

William Sharp and "Fiona Macleod"

A Life



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Chapter Fourteen

January–June 1896

In December 1895, Elizabeth's doctor was worried about her health and recommended three months in a warm climate. In the first week of January, her husband accompanied her as far as Calais, and she went on to Florence, where she stayed for several weeks with her aunt. From there, she continued to Rome, accompanied by her friend Mona Caird. After returning to London, Sharp wrote several letters on January 6. One informed the publisher Elkin Mathews that Elizabeth was ill and unable to continue her editing of *Musa Catholica*, an anthology of Catholic poetry. Mathews was free "to arrange with Mrs. Meynell, or Mr. Lionel Johnson, or Mrs. Katherine Tynan Hinkson, or any other Catholic poet or writer, to undertake the volume." In letters to W. Scott Tebb, a physician, and Richard Garnett, Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum, Sharp asked if he could borrow their editions of Matthew Arnold first two books. He wanted to collate their texts for an edition of Arnold's poetry Walter Scott would publish in the Spring. Short of money, Sharp was writing as many reviews as he could and becoming more active in Patrick Geddes and Colleagues. On January 12, that work took him to Edinburgh for four days. From there, he sent Geddes, who was teaching in Dundee, letters from several Belgian writers whose stories Edith Rinder had included in *The Massacre of the Innocents*. They thanked her for copies of the book and praised the quality of her translations. He also enclosed for Geddes a "digest of press opinions" of Fiona's *Sin-Eater*, some twelve from Scottish, Irish, and English papers and all favorable. He wanted to assure Geddes his work as Literary Editor was attracting attention and bode well for the firm.

At a social event in London on January 9, Grant and Nellie Allen invited Sharp to spend a few days with them in Surrey. The next day

he wrote a note to Nellie Allen asking if Sunday, January 19 would be convenient. Still trying to assure her husband he was not Fiona, he added: "If I were Fiona Macleod, as Grant seems to 'hanker after believing,' I would call you *Deo-Grein*, for you are of the Sunbeam kind." After a "very fatiguing time in Edinburgh," Sharp returned to London and spent the weekend of January 18 with the Allens. In a thank you note he told Nellie Allen he "had good news from Lill [...] tho' she is still very far from well." The Allens were considering a move to London, where Grant would be better able to defend and enhance his reputation. Sharp recommended strongly against a move to the "fog and gloom" of the city. If the Allens could only sleep a little better and be brave, they would know their luck and "feel inclined to throw the cat across [their] shadow for mere delight." He asked for "a pat on the head for not being obviously down" during his visit, for he "arrived at a moment of great anxiety and profound heart-sinking, & one of the telegrams was not calculated to allay either." He remained worried and depressed about the personal tensions and financial problems he described to Murray Gilchrist in December, but he managed to surface from the "black gulf of January" during his weekend with the Allens.

On January 24 he wrote "a chronicle of woe" to Herbert Stone. In Edinburgh he found Miss Macleod ill and unable to work, which meant *The Washer of the Ford* would not be published by the Geddes and Stone firms until May. When he returned from Edinburgh to London, he found Edith Rinder in bed with a serious infection, also unable to work. She hoped to be up and about soon but could not have the manuscript of *The Shadow of Arvor* ready until mid-March. Sharp had proposed to Stone that he undertake United States publication of Ernest Rhys' *The Fiddler of Carne* and Elizabeth Sharp's *Lyra Celtica*, both in preparation under his direction at the Geddes firm. Everything except the anthology was delayed, including Sharp's romance, *Wives in Exile*, which Stone had accepted. He told Stone he was "far from well." Apart from "the trouble connected with Mrs. Sharp's break-down & going to Italy, & the heavy extra strain thrown on me, & having her work to do for her [...] I have been under a great strain of anxiety & suffering of another kind," about which he could only hint to Stone. Ever anxious to present an optimistic face to publishers, he closed by telling Stone the "strain" was passing. He hoped to complete *Wives in Exile* in February and receive

the one-hundred pounds Stone had agreed to pay upon receiving the manuscript. Tapping all sources of money, he sent a statement to John Ross on January 28, which showed the firm owing him seventy-five pounds.

In the January 25 issue of the *Highland News*, John Macleay published the first of a two-part article on Scottish Highland writers. He praised Fiona Macleod's first three books and called on other Highlanders to follow her lead. It is to be hoped, he said, that "Miss Macleod is but the first in a movement which shall bring the Highlands into line with the great band of young Irish writers who are at present attracting so much attention in the literary world." In the next issue of the *Highland News* (February 1), under a section entitled "The Highlands in Literature: A Symposium," Macleay printed letters dated January 28 from William Sharp and Fiona Macleod. The Sharp letter refuted the notion that the Gaelic language was disappearing:

In Scotland at this moment there are estimated to be 310,000 people who speak both Gaelic and English, and about 48,800 who speak Gaelic only. [...] Doubtless, it will be a further surprise for many to learn there are nearly three-and-a-half million persons who to-day use one or other of the Celtic dialects, and that of these it is estimated 1,156,730 speak no other than their native tongue. Numerically, it is not Wales that comes first, as commonly supposed, but Brittany, of whose population nearly a million and a-quarter speak the Armorican dialect, while 700,000 of these can speak no other language.

He called for the expansion of Gaelic — written and spoken — beyond Ireland, Wales, Brittany, and the western isles of Scotland. He also thought it would be "a good plan to establish in Inverness, with branches in Oban, Glasgow, Edinburgh, and London, a society to be called say, The Gaelic Literary Union."

The Fiona letter proclaimed "a new spirit of intellectual and spiritual life is to go forth; not indeed merely to gleam in fantastic beauty, as bewitching but as insubstantial as a rainbow, but to merge into the larger spirit of intense life which makes everywhere for beauty." For that to happen, Highlanders

must be true to our old love of two of the noblest of human ideals — Beauty and Simplicity. We must not only love but revere Beauty in Nature, in Art, in Life, in the souls of men and women: and we must not only praise

Simplicity, we must practice it again. It is better to live on porridge and have the spiritual birthright of our race, than to be bondagers to the palate and the belly, and live less in the spirit and more in the body: and it is better to be wrought by what is Beautiful than by social ambitions and the chronic pathetic effort to live at a tangent.

In the previous issue of *The Highland News*, Macleay assigned Fiona the leadership role in the Scottish contingent of the Celtic Literary Movement. In this letter, Fiona encouraged Macleay in his "timely crusade" and thanked him for his "much too generous words" about her place and work. Sharp proceeded to use the Fiona letter to set forth his expansive goals for the Celtic Revival. Its apocalyptic rhetoric echoes that of several Irish writers, chief among them W. B. Yeats and George Russell (Æ).

In Macleay, Sharp found a champion for his Celtic writings. He sent copies of *The Highland News* to Elizabeth in Italy and told Murray Gilchrist "the chief North of Scotland paper [...] is printing two long articles devoted in a most eulogistic way to F. M. and her influence 'already so marked and so vital, so that we accept her as the leader of the Celtic Renaissance in Scotland.'" He "welcomed the opportunity of appearing in print in two guises for he believed that would help shield the true identity of Fiona" (*Memoir*, 258). Before long, Macleay began repeating rumors and engaging in speculation about the identity of Fiona. When forced to write letters of denial, Sharp became decidedly less enthusiastic about Macleay.

After a hectic month of January — trips to France and Edinburgh; physical and mental illness; dealing with the affairs of Patrick Geddes and Colleagues; trying to keep track of the progress of his publications with Stone and Kimball in Chicago; financial worries; and the need to keep writing essays, reviews, and stories as two different people — Sharp went north to the relaxing environment of the Pettycur Inn on the Firth of Forth for the first two weeks of February. Shortly after arriving, he wrote a brief note to tell Nellie Allen he was ill the previous week and sick of London. He canceled his plans to visit Le Gallienne in Surrey where he would also have called on the Allens. Instead, he came to "a remote inn on a little rocky promontory on the Fife coast" where he could hear "the lapping of the tide on the rocks below the windows, and a strange low casual moaning of the sea-wind far out on the water." He would be

joined by a friend in a day or so, and he thought Nellie could guess who that friend was. She would guess Fiona Macleod which suggests the guest was Edith Rinder. Several days later, in a letter thanking Macleay for copies of the *Highland News* with his articles on Fiona and the letters from Sharp and Fiona, he assured him “Fiona Macleod is very tangible indeed.” She and his sister Mary visited him the day before, and he had to pay for their luncheon. “One doesn’t pay for phantoms,” he asserted. Macleay had begun to have doubts. Sharp was certain Fiona would not allow her photograph to be published anywhere. She values her privacy, and “anyone who once saw her photograph would recognize her in a moment anywhere, for her beauty is of a very striking kind.” In his effort to create Fiona’s identity, he again conflated her with Edith Rinder.

Elizabeth had written to suggest he focus on his creative work rather than articles, reviews, and essays. He responded positively to her suggestion, promising to concentrate in February on “finishing *Wives in Exile* and *The Washer of the Ford*.” His diary for the first ten days of the month shows he was still balancing the two kinds of work. On February 3, he wrote a lengthy “Prologue” to *The Washer of the Ford*; while on February 7, he dictated a 1750-word article for the *Glasgow Herald* on “Modern Romantic Art.” On February 9, he wrote Fiona’s “The Festival of the Birds;” while on February 10, he produced another article for the *Glasgow Herald* on “The Art of the Goldsmith.” He also wrote a long Fiona letter to Herbert Stone about publishing and copyright problems. She would be late in completing *The Washer of the Ford* because she had been ill,

though not so seriously as Mrs. Sharp, who is now in Italy or my dear friend Edith Rinder, whom you know, and from whom at Christmas I received a copy of “The Massacre of the Innocents,” so delightfully got up — or as Mr. Sharp himself, who has had influenza, and is still in the doctor’s hands, from that cause and a superadded dangerous chill.

All four — Elizabeth, Edith, Fiona, and Sharp — were ill, and their illnesses, though varying in seriousness, set them behind in their work.

Still sick and depressed when he returned to London in mid-February, Sharp continued working. On February 21 he told Elizabeth he had finished the introduction and notes to Matthew Arnold’s *The Strayed Reveller, Empedocles on Etna, and Other Poems*, which was published by Walter Scott’s Canterbury Series in the spring. Also on February 21,

Elizabeth's poetry anthology, *Lyra Celtica: An Anthology of Representative Celtic Poetry*, with her husband's lengthy introduction and extensive biographical and critical notes, was issued in Geddes's "Celtic Library" series. He also finished the remaining tales for Fiona's *Washer of the Ford*, which was published in Edinburgh by the Geddes firm on May 12, and by Stone and Kimball in New York on June 10.

In the *Memoir* (263), Elizabeth included a paragraph about *The Washer of the Ford* from an early April letter she received from her husband. It is one of Sharp's most insightful paragraphs about his own work:

I know you will rejoice to hear that there can be no question that F. M.'s deepest and finest work is in this "*Washer of the Ford*" volume. As for the spiritual lesson that nature has taught me, and that has grown within me otherwise, I have given the finest utterance to it that I can. In a sense my inner life of the spirit is concentrated in the three pieces "The Moon-Child," "The Fisher of Men," and "The Last Supper." Than the last I shall never do anything better. Apart from this intense summer flame that has been burning within me so strangely and deeply of late — I think my most imaginative work will be found in the titular piece "*The Washer of the Ford*," which still, tho' written and revised some time ago, haunts me! and in that and the pagan and animistic "*Annir Choille*." We shall read those things in a gondola in Venice?

When one lays down *The Sin-Eater* and takes up *The Washer of the Ford*, one moves into a new universe, subjectively and qualitatively. It is the same author writing about similar locales and championing the Celtic cause, but the chief concern is not star-crossed lovers swimming out in the ocean never to be seen again and the impossibility of achieving the perfect amorous relationship while alive. For three years, Sharp had been consumed by the barriers preventing his living a full life with the woman he had found too late, and this burden made its way into his writings. Following the psychological maelstrom that beset him in the fall of 1895, described in his letters to Murray Gilchrist, and after Elizabeth left for Italy in January, Sharp, with the assistance of Edith and Frank Rinder, began to work his way out of the conundrum, come to terms with the facts of his life, and move on to other concerns and other subjects.

The over-arching aim of *The Washer of the Ford* was to illuminate the transition between the Druidic religion that prevailed in the Western Isles and the new religion (Christianity) St. Columba brought to Iona

and to show how many of the beliefs and rituals of the old religion were absorbed into the new. The title story is Sharp's rendition of the *bean-nighe*, or the washer at the ford — a woman who sits beside a stream washing blood from the linen and grave clothes of those who are about to die. All the stories are infused with the religion of nature or, as Sharp wrote to Elizabeth, the "spiritual lesson" nature had taught him. "Natural religion" was Sharp's recourse from Darwin's mid-century revelations. In stories like "The Fisher of Men" and "The Last Supper," he treats biblical stories as myths with universal applications and transposes them via dreams or visions into stories set in the Western Isles of Scotland, where they acquire new trappings. In "The Last Supper," for example, Ian Mor of the Hills recounts a dream he had as a young child. Separated from his mother and crying, he was approached by the Prince of Peace, who took him to a hut where a table was set for thirteen men. The Prince told the child he dies daily, and "ever ere I die the Twelve break bread with me." Asked by the child his name, the Prince replied "Iosa mac Dhe," Jesus son of God. The child then saw twelve men sitting at the table with "eyes of love upon Iosa." Each had three shuttles with which they wove phantoms that arose and left the room to enter the lives of men and women. The child liked most to look at the two men sitting on either side of Iosa. One was the Weaver of Joy and the other the Weaver of Love. The remaining men were Weavers of Death, Sleep, Youth, Passion, Laughter, Tears, Prayer, Rainbows, Hope, and, finally, Glory (who turned out to be Judas, and who the Prince named the Weaver of Fear). When Glory left the room, his shadow "entered into the minds and into the hearts of men and betrayed Iosa who was the Prince of Peace." After the child was led by Iosa from the room, he looks back and sees only the Weaver of Hope and the Weaver of Joy "singing amid a mist of rainbows and weaving a radiant glory that was dazzling as the sun." Finally, Ian Mor of the Hills recalls waking against his mother's heart, with her tears falling on him and her lips moving in prayer. It is a compelling story told with precision, restraint, and compassion.

As Fiona, Sharp dedicated the book to Catherine Ann Janvier. A lengthy "Prologue" addressed "To Kathia," begins:

To you in your faraway home in Provence, I send these tales out of the remote North you love so well, and so well understand. The same blood

is in our veins, a deep current somewhere beneath the tide that sustains us. [...] You will find much that is familiar to you; for there is a reality, beneath the mere accident of novelty, which may be recognised in a moment as native to the secret life, that lives behind the brain and the wise nerves with their dim ancestral knowledge.

If this sounds like William Sharp writing about a woman fourteen years his senior with whom he has bonded, it is. In what follows, he says things to and about Kathia that would have been awkward had he not attributed them to a woman. In an article titled "Fiona Macleod and Her Creator William Sharp" published in the *North American Review* in 1907, Catherine Janvier recalled receiving a letter from Sharp in April 1896 saying he had dedicated *The Washer of the Ford* to her and commenting "if a book can have a soul that book has one." A copy of the book did not arrive in Provence until mid-May, but on the first of May she received "an especially printed and bound copy of the Prologue, and a letter stating it had been materially improved and strengthened and largely added to." Later, Sharp gave her his original draft of the Prologue. Comparing the draft with the printed version, she noted "the precise choice of word, the careful ordering of phrase and placing of paragraph," and was moved to write "Never was there a more careful writer than Fiona MacLeod, while of her creator this cannot always be said." Catherine Janvier valued the "Prologue" and her friendship with Sharp.

Elizabeth included two of the letters Sharp received about *The Washer of the Ford* (*Memoir*, 264–265). One dated June 22, 1896 is from Catherine's husband, Thomas Janvier, who agreed with his wife about the quality of the writing:

I am sensitive to word arrangement, and some of your work has made me rather disposed to swear at you for carelessness. [...] But these stories are as nearly perfect in finish, I think, as literary endeavor can make them. [...] Of all in the book, my strongest affection is for "The Last Supper." It seems to me to be the most purely beautiful, and the profoundest thing you have done. [...] I feel some strong new current must have come into your life; or that the normal current has been in some way obstructed or diverted. [...] The Pagan element is entirely subordinated to and controlled by the inner passions of the soul. In a word, you have lifted your work from the flesh-level to the soul-level.

Janvier also thought the stories in *The Washer of the Ford* were quite clearly written by a man. It was not only that the masculine Sharp,

though nominally a woman, addressed his wife in the Prologue, but a great part of the book was “essentially masculine.”

If *The Washer of the Ford* were the first of Fiona’s books, I am confident the sex of the author would not have passed unchallenged. [...] The “Seanachas,” and “The Annir Choille,” and the opening of “The Washer”: not impossible for a woman to write, but unlikely. [...] The fighting stories seem to me to be pure man — though I suppose there are Highland women (like Scott’s “Highland Widow”) capable of their stern savagery. But on these alone, Fiona’s sex scarcely could have been accepted unchallenged.

Sharp sometimes said he was more a woman than a man, while Janvier claimed Fiona, in *The Washer of the Ford*, was more a man than a woman. One’s head spins at the reversal, but Janvier, like Sharp and many of his close friends, was reaching toward an understanding of human sexuality that became widely accepted in western culture only a century later.

In one story in the volume, “The Annir Choille,” Janvier continued, Fiona showed her “double sex” more completely than in any other. The story has “a man’s sense of decency and woman’s sense of delicacy — and the love of both man and woman is in it to a very extraordinary degree.” He concluded by moving beyond the masculine/feminine dichotomy:

What seems to me plainest, in all the stories together, is not the trifle that they are by a man or by a woman but that they have come out of your spiritual soul. [...] With their freshness they have a curious primordial flavor — that comes, I suppose, from the deep roots and full essences of life which are their substance of soul. Being basic, elementary, they are independent of time, or even race.

Men have feminine traits, and women have masculine traits, and basic human traits are shared by men and women. Though he maintained the distinction between the two sexes, he had come to believe it was not unusual for an author to be both a man and a woman who loved both men and women.

The second letter Elizabeth included is from Frank Rinder:

My dear Will, From my heart I thank you for the gift of this book. It adds to the sum of the precious, heaven-sent things in life. It will kindle the fire of hope, of aspiration and of high resolve in a thousand hearts. As one of those into whose life you have brought a more poignant craving for what is beautiful in word and action, I thank you for writing it. Your friend, Frank.

The letter is remarkable for the praise it conveys and its expression of gratitude for what Sharp has brought to his life. It also suggests an understanding had been reached between Sharp and the Rinders about the future of their relationship.

If during Elizabeth's absence in the first four months of 1896 Sharp overcame the anxiety and depression that arose from the frustrations of his relationship with Edith Rinder, another problem still plagued him. He was short of money. A letter to Geddes early in March reveals the pressure of his work, and the precariousness of his finances. He had come to rely heavily on an American woman, Lillian Rea, in his work for the Geddes firm. She was based in Edinburgh, but Sharp needed her in London. He was trying to finish Fiona's *Washer of the Ford* and her *Green Fire* for Archibald Constable, and his own *Wives in Exile* for Stone and Kimball. He was also managing the distribution of Elizabeth's *Lyra Celtica*, doing her reviewing work for the *Glasgow Herald*, and corresponding with Stone and Kimball regarding the publication of his books in America. Sharp's doctor ordered him to obtain the help of, or "give up at once" his connection to, Patrick Geddes and Colleagues, and do nothing besides his "own imperative work."

I am under extreme pressure of work of my own — which has been so terribly interfered with by *Lyra Celtica*, E's work, & my own ill health & absence — and in order to meet E's heavy expenses abroad & my own here I must put my best foot forward. In order to do this work, I must have help for the correspondence etc. involved with printer, binder, & the question of distribution, reviews, etc. etc. of L/C, Rhys, etc. — besides, Evergreen correspondence, etc. In a word, it is not only W. S.-F. M. who wants an opportunity to get well & to do his own work, but the Manager of P.G. & Co. who wants a clerk or at least an office-boy!

"If I could have Lilian Rea's services clear for about three weeks (or at most a month)," I would be able "to put all straight, for myself and others, at the least possible expenditure of my rather too severely drawn upon reserve."

There was another reason he needed Lillian Rea in London. He had been given "medical injunctions not to be alone," and Geddes, Sharp wrote, didn't realize how "down" he had been: "I don't care to speak about it. I want to forget it. I want to be well. I want to work." Sharp did not want to slip back into depression, and he informed Geddes he did

not feel well if left alone — “particularly in the evenings.” There was no one at present who could suitably come to him, except Lillian Rea. Elizabeth was in Italy and Edith Rinder was ill. When alone it was “not only the terrible (& to me novel) depression I then experience, but the paralysis that comes upon my writing energy.” The operative word is “depression.” It was this condition he described to Murray Gilchrist at the close of 1895. It was this condition he could only hint at in the “chronicle of woe” he sent to Herbert Stone in January. And it was this condition that caused his wife and Edith Rinder to agree that one or the other or a suitable substitute must always be with him. To be sure, he could not work — and sustain necessary income — when alone, but a greater worry was the possibility of his depression leading to suicide.

It becomes ever clearer that Sharp was manic-depressive, a condition augmented and partly caused by the precarious condition of his heart and other physical ailments. In this early March letter to Geddes, he summarized his situation as follows:

If I find myself unable to do my F. M. work — & it is imperative that for the next six weeks F. M.’s work should prevail — I must sever my connection with the firm. At all hazards, F. M. must not be “killed.” *But this is sure:* she cannot live under present conditions. Leaving aside then the Doctor’s & E’s urgent requests as to my not being alone (partly because of my heart, & partly because of a passing mental strain of suffering and weariness) it comes to this: (1) I have help (& mind you an “outsider” is absolutely worthless to me just now, & probably at any time) & stay here, and do both F. M. & W. S. & P. G. & Co. — each in proportion and harmony: or else [(2)] I definitely sever my connection — at any rate pro: tem: — before all correspondence: & go away somewhere where F. M.’s funeral wd. not be so imminent, & W. S.’s nervous health could not be so drained. My plans all hang upon (1) how much I can get done before the end of March, (2) and at what mental cost. God need not send poets to hell: London is nearer, & worse to endure.

Geddes responded positively to this appeal and sent Lillian Rea to London. Not a frugal person himself, he also responded as far as he could to Sharp’s need for money. At the same time, after receiving this letter and considering Sharp’s collapse at the Celtic summer session the previous August, Geddes began to realize that, just as working for the firm was not good for Sharp, Sharp was not good for the firm.

By early April, Sharp's need for money reached crisis level. In another letter to Geddes, he said Stone and Kimball had not sent the money promised for his books, and what he was writing currently would bear no fruit until summer. It was essential that he receive one-hundred pounds from Geddes before the end of the month. He was due that much for managerial fees and book contracts. Also, he had one-hundred pounds invested in Geddes's Town and Gown Association. Failing money for his work, he would retrieve his investment. With one or the other, he would be able to borrow the rest to cover his expenses in London and those of a trip to Italy he planned for May. It was not only that he wanted to meet his wife and accompany her home, but he had to go abroad because he had come to the end of his tether: it was "no longer a case of an *advisable* complete rest & change — but of that being imperative." Shocked at his "startling loss in vitality," his doctor ordered him not to travel far at a time. Consequently, it would be at least a week or ten days after he left Paris before he met up with Elizabeth. "I am told to go by the Riviera & stay somewhere 3 or 4 days on the way, at least — This for the head." He would spend the next three weeks making "the cauldron boil," but that would produce money only after he and Elizabeth return.

Sharp was also trying to understand the lack of communication from Stone and Kimball. On May 4, he vented his frustration in a letter to Herbert Stone:

If, when I wrote to you expostulatingly exactly a month ago today, I was then more than merely surprised and annoyed at the extraordinary delay in hearing from you concerning the matters about which you were to write to me, and in many weeks past-promised receipt of my MS. of "The Gypsy Christ" & Proofs — you may perhaps imagine how I regard the matter now: — now that you have had time to receive and answer that letter sent to you on April 4th.

He was "utterly at a loss to understand this most unbusinesslike and apparently grossly discourteous conduct." He understood Miss Macleod was being treated similarly. For the extraordinary discourtesy, he demanded "an immediate and absolutely explicit explanation." Unless Fiona heard from him before the end of May, she would take legal action in accord with her contract.

With Geddes's aid, he managed to put enough money together to leave for Italy in early May. After stopping briefly in Paris and then in

Provence to visit the Janviers, he went on to the Riviera, which turned out to be a profit center. In a May 6 note to Murray Gilchrist, he reported that he had made forty pounds on the gaming tables the previous night, almost half as much as he sought from Geddes. From the Riviera, he went on to Venice, where he joined Elizabeth on May 16. After a few days, they went north to the Italian lakes. On May 28, a card from Bellagio on Lake Como informed Gilchrist they would be in England on June fourth. Elizabeth would go directly to London, but he, having to break up his journey, would spend a few days — as it turned out a week — in Dover. After a week in the remote seaside hotel at St Margaret's Bay near Dover, he spent another week in London with Elizabeth. In mid-June he escaped to Edinburgh and stayed until the end of the month across the Forth at the Pettycur Inn.

During his absence, there had been no communications from Herbert Stone. As Fiona, Sharp wrote a letter to Stone dated June 9 in which he said he understood *The Washer of the Ford* had been published in the United States and requested his agreed upon twelve copies and advance of "£25 due on publication." Fiona was "strongly disinclined to publish further" with his firm unless she met with "more prompt courtesy and more satisfactory business relations." The next day — June 10 — Sharp wrote a letter to Hannibal Ingalls Kimball to say he received Kimball's letter dated May 22 which had followed him around Europe. In the letter Kimble said he had bought out Stone's interest in the firm and moved it to New York. He intended to go ahead with the publication of Sharp's *Wives in Exile* as soon as possible. Sharp replied he was willing to make allowances for the disruption, but he expected to receive 1) the £100 Stone promised on receipt of the manuscript of *Wives in Exile* and 2) proofs of the book to offer Archibald Constable for a possible British edition. Within a few months Kimball ran out of money and closed the business without publishing *Wives in Exile* or sending Sharp the promised money. Stone and Kimball was an excellent vehicle for introducing Fiona Macleod to the American public. With its dissolution, Sharp was left without an American publisher and a vital source of income.

In early June, Sharp received a letter from W. B. Yeats which must have buoyed his spirits, at least temporarily. In his lengthy introduction to Elizabeth's *Lyra Celtica*, Sharp singled out W. B. Yeats as "pre-eminently representative of the Celtic genius of today," and praised his poetry:

He has grace of touch and distinction of form beyond any of the younger poets of Great Britain, and there is throughout his work a haunting sense of beauty. He is equally happy whether he deals with antique or with contemporary themes, and in almost every poem he has written there is that exquisite remoteness, that dream-like music, and that transporting charm which Matthew Arnold held to be one of the primary tests of poetry, and in particular, of Celtic poetry.

High praise indeed to assert that Yeats's poems met the high test of Matthew Arnold, whose poetry Sharp had edited for Walter Scott's Canterbury Poets Series. He went on to quote and praise passages of several Yeats's poems. In the early June letter, Yeats told Sharp he had read *Lyra Celtica* "with greatest delight." No book for a long time had given him so much pleasure. It was certain "to be very influential & to help forward a matter" that meant a good deal to him: "the mutual understanding & sympathy of the Scotch, Welsh, & Irish Celts." Yeats lavishly praised a Fiona Macleod poem in the anthology: "In the Scottish part Fiona Macleod's 'prayer of women' filled me with a new wonder it is more like an ancient than any other modern poem & should be immortal." These words (as transcribed in *Collected Letters II*) must have given Sharp enormous pleasure and encouraged him to continue putting Fiona forward as the leader of the Scottish contingent of the Celtic Revival. Yeats concluded by accepting Sharp's invitation for dinner as he had some "Celtic matters" to talk over with him, and that meeting may have occurred the following week. When Yeats first met Sharp in the late 1880s, he was not impressed, but *Lyra Celtica* changed his mind. Sharp was a comrade in the Celtic cause. Thus began a close relationship that developed quickly and lasted for several years.

In mid-June, while her husband was at the Pettycur Inn, Elizabeth wrote a poignant letter to thank Geddes for his friendly welcome home, to tell him she felt stronger and better than she had for years after spending the winter in Italy, and to express her deep concern about the state of her husband's health. When she met him in Venice, he "was so weak and feeble I was very alarmed. He had long fainting fits which at first I thought were heart attacks." Geddes had offered the Sharps his seaside cottage, but Elizabeth could not go north right away because of her work for the *Glasgow Herald*. And Will had to be near the Edinburgh office of Patrick Geddes and Colleagues. She asked Geddes not to allow her husband, when he saw him, "to discuss business matters for any

length of time at one sitting. He needs all his time and strength to get well.”

Each spring, she told Geddes, her husband got worse, and she could see that “if he works at the present speed & with the present complications, he will not see many more springs. The dual work of F. M. and W. S. is a great drain on his strength, at the present moment too great a drain; & his state at present is unsatisfactory.”

Ignoring Elizabeth’s concern, Sharp continued his work with the Geddes firm. On June 22 and June 30, the day before he left the Pettycur Inn, he wrote long letters to Geddes about the firm’s publications and his work as Literary Director. The positive notices of the Fiona Macleod publications and the praise from Yeats were surely factors in his burst of energy during the last two weeks of June.

