

William Sharp and "Fiona Macleod"

A Life



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Cover image: William Strang, William Sharp (c. 1897), etching, printed by David Strang. Photograph by William F. Halloran of author's copy (2019).

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Chapter Twelve

January–June 1895

In January 1895 William Sharp wrote to a friend: “London, I do not like, though I feel its magnetic charm, or sorcery. I suffer here. The gloom, the streets, the obtrusion and intrusion of people, all conspire against thought, dream, true living.” The city is “a vast reservoir of all the evils of civilised life with a climate which makes me inclined to believe that Dante came here instead of to Hades.” Elizabeth recognized the problem, “the noise and confused magnetism of the great City weighed disastrously” on her husband. “The strain of the two kinds of work he was attempting to do, the immediate pressure of the imaginative work [by which she meant the work of Fiona Macleod] became unbearable, ‘the call of the sea,’ imperative” (*Memoir*, 242). Attempting to alleviate the crisis, the Sharps went to Ventnor on the Isle of Wight on January 6. Before they left, Sharp managed several letters. On January 1, he wrote to the editor of a Scottish paper recommending the publication of an article by Frank Rinder about the Scottish poet Robert Fergusson, who died at the age of twenty-four in 1774. He described Rinder, who at thirty-two was only seven years younger than Sharp, as an “able and promising young writer.”

After attending the funeral of Christina Rossetti on January 2nd, Sharp proposed an article about her to Horace Scudder at the *Atlantic Monthly*. It would be similar to his article on Walter Pater which appeared in the December 1894 issue of the magazine. Scudder accepted the suggestion, and Sharp’s “Some Reminiscences of Christina Rossetti” appeared in the July 1895 issue. He also proposed an article on “The Celtic Renaissance,” a subject that was “becoming recognized as one of profound interest and indeed of paramount significance.” He was

"a specialist in old and contemporary Scots-Irish Celtic literature," but he would, of course, restrict himself to "the Celtic spirit: not to what is written in Scottish Gaelic or Irish Gaelic." The new "Celtic movement in Ireland & Scotland, & in a less degree in Wales, is, in a word, of vital importance." Fiona would be the movement's dominant literary voice in Scotland, but William Sharp would also play a role. Scudder must not have accepted Sharp's proposal as no such article appeared in the *Atlantic*.

Writing to Catherine Janvier on January 5, he said he resented "too close identification" with the "so-called Celtic renaissance." To survive, his work "must be beautiful in itself." *Pharais*, he wrote, came from the core of his heart; it was the beginning of his true work. While writing it, his pen was "dipped in the ichor" of his life. He could not say more about *Pharais* without telling her about his whole life, but one day he would confide "some of the strange old mysteries of earlier days I have part learned, part divined, and other things of the spirit." He could write out of his heart as Fiona in a way he could not as William Sharp.

This rapt sense of oneness with nature, this cosmic ecstasy and elation, this wayfaring along the extreme verges of the common world, all this is so wrought up with the romance of life that I could not bring myself to expression by my outer self, insistent and tyrannical as that need is [...] My truest self, the self who is below all other selves, and my most intimate life and joys and sufferings, thoughts, emotions, and dreams, must find expression, yet I cannot save in this hidden way.

In this, his most concise and forthright justification of the pseudonym, there is no mention of supernatural beings or of a separate person, but simply a recognition of two "selves." His most basic self could be expressed only by adopting a feminine pseudonym and projecting a separate identity for his hidden feminine self. That the deeper self was female raised a question that has plagued Sharp's reputation since it was revealed upon his death in 1905 that he was Fiona. Of the book's reception, Sharp told Mrs. Janvier "It had reached people more than he dreamt of as likely" and "created a new movement" in Scotland. In England, it was hailed as a "work of genius" by the likes of George Meredith, Grant Allen, H. D. Traill, and Theodore Watts. It was "ignored in some quarters, abused in others, and unheeded by 'the general reader,'" but Sharp was nonetheless "deeply glad with its reception."

The Sharps met Anna and Patrick Geddes in the fall of 1894, and the couple figured prominently in their lives as 1895 unfolded. There arose between Sharp and Geddes

a friendship with far-reaching results for “Fiona Macleod” [...] Both were idealists, keen students of life and nature; cosmopolitan in outlook and interest, they were also ardent Celts who believed in the necessity of preserving the finer subtle qualities and the spiritual heritage of their race against the encroaching predominance of materialistic ideas and aims of the day (*Memoir*, 248–249).

The Geddes lived in Dundee, where he was Professor of Botany at University College. They were also active in the intellectual and social life of Edinburgh where, in 1887, Geddes established a summer school of arts, letters, and science and Scotland’s first student hostel. The summer school continued every August until 1899 and attracted students and scholars from Great Britain and the Continent. In 1894 he transformed a town mansion known as “Laird of Cockpen,” located near the Castle on Edinburgh’s High Street, into the Outlook Tower, where he created the

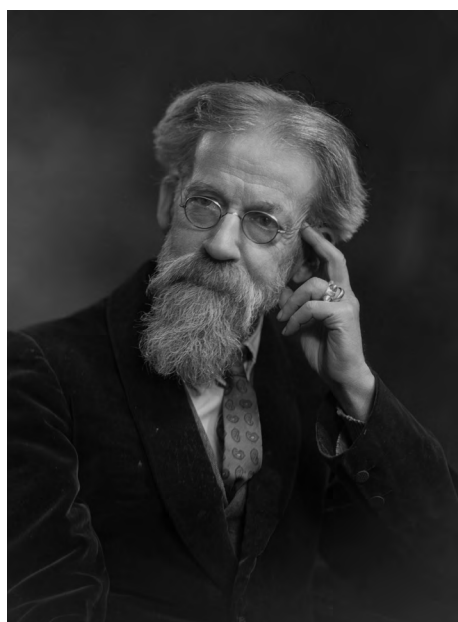


Fig. 31 Sir Patrick Geddes (1854–1932). Photograph by Lafayette, 30 December 1931. © National Portrait Gallery, London. Some rights reserved.

world's first "sociological laboratory." The building became the locus of the Scottish version of the Celtic Revival, and Geddes became the dominant figure in that revival. He fostered the movement as a means of furthering his ambition to restore Edinburgh as a major European center of learning. The Celtic Renaissance article Sharp offered Horace Scudder for the *Atlantic Monthly* was one of a series of lectures Geddes asked Sharp to deliver in August 1895 at the Summer School. The lectures, as we will see, had an unfortunate result, but the invitation initiated a friendship between the two men and opened the way for significant contributions to the Celtic movement by Sharp as an editor and Fiona Macleod as a writer.

From Ventnor on January 10, Sharp asked Anna Geddes if she was surprised when her husband told her "W. S. and Fiona Macleod are one in the same person." Since the Fiona writings were his "Celtic" credentials for taking part in the publishing firm Geddes was organizing, he had confided in Geddes and given him permission to share the secret with his wife. Sharp's purpose in writing to Anna was to emphasize the need for "absolute preservation of the secret." Before she was apprised of Fiona's identity, she received a letter from Fiona in the Fiona handwriting. Now Sharp wrote in his own hand and signed the letter, fittingly, "Fiona Macleod and William Sharp." This is a unique instance of the double signature in a letter and of the Fiona Macleod signature in a letter written in Sharp's hand. Signing both names and asserting W. S. and F. M. were one in the same implied the presence of two personalities. Sharp was trying to find a means of defining and describing his duality. Elizabeth believed her husband's frequent ailments were exacerbated by the strain of appearing to the world as William Sharp while experiencing insights and feelings that found an adequate means of expression only through the female persona.

On January 15 Sharp wrote again to Geddes from Ventnor to say he thought he should go to Edinburgh to discuss details of the publishing firm and "Celtic matters." They would accomplish more in a day than in "months of correspondence." The Sharps were returning to London on January 18 and would be fully occupied through the weekend, but he might be able to get away on January 21 and spend the next two days in Edinburgh. He could ill afford the trip, but it seemed a necessity. Geddes replied he would come to London for the meeting, and Sharp wrote on

January 21 to say he would keep the afternoon and evenings of January 29, 30, and 31 entirely free to talk with Geddes. The Sharp's flat had only one bedroom, but he would arrange with a nearby friend — probably Mona Caird — a place for him to stay.

In his response to Sharp's January 15 letter, Geddes suggested Sharp consider moving to Edinburgh where he could play a leading role in the publishing firm and avoid extensive travel between London and Edinburgh. In his January 21 response Sharp said he found the idea tempting: "I have a profound & chronic distaste for London & London life and a nostalgia for the north." The chief drawback of a move would be financial as a good deal of his income derived from reviewing London art exhibits and works of literature. Editors were less likely to ask for reviews beyond the London postal zone "partly on account of late transmissions & early return of proofs." He doubted there was "publishing, secretarial, tutorial, or other work in Edinburgh that, without more expenditure of time and energy than I now give to my reviewing, would ensure me say £300 & leave me time for my own particular work." In addition to the financial disadvantage of a permanent move to Edinburgh, the Sharps had many acquaintances and some dear friends in London, and the city was a great meeting place, a "bazaar of fortunate & smiling chances." Sharp mentioned his ambitions in the direction of the stage and his wife's love of music, one of her chief joys. He didn't see how he could "throw up Fogtown — at present." Perhaps he might have "rooms in Edinburgh (or the flat in Ramsey Gardens we want to take if possible [...]) and come & go a good deal: in fact, if the publishing idea develops, & you entrust me with a responsible part in it, I would need to be in Edinburgh for one week & perhaps two weeks in each month." On the other hand, if his work for the Geddes publishing firm were to develop to the point where he could receive a guaranteed salary of £300 per year, the move might be possible as he would be glad to drop all his "miscellaneous pen-work."

Having addressed his situation and his availability for the new publishing venture, Sharp described at some length how he thought the firm should develop. "The effort," he wrote, "should be to produce at first certain books of as pronounced a character as possible — books of significance so to say: so that the Firm be known at once for a certain distinction." To help the firm get a good start, he suggested "a little

Fortnightly," like Stone and Kimball's *Chap-Book* which sold for only two pence and was "a splendid advt. of their wares." He had given Geddes a copy of the *Chap-Book* that featured his photograph and an article publicizing the American edition of his *Vistas*. He would be glad to undertake the required careful editing and handling. Geddes penciled "Agreed" against this suggestion, which was the genesis of a more elaborate publication, *The Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal*, the first issue of which appeared in the spring of 1895.

Sharp went on to say the firm should engage in "no haphazard publishing at first": "There might be, to start with, a biological book by A. Thomson: a sociological or other work by yourself: 'A New Synthesis of Art' or other work by myself [...] a Celtic romance by Fiona Macleod [...] (for it is on Celtic lines, I think, the most development will take place first)." He estimated the firm would need an initial outlay of about £1,000; authors would be paid on a royalty system. As for his own involvement,

If you intend me to be the literary "boss" in the firm (tho' perhaps I mistake your intent!) I would give my best thought, care, & experience to making the venture a success in every way, & ultimately a potent factor in the development of Scotland & of Edr [Edinburgh] in particular. Of course, my editorial experiences, & far-reaching literary connections, would stand me in good stead: & in a year or so we could have a varied and potent "staff."

As he continued Sharp's thoughts expanded to include Wales and Ireland, "If I were lity. 'boss,' as I say, one effort would be to centralise in Edinburgh all the Celtic work now being done by Scottish, Irish, and Welsh writers." Capital would be needed to "grease the wheels" and then "patience" and "wise discretion." Here Geddes again wrote, "Agreed." There is always room at the "top of the tree," Sharp asserted, and "We are too enthusiastic, too determined, not to get to that top if it be possible, as I firmly believe it is, and as I know you do." To this statement, Geddes gave his final blessing: "Quite so. Full speed ahead!" Sharp concluded by apologizing for writing "so scrappy and unsatisfactory a note," but said the writing of it moved him out of his "depression & 'doleful dumps.'" This letter provided the basis for their discussion in London as Geddes noted his agreement with many of Sharp's suggestions and moved ahead with them without involving

Sharp. He must have sensed Sharp's inability to stay focused for long on the practical details of management.

In early February 1895, Sharp put the finishing touches on the second Fiona Macleod romance, *The Mountain Lovers*, which John Lane published in the summer. He also wrote Fiona stories for a volume called *The Sin-Eater and Other Tales* which was published in November of 1895 by the Geddes firm in Edinburgh and by Stone and Kimball in Chicago. He was corresponding as Fiona with Herbert Stone about that volume and as William Sharp about *The Gypsy Christ and Other Tales* which Stone and Kimball published, also in 1895. Two weeks of intensive writing and arranging took a heavy toll, physically and mentally. An incident brought home to Elizabeth the seriousness of his condition.

A telegram had come. I took it to his study. I could get no answer. I knocked, louder, then louder, — at last he opened the door with a curiously dazed look in his face. I explained. He answered, "Ah, I could not hear you for the sound of the waves!" It was the first indication to me, in words, of what troubled him (*Memoir*, 242–243).

It was "the noise and confused magnetism of the great City" and his estrangement from the sea. Since there were no waves to be heard in London, he soon left for the West of Scotland.

After spending a weekend in Edinburgh, he went to Corrie, a village on the western Island of Arran, and described his arrival on February 18 in a February 20 letter to Elizabeth:

It was a most glorious sail from Ardrossan. The sea was a sheet of blue and purple washed with gold. Arran rose like a dream of beauty. I was the sole passenger in the steamer, for the whole island! What made the drive of six miles more beautiful than ever was the extraordinary, fantastic beauty of the frozen waterfalls and burns caught as it were in the leap. Sometimes these immense icicles hung straight and long, like a Druid's beard: sometimes in wrought sheets of gold, or magic columns and spaces of crystal. Sweet it was to smell the pine and the heather and bracken, and the salt weed upon the shore. The touch of dream was upon everything, from the silent hills to the brooding herons by the shore.

Sharp was the sole passenger on the ferry between the mainland and the port of Brodick on the island. From there he traveled six miles north to the seaside village of Corrie.

After a cup of tea, I wandered up the heights behind. In these vast solitudes, peace and joy came hand in hand to meet me. The extreme loneliness, especially when I was out of sight of the sea at last and could hear no more the calling of the tide, and only the sough of the wind, was like balm. Ah, those eloquent silences: the deep pain-joy of utter isolation: the shadowy glooms and darkness and mystery of night-fall among the mountains.

"In that exquisite solitude," he continued, "I felt a deep exaltation grow. The flowing of the air of the hills laved the parched shores of my heart."



Fig. 32 Winter on the Isle of Arran. By Archie46 — Own work, CC BY-SA 3.0, Wikimedia Common, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=30013029>

Years later, Sharp retold the story of his 1895 experience in an essay called "Earth, Fire, and Water" which appeared in Fiona Macleod's *The Divine Adventure: Iona; By Sundown Shores* (1900). After repeating several tales about men who were called to the sea by the sound of waves, the narrator continued:

I have myself in lesser degree, known this irresistible longing. I am not fond of towns, but some years ago I had to spend a winter in a great city. It was all-important to me not to leave during January; and in one way I was not ill-pleased, for it was a wild winter. But one night I woke, hearing a rushing sound in the street — the sound of water. I would have thought no more of it, had I not recognized the troubled noise of the tide, and the sucking and lapsing of the flow in weedy hollows. I rose and looked out.

It was moonlight, and there was no water. When, after sleepless hours, I rose in the grey morning I heard the splash of waves. All that day and the next I heard the continual noise of waves. I could not write or read; at last I could not rest. On the afternoon of the third day the waves dashed up against the house. I said what I could to my friends and left by the night train. In the morning we (for a kinswoman was with me) stood on the Greenock Pier waiting for the Hebridean steamer, the *Clansman*, and before long were landed on an island, almost the nearest we could reach, and one that I loved well. We had to be landed some miles from the place I wanted to go, and it was a long and cold journey. The innumerable little waterfalls hung in icicles among the mosses, ferns, and white birches on the roadside. Before we reached our destination, we saw a wonderful sight. From three great mountains, their flanks flushed with faint rose, their peaks white and solemn, vast columns of white smoke ascended. It was as though volcanic fires had once again broken their long stillness. Then we saw what it was: the north wind (unheard, unfelt, where we stood) blew a hurricane against the other side of the peaks, and, striking up the leagues of hard snow, drove it upward like smoke, till the columns rose gigantic and hung between the silence of the white peaks and the silence of the stars.

That night, with the sea breaking less than a score yards from where I lay, I slept, though for three nights I had not been able to sleep. When I woke, my trouble was gone.

The word painting of this passage is precise and moving. The description of his arrival in the 1895 letter to Elizabeth germinated into a striking and controlled passage of poetic prose. While there are subtle efforts to feminize the narrative voice earlier and later in the essay, Fiona, the supposed author, is absent from this passage.

Elizabeth addressed the issue: “Although the essay is written over the signature of ‘Fiona Macleod’ and belongs to that particular phase of work, nevertheless it is obviously ‘William Sharp’ who *tells* the story, for the ‘we’ who stood on the pier at Greenock is himself in his dual capacity; his ‘kinswoman’ is his other self.” After inventing Fiona, Sharp sometimes portrayed himself as two persons in one body, one male and one female. In the 20 February letter of 1895, after telling Elizabeth he was alone on the ferry to Arran, he wrote,

There is something of a strange excitement in the knowledge that two people are here: so intimate and yet so far-off. For it is with me as though Fiona was asleep in another room. I catch myself listening for her step sometimes, for the sudden opening of a door. It is unawaredly that she

whispers to me. I am eager to see what she will do — particularly in *The Mountain Lovers*. It seems passing strange to be here with her alone at last.

It was one thing for Sharp to create and name a secondary personality over whom he had control. It was quite another, as here, to turn that personality into a woman over whom he had no control.

When Sharp objectified the Fiona persona as a separate person, she was sometimes a stand-in for a real person. The kinswoman who accompanied him to Arran in mid-winter 1895, stood on the pier with him, and was sleeping in the next room, may have been not the imagined Fiona, but Edith Rinder. Ever kind and generous, we recall Elizabeth writing of Mrs. Rinder:

Because of her beauty, her strong sense of life and of the joy of life; because of her keen intuitions and mental alertness, her personality stood for him as a symbol of the heroic women of Greek and Celtic days, a symbol that, as he expressed it, unlocked new doors in his mind and put him "in touch with ancestral memories" of his race.

In an 1896 letter to Elizabeth, Sharp wrote "to her I owe my development as 'Fiona Macleod' though, in a sense of course, that began long before I knew her, and indeed while I was still a child," but "without her there would have been no 'Fiona Macleod'" (*Memoir*, 222).

It is impossible to pin down the precise role Edith played in the work Sharp signed Fiona Macleod. Near the end of 1895, writing to his friend Sir George Douglas who knew Fiona was Sharp, he referred to her not as a separate personality, but as a "puzzling literary entity." The previous January, we recall, he told Catherine Janvier, "My truest self, the self who is below all other selves, and my most intimate life and joys and sufferings, thoughts, emotions and dreams, *must* find expression, yet I cannot save in this hidden way." Here Fiona was not a separate person, but one of several "selves" demanding expression. Elizabeth believed Edith Rinder enabled her husband to drop his defenses, release his deepest "self," and exercise most fully his creative imagination. She accepted his claim that he could write most fluently as Fiona when he and Edith were alone together. Some of his letters, especially those to E. C. Stedman, imply he used his need to be away from the city, his need for solitude, as an excuse to be alone with Edith. The build-up of

frustration that preceded his escape to the West of Scotland in February 1895 and again in June of that year may have been partly a build-up of sexual tension. The sense of relief and renewal in his February 20 letter to Elizabeth and, after a similar escape, in a June 4 letter to Geddes is palpable.

In early March, Sharp was back in London sending Geddes a detailed proposal for a quarterly which would be a vehicle for stories, articles, poems, and visual art and also a means of advertising the firm's other publications. He had in mind "a thoroughly representative Anglo-Celtic 'quarterly'" that would be "well-supported" in all the big towns of Great Britain and America and draw "Anglo-Celtic writers to look to Edinburgh." He enclosed a draft of what he thought the first number should contain and volunteered to be its editor (with the help of his wife). Drawing on his London connections, he would assemble a strong list of contributors. He envisioned the quarterly, entitled "The Celtic World," as a "valuable record" of the entire Celtic Revival. Rather than naming an editor, it should say only: "Published by Patrick Geddes and Colleagues" or "Edited and Published in Edinburgh." He constructed a Table of Contents for a "Summer Number" that included items by the most notable Irish, English, Welsh, and Scottish Celticists: W. B. Yeats, Ernest Rhys, Patrick Geddes, Katharine Tynan, George Russell (Æ), and, of course, Fiona Macleod. Planning expansively, he proposed a Frontispiece and Celtic Ornament by John Duncan, the principal visual artist of the Scottish revival.

Ignoring Sharp's offer of himself as editor, Geddes took the idea of a quarterly issued as a book and quickly implemented it. After securing an arrangement with T. Fisher Unwin in London to market the book, he produced not a summer issue, as suggested by Sharp, but a spring issue simply called *The Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal*. This would be followed, in accordance with Sharp's suggestion, by Summer, Fall and Winter issues. Geddes asked William Macdonald, an aspiring poet, to assemble and oversee the publication of the first volume. It began with a seven-page "Proem" by Macdonald and J. Arthur Thomson, a biologist, which set forth Geddes's ideas for reforming not only Edinburgh's Old Town, but the industrialized cities of Britain and beyond. It equated the decadence that pervades literature and the arts with the decay of cities and asserted there were signs of a New Birth "against the background of Decadence."

The music of the coming Renaissance is heard so far only in "broken snatches," but in these snatches four chords are sounded, which we would fain carry in our hearts — That faith may be had still in the friendliness of fellows; that the love of country is not a lost cause; that the love of women is the way of life; and that in the eternal newness of every Child is an undying promise for the Race.

One hears in that sentence attributed to the aspiring poet William Macdonald the distinctive voice of Patrick Geddes.

The content of the Spring volume was divided into four sections: "Spring in Nature," "Spring in Life," "Spring in the World," and "Spring in the North." Each story, poem, and essay touches on the theme of renewal. The authors are not the luminaries of the larger Celtic renaissance Sharp proposed, but comparatively unknown Scots. It contained two essays by Geddes ("Life and its Science" and "The Scots Renaissance"), a Fiona story ("The Anointed Man"), and three Sharp poems, one under his own name and two signed Fiona. Headpieces and Tailpieces of Celtic design appear throughout the volume which



Fig. 33 "Apollo's School Days," John Duncan, in *The Evergreen: A Northern Seasonal, The Book of Spring* (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes and Colleagues, 1895). Photograph by William F. Halloran of his copy in 2020

was printed on fine paper by Constable in Edinburgh. Several copies were produced with tan leather bindings and a full-page design on the front cover embossed in green. The finest of several full-page drawings is John Duncan's "Apollo's School-Days" which echoes the drawings of the decadent Aubrey Beardsley.

As a sidelight, my wife and I spent the summer of 1962 in Edinburgh where we met Arthur Allhallows Geddes — Patrick Geddes' son and William Sharp's godson — at the National Library of Scotland. He was a Lecturer in Geography at Edinburgh University who always wearing a kilt as he moved about the Old Town. When he learned I was examining the papers of his godfather, he offered to sell me for five pounds his set of the four *Evergreens* bound in leather. When he failed to locate his set, he arranged for me to receive the set, also bound in leather, belonging to Lady Mears, his sister, Patrick Geddes' daughter, and the widow of Sir Frank Mears, (1880–1953). Trained as an architect, Mears became Patrick Geddes' assistant in 1908 and married Norah Geddes in 1915. Scotland's leading planning consultant from the 1930s to the early 1950s, he was knighted in 1946. There followed an invitation to have sherry with Lady Mears at her home in the Morningside district of Edinburgh. She hoped to learn more about William Sharp and his relationship with her father. After a pleasant visit and well-fortified with sherry, we returned to our humble flat in Edinburgh's New Town with Lady Mears' set of *The Evergreen* which may or may not have been replaced by Arthur's missing set.

In a letter to Geddes dated May 15, Sharp said he liked much of what was in the spring volume, but some of it lacked "distinctiveness as well as distinction." It was promising and with "careful piloting" should "come to stay." He read Geddes's two contributions "with particular interest and pleasure, not only with the affection of a friend but with the sangfroid of a critic." The poetry in the volume, including that of Fiona Macleod, did not seem as good as the prose. The editorial control, he wrote, "must be more exigent." And the illustrations, he thought, perilously weak: "With the exception of Duncan's "Apollo's School Days" & some of the head-pieces, there is not a drawing [...] which is not crude in draughtsmanship and in design — or in one or two instances frankly meaningless!" John Duncan's "Anima Celtica" was weakly imitative and lacking in any redeeming features. He judged this kind of work as "the

mere dross and debris of the 'fin-de Siècle' ebb." It had "the same effect on one's optic nerves as a scraping nail has on one's auditory ditto." He expected much adverse criticism of the volume because of its art; "*The Yellow Book* drawings are at least clever if ultra-fin-de-Siècle, while the majority of these of *The Evergreen* are fin-de-Siècle without being clever." He recognized his criticism may be too severe, but he felt so strongly "that a really valuable & significant future awaits the 'Evergreen' if it preserve & develop its best, in literature & art, & disengage itself from what is amateurish."

The second volume of *The Evergreen* appeared in the fall of 1895, while the third (summer) and the fourth (winter) followed in 1896. Sharp's critique had the effect of improving the quality of the later volumes. In a note called "Envoy" at the close of the fourth volume Geddes and Macdonald announced the end of the first series and declared the need to take some seasons off before producing a second series. Since the publication was without an editor and invited authors were free



Fig. 34 The Outlook Tower, Castlehill, Edinburgh., locus of the Scottish Celtic Revival. Photograph by Kim Traynor (2013), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Outlook_Tower,_Castlehill,_Edinburgh.JPG#/media/File:Outlook_Tower,_Castlehill,_Edinburgh.JPG, CC BY-SA 3.0

to contribute as they wished, *The Evergreen* reflected Geddes's effort to create an artistic commune in the Outlook Tower and its surrounding buildings, in which writers, visual artists, and scientists would live happily together and stimulate each other's creativity. According to the "Envoy," the artists and scientists now recognized the need to go off on their own and do their own work before coming back together in a new synthesis. *The Evergreen* was not revived.

In early April Sharp wrote a long letter of complaint to Herbert Stone; he had not received proof sheets of *The Gypsy Christ* which had been promised in February, and Fiona Macleod was upset for not having heard from him about the agreement to publish an American edition of *Pharais*. Sharp was beginning to have doubts that Stone and Kimball would be a reliable American publisher of his books. It was an early sign that stresses had developed between the two young publishers. In fact, Melville Stone — Herbert's father and publisher of the *Chicago Daily News* — who supported the publishing venture had begun to wonder if it would develop into a viable business.

In mid-April Sharp went to Paris to cover a salon for the *Glasgow Herald*. He was back in London by the twenty-seventh when he wrote to Geddes apologizing for not having time in Paris to look up Thomas Barclay, a Scottish barrister and asking him to support Geddes's scheme to create a Franco-Scottish College somewhere in France. He promised to contact Barclay when he was back in Paris on May 5, this time with his wife, to review another salon.

Prior to the second Paris trip he wrote Geddes another long letter (April 29) describing an elaborate plan for book publications. He would be in Scotland around May 20 and would like to stay with the Geddes in Dundee for a few days to confer "about the publishing business." The two men must have come to an arrangement during Geddes's late January visit to London, for Sharp to oversee the publication of books, and his April 29 letter contained proposals for discussion. Sharp thought the firm's first book should be an "R. L. S. volume" — that is, a volume either about or by Robert Louis Stevenson — followed by a romance composed by "a well-known Man." Here Geddes wrote in the margin "Mrs. Mona Caird — Agreed 23/5/5." Though not a man, Mona Caird was a well-known advocate for the rights of women and a close friend of the Sharp's. Geddes's marginal note, surely suggested by

Sharp, raises the possibility that Mona Caird, who published in 1894 her ground-breaking novel, *The Daughters of Danaus*, was working on or had completed her next book, *The Pathway of the Gods: A Novel*, which was published in London by Skeffington in 1898. Neither a Stevenson book nor a Mona Caird romance was published by the Geddes firm.

The first two books, Sharp continued, should be followed by Fiona's volume of short stories, *The Sin-Eater and Other Stories*, which would be ready in late fall. Stories of the kind were in demand, Sharp explained, and its sales should be helped by the June appearance of Fiona's second romance, *The Mountain Lovers*. Geddes wrote in the margin of Sharp's letter next to Fiona's *Sin-Eater*, "Press for July," and then, during his meeting with Sharp on May 23, he wrote "Agreed 23/5/5/ for the Autumn." *Lyra Celtica*, an anthology of Celtic poetry, would also be ready for publication in the fall. Sharp suggested the firm publish a series of short books of fiction called "The Evergreen Series" and a "Cosmopolitan Series" containing translations of works by "foreign authors of marked power & distinction in the 'new movement' — a vague phrase that really means little save the onward wave of the human mind." He listed fourteen authors from six countries, including the United States, whose work might be translated. Finally, he thought it best to leave until 1896 the publication of a book called *The Literary Ideal*, which would contain the lectures he planned to deliver in August in Geddes's Summer School. Geddes wisely wrote in the margin "Discuss in August," as he wanted to see the lectures before agreeing to publish them.

Though few of the ideas proposed in this letter materialized, Sharp served briefly as Manager of Patrick Geddes and Colleagues and, when that proved impracticable, as its Literary Adviser. The firm produced, under Sharp's supervision, several beautiful books that rival in design and format those published by established firms in Dublin and London for the Irish contingent of the Celtic Revival. In a series called The Celtic Library, Fiona's *Sin-Eater and Other Tales* appeared in the fall of 1895 and her *Washer of the Ford* in 1896. The series also included in 1896, *The Fiddler of Carne: A North Sea Winter's Tale*, a Welsh romance set in the late eighteenth century by Sharp's friend Ernest Rhys, and, in 1897, *The Shadow of Arvor; Legendary Romances and Folk-Tales of Brittany*, translated and retold by Edith Wingate Rinder. The presence of Wales and Brittany

reflected Sharp's determination to have the firm reach beyond Scotland in its portrayal of Gaeldom. A collection of Fiona poems called *From the Hills of Dream, Mountain Songs and Island Runes* was published in 1896. It was dedicated to Geddes' son and Sharp's Godson, Arthur Allhallows Geddes, who was one year old on Halloween in 1896. In 1897, the firm issued *Fiona's Songs and Tales of St. Columba and His Age* and *The Shorter Stories of Fiona Macleod*, a rearrangement and reissue in three inexpensive paper-covered volumes of the stories published in *The Sin-Eater* and *The Washer of the Ford*. While under his direction, the books published by Patrick Geddes and Colleagues were limited to those by Sharp disguised by the pseudonym, his wife, and his friends. It became, nonetheless, the principal voice of the Scottish Celtic Revival due principally to the writings of Fiona Macleod; and with those writings she became, according to an article in the *Irish Independent*, "the most remarkable figure in the Scottish Celtic Renaissance." In that context, we need to keep reminding ourselves she was William Sharp.

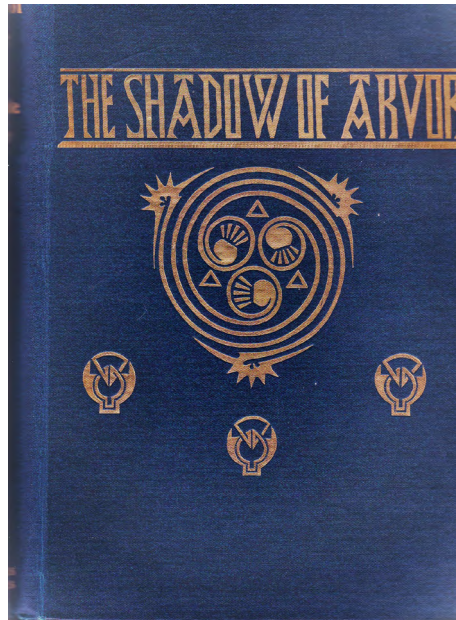


Fig. 35 An example of a Patrick Geddes and Colleague book: *The Shadow of Arvor: Legendary Romances and Folk-Tales of Brittany*, Translated and Retold by Edith Wingate Rinder (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes & Colleagues, 1897). Printed by W. H. White and Co. Ltd., Edinburgh Riverside Press. Photograph by William F. Halloran (2019).

In his April 29 letter to Geddes, Sharp said *Lyra Celtica*, an anthology of Celtic poetry, would be ready for publication in the fall of 1895. He thought its editor of record should be neither F. M. nor W. S., but Elizabeth Sharp. This was advisable, he thought, "for several reasons (one among them, its inclusion of F. M.'s runes & Celtic lyrics)." Sharp, however, would write a "critical introductory essay (as distinct from an ordinary preface)." When it appeared, the book's editor was Elizabeth A. Sharp, but it was largely the work of her husband who selected the poems, contributed copious notes, and wrote a lengthy introduction. *Lyra Celtica* contains ancient Irish, Scottish, and Cornish poems and early Armorican (Breton) and Cymric (Welsh) poems, but most of the volume is devoted to representative poems by "modern and contemporary" poets — Irish, Scottish, Welsh, Manx, Cornish, and Breton. Even Canada is represented by Bliss Carman, chosen because he was Sharp's friend, but justified by his Scottish ancestry. The volume's definition of Celtic is very broad; poems by Lord Byron and George Meredith are included. It reflects the suggestion in Sharp's April 29 letter to Geddes that the firm publish a "Cosmopolitan Series." That series did not materialize, but Sharp knew Geddes wanted the Scottish Celtic Revival's inclusiveness to signal its "cosmopolitanism," then fashionable in Europe, and the restoration of Scotland's centrality as a European center of learning and culture. E. A. Sharp was joined as editor by J. Matthey for the second revised and enlarged edition of *Lyra Celtica* which was published by John Grant's Edinburgh firm in 1924 and 1932.

Patrick Geddes and William Sharp shared a propensity to dream grandly and cast a wide net in their interests and concerns. It is no wonder they became good friends. Neither was a well-organized businessman, and the publishing firm soon descended into financial insolvency. Sharp's efforts to sustain his writing and publication under two signatures, his frequent bouts of ill-health and depression, and his inability to remain for long in one place placed a strain on his relationship with the individuals Geddes enlisted to save the firm. He was ever patient with Sharp and concerned for his well-being. Their close friendship produced a great deal in a brief period, but Geddes soon moved beyond the Celtic Revival as his interests expanded into town planning on a grand scale.

As promised in his April 29 letter to Geddes, Sharp left London on May 18, spent two nights in York with his friend George Cotterell,

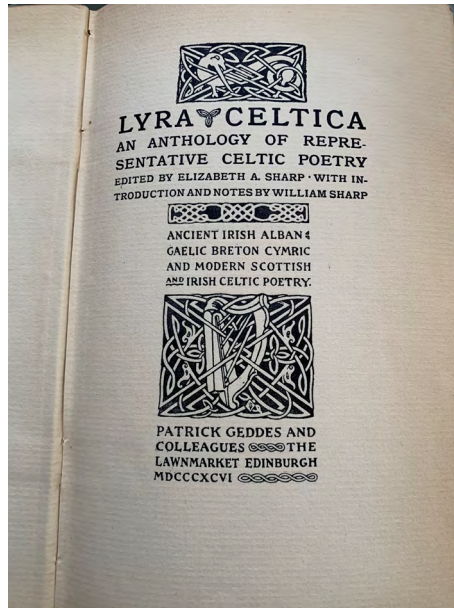


Fig. 36 Title page of the first edition of *Lyra Celtica, An Anthology of Representative Celtic Poetry*, edited by Elizabeth A. Sharp, with an Introduction and Notes by William Sharp (Edinburgh: Patrick Geddes and Colleagues, 1896), <https://archive.org/details/lyracelticaantho00sharp/mode/2up>

editor of the *Yorkshire Herald*, and went on to the Geddes home in Dundee on May 20. On the 23rd he left for a long weekend of relaxation in the West. During their brief visit Geddes became concerned about Sharp's physical and mental well-being. He wrote to ask Elizabeth's opinion about her husband's health and to propose a stipend from the publishing firm that would enable him to spend less time reviewing and more time on his poetry and fiction. In a late May response, Elizabeth expressed her deep appreciation for Geddes's concern and generosity. She was thankful to have someone else who "sees how he is expending health and strength — and encroaching on his reserve — in work of a kind he ought not to do." She continued:

Like you, I have a great belief in the future of W. S. and Fiona M., and I am equally persuaded that he must give up the fretting hack-work in order to give his real work its chance. But it is so difficult to make him do so; he grows nervous, and, I regret to say, chiefly on my account. But I feel sure, that now, your kind interest in him, and thought for him will

do more [than] anything else to make him, not only feel, but act on our advice — which coincides. You are indeed a most valuable ally.

It was a relief for her "to see that there is a friend who understands Will and sees his persistent overwork and delicacy." She would discuss Geddes's offers with her husband when he returned to London and put him into "his doctor's hands" to deal with the weakness in his back, which was the result of overwork. She assured Geddes of her interest in all the "schemes" he and her husband were discussing and hoped she might be allowed "to share in a little of the work."

After he returned to London on May 29 and saw the Geddes letter, Sharp wrote again to Geddes on June 3. He expressed his gratitude for his "solicitude about his health and welfare" and called Geddes "a good & loyal comrade as well as a dear friend." He promised to ponder all Geddes's "arguments and advice," but he was sorry Geddes had written "so exigently" about his health, especially about his back, as he had hoped not to worry Elizabeth about that "passing trouble." That said, he launched into a lengthy description of his brief sojourn:

I had the most glorious weather in the West and had a true sun-bath every day. Friday, Saty, Sunday, & Monday last I spent at one of my favourite remote places on Loch Fyne in Western Argyll. There I lived mentally, spiritually, & physically (excuse the unscientific specifications!) in rainbow-gold. All day from sunrise to midnight I was on the higher mountain slopes, or in the pine-woods (full of continuous solemn music with the north wind), or on the sea. On Sunday forenoon I rowed across (2 miles or so) to the uninhabitable rocky solitudes opposite (South of Ceann More) — went for a long glorious swim of about an hour! — lay naked in the sunlight below a pine on a mossy crag, & dreamed pagan dreams, & fell asleep, & had a wonderful vision of woodland lives unknown of men, and of a beautiful Child God, of which you will hear something from Fiona in due time — & wakened two hours later, still sun-bathed, tanned & burnt & midge-bitten — then another swim — then rowed across the loch again &, after tea etc., away up to the summit of a hill set against a marvellous vision of mountains & peaks & lofty ranges, which I have baptised with a Gaelic name meaning the Hill of the Beauty of the World — then watched the sunglow till 10 p.m. & came down thro' the dewy heather to the pinewoods, where I climbed into the branches of a great red brother & lay awhile listening to the wind, with its old-world wonder-song of the pines, & watching the moon sail upward.

This impressive paragraph of prose, with its long concluding sentence, pulls the reader into sharing the experience. It must have so affected Geddes who shared Sharp's affinity for escaping into the natural world.

Sharp then proceeded to the effect of the experience:

I have come away with a sense of the sunflood through & through me: of magic rhythms and hints of secret voices and cadences haunting-sweet: & with the almost passionate health & eagerness of that young Norse god who in sheer extravagance of joy wove the rainbows into a garland for the moment's mountain he made out of falling worlds.

Sharp's physical and mental state certainly improved during the brief interlude, but the main impetus of the letter was to convince Geddes he was well enough to undertake work for the publishing firm, and well enough to prepare the lectures he promised to deliver for Geddes's Summer School in August. All this, Sharp asserted, "means I am well." He thanked God "for life — for a swift pulse & red blood — and fever in the heart and brain," and stated his intention to "be good, & to lecture, & to publish, & behave, & always love Mrs. Geddes & yourself." The letter is yet another example of Sharp's ability to recover quickly from his too frequent bouts of illness and depression. The overt "Paganism" and his promise to behave raise the possibility he was not alone in this restorative interlude. Though he remained well enough through June to do a good deal of work, his recovery, as usual, was only temporary.

