

## ❁ Chapter 15 ❁

1866

From letters to various correspondents we can piece together the details of Ghalib's return journey from Rampur to Delhi. The journey was not a comfortable one, and before he had covered the first stage, from Rampur to Muradabad, he was in trouble. He describes some of his tribulations in a letter to the Nawwab of Rampur on January 10, 1866:

'I have reached Muradabad. The bridge collapsed after my palanquin had crossed it and the cart with the baggage—including the bedding—was left in the open [on the other side], along with the servants, in the freezing cold. They alone know what they went through there in the cold with nothing to eat. I went to stay in a small apartment at the inn, wrapped myself in a blanket, and, hungry and thirsty as I was, lay down to sleep. . . . I got up in the morning feeling worn out and in pain. Two angels sent by Sahibzada Mumtaz Ali Khan Bahadur appeared, and carried me off to Said ud Din Khan Sahib's house. Sahibzada Sahib treated me with an honour and a kindness, and Said ud Din Khan Sahib with a kindness and an honour, beyond my deserts. Then, unexpectedly, Maulvi Muhammad Hasan Khan Bahadur, the Sadr us Sudur, came and took me to his house. I stayed there five days. My friend Nawwab Mustafa Khan Bahadur [Shefta] came to see me there. The next day he took the road for Rampur, the city of delight, and I set out to measure the miles to Delhi, city of affliction, and reached the door of my house of sorrow on Monday 20th Shaban 1282, 8th January, 1866. And this too was only thanks to the assistance of Your Highness's auspicious influence; how else could one such as I have reached Delhi alive?'

Actually the Nawwab had already had news of Ghalib's misfortunes from Shefta after his arrival, and he at once (on January 5th) wrote to Ghalib at Muradabad, expressing his sympathy and concern, and suggesting that he return to Rampur where his illness could be properly treated. But by the time the letter reached Muradabad, Ghalib had already left. A further letter to the Nawwab dated January 21, 1866 again speaks of the difficulties and discomforts of the journey. He writes of

' . . . the cold, the rain, constipation, indisposition, loss of appetite, repeatedly having to go without food, and to stay in strange places, no sun all the way

to Hapur, a freezing wind blowing night and day and piercing you to the soul. . . . Anyway, from Hapur the Great Sun at length appeared, and we travelled in sunshine all the way to Delhi.'

Fragments from other letters speak of the last stage of the journey. He passed the night of January 7th–8th at Ghaziabad, 'about 11 miles from the city [Delhi]. It was there that I began to feel better. My constipation went, and improved health brought a return of strength.' He left there on the morning of the 8th, and 'at 11 o'clock [in the morning]', as he puts it in a letter of January 10th, 1866 to Bekhabar, 'I descended like a sudden calamity upon my home'. In another letter he says: 'I found my relations and friends alive and well. Thanks be to God. I am quite fit now. During the journey I was ill and in bad shape from start to finish. But the end of the journey was also, so to say, the end of my troubles'. The tone of a letter of January 13, 1866 to Alai also suggests that he was again in good form:

'When I was about to leave [for Rampur] your uncle [Ziya ud Din Ahmad Khan] asked me to get him a pellet-bow, and when I got to Rampur I was able to get one without any effort. . . . I put it aside. I told the boys, the servants and everyone else that it was for Nawwab Ziya ud Din. A week before I left, you asked for one. My friend, I can't tell you how I searched, but I couldn't get one—not even though I was willing to pay up to ten rupees. I asked the Nawwab Sahib [of Rampur] for one, but even he had not got one in his stores. Then I heard of a noble who had one, and hastened to him. I found that he had the bamboo for the bow—and what a bamboo!—as outstanding among its fellows as men of our [fresh Turanian] stock among Najaf Khan's [degenerate] Turanians. I had no time to get the whole thing made, for the next day I left Rampur. Mind you treat this bamboo with proper respect, and have it prepared with care. King Farrukhsiyar<sup>1</sup> and his brothers are in good spirits. Farrukhsiyar's mother has given him some halwa sohan<sup>2</sup> . . . to eat.'

Letters of a week or so later, however, suggest that he had perhaps congratulated himself on his recovery too soon. At all events, he ends his letter of January 21, 1866, to the Nawwab of Rampur: 'I was poorly and out of sorts for a week [after my return] and am now the same feeble old man as I was before I left [Delhi last October].' An undated letter to Bekhabar probably belongs to about this time:

'I was ill, and on top of that there was the intense cold and the winter rains, with all sunshine banished. The screens were let down, and the house darkened.

<sup>1</sup> A jocular reference to Alai's son Amir ud Din Ahmad Khan, nicknamed Farrukh Mirza. 'Farrukhsiyar' literally means 'of auspicious qualities.' It was the name of an eighteenth-century Mughal Emperor, (1713–1719).

<sup>2</sup> A kind of sweetmeat.

Today the Great Sun has shown his face, and I am sitting in the sunshine writing to you. But I do not know what to write. The grievous themes of your letter have distressed my heart. [Then follows a reference to the recent death of one of Bekhabar's relatives.] I knew that the late Khwaja Sahib was your uncle, but I had not been fully aware of the close and loving relationship between you which your letter now tells me of. How can one help feeling so deeply the parting from one who loved you so well, especially when the parting is for ever? May Exalted God pardon his sins and give you patience to bear his loss.

'My good sir, I too am the lamp of early morning. On the 8th Rajab of this year, I entered my seventy-first year. My strength has gone, my powers have left me. Sickness overwhelms me . . .

'Today I would have had more to say to you, but my barber has come. I have not had a trim for the past month. So I am putting this letter in its wrapping and sending it off to the post while I have my trim.'

All the same, his letters soon show a return to his regular pursuits. He writes to Sayyah on January 23, 1866, about some unexpected trouble over a large parcel of books he wanted to send him:

'When I got back from Rampur I found three hundred copies of *Dirafsh i Kawiani*' ready and waiting. I packed up a big bundle of my brother Nawwab Mir Ghulam Baba Khan Sahib's . . . share of a hundred and fifty copies,<sup>2</sup> and got it wrapped in canvas and sent off to the post-office. They refused to accept it, and sent it back. The post-office officials have flatly refused to send it, and contractors, pamphlet and packet despatchers, and the railway, all with one accord state in identical words their refusal to despatch it. Get this note read to his honour and write and tell me what instructions he gives about this. I want this package to reach him somehow. The sooner you reply to this letter, the more obliged to you I shall be.'

From a subsequent letter, of February 21, 1866, it appears that the Nawwab must have given him the obvious advice—to re-pack the books in a number of smaller parcels.

The same month he writes in an undated letter to Shākir:

'You will have heard that your humble servant got back [from Rampur] on January 8th—tired out, broken, and ill. I have still not completely recovered. It is early morning; there is no wind, and the sun is hot. I am sitting writing these lines propped up against a pillow and with my back to the sun. . . .'

He goes on to defend the following verse of his against the objection of some critic which Shākir had passed on to him:<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>The revised, second edition of *Qāte i Burhan*. See ch. 17 below.

<sup>2</sup>Cf. p. 308 above.

<sup>3</sup>Cf. p. 320 above.

My home lies plunged in the black night;  
of raging grief  
Only a burnt-out candle shows that day  
has dawned.

About the same time he writes to Tufta, who had apparently been so upset by some recent experience that he was contemplating abandoning the world and becoming a faqir. Ghalib's reply plays on the conventional phrase for such an action, which literally means 'unclothing oneself'.

'Why do you want to "unclothe yourself"? What have you got to wear anyway, that you should take it off and throw it away? You can abandon clothing, but that won't release you from the bonds of existence, and you won't get by without eating and drinking. Take hard times and good and trouble and ease as they come. Let things come and go as they will:

Resolution alone will serve you, Ghalib;  
Troubles press hard on you—and life  
is dear.'

On March 1, 1866 he writes to Sayyah:

'I had been thinking for a long time, "Maulana Sayyah hasn't written to me" when yesterday out of the blue your letter came. I'm answering it today.

'You need not be so apologetic about asking me to get the seal engraved. I'm not going to do it myself, and what "trouble" and "inconvenience" is there in getting it done? I like to serve my friends. Give my respects to Mir Ghulam Baba Khan and send the stone and the design without more ado. Your instructions shall be carried out and the seal attended to. So put your mind at rest. What more can I say?

'And yes, Sayyah Sahib, my thoughts are always upon you. Keep on writing from time to time. I have a feeling that if Mir Ghulam Baba Khan Sahib hadn't wanted a seal engraved and hadn't spoken to you about it you'd never have written me this letter. In other words you wrote it on Mir Ghulam Baba Khan's instructions, and the idea was that I should address my reply to *him*. But then I thought that you would be upset if I did, and so I wrote to you. My friend, you have a way of forgetting me, and that is not good. Keep on writing now and then.'

On March 22, 1866, he writes to Mir Ghulam Baba Khan:

'My nephew<sup>1</sup> Khwaja Badr ud Din Khan has produced *Bostan i Khayal* in Urdu. I am sending you a notice about it with this letter, and two notices about a new newspaper about to be published here. If you or any of your friends should

<sup>1</sup> The relationship was actually more remote.

wish to buy the book or the paper, they should follow the instructions in the notices. . . .'

On April 23, 1866, he writes indignantly to Sayyah. He had already objected in a letter of February 21st to Sayyah's sending him Rs. 5 to pay for books which Ghalib had expected him to accept as a gift: 'My friend, what are these five rupees' worth of stamps you've sent me? I'm not a bookseller or an agent. Your action offended me, and you shouldn't have done it.' He now returns to the same theme:

'Maulana Saif ul Haq [Sayyah], nowadays every letter you send has a note or a draft or stamps in it. I ask you, *you* tell me, what are these two and a half rupees for? What are they to pay for? That five rupees you sent me before upset me, and now these two and a half crown it all. Anyway, write and tell me about it. Why have you sent it? What is it for? I want an answer to this note quickly. I'll send off the hats after Id.'

On June 17, 1866 he again writes to Sayyah:

'Friend, my greetings to you. Your letter came, and I read both your ghazals and rejoiced. Flattery is not your humble servant's way, and if flattery be allowed to enter into matters where the craft of poetry is concerned, then a man's shagird cannot perfect himself. Remember, you've never yet sent me a ghazal in which I have not made corrections, especially of Urdu usage. These two ghazals are, in word and content, without blemish. No correction was called for anywhere. A hundred thousand praises upon you!

He makes a similar reference to a guiding principle in an undated letter of about this time to Junun:

'I have examined your ghazals. Your humble servant makes it a rule that where he sees faults or defects in a man's verse he puts them right, and where he finds it free of fault he does not make changes. I swear to you, then, that these ghazals do not call for correction anywhere.'

The letter of June 17, 1866, to Sayyah continues:

'Mir Ghulam Baba Sahib really is just as you say he is. In your travels you must have seen ten thousand men pass before your gaze. And when out of this great legion you single out one for your praise, he must indeed be one in thousands. "That is beyond all doubt."<sup>1</sup> [From the next words it seems that either Sayyah or Mir Ghulam Baba Khan had expressed a wish to send Ghalib a gift and had wanted Ghalib to suggest one.] I don't know what I should ask for. What shall

<sup>1</sup> A quotation from the Quran.

I ask you to send? I'm very fond of mangoes—I like them as much as I like grapes. But how are they to get to me from Surat and Bombay? . . . You would be paying four rupees postage on one rupee's worth of mangoes; and then too it's quite likely that not more than ten in every hundred would get here. No, you really mustn't think of it. There are plenty of good *desi* mangoes of all kinds and varieties to be had here—select and fresh and delicious and fragrant. Plenty of *paiwandi* mangoes too. The Nawwab Sahib often sends me presents of mangoes from his orchards in Rampur. Just see! Today two baskets arrived from a friend at Bareilly—two baskets, each holding a hundred mangoes. Kallu my steward opened them in my presence. Out of two hundred mangoes only eighty-three were sound, and a hundred and seventeen were completely rotten.

'Early this month—June—we had rain for a week. Ever since then it's again been raining fire, and the hot wind is blowing.'

In addition to the pleasure of eating mangoes he also had the pleasure of a flying visit from Tufta about this time: 'Munshi Hargopal Tufta came here by rail, stayed one night, and took himself off the following morning.'

On August 9, 1866, he writes to Mir Ghulam Baba Khan, to whom a son had recently been born:

'Well, reverend sir, did you like the chronogram-name I wrote for your son or not? The name not only gives the date of birth, but brings in both "Sayyid" and "Khan"—Sayyid Mahābat Ali Khan. It would be surprising if you did not like it, and it is more surprising still that neither in your letter nor in that of Miyan Dad Khan [Sayyah] is there anything about it. I do not say that you are willy nilly to give him this name. But at any rate let your humble servant know whether you like it or not.'

A number of other letters which bear only the date '1866' or, in some cases, no date at all, may be taken here. One is to Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan—the last to him which we possess: 'If you have been making a fool of me and calling me your ustad and your father by way of a joke, well and good. But if you sincerely respect and love me, then do what I ask you and forgive Hira Singh his transgression.' From what follows it appears that Hira Singh had been under Hakim Ghulam Najaf Khan's treatment, but had, without his knowledge, gone to consult other hakims instead. Ghalib continues:

'Be fair, my friend. If he went to Hakim Ahsanullah Khan, he went to a man who is your cousin and from whom you yourself have learned. And if in his anxiety he went to Hakim Mahmud Khan, well, you served your own apprenticeship under his father, beginning your studies under his direction. In short, if the poor fellow consulted others besides you, it was precisely because of your connection with them that he did so—and that too in a state of anxiety, driven

to it by his hysterical fears. Now when he comes to see you it is incumbent on you to be even more attentive to him than before and concentrate all your attention on giving him the treatment that his condition needs.'

Most of the other letters are to Bekhabar. Some make reference to the volume of Ghalib's Urdu letters which Bekhabar was preparing for publication at this time, though it did not ultimately appear until October, 1868. Most are concerned with the correction of verses and discussion of the points that arise from them. But mingled with them are other more personal themes. Thus he writes:

'I don't know what inauspicious star, to use the terms of the Indian astrologers, is casting its influence on me these days, that troubles come pressing in upon me from all sides. I met the Maulvi Sahib once, when he came to Delhi and stayed at Mir Khairati's house. When gentlemen are introduced to one another, this lays the basis for friendship and cordiality, all the more so when they embrace, and talk together, and recite poetry to one another. From the day I met him to the day he left for the Deccan nothing happened between us which could have caused him any displeasure. Since he is your friend and associate, and the bond of love between you and me is established beyond all doubt, you too can bear witness to this, for if—which God forbid—strained relations had arisen between him and me, you would at once have turned your attention to repairing them. Now let me tell you the position with regard to Munshi Habibullah [Zaka]. I have never seen him—or may my eyes burst. Three to four years ago I had a letter out of the blue from Hyderabad, enclosing two ghazals. The purport of the letter was that the writer was employed in the office of Mukhtar ul Mulk, and wished to become my shagird, and that I should kindly correct the two ghazals he enclosed. He is not the first case of this kind. There are many—from Bareilly and Lucknow and Calcutta and Bombay and Surat—who regularly send their Persian and Urdu prose and verse for me to correct; I perform that service for them, and they accept the corrections I make. I have an eye for merit and demerit in verse, and I can assess their quality and the talent for poetry which each of them possesses. As for their habits and ideas, since I do not meet them personally, what can I know of them? But let me come to the point. Munshi Habibullah Zaka's verses continued to come in and I continued to correct them and send them back to him. After the Maulvi Sahib reached Hyderabad, a ghazal of Zaka's arrived one day with a note that it was in the same metre and rhyme as one of Maulvi Ghulam Imam Shahid of Agra. I corrected and returned it as usual, and added a note that Maulana Shahid came not from Agra, but from Lucknow and Allahabad. That was all I said.<sup>1</sup> If that implies any insult, then I grant I insulted him! But I do not know what the Munshi Sahib [Zaka] may have said to the Maulvi Sahib, and what the Maulvi Sahib wrote to you.'

<sup>1</sup> Hardly true! Cf. p. 291 above.

In another letter he writes, apparently in reply to a request for a preface to the forthcoming volume of his letters: 'I have already told you before that I am confined to bed and cannot get up or sit up. I write my letters lying down. How can I write you a preface in this state?' And in the next letter:

'If an old servant who has obeyed your commands all his life fails to carry out an order in his old age, that is no crime. If the collection of my Urdu prose [letters] cannot be printed without a preface by me, then I opt not for impression but for suppression. Sadi—God's mercy be upon him—says

It is the way of men with freedom in their gift  
To free their slaves when once old age  
has come to them

You come in that category. You are a "man with freedom in your gift". So why don't you act upon this verse?'

He goes on to quote a verse in 'Bengali Urdu' which, he says, 'I brought from Calcutta in 1829 for the amusement of my friends'. In another letter he writes:

'Your letter came yesterday, and I am replying today. First let me quote a sentence of yours, to make me laugh until I gasp for breath and the tears stream down my face: "I don't know how I've got so testy in my old age." Well, my friend, if you've inscribed your name among the aged, I must enter mine on the roll of the dead. I don't think you're more than fifty years old, or if you are, not by more than two or three years. My kinsman Ziya ud Din Khan and you are about the same age: he's a little under fifty, and you're a little over fifty. You each of you need another seventy years or a few less before you reach your natural span of a hundred and twenty.'

An undated letter to Tufta perhaps belongs to about this time. Ghalib seems to have been expecting money from somewhere, though he gives no details:

'Your second letter came the day before yesterday. What secrets have I from you? I'm expecting a windfall, and I've already settled in my own mind that you shall share in it. The time for it is quite near now. God willing, a letter from me with your share of the windfall will reach you very soon.

'Pandit Badri Das, a post office official at Karnal, used to send me his verses for correction when I was alive, although we had never actually met. After my death I sent word to him that from now on he should submit his verses to Munshi Hargopal Tufta. Now I'm writing to you too, to write and inform him of this. I'm still alive. What I've written above about being dead has reference to my giving up correcting people's verses. In other respects I'm alive. Not dead, and not even ill—only old, feeble, poverty-stricken, in debt, deaf, a prey to misfortune, sick of life and hoping for death.'

Two more very short, undated letters are the only others to Tufta which we possess. They form a fitting conclusion to the record of Ghalib's friendship for a man who could clearly be stupid, obstinate and insensitive, and yet who, equally clearly, sincerely loved Ghalib, and was loved by him in return. Both letters acknowledge odes which Tufta had written in Ghalib's praise. The first reads:

'I cannot praise your ode too highly. What ingenuity your verses show! But alas! it is untimely and misplaced. Your praise and the object of your praise are respectively like an apple-tree or a quince-tree that springs up on a rubbish-dump. May God preserve you! You bring your custom to a shop that is failing.'

The second is even shorter: 'I cannot find words to praise you. . . . A hundred thousand praises are the praiser's due: a hundred loathings are the due of him you praise.'

Thus, many of the letters of 1866 show a mental liveliness, a range of interest, and a capacity to react sensitively to all the varied experiences of life which persisted to the end of his days. But his health was declining, and with it—what grieved him no less than this—his capacity to be of service to his friends. Already perhaps at the end of March 1866—the letter is dated only '1866'—he had written to Bekhabar:

'I am counting the months of my seventh decade. I used to have recurrent bouts of colic; now it is with me all the time. . . . I eat less and less, and now my diet, if not non-existent, is something approaching it. . . . I also feel a strange burning in my liver, and though I take only a mouthful at a time, God knows how much water I drink from morning to the time I go to bed.'

On April 8, 1866, he writes to Maududi:

'Do you know the state I am in now? I am extremely weak and feeble. [My hands] have begun to tremble, my eyesight has got much worse, and my senses are not with me. I have done what I could to serve my friends, reading their pages of verse as I lie here and making corrections. But now my eyes cannot see properly and my hands cannot write properly. They say of Shah Sharaf Ali Bu Qalandar that when he reached advanced old age God exempted him from his religious duties and the Prophet excused him the prescribed observances. I expect of my friends that they will exempt me from the service of correcting their verses. The letters they write out of love for me I shall continue to answer to the best of my ability.'

Later letters show that this did not stop his friends from continuing to send verses for correction. Ghalib did not rebuke them, and to the extent that his health allowed, continued to perform this service for them.

On May 12, 1866, he writes to Zaka:

'My kind friend, my benefactor, who admire me although I am worthless and think good of me although I am bad, and who love me and whom I love, do you know anything of my state? I was weak, and now am half-dead. I was deaf, and now am going blind. The journey from Rampur has brought me trembling and failing sight. I cannot write four lines without my fingers crooking and stiffening, and the letters blurring in my sight. I have lived seventy-one years—too long. And now not years, not months, but only days of life remain.

'Your first letter reached me and told me you were ill. A second, with a ghazal, followed on its heels. I read the ghazal. All its couplets were good. . . . The state of my memory is such that I can't remember the metre and rhyme scheme it was written in. All I can remember is that I altered one word in one of the couplets. In short, I looked at the ghazal and sent it off to you, telling you at the same time to write soon with the good news that you were well again.

'Yesterday a registered letter came, like a comet descending. I wondered what it could be. At length I opened it, and found it empty of the good tidings that sickness was gone and health restored, and brimful of unwarranted complaint.

'My friend, a letter addressed to me may get stranded at the place of despatch, but once it reaches the Delhi post-office it is out of the question that it should not reach me. The post-office employees there have it in their power to send it or not to send it to the addressee. . . .

'Well, all I have to add is that you are to write soon to tell me that this letter has reached you and that you are well.'

By August increased financial worries add to the burdens he has to bear. On August 10, 1866 he writes to the Nawwab of Rampur:

'Today is Saturday, 10th August 1866. Your humble servant was watching and waiting for the postman to come bringing a kind letter from you with your draft enclosed. Unexpectedly, he brought instead a letter from my young friend Munshi Sil Chand,<sup>1</sup> asking me why I had not sent a receipt for my allowance for the month of June. After that there was a sentence saying that letters to accompany the July remittances were being prepared and that my own allowance would be sent after a day or two. I was completely puzzled. "Good God," I thought to myself, "I sent off the receipt for June as usual. Why am I being asked for it again?" Then the announcement that the July allowance would be despatched shortly was a virtual sentence of death to me. Good God! On the 10th it is promised, on the 13th or 14th it is despatched; by the 20th it will reach me. And my position is that my English pension goes to my wife, and towards paying off an instalment on my debts, and it is on Your Highness's

<sup>1</sup> One of the Nawwab's staff.

bounty that I and my servants and Husain Ali<sup>1</sup> live. My remaining debts amount to something like four hundred or four hundred and fifty rupees, and no one is willing to loan me money any more. In short, I have two submissions to make: first, that I have already sent the receipt for the allowance for June; if it was lost in the post, I could send another; secondly, no matter if this month's (July's) allowance does not reach me until August 20th, but for the future orders may please be given that your humble servant's allowance, which is no more than a gift of alms, be despatched on the 1st or 2nd of the month.

May you live on and on till Judgement  
Day  
And every day your honour and wealth  
increase.'

On August 13, 1866, he wrote again:

'Let me first explain my situation to you, and then say what else I have to write. Distress and old age have combined to lay me low and rob me of my strength. I swear by Your Highness's feet that my faculties are not in order, nor can I think properly. For years together I have had such troubles to bear that I no longer have the strength to sustain them. God knows what happens and what I understand of it and what I ought to do and what I *do* do. Yesterday towards evening a letter arrived from Your Highness's chief clerk, bringing me the information that the receipt for my June allowance had not reached you. I was sitting there borne down and broken under the weight of debt and destitution. There and then I wrote you a letter, and although it was too late for the post, I sent it off. Today towards evening your [letter] . . . with the draft for the allowance for July came. I gave the draft to my agent and sat down to write this letter. I shall put it in an envelope and keep it by me, and send it to the post first thing in the morning. Should there be anything in the first letter which sounds like impertinence or madness or derangement, let your humble servant's offence be pardoned. And if any word of mine displeased your head clerk, I ask him too to overlook it. The letter with the receipt for the June allowance must have been lost in the post. Or it is not impossible that I myself may have forgotten to send it. Indeed, it is more than probable that I was guilty of this oversight. Please let the employees of your court be informed that I received the June allowance in July and the July allowance in August. I hope that for the future, the draft may be despatched on the second or third of the English month.'

The Nawwab's response was as Ghalib had hoped, if perhaps a little tardy. He wrote on August 25th that there was no need for Ghalib to send another receipt for the June allowance, and that orders had been issued that for the future his

<sup>1</sup> The elder boy, Baqir Ali, was by now, it seems, no longer a liability to Ghalib. He ultimately got employment in Alwar.

allowance should be despatched in time to reach him by the first or second of the month.

About the same time he writes to Rizwan:

'Mirza, weakness is increasingly compelling me to give up the custom of writing letters. I am not giving letter-writing up: letter-writing is giving *me* up. Don't think of me as I was when you left me. The Rampur journey robbed me of all my possessions—my strength and fortitude, my imaginative powers, my lively disposition. If I don't reply to your letter, that is an occasion for pity, not for complaint. Listen. Why do you worry if my letters don't come? While I live, I live oppressed by grief and dejection, feeble and half-dead. When I die you will hear the news of my death. Well then, until you hear that I have died, you will know that Ghalib is still alive—broken and infirm, and in illness and pain. I'm writing these few lines and sending them to your brother [Salik]. But he is always off on his travels. If, to assume the impossible, he is at home, then Inayatullah [Ghalib's servant] will hand this to him; and if not, he'll leave it with Muhammad Mirza.'

He writes a little more cheerfully to Sayyah on September 5, 1866:

'Friend Saif ul Haq, I got your letter. You must forgive the Qazi Sahib. . . . If I could have discovered any reason why he should be angry with me I would have apologized and asked his forgiveness for my sin. But since there is no apparent cause for his displeasure, what am I to do? You must not take offence at it. Why? Because if I am bad, he has spoken the truth; and if I am good and he has called me bad, then you should leave him to God.

Ghalib, do not think ill of them when  
enemies abuse you.  
Does any man exist of whom all men  
speak only good?'

Sayyah had asked him to have his portrait done or his photograph taken. He replies:

'Sir, at my advanced age what do I want with having my picture done? I am a recluse. Where am I to find a man to take my photograph? Look, somewhere there's a picture of me in the King's [Bahadur Shah's] court. If I can get it I'll send it you.

Good heavens, I was just joking when I wrote that to the Nawwab Sahib. . . . My friend, I'm deaf; I can't *hear* singing. I'm old; what would I want with watching dancing? Six *mashas* [about 1/5th oz.] of flour suffice for my food; what would I eat? There are English wines to be had in Bombay and Surat. If I could have come to take part in the gathering I'd have had them to drink.'

On September 25, 1866, he writes to Maududi:

'Revered sir, the postman yesterday brought two letters together. One was your letter with a ghazal, and the other a letter from Nawwab Mir Ibrahim Ali Khan, also with a ghazal. Today there were three things of importance I had to tell you, so I am sending off this letter. The first point is, that I am sending back the paper with the ghazal on it. . . . There is a ghazal of Shahidi in the same rhyme and a different end-rhyme, and it is such that these rhymes should on no account be employed again. You must write another ghazal and on no account include this one in your diwan.'

The second point is of relatively little interest.

'The third point is, when you send me a currency note, do not do what Calcutta people do and send half the note at a time. A letter addressed to me may get stranded at the post-office of the city it is sent from, but once it reaches the post-office in Delhi it is out of the question that it should be lost.'

On October 6, 1866, he writes to Maulvi Numan Ahmad. He had written to him previously on September 5th praising him highly for the skill with which he writes Persian prose in Ghalib's own style. Numan Ahmad must have replied in terms which suggested that he thought Ghalib was flattering him, and Ghalib now responds with some indignation:

'Your humble servant has many faults, and one of them is that he does not tell lies. Because I am a man of noble family that has had ties with the [British] authorities, I often have occasion to meet persons in authority and to have dealings with them from time to time. I have never flattered any of them. I ask you why should I lie to you, respected sir? Why should I flatter you? Nor am I a man so vulgar as to use the words "I swear by God" as a mere expletive. When I . . . swore to you on oath I meant it seriously, and now too I swear to you on oath that you excel other claimants to distinction in this distinctive style of prose. I thought of you as my fellow-artist, a man at one with me, and so laid the grief of my heart before you. And you felt no sympathy with my grief but on the contrary felt displeased with me. Well, this too is the perverseness of my fate that you, respected sir, took it into your head to understand the reverse of what I intended.

'For years I have given up writing letters in Persian. Now the only person I write to in Persian is Prince Bashir ud Din, the grandson of Tipu Sultan. . . . This too I do at his command, for he commands and I obey. I am seventy-two years old, and my faculties have deserted me, and my powers have failed me, and my sight is going and my hands tremble and absent-mindedness prevails. Well, then, your letter came, and I read it; then, deciding that I would answer it another time, I put it . . . aside. Today I sat down to reply, but I cannot find

the letter; it is not in my box, nor among my books, nor on the shelf. I did not know what to do, but at length I decided to write the answers to whatever points I could remember.'

He goes on to explain various movements of the heavenly bodies and what they signify for kings and poets.

On October 18, 1866, he writes to Maududi:

'Honoured sir, slave of your noble ancestor<sup>1</sup> that I am, you will be the death of me with your numerous commands, your repeated consignments of verses, and on top of that your asking a hundred times over for confirmation of the receipt of the hundred rupees. Mir Ibrahim Ali Khan Sahib's ghazal, of which one verse was [here he quotes it] I have already corrected and returned—and you keep on pressing me to return it. Your ghazals descend on me in showers. How can I go on reading and correcting them? Other ghazals besides yours get lost. I'm a man of seventy-two, and perpetually ill. I have nothing whatever to eat; once in twenty-four hours I drink meat soup—no bread, no meat, no pulao, no rice. My sight is failing, my hands cannot grip properly, I tremble all the time, my memory is non-existent. If a paper gets lost, it stays lost.

'I have received Mir Alam Ali Khan Sahib's two ghazals, and have put them somewhere, and can't find them. To be brief, I got the [Rs. 100] note which Sayyid Sahib sent me with your letter. I got the money, and spent it as soon as I got it. One of his ghazals—the one of which I have quoted a verse above—I have corrected and sent off. I have no other ghazal of his now. As for Mir Alam Ali Khan Sahib's two ghazals, I remember them coming, and if I can find them I will correct them and return them. Your ghazals are past all counting. I'll look in my box, and search among my books. I want you and the two Sayyid Sahibs to make it a point to send one ghazal with each letter, and not to send another until you have had the first ghazal back with a reply to the letter. Then you can send another letter, with another ghazal enclosed. And each of you should write separately. Read this letter carefully, and get the two Sayyid Sahibs to do the same. I am taking the precaution of sending it unpaid.'

A similar letter to Wafa went off two days later, on October 20, 1866:

'If the feebleness of old age causes delay in serving you, I must be forgiven. If Great God wills, I shall never be found wanting. Of your two ghazals I have corrected one, which I send. The second will reach you within the coming week. Besides the weakness of my limbs and perpetual illness, my senses are deserting me. How can I explain? Two or three days ago I had a letter from my revered master Mir Alam Ali Khan. He writes that he has received two corrected ghazals of Azurda's. Just see what I have done—I have sent someone's ghazals to someone else. And the best of it is that now I cannot even remember what

<sup>1</sup> Ali.

Azurda's name is, and who he is, and where he lives. I have probably sent . . . [Mir Alam Ali Khan's] ghazals to this good man. God grant that the gentleman, like Mir Sahib, send Mir Sahib's ghazals to me, so that I can send them on to him. If he does not, then I will look at the ghazals which have just arrived. These are the blessings which the age of seventy-one brings a man. Please give my respected master Mir Sahib this letter to read.'

On November 5, 1866, he writes to the Nawwab of Rampur, who is about to go to Agra to attend the Governor-General's durbar:

'When I heard of Your Highness's intention to go to Agra I wanted to go there too. But I could not face a journey by rail. I thought of travelling by stages [by road, in a palanquin], but then I thought "It is seven stages [i.e. days' journey] to Agra, and only six to Rampur. If I can go to Agra, why not to Rampur?" I had fully made up my mind to send my son, your slave, and he too agreed with alacrity to make the journey. Then all of a sudden he fell ill with a high fever, and with pains in his shoulder besides. In a full month the fever has not left him, nor is the pain in his shoulder any better. On Hakim Ahsanullah Khan's advice he had been bled, but this too brought no relief. Some nights he sleeps a little. Otherwise he is awake and moaning all night, and keeping everyone else awake too.

In that house where a man lies sick,  
there is no peace.

This is the general position. Mir Muhammad Zaki will lay the detailed picture before you.

May you live on another thousand years  
And every year have fifty thousand days.'

On November 14, 1866, he writes to Mir Ghulam Baba Khan, who had apparently invited him to Surat to take part in some celebrations:

'Your letter scattered flowers before me, bringing the scenes of spring before my eyes. An impulse to take the train arose in me; but my legs cannot carry me and my ears are deaf and my sight is failing and my mental powers are failing, and my heart is failing, and my stomach is failing. And not only do all these things fail me; my fortune fails me too. How can I contemplate the journey, shut up for three or four days and nights together [in the train]? I have to go to make water every half-hour. Every week or every fortnight I get a sudden sharp attack of colic. No strength in my body, no spirit in my soul. My coming to Surat is quite beyond the bounds of possibility. . . .

'My regards to Saif ul Haq Sahib [Sayyah]. A friend of mine who does pictures has made a sketch of your humble servant and gone off to do a picture



of the [Governor-General's] durbar at Agra. When he comes back he will finish the picture, and then it shall be sent to you.'

On November 15, 1866, he writes to Nawwab Amin ud Din Ahmad Khan of Loharu to condole with him on the death of his mother:

'My brother, until today I have been wondering what I should write to you about [your mother's] death. On such occasions one writes of three things—to express one's grief, to enjoin patience, and to pray for the forgiveness of the dead person's sins. But, my brother, to express grief is a mere formality. It is impossible that another should feel the same grief as you feel. To exhort you to be patient is to show lack of sympathy. This is a heavy blow, a blow that revives the grief you felt when the Nawwab Sahib [your father] died. How should I exhort you to patience at a time like this? And as for prayers for forgiveness, who am I? and what are my prayers? But since she was my patron and benefactor, the prayers well up from my heart. Besides, I heard that you are coming here, and so I did not write. Now that I hear you are not well and so cannot come I have written these few lines. May Exalted God keep you safe and well and happy.'

On November 18, 1866, he writes to Sayyah:

'I am ashamed to tell you that your letter with the ode reached me, and that I put the ode in some book and forgot about it. Now your second letter has reminded me of the ode. I have looked for it, but I can't find it. It's just as well that I can remember this much, that I read all the verses right through at the time and found all of them all right. Have no fear; present the ode and journey safely to your birthplace. But, my friend, when you get there be sure to write to me and tell me your address so that I can write to you there. . . .'

On December 4, 1866, he writes to Zaka:

'Life is a burden. On the eighth of this month—that is, of Rajab—I entered my seventy-third year. My diet is the juice of seven almonds in the morning, mixed with water sweetened with crystallized sugar, the thick broth of two pounds of meat at midday, occasionally three fried kababs towards evening, and five tolas<sup>1</sup> of home-made wine about two and a half hours after sunset, with an equal amount of essence of. . . .<sup>2</sup>

'The weakness of my sinews is such that I cannot get up, and if I use both hands and raise myself on all fours, my calves tremble. I have to go to make water ten to twelve times during the day and as many times during the night.

<sup>1</sup> About an ounce.

<sup>2</sup> The Urdu word in the original means 'milk' but this is clearly a mistake. Ghalib normally mixed his wine with rose-water.

I have a chamber-pot kept by the bed. I get up, use it, and lie down again. Among the signs that some life remains is the fact that I do not sleep badly at nights. After I have made water, I quickly fall asleep again. My income is a hundred and sixty-two rupees, eight annas [a month] and my expenditure three hundred a month; so tell me, is life difficult or isn't it? Obviously, no man likes to die. So how can I find this death-in-life supportable?'

No wonder that two months earlier, on October 6, 1866, he had written appealing for financial help to the Nawwab of Rampur:

'I am afraid that my young friend Nawwab Mirza Khan<sup>1</sup> has not informed you . . . of my position. Your Highness can bestow wealth and property as much as he pleases on whomever he pleases. I ask from you only relief, and relief means only that I should be able to pay off my remaining debts and should not have any need to borrow again.'

It was some months before the Nawwab responded.

Meanwhile, however, there was one welcome development for which he felt he had the Nawwab to thank. On December 17th he had been summoned to a durbar held by the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, and there, to his surprise, he had for the first time since the Mutiny been accorded the full honours that he had customarily received before it, receiving a robe of honour and other ceremonial gifts.<sup>2</sup> He writes to the Nawwab on December 18, 1866: 'I look upon this bounty as being in reality your gift, and now look forward to a further gift, namely, a prompt reply to this letter.'

<sup>1</sup> The young poet Dagh.

<sup>2</sup> This does not quite square with the earlier account of the restoration of court honours in March 1863. Ghalib now says that though his attendance at court had been restored then, this is the first time that the ceremonial robe was once more presented.