

Voltaire for children or teenagers

Lahore, Jan. 8, 2002
By Ashfaque Naqvi

KAZY Javed, the local director of the Pakistan Academy of Letters and a former research scholar in philosophy at the Punjab University, is a prolific writer. He has written more than 30 books some of which have run into many editions. The titles of some of his books would give an idea of the subjects he chose to write upon — Bertrand Russell, his life and thought, the Theatre of the Absurd, 20th Century Philosophers. He has written a series of books after carrying out research on the mental and cultural history of the Muslims in South Asia. Additionally, he has translated many books from English into Urdu.

The latest book by Kazy Javed is about Voltaire. It has been published by Mashal, the non-commercial organization devoted to publishing books on social, cultural and developmental themes of modern relevance.

Going through the book, I find that the author has tried to give all possible information, though basic, about Voltaire in just about 100 pages, and that, too, in easy language. Voltaire, as we

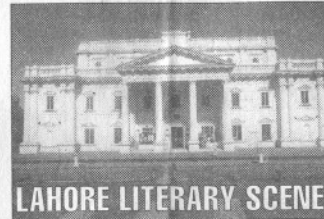
all know, is the pseudonym of Francois Marie Arouet (1694-1778), author of plays, poetry and histories. But he is better known for being an outspoken critic of the civil and ecclesiastical establishments. He selected a rather meaningless name, at the age of 24, probably to distance himself from his rich family background.

After dwelling upon his childhood, Kazy Javed goes to write about his first love, his landing in prison not once but twice for his outspoken criticism of the prevailing system, his days in exile in London and his last days. But I really do not know why he has given me this book to read. From its language and contents it appears he has conceived it keeping in view those who do not know anything about Voltaire. In plain words, I may say it is meant for the reading of children, or at best, adolescents. Perhaps Kazy Sahib thinks that a person close to 80 is as good as a child.

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SOME years ago when a well known retired general who claimed to have started writing

poetry at the age of forty, came up with his first collection an equally well known journalist said, "You cannot be a poet at forty." He was correct as the poetry in that book was not worth the paper on which it was printed. But now I see the



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maiden poetic collection of a former journalist who is past his sixtieth year but cannot say the same about his venture.

Ejaz Naqvi, or Ejazun Nabi Naqvi, now assuming the name Ejaz Tahiri, served the late *Pakistan Times* for umpteen years and been close to me. During all those years I never heard him recite, or even quote, a single line of Urdu poetry. He has a master's degree in English, but never did he talk about English poetry either. And now he stuns me with a collection of

his Urdu poetry under the title, *Kaghaz ka Tukra*. I repeat that he has stunned me as I find his verses of quite some standard. In particular he seems to be impressed by Faiz.

The book carries complimentary comments on Ijaz Tahiri's verse by such stalwarts as the late Meerza Adeb, Munnoo Bhai and the veteran, Syed Amjad Husain.

The title of the book has been taken from one of his quatrains in which he modestly refers to himself as a piece of wastepaper, of no use to anyone.

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THE year 2001 was declared the year of the Quaid. Various functions were held in this connection, including many in educational institutions. It is, therefore, a pleasure to see a recent publication of the Government Islamia College for Women, Cooper Road, covering its activities during the year. The issue has been well-produced by Nasra Farooq and Zarreen Bukhari, both associate professors at the college.

The college is proud of the fact that the Quaid paid a visit

there and addressed the students in March, 1940. The college now has a regular Quaid-i-Azam Club with sections pertaining to English, Urdu, philosophy, economics and other subjects. It organizes declamation and quiz competitions, some at the inter-collegiate level, in addition to holding seminars and mushairas. I am glad that the girl students are not lagging behind in extra-curricular activities. These are an essential part of education and widen one's mental horizon.

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IDO not know how, but some Isnaag creeps into my regular column quite often. This time I refer to the column appearing last week (March 2).

What I had written about Josh Malihabadi's article appearing in the weekly *Musawwar* of Bombay was something like this: One who has the fear of God in him *cannot* become a poet. It was because of this that many eyebrows were raised. Unfortunately, what appeared in cold print was quite the opposite of what I had written.