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GHAALIB

LIFE AND LETTERS

❁ GHALIB ❁

1797-1869

VOLUME I: LIFE AND LETTERS

translated and edited by
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and
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❀ Introduction ❀

The modern literatures of the Indian sub-continent are comparatively young, and though there are in many of them figures who have for two centuries and more been recognized within their own language-communities as great writers, few of them have yet become widely known outside them even as names. The few that have are generally those who are so enthusiastically admired by the people in whose language they wrote that this very enthusiasm arouses the curiosity of others. In Urdu there have been two such writers—Iqbal and Ghalib. Their fascination for Urdu speakers is amply attested by the fact that these two—and, as yet, these two alone—have in the last few decades each become the subject of a whole literature of research, criticism and appreciation, and both have inspired attempts by Urdu speakers to win for them a wider audience through translations and studies in English. Iqbal's fortunes have prospered beyond this point, and there now exists a number of studies and translations in English, aimed at, and likely to appeal to, a world audience, and affording access to anyone who can read English to a widely representative range of his work; and translation and studies are also available in other European languages. This has not yet happened with Ghalib. Studies and translations in English of varying merit do indeed exist, but these are either not aimed at, or are not for one reason or another likely to appeal widely to, an audience outside the sub-continent. We hope that the present work may do so. We have for many years believed that if once the barrier of language could be satisfactorily surmounted and Ghalib's prose and verse made available to a world audience, his work would win him a place in world literature which historical circumstance has hitherto denied him; and it is this belief which has inspired us to undertake the present work.

Its plan, stated in general terms, is to present in translation a representative selection of his prose and verse set against a portrait of the man and his age. The present volume, devoted to Ghalib's life and letters, is the first of two. In a second volume we shall attempt the far more difficult task of presenting his poetry. To speak in more detail, we have attempted wherever possible in the volume now before the reader to let the story of Ghalib's life emerge from his own words; but this can become the predominant method only from the early eighteen-fifties, when the steady flow of Urdu letters which was to last nearly twenty years begins. For the earlier years we have drawn mainly upon the *Memoir of Ghalib* written by Ghalib's friend and younger contemporary Hali—a book which is in its own right a classic of Urdu literature. But this could not