

William Sharp and "Fiona Macleod"

A Life



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Chapter Twenty

1900

In early January Sharp sent Nellie Allen a letter with a copy of the poem he delivered at the December meeting of the Omar Khayyam Club. The poem alluded to her husband, and in his preliminary remarks he called Grant Allen “a fine writer and true-hearted man” whose death was a loss to his many friends and to the club. Both Sharps looked forward to seeing Nellie again as soon as she vacated The Croft in Hindhead and settled in London. On January 8, he wrote a long letter to Edith Lyttelton who remained under the spell of Fiona. He was sorry to hear she had been ill through much of the fall. He had also been ill and was determined not “to spend another midwinter in this damp & sunless climate.” He asked if she had written anything lately and declared Fiona, having sampled her earlier work, felt assured she “could, and probably some day soon would, write a notable book.” Fiona’s new book, *The Divine Adventure*, would be published in March by Chapman & Hall. Its title was also the title of its long titular essay which had appeared in the recent November and December issues of Chapman & Hall’s *Fortnightly Review*. The book will be “personal” and “autobiographical,” unlike anything Fiona has produced. As for William Sharp, he was “at work every available hour on a commissioned ‘History of the Fine Arts in the Nineteenth Century’ — a kind of synthesis, or coup d’oeil perhaps, of the dominating features and interrelated developments of modern art.” He concluded by asking Mrs. Lyttelton to join him the following Monday for tea and a chat at his club or, if she preferred, he could come to her.

During the warm and sunny fall Sharp enjoyed life in Chorleywood, but as winter set in he began to tire of country life and dislike the travel in and out of London in foul weather. In an early February letter, he

told Theodore Watts-Dunton he would ask the Walter Scott publishing to make the requested "rectifications" in Watts-Dunton's sonnets in the next edition of *The Sonnets of the Nineteenth Century*. Given his current money problems it is not surprising that he went on to say about that book:

It's a little hard that for this book I got £10 — & that all I ever had from it since was £5 for preparing a special reprint! It has gone into innumerable editions — & in all forms has sold to an unprecedented extent for a book of the kind, here & in America etc. At even a royalty of 1d a copy I'd had over £400 — so imagine what Scott's profit must be!

The book had sold about 100,000 copies and another edition would be out in the Spring.

He turned next to his ill health since the turn of the year:

I know you will be sorry to hear that since Christmas I have had a bad time of it. First, I got influenza again, with pneumonic complication — then an inflammatory condition of the veins was set up — & thro' that & an accident on the railway I started a bad varicose vein, badly strained, & constantly threatening a clot (phlebitis) — laming me as though I had the gout! — & keeping me to the house for weeks. Then a very painful & prostrating meningeal neuralgia set in — partly from overstrain of work & financial straits etc. Still, all might have gone well, had not I gone one day (under great stress of agony) to a dentist to be sure there was nothing the matter with my teeth. He was a faddist, & incompetent — & having found all absolutely sound said he wd. take out five sound teeth then & there (& without gas!) as that would cure me! I was weak enough to be persuaded of urgency — but after the second sound tooth had been literally torn out (for my teeth are very sound & strong) I fainted & he could do no more. It now turns out he was wholly wrong as to this — & I have lost two sound molars & have my neuralgia still, only worse! The nervous shock proved so bad for me that my wife, & the doctor, became seriously perturbed. The upshot was that a few days ago I was ordered away for a month to recruit by the sea — & would have gone 2 days ago but for a sudden painful attack of lumbago.

From a twenty-first-century perspective, one can only wonder how people endured such a litany of pain.

The lengthy description of his illnesses was "partly a preamble" to explain his inability to repay the £25 Watts-Dunton loaned him in November. He had hoped to do so in February, but his inability to work

meant no income. He planned to go into London the next day to see if from his bank or other sources he could raise enough money to go away for a month as recommended by his doctor. Elizabeth was down with bronchitis, and she also needed to "recruit by the sea." His trip to London must have been successful since he and Elizabeth escaped for a month to Broadstair, a coastal resort town on what was then an island and is now a peninsula at the most easterly point of Kent. He concluded the letter by saying he hoped to see Watts-Dunton and be "recuperative & buoyant" when he returned. Shortly after returning in early March, he went to Edinburgh to visit his mother and sister for two days on "family business." On March 15, he wrote to William Blackwood proposing an article for *Blackwood's Magazine* on recent French Art or an article on Breton poets. He planned to visit Paris for the Salon which would open on April 2 and then go on to Brittany where he hoped to meet and interact with poets. Since Blackwood was not in his Edinburgh office when Sharp called, he would not have the pleasure of meeting him since he was returning to London the next morning. The proposed articles did not make it into *Blackwood's Magazine*.

As it turned out, he fell ill again, and instead of leaving Edinburgh as planned on March 16, he stayed an additional ten days. Back in Chorleywood on the 26th, he wrote a note to Stanley Little: "Just returned — but E. still very seedy and at her mother's. I go there now but shall be back tomorrow and hope to write then or Wedny." When he wrote two days later, he began by saying he was months behind with urgent work due to illnesses, his and Elizabeth's. After recounting the progress of their maladies, he turned to the work he had managed to accomplish. Between January 1 and 21, he wrote 50,000 words for what would become *The Progress of Art in the Nineteenth Century*. Then he came down with the flu and was unable to continue. He still had 70,000 words to write, but he could not get to it until mid-April. Elizabeth agreed to write an additional 15,000 words about music, and they hoped to have it all done before the end of May. Commissioned by The Linscott Publishing Company in Toronto and Philadelphia, it became Volume Twenty-Two in their gigantic Nineteenth Century Series. It was published separately in 1902 by W. and R. Chamber, Ltd., in London and Edinburgh.

Little asked Sharp about this work because he had agreed to write another volume for the Linscott series and wondered how much he

should charge. Sharp said he "had special terms, without which it wd. have been wholly impossible to take up the book: and not only special terms, but special conditions of payment." Unfortunately, he could not share those terms with Little because he was under a pledge of honor, a given promise, not to do so. He also asked Little not to mention his name or what he had told him about dealing with the Linscott firm. Unless specified in a contract, Little was unlikely to get an advance from Linscott so he should just send in his manuscript and hope for royalties. He was leaving in a few days to review the Salon in Paris and then to spend some time in Brittany.

When he returned to London in mid-April, he began making arrangements for a performance of a Fiona Macleod play. While visiting Grant Allen in 1897, he met Frederick Whelen, one of Allen's nephews, who wanted to find a vehicle for producing contemporary art plays. Sharp expressed interest since he was writing a highly symbolic Fiona Macleod play destined, he thought, for the Celtic Theater Yeats was planning in Dublin. Encouraged by Sharp and some prominent actors and businessmen, Whelen, in July 1899, invited several hundred people to attend an organizing meeting for what became the Stage Society. Seventy-five invitees showed up at his house in London's Red Lion Square. Despite the crowd, Whelen managed to form a seven-member Managing Committee that included Sharp. It was agreed the Society would sponsor several performances of new plays every year. They would take place on Sunday evenings when theaters would otherwise be dark because of the prohibition of public performances on the Sabbath. To circumvent the law, the performances would be called meetings of the Society and only members of the society and invited guests would be able to attend.

The performances began in the fall of 1899, and Whelen, with Sharp's encouragement, scheduled a production of Fiona Macleod's "The House of Usna" for the fifth meeting of the Society in the Globe Theatre on April 29, 1900. Sharp sent a Fiona letter to Whelen dated April 16 which contained her permission for the performance and delegated all final revisions and performance details to her "friend and relative Mr. William Sharp." Her only request had to do with "reserved accommodations." She asked for two contiguous boxes, one for the Sharps and herself if she was able to "come from Scotland for the occasion." The second

should be offered to George Meredith in case he was able to attend or, if not, to other friends. She requested eight reserved stall seats which she designated for W. L. Courtney, Editor of the *Fortnightly*; James Knowles Esq., Editor of the *Nineteenth Century*; W. B. Yeats. Esq.; Mr. and Mrs. Ernest Rhys; The Hon. Alfred & Mrs. A. Lyttelton; and Mr. Percy Bunting who edited the *Contemporary Review*. The tickets were to be given directly to Sharp who would either send them to Fiona or forward them as she directed. The absence of Edith and Frank Rinder from the list of people for whom tickets were to be reserved is curious. I expect it was due to the possibility that Meredith might attend. We recall Sharp had introduced Edith as Fiona Macleod to Meredith who described her as one of the most beautiful women he ever met. It would be more than embarrassing if he saw Edith at the performance and identified her as Fiona, the author of the play. Since Meredith, in the end, was unable to attend, the Rinders may have been among the friends who occupied the second reserved box.

"The House of Usna" was one of three Fiona plays Sharp was writing with Yeats' encouragement. On April 29, it shared the bill with two Maeterlinck plays: "The Interior" and "The Death of Tintagiles." Y. M. Capel composed music for the Sharp play, and it was directed by Granville Barker. According to Elizabeth, one critic said the play had beauty and atmosphere, "two very rare things on the stage, but I did not feel that it quite made a drama, or convince, as a drama should, by the continuous action of inner or outer forces. It was, rather, passion turning upon itself, and with no language but a cry." Other reviews were more positive. Elizabeth said Sharp "took the greatest interest in the rehearsals, and in the performance. He thoroughly enjoyed the double play as he chatted about Fiona during the intervals unconcerned about the risks of their detecting the real authorship." The play was printed in the *National Review* in July 1900 and then in book form by Thomas Mosher in Maine in 1903 (*Memoir*, 317–318).

By July 1900, the Stage Society was floundering for lack of resources. Sharp and Whelen developed a plan to rescue it which Sharp described in a letter to the actor/manager Frederick Charles Charrington, a fellow member of the Managing Committee. The plan prevailed, Sharp became the Society's Chairman, and Whelen its Secretarial Manager. The Society went on for forty years and produced more than two hundred plays that would not have succeeded initially in the West End.

For some time, Sharp had used the London address of Lillian Rea rather than that of his sister in Edinburgh as the return address for the Fiona letters. Receiving the letters in London, where he spent most of his time while in Britain, enabled him to draft answers more quickly and send them to Edinburgh for Mary to copy and mail. In a June 1 letter to Grant Richards, Fiona identified Miss Rea as her "late agent and typist" and said she was away recovering from illness. Fiona was having all her correspondence "sent through a literary friend, whose address heads this letter." This address (11 Woronzow Road, London) was the home of Edith Rinder who was often conflated in Sharp's mind with Fiona and who began providing secretarial assistance for Sharp.

In June 1899, Grant Richards, at Sharp's suggestion, asked Fiona to assemble and edit a poetry anthology which would be called "The Hour of Beauty." A year later, a Fiona letter informed Richards she could not promise to have the book done before the New Year. She had been "much of an invalid" since the previous November and unable to do much work. On 20 October 1900, Fiona wrote again to Richards, with the Lillian Rea return address restored, to say she was resting in London for two days before leaving England for Tangiers. She had been seriously ill, and "a southern air" and "absolute rest are imperatively prescribed." She had to "relinquish [...] all hopes" of finishing *The Hour of Beauty* by Christmas. She wanted to give Richards the option of withdrawing from their agreement or letting it stand indefinitely until her health recovered so she could "take up properly that which can be done only absolutely *con amore*, and with scrupulous judgment and care." She wondered, instead, if Richards would like to publish a little volume of her poetry in the spring:

It would be called either *For a Little Clan* or else *The Immortal Hour* — the latter being the title of the greater part of the little book, a poetic old-world drama, perhaps to be defined as "a symbolist drama" (though I dislike such designations) which is to appear in the *Fortnightly Review* either in November or December (or in both). The remainder of the book would consist of the few selected poems (all I care to preserve) from a volume of verse published some four or five years ago, *From the Hills of Dream*, with some new and uncollected poems.

A Fiona letter to Richards dated October 31 indicates he decided to defer the anthology until she was able to finish it. He liked her suggestion of a

small book of poems which would include "The Immortal Hour." In her response, Fiona expressed her hope that she would be able to select the poems and send copy for the book "from Marseille or Malta or Algiers (I do not know where yet) by the end of November." To avoid Richards asking to meet Fiona, her October 20 letter informed him she would be in London only two days on her way South. Her October 31 letter is postmarked from Paris on November 13 which means Sharp held it to avoid a London postmark and mailed it from Paris on his way south.

In the summer and fall of 1899, Sharp implied to several friends he was experiencing a blurring or a reintegration of the two aspects of his personality and suggested his future writings would reflect a merger of the Fiona voice and the William Sharp voice with the former more prominent in his fiction and poetry and the latter more prominent in his nonfiction. In his 8 January 1900 letter to Edith Lyttelton, he said Fiona Macleod's *The Divine Adventure* would be "unlike anything she has done; it would be personal and autobiographical, especially in the essay called 'Iona,'" parts of which would appear in February and March in the *Fortnightly*. The periodical's publisher, Chapman & Hall, would also publish the book containing "Iona" and other essays. When it appeared in May 1900, it carried a longer title derived from its content, *The Divine Adventure: Iona: By Sundown Shores: Studies in Spiritual History*, and it went through several editions during the year. In a Fiona letter to John Macleay in early October 1899 Sharp wrote:

There is a sudden departure from fiction ancient or modern in something of mine that is coming out in the November and December issues of "The Fortnightly Review." I hope you will read "The Divine Adventure," as it is called — though this spiritual essay is more "remote" i.e., unconventional, and in a sense more "mystical," than anything I have done. But it is out of my inward life. It is an essential part of a forthcoming book of spiritual and critical essays or studies in the spiritual history of the Gael, to be called "The Reddening of the West."

The essay improbably personifies the Body, the Will and the Soul and sets them on a journey to discover the meaning of life: "We had never been at one, though we had shared the same home, and had enjoyed so much in common; but to each, at the same time, had come the great desire of truth, than which there is none greater save that of beauty." Confusion sets in from the start as the narrator of the journey sees his

Body, his Soul, and his Will independently travelling through a Scottish landscape each talking with people they meet along the way. Just who, we wonder, is the observer-narrator? What part is left after the departure of Body, Soul and Will? Perhaps the intellect, but that piece of the puzzle seems to merge with the Will or the Mind as the journey proceeds. It is a decided relief to find the narrator learned at the end:

There is no absolute Truth, no absolute Beauty, even for the Soul. It may be that in the Divine Forges we shall be so moulded as to have perfect vision. Meanwhile only that Truth is deepest, that beauty highest which is seen, not by the Soul only, or by the Mind, or by the Body, but all three as one. Let each be perfect in kind and perfect in unity. This is the signal meaning of the mystery.

If that is the conclusion, was the thirty-four-page journey worth the author's effort and the reader's patience? It must have been, since the book went through several editions. Its success shines a bright light on the efforts of many in 1900 to come to terms with the previous century's scientific discoveries. With its masculine narrator and the masculine nature of his dissected parts, the essay comes out of the "inward life" of William Sharp. The voice of Fiona Macleod, the nominal author, is nowhere to be heard.

The longest essay in the volume is "Iona" in which the narrative voice of Fiona alternates with that of Sharp in chronicling stories and legends associated with the island. As mentioned in the previous chapter, Sharp, in December 1899, wrote Frank Rinder a letter in which he said he would like him to read

the opening pages of "Iona," for they contain a very deep and potent spiritual faith and hope, that has been with me ever since, as there told, as child of seven, old Seumas Macleod (who taught me so much — was indeed the *father* of Fiona) took me on his knees one sundown on the island of Eigg and made me pray to "Her." I have never written anything so spiritually autobiographical. Strange as it may seem it is almost all literal reproduction of actuality with only some dates and names altered.

In Iona's opening pages, Sharp as Fiona said she will speak "as befalls her pen" of the multiple meanings of Iona, and she will recount legends and remembrances of her own and others. She will describe "hidden meanings and beauty and strangeness surviving in dreams and imaginations, rather than facts and figures that others could

adduce more deftly and with more will." After a hundred and sixty-one Iona pages in the first edition of *The Divine Adventure*, Sharp/Fiona summarized the history of the island:

To this small, black-brown tarn, pilgrims of every generation, for hundreds of years, have come. Solitary, these; not only because the pilgrim to the Fount of Eternal Youth must fare hither alone, and at dawn, so as to touch the healing water the moment the first sunray quickens it — but solitary, also, because those who go in quest of this Fountain of Youth are the dreamers and the Children of Dreams, and those are not many, and few come now to this lonely place. Yet, an Isle of Dreams Iona is, indeed. Here the last sun-worshippers bowed before the Rising of God; here Columba and his hymning priests labored and brooded; and here Oran or his kin dreamed beneath the monkish cowl that pagan dream of his. Here, too, the eyes of Fionn and Oisín, and of many another of the heroic men and women of the Fiàna, may have lingered; here the Pict and the Celt bowed beneath the yoke of the Norse pirate, who, too, left his dreams, or rather his strangely beautiful soul-rainbows, as a heritage to the stricken; here for century after century, the Gael has lived, suffered, joyed, dreamed his impossible, beautiful dream; as here now, he still lives, still suffers patiently, still dreams, and through all and over all broods upon the incalculable mysteries.



Fig. 54 Benedictine Abbey on Iona, Inner Hebrides, constructed in 1203 AD on the site of the Celtic Church which St. Columbo built after he settled on Iona in 563 AD and began to establish Christianity in Scotland. Photograph by Paul T. (Gunter Tschuch) (2019), Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Iona_07.jpg, CC BY-SA 4.0.

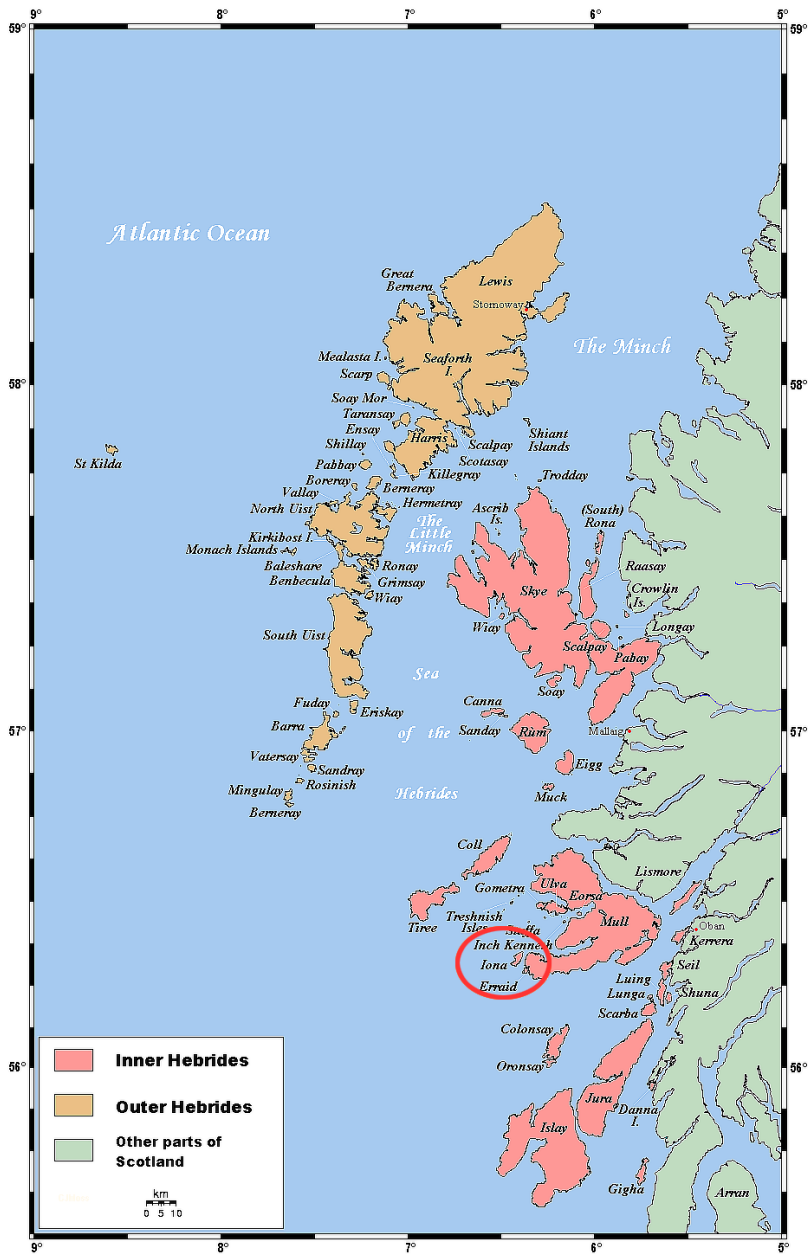


Fig. 55 Map of the Isle of Mull in Scotland’s Inner Hebrides. Iona is the tiny island located off Mull’s eastern-most tip. Wikimedia, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Ordnance_Survey_1-250000_-_NM.jpg, OGL v.3. Contains OS data © Crown copyright and database right (2021).

The quotation illustrates the power of the essay which is among the most lasting and influential pieces of Sharp's writings. When it was published Iona hosted only a few visitors in fine weather. Many, motivated by this essay, began to take the steamer from Oban to Mull and make their way across that large island to Iona. Nowadays, Iona is flooded with visitors during the summer months, and many purchase a book containing this essay in the island's shops.

The section of *The Divine Adventure* called "By Sundown Shores" contains five short essays and "Celtic," a longer piece which also appeared in the May issue of the *Contemporary Review*. The latter essay exemplifies what Sharp called the merger of his masculine and feminine voices. One hears in it the voice of Fiona, but that of Sharp, the practical literary and cultural critic, predominates. It is as though two separate persons were speaking. Early on we hear Fiona saying the Celtic Movement was not "as so often confusedly stated an arbitrary effort to reconstruct the past," but an "effort to discover the past." As "one imputed to this movement," she sought "in nature and in life, and in the swimming thought of timeless imagination, for the kind of beauty that the old Celtic poets discovered and uttered." Those poets had no monopoly on artistic beauty. No beauty of art excels "that bequeathed to us by Greece," but artists must seek and express their ideals through their own tradition. Fiona placed herself firmly in the Celtic camp, the camp of her heritage: "There is one beauty that has to me the light of home upon it; there is one beauty from which, above all others now, I hope for a new revelation; there is a love, there is a passion, there is a romance, which to me calls more suddenly and searchingly than any other ancient love or ancient passion or ancient romance."

After placing Fiona with her heightened rhetoric firmly among the Celts, Sharp reverted to the plainer language of the literary critic. Still writing as Fiona, he began to sound like the critic William Sharp. Although not a great believer in "movements" or "renascences," he understood the "Celtic Movement" as "the natural outcome, the natural expression of a freshly inspired spiritual and artistic energy." Its source was "a mythology and a literature, and a vast and wonderful legendary folklore [...] in great part hidden behind veils of an all but forgotten tongue and of a system of life and customs, ideals and thought that no longer obtains." Then, veering toward dangerous territory, he said he

was unable to see the Celtic movement as having "sustenance in elements of revolt." If a movement is to have any force, "it will not destroy itself in forlorn hopes, but will fall into line, and so achieve where alone the desired success can be achieved." He took his examples from the realm of art, but "revolt" and "falling into line" opened the door to politics.

The term Celtic writer, he continued, "must denote an Irish or Scottish Gael, a Cymric or Breton Celt, who writes in the language of his race." Those who write in English, however, are English writers "who in person happen to be an Irish Gael, or Highland, or Welsh." He was willing to be designated

Celtic only if the word signifies an English writer who by birth, inheritance, and temperament has an outlook not distinctively English, with some memories and traditions and ideals not shared in by one's countrymen of the South, with a racial instinct that informs what one writes, and, for the rest, a common heritage.

The paragraph that stands out among the others in the essay turns overtly from literature to the issue of national identity:

Above all else, it is time that a prevalent pseudo-nationalism should be dissuaded. I am proud to be a Highlander, but I would not side with those who would "set the heather on fire." If I were Irish, I would be proud, but I would not lower my pride by marrying it to a ceaseless ill-will, an irreconcilable hate, for there can be a nobler pride in unvanquished acquiescence than in revolt. I would be proud if I were Welsh, but I would not refuse to learn English, or to mix with English as equals. And proud as I might be to be Highland or Scottish or Irish or Welsh or English, I would be more proud to be British — for, there at last, we have a bond to unite us all, and to give us space for every ideal, whether communal or individual, whether national or spiritual.

Choosing his words carefully, Sharp gathered all people with Celtic roots or inclinations in the British Isles, including Ireland, under the British umbrella.

He knew Æ (George William Russell) and Yeats were intent on establishing Ireland as an independent country free of English rule. His argument for unity was an attempt to discourage them from advocating separation. Though he knew it would not sit well with them or with other Irish writers advocating independence, but he hoped to soften their attitudes and dissuade them from overt revolutionary activities.

He also wanted to maintain, both as Macleod and Sharp, his own position in a Celtic Literary Movement that transcended nationalisms. He underestimated the depth of Æ's feelings, the fire underlying his rhetoric, and the strength of the Irish independence movement.

Such is the background of a June 15 Fiona letter to George Russell who had written to put her on notice he intended to write a review of *The Divine Adventure* that took issue with her "Celtic" essay. In her response, Fiona expressed her regret; she was sorry Æ rejected her effort to "save our Gaelic remnant from extinction." She hoped he would give up "the transitory while inevitable logic of human sorrow and revolt" and adopt "the immortal and inevitable logic of the Spirit." She failed to dissuade Æ.

His review appeared in the July 21 issue of Standish O'Grady's *All Ireland Review*. There were many things in the book everyone could enjoy. In the title essay, "The Divine Adventure," and in "Iona" there was "a graver and more restrained use of that rhetorical eloquence which Miss Macleod perhaps finds it too easy to employ." If at times there was "only vagueness where a mystic meaning was intended," there was also "genuine imagination and frequent beauty of thought and style." That said, he turned to "Celtic" and its "anti-nationalistic" stance. Casting reasoned argument aside, he accused Fiona of "arrogance and shallowness of judgment" and remarked disparagingly, "it is perhaps like a woman to advise a cheap peace between race and race." She was unable, he said, to distinguish "English emotion from Celtic emotion, or from Hindu emotion." She was "devoid of the faculty of analysis or the power of seeing distinctions, not even subtle distinctions, but glaring ones." He imagined a good Briton reading this essay and feeling quite satisfied that "there were to be no more wild Irish; that he was not to be troubled further with revolt or plain speaking; the truth would be modified to suit his capacity for receiving it." He would beam in satisfaction as the Celtic "crown of strange jewels" is placed on his brow. There followed some high-handed advice that drew a clear and foreboding line between the Irish and Scottish revivalists: "It is to be hoped in the future if Miss Macleod wishes to write semi-political essays she will speak only for the Scottish Celt. We are a strange people over here, and we dislike being preached to by foreigners." When we read this review with the knowledge Sharp had told Æ he was Fiona,

pledging him to secrecy, we recognize, as did Sharp, that "perhaps like a woman" was a double-barreled shot at the male William and his creation, the female Fiona.

Standish O'Grady attempted to ameliorate Æ's venom by printing immediately following his review a different assessment of *The Divine Adventure* signed by J. S.: "From the beginning of her remarkable career till now Miss Fiona Macleod has done nothing so beautiful and lofty as this wonderful book." The praise became increasingly elaborate. "Iona," J. S. wrote, was "so full of spiritual light, not raying out aimlessly into the void but clothing reality and life with beauty, that it is no exaggeration to describe them [the rays] as adding a new sacredness to the Mecca of the Gael [Iona]." Turning to "Celtic," the reviewer met Æ headlong:

Miss Macleod showed "that her keen insight does not fail her in a region of thought far removed from that into which she has hitherto taken her readers. A Celt of the Celt, and possessed as no other writer of our time is possessed with a sense of the faculty and mission of the Celt, she shows here not only deep intuition but the power [quoting Matthew Arnold] "to see life steadily and see it whole," of which the Celt, in this country at least, must acquire some greater measure before his flame can burn with any but a destructive power.

The real argument, he concluded, was not between the Scots and the Irish, but among the Irish.

In the next issue of the *All Ireland Review* (July 28) O'Grady printed in the letters section the following sentence: "We overhold an interesting communication from the celebrated Fiona Macleod in reference to strictures recently made in A. I. R. on her latest book 'The Divine Adventure.'" In that communication — dated July 22 and printed in the next edition of the weekly (August 4) — Sharp as Fiona thanked the unidentified J. S. for his praise and responded to Æ's charges. She denied her inability to see distinctions, stated she was not anti-nationalistic, and reaffirmed her belief that "Genius does not lie with any one race," but it is "a calling of the Spirit to one soul here, another there; neither tribe nor clan has the divine mystery as its own." Allowing that some of her fellow Gaels may be "in some things [...] astray," she insisted that "others, and the English in particular, are not invariably and inevitably in the wrong, and stupid and malevolent." Justice and love, not hatred and resentment, must accompany nationalism. Taking up Æ's gender

challenge, Fiona asserted that even a woman knows “there is a peace which is death.” She did not advocate “a cheap peace between race and race,” but an ideal for “our broken and scattered race that may not only uplift and ennoble but may bring about a great and wonderful regeneration.” Here Sharp referred obliquely to the regenerative goals of Yeats’ Celtic Mystical Order which he and Æ shared. Fiona’s attempt to clarify her position only caused Æ to harden his. In a letter O’Grady published which constituted the entire front page of the August 18 *All Ireland Review*, he accused Fiona of labeling nationalism as “race hatred,” reasserted his adherence to Irish nationalism, and confessed he had no love for England. He called Fiona a Briton and an English writer who, unlike some other Scottish Celts, lacked the aspiration to nationality common among Irish Gaels.

The public exchange of correspondence concluded with a letter from T. W. Rolleston on the front page of the August 25 *All Ireland Review*. After noting Æ’s letters contained “so much that is good and true,” Rolleston addressed what he considered the major errors of his ideas about nationalism. Taking issue with Æ’s emphasis on British oppression, he suggested the Irish had not been so much oppressed as indifferent to the claims of their heritage and that any changes in attitude must be enforced by the Irish people themselves. He also criticized Æ for linking the Celtic spiritual movement with the Irish political movement, adding that “Ireland might have her local legislature and yet be thoroughly denationalized and vulgarized.” Or “she might attain nationalism in social life, literature, and art and yet be content with her present voice in the Imperial Parliament.” After criticizing the bitterness and hatred underlying much of the political movement, he said Æ and Fiona Macleod were pressing each other to extreme views; their positions were complementary, not contradictory. Finally, he commended Fiona’s Celticism, insisted she was a “helper not a hinderer,” and condemned Æ’s bias against her as a Scottish Celt. Despite the efforts of O’Grady, J. S., and Rolleston to keep Fiona on board and maintain a unified movement, Æ’s attack, fueled by the growing spirit of Irish nationalism, caused a rift between the Irish and the Scots that became increasingly difficult to bridge.

In late August Sharp wrote a letter to Yeats in which he expressed his feelings about Æ’s attack: “As for Æ, I think I had better not say what

I think: but of one thing I am very sorry, his inevitable loss of prestige among those of his own circle who like myself have thought so highly of him and his work. None can now accept him as a thinker, or as a fair and loyal opponent, however else one may regard him." The letter re-enforced what Sharp had told Yeats about Fiona — that she was an independent individual with a will of her own, mysteriously speaking through him, and that there was a flesh and blood woman whom Sharp loved and depended on to evoke this persona. He wished Fiona would not take notice of critics. He wished he had seen her letter to the *All Ireland Review* before she sent it. And he wished Æ would be "content to be the poet and seer, and not turn aside to these unworthinesses."

Perhaps motivated by encouragement from Yeats and by Rolleston's suggestion that they were pushing each other to extremes, Sharp drafted a Fiona letter to Æ in mid-September saying she wanted to go with him on the "quest," not apart from him. This letter evoked a conciliatory response in which Russell said he had no personal feelings against her: "You are to me so far only a beautiful myth." He never fights, he said, "except when I feel the spiritual life of Ireland is threatened and when I fight why of course I do it with all the energy I can put into it." He often fights with his friends, he said, and remains good friends with his opponents. He hoped to remain friends with Fiona because she belonged to "the clan," the group of Irish or Scottish people "who's ideal is mainly a spiritual one." The clan included O'Grady, Yeats, Hyde, Lady Gregory, and others whom Fiona/Sharp did not know. Finally, he enclosed a spray of heather as a peace offering. The letter was written with the awareness that its recipient would not be "a beautiful myth," but William Sharp. Indeed, Æ had written to Yeats on July 13, a week before his first review appeared in print, that he was "a little sorry" he had been "so savage," but he hoped it would "do Fiona/Sharp some good." We can only wonder if his review would have been so savage had he thought Fiona a real woman.

Sharp responded as Fiona on October 20. Briefly in London on her way to southern France, she accepted Æ's offer of continuing friendship: "Your spray from the sacred hill brought me not only a message from your inward self, but more than you could know perhaps. Some fallen link has been caught up through it — and, too, a truer understanding has come to me in one or two points where we have been at issue." She

hoped Æ would read and like “The Immortal Hour” in a forthcoming *Fortnightly Review* and a forthcoming essay in the *Nineteenth Century* on “The Gael and his Heritage” which dealt with “the treasure-trove of the spiritual hymns and ancient lore in the Hebrides.” The breach with Æ was papered over, but there followed a decided cooling of enthusiasm for the writings of Fiona Macleod among the independence-minded Irish.

In addition to managing this public controversy, Sharp continued his association with the evolving Stage Society during the summer and fall. He made only two brief trips to Scotland in late summer and continued work on the long essay that was published in 1902 as *The Progress of Art in the Nineteenth Century*. His article titled “Some Dramas of Gabrielle d’Annunzio,” appeared in the September *Fortnightly Review*, and the October issue of the *Art Journal* carried his article about the work of Monro S. Orr, a well-known contemporary Scottish painter, etcher, and illustrator. In November, Fiona Macleod’s “The Immortal Hour” appeared in the *Fortnightly Review* and her “The Gael and His Heritage” in the *Nineteenth Century*. The latter was a lengthy and adulatory tribute to Alexander Carmichael’s recently published *Carmina Gadelica*.

In early November, Sharp began a letter at his club (the Grosvenor) to Murray Gilchrist with the incident that occasioned it:

A little ago, on sitting down in my club to answer some urgent notes (and whence I now write) my heart leapt with pleasure, and an undeserving stranger received Part I of a beaming welcome — for the waiter announced that “Mr. Gilchrist would like to see you, Sir.” Alas, it was no dear Peaklander, but only a confounded interviewer about the Stage Society!

He went on to say he and Elizabeth planned to leave England on November 12 and go first to Provence and then, after Christmas, to Italy, “perhaps first to Shelley’s Spezia or to Pegli of the Orange Groves near Genoa: and there we await you, or at furthest a little later, say in Florence. We shall be away till the end of March.” He had just returned from Dorset where he saw Thomas Hardy who was well and at work, “the two happiest boons of fortune for all our kinship.” He wished Gilchrist would come to London for the Stage Society production that weekend, Sunday November 11, of a play by Hardy, another by Robert Louis Stevenson, and William Ernest Henley’s “Macaire.” Sharp said he

had resigned as Chairman of the Stage Society but was re-elected, so he was extra busy before leaving for France. As usual in his letters to Gilchrist, Sharp told him how he was feeling; "all unpleasantness and incertitude: much to do and little pleasure in the doing: a restlessness too great to be salved short of departure, and the longed for mental and nervous rest far away."

Ill-health continued to plague both Sharps in the late summer and early fall. Mrs. Sharp described their condition:

Partly owing to the insistence of circumstance, partly from choice, we began that autumn a series of wanderings that brought us back to London and to Scotland for a few weeks only each summer. The climate of England proved too severe. ... Despite his appearance of great vitality, his extraordinary power of recuperation after every illness — which in measure was due to his buoyant nature, to his deliberate turning of his mind away from suffering or from failure and "looking sunwise," to his endeavor to get the best out of whatever conditions he had to meet — we realized that a home in England was no longer a possibility, that it would be wise to make various experiments abroad rather than attempt to settle anywhere permanently. Indeed, we were both glad to have no plans, but to wander again how and where inclination and possibilities dictated (*Memoir*, 323–324).

The Sharps left London on November 12, passed through Paris, and went on to stay near the Janviers in Saint Remy where they socialized with local writers and artists. Sharp finished an essay on "The Impressionists" which appeared under his name in the April 1901 *New Library Review*. He also began an essay on famous Provençal poets called "Modern Troubadours" which appeared in the *Quarterly Review* of October 1901. Stage Society business followed him. On November 19, he hand-printed a letter to the Editor of the *Topical Times* stating his absolute opposition to the official censorship of plays.

On November 30, he wrote a long letter to John Macleay, of the *Highland News*, in which he expressed his regret that he was unable to visit Andrew Carmichael and his family during his brief visit to Scotland in the fall. He praised Carmichael's *Carmina Gadelica* which, he affirmed, "ought to become as precious to the Scottish Gael as the Greek Anthology to all who love the Hellenic ideal, but with a more poignant, a more personal appeal." After eagerly perusing it from "cover to cover" he had given his early copy to Miss Macleod who praised it highly in

"The Gael and His Heritage," an article published in that month's issue of *Nineteenth Century*. Fiona had become dissatisfied with the historical novel she was writing, and ill health, "involving much absolute rest, and latterly change of climate," had interfered with her writing. She wanted to go to Italy, but her doctors recommended Egypt or Algeria, as "drier & sunnier, & to vary this frequently with the sea she loves so well & which suits her splendidly." Sharp saw her a week or two ago in Marseilles on her way south, He does not know where to address her now. She may be in Mustapha, near Algiers. He hopes she will be able to pay a flying visit to Sicily in February, where the Sharps will be, as she will then be yachting in the Mediterranean with friends. Although he does not know her current address, Sharp said he would be writing to her in a few days and would forward Macleay's note. It was an elaborate effort to impress upon Macleay, who had his suspicions, the separate identity of Fiona Macleod. On Christmas Day, the Sharps left Provence for Palermo in Sicily where they spent New Year's Day. A week later, they crossed the island to the east coast and Taormina where events affecting the remainder of Sharp's life would unfold.

