

William Sharp and "Fiona Macleod"

A Life



WILLIAM F. HALLORAN



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Chapter Eleven

1894

In the fall of 1893 Elizabeth Sharp became increasingly uncomfortable at Phenice Croft:

The damp, autumnal days in the little cottage on its clay soil, and the fatigue of constantly going up and down to town in order to do the work of the Art Critic for the *Glasgow Herald* — which I for some time had undertaken — proved too severe a strain on me. And I found that in the winter months I could not remain at Phenice Croft without being seriously ill (*Memoir*, 233).

The Sharps rented a flat in January 1894 — number seven in Kensington Court Gardens, then a new mansion block south of the Kensington High Street — where Elizabeth would live through the winter while her husband traveled back and forth from Phenice Croft. At the end of the month, the Sharps tried to revive the “Sunday evening informal gatherings” they held in the late eighties in South Hampstead. For the first, on February 4, Sharp invited Grant Richards for dinner. Edith and Frank Rinder would be there, and others — including the publisher John Lane — would drop by later for a cup of coffee and to smoke a cigarette. Back in Phenice Croft on the ninth and hoping for a positive review, he sent Richard Le Gallienne an advance copy of *Vistas*, which Frank Murray would publish on the fifteenth. On Saturday, the tenth he was back in London writing to Stanley Little. Elizabeth was “better on the whole.” He would be back in Phenice Croft the next day and in London again at the Grosvenor Club the following Saturday. He hoped Little would meet him there. Before the month was out, traveling to and from London in the mid-winter gloom affected his health.

In an early December letter, Sharp told Murray Gilchrist he could not visit him in Derbyshire in January, but he hoped Gilchrist would visit

him in Bucks Green. In his Christmas greeting to Gilchrist, he wrote, "You are to come here in the early Spring, remember!" Correspondence and the pattern of events indicate Gilchrist accepted Sharp's invitation in mid-February. In a letter dated only "Wendy," either February 14 or 21, he told Gilchrist he would be happy to welcome him and his partner Garfitt at Phenice Croft the following Friday. This visit deserves attention for what it reveals about the atmosphere Sharp created in Bucks Green and the state of his mental and physical health.

More than a year later, on September 26, 1895, Sharp drew Gilchrist's attention to a section of Fiona Macleod's *The Sin Eater* called "Tragic Landscapes." That section contains three "prose poems" which Sharp described in his *Pagan Review* as impressionist word paintings, "a consciously-conceived and definitely-executed poetic form." In Sharp's letter to Gilchrist, who knew Fiona was Sharp, he described the first of the three, called "The Tempest," as a detailed word painting of a natural setting in which an approaching storm threatens to sweep away the natural world and all living inhabitants. The second "Tragic Landscape," called simply "Mist," portrays the post-apocalyptic natural world:

A dense white mist lay upon the hills, clothing them from summit to base in a dripping shroud. The damp, spongy peat everywhere sweated forth its over-welling ooze. [...] There was neither day nor night, but only the lifeless gloom of the endless weary rain: thin soaking, full of the chill and silence of the grave.

Eventually, a shadow appears in the gloom, a slow-moving man who "stood beside a tarn. And was looking into it, as the damned in hell look into their souls." A stag appears on an overhanging rock and vanquishes his rival whereupon: "Night crept up from the glen and strath — the veil of mist grew more and more obscure, more dark. [...] there was a uniform pall of blackness. In the chill, soaking silence not a thing stirred, not a sound was audible."

The third "Tragic Landscape," called "Summer-sleep" portrays a hot, dry vista that is peaceful and drowsy with some signs of life:

The high-road sinuated like a snake along the steeper slope of the valley. [...] The gloom of July was on the trees. The oaks dreamed of green water. The limes were already displaying fugitive yellow banners. A red flush dusked the green-gloom of the sycamores. [...] The sky was of a vivid blue, up whose invisible azure ledges a few rounded clouds,

dazzling white or grey as swans-down, climbed imperceptibly. [...] The wild-bee and the wasp, the dragonfly and the gnat, wrought everywhere a humming undertone.

The landscape is descending into a dreamy sleep:

Peace was upon the land and beauty. The languor of dream gave the late summer a loveliness that was all its own, as of a fair woman asleep, dreaming of the lover who has not long left her, and the touch of whose lips is still upon her mouth and hair.

Through this personified natural world, which differs markedly from that of "The Tempest" and "Mist," three men are walking. Two were "tall and fair; one dark, loosely built, and of a smaller and slighter build."

In his September 1895 letter to Gilchrist, Sharp wrote: "You will read the third piece, 'Summer-sleep,' with mingled feelings, when you know it is an exact transcript of Phenice Croft at Rudgwick and that the three men are you, Garfitt, and myself." The two tall, fair men are Sharp and Gilchrist, and the shorter Garfitt. They approach "a small hamlet of thatched, white-walled cottages" which is Bucks Green. Sharp, the tallest wayfarer, points "to a small square house set among orchard-trees, a stone's throw from the hamlet," which is Phenice Croft, and says: "There is my home." His "comrade," Gilchrist, replies slowly, "It is a beautiful place, and I envy you." Garfitt agrees, and the owner replies "I am glad you think so." At that, the shadows of the three men "leapt to one side, moved with fantastic steps, and seemed convulsed with laughter." Perhaps the grass on the side of the road understood the speech of the shadows. If so, it would know Gilchrist said in his heart: "There is something of awe, of terror, about that house; nay, the whole land here is under a tragic gloom. I should die here, stifled. I am glad I go on the morrow." Then Garfitt said in his heart "It may all be beautiful and peaceful, but something tragic hides behind this flooding sunlight, behind these dark woodlands, down by the water-course there, past the water-mill, up by that house among the orchard-trees." If the grass understood the shadows, "It would know that the tallest man [Sharp] who lived in that square cottage by the pleasant hamlet, said in his heart: 'It may be that the gate of hell is hidden there among the grass, or beneath the foundations of my house. Would God I were free! O my God, madness and death!'" The three men know the placid landscape

overlays a natural world that is "red in tooth and claw." They also know what only their shadows express: the placidity of human life overlays a chaotic darkness of tragic impulses and fear of obliteration.

Following that shadowy experience of fear and horror, the final paragraph restores the peacefulness of the land and of everyday life:

After another long silence, as the three wayfarers drew near, the dark man murmured his pleasure at the comely hamlet, at the quiet land lying warm in the afternoon glow. And his companion said that rest and coolness would be welcome, and doubly so in so fair and peaceful a home. And the tallest of the three, he who owned the house in the orchard, laughed blithely. And all three moved onward with quickened steps, through the hot, sweet, dusty afternoon, golden now with the waning sun-glow.

After drawing Gilchrist's attention to the third "Tragic Landscape," Sharp wrote, "I cannot explain aright: you must read into what you read." We recall Elizabeth Sharp wrote of their residence in Bucks Green:

The quiet and leisure at Phenice Croft, the peace, the "green life" around were unspeakably welcome to my husband. Once again, he saw visions and dreamed dreams; the psychic subjective side of his dual nature predominated. He was in an acutely creative condition; and, moreover, he was passing from one phase of literary work to another, deeper, more intimate, more permanent. (*Memoir*, 221)

The transition was from the work of William Sharp to that of Fiona Macleod, which Elizabeth, reflecting no doubt the opinion of her husband, thought "deeper, more intimate, more permanent." At Phenice Croft, she continued,

he was testing his new powers, living his new life, and delighting in the opportunity for psychic experimentation. And for such experimentation, the place seemed to him to be peculiarly suited. To me it seemed "uncanny," and to have a haunted atmosphere — created unquestionably by him — that I found difficult to live in unless the sun was shining. This uncanny effect was felt by more than one friend; by Mr. Murray Gilchrist, for instance, whose impressions were described by his host in one of the short "Tragic Landscapes" (*Memoir*, 223).

In his September 1895 letter to Gilchrist, Sharp wrote ominously, "The most tragic & momentous epoch of my life followed that visit of yours to Phenice Croft, & is, so far, indissolubly linked with that day I met you,

and that time." What, we must wonder, happened following the Gilchrist visit that so affected Sharp? His letters, beginning in late February 1894, suggest the probable answer.

On February 26, Sharp sent Edward Dowden a copy of *Vistas* and asked him to "excuse so brief a note as I have been ill & am still debarred from much use of the pen." On March 1, in a letter thanking Stanley Little for his positive notices of *Vistas*, Sharp wrote: "I should have written to you before this, but I have not been well: & yesterday had to telegraph to a friend. I am now, however, pulling round all right. Please say nothing of this to Elizabeth. Tomorrow [Friday, March 2] I shall go up to town, & come down with her on Saty, till Monday [March 3–5]. On that weekend [March 9–11] some friends are coming for a fortnight, of which I am glad." On March 5 he wrote again to Little:

Did I tell you how unwell I have been? I have had to "cave in" completely. I am now nearly better — but for some time to come must write only for 2 or 3 hours daily at most: and, moreover, am not to be alone at all. Elizabeth (who is steadily gaining ground) returns to town in a couple of days: & then Mr. and Mrs. Rinder come here on "a working visit" to keep me company for a fortnight. [...] I must not write more.

Elizabeth, herself unwell, but improving, was with him until at least Wednesday, March 7, and the friends, Edith and Frank Rinder, came on that weekend to stay for two weeks.

The psychic experimentations that gave Phenice Croft an "uncanny" and "haunted atmosphere" led Sharp to the "gate of hell... hidden there among the grass, or beneath the foundations" of his house and to exclaiming "Would God I were free! O my God, madness and death!" Shortly after Gilchrist and Garfitt visited Phenice Croft, Sharp suffered a nervous collapse that produced a state of depression so serious that his wife and Edith Rinder decided he should not be left alone. He was advised to stop his psychic experimentations, drastically reduce his imaginative work, and not write at all more than two or three hours a day. It must have been this collapse Sharp described in his September 1895 letter to Gilchrist as "the most tragic & momentous epoch" of his life. It recalls a letter he wrote to Hall Caine ten years earlier — on June 15, 1884 — in which he described a "sharp and sudden attack" that left his hands so chilled and pained he could hardly hold a pen. The mental collapse at Phenice Croft may well have been accompanied by a physical

collapse that endangered his weakened heart. He concluded his March 5 letter to Little as follows: "This is an unusual break-down for me. But, for one thing, I have been living the life of Imagination too fiercely of late. I think you will be surprised when you learn what I have done." These sentences connect his breakdown with his writing as Fiona Macleod and suggest that work, yet unknown to Little, was initiating a splitting of self — masculine versus feminine — that contributed to his collapse.

In a March 27 letter to Gilchrist, Sharp apologized for being too unwell to write sooner and announced he was leaving Bucks Green:

My wife's health... has long been troubling me: and we have just decided that (greatly to my disappointment) we must return to Hampstead to live. Personally, I regret the return to town (or half town) more than I can say: but the matter is one of paramount importance, so there is nothing else to be done. We leave at midsummer.

Elizabeth's illness in the fall and continuing into the winter, her dislike of the atmosphere Sharp had created in Bucks Green, and her work as London art reviewer for the *Glasgow Herald* had forced her to let the Kensington flat. Her husband's mental and physical breakdown was the last straw. He could not be left alone. Fortunately, they found someone to sublet the house, which they vacated on June 21. Sharp described his actions of the previous night:

I took up a handful of grassy turf and kissed it three times, and then threw it to the four quarters — so that the Beauty of the Earth might be seen by me wherever I went and that no beauty I had seen or known there should be forgotten. Then I kissed the chestnut tree on the side lawn where I have seen or heard so much: from the springing of the dream flowers to the surge of the sea in *Pharais* (*Memoir*, 236).

Elizabeth understood his reluctance to leave: "Phenice Croft had seen the birth of Fiona Macleod; he had lived there with an intensity of inner life beyond anything he had ever experienced" (*Memoir* 233).

After describing their decision to give up rural living in his March 27 letter to Gilchrist, Sharp demonstrated what many of his close friends found remarkable, his ability to recover quickly no matter how debilitating the illness:

As for me, one of my wander-fits has come upon me: the Spring-madness has got into the blood: the sight of green hedgerows and budding leaves

and the blue smoke rising here and there in the woodlands has wrought some chemic furor in my brain. Before the week is out, I hope to be in Normandy — and after a day or two by the sea at Dieppe, and then at beautiful and romantic Rouen, to get to the green lanes and open places, and tramp “towards the sun.” I’ll send you a line from somewhere if you care to hear.

He turned to Gilchrist’s relative isolation in Derbyshire:

I think you should see more of actual life: and not dwell so continually in an atmosphere charged with your own imaginings. [...] part of the year should be spent otherwise — say in a town like London, or Paris, or in tramping through alien lands, France or Belgium, Scandinavia, or Germany or Italy, or Spain: if not, in Scotland, or Ireland, or upon our Isles, or remote counties. [...] Take your pen and paper, a satchel, and go forth with a light heart. The gods will guide *you* to strange things, and strange things to you. You ought to *see* more, to *feel* more, to *know* more, at first hand. Be not afraid of excess. “The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom,” says Blake.

Gilchrist must have told Sharp he also suffered from depression:

To be alive and young and in health is a boon so inestimable that you ought to fall on your knees among your moorland heather and thank the gods. Dejection is a demon to be ruled. We cannot always resist his tyranny, but we can always refuse to become bondagers to his usurpation. Look upon him as an Afreet to be exorcised with a cross of red-hot iron. He is a coward weakling, after all: take him by the tail and swing him across the moor or down the valley. Swing up into your best. Be brave, strong, self-reliant. Then you live.

In advising Gilchrist, who was ten years younger, to take the demon of dejection “by the tail and swing him across the moor or down the valley,” Sharp drew on his own experience.

Sharp did not escape to France before the week was out. On April 3 he wrote a long letter to Herbert Stone, a Harvard undergraduate who, with his friend and classmate Hannibal Ingalls Kimball, had established a publishing firm, Stone and Kimball, which would “accept only manuscripts of literary merit and publish them in an artistic form.” In August 1894, the firm relocated from Cambridge to Chicago where Stone’s wealthy father, Melville Elijah Stone, edited the *Chicago Daily News*. When Louise Chandler Moulton drew Sharp’s attention to the enterprise, he saw an opening. He proposed to Stone a volume of seven

short stories titled "The Rape of the Sabines," after one of its stories he had included in the *Pagan Review*. As it turned out, Stone and Kimball published an American edition of *Vistas* late in 1894, and the volume of short stories in 1895 under the less provocative title *The Gypsy Christ and Other Tales*. Stone and Kimball also published the early works of Fiona Macleod, which began to establish her reputation among America's literary elite. At the suggestion of Arthur Stedman, Sharp asked Stone to negotiate for the plates and stock of his *Flower o' the Vine* from Charles Webster and Company as the firm was being liquidated. If Stone took up the suggestion, the negotiations failed since there were no further printings of that volume.

On April 8 Sharp told Arthur Stedman in a letter from Phenice Croft, "I am better, though not right yet." When he went to France is uncertain, but on April 22 he sent a card to Murray Gilchrist from Paris that promised a letter and declared "Here summer is come," and concluded "Some strange things happen in this world! Well — no more just now." Elizabeth joined him in Paris on April 30, and they both returned to London on May 3. Recalling that Elizabeth and Edith Rinder decided Sharp should not be left alone, Edith may have accompanied Sharp to Normandy in mid-April and their time together in Dieppe and Rouen may have been the "strange thing" Sharp would share with Gilchrist when they next met.

The public aspect of the Fiona Macleod phase of Sharp's literary career began in May when Frank Murray published *Pharais, a Romance of the Isles* from his Moray Press in Derby. In a May 4 letter, Sharp told Stanley Little he had asked Murray to send him a pre-publication copy of a Celtic romance written by a friend, a Miss Fiona Macleod. It was a successor to his *Vistas* in Murray's Regent's Library Series, and he was "specially interested not only in its author but in the book," which dealt with "the almost unknown life of the remoter isles of the Atlantic seaboard." Only three copies had been issued, one for him and two for Miss Macleod. He hoped Little would like the book and write a notice or review for the *Academy* or the *Literary World*. Prior to the formal publication of *Pharais*, Sharp had decided to create a separate identity for the female author and present her to the world as a real person.

As described in the previous chapter, Sharp told Catherine Ann Janvier in August 1893 he was writing "a strange Celtic tale" he planned

to call *Pharais*, a Celtic word for paradise. So, we know he began writing passages in 1893 or even earlier for what became Fiona Macleod's *Pharais*. Shortly after the release of creativity he experienced in Rome in 1891, he began looking for a means of capitalizing on his knowledge of the Hebridean landscape and Celtic lore. Finally, he was able to tell Murray Gilchrist in a letter of December 20, 1893, his "long dreamed of Celtic Romance" was finished. A week later he told Frank Murray, the Derby publisher, he wished "to adhere rigidly to the 'Fiona Macleod' authorship." That decision meant Sharp's main contribution to the Celtic Renaissance would be attributed to a woman named Macleod.

Sometime between December 1893 and May 1894, Sharp realized he would have to find a means for the fictitious author to communicate with publishers and readers. His sister Mary, who lived with their mother in Edinburgh, was an intelligent woman with time on her hands. He enlisted her to copy his Fiona letters and mail them in Scotland. Mary's distinctive handwriting became an essential feature of the deception. It was frequently cited as proof the writings were not the



Fig. 26 Portrait of Mary Beatrice Sharp, William Sharp's youngest sister taken in the Davis Studios in Edinburgh in 1906. Mary provided the handwriting for Fiona Macleod's extensive correspondence. Courtesy of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Dulles Reading Room, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

product of William Sharp, and it was principally through the letters that he conveyed Fiona's distinctive personality and established the fiction of her separate identity. Discreet, efficient, and available, Mary was a vital link in the two-step transmissions that contributed to the remarkable success of Sharp's covert literary career.

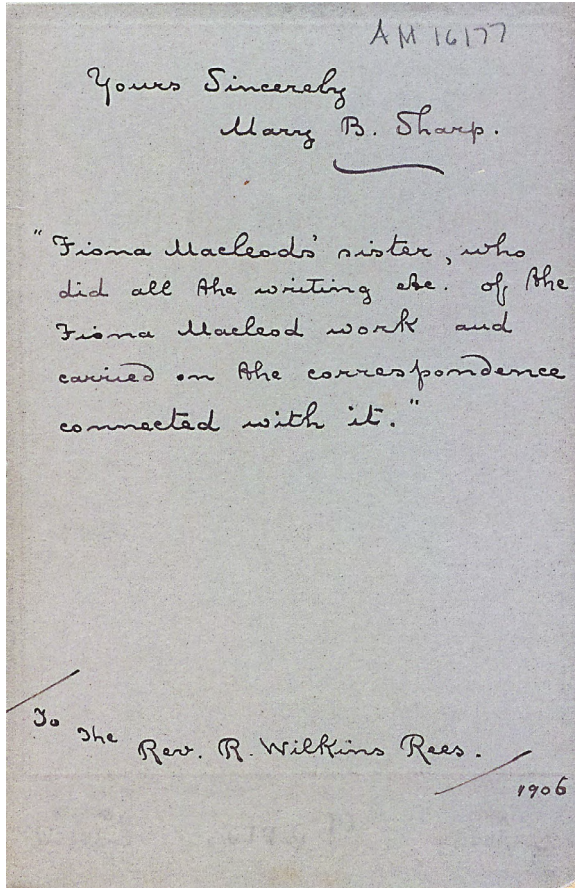


Fig. 27 Verso of Fig. 23 in Mary Sharp's handwriting (the handwriting of Fiona Macleod). The photograph is inscribed "To the Reverend R. Wilkins Rees. Yours Sincerely, Mary B. Sharp. Fiona Macleod's sister, who did all the writing of the Fiona Macleod work and carried on the correspondence connected with it." Reverend R. Wilkins Rees was the author of ghost stories, among them "Ghost-Layers and Ghost-Laying," in *The Church Treasury of History, Custom, Folk-lore, Etc.*, ed. William Andrews (London: William Andrews & Co., 1898), 241-274.) Courtesy of the Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Dulles Reading Room, Firestone Library, Princeton University.

Sharp bolstered the deception by sharing details about the reclusive writer with friends, critics, and publishers. She was his cousin, married to a peripatetic Scottish laird who owned a yacht that could whisk her away to avoid detection. Sharp regarded her highly, provided advice and assistance as needed, and respected her desire for privacy. He sometimes floated the impression that he and Fiona were more than close friends as they would go to remote locations together. In those instances, he conflated Fiona with Edith Rinder. He often claimed he was unaware of Fiona's location so he could decline requests to meet her. When avid readers did turn up at her Edinburgh return address, she had just left to sail among the Hebrides. It was on those islands she heard the tales and absorbed the atmosphere of her stories and poems.

The first known Fiona letter was written in mid-May to Grant Allen, a well-known writer and Sharp's friend:

C/o Mrs. B. etc.

Dear Sir,

I have only now ascertained that you are in England. I was informed you were in the South of France. Some short time ago I asked Mr. Frank Murray of Derby to forward to you a copy of my just published romance *Pharais*. I now write to ask if you will accept it as a slight token of homage from the youngest and latest of Celtic writers to the most brilliant champion of the Celtic genius now living. I do not, however, send it by way of inveigling you to write about it, much as any word of yours would mean to me both in service and honour: but primarily because of your deep and vivid sympathy not only with nature but with the Celtic vision of nature — and, also, let me add, because of the many delightful hours I have enjoyed with your writings.

Believe me, | Faithfully yours,

Fiona Macleod

This letter in William Sharp's handwriting and preserved in New York's Pierpont Morgan Library was sent to Mary Sharp in Edinburgh for her to copy and send to Allen.

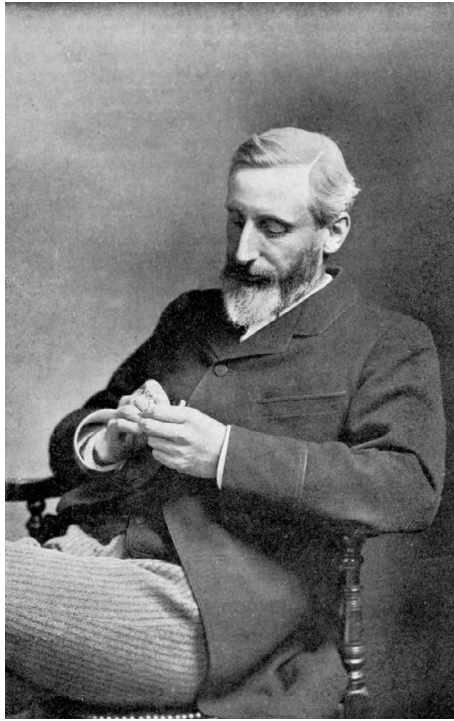


Fig. 28 Photograph of Grant Allen (1848–1899) by Elliott & Fry (c. 1899), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Portrait_of_Grant_Allen.jpg, Public Domain.

The letter elicited a positive reply from Allen: *Pharais*, he wrote to Fiona “strikes me as a beautiful and poetical piece of work.” He tempered his praise with a few words of criticism from an experienced writer to a novice. Interlarding English with Gaelic words was a trifle distracting. She should strive for a little more story and less pure poetry. “Perfection in literature lies in avoiding excess in any direction.” He asked Fiona for some details about her life and expressed hope she would visit him and his wife who was much taken by *Pharais* (*Memoir*, 228–229). Allen accepted the fiction Sharp was creating, but according to Elizabeth “Questions as to the identity of the author were already ‘in the air’” (*Memoir*, 230). In a June Fiona letter to the publisher John Lane, Sharp had Fiona raise the issue directly: “You asked me in your note who told me to apply to you with *The Mountain Lovers*. It was my cousin, Mr. William Sharp. I hear that some paper says *he* wrote *Pharais*: and I

sent a disclaimer at once to the *Westminster Gazette*." Something in that periodical touched on the possibility that Sharp was the author. Even Grant Allen expressed some skepticism in a July 12 letter to Sharp:

As to *Pharais*, I will confess I read it with some doubt as to whether it was not your own production; and after I had written my letter to Miss Macleod, I took it to my wife and said "Now, if this is William Sharp, what a laugh and a crow he will have over me! Le Gallienne, who is stopping with us, was sure it was yours; but on second thoughts, I felt certain, in spite of great likeness of style, there was a feminine touch in it and sent my letter.

He continued:

All the same, however, I was not quite satisfied you were not taking us in, especially as your book with Blanche Willis Howard had shown one how womanly a tone you could adopt when it suited you; and I shan't feel absolutely at rest on the subject till I have seen the "beautiful lassie" in person. If she turns out to be W. S. in disguise, I shall owe you a bad one for it: for I felt my letter had just that nameless twinge of emotion one uses towards a woman, and a beginner.

Allen would be glad to meet Sharp's cousin in October, "supposing her to exist," when he hoped the Sharps would bring her to visit him in Hindhead, his village in Surrey. It is interesting to note in the context of this correspondence that Grant Allen wrote and published in 1897 a novel — *The Type-Writer Girl* — under the female pseudonym Olive Pratt Rayner. Like Sharp, he must have thought a work so titled would be taken more seriously if by a woman.

These letters illustrate the problems Sharp encountered from the start maintaining the fiction of a real Fiona Macleod. A year later he was still trying to assure Allen of Fiona's existence. By that time their mutual friend Richard Le Gallienne, who saw from the start the linkage between Sharp's writings and Fiona's, was sure of the deception and said so in print. That so alarmed Sharp he sent Le Gallienne a letter telling him to "shut up." When next they met face to face, he told Le Gallienne the truth after obtaining a firm promise of confidentiality.

In early June Sharp sent from Fiona a copy of *Pharais* and positive quotes from several reviews to John Lane. He hoped to entice Lane into publishing *The Mountain Lovers*, the second Fiona romance. As Fiona, Sharp wrote: the publisher John Lane

Possibly you may care to make me an offer in advance for "The Mountain Lovers." It will be a book of about the same length as "Pharais," probably a little longer. The note that is dominant is the Return to Joy. The story deals with the love of two young mountaineers, Alan Gilchrist and Sorcha Cameron: but there is an interweaving of dramatic and tragic episodes in the lives of those directly connected with the Mountain Lovers. For the rest, there is, in a more marked degree than in "Pharais," a constant recurrence to the intimate relationship we have, or may have, with Nature. It is here, I know, that I have "something to say": but I will not trouble you with details which in embryo, can be of no interest to anyone until duly and finally set forth.

He sent Lane the opening chapter of the new romance and promised the completed manuscript "by the end of August, or, possibly, a little earlier." He knew Lane was the principal in the firm, but Fiona, unfamiliar with the London publishing scene, was not sure: "If I have been misinformed as to your being the literary representative or chief partner in your firm, I beg you to excuse the informality of my addressing myself to you direct." If Lane was unwilling to accept the book without seeing it, Fiona asked him to return the opening pages so she could find "a publisher on my own terms elsewhere." She would soon be going abroad for two or three months, so she hoped Lane would reply at his very earliest convenience. Though a remote novice, Fiona could demonstrate some of Sharp's backbone in her dealings with Lane. The favorable reception of *Pharais* suggested there was money to be made by the Fiona deception, and Sharp set about acquiring it.

On July 7 Sharp, under his own name, admonished John Lane for not responding to Fiona's early June letter. He was too pressed with his own work "to attend properly to other people's affairs." He had "quite enough trouble" arranging the publication of *Pharais* with Murray. He even had to read the proofs since "Miss [sic] Macleod when not on one of her visits to Edinburgh or Glasgow lives in a very remote spot." He had promised to see *The Mountain Lovers* through the press, but he could not "undertake all the preliminary 'skirmishing' as well." He is critical of both Miss Macleod and Mr. Lane: "What with an exasperatingly vagrant — if dear and lovely — cousin on the one hand, and an exasperatingly dilatory publisher on the other, the fate of a kindly intermediary who happens to be frantically busy is not a pleasant one!" The distinction between Sharp and his cousin is clearly drawn, and Lane

is put on notice. Sharp further baited the hook by saying he thought he would arrange with Miss Macleod the publication of her next book, a volume of "fantasies, short stories, and poems called 'A Celtic Wreath,'" with Macmillan in London and a Boston firm. The letter had its desired effect. Sharp was able to write again to Lane within a couple of weeks, this time as Fiona, to say she was glad Lane entertained her proposal favorably and set forth the terms she would require if Lane went on to publish the book. Whether or not he met all the terms, Lane published *The Mountain Lovers* in 1895.

At the beginning of August, Sharp went to the west of Scotland to stay with his mother and sisters who were on holiday in Kilcreggan on the Firth of Clyde. In a letter to Elizabeth, he said he was learning legends and customs from "a Celtic Islesman from Iona" who gave him "a copy of an ancient MS. map of Iona with all its fields, divisions, bays, capes, isles, etc." While out with the Islesman in his "two-sailed Wherry," a storm sprang up which he quite enjoyed:

We flew before the squalls like a wild horse, and it was glorious with the shriek of the wind, the heave and plunge of the boat, and the washing of the water over the gunwales. Twice 'the black wind' came down upon us out of the hills, and we were nearly driven under water. He kept chanting and calling a wild sea-rune, about a water-demon of the isles, till I thought I saw it leaping from wave to wave after us.

In addition to that rune, he learned the rune of "the reading of the spirit" and the rune of the "Knitting of the Knots."

On August 15 he returned to Edinburgh where he wrote a long letter to Herbert Stone regarding the American edition of *Vistas* which Stone and Kimball planned to publish. The firm had initiated a small trade magazine called the *Chap-Book* to advertise its publications. The September 15 number would be devoted to William Sharp and *Vistas*. It would contain a poem by Sharp ("To E. C. Stedman"), an "appreciation" of Sharp's poetry by his friend, the Canadian poet Bliss Carman, and "The Birth of a Soul," a new "dramatic interlude," which would be included in the American edition of *Vistas*. He enclosed a photograph for the *Chap-Book* that had been taken in the spring by Frederick Hollyer. Sharp remained a very handsome man, only slightly greying at the age of thirty-nine. His frequent illnesses, physical and mental, had yet to take their toll.



Fig. 29 Photograph of William Sharp by Frederick Hollyer (1894). Reproduced from *Poems by William Sharp*. Selected and arranged by Mrs. William Sharp (London, William Heinemann, 1912). Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:William_Sharp_1894.jpg#/media/File:William_Sharp_1894.jpg, Public Domain.

Sharp also included with his August 15 letter to Stone a dedication of *Vistas* to Henry Alden. It described the contents of the book as "vistas into the inner life of the human soul, psychic episodes," and acknowledged their debt to Maeterlinck, "the Belgian poet-dramatist" who had "introduced a new and vital literary form." During his visit to New York in 1891, Sharp and Alden, editor of *Harper's Magazine*, became friends, and the dedication was "a tribute of affection and admiration" to one he honored and esteemed. From Kilcreggan in early August, Sharp sent Alden two articles for possible publication in *Harper's*. He hoped for the best because money was short: "What with illness & consequent 3 or 4 months' idleness or next to idleness, my wife's long illness, & serious financial distress, we have gone thro,' & are still suffering from, a rather bad time lately." Alden responded positively, and both articles appeared in *Harper's* in 1895: "Rome in Africa" in June and "The Hebrid Isles"

in December. The editors Sharp met during his two trips to New York opened a new outlet for his writing and provided a welcome source of income.

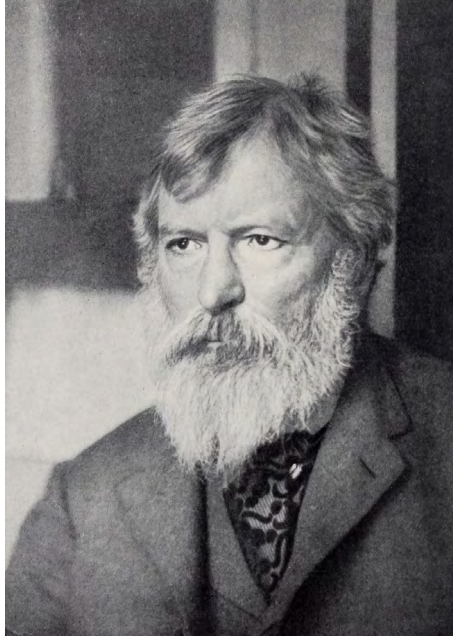


Fig. 30 Portrait of Henry Mills Alden (1836–1919), who edited *Harper's Magazine* for fifty years, in 1910. Unknown photographer. Wikimedia, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Henry_Mills_Alden_portrait_in_In_After_Days_\(1910\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Henry_Mills_Alden_portrait_in_In_After_Days_(1910).jpg), Public Domain

In mid-August, Elizabeth joined her husband in Scotland, and they spent the next six weeks exploring and collecting materials in the western isles. When they reached Oban, they sailed to the Isle of Mull, crossed to its western shore, and boarded a small ferry to Iona. This was Elizabeth's first visit to the island, and she was deeply moved by its beauty and its history. In the Fiona writings, Sharp turned often to the story of St. Columba who established a religious colony on Iona in the sixth century, built an abbey, and brought Christianity from Ireland to Scotland. He captured the romanticism Iona induces in a September Fiona letter to the Irish poet and novelist, Katharine Tynan-Hinkson.

I read your letter last night, at sunset, while I was lying on the Cruac-an-Angeal, the hillock on the west where the angel appeared to St Columba.

[...] It was a very beautiful sight to see the day wane across the ocean, and then to move slowly homeward through the gloaming, and linger awhile by the Street of the Dead near the ruined abbey of Columba. But these Isles are so dear to me that I think everyone must feel alike!

Sharp wanted to establish a close friendship between the two ladies as he hoped Fiona would become the foremost female writer in a Scottish Celtic Renaissance as Mrs. Hinkson had become for the Irish Celtic Renaissance. Iona was an ideal place to achieve that objective as it linked Scottish and Irish history. The impressions Sharp gained during this and subsequent visits provided the material for the Fiona Macleod essay "Iona" that formed part of *The Divine Adventure* in 1900. Fiona would become part of the lore of Iona where her books are available even today for purchase by tourists who descend on the island. After several more weeks exploring the islands south of Oban and hearing more stories, the Sharps returned at the end of September to their new residence in Hampstead.

During the fall, Sharp worked on the stories and sketches Stone and Kimball published in 1895 as *The Gypsy Christ and Other Tales*. To maintain the separate identity of Fiona and that stream of income, he continued to publish under both names. Elizabeth often blamed the strain of dual authorship for his frequent illnesses, physical and mental, but those illnesses plagued him in the 1880s, long before the advent of Fiona. In October and November, he wrote several Sharp articles while also working on Fiona's *The Mountain Lovers*, the Fiona short stories he began in August, and the poems that would appear in Fiona's *From the Hills of Dream* in 1896.

In mid-October, he wrote a conciliatory letter to Theodore Watts (from 1897 Watts-Dunton) hoping to repair a breach in their friendship. Before the break occurred, Sharp sent Watts a birthday letter each year. This letter, resuming that practice, contained a paragraph that demonstrates the amiability frequently attributed to Sharp by his friends.

In the old days, before your feelings towards me changed somewhat, you were not ill-pleased that (more Scoticè, looking upon the remembrance of a friend's birthday as a scrupulous, almost a religious observance) I used to drop you a line on each 12th Oct. Nor, I hope, will you be ill-pleased now: for the remembrance & the good wish arise from an affectionate regard, and, I need hardly say, high esteem. No doubt I have given you cause of irritation: as, in turn, I was resentful because of things

repeated to me, said of me by you. Right or wrong, I don't think anything is to be gained now by going over the ground of complaint either may have or may imagine against the other. For myself, I bear you nothing but good will: and hope you entertain something of the same feeling towards myself. It is a pity that between friends of material difference in age, differences and divergences are so apt to occur: but I like to believe that in most instances these are not fundamental, but only, as it were, the surface currents.

Born in 1832, Watts was twenty-three years Sharp's senior, and this letter had its intended effect as the two men resumed their friendship, and Sharp regained occasional access to Algernon Swinburne, Watts's housemate. This letter included a poignant passage:

This has been a sad year, in the loss of friends: J. Addington Symonds, John M. Gray, Mrs. Augusta Webster, Roden Noel, Walter Pater. The death of the last named is a deep loss to everyone who loves what is beautiful and dignified and nobly helpful, in literature.

First Symonds and then Pater befriended the young and handsome William Sharp in the early 1880s and helped pave the way for his acceptance as an editor and writer. All five individuals were writers and friends of Watts and Sharp.

In a late October letter Sharp informed Herbert Stone *The Gypsy Christ* was complete. In mid-November he told Murray Gilchrist he was busy writing articles "for *Harpers*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, *Nineteenth Century*, and three or four other monthlies, and weekly art-articles, etc." Of the titular story of *The Gypsy Christ*, he wrote to Gilchrist:

The locale of this story is the moorland country where my dear friend & comrade, Murray Gilchrist lives. I wonder what you will think of the tragic atmosphere I seem to have gained from your remote moorlands. There are descriptions and episodes which you will be able to read between the lines.

It is unclear what Gilchrist might read between the lines. It is also unclear what Sharp meant by telling Gilchrist he was "steadily gaining ground. The prolonged mental strain I was under being gone, the chief cause is removed." The removed "chief cause" may have been financial as the articles he was writing and the popularity of *Fiona* promised a more secure future. It may have been the environment of Phenice Croft which he had left. It may have been that arrangements had been worked

out between the two Sharps and the two Rinders to enable Sharp and Edith to maintain their relationship. In early December Sharp went to Scotland — St. Andrews and Edinburgh — for the three weeks preceding Christmas. Having agreed with Elizabeth that Sharp should not be left alone, Edith may have joined him for all or part of his escape from the fogs of London. After Christmas, his doctor advised a rest near the sea, and the Sharps spent a week on the Isle of Wight. Thus ended 1894, a year in which Sharp launched Fiona Macleod upon the world and produced, despite frequent illnesses, an abundance of writings, hers and his own.