

The scene of the story is laid in Egypt and the object is a study or rather an attempt at a solution of the problem of growing irreligiousness. This object is, of course, incorporated in the form of a story, but because of it, the dialogue very often reads like a sermon and the "characters" become personifications of vices and virtues. There are at times successful characterisation and rendering of the moods of wistfulness and doubt. '*Māh i Durakhshān*' also shows a great deal of knowledge of and research in Islamic history. It is a good book, but not typical of the period, the tendencies of which can be summed up as a more realistic attitude towards life and a greater concern with the motives and thoughts of people than with their actions. There has been a growing realisation amongst the serious writers that all is not well with the present society and, what is more, that the solution does not lie in the accepted clichés.

It is in this realisation, that there is no formula of salvation, that the chief difference between the older and the new school of thought lies, and the tendency towards realisation of this is even more marked in the short-story.

## PART III

### CHAPTER XI

#### THE SHORT-STORY, ITS DEFINITION AND ITS APPEARANCE IN EUROPEAN LITERATURE

The short-story, like the novel, has its roots in the distant past, in the tales and fables of the world's childhood. In its present form it appeared even later than the novel. It is the most modern of literary forms and the most popular. Its popularity rivals or rather exceeds that of the novel; like the latter it is essentially an art of the people. It concerns itself with the life, thoughts and feelings of ordinary men and women. This is what differentiates it from the tales and fables which are its precursors. They, like the larger romances, set out to tell imaginary stories of imaginary folks. Short-stories of to-day deal only with stark reality. There is not much difference between the novel and the short-story as to their purpose or in the material they use. The objects of both are a criticism of life and a depicting of its panorama, a probing into the mind and motives of man.

But the short-story is not a condensed novel. It is a separate art form. The very fact that it is not possible to make a novel out of each short-story shows that it is something entirely different. The novel deals with a lifetime or even generations as in the '*Forsyte Saga*', while the short-story can only deal with a few hours or at most a few days of a person's life. The task of the short-story is to express a single mood. This is at once more difficult and more easy than the task of the full-length novelists. The short-story writer must interpret the history of a lifetime by a mere incident, he must draw an entire character within the compass of a few hundred words. Of

course, no such detailed rendering of the character is required of him as of the novelist. He is not called upon to show the inner workings of the mind so comprehensively as a novelist. Yet he has to show enough to make the character understandable to the reader.

Space being limited, digression is more fatal to a short-story writer than a novelist. Nothing must deflect the interest from the central point. A short-story cannot have several threads of interest running through it, it must work up towards a single effect only. The one incident must be chosen and presented in such a manner as to be significant of the whole life. The short-story writer catches his hero and heroine at a turning point of their lives and shows them to us at that juncture in such a manner as to make us comprehend what they had been and what they now shall be. The past and the future are all made clear in that crucial moment.

The short-story, understood as such, came into being in the wake of the magazine. A demand was created for the story which should not take more than a few pages and serve to amuse the reader. The popular nature of its origin prevented it from being recognised as literature for a long time. The recognition was granted to the short-story first by America. Irving, Hawthorne and Edgar Allen Poe are the first names in connection with it. France, more readily than England, accepted it as a literary form; Maupassant's fame rests on his short-stories and not on his novels. In England, Stevenson was the first writer of consequence to attempt a short-story. He was followed by Kipling, whose most popular work is 'Plain Tales from the Hills'. And Katherine Mansfield, H. G. Wells and Arnold Bennett further invested it with the dignity of literature.

In India the short-story has in recent years gained enormous popularity. Perhaps the fact that a short-story has a greater chance of seeing the light by publication than a novel has caused most of the writers in Urdu to turn their attention to it

in preference to the latter. Nadīm Aḥmad Qāsmī, Aḥmad 'Alī, M. Aslam, Nyāz Fatehpūrī, Ḥijāb Ismā'īl, Rashīda Zafar, 'Abbās 'Alī Ḥusainī, are all short-story writers of eminence. Even those who have attempted writing longer novels have achieved literary eminence through the excellence of their short-stories and not through their novels.