"STAMBOUL NIGHTS"

Of the short story less may be demanded. Here is little scope for the development of character: we must be content for the most part with a flashing suggestion, a vital hint of the truth. There is less temptation here, on the other hand, to shift the characters to fit a shifting action. Consequently we often come closer to character in good short stories than in inferior novels. There are a dozen figures in the *Stamboul Nights* of Mr. H. G. Dwight which are likely to stand out in the memory, for a brief time, at least, with uncommon clearness. Mr. Bisbee, the obtuse and well-meaning missionary; Mehmish, the amiable and ingenious murderer; Madame Belize of the Glass House; Nousret Pasha, the Sultan's foster-brother, who presumes, at last, too much; Persis of the golden javelin; his luckless Beatitude, the pseudo-Patriarch; the bathman of "Under the Arch," with his sombre memories of the unforgetable Lisa; the dolorous and yet unconquered Pasha of the Garden: these and other figures linger upon the mind's retina after the book is closed. Whether they will remain there a year or two from now, in company with—well, for a single (relatively) immortal name, Private Ortheris, is doubtful. In his preliminary word to "a possible reader," the writer speaks of "the discouragements through which his somewhat exotic fictions have slowly made their way into print." Exotic they all are in setting and atmosphere. Constantinople is not exactly new ground for a story-teller, but it has never been very successfully "covered" in English; certainly it has never been made as vivid and human as Mr. Dwight makes it. He ascribes such merit as the stories may have largely to his luck in stumbling upon material: "No good fairy, alas, dropped the gift of invention into my cradle, and not one of these stories could really be called mine. Several of them I put on paper almost exactly as they were told me. More of them were pieced together out of odd bits of experience and gossip. The seed of one was contained in a paragraph of the *Matin* which I read one morning in Paris." And so on. This, of course, is a familiar bit of story-teller's guile. It is based upon the strange old fallacy that invention—the kind worth having—is the manufacture of new materials, instead of the discovery and employment of old ones. Mr. Dwight's method was good enough for Shakespeare, has been good enough for all the great story-tellers. The present tales, with all their air of careless improvisation or merely faithful recording, are singularly finished products of the story-teller's art. The author has sedulously (and rightly) studied the masters in this kind. Now and then the influence of some one of them, notably Joseph Conrad or "O. Henry," is too directly evident. For my own part, I feel that Mr. Dwight is most successful and most original in those of his stories which embody the romance and mystery of the East, the sombre intensity of the Oriental temperament—stories like "The House of the Giraffe," or "Under the Arch," or—most perfect of all in its way

—"In the Pasha's Garden." The half-cynical humour of some of the other tales, has at times an almost official ring —the tone you may profitably adopt for that kind of story, as Kipling discovered long ago, in the days of the *Plain Tales.*