friends, and what are they but Hindus, and Muslims!"

"Those nations which have held fast the rope of unity are now in the noonday of their civilisation; whilst those which have adopted an attitude of disunion and strife; on them has history shut her eyes;" and so on, and so on!

When I was small, I had read in some school book a story which began, "Once upon a time two bullocks lived together."

I got the book out, read the story all over again, and noted down all the details.

I then remembered another story that I had read about a man, who, when he was dying, sent for all his sons, and putting before them a bundle of sticks, told them to break it. This, of course, they were unable to do. Whereupon he undid the bundle, and gave them one stick each, which they broke without any difficulty. By this means the father drove into his sons' heads the advantage of co-operation.

I wrote out that story too.  
I wondered how I should begin my speech, and

1. Note the misprint: the inverted commas should start before *Do bail*.....

considered that some introduction, such as the following, would be suitable:—

“Dear compatriots !

‘The gathering clouds of adversity overshadow your heads.

Poverty displays its wares throughout the land.

Misfortune hovers before and behind ;

And from all sides one hears the cry ;

Compare yourselves to-day with what you

were yesterday !”

You were awake just a minute ago, but in the twinkling of an eye you fell asleep !”

When India’s pride, the poet Maulana Altaf

Husain Hali of Panipat, wrote these lines several

years ago, little did he think that as time went on,

these sad words would become more and more apt !

“Such is the condition of India today.....” etc. etc.

I thought that I would then give them a heartrending description of the condition of India. I would refer to the poverty, misery, animosity etc. which pervaded the country, and then would ask them what the cause of it all was. I would enumerate all the causes that are usually given, such as a foreign government, the climate, western culture, moreover I would deal with each of those individually, and prove that they were all wrong ; and then I would give them the real reason, which is the ill-feeling between Hindus and Muhammadans.

I would end up by advising the two parties to unite, and conclude my speech with the following verse:—

“Oh come nightingale, alás let us cry !

Thou for the rose, and for my heart I.”

1. Note the expression in Urdu and the idiomatic use of questions.

I thought it all out very carefully for about a fortnight, and jotted down all the headings for the speech, so that I could have it in front of me at the meeting.

The outline was something as follows:—

(i) Introduction—some verses of Hali, (to be read in a loud and pathetic tone of voice).

(ii) The present condition of India—(a) Poverty 55

(b) Animosity (c) Selfish ambition of national leaders.

(iii) The cause of it.

Is it the foreign government? ..... No !

Is it the climate? ..... No !

Is it the result of western culture? No !

Then what is it? (a pause, during which look at the audience with a smile).

(iv) Then give real reason—ill feeling between Hindus and Muhammadans—(pause for applause)—Give word picture. Describe in moving terms various disturbances etc. that have taken place—(after this more applause probable—Short pause for this).

(v) Conclusion—general advice—in particular stress the lesson of unity. (Verse).

(Then go and sit on a chair in a modest attitude, and every now and again bow your acknowledgements of the applause of the audience).

56

After I had prepared this *précis*, I used to run over it every day right up to the day of the meeting, and would practise some of the more telling sentences in front of the looking glass.

I made a special point of practising the smile after number three ; and I acquired the habit of turning whilst standing from side to side so that my voice

would carry right to the back of the hall (lit. everywhere) during the show, and everybody would be able to hear every word comfortably.

Muridpur was an eight hours run: one had to change at Sanga. Some of the enthusiastic leading members of the All India Young Men's Association had come there to receive me. They put garlands of flowers round my neck, and gave me fruit and other stuff to eat. From Sanga to Muridpur, I discussed with them the most important political matters. When the train arrived at Muridpur, there was a crowd of at least three thousand people collected outside the station, who cheered continuously.

The volunteers, who had accompanied me told me to be sure to keep my head out of the window as the people wanted to see me. I did so, with the garlands round my neck, and an orange in my hand.

When they saw me, they cheered still more enthusiastically.

With the greatest difficulty I managed to get out of the train, and they put me into a car, and the procession progressed in the direction of the Meeting Hall.

By the time we arrived at the Hall, the crowd had increased to some five or six thousand, who were all shouting my name in unison and cheering. To right and left were red flags on which were inscribed a few words in praise of your humble servant; such as:—

“ You alone can save India! ”

“ Welcome, Worthy, Son of Muridpur! ”

“ At this juncture India is in need of *action!* ”

They gave me a seat on the stage, and the President of the Meeting again shook hands with me in full view of the audience.

He kissed my hand, and then began his introductory speech:—

“ Gentlemen! The great and famous Indian leader, who has been asked to make a speech to you at to-day's meeting..... ”

As soon as I heard the word ‘ speech ’, I tried to remember the introductory sentences of my speech; but my mind, at the time was registering<sup>1</sup> so many conflicting impressions that I had to look at my notes. I put my hand into my pocket, but the notes weren't there<sup>2</sup>! All at once I felt a sort of chill in my hands and feet. I pulled myself together and told myself<sup>3</sup> that I had several other pockets, and that I must not lose my head.

Shaking and shivering, I turned out all my pockets, but I couldn't find the paper anywhere. The whole Hall swam before my eyes.

My heart beat violently, and my lips felt dry. I searched all my pockets about a dozen times, but found nothing. I felt as if I'd like to burst out crying, and in my misery bit my lips.

The President was going on with his speech:—  
“ The City of Muridpur cannot be too proud of him. In every century and in every country only a few like him are born, whose existence for the human race..... ”

Good God, what on earth am I to do now? For one thing I have to give them a word picture of the present condition of India—no, no—before that I have to explain how unworthy we are—but ‘ unworthy ’ is not a very suitable word—I had better

1. *Amdigāh*: Persian—a target; stones piled up on a mound of earth to shoot at with bow and arrows.

2. *Na dārad*: Persian—it has not (got)

3. Note the use of the particle *kīh* with the signification of ‘ and said? ’

59 say 'ignorant', but that isn't very good either.....  
'uncivilised'? .....

"All are aware of his great political sagacity, his patriotism, and his genuine sympathy. You all of you are fully aware of this, but the great talent he possesses as a speaker....."

Yes, how the hell does the speech begin?

I've got to make a speech on Hindu-Muslim unity, and then there's some advice to be given—but that comes at the end—then where exactly does that smile in the middle come in? "..... I can assure you that he will move you to the very core, and make you weep tears of blood....."

The President's voice was drowned in the roars of applause.

The world became dark before my eyes, and just then the President said something to me, but I didn't hear a word of it.

I just realised that the time had come for me to make my speech, and that I would have to get up from my seat.

60 And so with a superhuman effort, I rose, staggered a little, but eventually regained my self-possession. My hand was shaking—there was an uproar in the Hall—I was within an ace of fainting, and the thunder of the applause sounded in my ears like the waves passing over the head of a drowning man.

How does the speech start off? I've got to say something about the selfish ambitions of the leaders; then what else was there? There was a story 'The story of the crane and the fox'—no—now I've got it—'Two bullocks.....'

In the meantime silence fell on the Hall—everyone was looking at me—I closed my eyes, and caught hold of the table to support myself. My other hand too was trembling, and I rested that on the table as

well. At that moment it looked as if the table was about to run away, and that I was doing my best to stop it.

I opened my eyes and tried to smile—my throat, was dry, and with the greatest difficulty I blurted out, "My dear compatriots!" Contrary to expectation, my voice sounded very thin and feeble<sup>1</sup>. One or two people laughed. I cleared my throat, whereupon more people laughed. I pulled myself together, and began to speak loudly. As a result of this sudden<sup>2</sup> exertion of the lungs, it sounded as if I was shouting, and on this, a great many people burst out laughing. When the laughter died down, I said, "My dear compatriots!"

61 After this I paused for a little and repeated, "My dear compatriots". I could not, for the life of me remember what I ought to say after that.

Scores of ideas were coursing through my mind, but devil a one would come to my tongue.

"My dear compatriots!"

By this time I was wild at the laughter. I was furious at the way I had been disgraced, and I made up my mind to say something, anything that came into my mind—once I had started the speech, the rest would be quite easy.

"My dear compatriots, some people say that the climate of India is bad, that is to say that India has many defects...d'you see what I mean? (pause.....) defects. But this matter, that is to say affair, to which I have referred, is, as it were, not so very accurate." (laughter). I was losing my wits, and I could not think how the speech went on. All of a

1. *Munhāni*: Arabic—bent; crooked, lean, thin, etc.

2. *Yak lakht*: Persian—all at once.

sudden I remembered the story of the two bullocks, which seemed to clear the way a little. "Yes, the fact of the matter is that two bullocks were living together, who, in spite of the climate and foreign rule," (loud laughter).

By this time I realised that my remarks had been rather disconnected. I told myself to pull myself together, and to get on with the story of the bundle of wood.

"For example, now just take a bundle of wood. Wood is often expensive. The reason for this is that poverty is widespread in India—*I* mean because most people are poor, therefore it as if a bundle of wood—I mean; you see, if..." (loud and prolonged laughter). "Gentlemen! If you don't behave sensibly, your nation will perish—misfortune is hovering—(Shouts of laughter—an uproar..... and cries of—"turn him out—we don't want to listen to him.")

63 "Shaikh Sa'di has said, 'When one member of a nation committed folly,'

(A voice. 'What are you drivelling about?')

"Well, we'll leave that alone, anyhow there can be no doubt about this":—

"Oh come mightingale, alas let us cry,  
Thou for my heart, and I for the rose."<sup>1</sup>

This verse made the blood course faster through my veins, and, at the same time the uproar increased. However I continued very excitedly:—"Those nations which have now risen to the sky of wakefulness, their hives are high roads for all men; and their Governments shake the four corners of the earth." (The uproar and laughter increased yet more).

"The ribbon of selfish ambition is tied to the ears

of your leaders. The history of the world bears witness to the fact that all those different divisions of existence....."

By now the uproar and laughter were so deafening, that I could not hear myself speak. Most of the crowd were standing up with their mouths wide open saying something. I was trembling from head to foot. One of the crowd like the first drops of a rain storm, plucked up sufficient courage to throw an empty packet of cigarettes at me. After that four or five paper balls fell around me on the stage, but still I went on with my speech:—

"Gentlemen! You will perish, and don't you forget it! You are two bullocks....."

But when the shower (of missiles) only increased, I thought that it would be better for me to escape from this foolish collection of people, and with one leap was off the stage, and went bounding straight through the door and outside.

The crowd followed me. I never turned to look round, but ran straight ahead. Every now and again, I heard some impolite remark that was hurled at me, and this made me quicken my pace, and I went headlong for the railway station, where I found a train in. Blindly I burst into a carriage, The next instant the train started.

From that day to this neither has Muridpur ever invited me nor have I felt the slightest inclination to go there.

1. *Bāriṣh. kṛ. pahlā gāthā.* This refers to a well known poem by Tsmā'īl Merāṭhī which is often quoted in school text-books.

1. Note the correct version of the couplet on page 38.