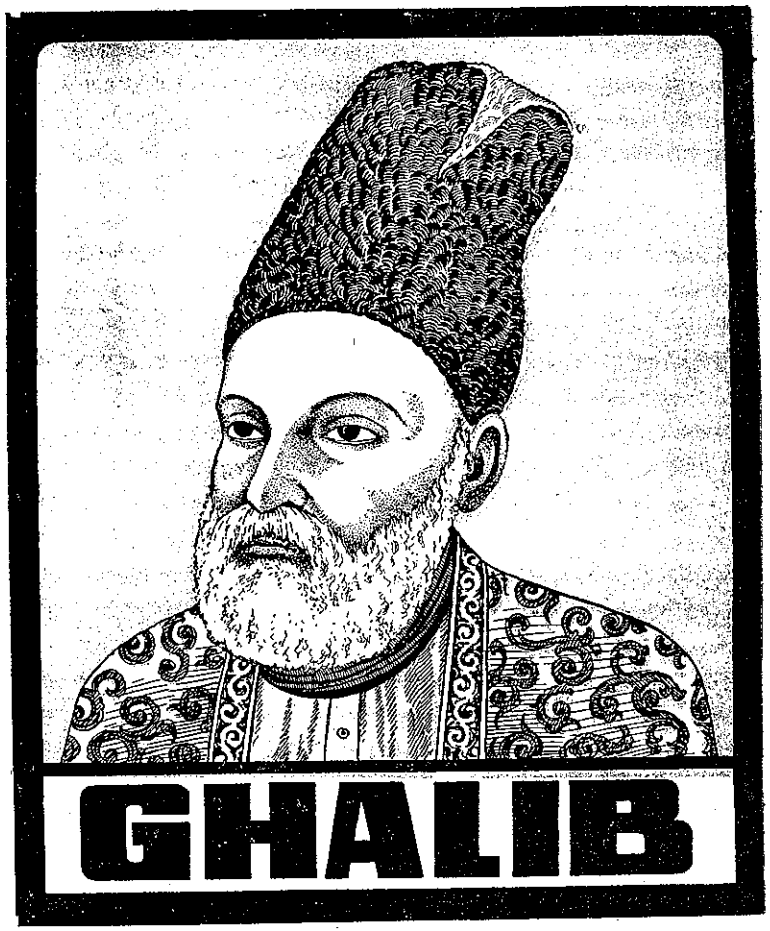

Ghalib as a Poet

The second half of the nineteenth century has been remarkably productive of literary talent all over the world. India has been no exception. In the domain of Urdu, some of the greatest masters of modern Urdu have lived or flourished during this period, thus giving it a unique importance in the history of Urdu literature. In order to stimulate interest in the study of the Urdu language and literature, the Punjab University has arranged for a series of lectures on modern Urdu writers and I have been asked to deal with this important period. We have practically to take up the story of Urdu Literature from where Maulvi Muhammad Husain *Azad*, left it, in his well-known book the " Ab-i-Hayat." He divided the history of Urdu Literature into five periods, the last of which dealt with authors like Zauq, Momin and Ghalib of Delhi and Nasikh and Atish of Lucknow among the great writers of *Ghazal*. He also dealt briefly with the work of Anis and Dabir, the two famous writers of *Marsia*, (elegiac poems). Some of these writers must, however, be included in the list of men whose brilliant work has adorned the second half of the nineteenth century, though the greater part of their lives

belonged to the first half. The authors are links, as it were, between the past and the present. The name of Ghalib stands foremost amongst them, as his work, both as a poet and as a prose writer, may be regarded as epoch-making. It is in his work, more than in that of any other contemporary of his, that we see the dawn of a new era in Urdu Literature. His poetry we find full of deep thought and meaning, and his prose a model of simplicity combined with elegance of style.

It is, therefore, in the fitness of things that the present series of lectures should start with a description of the life and work of Ghalib.

Like most Oriental authors, it is his *nom de plume* by which Ghalib is best known. His name was Mirza Asadullah Khan, and he came of a noble Central Asian family, which could trace its descent from the Saljuq kings. His grandfather was the first member of the family to migrate to India from Samarkand. His father, Mirza Abdullah Beg, was married to a daugher of Khawja Ghulam Hussain Khan, a Commandant in the army and a respectable citizen of Agra. Mirza Asadullah Khan was born at Agra, in the year 1212 Hijra, (1796, A.D.) and the days of his childhood were passed there. His father died while Mirza Asadullah Khan was only a child of five, and his uncle, Mirza Nasrullah Beg, who was employed in the British army as a Risaldar, undertook to bring him up. The uncle too was taken away by the cruel hands of death when the boy was only nine years of age, and then his care devolved upon the family of his mother's

parents, who were well off and who showed him every indulgence. He received his early education from Shaikh Muazzam, an eminent teacher at Agra in those days. He was still a mere youth when he came in contact with a Parsi Scholar of Persian, whose original name was Hurmuzd and who had been given the name of Abdul Samad on his conversion to Islam. This was the foundation of Mirza Asadullah Khan's taste for Persian literature, which proved of such value to him throughout his life. Hurmuzd was a well-read and well-travelled man and he stayed with Mirza Asadullah Khan for some time at Agra and subsequently for some time at Delhi. The period of his stay was, however, very short, about two years altogether. This brief contact with an educated scholar, whose mother tongue was Persian, is hardly sufficient to explain the wonderful command over that language which Ghalib afterwards displayed, but it shows how his natural aptitude in that language got a much-needed impetus in his early life and made him a profound scholar of Persian.

Mirza Asadullah Khan visited Delhi for the first time in his childhood, when he was about seven years of age, as his uncle Mirza Nasrulla Beg was connected by marriage with the family of Nawab Ahmad Baksh Khan of Delhi. He was himself married in the same family later, when he was only thirteen, and after that he made Delhi his home and lived there till his death in 1285 A.H. (1869 A.D.), at the ripe age of 73. His father-in-law, Mirza Ilahi Baksh Khan *Maruf* was a poet of no mean order and has left behind a

collection of *ghazals* in Urdu known as *Diwan-i-Maruf*. I have not read the collection in full, but a friend of mine, S. Kesra Singh, *Jahangir*, gave me some selections from it which he made from a manuscript copy preserved in the library of His Highness the Nawab of Rampur. These selections showed considerable literary merit. This contact with *Maruf* must have influenced, to some extent, the natural bent of mind of the young poet. Though the palmy days of Delhi were a thing of the past when Ghalib came and settled there, yet in the literary world, the remnants of past eminence, were, by no means, small. Among the contemporaries of Ghalib we see quite a galaxy of poets and *Mushairas* (political contests) were quite common. Ghalib had for a long time concentrated his attention on Persian and had written only Persian *ghazals* but the popularity which the Urdu *ghazal* was beginning to command attracted him towards Urdu also. His mind was so much saturated with the Persian mode of thought and his tongue was so familiar with Persian ways of expression, that his early efforts in Urdu verse were full of Persian words and idioms, mingled here and there with Urdu words. Verses of this kind could be called Urdu *ghazal* only by courtesy. With practice, however, his style improved and his later Urdu *ghazals* combine purity of language with dignity of thought and rare beauty of expression. He or his contemporaries did not realize in their life time what a great achievement the small collection of his Urdu *ghazals* was. In his letters and in his Persian *Diwan* you find reference to his Urdu

verse showing that he was proud of his Persian *Diwan* and that he did not want to be judged by his Urdu verse. He says :—

"Farsi bin ta bi bini naqshhai rang rang,
Biguzar az majmua-i-Urdu ki be rang-i-manast."

(Read my Persian verse in order to see pictures of various hues. Overlook the Urdu collection which is colourless).

Little did he know that in India his name would be remembered by posterity and would achieve an undying fame through his Urdu writings and not through the Persian writings on which he prided himself. It must be stated, in fairness, to him, that his Persian *ghazals* are of a high order. Maulvi Altaf Husain *Hali*, in his valuable work, *Yadgar-i-Ghalib*, gives an appreciative criticism of Ghalib's Persian poetry and quotes the opinions of several well-known critics, according to whom Ghalib can hold his own against many of the best writers of Persian, including some of the masters recognised in Persia itself. This estimate may be regarded by some as exaggerated and by others as fairly accurate, but it is obvious that the Persian verse of Ghalib is not well-known in persia and has had no recognition there. It has been admired in India and is still admired by the ever decreasing number of scholars of Persian in this country, but as Persian is going out of vogue in India, the fame of Ghalib as a Persian poet must decline. This illustrates the disadvantage of a talented man devoting his main efforts to the attainment of distinction in a tongue which is not the language of his country. Fortunately for Ghalib, however, his claim to our gratitude does

not rest on his Persian writings only. His Urdu *Diwan*, though very brief, compared with his Persian *Diwan*, has not only risen highly in public estimation, since his death, but will probably continue to rise with the advance of a taste for Urdu Literature. This collection consists of about 1800 lines, of which a large number consist of semi-Persian verses, which do not, after all, constitute the basis of Ghalib's real claim to greatness as a writer of Urdu, but the proportion that is left, is of such a high order that in the vast domain of Urdu *ghazals* it would be difficult to find an equal number of verses of similar merit, even in the more voluminous collections of other authors.

In order to understand the difference between Ghalib and some other writers of *ghazal* some discussion of the nature of this form of verse will not be out of place. The word *ghazal* in Arabic means "talking to women" or "talking love" and *ghazal* as originally composed, was a song consisting of stray thoughts occurring to a lover, complaining of separation, longing for union and giving expression to sensations of pain and pleasure that characterise experiences of love. A *ghazal* starts with a verse called the *Matla*, which contains two lines, the last word but one of which in the first line, known as the *Qafia*, rhymes with the last word but one in the second line. The *ghazal* closes with a verse called the *Maqta*, in which the poet introduces his name or *nom de plume*. All the verses from the *Matla* to the *Maqta* are written in the same metre and the endings of the second line of each verse, known as *radif* must

rhyme together. These restrictions have, in some ways, hampered poetical flights of fancy, but this form of verse is not without its advantages and has been very popular in the East. Some renowned Western writers too have expressed admiration for this form of poetry, and have even paid it the compliment of imitating it. But this praise is due only to the best specimens of *ghazal*, because, in its ordinary form, it is the most elementary type of versification and not at all difficult to write. The method most commonly practised by writers of *ghazal*, in the beginning, is to think of a number of rhyming words for the *Qafias* and then to think of suitable ideas in which to use those words. This artificial way of versification, in which thoughts follow words, instead of words following thoughts, is responsible for a great deal of bad or indifferent poetry in the East. The first thing which distinguishes Ghalib's *ghazal* from that of many others is that in his case words follow thought. This is apparent, among other things, from the fact that most of his *ghazals* consist of 10 or 12 lines only, unlike those of many writers who preceded him and many who have succeeded him. They seem to have thought that by writing lengthy *ghazals* they could make a show of power of versification and for that purpose they attempted several lines for one *Qafia* and sometimes wrote 2 or 3 *ghazals* in the same *Qafia* and *Radif*. These are called *Do Ghazalas* and *Sih Ghazalas*. Most of such Do Ghazalas and Sih Ghazalas, however, are nothing more than efforts at rhyming, more or less polished according to the degree of the practice of the writer and cannot

lay claim to much literary merit otherwise. Ghalib avoided this kind of writing and has actually left some *ghazals* incomplete, without any *Matlas* or *Maqtas*, probably because more verses of sufficiently good quality in that strain did not occur to him. This is as it should be. Another feature of his poetry is that thought containd in his verses is often expressed in a strikingly original manner. For instance it is a favourite theme with Oriental poets to give expression to the pangs of love, by using the metaphor of the beloved one causing injuries to the lover. Many a poet would describe plainly the kind of dagger used, the violence with which it is struck and the extent and depth of the wounds caused. This is a fancy which would strike Western readers of Urdu verse as very quaint, but it is a very common theme in the East. Ghalib, in following this tradition, adopts a manner of alluding to his injuries which is peculiarly his own. He says :—

Nazar lage na kahin unke dast-o-bazu ko
Yeh log kiun mire zakhmi-i-jigar ko dekhte hain.

(Do not let people stare at the injuries inside my breast, lest the pretty and strong arm of my beloved one may catch the evil eye). He thus leaves the whole description, which others would have revelled in, to be understood by the reader, implying that the wounds are such that to look at them would at once suggest the idea of the strength of the arm that inflicted them. He brings out, in addition, the fact that as a true lover his regard for the beloved one is such that he would not, in spite of his affliction, bear the idea of the

slightest harm coming to the latter, not even as much as may be caused by the superstitious notion of the evil eye. His desire to express his thoughts in the manner in which others have not expressed them sometimes leads him to paradoxes, which he uses with great effect. For instance where he says :—

Baske dushwar hai har kam ka asan hona,
Admi ko bhi muyassar nahin insan hona.

The beauty of expression of these simple words, as it is seen in the original, is very difficult to bring out in translation, but a literal translation of this verse given in English would be as follows :—

"It is not easy for every task to be easy. Even a man cannot easily be a man." In Urdu we have two words for a man, namely *Admi* and *Insan*. The first one is taken from the Persian language and the other comes from the Arabic ; but idiomatically Insan has come to mean all that is good and human and manly in man. The poet, therefore, means that it is not easy for a man to be manly.

Ghalib's verses are also full of deep philosophic truths, expressed with remarkable facility, in philosophic language. He says, for instance :—

" Hai gaib-i-gaib jisko samajhte hain ham shahud,
Hain khwab men hanoz jo jage hain khwab men.

" It is the absence of absence, which we call manifestation.

Those who have awakened in a dream are still dreaming."

Though a Mussalman and a believer in the

doctrines of the faith in which he was born, Ghalib's bold and philosophic spirit has not remained unaffected by the scepticism of some of the advanced free-thinkers whom Islam has produced from time to time. There is a school of thought which is not inclined to accept, in a literary sense, the beautiful and glowing pictures of the Gardens of Paradise found in some Muslim religious books. Ghalib boldly expounds this view, in a line which is very commonly quoted and has passed almost into a proverb.

Hamko malum hai jannat ki haqiqat lekin,
Dil ke khush rakhne ko Ghalib yeh khiyal achha hai.

"We know what paradise is in reality, but O Ghalib!
It is a fine idea to keep one's heart happy."

It has been stated above that Ghalib was an eminent Persian poet first and a great Urdu poet afterwards. His long practice in the use of Persian turns of expression adhered to him throughout his life and though in the earlier stages of his Urdu versification there is too much of the Persian element, yet it cannot be denied that he has often employed Persian words and phrases with singular effect. So much so that this feature of his style is particularly associated with his name and has found a large number of imitators.

The ideals of poetry followed in the East and the West are in some respects so different that it would be difficult to say that the Indian or Persian poets were poets in the sense in which

Tennyson and Wordsworth were poets; but it must be remembered that in the case of a man like Ghalib, if you do not find studies of nature and natural beauty and lengthy and connected discriptive poems among his compositions, it is not because he had not the gift or the talent for them, but because his lot was cast in entirely different surroundings and his opportunities were absolutely different compared with those of Western poets. I believe, that if Ghalib had been born in the West and brought up in the atmosphere in which the Western poets lived and moved his genius could have also risen to any height. Ghalib was a born poet, who not only wrote poetry but thought poetically. When I deal with his prose-writings and place before you extracts from his memorable letters, published under the name of *Urdu-i-Mualla*, I will place before you instances of his extreme tenderness of feelings and the nobility of his loving nature. His life was one of complete devotion to his art, in spite of all kinds of adverse circumstances. It was full of a noble desire to serve his friends and relatives in any way he could. It was also full of patient and resolute suffering. Though he devoted the greater part of his literary energy to the writing of *ghazals*, which was the principal kind of literary production in demend at the time, yet his high-soaring genius felt the bondage of the restrictions, which the *ghazal* imposes upon those who write it, as very irksome. He very rightly observes :—

" Baqadri shauq nahin sehne tangna-i-ghazal
Kuchh aur chahie wusaat mire bayan ke liye."

"The narrow dimensions of the *ghazal* are not in accordance with the extent of my desire to express myself.

A wider expanse is necessary for expressing my thoughts."

This shows his true instinct and the cry that he thus raised, more than half a century ago, was really a cry of the succeeding generation of poets, among whom the name of my esteemed friend, Dr. Mohammad Iqbal, stands foremost. They are now giving practical effect to the reform which Ghalib desired to effect in his time. Either because there were no models of thought and expression from the West available at the time or because the conventions were too strong to be resisted, Ghalib did not go beyond the conventional line in the forms of his compostion. He has written *Qasidas* in Urdu and Persian, *i.e.*, eulogies of kings and noblemen like many a poet of the olden times. He has written *Marsiyas* in Urdu and Persian (*i.e.* elegies of a religious nature on the martydom of Imam Hussain). He has written *Masnawis* but they are in Persian only. They show his great power in writing connected verses on a particular subject. I would quote here a translation of a somewhat lengthy passage from one of his Persian *Masnawis*, called *Abr-i-Gauhar Bar*, (The Pearl-dropping Cloud). This is an incomplete piece of work, as we are told by Hali, the biographer of Ghalib, in his valuable work *Yadgar-i-Ghalib*. He rightly says that this incomplete poem is the best of Ghalib's *Masnawis*. I do not think any apology is needed for the lengthy extract, from that poem

as it gives us an insight into the heart of the poet and sheds light on many of his sayings and doings. His life was not a life of luxury and ease, though it was not a life of absolute poverty or starvation. He was born of a good family and had heard and seen something of its past affluence. His habits were those of the gentry of his generation and he was inclined to be liberal with his money when he got any. He was, therefore, living from hand to mouth, in spite of some stipends and pensions that he enjoyed. At one time even some of these sources of income ceased and he had to suffer great hardship. Considering the aspirations which he had, his life, on the whole, passed in need and privation. Added to this was the feeling of solitude in his heart, owing to the want of a suitable companion in life. He had been married in a good family, but very early in his youth, and at a time when he could not understand what marriage meant. The marriage, therefore, seems to have remained at best a tie of duty and convention. We do not read much about the happiness or unhappiness of his wedded life in his writings, but there is an allusion half-humorous, half cynical, to his domestic life in one or two of his letters. In consoling a friend for the loss of his wife, Ghalib writes that he envies those whose wives die in their life time and facetiously observes that so far from there being any prospects of his release from the yoke of matrimony, his worthy companion in life has never had so much as a headache. This obviously is not meant to be taken literally and seems more to have been

meant to divert the thought of his bereaved friend from the loss which he had suffered. The allusion to domestic life is not, however, without its significance, when coming from a poet like Ghalib, and shows that his home life was of an indifferent nature, neither happy nor unhappy. To add to their sorrows, Ghalib and his wife had lost as many as seven children and were left without issue in their old age. To an affectionate nature this was no ordinary suffering. He and his wife appear to have lavished their pent up affection on an adopted son, but unfortunately that son too was taken away from them. The evening of his life was further embittered by various physical ailments, about which he writes to his numerous friends in a plaintive tone. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that he had taken to the solace of the cup and he wanted thereby to drown the miserable feelings which seemed to dominate his nature. He says :—

Mai se gharaz nishat hai kis ru siyah ko
Ik guna bekhudi mujhe din rat chahie.

" If I desire merriment from wine I should be regarded as a man with a blackened face. All that I want is a sort of forgetfulness of self."

He was never anything more than a moderate drinker, though wine had come to be a daily necessity with him. As a believer in Islam he felt very often qualms of conscience regarding this habit. He is, therefore, full of constant apologetic allusions to the growth of this habit throughout his writings and in the extract the translation of which is given below, he pours forth a strong apology to his Creator for having indulged in wine :—

" I was sorrowful and wine takes away sorrow, what could I do, O' Benevolent God ?

An account of wine and music and beauty and scent, should be demanded from Jamshed[1] and Bahram and Parvez. But not from a poor man like me, who has, now and then, temporarily blackened his face by the fire of liquor. I had no garden in which I could enjoy drinking of wine, nor a cellar in which I could store it.

" No musician to amuse me nor a sweetheart to sit by me. No fair-faced dancers ever danced before me.

There was no noise of minstrels in my courtyard.

I had many periods of privation and many a spring season without wine.

Days when rain gladdened the earth, and nights when the moon lit the sky.

Were dark in my eyes, without a drop of drink.

The cloud of the month of Bahman covered the horizon, while my earthen cup of wine remained as empty as ever.

Many a spring found me searching for the necessaries of life. And the door of my house was left open, because there was nothing in it to protect.

Many a time the world has been gay with the rose and the tulip,

While I have been living moodily in my cell.

Any moments of pleasure that fell to my lot were like a dance of the half-dead.

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1. Names of old Iranian Kings.

I never had a full measure of happiness according to the desire of my heart.

If I prepared a thread to make a necklace of pearls, the pearls broke,

And when wine was procured, my cup got broken.

Do not look at my dress besmeared with liquor,

But look at my emaciated frame.

Thou hast kept me poverty-stricken in this world,

But hast kept my heart a prisoner of desire.

Owing to the unpleasant life that I have had, Life has been like a thorn in my side.

Whenever my heart used to boil owing to my desires,

A cry of pain rising from my heart used to reach my ear.

When I will remember my continued disappointments,

My heart will not be at rest even in Paradise.

For every simple sin that thine records may show me to have committed,

I will cite a privation to show a desire unfulfilled.

Then how O ! God will justice be done,

If my unfulfilled desires exceed the numbers of sins committed by me."[1]

Apart from the biographical interest of the above lines, there is another important reason why I have quoted them. They serve to illustrate how much thought Ghalib can sometimes con-

1. For the original Persian verses see Yadgar-i-Ghalib, printed at Faiz-i-am Press, Aligarh, 2nd edition, page 306-307)

dense in a single verse. In his Urdu *Diwan* there is a beautiful verse, to my mind one of the prettiest, which, in the briefest possible space, condenses all that has been said in the above extract. It runs thus :—

" Ata hai dagh-i-hasrat-i-dil ka shumar yad,
Mujh se mire gunah ka hisab ai khuda na mang."

" It reminds me of the number of sore spots in my heart, owing to longings unfulfilled, Do not, therefore, ask me O God ! to render an account of the sins committed by me." The verse is very pathetic. It makes such a pretty reference to the fact that the sins committed by one in his lifetime must be numerous and yet alludes in such a telling manner to the heroic struggle of feeble humanity against alluring temptations, that it cannot but charm the reader. Ever since I came across this verse it has had a charm for me and very often I have found myself repeating it. The line of thought observable in the extract just given from the Persian *Masnavi.* is exactly the same. Till the publication of the *Yadgar-i-Ghalib*, however, I had not read the passage quoted above and I did not know that Ghalib had expressed the same feelings as he did in one verse, in Urdu, with such wealth of graphic detail elsewhere. I have, therefore, thought fit to place side by side these two expressions of the same idea, one of them being a model of brevity and suggestiveness, while the other is a bold and straightforward expression of the feelings that crowded themselves into the heart of the poet on

reflecting that in his life there had been so many enjoyments omitted, even if there had been some moments enjoyed. I am sorry I cannot, in this brief essay, give any specimens of Ghalib's poetry. Those who can read his poems in the original must read them again and again for themselves. Then will they learn how to appreciate and enjoy his poetry. It is a pity that, for a long time, his Urdu *Diwan*, in spite of its excellence, was not available in a nicely got up edition. We are familiar with cheap and badly and incorrectly lithographed editions of the *Diwan*, which have stood in the way of a proper appreciation of the author. Attention has, of late, been directed to remove this difficulty. An annotated editions of the *Diwan* compiled by Professor Ali Haidar Taba Tabai of Lucknow was published many years ago at Hyderabad (Deccan) and has been helpful to many students of Ghalib. Another writer who has annotated the *Diwan-i-Ghalib* is Maulana Shaukat of Meerut and more recently Maulvi Fazl-ul-Hasan, B.A., better known as Hasrat Mohani, brought out a popular edition of the *Diwan* with notes. I have seen recently a nicely got up edition of Ghalib published at Badaon and have since then brought out myself a pocket edition of *Diwan-i-Ghalib* with an interesting photograph of the poet in his old age. This edition had been long in contemplation and was actually taken in hand several years back, but for various reasons it could not be completed till now and is not free from defects, but it aims at placing before the readers of Ghalib a presentable and neatly lithographed copy of the *Diwan* and may pave the way for better

editions.[1] It contains only the bare text, as I think, those who are fond of Ghalib must first try to read him for themselves without the oft-confusing help of commentators. Moreover a commentary like the one I desire is yet to be written and I did not feel myself equal to the task of producing an ideal commentary.

The *Yadgar-i-Ghalib* of Hali, to which reference has been made already, though not professing to be a commentary on Ghalib, is yet the best help to the study of the poet that I know of. The finest verses in the Diwan are quoted and illuminating notes given to explain their beauty or to bring out their significance. Hali has the advantage of being the most sympathetic admirer of Ghalib among his critics. He was himself, in his youth, one of the favourite pupils of Ghalib. He had the privilege of having come in familiar personal contact with the great poet. He had the advantage of having heard some of those verses from the poet's own lips and discussed the meanings of some with him. Therefore whatever light he throws on the important verses of his master is really valuable and I think he has done a great service to Urdu literature by writing the *Yadgar-i-Ghalib*. He has not only performed a duty which he owed to his master, who was his ideal in literature, but has also succeeded in removing, to a large extent, the somewhat unfair impression which the *Ab-i-Hayat* of Maulana Azad leaves on

1. Many beautifully got up editions of Ghalib have been published since. A pocket edition printed in the type was published by the *Kaviani* Press in Germany. A large sized illustrated edition, published by K. B. M. Abdul Rahman Chagtai, the well-known artist of Lahore, deserves special mention.

one's mind with regard to the merits of Ghalib as a poet. It may be said in fairness to Azad that, gifted as he was with a remarkable capacity for literary criticism, he could not shut his eyes to the eminence of Ghalib as a poet and has paid a tribute of praise to the genius of Ghalib in his memorable work, the *Ab-i-Hayat.* Those who know, however, that Azad has the greatest admiration for his own master, Zauk, and that there was rivalry between Zauk and Ghalib over the sovereignty of the realm of letters, cannot wonder at the fact that Azad wants to make out, on the whole, that Zauk was greater than Ghalib as a poet. Though Zauk is undoubtedly one of the greatest masters of Urdu verse and in simplicity of style and in the beauty and flow of his language has few equals; yet the trend of opinion now is that as a genius and a thinker Ghalib must be considered much superior to Zauk.

We have seen something of what Ghalib was as a poet. We may now see what he was as a man. Some people in Delhi are still alive[1] who have seen the poet with their own eyes in his old age and have the greatest admiration and regard for his personality. As revealed by his letters to his friends and by the reminiscences of those who had the good fortune of seeing or knowing Ghalib, he appears to have been a man of an extremely tender, loving and loveable nature. He was possessed of broad sympathies. His religious views were also characterised by a rare breadth, which even the present day gene-

1. This was true when this series of lectures was delivered. Alas! that is no longer the case.

ration of educated people might envy. The number of his friends and admirers was very large and he was in constant correspondence with them. His letters to those numerous friends show how full of kindness and affection he was for each one of them, and how sincerely and with what depth of affection were his feelings reciprocated by them. Among his correspondents, some were his pupils who submitted their verses to him for correction and improvement, according to the old established custom among Eastern poets. Even in his old age, when he was troubled with various infirmities, he used to take pains over this labour of love and used to correct and improve poems sent to him with a regularity and punctuality which could not, under present day conditions, be expected even from a paid master of rhetoric, who undertakes to teach by correspondence. No one informed Ghalib of his misery or sorrow without eliciting from him a suitable response and sympathy. He was willing to lend pecuniary help to a friend in difficulty, though he was not possessed of an abundance of wealth himself. He seems to have been a great lover of children, perhaps because he had none of his own. In a letter to his pupil Tafta[1] we read:—

"You know Zainul-Abidin was like a son to me. He has left two children, who are my grandsons. They often come to me and trouble me in

1. Tafta was a remarkable man. His full name was Munshi Har Gopal *Tafta.* He admired his master to such an extent that he called himself *Mirza* Tafta. He has left behind a big *Diwan* in Persian. Sir Shanti Sarup Bhatnagar, the famous scientist, is closely related to him. Sir Shanti Sarup occasionally writes Urdu poems. He has probably inherited the gift from Tafta.

various ways, but I do not mind the trouble. God knows that I regard you as my son and your poems, the product of your genius, as my spiritual grandsons. When I do not get tired of my mundane grandsons, who come and interrupt my dinner when I am dining and interfere with my sleep when I am trying to sleep at noon and step on to my bed with their dusty and bare feet and spill some water here and raise a colud of dust there, why should I get tired of my spiritual grandsons who give me no trouble."[1]

To show the breadth of his sympathy and his extreme freedom from any kind of racial prejudice, which is the bane of India, his relations with Tafta and other Hindu pupils and friends are the best illustrations.

There were many other intellectual Hindus of his day, who were equally favoured with Ghalib's friendship. Among them may be mentioned Munshi Jawahir Singh, *Jauhar*, who first arranged to collect and publish the Urdu letters of Ghalib and the late R.B. Piyare Lal, an eminent educationalist in the Punjab who retired from Educational Service as an Inspector of Schools, and has now passed away. The photograph of Ghalib which has been mentioned above was given by the poet to the late Rai Bahadur and was obtained by me from my friend, L. Siri Ram, M.A. of Delhi, author of the *Khum Khana-i-Javid* and a nephew of R.B. Piyare Lal.

Ghalib's broad sympathies were not confined to these instances of personal friendship with the

1. This is a translation of a passage in the letter to Tafta, published In *Urdu-i-Mualla* (Edition of 1899, Mujtabai Press), at Page 63.

intellectual Hindus of his day, but embraced a much larger circle.

In a letter to Tafta, Ghalib says:—

"I hold all human beings whether Mussalman, Hindu or Christian, dear to me and regard them as my brethren."

He knew practically no differences between various Islamic sects. His writings show that he was inclined towards the doctrines of the Shia school and had a deep reverence for the descendants of Fatimah, the universally venerated daughter of the Prophet of Arabia, but he never allowed this inclination of his to mar, in any way, the smoothness of his relations with the Sunni sect, so that it is a moot point whether he belonged to the Sunni or the Shia persuasion. The fact is that he was entirely above these differences and must have disliked them. In one of the prettiest of his *Ghazals* he sings:—

"Ham muwahid hain hamara kesh hai tark-i-rasum
Millaten jab mit gain ajzai iman ho gain."

(We are believers in the unity of God. Our religion is the renunciation of convention.
The sects when they disappear become parts of faith.)

Ghalib had a legitimate pride in the nobility of his birth, which has been often expressed in verse and prose, but in his dealings with his friends and with visitors who came to see him, he was the humblest and the mildest of men. This sense of humility existed in him side by side with his great sense of self-respect and love

of independence like a true Oriental of good birth. He attached an almost fantastic value to the maintenance of his dignity.

Maulana Hali relates an interesting anecdote about this. When the Old Delhi College was founded, there was a vacancy in it for a professor of Oriental Literature. Ghalib made up his mind to apply for the appointment. He went to see a high Government official in this connection, but as he was not received by the officer on this occasion in the manner to which he was accustomed, he plainly told him that he had come with the intention of asking for the job, but had changed his mind because he was not received with the ceremony which had usually characterised his reception on other occasions. The official explained to him that the previous interviews were in his capacity as an important citizen, while now he had come to ask for a job. Ghalib replied that he thought of applying for the post in the hope that the appointment would add to the respectability already enjoyed by him, but if it was calculated to take away anything from that and to reduce his position, he would rather go without the emoluments of the post. With all this his attitude towards the British Officials was one of great regard and respect and we find numerous instances in his letters of his good opinion about them and his desire to be on good terms with them. At the time immediately following the Mutiny, owing to some misapprehensions, which were subsequently removed, he unfortunately came under a cloud. The idea was that as he had been on good terms with

Bahadur Shah, the last of the Mughal Emperors of Delhi, he must be regarded as one of his partisans. Some enemy of his attributed to him the writing of two verses, which really belonged to Zauk, and were composed at the time of the coronation of Bahadur Shah, about 1837 A.D. Those verses were merely eulogistic and quite innocent in themselves, but the person, who attributed them to Ghalib, wanted the Government to infer therefrom his intimate association with the deported ruler of Delhi. We find references in Ghalib's letters to this episode and his intense desire to ferret out an old issue of the *Urdu Akhbar* of Delhi, which had long before published the lines in question as those of Zauk. We do not know whether he succeeded in finding that issue of the newspaper or not, but we do know that he was successful in completely dispelling the suspicions that had been aroused against him of being hostile to the British Government. The suspicion, however, caused him serious loss. For a long time his family pension from Government was stopped and he was not invited to the Darbar or granted the usual *Khilats* etc., to which he was entitled. This was to him a time of great mental and pecuniary suffering, but he felt confident about his innocence, which was after all fully recognised and his *Khilat* and his pension and the honours due to him were all restored.

He was very fond of books and was an omnivorous reader. To have a sufficient provision of reading material on his book-shelf and a quantity of good wine in his godown, was, it

seems an ideal of earthly bliss in his eyes. In a letter to Mir Mehdi Hasan *Majruh*, he writes, speaking of himself in the third person, as follows :—

"Maulana Ghalib is very happy now-a-days. *Dastan-i-Amir Hamza*, a book extending over 960 pages and a volume of the *Bostan-i-Khial*, of about the same bulk, have just arrived and I have got 17 bottles of pure wine in my storehouse. I read throughout the day and drink throughout the night. Anyone who has attained this much, deserves to rank with Jamshed or Alexander."

It is curious, however, that we are told by Hali that in spite of his fondness for books, Ghalib never purchased books to read, nor did he make a collection of them. He seems to have possessed a retentive memory in his youth and to have absorbed and digested all that he read, so that the result of his reading became a part and parcel of his being. It appears that he was a ready writer and wielded a facile pen. The greater part of his literary work was, as has already been said, in Persian. His Persian poems extended to more than ten thousand lines. His works in Persian prose occupied a much larger space. I can only mention here the names of some of them. They were *Kati-i-Burhan*, which excited a bitter controversy among the Persian linguists of his day, the *Drafsh-i-Kawiani*, the *Lataif-i-Ghaibi* and the *Dastanbo*. This last dealt graphically with his experience and observation of daily events soon after the Mutiny and had a considerable historic value. This is not the place to go into the details of his work as a writer of

Persian and I have to content myself with this passing allusion to it. It is remarkable that like many an Oriental poet, Ghalib wrote because it was his instinct to write. He was indifferent to the preservation of his own writings. We find constant references in his letters to this tendency. When his pupils wrote asking him for some of his compositions, he told them he had none of them in his possession. He says that Nawab Ziauddin Khan had been collecting his writings and had them all in his library, but the library got destroyed in the Mutiny and no trace of it was left. Another friend's collection met with a similar fate.

Whenever any of his books were published, he took great interest in their printing and wanted them to be as accurate and as well got-up as possible. He himself used to purchase a certain number of copies of those books for distribution among his friends, and this was done so liberally, in spite of his scanty means, that at the end of those distributions there was not much left in his pocket and not a single copy of the book left with him. Another noteworthy feature of his character was his frankness and candour about his personal shortcomings. In his writings in prose and in verse he frequently alludes to them. He does so in a way which shows that he is sorry for his defects, probably having an idea that any laxity on his part should not have, so far as possible, the effect of setting a bad example to others. In fact, in describing his shortcomings of religious practice he is often inclined to paint himself darker than he really

was. This is due to several reasons. In the first place it seems that the consciousness of those omissions weighed heavily upon his mind and made them appear larger in his eyes than they really were. In the second place there is the natural tendency of Oriental poets to resort to exaggeration in descriptions. In the third place he is inclined to be emphatic in expressions of humour, according to the peculiar needs of the occasion on which he utters them. For instance, he is represented as having said to a British Military Officer, when he was still suspected of being a Muslim fanatic, opposed to British rule: "I have never offered prayers in my life and I have never avoided drinking, whenever drink was available, why should then I be regarded as a Musalman and ill treated as such". All that he wanted to emphasise, in his own humorous way, was that he was too much of a latitudinarian to be a fanatic; but this saying of his would give the wrong impression that he had never offered prayers. Similarly in one of his *Rubais* (quatrains) he says:—

"Let those observe fast who have the wherewithall to feast in the evening; but he who has nothing to eat when he breaks his fast, should be excusable, if he eats the fast itself, (that is, he does not keep it). This quatrain would lead one to think that Ghalib perhaps never observed the fast during the month of Ramazan. We find, however, that these were really passing phases of thought as well as of action and that very often he did offer prayers and did observe

the fast. In a letter[1] to *Majruh* he says:

"Have you forgotten my usual habits? Have I ever abstained from the *Tarawih* prayer at night in the Jamia Masjid during the month of Ramazan? How could I have stayed at Rampur during this month? The Nawab was insisting that I should stay. He tempted me with the prospect of the mangoe crop in the coming rainy season, but I managed to get away, so as to reach Delhi on the night, when the moon came out. From the very first day of the month, I have been going every day to the mosque of Hamid Ali Khan to hear Maulvi Jafar Ali recite the Quran. I come at night to the Jamia Masjid for the *Tarawih* prayers and for breaking my fast I sometimes go to the Mehtab Bagh at evening time and enjoy the cold water of that place." Such a regularity of religious observances would put even a pious Mulla to shame. This, however, relates to the month of Ramazan when even the less religious Musalmans try to observe the commandments of their religion, but it is enough to show that Ghalib exaggerated the pictures of his indifferent religious practices, which are not to be taken too literally or too seriously, except about the time when age and infirmity practically confined him to bed in the last years of his life. In his last days he used often to contemplate and even desire death. Two years before it actually came, he felt so sure of its coming that he prophesied about it in a phrase, the letters of which, if counted according to the numerical

1. For reference please see page 134 of *Urdu-i-Mualla*, Edition, 1899.

values assigned to them in the system known as *Abjad*, yield the figure 1283 A.H., (corresponding to 1867 A.D.) The phrase was "Ah! Ghalib Murd." This prophecy, however, was not fulfilled and he was destined to live a little longer and to do some further good to his numerous pupils, with whom his correspondence lasted up to the very last. He died in 1285 A.H. corresponding to 1869 A.D. The same phrase in which he had tried to bring out the date of his death was utilized by his pupils by the addition of the letter (ب) the numerical value of which is 2. "*Ah Ghalib Bimurd*" gives the actual date of his passing away from from this world, universally respected and widely mourned. It is said that for a year Delhi Urdu papers kept publishing the elegies in which his numerous admirers expressed their feelings about this great loss to literature. His loving soul must have felt in Heaven that the seed of the affection, which he lavished on his friends in his lifetime, had not fallen on barren soil but had flourished and was bearing the fruit of reciprocated love.