

VII

THE NEW AGE

WE have seen how Urdu poetry became enslaved to Persian models, with the result that the life passed out of it, and it became artificial and insincere. Outward expression, mere cleverness of phraseology or thought, was everything; inner beauty, artless simplicity of idea and true seriousness were absent. To a large extent this is the case even to-day, but a great change has made itself felt; side by side with the old, a new school of thought and poetry has arisen and is freeing Urdu from the shackles of the past and leading it into poetic truth and earnestness. This is chiefly the result of English influence, through education and literature.

The pioneers of the new school were ALṬĀF ḤUSAIN ḤĀLĪ and MUḤAMMAD ḤUSAIN ĀZĀD. By a fortunate circumstance they found themselves in Lahore at the same time, working in the Education Department, at the head of which was Col. Holroyd, a man of sympathetic spirit. At his instigation they inaugurated in 1874 poetical gatherings in which poems were recited that expressed the new ideas. In spite of considerable opposition the work was begun and the new era ushered in. Urdu poetry definitely entered upon a new stage. The leaders avoided two dangers, the Scylla of artificial insincerity on which most Urdu poetry down to that time had suffered shipwreck, and the Charybdis of exaggerated westernisation into which some of the younger writers fell in the end of the nineteenth century.

231. **Hālī.** ALṬĀF ḤUSAIN ḤĀLĪ of Pānīpat (1837-1914) went to Delhi as a young man. After the Mutiny he entered the service of the poet and critic, Shefta, whose pupil he became. He also received much help from Gālīb. These two men, especially Shefta, influenced him greatly in poetical

matters. Still greater was the influence of English books, which he read while working under Col. Holroyd. In the poetical meetings of 1874 and 1875 he read some of the poems by which he was to become famous, poems which marked him out as a pioneer. Such were *Ḥubb i Vatn*, *Rahm o Inṣāf*, *Nishāt i Ummed* and *Barkhā Rut*. These poems and others like them show beautiful simplicity and directness of thought, and really attempt to express truth.

The influence of Sir Sayyid Aḥmad turned his attention to the spiritual uplift of his co-religionists. This found fruit in his longest poem, *Madd o Jazr i Islām*, commonly known as the *Musaddas i Ḥālī*, which with its appendix is 2,800 lines long. It is a glowing account of the former glories of Islām, a lament over its decadent condition and a trumpet call to reform. No single poem has had so great an effect on the Urdu-speaking world. The spirit of reform is shown also in his short poems about women, *Bevā kī Munājāt*, *Cup kī Dād* and *Shikvā e Hind* and in the elegies on the death of his friends, Gālīb, Maḥmūd Khān and Sir Sayyid Aḥmad. The *Musaddas* is his greatest poem, and next to this come the short poems just mentioned, which are very popular. He published also two volumes of poetry, *Dīvān i Ḥālī* and *Majmū'a e Nazm i Ḥālī*. In his *Musaddas* he shows real power; the mind is swept along by enthusiasm for the past with sorrow over what has been lost. Some say he exaggerates; but the need for reform is ever present, and the stirrings of the soul reaching out to better things are a tribute to the force of his appeal. It is the greatest Urdu poem since the time of Anīs. Ḥālī is in the first rank of Urdu poets. (See No. 218.)

THE ANCIENT GLORIES OF ARABIA

From Ḥālī's *Musaddas*

In those dark days no elegance of speech
Was known; the paths of eloquence were sealed;
The literature of Rome had ceased to be,
And Persia's old religion was no more—
When suddenly Arabia's lightning blazed,
And every man was smitten wide awake.

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Was known; the paths of eloquence were sealed;
The literature of Rome had ceased to be,
And Persia's old religion was no more—
When suddenly Arabia's lightning blazed,
And every man was smitten wide awake.

And when they knew the Arabs' flaming words,
 And plainly heard the fashion of their speech,
 And felt the verses racing through their veins,
 Their sermons rushing like a stream in flood,
 Those magic phrases, charmed sentences,
 Then they perceived themselves but dumb before ;
 They had not known how they might praise or blame,
 Nor how express their sadness or their joy,
 Nor how give sacred counsel or command—
 Treasure of tongue and pen was buried, lost.
 Now Arabs taught them tuneful melodies,
 Arabia's speech unloosed the tongues of men.

THE PRESENT EVIL CONDITION OF ISLAM IN INDIA

From Hālī's *Musaddas*

The race whose step was firm on every land,
 Whose banner waved in all the winds of heaven,
 People whose honour all horizons knew—
 'The best of nations' was their title proud—
 Nothing remains of that proud folk but this,
 That we still give ourselves the Muslim name.
 For otherwise within our veins and blood,
 In our intentions and our search for truth,
 Our hearts and minds and thoughts and tongues and speech.
 Our nature, habits, dispositions too,
 Remains there nought of old nobility,—
 Or if there be, it is by chance alone.
 For now our every deed ignoble shows,
 Our actions are the meanest of the low ;
 The fair name of our fathers is eclipsed ;
 Our very steps disgrace the place we dwell.
 Dishonoured is the honour of the past,
 Arabia's greatness sunk beyond recall.

232. **Azād.** MUHAMMAD HUSAIN ĀZĀD (c. 1834–1910), who has been dealt with more fully under prose writers (No. 215), is important also as a poet, particularly because he was a pioneer. His poetic output was small; indeed, not 5,000 lines of his have been published. He presided over the first meeting of the poetic assembly in 1874, delivered a lecture and read a poem, *Shab i Qadr*. In the early days he did even more than Hālī to introduce the new views. Though the meetings ceased within a year, it was impossible to stem the tide. Others threw in their lot with Āzād and

Hālī, and in spite of checks from time to time, the movement grew in strength. Āzād's poetry is in one small volume called *Naẓm i Āzād*. It contains a number of poems on subjects like Love of Country, Dawn of Hope, Night, and the Dream of Peace, some love lyrics of less value, and a few odes. Like Hālī he deplored conventional exaggeration and strove to be natural, to express in forceful language the feelings which animated him, and to describe what he saw. He would be better known as a poet if he were not so famous as a prose writer.

233. MUHAMMAD ISMĀ'IL (1844–1917) belonged to Merāth and worked in the Education Department, for which he wrote books. He gave his support to the new school and always kept the new ideas before him. His poetry has been printed in one volume, *Kulliyāt i Ismā'īl*, which contains a large number of short poems. Two of them are in blank verse. He wrote on everyday subjects with great directness and simplicity, avoiding the defects of the old style. Shibli had a very high opinion of him and put him after Hālī among the poets of the new school. As a prose-writer he is known by a number of excellent Urdu readers which have been used with success in the lower classes of schools.

234. **Akbar.** AKBAR HUSAIN RIṢVĪ AKBAR (1846–1921), named Lisān ul 'Asr, Mouthpiece of the Age, is the last but one of the front-rank Urdu poets. He spent many years in Government service, and on retirement in 1903 devoted himself to literature. He belonged to the new school, though at first he wrote in the old style. He was a fervent patriot, who preached love not only for his religion but for the East as a whole with its customs and peoples. He published three volumes of letters, valuable as examples of good prose, and three volumes of poems, each called *Kulliyāt*. His chief characteristic is his use of humour and satire to enforce his views on national, political and social subjects; in this he was both effective and popular. His command of pure Urdu, his ability to bend to his purpose strange words, whether English or vernacular, his appeal to his countrymen, both Hindu and Muslim, both learned and unlearned, his humour and his wit, his flow of language and

charm of style, mark him out as a writer of eminence. He was a master of moral, didactic and political verse.

235 **SURUR**. DURGĀ SAHĀB SURŪR (1873-1910), usually known as Surūr Jahānābādī, is one of the most remarkable of recent poets. His life was sad; to secure a living he sold fugitive verses to anyone who would buy them. Happily two volumes of poems have been preserved, *Jām i Surūr* and *Khumkhāna e Surūr*. He disliked the unreal images and meaningless expressions of the old poetry, and did not care for love lyrics, but, like Nazīr of Āgra (No. 125), delighted in everyday subjects. He was an Indian first and foremost; being a Hindū he was able to enter into a phase of Indian life little touched on except by Qulī Quṭb Shāh (No. 20) and Nazīr. He loved the old heroes, and the stories of Hindu life and religion; his poems are full of national sentiment.

He was specially fond of nature-subjects and those which brought out the inherent tenderness of his character; his imagination was vivid, and his command of language great. He liked simplicity and preferred vernacular Hindi words to those taken from Arabic and Persian. He never had a poetical teacher and was therefore free from the fetters that bound many of his fellow poets. Urdu poetry suffered a great loss in his premature death.

236. NĀDIR 'ALĪ KHĀN NĀDIR (1867-1912) is another prominent name in the new movement. He was a much better English scholar than Surūr and shows more western influence in his writing. He was a patriotic writer, but wrote more on imaginative subjects than on the things of everyday life.

237. MUḤAMMAD MUḤSIN MUḤSIN (1825-1905), called Kākauravī after his native village, was a lawyer who gave his leisure time to literature. At first he wrote odes and love lyrics but he gave them up for *na't*, praise of Muḥammad, in which he gained great fame. He and Amīr Mināī are the best writers of this kind of poetry. He was a friendly man of old fashioned courtesy. In verse he combined high sounding words with fertility of ideas, happy metaphors and allusions to well known stories.

238. AḤMAD 'ALĪ SHAUQ QIDVĀĪ, is one of the chief poets

of the last 50 years. He wrote simple and beautiful poems on nature and love, such as *Tarānā e Shauq*, *Ganjīna*, *Nairang i Jamāl*, *'Ālam i Khayāl*; also the plays, *Macpherson aur Lucy* and *Qāsim o Zuhra*. In his revolt against artificial ornament and Persian constructions he did a real service to the language.

239. 'ALĪ MUḤAMMAD SHĀD of Patna, who died in 1927, for many years took part in all the life of his city. He was a prolific writer, very fond of writing congratulatory odes and other poems on occasions of public or domestic importance. He is the author of many elegies which are noteworthy for their freedom from exaggeration. His poetry suffered from haste and over-production, for he gave no time to revision and correction.

240. 'AZMAT ULLĀH KHĀN of Delhi (d. 1927) must be mentioned chiefly on account of his resolutely turning to Hindi models in language, thought and metres. Some think that in this respect he will have a great, even an epoch-making influence on Urdu poetry. Though not a poet of the first rank, he is well worth reading. He wrote in a rather feminine style.