

CHAPTER VII

THE DOMINION OF DREAMS

For the January number of *The Fortnightly Review* for 1899 "Fiona" wrote a long study on "A Group of Celtic Writers" and what she held to be "the real Celticism." The writers specially noted are W. B. Yeats, Dr. Douglas Hyde, George Russell (A. E.), Nora Hopper, Katherine Tynan Hinkson, and Lionel Johnson. With regard to the Celtic Revival the writer considered that "there has been of late too much looseness of phrase concerning the Celtic spirit, the Celtic movement, and that mysterious entity Celticism. The 'Celtic Renaissance,' the 'Gaelic glamour,' these, for the most part, are shibboleths of the journalist who if asked what it is that is being re-born, or what differentiating qualities has the distinction of Gaelic from any other 'glamour,' or what constitutes 'glamour' itself, would as we say in the North, be fair taken aback. . . . What is called 'the Celtic Renaissance' is simply a fresh development of creative energy coloured by national-

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ity, and moulded by inherited forces, a development diverted from the common way by accident of race and temperament. The Celtic writer is the writer the temper of whose mind is more ancient, more primitive, and in a sense more natural than that of his compatriot in whom the Teutonic strain prevails. The Celt is always remembering; the Anglo-Saxon has little patience with that which lies far behind or far beyond his own hour. And as the Celt comes of a people who grew in spiritual outlook as they began what has been revealed to us by history as a ceaseless losing battle, so the Teuton comes of a people who has lost in the spiritual life what they have gained in the moral and the practical — and I use moral in its literal and proper sense. The difference is a far greater one than may be recognised readily. The immediate divergence is, that with the Celt ancestral memory and ancestral instinct constitute a distinguishable factor in his life and his expression of life, and that with his Teutonic compatriot vision, dream, actuality and outlook, are in the main restricted to what in the past has direct bearing upon the present, and to what in the future is also along the line of direct relation to the present. . . . All that the new generation of Celtic or Anglo-Celtic (for the

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most part Anglo-Celtic) writers hold in conscious aim, is to interpret anew 'the beauty at the heart of things,' not along the line of English tradition but along that of racial instinct, coloured and informed by individual temperament."

Naturally the article was favourably commented upon in Ireland. The immediate result in the English press was the appearance in *The Daily Chronicle* of January 28th of a long unsigned article entitled "Who is Fiona Macleod: A Study in two styles," to suggest that in response to the cry of "Author!" so repeatedly made, "we may, in our search for Miss Macleod, turn to Mr. William Sharp himself and say with literal truth 'Thou are beside thyself!'"

The writer advanced many proofs in support of his contention, drawn from a close study of the writings and methods of work of W. S. and F. M.; and asked, in conclusion: "Will Mr. Sharp deny that he is identical with Miss Macleod? That Miss Macleod is Mr. Sharp, I, for one, have not a lingering doubt and I congratulate the latter on the success, the real magic and strength of the work issued under his assumed name." At first the harassed author ignored the challenge; but a few months later F. M. yielded

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to the persuasion of her publishers — who had a book of hers in the press — and wrote a disclaimer which appeared in *The Literary World* and elsewhere.

In April, 1899, *The Dominion of Dreams* was published by Messrs. A. Constable & Co.

To Mr. Frank Rinder the author wrote:

MY DEAR FRANK,

To-day I got three or four copies of *The Dominion of Dreams*. I wish you to have one, for this book is at once the deepest and most intimate that F. M. has written.

Too much of it is born out of incurable heartache, “the nostalgia for impossible things.” . . . My hope is that the issues of life have been woven to beauty, for its own sake, and in divers ways to reach and help or enrich other lives. . . . “The Wells of Peace” must, I think, appeal to many tired souls, spiritually athirst. That is a clue to the whole book — or all but the more impersonal part of it, such as the four opening stories and “The Herdsman”; this is at once my solace, my hope and my ideal. If ever a book (in the deeper portion of it) came out of the depths of a life it is this: and so, I suppose it shall live — for by a mysterious law, only the work of suffering, or great joy,

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survives, and that in degree to its intensity. . . .

F. M.'s influence is now steadily deepening and, thank God, along the lines I have hoped and dreamed. . . . In the writings to come I hope a deeper and richer and truer note of inward joy and spiritual hope will be the living influence. In one of the stories in this book, "The Distant Country" occurs a sentence that is to be inscribed on my gravestone when my time comes:

"Love is more great than we conceive and Death is the keeper of unknown redemptions."

Lovingly,
WILL.

To another correspondent he wrote:

" . . . Well, if it gains wide and sincere appreciation I shall be glad: if it should practically be ignored I shall be sorry: but, beyond that, I am indifferent. I know what I have tried to do: I know what I have done: I know the end to which I work: I believe in the sowers who will sow and the reapers who will reap, from some seed of the spirit in this book: and knowing this, I have little heed of any other considerations. Beauty,

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in itself, for itself, is my dream: and in some expression of it, in the difficult and subtle art of words, I have a passionate absorption."

In a letter to Mr. Macleay W. S. explained that Fiona's new book is "the logical outcome of the others: the deeper note, the *vox humana*, of these. I think it is more than merely likely that *this* is the last book of its kind. I have had to live my books—and so must follow an inward law—that is truth to art as well as to life I think. There is, however, a miscellaneous volume (of 'appreciations,' and mystical studies) and also a poetic volume which I suppose should be classed with it. I imagine that, thereafter, her development will be on unexpected lines, both in fiction and the drama: judging both from what I know and what I have seen. In every sense I think you are right when you speak of 'surprise' as an element in what we may expect from her. . . . I suppose some of that confounded controversy about Miss M. and myself will begin again. . . ."

To Mr. W. B. Yeats the author wrote about the book, and described our plans for the summer:

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Monday, 1899.

MY DEAR YEATS,

. . . As you well know, all imaginative work is truly alive only when it has died into the mind and been born again. The mystery of dissolution is the common mean of growth. Resurrection is the test of any spiritual idea — as of the spiritual life itself, of art, and of any final expression of the inward life. . . . I have been ill — and seriously — but am now better, though I have to be careful still. All our plans for Scandinavia in the autumn are now over — partly by doctor's orders, who says I must have hill and sea air native to me — Scotland or Ireland. So about the end of July my wife and I intend to go to Ireland. It will probably be to the east coast, Mourne Mountains coast. I hope you like *The Dominion of Dreams*. Miss Macleod has received two or three very strange and moving letters from strangers, as well as others. The book of course can appeal to few — that is, much of it. But, I hope, it will sink deep. We leave our flat about 20th of July. Shall you be in town before then? I doubt if I'll ever live in London again. It is not likely. I do not know that I am overwhelmingly anxious to live anywhere. I think you know enough of me to know how

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profoundly I feel the strain of life—the strain of double life. Still, there is much to be done yet. But for that. . . .

Your friend,

WILLIAM SHARP.

Mr. Yeats' Review of *The Dominion of Dreams* in the *Bookman* (July, 1899) was carefully critical; it was his desire "to discover the thoughts about which her thoughts are woven. Other writers are busy with the way men and women act in joy and sorrow, but Miss Macleod has rediscovered the art of the mythmaker and gives a visible shape to joys and sorrows, and make them seem realities and men and women illusions. It was minds like hers that created Aphrodite out of love and the foam of the sea, and Prometheus out of human thought and its likeness to the leaping fire." And then he pointed out that "every inspiration has its besetting sin, and perhaps those who are at the beginning of movements have no models and no traditional restraints. She has faults enough to ruin an ordinary writer. Her search for these resemblances brings her beyond the borders of coherence. . . . The bent of nature that makes her turn from circumstance and personalities to symbols and per-

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sonifications may perhaps leave her liable to an obsession for certain emotional words which have for her a kind of symbolic meaning, but her love of old tales should tell her that the old mysteries are best told in simple words."

At first this criticism caused the author much emotional perturbation; but later, when he reconsidered the statements, he admitted that there was reason for the censure.

"Fiona" then asked the Irish poet to indicate the passages he took most exception to, and Mr. Yeats sent a carefully annotated copy of the book under discussion. And I may add that a number of the revisions that differentiate the version in the Collected Edition from the original issue are the outcome of this criticism. The author's acknowledgment is dated the 16th September, 1899:

MY DEAR MR. YEATS,

I am at present like one of those equinoctial leaves which are whirling before me as I write, now this way and now that: for I am, just now, addressless, and drift between East and West, with round-the-compass eddies, including a flying visit of a day or two in a yacht from Cantyre to North Antrim coast. . . .

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I am interested in what you write about *The Dominion of Dreams* and shall examine with closest attention all your suggestions. The book has already been in great part revised by my friend. In a few textual changes in "Dalua" he has in one notable instance followed your suggestion about the too literary "lamentable elder voices." The order is slightly changed too: for "The House of Sand and Foam" is to be withdrawn and "Lost" is to come after "Dalua" and precede "The Yellow Moonrock."

You will like to know what I most care for myself. From a standpoint of literary art *per se* I think the best work is that wherein the barbaric (the old Gaelic or Celto-Scandinavian) note occurs. My three favourite tales of this kind are "The Sad Queen" in *The Dominion of Dreams*, "The Laughter of Scathach" in *The Washer of the Ford*, and "The Harping of Cravethen" in *The Sineater*. In art, I think "Dalua" and "The Sad Queen" and "Enya of the Dark Eyes" the best of *The Dominion of Dreams*.

Temperamentally, those which appeal to me are those with the play of mysterious psychic forces in them. . . . as in "Alasdair the Proud," "Children of the Dark Star," "Enya of the Dark Eyes," and in the earlier tales,

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“Cravetheen,” “The Dan-nan-Ron,” and the Iona tales.

Those others which are full of the individual note of suffering and other emotion I find it very difficult to judge. Of one thing only I am convinced, as is my friend (an opinion shared by the rare few whose judgment really means much), that there is nothing in *The Dominion of Dreams*, or elsewhere in these writings under my name to stand beside “The Distant Country” . . . as the deepest and most searching utterance on the mystery of passion. . . . It is indeed the core of all these writings . . . and will outlast them all.

Of course I am speaking for myself only. As for my friend, his heart is in the ancient world and his mind for ever questing in the domain of the spirit. I think he cares little for anything but through the remembering imagination to recall and interpret, and through the formative and penetrative imagination to discover certain mysteries of psychological and spiritual life.

Apropos — I wish very much you would read, when it appears in the *Fortnightly Review* — probably either in October or November — the spiritual “essay” called “The Divine Adventure” — an imaginative effort to

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reach the same vital problems of spiritual life along the separate yet inevitably interrelated lines of the Body, the Will (Mind or Intellect) and the soul. . . .

I have no time to write about the plays. Two are typed: the third, the chief, is not yet finished. When all are revised and ready, you can see them. *The Immortal Hour* (the shortest, practically a one act play in time) is in verse.

Sincerely yours,

FIONA MACLEOD.

These two plays were finally entitled *The Immortal Hour* and *The House of Usna*. The third, *The Enchanted Valleys*, remains a fragment.

At midsummer we gave up our flat in South Hampstead and stored our furniture indefinitely. It was decreed that we were to live no more in London; so we decided to make the experiment of wintering at Chorleywood, Bucks. Meanwhile, we went to our dear West Highlands, to Loch Goil, to Corrie on Arran, and to Iona. And in August we crossed over to Belfast and stayed for a short time at Ballycastle, the northeasterly point of Ireland, to Newcastle, and then to Dublin.

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From Ballycastle my husband wrote to Mrs. Janvier:

6th Aug., 1899.

“ . . . We are glad to get away from Belfast, tho' very glad to be there, in a nice hotel, after our fatigues and 10 hours' exposure in the damp sea-fog. It was a lovely day in Belfast, and Elizabeth had her first experience of an Irish car.

“We are on the shore of a beautiful bay — with the great ram-shaped headland of Fair Head on the right, the Atlantic in front, and also in front but leftward the remote Gaelic island of Rathlin. It is the neighbourhood whence Deirdrê and Naois fled from Conobar, and it is from a haven in this coast that they sailed for Scotland. It is an enchanted land for those who dream the old dreams: though perhaps without magic or even appeal for those who do not. . . .”

October found us at Chorleywood, in rooms overlooking the high common. Thence he wrote to Mr. Murray Gilchrist:

MY DEAR ROBERT,

It is a disappointment to us both that you are not coming south immediately. Yes; the

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war-news saddens one, and in many ways. Yet, the war was inevitable: of that I am convinced, apart from political engineering or financial interests. There are strifes as recurrent and inevitable as tidal waves. To-day I am acutely saddened by the loss of a very dear friend, Grant Allen. I loved the man — and admired the brilliant writer and catholic critic and eager student. He was of a most winsome nature. The world seems shrunken a bit more. As yet, I cannot realise I am not to see him again. Our hearts ache for his wife — an ideal lovable woman — a dear friend of us both.

We are both very busy. Elizabeth has now the art-work to do for a London paper as well as for *The Glasgow Herald*. For myself, in addition to a great complication of work on hand, I have undertaken (for financial reasons) to do a big book on the Fine Arts in the Nineteenth Century. I hope to begin on it Monday next. It is to be about 125,000 words, (over 400 close-printed pp.), and if possible is to be done by December-end! . . .

You see I am not so idle as you think me. It is likely that our friend Miss Macleod will have a new book out in January or thereabouts — but not fiction. It is a volume of

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“Spiritual Essays” etc.—studies in the spiritual history of the Gael.

We like this most beautiful and bracing neighbourhood greatly: and as we have pleasant artist-friends near, and are so quickly and easily reached from London, we are as little isolated as at So. Hampstead — personally, I wish we were more! It has been the loveliest October I remember for years. The equinoctial bloom is on every tree. But today, after long drought, the weather has broken, and a heavy rain has begun.

Yours,
WILL.

The Progress of Art in the Century was a longer piece of work than the author anticipated. It was finished in the summer of 1900, and published in *The Nineteenth Century Series* in 1902 by The Linscott Publishing Co. in America, and by Messrs. W. & R. Chambers in England. In the early winter the author wrote again to Mr. Gilchrist:

CHORLEYWOOD,
Nov., 1899.

MY DEAR ROBERT,

The reason for another note so soon is to ask if you cannot arrange to come here for

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a few days about November-end, and for this reason. You know that the Omar Khayyàm Club is the "Blue Ribbon" so to speak of Literary Associations, and that its occasional meetings are more sought after than any other. As I think you know, I am one of the 49 members — and I much want you to be my guest at the forthcoming meeting on Friday, Dec. 1st, the first of the new year.

The new President is Sir George Robertson ("Robertson of Chitral") — and he has asked me to write (and recite) the poem which, annually or biennially, some one is honoured by the club request to write. The moment she heard of it, Elizabeth declared that it must be the occasion of your coming here — so don't disappoint her as well as myself! . . .

Ever affectly yours,
WILL.