

❁ Chapter 5 ❁

More Letters, 1848-56

Hali, after suggesting the reasons for Ghalib's changing from Persian to Urdu as the medium for his correspondence, continues:

'Ghalib probably at first thought it beneath him to adopt Urdu as the medium of his writing. But it sometimes happens that the very achievement which a man regards as trifling and of little weight becomes the basis of his fame and popularity. Wherever one looks, Ghalib's fame throughout India owes more to the publication of his Urdu prose [i.e. his letters] than it does to his Urdu verse or to his Persian verse or prose. True, people generally already regarded him as a very great Persian poet, and thought of his Urdu verse too as poetry of a high order beyond the comprehension of the ordinary reader, but these opinions were based on hearsay, and not on their own reading.'

He goes on to say that Ghalib was himself aware of this, and saddened by it.

One may share Ghalib's regret that his verse and his works of Persian prose were not generally appreciated, without belittling the achievement which his Urdu letters represent. In them one finds a vivid picture of the man and of the life he led, and one which, incidentally, assists substantially in the understanding of his avowedly literary work. Even among his Persian letters one occasionally finds one in the homely style and content more characteristic of his Urdu. For example, on December 1, 1848 he writes to Jawahir Singh, the son of his old friend Rae Chajmal Khatri:

'You will remember that I had a cap made of kid-skin. Well, it is moth-eaten now, and I am without a hat. I want a silk turban, the kind they make in Peshawar and Multan, and which distinguished men in those places wear. But it must not be of a bright colour or a youthful style; and it must not have a red border. At the same time it should be something distinctive and elegant, and finely finished. I don't want one with silver or gold thread in it. The silks in the material must include the colours black, green, blue, and yellow. You can probably get something like this quite easily in those parts. See if you can find one, get it for me, and send it me by post. And tell me how much it costs. I shan't accept it until you've told me what it costs. It's not a gift. A gift, a present, is something you send without being asked. You can't give a man

something that he's asked for as a present. I don't mean that I wouldn't accept a present from you. Not at all. I only mean that I'm buying the turban, and I'll only accept as a gift something that I haven't asked for. Anyway, please send the turban without delay, and don't hesitate about telling me what it costs.'

In the Urdu letters it is this sort of informal, intimate writing on everyday personal matters that prevails. Most of those given in the last chapter relate either to Ghalib's employment at the Mughal Court or to poetry and criticism. But there are many more, and they cover a wide variety of themes.

Some of them express his love of children, a love which he perhaps felt all the more strongly because he had none of his own.

Little is known in detail about his family life, for in Indian Muslim society one did not (and does not) talk about one's wife and children. His marriage was, as far as we know, no more and no less successful than most in his society, but he seems always to have felt that a wife was an encumbrance he could very well have done without. Hali writes:

'Ghalib's wife, the daughter of Ilahi Bakhsh Khan Maruf, was an exceedingly pious and sober lady, meticulous in keeping the fasts and in saying her prayers. She was as strict in her religious observances as Ghalib was lax in these matters—so much so that she even kept her own eating and drinking utensils apart from her husband's. At the same time, she never failed one iota in her duty of serving him and looking to his welfare. Ghalib always spent his time in the men's apartments, but . . . at an appointed time every day without fail he would go into the zenana, and his treatment of his wife and her relations was always considerate in the extreme. . . .'

One wonders whether Ghalib really was so considerate to his wife as Hali makes out, but his description of the wife is entirely convincing. There were and are thousands like her. From a brief reference in one of Ghalib's letters, written many years later, we know that she bore him seven children, but none survived longer than fifteen months. There were times when, hard-pressed by financial worries, he counted this his good fortune, but at other times it grieved him, for he was genuinely fond of children. Having no son of his own, he gave a father's love to Zain ul Abidin Khan Arif, his wife's nephew; his verse includes a Persian poem in Arif's praise. 'He is the flame of the candle that lights my house,' he writes, 'and the pen in my fingers dances for joy as I write his name.' But Arif's health was poor, and in 1851 he fell seriously ill. In a letter to Haqir, written probably between April and July of that year, he describes his sickness:

'He has had a sudden attack of *ru'āf*. In this disease there is usually a flow of blood from the nose, but he has been losing blood mainly from the mouth, and only a little from the nose. The blood flowed from his mouth like water

from a water-carrier's goat-skin. In the course of a week—may God strike me if I tell a lie—he lost something like ten to fifteen pints of blood—black and foul-smelling. No one thought he would live, and all hope was given up. But in the end God saved him. You may imagine what he looks like now. Even before he was nothing but skin and bone, and now he has shrivelled up until he is as thin as a rake. He is still confined to bed. Not only can he not move about; he cannot even get out of bed. But his life is out of danger.'

Ghalib's concern was all the greater because Arif's wife was suffering from a prolonged illness at the same time. In the same letter he writes:

'For three months she has been suffering from fever and a persistent cough. God have mercy on her and on her children, and save her life. I cannot tell what will happen, but you may take it that if she lives it will be as though she had returned from the dead.'

Ghalib's fears proved only too well-founded. Arif's wife died in January 1852. Arif himself survived her for only three or four months. One of Ghalib's simplest and most moving ghazals was written on his death.

They left two small boys—Baqir Ali, aged five, and Husain Ali, aged two. If the letter to Tufta quoted above (p. 91-2) is correctly dated, he must have taken both of them into his care; but in that case it must have been a temporary arrangement, and the elder boy soon went to his grandmother, Arif's mother. The younger, Ghalib and his wife adopted as their own child. Hali says: 'Ghalib loved him more than if he had been his own child, and never let him out of his sight'. He often speaks of him in his letters.

He was also very fond of Haqir's children, and there are few letters to Haqir in which he does not ask after them and send them his blessing. The thought of them seemed to bring him some sort of consolation even in his keenest grief. The letter of January 9, 1850 already quoted, in which he wrote of the bitterness of his grief, his desire to leave Delhi and the insuperable obstacles that prevented him doing so, goes straight on:

'Today amid this same tumult of grief and sorrow, my thoughts turned to you and your children. It is a long time since I heard how you are faring, and how my dear little niece i.e. [Haqir's daughter] Zakiya is faring. Nor have I any news of [your sons] Munshi Abdul Latif and Nasir ud Din. . . .'

Somewhere between August and October 1850 he wrote:

'How is my nephew and my dear little niece? You told me in an earlier letter that she takes her own pen and inkpot and sits down to write letters to me, and that when she quarrels with you she says, "I'll go off to stay with Mirza Sahib". Now you must tell her to stop calling me "Mirza Sahib" and call me "Uncle".'

On January 8, 1853 he ends a letter with:

'My blessing to Munshi Abdul Latif and to Nasir ud Din . . . and last of all I send my blessing to my dear niece Zakiya Begam: May Exalted God preserve her and grant that I may see her face; otherwise as the days pass by she will grow up and become a lady, a gentleman's daughter. And then I don't suppose she'll appear unveiled before me. She'll hide herself from me, because I'm not really her uncle; I've only laid claim to be her uncle on my own account.'

On March 27, 1854 he writes of her again. It seems that Haqir was anxious to give her a good education, but Ghalib urges what was in his time (and, indeed, continued to be long after his time) a more traditional view:

'Give my blessing to all the other children, especially Zakiya Begam. My friend, for women it's quite enough if you teach them the letters, so that they can read the Holy Quran at sight. Don't lay too much stress on her education.'

A few months later, on June 18, 1854, he expresses his satisfaction with her progress, but says:

'My friend, I can't make out whether you mean that Zakiya Begam has just read to the end of the *sipara*¹ amma yatasa alun or whether she has memorized it too. Praise be to God! If she's memorized it, that is a great achievement, and it will be a very great achievement indeed if she memorizes all thirty *siparas*. Anyway, tell me: you must have heard her read. She must have learned the letters, and learnt how to join the separate letters together. Or does she just read . . . parrot-fashion?'

He ends the same letter with a report on Husain Ali's progress: 'He can read the letters *alif, be, jim, he, khe*. God preserve my good name and grant that no fault remain in him, that people may not reproach me with having brought him up badly.' He speaks of Zakiya again in a letter of August 15, 1854: 'My blessing to Begam. [Then, addressing her directly:] Tell me, my dear. Even if I come to Aligarh now, shall I be able to see you? Or do nieces in your country observe parda from their uncles?' A month later, on September 15, 1854 he writes: 'From now on I shan't call Begam "Zakiya" or "Begam". From now on I shall call her "Hafiz Ji"'. Give Hafiz Ji my blessing. And my blessing and my greeting to Munshi Abdul Latif and his children.' Apparently Zakiya had by now memorized a part of the Quran. Hafiz is the title given to one who knows the whole Quran by heart, and ji is a suffix of respectful address.

A little over a fortnight later he is writing that Husain Ali is seriously ill. On September 15, 1854 he had written:

¹ One of the thirty sections into which the Quran is divided. The one mentioned here is the last. It contains the shortest chapter of the Quran. It is this section which the Muslim child studies first.

'There has been an outbreak of fever here so widespread that I don't suppose there's a single house where half the occupants aren't down with it. It's a recurring fever. My steward Kallu, his mother, Madari's wife and his children are all ill. Your sister-in-law—that is, my wife—and the woman who looks after Husain Ali and runs the household are also ill. And the best of it is that both of them get the fever on the same day. Thank God that Husain Ali is well.'

But it must have been only a few days later that Husain Ali caught the fever too, for on October 3, 1854 Ghalib writes:

'Today it is thirteen days since he opened his eyes. He lies there day and night with the fever, unaware and unconscious. Yesterday, the twelfth day, he was purged, and he passed four motions. All he has to live on is medicine three or four times a day and barley-water two or three times. The outlook is not good. His grandmother [Ghalib's wife] is also ill. Every day at midday she gets a fit of shivering. It leaves her at evening. She has to miss the midday prayer, but manages to say the afternoon prayer at the right time. . . . My friend, I am not too concerned about my wife, but Husain Ali's illness drives me to desperation. I love him dearly. May God preserve him to survive me when I am gone. He has grown thin as a rake. I didn't write to you before, but sickness is spreading here on a huge scale . . . all kinds of fevers, most of them recurring ones. In other words if in a household of ten persons, six are sick and four well, three of the six will get well and the four well ones will fall ill. So far all ended well, but now people have begun to die. . . . In short it's a case of

The seven heavens¹ are turning night and day.
Something will happen: set your mind at rest.'

Three days later he had despaired of Husain Ali's recovery:

'I told you of Husain Ali's condition in my last letter. Today is the sixteenth day of the fever, and the ninth since he had so much as a grain of solid food. He has grown thin as a rake. Today he is being given an enema. I cannot bear to watch it, and am sitting in the sitting room writing this letter. . . . Let us see what the result is. I am in despair.'

But on October 15th he is able to write: 'Husain Ali is better now. That is, the fever has left him. His urine is cloudy and his stomach is hard. He is weak beyond all measure. God grant he may be spared and get completely well.' On November 5, 1854 he writes again:

'Husain Ali is better now, except for the hardness in his stomach and his stomach-orifice. And yes, there is still some swelling. Yesterday, for the first

¹ Whose movement determines men's destinies.

time in several days, he again had a fever. It left him as the night ended, and today he is well. Let me see how he is tomorrow. His real grandfather, that is, Zain ul Abidin Khan's [Arif's] father and my wife's sister's husband, Nawwab Ghulam Husain Khan, has died. His death is much to be regretted. He was a very humane and affectionate man.'

Less than a year later Arif's mother also died, and Ghalib took Arif's elder boy Baqir Ali into his care. His position caused him some anxiety. He wrote to Haqir on June 23, 1855:

'Let me inform you that Zain ul Abidin's [Arif's] mother, that is, Husain Ali Khan's grandmother, died on Wednesday, 28th Ramzan. Zain ul Abidin's elder boy, Baqir Ali Khan has come to live with me too. Do you see, my friend, the tricks that cruel fate plays on me? Load upon load it piles upon me. Wound upon wound it inflicts upon me. There is nothing I can do. My income is the same; my expenses have increased. But I must fear God. I cannot behave callously towards them. And there is no one to whom I can say, "Look after your own boys. I can't afford it." Anyway, I hold my peace and am at a loss what to do. May God safeguard my honour.'

The children are mentioned once or twice more in the letters to Haqir. The first, written during Ramzan, 1856 (June 4, 1856) says: 'Both your children, Baqir Ali Khan and Husain Ali Khan, are well. They break the fast three or four times a day, and as the time for breaking the fast [sunset] draws near, stand sentry over the mouths of those that are keeping it.' The second comes just over a year later, on July 27, 1856: 'Both the boys are happy. They wander about the place demanding mangoes, but no one will give them any. Their grandmother [Ghalib's wife] has got it into her head that she mustn't let them eat their bellyful of food.'

He often wished that he could go to Aligarh to visit Haqir, and at one time planned to do this and then go on to Banda, further East, to visit other friends. But he found constantly that circumstances prevented him. Some time between August and October, 1850 he had written to Haqir: 'God willing, I shall find an occasion to come by the mail to Aligarh this winter to visit you, and stay with you for a few days'. On May 21, 1852 he concludes a letter:

'Today I felt like talking to you. And I *am* talking to you, not writing a letter. But, alas, there's not the same pleasure in this conversation as in actually talking together, because I'm doing all the chattering and you're not saying a word. And that's not the same as talking together, with you answering my questions and I answering yours. What can I do? It's a strange life I'm leading—everything goes absolutely against my own inclinations. What I want is to travel around, stopping a month here and two months there; and the position is that I, so to speak, lie here unable to move, with my arms pinioned behind me. And

now, God help me, I've used up all the paper and I still have a lot more to say. I haven't even written my blessings to my children. *You* say them for me. And when you write, tell me how they are.'

More than a year later, on August 21, 1853, he writes:

'You ask me about the King. What am I to tell you? The diarrhoea has stopped, except for an occasional attack. The fever has left him, but he still gets a temperature from time to time. His hiccups are less violent than they were. He sometimes gets a burning in his chest and sort of belches now and then. They bring his open palanquin to the bedside, and move him from the bed on to it, and that is how he goes out. They carry him around within the precincts of the Fort and then bring him back to his apartments. You may take it—and this is what is being generally said—that the sickness has left him but he is still weak. Anyway, as long as he's safe, that's something; but I shall have to wait and see how long it is before what *I* want happens, and he takes his bath to mark his recovery¹ and receives his gifts in congratulation, so that I can take leave of him and go off by the mail to Banda. I shall have lost half the pleasure of the journey, for the mangoes and the rains are practically over. Oh well, let's see when I shall manage to meet my friend [Haqir] in Aligarh and see his children and meet my friends in Banda and see their children. . . . My friend, I tell you by God that my heart was—and is—set upon making this journey. It is just what I would like. But just see what has happened. If only things had not turned out this way, I would have been off to Banda by now, visiting you on the way. But what can I do? In the circumstances I cannot ask for leave; and I can't go off without taking leave. "God is recognized in the failure of man's plans." [i.e. Man proposes, God disposes.]² I will write to you in more detail later. My blessings to the children.'

On September 3, 1853 he writes again:

'You can take it that my intention is absolutely unchanged—absolutely. The King has recovered. Once he has held his court after taking the bath and I have recited an ode or a poem of congratulation before him, I shall take leave of him, take my seat in the mail-coach, and come to Aligarh. I shall stay twenty-four hours there [with you] and then go on.

'One Shaikh Momin Ali Sahib, Sadr Amin³ at Aligarh, has been here. He came to see me one day, but I had gone out, so we were not able to meet. Two days later I went to visit him, and found him at home. We spoke of you too, and he spoke very highly of you. I was expecting him to visit me again, but three or four days ago I met Hakim Imam ud Din Khan in the Fort and asked

¹ Prescribed by Muslim usage.

² The saying is attributed to Ali, the cousin and son-in-law of the Prophet.

³ A post in the judiciary.

him. "How is the Sadr Amīn from Aligarh whom you were treating?" He said, "He has gone back to Aligarh." The point is, if you meet him tell him, "An unworthy Asadullah [Ghalib] presents his respects and begs to state that he cannot presume to complain to you that you left without visiting him again. But he regrets that he was not informed of your departure; otherwise he would have waited upon you to bid you farewell."

On October 2, 1853 he is still hoping, though not without misgivings:

'May God hold you and your children safe in His keeping, and bring me the happiness of meeting you and seeing them. My friend, the fate that I brought into the world has laid it down that nothing that I want comes to pass. . . . The enjoyment of the journey by the mail, the pleasure of coming to Aligarh, the joy of meeting you, my friend, the delight of seeing your children, the diversion of halting here and there on the way to buy mangoes—how can I tell you all the things I have missed? As you know, I got a windfall of money, and I intended to use it to pay the expenses of my journey. And then I was confronted with this state of affairs here. They say now that His Majesty will not celebrate his recovery until after Muharram [the month in which Muslims mourn the martyrdom of Husain]. My intention is unchanged. But where shall I find the money? Anyway, let a suitable opportunity present itself and I will take leave, borrow money, and be on my way—unless fate plays me some new trick in the meanwhile.'

Four days later, on October 6, 1853, he writes again:

'I am told that the King will celebrate his recovery after Muharram. He is well again—weak, it is true; but that is inevitable at his age. Anyway, after the 10th Muharram¹ I shall ask for leave—but only when a suitable occasion presents itself and when I have arranged for the expenses of the journey. Yesterday all day the sun was blazing and the wind as hot as it is in Jeth and Asarh [the months in the Hindu calendar corresponding to May-June and June-July] when the hot season is at its height. But as evening came on it got so cold that the rich had their big shawls taken out of their store-rooms and the poor untied their bundles and got out their quilts and blankets. The sky was completely overcast with black clouds throughout the night, but there was no rain. Now as morning dawned there was such a downpour that water lies in sheets everywhere. I haven't been able to go to the Fort. It is still raining, and I am sitting here writing this letter. If it keeps on like this I shan't be able to send it off today. It's raining heavily. . . . My blessings to the children. God grant them long life and happiness and grant me the joy of seeing them. Here gram, wheat, and gram flour are selling for forty to forty-five pounds for a rupee.

¹ When the period of the most intense mourning for Husain ends.

Write and tell me the position there. Here the new moon was visible on Tuesday; so Wednesday was the 1st Muharram and today is the 2nd. . . .'

In the end it seems that his ambition of visiting Haqir was never realized. He wrote on September 15, 1854: 'To go anywhere now is beyond my strength. Even if I had not had these ties with the King, I should still have been stranded here.'

Several letters throw a sidelight on the marital and other problems of a common acquaintance of theirs. Somewhere between April and July, 1851 he writes:

'My friend, for God's sake make Hasan Ali Beg see sense. Is this any way to go on—to leave his wife for a boy? Even your mother takes no interest in what has happened to her. The poor woman is stranded there with her aunt. Write to your mother and tell her to write and persuade the girl to come to her so that she can send her off to you. I mean, give Mirza [Hasan Ali Beg] this piece of advice, and give him a good talking to.'

Sooner or later this advice seems to have had some effect, and Hasan Ali Beg returned to his wife. But a letter of three years later shows that this did not resolve all problems. On June 18, 1854 Ghalib writes:

'My heart bleeds for Hasan Ali Beg. His wife has, in cash and in kind, got rid of five or six thousand rupees of his money. And it's not just the money. She's as good as ruined him. What's he to do now, poor man? He's been to see me two or three times, and one day when we were alone he told me the whole story. I could see that the man was near to tears. How true it is:

A good man married to an evil wife
Tastes all the pains of hell here in this life.

Here in Delhi they have a term 'a new nawwab'. This term can be applied to anyone, Hindu or Muslim. When a man dies—a wealthy man, that is—and his property comes to his son, bad characters get together and begin addressing him as "Lord of bounty" and "Your exalted lordship". They tell him, "Such and such a courtesan is desperately in love with you", and "Such and such a lord was praising you to his assembled friends. You must certainly send for this courtesan and give a party for this lord. That is what worldly wealth is for. You cannot take it with you. Did your father take anything with him? And will you?" Anyway, to date your humble servant has seen three such new nawwabs. One was Khatri Todar Mal. He had a hundred thousand rupees to his name, and in six to seven years he lost it all, left Delhi, and disappeared without a trace. The second was a Panjabi boy named Sa'adat. He lost all he

had—some forty to fifty thousand rupees. The third was named Khan Muhammad—the son of Sadullah Khan. He too had twenty to twenty-five thousand rupees and used to ride around in a buggy. Now he clip-clops around in down-at-heel shoes. In short, I've heard of *men* becoming new nawwabs; but this good woman is the only woman new nawwab I've come across. The root of the matter is that there's a crafty, cunning whore, who has, only recently, got round my brother-in-law, Zain ul Abidin Khan's [Arif's] uncle in his old age, got herself installed in his house, and goes about fleecing the respectable young wives of the household. It's this same woman who has got together with [Hasan Ali Beg]'s wife and made a "new nawwab" of her, and got her to spend all the money they had. You'll hear the whole story from him. He did his best to persuade her to accompany him, but she absolutely refused to go.

Seek not within my head for room where sound
advice may lodge—
The music of the lute and viol has entered
every cell.

He'll be coming to you alone. You must hear all his tale of woe from his own lips.'

Haqir perhaps suggested that Hasan Ali Beg's wife was probably behaving like this to punish him for his own misdeeds. Ghalib rejects this idea in his next (undated) letter:

'What you wrote about Hasan Ali Beg's household affairs is not so—that is, his good woman hasn't done this out of spite.

Another story lies behind this tale

A woman man-hunter, a bad character, a cheat, has got her claws into her. And now she entertains guests every day, and is for ever ordering flowers and fruits and all sorts of fancy things. She's doing all this out of mischief and a taste for luxury, not out of anger and resentment.'

There are occasional comments on the British administration, which, in its larger aspects, impresses him very favourably. Thus he remarks in passing in a letter of October 2, 1853:

'The Lieutenant-Governor [of the North-Western Provinces] has died in Bareilly. Let's see who is appointed in his place. Just see the way this nation runs its affairs! [In former times] in India if so great a potentate had died, what an upheaval there would have been! But now nobody turns a hair. People hardly notice what has happened or who has died.'

There were still important British officials whom he knew and admired, and this attitude is implicit in a letter of November 7, 1853, in which he writes:

'Thomas Metcalfe Sahib, the Delhi Agent and Commissioner, has died. He was the only one left of those who knew us. The celebration of his funeral defies description. There was a crowd of a hundred thousand people stretching from the Kashmiri Gate to his residence. He was buried in the precincts of Sikandar Sahib's [Skinner's] church, beside Fraser Sahib.'

The British administration did not always impress him so favourably in its more detailed workings. On May 29, 1853 he wrote:

'You may well ask about the weather. I am in exactly the same plight as the animals that lap up water with their tongues. As Zuhuri puts it

The dog's plight, and the cat's plight and the
Jackal's plight.

You have to see me in this weather before you can understand how I pass my days.

'I have some news for you. An epidemic is raging in the city. That is, the [East India] Company's agent has examined the papers of past years to see who owes dues [i.e. income tax, says Mihr] to the government, and has presented a demand for them. In fact "demand" is too mild a word. He is fully determined to exact them. Among others, he found that I too owed dues—five hundred rupees and eight annas—and demanded this sum on pain of imprisonment. I'd be hard put to it to raise even the eight annas; where am I to find the five hundred rupees? In the end his honour decided that the money should be paid by instalments, and a monthly deduction of five rupees should be made from my British pension. I used to get sixty-two rupees eight annas a month. So that leaves me fifty-seven rupees eight annas. Five rupees a month comes to sixty rupees a year. So when can I look forward to getting my full pension again? In other words you may take it that my pension is now fifty-seven rupees a month.'

And he more than once comments unfavourably on a British invention of great importance to one who wrote so many letters—the post office. On June 4, 1854, he writes:

'What do you think of the state of the British postal services? I don't know what innovations they've introduced, but all organisation is at an end and you simply can't place any reliance on it. An Englishman had one or two of his letters in English go astray. He spoke to the post-office here about it and when nobody paid any attention to him, he addressed a complaint to the head post-

master. He got a reply to say that they accepted no responsibility; he had handed in his letter and they had sent it off; it was not up to them whether or not it reached its destination. Complaints have come from Meerut too, and one hears the same thing in letters from Agra. So far no letter of mine has gone astray, but in a general epidemic who is safe? I've felt obliged to make a new rule. I've sent word to Major John Jacob at Agra and to you at Aligarh and to a cousin of mine—my mother's brother's son—at Banda, and one or two other friends in various districts, telling them that in future we should send our letters to each other unstamped. It works out quits, and it puts our minds at ease. In future if you send me a letter postage pre-paid I shall be cross with you. Send them unstamped; and get Munshi Hargopal Tufta to do the same; in fact show him what I have written. A lot of pre-paid letters go astray. Unstamped ones can be trusted to get there.'

A few months later he is even more dismayed. It seems that the British had for the first time introduced the letter-box. On October 3, 1854 he writes:

'The post office department has gone all to pieces. It may have been an idle foreboding, but I had thought it proper, as a precaution, to start sending my letters unstamped. The letter would go to the post-office and I would get a receipt—stamped with a red-ink stamp for a pre-paid letter and a black-ink stamp for an unstamped one. My mind was at rest, because I could look at my mail-book and remind myself on what date I had sent such-and-such a letter and how I had sent it. Now they've put a big box in the post-office. It has an open mouth and anyone who wants to post a letter can go and drop it in the box and come away. No receipt, no stamp, no evidence of posting. God knows whether the letter will be despatched or not. And even if it is, when it gets to the other end there's no prospect of a tip to tempt the postman to deliver it, and no incentive to the authorities to collect what is due on it. They may not even give it to the postman to deliver, and even if they do he may not deliver it. And if it doesn't arrive, the sender has nothing in writing to base a claim on—not, that is, unless he pays four annas extra and sends it registered; and we send off letters all over the place practically every other day. Where are we going to get eight annas and more a week to register them all? Suppose I calculate that a letter weighs three *masha* and stick a half-anna stamp on it. It turns out that it's two *ratti*¹ overweight, and the addressee has to pay double. So you're forced to keep a balance to weigh your letters. The tongue of every balance is different, and shows a slightly different weight. In short, sending off a letter is a headache; it's asking for trouble. I've written this letter on 10th Muharram. Tomorrow I'll send for the necessary stamps, stick them on the envelope and send it off. It's like shooting an arrow in a dark room. If it hits, it hits, and if it misses, it misses.'

¹ There are eight *ratti* to a *masha*.

In the remaining letters of this period all manner of subjects come up. Like the preceding ones, most of them are letters to Haqir, but there are letters to other correspondents too, notably to Ghalib's and Haqir's common friend Tufta. We give extracts below, generally speaking, in the order in which they were written.

May, 1848, to Tufta:

'What's wrong with our good friend Munshi Nabi Bakhsh Haqir, that you write that even goat's whey couldn't cure it? There is a recipe given in *Tibb i Muhammad Husain Khani* which has no harmful effects and does you good, though it takes a long time for its effect to show. This is it: Take six or seven quarts of water, and, in the proportion of half an ounce to each quart, put in it crushed China-root. Boil it until a quarter of the water has evaporated. Strain the remainder into a fresh, unglazed earthenware vessel. Leave it to stand some hours and then drink it. Follow your normal diet, but whenever you feel thirsty, either by day or at night, drink only this. Make a fresh supply every day. After a full year its beneficial effects will be evident. Give him this recipe with my regards. Whether he uses it or not is up to him.'

August–October 1850, to Haqir—it appears that Tufta had secured some nominal employment with the Raja of Jaipur:

'I received the news about Tufta. Well, I too entered the King's service. Tufta is my shagird: why shouldn't he enter the Raja's? What you say is quite right. He's not taken service because he's concerned with supporting himself, but because he's concerned to get his diwan printed. What can I do? I have no resources, and can do nothing. Otherwise would I not have given a hundred or two hundred rupees to help him? I am disgusted with myself and ashamed to face my friends. How can anyone tell how much I love my friends? Who respects a man whose pockets are empty? And who listens to what he says?'

On September 6, 1851, to Haqir:

'I read in the papers that epidemics are raging in Agra and in Patna. There was nothing about Aligarh, but now I've learned of the situation from your letter. May Exalted God keep all His servants safe and well. All is well here, except that, as usual with the changes that take place at the beginning of this season, there's a wave of fevers and agues and colds. But there's no epidemic. It's been very hot, but for the last two days there's been a cool breeze. The clouds are gathering, but there has been no rain. If Almighty God wills, there will be in a day or two. His Majesty is at the shrine of Qutub Sahib.¹ He'll be returning on the 20th of this month—i.e. of Zi Qad. I ought really to have gone for a few days to the shrine, but I got one or two boils on my foot, and these provided me with a lame excuse not to go.'

¹ The famous Muslim saint Qutub ud Din whose tomb is at Mihrauli, near the Qutub Minar.

On January 4, 1852, to Tufta, rebuking him for not writing: 'Brother, just for one day keep off the drink—or cut it down—and write me a few lines, for you are much in my thoughts.'

On March 9, 1852, to Haqir:

'There's no need to feel so concerned about the pain in my chest. Most of my ailments are recurring. A little while ago I had a bout of colic. Now I've started a bout of pain in the chest. The pain starts up, lasts for twelve hours, or eighteen hours, or six hours, and then goes away. Munshi ji's ghazals came. He wanted them back quickly, but that was the day my pain began. I wrote and told him that I should not be able to attend to them that day or the next. I returned them to him on the third day. He had no business to tell you about it and cause you concern. In short, I'm quite all right.

'I don't have Hakim Imam ud Din Khan Sahib to treat me any more. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan looks after me now. He told me that the season was changing and I should be purged. Accordingly I have had ten to twelve suppuratives and three purges. The third was today. I'm writing to you after taking my cool drink, and my servant has gone to [Ahsanullah] Khan Sahib with a note. Let me see whether he brings back the good tidings that I am finished with them now and can relax, or whether I'm to be purged once again the day after tomorrow. This was the reason for the delay in answering your letter. Now you please be kind enough to write me in similar detail about your own health,¹ and tell me how the children are. My blessing to Munshi Abdul Latif Sahib. And my blessing to Zakiya Begam. Zakiya Begam, I want to know how far you have got with your lessons, and what you are reading now. Write and tell me. My blessing to Nasir ud Din and Abdus Salam. I've forgotten the name of the new arrival. Give him my blessing and write and tell me his name.'

On March 22, 1852, to Tufta:

'I have moved from Kale Sahib's house and rented a house in Muhalla Ballimaron. It was my affection for him that kept me there, not any consideration of the lower rent. I tell you this simply for your information, though letters to me don't need the house address: "Asadullah, Delhi" is sufficient. But don't write Lal Kuan any more; write Ballimaron.'

We shall see later how much Ghalib prided himself on being so well known that a letter addressed to him at 'Delhi' would reach him and how cross he got when people pestered him for a more detailed address.

On May 15, 1852, to Haqir:

'Today is Saturday, the 15th of May, and it's morning. I've written you two letters. One of them I have just sent off to the post and the other I am giving

¹ Haqir had had something wrong with his eye.

to Hakim Ilahi Bakhsh Sahib. He is a man of good family from Sikandra, and is the friend and pupil of him whom, without ever having seen him, I love—namely of Sahib i Alam of Marahra—may Exalted God preserve him! He brought me a letter from him. He spent several months here, studying *Mufarrih ul Qulub* ["The Rejoicer of Hearts"—presumably, from the context, a work on medicine] under Hakim Imam ud Din Khan Sahib. He is a very nice man, a cultured man, and a man of excellent disposition. Here it has proved quite impossible to get employment for him, and fortune has not favoured him. Now he is returning home, and when he reaches Aligarh, will call upon you. You must treat him with deference and think of him as an old friend. And bear in mind that in your district there are many contractors and landed gentry. If any of them needs a physician, see to it that he is given a favourable introduction to him. There is no hurry about this; but bear it in mind.'

On May 21, 1852 to Haqir:

'Strange things are going on here. It's the month of Jeth [the Hindi month corresponding to May-June, and associated with the worst of the heat that precedes the rains] and we are having rain every day and it's quite cold. People are wrapping themselves in quilts at night, and I am myself using a coverlet. Ever since Nauroz¹ I've witnessed the spectacle of rain day and night and piercing cold. For two days it was hot, and the third day we had rain. And the rain continued for three to four days. Write and tell me how it is where you are.'

On March 17, 1853, to Haqir:

'I had myself purged because I was feeling constant pain in my limbs, and my stomach was overloaded with accumulated waste. Well, by God's mercy I have attained my object and feel relieved and well again. I have as much faith as ever in Hakim Imam ud Din Khan, and he is as kind to me as ever. But I had drawn closer to Hakim Ahsanullah Khan Sahib, and we see each other frequently. And he too is second to none in learning and practical ability. That is why I followed his advice and had my bowels purged.

'You're drinking infusions of neem leaves, and you do well to do so; but it's a vulgar prescription you're acting on in following it with gram-flour cake dipped in clarified butter. The accepted thing is to make gram chapaties your staple diet in ailments of this kind. If you continue this for some time you feel considerable benefit from it.'

Letters both to Tufta and to Haqir in 1852 and 1853 show that Ghalib tried about this time to gain the patronage of the Raja of Jaipur. He never seems to have felt very confident of the outcome, for at quite an early stage² he writes to Tufta:

¹ New Year's Day in the Persian calendar—about March 21st.

² Though the date of the letter is disputed. Mihr places it at about May 1852.

'The Jaipur business was a chance affair. It came up without my really thinking about it or planning anything. My cupidity has turned my attention there. I have grown old and deaf. I stood high in favour with the British authorities, and was counted among those of noble descent, and used to receive a full robe of honour. Now I have a bad name, and a great stain upon my character. [Mihr suggests that this is a reference to his imprisonment in 1847] and cannot hope to gain the entry into any princely state—unless I can establish a link as an ustad, or a spiritual counsellor, or a panegyrist, and so gain some advantage, or perhaps get a foothold for some relation there. Let us see what turns up.'

Afaq Husain, the editor of the collection of Ghalib's letters to Haqir, summarises the history of this episode:

'Ghalib, through Jani Banke Rae, presented a copy of his Urdu diwan as a gift to the ruler of Jaipur, submitting a petition at the same time. Jani Banke Rae appointed . . . Hardev Singh to await the Raja's reply. . . . In the end it was decided that Ghalib should be given a grant of five hundred rupees. When Ghalib heard this he decided to give twenty-five rupees of it to Munshi Hardev Singh, and wrote to Jani ji to deduct twenty-five rupees and give them to Hardev Singh, and send a draft for the remaining sum. He later learned that Hardev Singh had spent twenty-nine rupees and some annas of his own money in this connection; so he again wrote to Jani ji to deduct [this sum also] from the draft. . . . But Jani ji paid Hardev Singh out of his own pocket, and sent Ghalib a draft for the full five hundred. [Two officials of the state] had promised their help to Ghalib, and he had felt confident of receiving a substantial sum from the Raja. But his hopes were dashed when the Raja died suddenly, and the two officials fell upon evil days. . . .'

But Ghalib had at any rate got the five hundred rupees, and was not too dissatisfied with such an outcome. He wrote to Haqir on June 22, 1853: 'Well, it's better than nothing. I couldn't assume that I would get just what I wanted.' A letter to Tufta written some days earlier, on June 9, 1853, elaborates the picture a little:

'If this your well-wisher attains to no high rank in other things, in want his rank is very high—that is, I am greatly in need, and a hundred or two hundred rupees will not quench my thirst. A hundred thousand praises to your generosity!¹ If I could have got two thousand from Jaipur I could have cleared my debts, and, given that a few years more of life were granted me, could have borrowed as much again. This five hundred, my friend—I swear to you—will go (all but a hundred and fifty) on sundry items. What's left I shall need for my own expenses. The loans which I've borrowed on interest from money-lenders will still amount to fifteen-to-sixteen hundred rupees. The whole of

¹ Tufta had been instrumental in bringing about the approach, through Jani ji, to Jaipur.

the hundred which I asked Babu Sahib [Jani ji] to send me was due to the English merchants in payment for that thing which our religion forbids and yours permits [wine], and I have now paid it. . . .'

A fortnight later, on June 24, 1853, he writes:

'Three days after I last wrote to you I [received more money]. . . . All my miscellaneous debts are paid and I feel greatly relieved. I now have forty-seven rupees cash in my box, and four bottles of wine and three of rose-water in the store-room. Praise be to God for His kindness!'

On June 22, 1853—corresponding to Ramzan 14th—he writes to Haqir:

'You may well ask about the heat. Scorching winds and burning heat like this hasn't been seen for the past sixty years. On the 6th-7th of Ramzan there was heavy rain. No one had ever seen such rain in the month of Jeth [May-June]. Now the rain has stopped. The sky is overcast all the time. When there is a breeze it is not hot, and when the breeze drops the weather is unbearable. The sun is fierce. I'm keeping the fast—whiling it away, that is. Every now and then I take a drink of water or smoke the hookah, or eat a bite of bread. People here have warped minds and strange ways: here am I whiling away the fast and they inform me that I'm not keeping it. They can't understand that not to keep it is one thing, and to while it away is another.

' . . . Two days ago someone mentioned to me that there had been a news-item in the Delhi *Urdu Akhbar* (Urdu News) that there had been a riot in Hatras and that the magistrate had been injured. Today I borrowed a sheet of the paper from a friend, and found that there really was such an item, reporting that there had been a riot over the demolition of houses and shops in connection with the widening of the roads, and that the people had pelted the magistrate with stones and injured him. If that was so, I can't understand why the magistrate left the place; and if he didn't leave it, how were *you* able to come away? I am consumed with desire to hear the full story from you. . . . Now I address myself to Begam. You are to know that I can't say anything for definite yet, but if I get the chance, I shall be seeing you round about Id or soon after, and shall hear how you read the Quran. But don't tell your daddy this. Keep it to yourself. Why? Because if he gets to hear of it he'll write and ask me all the details.'

On August 21, 1853, he comments to Tufta on the fact that he had pre-paid postage on a letter to him: 'Apart from Hatim and myself did any man ever show such generosity?' (Hatim was a hero of Arabic legend, and proverbial for his open-handedness.) Somewhere about the same time—Mihr places the letter between August and December 1853—he grumbles at him for not leaving room for him to enter corrections and answer questions on some pages of verse he has sent:

'You've left me no room for corrections, nor can I follow the convolutions of the lines you've written. Why didn't you write them out separately on a double page, and why didn't you space them out a bit? Now I've got to set out your questions. If there are any I haven't noticed and so haven't answered, don't blame me; blame the twists and turns of your writing.'

He then sets out the questions and his answers to them and concludes:

'I've hunted out your questions and answered them . . . I hope to God I've not missed any. And mind that you too when you read these enchanted pages, don't neglect any of my hints for correction. See to it that you never write like that again. It puts me off. . . .'

In another letter of the same period he writes:

'See what good fortune is mine! All these days I was thinking that any day now I should be getting a letter from Munshi Ji [Nabi Bakhsh Haqir] telling me that he is safe and sound; and now a letter has come and it tells me no such thing. He's not well, but has hurt his foot. But I tell you it's a good thing that the bone wasn't injured. And the only reason that it has swollen so much is that there was no one there to massage it and the injury became chronic. Anyway it will right itself after a while. Be sure to write and tell me as soon as it does. The thing will be on my mind. . . .'

'I gather from the fact that your letter conveys the respects of Babu Hargobind Singh that he must have gone on holiday to Aligarh [where Tufta was]. He shouldn't have troubled himself. His house is at the most two hundred yards from mine, and he went off without coming to see me first. What do I want with his "respectful service" now?

'Oh, and another thing. What are you and Babu Sahib thinking of to address my letters to "Imli ka Muhalla"? I live in Ballimaron. Imli ka Muhalla is a good mile away from here, without any exaggeration. It's a good job the postman knows me: otherwise your letters would have been going the rounds undelivered. . . .'

On December 22, 1853, he writes to Haqir briefly and movingly of the death of a lady about whom we should have wished to know a great deal more—his father's sister. The opening sentence suggests that Haqir himself had recently suffered a similar loss.

'My friend I too have become a partner in your grief; because [two days ago] on Tuesday, 18th of Rabi ul Awwal, in the evening, the aunt whom from my childhood onward I looked upon as a mother, and who looked upon me as her son, died. I may tell you that the day before yesterday it was as though I had lost nine of my dear ones—three aunts, three uncles, my father, and his

father and mother. Because so long as she was alive I felt that these nine lived too, and with her death I feel that now all these nine have died at once, "Verily we are for God, and verily to Him we shall return".'

The last words are a verse from the Quran; they are always quoted when someone dies.

On January 23, 1854, to Haqir:

'The late Mirza Najaf Ali Khan must have been a friend of yours. He has died here. His son . . . Mirza Yusuf Ali Khan, I look upon as my own son. He behaves as a son should, and for this, and for all his other good qualities, I love him. He has just gone to Aligarh. You must go and visit him . . . and hear his story from his own lips. He's a young gentleman who was brought up in the lap of luxury and knows nothing of the ups and downs of life. His father owned one or two houses there. God knows what he will do with them. You must act as a sort of well-wisher and guardian to him. But he'll be leaving on Thursday. Today's Monday, and I'm sending off this letter to you. I feel sure you'll get it tomorrow. As soon as you do, please go and see him. It would not be proper to send for him, because he is mourning his father; you should go to express your condolences. And read him this letter to you.'

On March 2, 1854, to Tufta:

'Your letter came that day—yesterday, Wednesday. For the last four days I have been afflicted by the ague, and the best of it is that this is . . . the fifth day and all this time I have had nothing to eat during the day, and no wine at night . . . and I don't feel at all hungry; I feel absolutely no interest in food. . . .'

On March 27, 1854, to Haqir:

'Sanaullah Khan Sana lives with his son in one of the cells of the Fatehpuri Mosque. I got him introduced to Ihtiram ud Daula Hakim Ahsanullah Khan. Five days ago the respected Hakim Sahib came to see me. Sanaullah Khan was there with an ode. He was asked to read it out. The next day he went to his house, and the Hakim Sahib gave him five rupees. Then he was sent with his ode to brother Nawwab Ziya ud Din. (He is the younger son of Nawwab Ahmad Bakhsh Khan.) He too gave him five rupees. So he's raised ten. Yesterday Sanaullah Khan didn't come to see me. He may come today. There's a courtesan named Chotam in the service of Maharaj Hindu Rao. He [Sanaullah] says that she is his shagird. Now he is planning to take leave of her. When she gives him something he'll set out to see you at Aligarh.'

On June 4, 1854, to Haqir:

'My friend, praise be to God everything else is all right, but the heat is so

intense that we cry to God to protect us. I suffer from heating of the blood as it is, and there's this torture on top of it. I was taking only one meal a day, and now I've discontinued that too. All I have to eat is curd, and how long can I go on eating that? I don't know what to do. To keep the fast is well beyond my powers, but I'm in a worse state than those that do keep it—and it's hard to describe their state. I have four servants, and all of them are keeping the fast. By the end of the day they look like four corpses walking about. And amid all these troubles I've got nothing that would provide some relief from them—no cooled room, and no iced water.'

He then quotes the rubai translated, and the short poem summarized, on p. 101 above and continues:

'I recited this rubai and this poem yesterday to the King. He was very amused and laughed heartily.

'I'm dying of over-heating, but I'm on the alert to see when the mango crop is ready. I'm certain they must already have ripened in Bengal. I lived two years in Calcutta, and mangoes are on sale there in June. About three days ago a fruit-seller brought five mangoes, but they had no taste. The hot wind had ripened them.'

On June 18, 1854, to Haqir:

'My friend, I can't tell you how much your comment made me laugh—that I'd excused myself the fasting with a rubai or a qata, while you'd had to fast for full thirty days—as though you and I weren't each and severally bound to keep the fast; as though it were a task entrusted jointly to you and me, and I had done nothing, and left it to you to do both our shares! God guard you in his keeping!'

Later in the same month, to Tufta:

'My greetings to you. Your letter and the sheet of verses have reached me. For the present I shall leave them—and the ones you sent before—lying where they are. Although the hot season has passed and the rains have started, and a cool breeze has started to blow, I'm ill at ease and can't concentrate on anything. I'd already composed a complete ode to the King and another, all but the conclusion, to the heir apparent, and had put them aside. I managed to finish this with the greatest difficulty during Ramzan, and recited them at Id. . . .'

On September 15, 1854, to Haqir:

'I'll tell you what happened here at [Baqar] Id. But let me tell you first what they're saying here about what happened in Aligarh. God save us! Wherever

people meet they were saying that there had been a great civil war in Aligarh. Hindus and Muslims had drawn their swords on each other and ten to twenty on both sides had been killed. I was intending to write to you about it when in the meanwhile your letter came and I learned the true situation. I expect the same sort of reports have been current there about Delhi—that swords were drawn, and so on. Well, my good sir, swords were not drawn and there was no fighting. For two days the Hindu shopkeepers kept their shops closed, whereupon the British magistrate and the Chief of Police toured the whole city. Persuading and cajoling and insisting and threatening, they got the shops opened, and both goats and cows were sacrificed.'

Baqar Id is the festival on which Muslims commemorate Abraham's preparing to sacrifice his son. Some of them kill a cow on this occasion—'baqar' in Arabic means 'cow'—and Hindus, to whom the cow is sacred, were protesting against this practice.

On November 5, 1854, to Haqir:

'Yusuf Ali Khan has told me about your hearing and your sense of smell. My friend, by God I swear to you that I've been in this position for ages. I can neither hear nor smell properly. Although I am here in Delhi and some of my friends are hakims, they can't prescribe anything for it. And you sit there and want some prescription or some medicine sent you from here which will cure you at once! It can't be done. It takes time. It takes effort. There are purgatives to be taken, electuaries to be taken, essences to be drunk. And then you wait and see whether they have done you any good or not. Hakim Ahsanullah Khan in his kindness wanted to treat me, but I couldn't contemplate the rigours involved. Anyway, that's another story. The point, as I have said, is that the treatment of these ailments involves a great deal of purging. And for that you need a physician present, and peace of mind.'

Some time in 1854—the letter is not more precisely dated—he writes to Qazi Abdul Jamil Junun, who had sent him verses to correct, making the same complaint as he had made to Tufta; but, since he was evidently on less intimate terms with him, he expresses himself more politely:

'In the margins and on the back of your first letter there are verses written, but the ink is so faint that I cannot easily read what is written. Though my eyesight is good, and I have no need of spectacles, it cost me some effort to read them. Moreover, there is no space left in which to enter corrections. Accordingly I am returning the letter to you lest you should think that I had torn it up and thrown it away. . . . You will see for yourself that there is no space for corrections. In future when you send a ghazal for correction would you please leave more space between each couplet and between each line? . . .'

It seems that some of his friends were equally short-sighted even where more important things were involved. He writes, perhaps in 1854 or 5, to Anwar ud Daula Shafaq, who had sent him an ode in praise of the King to present to His Majesty: 'Your ode . . . had no space at the top for the signature. I had to have it written out again on a double page. I then presented it to His Majesty, and your old ambition was realized, that is, he signed it with his own hand, signifying his pleasure. . . .' The letter is a long and rambling one. He goes on to speak scathingly of Indian 'scholars' of Persian, expresses his keen desire to meet Shafaq, explains at some length his relationship to the ruler of the small princely state of Banda, in Bundelkhand, and how he had planned to go there to see his relative and take the opportunity to visit Shafaq before returning to Delhi, and why this plan came to nothing. He concludes: 'Please forgive my crime in babbling on like this. I felt like talking to you and so wrote down whatever was in my mind.' He begins the next letter to Shafaq on the same note, ironically scolding himself for his informal style of writing, and for failing to observe the elaborate formalities generally considered essential in his time:

'How can I claim that I am not mad? The most I can say is that I am sane enough to recognize I am mad. I ask you! Where is the sanity in this, that I write a letter to you, revered sir, to whom the wise turn in veneration, and use no proper forms of address or of salutation, or assurances of respectful service and humble submission? Listen to me, Ghalib! I tell you plainly: don't presume to play the companion. "Ayaz, know your place!"¹ What if last night you did write a ghazal of nine couplets for the first time in several years? What if you do go into ecstasies over your own verse? Is *this* any way to write? First write the proper forms of address. Then, with joined hands, enquire after your correspondent's health, then express your thanks for the receipt of his kind missive. . . ."

And some months later he writes, 'I am not writing you a letter. I am talking to you; and that is why I do not use the formal style of address.'

In May 1855, to Haqir:

'I do not envy men their riches and wealth or rank and splendour, but how should I not envy Shaikh Wazir ud Din and Mirza Hasan Ali Beg, who have met my friend [Haqir] and talked with him before coming here. I write to tell you that both of these gentlemen have separately been to see me and I have learned from both of them that you are well. Shaikh Wazir ud Din was saying something about *Mihr i Nimroz*, but I am deaf, and I didn't understand a word he said. Perhaps he was asking me to send [you] a further copy when it is reprinted. . . . Well, my friend, it's past eight o'clock, and getting on for nine. You be off to the courts, and I'll visit the Fort.'

¹ A common saying. Ayaz was a favourite slave and catamite of Mahmud Ghaznavi who presumed too much upon his intimacy with his master.

On May 25—9th Ramzan—1855, to Haqir:

'You did well not to have Begam [Zakiya] keep the fast. God grant that the fever has left her now too. Write and let me know. You said in your letter that Abdur Rashid's bismillah [a ceremony observed when a child begins to learn to read and write] would be in the month of Shaban. Who *is* Abdur Rashid? It seems you meant Abdus Salam, but wrote Abdur Rashid by mistake. Tell me about this too when you write. Munshi Abdul Latif too should take care and not keep the fast. Otherwise God knows what damage it may do his health. . . .

'Be sure to write and tell me how Begam is, and the position about Abdur Rashid and Abdus Salam. And tell me the position about our young friend Abdul Latif's fasting.

'Husain Ali is well. He has got as far as the Sura [of the Quran] Lam yakun.'

On June 3, 1855, to Haqir:

'You, and I, and his father are all to be congratulated on Abdus Salam's starting his schooling. Your writing Abdur Rashid by mistake was a good omen. It means that he will be *rashid* (dutiful). I was glad to hear about Munshi Abdul Latif. It doesn't matter whether it's a hakim or a doctor who attends him. It's the results you're concerned with.

'Good wares we want, from any shop you please. My friend, you're involving the poor boy in the toils of [a second] marriage. [Abdul Latif's first wife had died.] But, God keep them, Abdus Salam and Kulsum are enough to preserve his name. For my part, my friend, I believe in Ibn i Yamin's words:

Wise is that man who in this world refrains
from just two things:
He who would pass his days in peace must
steel himself to say,
"I will not wed, though I might have the
daughter of a king,
I will not borrow, though I get till
Doomsday to repay."

'I hope it's not the case that he doesn't want to marry and you are pushing him into this misfortune. Find out from men he confides in what is in his mind. If he is willing too, I've nothing more to say. But if he isn't, then in my opinion it would be an imposition.'

On July 5, 1855, to Haqir:

'My dear friend, congratulations upon Munshi Abdul Latif's marriage, first to him, then to his parents, and then to his sisters and brothers. I tell you again,

God grant that it has been done with his willing consent. Congratulations on Zakiya Begam's engagement.

'The air is very pleasant now, and it rains every day. . . . This time I had to wait a long while for a letter from you, and several days ago I felt like writing to complain. But the rain made it impossible for me to send my man out to the post, and after that your letter came two days ago. Yesterday it still rained, but today it's cleared up; that is, the rain has stopped. I've been to the Fort, and written this letter to you too.'

On July 26, 1855, to Haqir:

'It's rained until there's a river wherever you look, and the sun appears as briefly as the lightning flash—that is, it only shows its face very occasionally. Many houses in the city have collapsed. It's still raining as I write this. I'm writing the letter, but let's see when it can be taken to the post office. I'll tell my man to wrap a blanket round him and go.

'The mangoes this year have been ruined—so much so that if for the sake of argument a man climbs a tree and picks one from the bough and sits and eats it there, even then he finds that it's rotted and decayed. And, if all this were not enough, have you heard about Tufta? His beloved son Pitambar Singh has died. Alas, I can imagine what the poor man is feeling.

What should His servant do that would not
bow to God's command? . . .

You're not writing anything like so frequently these days. What's so difficult about writing once a week?'

On October 3, 1855, he writes to Haqir to explain a misunderstanding that had arisen between them. It seems that Ghalib had sent him a copy of the second edition of his diwan, which had recently come out, and that Haqir had given this to one of his friends and written to ask for another copy. Ghalib had not immediately responded, and Haqir, thinking that this was perhaps because Ghalib was cross with him for having given away the first copy, wrote and expressed regret at his attitude. Ghalib replies:

'Far be it from me to resent your displeasure. But, by God, it's not what you have assumed. I grant you I did think, "My friend doesn't care for my diwan, otherwise he would not have given a thing like that away." But your giving it away would not have made me refuse you another copy. The people at the press have sold as many as a hundred and two hundred copies at a time to the booksellers beforehand, and when I ordered a copy from the press I couldn't get one. Now I've spoken to various booksellers. As soon as I can get hold of a copy I'll send it. My position is that when I write anything I don't feel any

peace until I've sent it to you. I regard you as a man who really understands poetry. Last night, after a lapse of several years, I wrote a [Persian] ghazal, and I'm sending it you first thing this morning. In God's name take note that this is what you *call* a ghazal. . . . Just listen to it, but concentrate your attention and listen attentively. You can copy it out and send it to anyone you like. [The full ghazal follows.]'

On November 20, 1855 he writes to Junun:

'Why are you worried in case your letters have not reached me? Several letters reach me every day from all over the place—occasionally even English ones. The postman knows my house. The post-master knows me. All my friends write to me giving only my name and "Delhi" as the address—there is no need even to add the name of the muhalla. Judge for yourself: you have gone on addressing me at Lal Kuan and your letters have always reached me at Ballimaron. . . . In short, none of your letters has gone astray. Every one you wrote has reached me. I am at fault in failing to reply sometimes, but there are two reasons for that. First, your honour writes from nine different addresses in the course of a month. How many can I keep track of? If there were only one address I could keep a note of it. Secondly, I can't keep on writing letters in reply, when you go on writing just for the pleasure of writing. What could I say? I have given up editing epistles, and only write now when I have something to say. What am I to write when there's nothing to necessitate my writing? In your last letter there were three points that demand a reply. First, the rubai which you sent to this disgrace to God's creation. The reply to that is my humble service, and obeisance, and respect. The second, your concern lest your letters were not reaching me. I have already replied to this. The third point, Maulvi Allah Yar Khan Sahib's calling on me when I was out. I really was extremely sorry to hear this. If you see him please give him my regards and tell him how sorry I was. Every morning I go to the Fort. It seems he must have come early in the day. But even when I go out, there are always one or two people in the house. Maulvi Sahib could have taken a seat and smoked the hookah. If I go to the Fort, I am always back in about three hours. What more need I write?'

An undated letter—perhaps of 1855 or 1856—to Shafaq expresses a more bitter mood:

'Lord and master, was it a sin if, to express my grievance against you, I addressed you as "umid-kah" instead of "umid-gah"? [The latter word means "centre of my hopes", the former "destroyer of my hopes". In the Urdu script the two key letters "k" and "g" very closely resemble each other.] You neither answered my letters nor acknowledged my ode. And

In this distress seek not forgiveness from me:
A servant in distress grows rude of speech.

'Mushairas are not held anywhere in the city. In the Fort the Timurid princes gather to recite ghazals. . . . Sometimes I go, and sometimes I don't; and this assembly [the Court] itself will not last many days more. . . . It can vanish at any moment. . . .'

In 1856 he suffered two serious losses of income, with the death of the Mughal heir apparent and the British annexation of Oudh. About the former event he wrote to Haqir on July 27, 1856:

'You must bear in mind that the death of the heir apparent has been a great blow to me. It means that my ties with the Empire [i.e. the Mughal Court] will last now only as long as the King does. God knows who the new heir apparent will be. He who appreciated my worth has died. Who will recognize me now? I put my trust in my Creator, and resign myself to His will. And there is this immediate loss: he used to give me ten rupees a month to buy fruit for Zain ul Abidin Khan's [Arif's] two boys. Who will give me that now?'

He does not mention the stipend which he had received as the heir apparent's *ustad*.

The whole future of the Mughal court now became even more uncertain, for the British decided that Bahadur Shah's successor was to be styled 'Prince' and not 'King', and that the allowance paid him by the British Government was to be reduced. Not surprisingly, Ghalib thought it prudent to seek other sources of support. First he decided to try his luck with the all-powerful British themselves. He wrote a Persian ode in praise of Queen Victoria, and sent it to the Governor-General, Lord Canning, for forwarding to London. Along with it went a letter containing a none too subtle hint of his motives in writing it. He later wrote of this letter:

'I indicated what my expectations were by saying that the emperors of Rum and of Persia, and other conquering kings, had been accustomed to bestow all manner of bounties on their poets and panegyrists. They would fill a poet's mouth with pearls, or weigh him in gold, or grant him villages in fief or open the door of their treasuries to shower wealth upon him. "And so your poet and panegyrist seeks a title bestowed by the imperial tongue, and a robe of honour conferred by the imperial command, and a crust of bread from the imperial table."'

At the end of January 1857 he received a reply from London which greatly encouraged him, saying that when enquiries had been made appropriate orders in the matter of the title and robe would be issued. About the same time, early in 1857, through his old friend Fazl i Haq, he established a link with the small princely state of Rampur. On Fazl i Haq's suggestion, Ghalib addressed a Persian letter to its ruler, Nawwab Yusuf Ali Khan, and followed this up by

presenting him a copy of his diwan. The Nawwab, who had once studied Persian under Ghalib in Delhi, now appointed him his *ustad*, and sent him occasional gifts of money.

Ghalib did not make these new contacts any too soon. A few months later, in May 1857, the Indian soldiers at Meerut rose in revolt against their British rulers. They entered Delhi on May 11th, and were to hold it for several months. But with the British victory in the struggle that followed, the Mughal power was finally swept away.