MAHMOOD HASHMI

The Story of *Mashriq*

It was the middle 50s—1955–56—when Britain was busy rebuilding as quickly as possible the cities and factories that had been destroyed in the war. Britain was in urgent need of manpower. Its doors were open, and hardy, hardworking villagers from Mirpur and Panjab were arriving in droves.

These were the days when the star of illiterate laborers was in the ascendant in Britain. One or two educated people were arriving too, but in comparison with the illiterate laborers their achievement was not at all impressive. Most of them considered it an insult to them and to their university degrees to be offered work in a factory, and the British were not prepared to attach the importance to their degrees that they thought they deserved. True, some of them came to terms with this situation; they forgot about their B.A.s and M.A.s and began to work side by side with their fellow countrymen, some of them as conductors, some of them as porters on the railway, some of them as postmen—and a few fortunate people like me as school teachers.

The British took a real liking to those Pakistanis and Indians who

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Mahmood Hashmi was in the '40s quite a well-known name on the literary scene, whose short stories and articles of literary criticism appeared in such reputable journals as *Ṣāqī* and *Adabī Dunyā.* He comes from a village in Azad Kashmir and at the time of independence and partition wrote a book of reportage, *Kashmīr Udās Hai*, which was very popular in Pakistan. Extracts from it continue to feature in prescribed reading for courses of the Open University, Islamabad, and it has recently been reprinted. He emigrated to England in 1953 and it has been his permanent home ever since. His long-continued concentration on journalism, recounted in this extract from an as yet unpublished volume of reminiscences, for many years left him no room for writing in the fields in which he had made his name. —*R.R.*

couldn't say anything beyond "yes," "no," "okay," and "thank you," and who, when any white manager or foreman spoke to them in English would gesture with both hands and with a very innocent smile would say "Me no Hindustan," that is, "me no understand," that is, "I don't understand," that is, "I don't understand English." The factory foremen and managers felt really fond of these simple, harmless, hardworking creatures who simply minded their own business. By contrast, when they were suddenly confronted with a brown face speaking the King's English, without any grammatical mistakes, and in a very classical style, they would stare in amazement. "Who is this," they would think, "who comes to our country and talks to us as though he were just like one of us?" When they heard such a person speaking English—correct English, but in an unfamiliar accent—it seemed to them that they were listening to a new language, and they would refuse to understand it. Besides, it seemed as though the meanings of quite a few English words had changed and the English that they had learned with such effort in their own country was at its last gasp. Here "dinner" didn't mean the evening meal but the midday meal. If you met somebody after dark and greeted him at first meeting with "Goodnight," people made fun of you. "Evening" went on until midnight and didn't end until you said goodnight as you parted company. Those English idioms and proverbs which you had learnt with such labor in the Englishman's India were for the most part unfamiliar in England even to educated people. The style of conversation in which you used English idioms and proverbs was regarded as a relic of the Victorian age. Those days were gone when elderly people could assert "proper English is what *I* speak." What elderly people said was no longer of any importance, so it was no good supporting what you said by reference to the English of former days. You must talk the way people do *now.*

The education which they had received at the hands of their English rulers failed in the first examination it was subjected to on arrival in England, and their compatriots who had come to England untouched by education triumphed over the educated. Their feeling of inferiority was disappearing. They were beginning to acquire self-confidence and their latent capacities were emerging. In Britain a new world was coming into being. Here in the West a new enclave of the East was coming into existence. And in this new enclave, on the seventh of April, 1961, the first regular Urdu weekly paper to appear in Britain, or indeed anywhere in the West—*Mashriq*—was launched.

When *Mashriq* was getting started I had to undergo all the experiences which were bound to confront the editor of a paper whose readers,

thousands of miles from their homelands, were eager to hear every latest item of news from home. Most of them were people who before the appearance of *Mashriq* had never heard of any such thing as a newspaper. They came from those far-flung villages in their homeland where, if from time to time a letter came from some youngster who had emigrated, it was regarded as the common property of the whole village. At the end of such letters you would usually find the sentence, "Give my regards to all who read this or have it read to them," and this confirmed them in their view that this was a letter for everyone in the village, old men and young, men and women alike. They would all get the letter read by some literate villager and would listen to it as though the letter had been written individually to every single person in the village; and everything in it would make them feel as though this letter were written just for them.

In those days this was the state of mind of most of the new arrivals in Britain. They would work day and night in the factories here and then on Sunday would gather at the house of anyone who had received a letter from his village. They would all listen to the letter—repeatedly—and then would spend their day off commenting on everything in it.

When *Mashriq* appeared it was greeted eagerly, as though it too had come to them from their homeland, and it often happened that they would compare the paper with the letters which they received from home. This comparison was sometimes quite unfavorable. For example, if one of our readers had received a letter from home giving him news of the transfer of his local *taḥṣīldār* (local official) or *paṭvārī* (keeper of land records) or of the tour of some official, and this had not been mentioned in *Mashriq*, then he would phone us up and rebuke us, and read us a lecture about how it was necessary for people who brought out newspapers to keep abreast of the news. On one occasion we asked a grocer to put an advertisement in *Mashriq*. (In those days even in a big city like Birmingham there were only a handful of Asian grocers.) He enthusiastically agreed, and when we suggested to him that if he repeated this advertisement every week it would be a good idea, he was very pleased and said, "You know best. Do as you think best." But when after four or five issues carrying the same advertisement we asked him to pay for it, he was very annoyed. He told us "That's a fine thing, Sahib! I thought that was what newspapers were for. I thought the whole idea was to give this kind of information. I didn't know that you've come to this country like all the others and are simply concerned with earning money." There were other readers too who were unfavorably impressed. We had a phone call from one indignant reader who said, "If you want to bring out a newspaper you

should bring it out properly. What's all this that for several weeks past you've given the same news about a grocer again and again?"

In these early days we often received some extremely interesting letters. On one occasion one gentleman wrote, "I have read the story 'What is Your Destination?' in *Mashriq.* What the writer said about that girl Naseema affected me very much. I would like to help that girl. Please send me her address by return post. I am enclosing a self-addressed envelope." When *Mashriq* came out the poets had a field day. It seemed as though all the "local" poets from Pakistan and India were now gracing Britain with their presence. Many of them began to send their ghazals and their poems. One gentleman turned up at the office bearing with him a volume of his collected poetry written out in his own hand and invited us to print any selection we pleased. None of his verse had as yet been published, and as a favor to *Mashriq* he put forward the idea that he should offer poems every week, and if we published these with the heading "Specially Written for *Mashriq*" or "Sent at the Request of the Editor of *Mashriq*," he would have no objection. On one occasion he sent a ghazal which included a couplet which made us surrender immediately. The couplet was:

> They are false lovers who weep and sigh at night
> I spend the nights of separation from my love reading *Mashriq*

There were some readers of *Mashriq*—granted, not very many—who were absolutely illiterate. They would buy the paper and get somebody else to read it out to them, after which they would engage with great confidence in an exchange of ideas with their educated compatriots about politics and current affairs. Some of them became so accustomed to reading the paper that when after a year or two they would return to spend some time in their village they would make arrangements for *Mashriq* to be sent to them regularly while they were there. And there was no lack of readers who had read the Holy Qur'an in the village mosque and used their knowledge of the Arabic script to read the Urdu of *Mashriq*. It didn't bother them if they couldn't read every word written in it or understand what they had read. It was enough for them to feel that this was their paper and that since it had come into existence they were no longer "illiterate" or "uneducated." In the icy mornings on the bus journey to their factory or during tea-break or dinner-break in the factory when their English mates were looking at their papers and studying the football pools, they too would take *Mashriq* out of their pocket and

become engrossed in reading it. This was their own paper, the expression of their own language and their own culture. Before *Mashriq* was launched they would sit at such times not knowing what to do or talking to each other in their own language, and their English mates would regard them as backward, illiterate people. Some of them would look upon them with contempt. Others would feel some sympathy for them, pleased with themselves for showing the compassion which God-fearing people should. Some of them did not think them fit to be regarded as human beings. But now, when they saw *Mashriq* in their hands, they began to feel that these black and dark brown creatures too were human beings, people who like them had a language of their own and a language sufficiently developed to produce newspapers, and if these people did not know English then this was absolutely no justification for regarding them simply as animals who after a little practice could be harnessed to a machine to do physical labor. Now quite a number of them began to feel quite impressed. If these people didn't know English, well, the English too didn't know *their* language, so what of it? In *Mashriq* they acquired an identity and a sense of self respect which up until that time in this strange country had been totally lacking. *Mashriq* was the paper of illiterate people, of illiterate laborers, but these illiterates were often people who were better men than the so-called educated. They came to this new country, and when they encountered favorable conditions and opportunities to improve their life then their latent capacities became evident, and once having learnt the secret of confidence in themselves their personality began to develop in a new form. The ways of self-awareness broke through the thick layers of ignorance, and that ignorance and lack of knowledge which had made them slaves for generation after generation began to lift. There were degrees from universities in India and Pakistan which proved to be worth less than this.

Before we brought out the paper we had not realized that here too there would be "leaders" among us. Once we had brought out the paper we learnt that wherever there is a newspaper leaders will appear, and that every leader will want to have his name and picture printed in the newspaper. After we had printed one or two pictures we began to learn that it seemed that in every household of Pakistanis and Azad Kashmiris that had settled in Britain some political or social organization existed. Every week we would find that we would receive statements expressing the opinions of some president, general secretary or other office-bearer in some organization about some news item we had printed. We took a decision that we would print these letters only in the column of readers'

letters. The result was that our letter pages increased in numbers from one to two and from two to three, and now we had to make it clear to these gentlemen that it was not necessary that every leader should every week express his reaction to some important news item, and that it would be better if they engaged in some practical activity and sent us a report of it. After that it suddenly seemed that from every part of the country news began to pour in of meetings—meetings about the Kashmir problem, meetings to raise subscriptions to build a mosque or to enclose the village cemetery within four walls, or to put up a building for a girls' school. And along with every news item of this kind we would receive a passport-size photo for publication.

As the paper became more and more popular the numbers of our organizations and associations in Britain began to increase and their scope began to extend. There were even meetings to arrange for demonstrations—a demonstration outside the Indian High Commission about the Kashmir question, demonstrations in front of the Pakistan High Commission about the extension of passports, protests against the policy of the High Commission, demonstrations outside Marlborough House on the occasion of the annual Commonwealth Conference. Reports of these meetings and of meetings of delegations of different organizations and associations with the Pakistan High Commissioner became more and more numerous.

We reached a point where the pages of *Mashriq* proved to be inadequate to cover all these things, and in spite of our financial problems we had to increase the number of pages. In those days it sometimes happened that some leader would arrive at the *Mashriq* office and ask us to take down his speech, and when we excused ourselves and explained that this was not our job and that our staff was not really sufficient even to do what *was* our job, and that we were extremely busy, then these gentlemen would become cross and would say, "A fine thing! You've brought out a newspaper and you can't even give this service for the public."

The launching of *Mashriq* was an extremely important event in the lives of Azad Kashmiris and Pakistanis here in Britain. They needed *Mashriq*, and to meet this need in a way which met their wishes, and in spite of that to avoid making it a medium for adult education, and to make it acceptable to well-educated people too—all this was the responsibility of the editor. And this responsibility became somewhat heavier because educated people had now begun to arrive in Britain. In 1963 a law was passed restricting the entry of immigrants. Before that all you had needed to come here was a passport. Now in order to come you had first

to get an entry certificate or a visa from the British government and this entry certificate was easier for the B.A.s and M.A.s to try their hand at getting than it was for the villagers of Mirpur and Panjab.

And now came the time when not only were educated immigrants coming, but people began to send for their wives and children, and these wives and children began to arrive to join their husbands who had already come here from the villages of Azad Kashmir. These newcomers began to appear upon the British scene, and we had to add to *Mashriq* a women's page and an education page. The women's page was written at different times by Rafat Iqbal (after her marriage, Rafat Mahbub) and the well-known short story writer Mohsina Jilani who had come to London with her journalist husband Asaf Jilani.[1] *Mashriq*, which up until that time had had 16 pages, now grew by degrees to 20, 24, 28, and eventually 40 pages. The first Pakistani to be made Justice of the Peace in Britain was Muhammad Sabir, and on that occasion we printed his picture to cover the whole title-page. He had been a clerk in some railway office in Lahore before he came here and within a few years had been made Justice of the Peace in Manchester. Similarly in a Birmingham school Najma Hafiz was made "top girl" and we made this too our title-page story. After a year or two Muhammad Aslam, who had come here from Jatila Mirpur, qualified as a chartered accountant and became the second Asian Justice of the Peace in Britain, and we gave great prominence to this news as well.

Quite soon the developments which led to Asians becoming Justices of the Peace and the award of various honors to Asian school children gathered such pace that news items of this kind lost their former importance. Now we began to print them on the page devoted to local news under the heading "Where We Are." Gradually we had to increase the number of pages devoted to local news.

In the *Mashriq* of those days we carried another title-page story about Samiuddin Sami. This man was the first Asian to be made Town Clerk, that is, the senior official of a whole city. Sami before 1947 had been a messenger in an electric power house in Sabzi Mandi in Delhi. After his father died he had not been able to continue his education beyond class four. When Pakistan was formed he came to Karachi and got a job as a

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[1]Asaf Jilani had come to London as the representative of the daily *Jaṅg*. A few years later when the London edition of *Jaṅg* came out and its first editor Inam Aziz left *Jaṅg* to bring out the daily *Millat* from London, Asaf Jilani became editor of *Jaṅg*. These days he is in the Urdu service of the BBC.

messenger in the Central Government Secretariat. One day his superior officer saw that he was sitting there with an English primer in his hand and was writing out the ABC in an exercise book. He encouraged him and Sami went on to "middle" (about the level reached by a 14-year-old in a British school) and was then admitted to the night shift in a Karachi school and passed his matric. In due course he got his B.A. and came to England. After he came here he became a barrister and began to write articles in *The Times* on legal problems. At this time he got a job as assistant solicitor in Watford Council. Then he became solicitor there and very soon afterwards became assistant Town Clerk in a small Yorkshire town. Then he became a Town Clerk in Wales. (These days a Town Clerk is called a Chief Executive.) At this time he got married. He had advertised for a wife in a Pakistani newspaper saying that he wished to marry a girl who was poor and who wanted to acquire higher education. As a result he got his wife Maimuna, whose father was a head constable in the Pakistani police but, who because he did not take bribes, had not been able to realize his daughter's aspirations for higher education. After her marriage to Sami, Maimuna passed an examination in some university in Austria and qualified as Master of Medicine. The last time I met Sami in London he was very happy. He missed his home country and wanted to return to Karachi with his wife. I don't know what happened to him after that and what befell him in Karachi, that city of turmoil and tempest. I do not know where he is or how he is these days.

In 1965 war broke out between India and Pakistan. It so happened that Khwaja Abdur Rahim and Justice Sardar Muhammad Iqbal were in London. Khwaja Abdur Rahim was a Kashmiri from Amritsar, and in the days of 1947–48 had been commissioner in Rawalpindi. In those earliest years of the movement for independence for Azad Kashmir he had been especially close to the movement. Justice Sardar Iqbal comes from Poonch and for that reason everything which has anything to do directly or indirectly with Kashmir moves him very deeply. Both of them were fervent well-wishers of *Mashriq* and frequently came to the *Mashriq* office. When war broke out both of them would come to the *Mashriq* office early in the morning and would take on all the telephone callers from throughout the length and breadth of Britain, and people who would sometimes come to the *Mashriq* office. The success which *Mashriq* enjoyed in those days of the war owes a great deal to these two. If it had not been for them our limited staff would probably not have been able to cope with the situation which the war had produced.

The war had stirred the Pakistanis and Azad Kashmiris throughout

Britain so much that it was as though they were themselves fighting in the war and that one of the war fronts was the *Mashriq* office. By the time the war was over we had established such a bond with our readers that we now had to give prominence not only to our journalistic role but to a social role as well and to take a full part in all those activities of our readers which we had in a sense stimulated. Through *Mashriq* we raised substantial sums to help the Muslims of Palestine and Cyprus. Then when it was planned to build a big mosque in Birmingham we raised something like £4,500 in contributions. In those days this was reckoned to be quite a large sum. In those same early years in *Mashriq* the movement for religious education which is now the norm in British Muslims' life began.

At that time we obtained the services of two poets, Sadaqat Husain Soz and Betab Suri. At different times both of them would write every week a *rubā'ī* (quatrain) for *Mashriq* in which they would comment on some recent event affecting the lives of Asians settled in Britain. We would publish these prominently in a box. Besides these *rubā'īs,* poems by both of them would be published from time to time and our readers greatly appreciated them. On one occasion it so happened that our calligrapher made a mistake and instead of writing "Sadaqat Husain Soz" he inadvertently wrote "Suz." When he noticed this, Soz Sahib phoned us and drew our attention to the mistake. When we explained to him that this was a mistake which our calligrapher had made, he said, "Well sir, if your calligrapher was going to make a mistake like that then while he was about it he might as well have left out the dot above the last letter. That would at any rate have made a meaningful Panjabi word." (In that case his pen name would have become "Sur," and "sur" is the Panjabi for "pig.") We laughed a lot over this. Sadaqat Husain Soz later went off to Brazil and now writes a regular Brazil Letter for the daily *Jaṅg.*

Betab Suri is now Barrister Betab Suri. I can remember an incident about him too. We had printed in *Mashriq* a long poem of his called "A Night in London." This offended one of our readers. The poem had spoken of a dancer in a London club and the poet had described her from head to foot and in one couplet of the poem had compared her with a houri. Our reader objected to this, saying that to compare any English dancer with a houri was un-Islamic and blasphemous. I mentioned this to Betab Suri, whereupon the very next day he wrote and sent us another long poem which he addressed to his readers and told them, "Gentlemen, you had no occasion to be offended; the dancer whom the poet had described in his poem was an Arab houri, not an English woman."

Another poet whose verse used to be published in *Mashriq* in those

days was Ustad Batangi. His name was Banaras Khan and his pen name was Batangi. The writer Haji Laq Laq, who used to write in the newspaper *Zamīndār* half a century ago, would come to mind as I read his verse. Ustad Batangi had come to Nottingham from a village near Rawalpindi. For some time he followed in the footsteps of those ambitious graduates from India and Pakistan who had newly arrived and were working as conductors or drivers on the buses. Then he began to bring out a monthly called *Āfāq*. He and *Āfāq* later transferred themselves from Nottingham to London, and he had not been in London long before he died young. If he had lived he would certainly have made a name for himself as a writer of humorous and satirical verse. There is a couplet of his which many people in those days used to recite as expressing their own position:

> Here in a London mill I carry sacks
> And spend my weekly earnings on white girls

But the days when graduate Asians had to earn their living by carrying sacks in mills or working as conductors on the buses were very quickly coming to an end. Najma Hafiz, who had become "top girl" in her school, after some years got her B.A. and became a Birmingham City councilor. Anbar Lone (ancestral village: Mal, Mora Kanyal, Mirpur) who was born in Birmingham, before our very eyes became an English short story writer and poet. While she was still in her last years at school three of her booklets were published.[2] In Watford Nasrin Aziz, who had come here from my village Potha Bangash, was educated in schools in Watford, then got her Ll.B from Leeds University, and then became legal adviser to the Manchester Council. The parents of her husband Muhammad Ajaib had come to England from Chak Deharan, a village near Potha Bangash, bringing Ajaib with them when he was only a child. He has now done his B.Sc. in electronics from Imperial College, London University and is working in the research department of a firm, for which he spends a part of his year in America where his firm has a branch. It was from Potha Bangash that Muhammad Sadiq came here. He worked in a factory, and then opened a grocery and *ḥalāl* meat shop and made a lot of money. He became a shareholder in the Chenar Matches Factory in Mirpur. He was also for some time a director of *Mashriq*. Then one day it was suddenly revealed to him that his son Salam, who used to help him slaughter

[2]*My Two Motherlands, If All the Trees Were Pens,* and *Hold Your Head High.*

chickens after he came home from school, had become such a talented boy that he was now going to Sheffield University. He got his B.Sc. in maths from Sheffield and is now earning such a handsome salary in the production department of a firm here that his father has begun to regard his income from his grocery store as being much less profitable. In the same way Peterborough's Muhammad Sultan (ancestral village: Potha Bensi, Mirpur) was educated in the schools here and qualified as a doctor. Three brothers from Nottingham—Javed Khaliq, Parvez Khaliq and Abrar Khaliq (ancestral village: Liddar, District Mirpur)—are all doctors, doctors who were brought up here, grew up here, studied here, and earned their degrees here. One of their sisters is a dental surgeon and two others have done their M.A.s in English literature. One of them writes poetry in English too. Maqsud Elahi Shaikh, who after sixteen or seventeen years was to bring out the weekly *Rāvī* from Bradford, came here from Gujrat with his young children. One of his sons Mahmud Elahi Shaikh has done his M.Sc. in chemistry from Manchester University. His second son Mashkur Elahi Shaikh is a doctor and a squadron leader in the Royal Air Force. In much the same way the well-known journalist Sultan Mahmud came with his two young children from Lahore to live in Birmingham. They grew up, and Vasim Mahmud became a producer for the BBC, and the younger son Mazhar Mahmud became a reporter for the world famous newspaper *The Times*.

The majority of those who came here from Pakistan and Azad Kashmir when they were little or were born here are now at university, and after completing their university course are working in good positions in different departments, positions which their parents could never have dreamed of. These students from India and Pakistan seem very different from those whom I had seen in Leeds University in 1955. They had been beset by worries not only about gaining an education but also finding some remedy for the deprivation and sexual frustration of which they had been victims in their own country. In the words of one of them, they had to realize the arrears due to them from their youth and, in the words of Nun Mim Rashid, "to take their revenge for the helplessness of their fellow countrymen." Now in British universities one sees not only the confident relaxed faces of our new generation but such distinguished personalities as the Nobel Prize-winner Professor Abdus Salam in London University's Imperial College and Dr. Saeed Durrani in the University of Birmingham. Dr. Saeed Durrani has the distinction of being one of those few scientists in the world who has been entrusted with the task of analyzing soil brought from the moon. Dr. Durrani is a poet too and a frequent

participant in *mushā'iras.* A book of his, *Iqbal in Europe*, has made him one of the experts in Iqbal studies also. Now in a number of different places there are lecturers from India, Pakistan and Azad Kashmir who grew up here and obtained their education here. One of these is Karamat Iqbal who came to Birmingham from the Mirpur village Khurda Sorakhi. He went to school here, did his M.A. in sociology from Birmingham University, and is now a senior lecturer in a college in Wolverhampton.

I was with *Mashriq* for eleven years and four months. When I launched it it was a challenge, probably much the same sort of challenge which the discoverers of new worlds experienced after crossing the oceans. Work on it was a sort of obsession. I felt as though I was waging a very great campaign. Along with a few friends I worked from seven in the morning until eleven or half past eleven at night and never took a break at the weekend; and yet I never felt tired.

We were all very happy. Ahsan Malik did the calligraphy and also attended to the layout. Every now and then he would make some addition to the headlines that I had written. When the Secretary General of the United Nations Hammarskjold was killed in an air accident Ahsan Sahib came very hesitantly to me and said "Would you mind if above your headline towards the right in small type I added 'A Tragedy?' " I never did mind.

Wali Sahib (his real name was Khan Wali of Mora Kanyal, Mirpur) used to run the printing machines and until such time as we were able to afford a mailing machine he used to stick the stamps on the envelopes mailed to our annual subscribers, whose numbers in the first two years had reached something like 1,500. In addition to my work as an editor I had many other tasks to do. One of them was addressing the envelopes. Wali Sahib was very particular to see that I shouldn't make any mistakes in writing the addresses. For example he looked particularly to see whether before the name of Choudhry Allah Ditta I had written "Qaid-e Andhral." Adding the words "Qaid-e Andhral" made the address inordinately long, but Wali Sahib would have been upset if we hadn't included these words and none of us wanted to upset him. And so "Qaid-e Andhral Mr. Choudhry Allah Ditta" was what we wrote. Which, written in English, took up a lot of room. Wali Sahib was also one of the Directors of *Mashriq*, and when we issued shares he was the first to bring his money to buy some. For this reason we used to call him Founder Director.

Rahman Sahib used to make the negatives of the photos and was responsible too for making the plates. He also used to lend a hand to Wali

Sahib in the printing. Besides the editorial page we used to print every page in two colors. On one occasion when the paper had been printed and was put before me I was astonished to find that right in the middle of the editorial words like "and," "or," and "also" had been printed in red. I sent for him and asked him why. He said very innocently, "You said yourself that if there are two colors on the page this will make the paper more attractive. The words in red were right in the middle of the page. I thought that this red word would look very attractive, like the red mark on a woman's forehead. So I made another plate and made it red." Well, the arrow had already been loosed from the bow, and in any case there was no time to reprint the page. So all I could do was to congratulate Rahman Sahib on his aesthetic sense. What else could I have done?

We had an English youngster, David Hardy, working in the printing press. We used to call him Daud instead of David: in fact we generally called him Daud Sahib, and he learnt to say "As salam alaikum." In those days it was the fashion for young Englishmen to wear a beard; so he too had a little blonde beard. One day I had a Maulana Sahib sitting with me when Daud Sahib passed that way. Daud greeted him with a splendid "As salam alaikum." The Maulana had noticed that I called him Daud Sahib, that Daud Sahib had a beard and that he had greeted him with "As salam alaikum," and was very pleased. He asked me in mingled astonishment and delight, "Has that white boy become a Muslim?" I said "If he hasn't then, God willing, he will one day." He was delighted and sang the praises of *Mashriq*'s missionary role and departed calling down blessings upon us.

All of us were like a little family, engaged on a task which was its own reward. When I used to go home at night sitting in the last tube train I used to think that the other passengers on the tube seemed very nice people and that life was good.

But when we had discovered the new world and achieved what we had set out to do, when we had crossed the deep seas and negotiated the tortuous mountain passes along our route and entered a period when everything was smooth sailing, the sort of intoxication that had possessed me in the early days of *Mashriq* gradually began to disappear. Now the journey was easy. All the obstacles in our way had been cleared away and we had cleared the ground to such an extent that there was room not only for small families like ours to settle here but also for a big newspaper like *Jaṅg* to establish itself there with confidence. *Jaṅg* issued its international edition in London in 1970.

Mashriq was now receiving plenty of advertising. We were living in

style, very comfortably. But "What was I to do to bring comfort to my discontented heart?" I no longer enjoyed the work I was doing. Among the advertisements we used to get was one regularly placed by an official Pakistani organization. But to ensure its continued appearance I had to go in person once a month and pay in cash a sizable bribe to the man in charge of this organization. He was an extremely nice man but he used to say that he was compelled to take this money, because when higher officials came to London from Pakistan on tour, they expected him to entertain them, to take them to some night club or to a West End play and he could not afford to pay for this "hospitality" out of his own pocket. So he had to rely upon me for money to make this possible for him. And between friends there is no keeping of accounts. In order to cover payments of this kind we had to do a lot of juggling with our accounts, entering the sum we paid under some other head. Every month on the day when I had to go to him to pay this money I felt miserable all the way there and kept cursing myself because I had not been able to mold myself to accept this kind of transaction and it was a constant torture to me.

During those same days when this sort of commercial transaction had become a burden to me a friend of mine in the BBC, Taqi Ahmad Sayyid, gave me another jolt. From the early days of *Mashriq* he had written for us every week a feature headed "A Glance at the British Press." We never paid him anything, but he always produced his feature regularly on time. There were times when in order to get it to us on time he had to rush out and take a taxi at his own expense. When our circumstances improved I began to pay him a fee for his column, and now it sometimes happened that he would not get it to us on time, and this meant considerable difficulties with our calligraphy and printing. We were very anxious about this and I complained to Taqi Sahib about it. He replied "My friend, when I used to do this for you I was doing it because I was keen to help you and *Mashriq*. Now those days are over. You pay me a fee and I work for the fee. So obviously I'll do my work when it is easy for me or not at all."

I often remember Taqi Sahib. In the early days of *Mashriq* I too was motivated by the same feelings as he had. In those days I enjoyed my work, but now we had entered a period of earning and paying out money and I often used to think, "If I have to give myself a headache, then why *this* headache?" In 1968, seven years after *Mashriq* had been launched, I resigned as Managing Director of the organization which published it, Laxton Publishers Limited. The other directors could not understand why I was resigning, but when they saw that I had made up my mind

they accepted a successor whom I had nominated to be Managing Director. Four years later I also gave up the post of Chief Editor of *Mashriq*. This too the directors could not understand—and I myself could not explain it to them. ❒

—*Translated by Ralph Russell*