compliments, and then when they are not forthcoming, flying into a rage. She is not content to dismiss the matter even after Jân 'Ālam says that the chattering of a bird should not be given much attention, and it is her insistence which really is responsible for Jân 'Ālam's coming to know of Anjuman Ārā's beauty and for his forsaking her and starting in search of Anjuman Ārā. Of course, her attitude towards the parrot is quite comprehensible and in keeping with the character of any ordinary woman. Such confidence as the parrot enjoyed, and the amount of time and attention that was given to it would have excited the jealousy of any wife; but she shows herself in rather an unfavourable light in comparison with Mehr Nigār and Anjuman Ārā, who are both above such feelings of narrowness.

The other "characters" in 'Fasāna e Ājāib' are very shadowy and indefinite, and make no impression of any sort on the reader's mind. The villain of the piece, the Wasīr zāda, is a singularly colourless "character". In fact, 'Fasāna e Ājāib' is an exact counterpart of 'Euphues' in English. 'Euphues' shows no advance in style or manner of dealing with the subject. Its "characters" are wooden, and have no life in them, yet it is regarded as an important landmark in the development of the English novel on the ground of its being the first original composition of its kind. The same applies to 'Fasāna e Ājāib'. It is the first attempt at original composition, and as such it shows in which way the taste of the public was developing.

PART II

CHAPTER IV

PANDIT RATN NĀTH SARSHĀR

"Fasāna e Āzād"

With 'Fasāna e Āzād' we come into the actual domain of the novel. The supernatural is left behind; the miraculous and the impossible are discarded; "characters" are no longer princes and kings of fictitious and imaginary countries, but men and women from all strata of Lucknow society. The setting is real— it is recognisable as the decadent nineteenth century society of Lucknow, and Sarshār paints this background with masterly strokes; it stands out bold and clear before us: its customs, manners, feasts and festivals—we see it all clearly. He takes us right into the midst of it all, and even behind the scenes. His canvas is very large: it includes everyone, from the prince to the peasant. Every type that goes to make society is to be found in Sarshār's story. The decadent Navābs, the insolent dancing girls, the hypocritical Sheikh, the hangers-on and loungers sponging on a decaying aristocracy, the fakirs and miracle-workers trading on the credulity of the superstitious, the petty bourgeois in their pedantic morality and colourless life, and the Begams in their luxurious homes and fastidious refinement.

It is as full of incidents as of "characters". All sorts of things take place, from the most improbable to the most trivial. Murders are committed, elopements planned, burglaries take place, there are rows in the streets and brawls in an inn, and there are the ordinary comings and goings of life, train journeys and visits from relations, weddings and engagements, "'Īd" and "Shab i Barāis" and such like.
The incidents are placed without sequence, with no eye for cause and effect, they are just there as a part of the variegated picture Sarshār is painting. They do not contribute towards an unravelling of the plot, they are just separate links in a chain of events, and that is what detracts from 'Fasāna e Āzād' s merit as a novel. Indeed it has made critics deny that it is a novel, for it certainly has no plot. Or it would be more correct to say that its thousand-and-one incidents and hundred-and-one "characters" have nothing to do with the plot, which is of the thinnest, namely, Āzād's falling in love with Husn Ārā, his going to Turkey to fight the Russians at her command, there meeting with numerous adventures, returning successful and being accepted by her. This plot is not affected at all by the incidents that are crowded into the story by Sarshār. They have no bearing on, and contribute nothing towards, the development of the story. If they were all taken out, the story would remain intact, but a very poor story it would be. It is the brightly-coloured, vividly-painted, masterly-drawn portrait of incidents and events that make 'Fasāna e Āzād' such delightful reading and such a treasure-trove of wit and humour, repartee and bons mots. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the plot of 'Fasāna e Āzād' is extremely poor and the events are very loosely knit and contribute nothing towards the dénouement.

The "characters" also do not develop consistently; they act and react in an unexpected manner. Incidents do not alter or affect them at all. There is no subtle delineation, no analysing of motives, no showing of the mainsprings of action. We see the "characters" moving, acting, talking; we know their looks and hear their conversation, but we do not know their thoughts and are not admitted into the realm of their feelings. We know about them and of them, but their real selves are never revealed to us. The main function of the novel is to lay bare the motives and show the why and wherefore of human actions. Sarshār does not do this, yet his "char-
the other three. "Lakhnaun kā Cēhand", "Lakhnaun kī Barīten", "Lakhnaun men Basant kī Bahār" are all described in the first volume. The main story also moves at a greater pace in this volume, than in the others. Āzād meets Ḥusn Ārā and is commissioned by her to go and fight for the Turks against the Russians. His acceptance of this task and his preparations for the journey all come into this volume.

Ḥumāyūn Far falls in love with the other sister, Sīpehr Ārā, and his attempts to reach her are also described. The first volume concerns itself more with the main "characters" than the others, and in it there are fewer extraneous incidents.

The second volume is the shortest of the four; it has only 442 pages. In it the story is carried a step further. Āzād arrives at Constantinople after a few adventures on the road. He is received very well by the Turkish officers, but, rather inexplicably, is thrown into jail. Later it transpires that it was due to the machinations of a young lady called Miss Mulța, who had fallen in love with Āzād and had been repulsed by him; she had revenged herself on him by declaring him to be a spy. He is, however, released on the charge having proved to be false, and is given the rank of an officer in the Turkish Army. There are several chapters dealing with the war, and of Āzād and Khoji's exploits.

These are interspersed with the chapters about Ḥusn Ārā, as it is contrary to convention that "the path of true love should run smooth". Ḥusn Ārā is made to face some opposition. Her grandmother referred to in the book as Barī Begam refuses to allow her to wait for Āzād's return, and when Ḥusn Ārā does not agree readily, she attempts to force her to marry. Ḥusn Ārā, however, falls ill at the decisive moment and thus avoids the issue.

The disappointed suitor tries, by spreading numerous rumours about Āzād, to poison Ḥusn Ārā's mind against him. But she remains steadfast in spite of them. Ḥumāyūn Far presses his suit for Sīpehr Ārā and his proposal is eventually accepted by Barī Begam. There are, of course, many intervening chapters dealing with the amours of Ḥumāyūn Far and Sīpehr Ārā.

The Bhayārī or Allā Rakkī of the first volume becomes a "jogan" in this, and the "character" referred to as Shāh Savār in the first volume is again introduced here. He is shown in many roles and his character is so abnormal, and his behaviour so eccentric, that it is impossible to form any conclusions about him. He is shown enamoured of the Jogan as well as being in love with Ḥusn Ārā and Sīpehr Ārā.

The third volume is of 1,148 pages. It is the longest of the four. It mainly deals with the adventures of Allā Rakkī alias Jogan alias Shabbo Jān, who now takes on the name of Surayā Begam and plays the role of a respectable lady and manages to get married to a Navāb. There are chapters after chapters about her. Her wedding is described at great length, and a whole host of new "characters" is introduced in the shape of Surayā Begam's new relations and friends and the guests at the wedding. The marriage of Sīpehr Ārā with Ḥumāyūn Far takes place in this volume. Ḥumāyūn Far is killed by an unknown enemy as the "barāt" reaches the bride's house. The unknown enemy turns out to be Shāh Savār. Shāh Savār is arrested but makes his escape. Sīpehr Ārā is plunged into grief, and there are several chapters describing the funeral and other rites in connection with it. A whole host of new "characters" is also brought on the scene in this connection.

The account of Āzād's adventures and of his love affairs and the story of Khoji's misadventures fill many chapters. The Princess of Poland falls in love with Āzād and he is again thrown into jail. This time he is rescued by the help of Mulța with whom he is by now on excellent terms. There is yet another young lady, called Clarissa, who has fallen a victim to Āzād's charms.

By far the largest part of the book, however, deals with
the affairs of Suraj Begam. It is most confusing, and utterly irrelevant to the story of Husn Arā and Azād or Sipēhr Arā and Humāyūn Far.

The fourth volume opens with the news of Azād's having started for India. Of course, being Azād, he meets with numerous adventures on his way, and several beauties lose their hearts to him, and he also stops and dallies with them. Sipēhr Arā is married to Humāyūn Far's brother, but at the time of the wedding she thinks it is Humāyūn Far who has been resurrected through the miraculous powers of a dervish. There are several chapters gradually building up the belief in the dervish by recounting his powers, and finally a most elaborate description of the resurrection itself. Later, as a concession to realism, Sarshār explains away the whole thing as an elaborate plan for getting Sipēhr Arā agreeable to remarriage. Had she realised it was not Humāyūn Far, probably she would not have agreed. Once married, Sipēhr Arā realises that it is not Humāyūn Far risen from the dead, but a lost brother of his who has married her. This becomes generally known through the Government inquiries in connection with the property of Humāyūn Far.

Clarissa and Mīda both come with Azād to India. Mīda declines to marry Azād as he had pledged his word to Husn Arā first. Husn Arā, on her part, tries to persuade Mīda against it. Many chapters deal with this.

At last this unwieldy story is brought to a close in the accepted way. Azād and Husn Arā marry, and we are told lived happily ever after. Azād was the recipient of many honours and performed many further creditable deeds. The Misses Mīda and Clarissa devoted their lives to education and social work. Husn Arā also did much in that line, and we leave them leading useful and happy lives.

'Fasāna e Azād' is a novel of action, and in these the stress is always on action; 'character' is only by the way and is always presented objectively. But even for a novel of action the characterisation of 'Fasāna e Azād' is very poor. Azād, the hero, is described as gallant and brave, debonair and attractive, a great linguist, a fine soldier; in short, an embodiment of all manly virtues. But all this we are told by the author; it is not the information we ourselves gather of Azād's character from seeing him in action. The impression he creates is that of an adventurer, a man-about-town, as of one who lives by his wits, not of a gallant and cultured gentleman. In the same way, Sarshār has not been able to present Husn Arā and Sipēhr Arā in the light he had intended to. He wanted them to appear as extremely decorous, modest, cultured and refined young ladies. But from their actions they appear as extremely forward and bold. They seem to have an independence and freedom of action which is surprising, and not at all likely to have been enjoyed by girls of good family in 1880. Their conversation and idioms are also not those of Pārādāh ladies. In fact, it is generally said about Sarshār that he made ladies of good family talk like 'Tavāafs'.

Sarshār's characterisation has another defect as well. His 'characters' are absolutely static. They do not change or develop at all. Azād, Husn Arā, Sipēhr Arā, Humāyūn Far, appear as finished products and remain as such throughout. They remain entirely unaltered by their experiences and their environment has no effect on them. The story is spread over a number of years, but Husn Arā and Sipēhr Arā talk and behave at the end of it just in the same way as on their first appearance in the book. Neither their attitude, nor their point of view, has changed, and yet they have undergone so much.

The 'character' of Khoi, however, is a remarkable achievement. He is amongst the immortal 'characters' of fiction. Small, insignificant, boastful, conceited, addicted to taking opium is Khoi. He falls in love as many times as his master Azād, and always gets into trouble in consequence. But his ardour is in no way abated, nor does his good opinion
about himself suffer. He thinks he is the handsomest and bravest of men. One always hears him saying

नेप होती अस वक़्त नोरल, और नाल न वहरनी होती।

but unfortunately the "garaud" never is handy and we never get the opportunity of having a proof of his valour. He tries to deceive not only others but himself also, and his self-deception is marvellous. He never realises that it is ridiculous that he is exciting wherever he goes, but persists in thinking that the crowd gathers round to admire him.

Khojii has been declared by Saxena a unique character in the whole range of Urdu literature and the most original and wonderful creation of the humorist's art.

Shah Savar is another fantastic creation of Sarshar's. He can hardly be called sane or human. He seems to be the type whose effigies one finds in Madam Tussaud's 'Chamber of Horrors'. He has numerous murders to his account, and attempts to kill Azad and does kill Humayun Far. The reason given for murdering Humayun Far and attempting to murder Azad is his love for Husn Aran and Siyehr Aran, but in reality they are the acts of a madman.

It is not in the subtlety of his characterisation or the excellence of his plot construction that the greatness of Sarshar lies. His "characters" are poor and his plot is almost non-existent, but in spite of it there is a vigour, a life in 'Fasana e Azad' which made it one of the most popular works of its time and which still makes it such an enjoyable reading. There is a spirit of bonhomie in 'Fasana e Azad'; it somehow conveys the fact that life is supremely livable and enjoyable, and in the reading of it one gets swept away by its rush of events.

Sarshar wrote several other novels besides 'Fasana e Azad'. They were none of them as unwieldily voluminous as 'Fasana e Azad', nor did they possess that charm of spirit of good fellowship that radiates from it.

'Kamin' is the only novel of Sarshar which deals with the fortunes of a Hindu family; in 'Fasana e Azad' itself, and in 'Sair i Kohsar', 'Bichri Dulhan' and 'Hushshah', the chief "characters" are from Mohammedan families. 'Kamin' is not distinctive in any way. Of course for years nothing better than it could be found in Urdu and, considering that, it is a creditable achievement. Kamin is the daughter of a rich Rajput family. She grows up to be a remarkably accomplished and beautiful girl. She is engaged for a while to a worthless sort of fellow, but this is broken off and she is engaged to Rangbhar Singh, who is as handsome and as accomplished as she, and through the offices of her and his friends they manage to see each other's photographs and fall in love. Efforts are made to break the engagement by various people but it fails and Kamin and Rangbhar Singh are married.

Soon after, Rangbhar Singh is called to join his regiment and ordered to the front. News comes that he has been killed. Kamin is naturally grieved. She becomes a "jogan" and lives in a hut in the outskirts of the town, helping young mothers, and doing other charitable work.

Her far-famed beauty once or twice gets her into trouble, but she comes out unscathed. Unexpectedly, Rangbhar Singh returns and all is well once again.

There are passages in 'Kamin' which recall the Sarshar of 'Fasana e Azad'. The talk between Kamin and her sisters and sisters-in-law is in the style of the talk between Husn Aran and Siyehr Aran, Bahrun Nisab and Ruh Azad. But the greatness of 'Fasana e Azad' lay in the truthful picture it painted of the life of every stratum of Lucknow society. No such thing is achieved by 'Kamin', and characterisation or construction of plot was not Sarshar's forte, and in consequence there is not any distinctive quality about 'Kamin', and the same can be said of all the other novels of Sarshar. They are lit up every now and then by witty, humorous dialogues, but have not that particular charm of 'Fasana e Azad'.
Note.—‘Fasna e Azad’ chronologically appears later than ‘Mirat ul ‘Arus’. The date of publication of ‘Mirat ul ‘Arus’ is 1869. ‘Fasna e Azad’ was not completed till 1880, but ‘Fasna e Azad’ was recognised as a novel very much earlier than ‘Mirat ul ‘Arus’. ‘Mirat ul ‘Arus’ continued to be called a suitable text-book for girls for years, and only recently has been accepted as a novel. Besides which in style and spirit, ‘Fasna e Azad’ is nearer the romances than ‘Mirat ul ‘Arus’, and, therefore, though chronologically it should come after ‘Mirat ul ‘Arus’ in the history of the development of the novel, it must be treated as a work of transition bridging the gulf between the true novel and the romance.

CHAPTER V

NAZIR AHMAD

Amongst Nazir Ahmad’s works we find the best novels written in the Urdu language. He has had a host of imitators, but none have equaled, much less excelled, him. His ‘Mirat ul ‘Arus’ is the first real novel in Urdu, and still the best. ‘Fasna e Azad’s’ plot is too loosely knitted, a number of its “characters” are rather unusual, and most of its incidents border on the impossible, and these factors detract from its right to be considered a perfect novel. ‘Fasna e Azad’ is an improvement, a transition, a bridge between the absolute romance and the realistic novel. With ‘Mirat ul ‘Arus’, achievement is reached. The trammels of the supernatural have been shaken off once and for all. Recourse is no longer made to impossible or improbable incidents for the sake of enhancing interest and holding the reader’s attention, yet it more than succeeds in doing both. Members of both sexes and of all ages have found it delightful and its popularity remains unabated with each succeeding generation.

Nazir Ahmad established the fact successfully that ordinary events in the life of ordinary people succeed in getting a deeper response than extraordinary events in the lives of superhumans. Nazir Ahmad’s canvas is not large, he does not attempt to portray “grande passion” of any description, neither intense love, nor intense hate, no soul-scorching jealousy or gnawing ambition devours his “characters”. They are none of them villains of the deepest dye, nor are any of them complicated, difficult or obscure “characters”, motives for whose actions lie in their sub-conscious inhibitions and repressions. They are ordinary normal men and women with the very ordinary emotions the human heart is subject to.

That his field is limited and he only portrayed domestic life of the middle and the upper middle class Muslim families, and did not try to attempt anything bigger, does not take away