

CHAPTER X

LISMORE

Taormina

Our summer was spent on Arran, Colinsay, and on "the Green Isle" of Lismore in the sea-mouth of Loch Linnhe within sight of the blue hills of Morven. We had rooms in the ferryman's cottage at the north point of the isle, where the tide race was so strong at the ebb in stormy weather that at times it was impossible to row across to the Appin shore, even to fetch a telegram whose advent was signalled to us by a little flag from the post office — a quicker way of getting it than by the long road from the Lismore post office. We spent much of our time on the water in a little rowing boat. A favourite haunt was a little Isle of Seals, in the loch, where we one day found a baby seagull, fat and fully fledged, but a prisoner by reason of a long piece of grass that had tightly wound round and atrophied one of its feet. Sometimes our friend the ferryman would come too. At first he refused to talk if I

William Sharp

was there, because I could not speak Gaelic, and he thought I was English. But at last when I had reassured him that I too was a Scot, when he admitted that though I had not a Highland tongue I had Highland eyes just like his mother's—his shyness wore away. And one day when we were out on the loch at sundown, and an exquisite rosy flush lay over hill and water, he stopped rowing and leant over his oars, silent for a time, and at last murmured in his slow Highland English: "'Tis — the — smile — of God — upon — the — waters."

At Lismore F. M. wrote, to quote the author's own words, "'The Four Winds of Eiré' (long); 'The Magic Kingdoms' (longer and profounder, one of the best things F. M. has ever written); 'Sea-Magic' (a narrative and strange Sea-Lore); 'The Lynn of Dreams' (a spiritual study); and 'Seumas' (a memory)."

During the summer and autumn William had, as "F. M.," written a long study on the work of W. B. Yeats for *The North American Review*; had arranged the first volume of a selection of tales for the Tauchnitz series, entitled *Wind and Wave*; and had prepared a revised and augmented edition of *The Silence of Amor* for publication in Amer-

ica by Mr. Mosher. "W. S." meanwhile had not been idle. After editing a volume of the Poems by our friend, Eugene Lee-Hamilton, with a long Introduction for *The Canterbury Poets*, he was at work on a series of articles which were intended for a projected book to be called *Literary Geography*; and of these there appeared in *Harper's* "Walter Scott's Land," "R. L. Stevenson's Country;" and a poem, "Capt'n Goldsack."

Unfortunately, his increasing delicacy not only disabled him from the continuous heavy strain of work he was under, but our imperative absence from England necessitated also the relinquishing of my journalistic work. The stress of circumstances weighed heavily on him, as he no longer had the energy and buoyancy with which to make way against it. At this juncture, however, one or two friends, who realised the seriousness of conditions, petitioned that he should be put on the Civil Pension List. The Hon. Alex. Nelson Hood and Mr. Alfred Austin were the chief movers in the matter, and were backed by Mr. George Meredith, Mr. Thomas Hardy and Mr. Watts Dunton. Realising however, that the writings of William Sharp, considered alone, would not constitute a sufficient claim, Mr. Hood urged William to al-

William Sharp.

low him to acquaint the Prime Minister with the authorship of the Fiona Macleod writings, and of the many sacrifices their production had entailed. My husband consented providing that Mr. Balfour were told "confidentially and verbally." However, it proved necessary that "a statement of entire claims to consideration should be laid upon the table of the House of Commons for the inspection of members." In writing to acquaint my husband of this regulation, Mr. Hood added:

"I do not presume to say one word to influence you in the decision you may come to. In such a matter it is for you to decide. If you will sacrifice your unwillingness to appear before the world in all the esteem and admiration which are your due, then, (I may say this) perhaps you will obtain freedom — or some freedom — from anxiety and worry that will permit you to continue your work unhampered and with a quiet mind. But advice I cannot give. I cannot recommend any one to abandon a high ideal, and your wish to remain unknown is certainly that. . . ."

To this W. S. replied:

EDINBURGH,
21st Aug., 1902.

MY DEAR ALEC,

You will have anticipated my decision. No other was possible for me. I have not made

Lismore

many sacrifices just to set them aside when a temptation of need occurs. Indeed, even writing thus of "sacrifices" seems to me unworthy: these things are nothing, and have brought me far more than I lost, if not in outward fortune. It is right, though, to say that the decision is due to no form of mental obstinacy or arrogance. Rightly or wrongly, I am conscious of something to be done — to be done by one side of me, by one half of me, by the true inward self as I believe — (apart from the overwhelmingly felt mystery of a dual self, and a reminiscent life, and a woman's life and nature within, concurring with and oftenest dominating the other) — and rightly or wrongly I believe that this, and the style so strangely born of this inward life, depend upon my aloofness and spiritual isolation as F. M. To betray publicly the private life and constrained ideal of that inward self, for a reward's sake, would be a poor collapse. And if I feel all this, as I felt it from the first (and the *nominal* beginning was no literary adventure, but a deep spiritual impulse and compelling circumstances of a nature upon which I must be silent) how much more must I feel it now, when an added and great responsibility to others has come to me, through the winning of so already large and

William Sharp

deepening a circle of those of like ideals or at least like sympathies in our own country, and in America — and I allude as much or more to those who while caring for the outer raiment think of and need most the spirit within that raiment, which I hope will grow fairer and simpler and finer still, if such is the will of the controlling divine wills that, above the maze, watch us in our troubled wilderness.

That is why I said that I could not adopt the suggestion, despite promise of the desired pension, even were that tenfold, or any sum. As to “name and fame,” well, that is not my business. I am glad and content to be a “messenger,” an interpreter it may be. Probably a wide repute would be bad for the work I have to do. Friends I want to gain, to win more and more, and, in reason, “to do well”: but this is always secondary to the deep compelling motive. In a word, and quite simply, I believe that a spirit has breathed to me, or entered me, or that my soul remembers or has awaked (the phraseology matters little) — and, that being so, that my concern is not to think of myself or my “name” or “reward,” but to do (with what renunciation, financial and other, may be necessary) my truest and best.

Lismore

And then, believing this, I have faith you see in the inward destiny. I smiled when I put down your long, affectionate, and good letter. But it was not a smile of bitterness: it was of serene acceptance and confidence. And the words that came to my mind were those in the last chorus of Oedipus at Kolônos:

“Be no more troubled, and no longer lament, for all these things will be accomplished.”

Then, too, there's the finitude of all things. Why should one bother deeply when time is so brief. Even the gods passed, you know, or changed from form to form. I used to remember Renan's "Prayer on the Acropolis" by heart, and I recall those words, "Tout n'est ici-bas que symbole et que songe. Les dieux passent comme les hommes et il ne serait pas bon qu'ils fussent éternels." . . .

Elizabeth, who is on a visit to Fife, will, I know, wholeheartedly endorse my decision.

Again all my gratitude and affection, dear Alec,

Your friend,

WILL.

Early in September Mr. Hood sent the welcome information to my husband that the

William Sharp

Prime Minister had decided "on the strength of the assurance that Mr. Sharp is F. M." to make him a grant that would meet his pressing needs and enable him to go abroad for the winter.

A few days before this message reached W. S. he had written to his friend:

23d Aug.

DEAR JULIAN,

A little line to greet you on your arrival in Venice, and to wish you there a time of happy rest and inspiration. May the spirit of the Sea-Queen whisper to you in romance and beauty.

How I wish I could look in on you at the Casa Persico! I love Venice as you do. I hope you will not find great changes, or too many visitors: and beware of the September heats, and above all the September mosquito!

"Julian" ought to have a great lift, and not the least pleasure in looking forward to seeing you again early in October is that of hearing some more of your book of Venice and of the other Julian.

[“Julian” is the name of the hero of a book, *Adria*, on which Mr. Hood was then at work.]

If all goes well — and I have been working

Lismore

so hard, and done so much, that things ought to go smoothly with me again — then we hope to leave London for Sicily about the 21st Oct., and to reach Taormina *about* the 26th of that month.

I need not say how glad I am that you *knew* I could not decide otherwise than I did: and I am more than ever glad and proud of a friendship so deeply sympathetic and intuitively understanding.

Ever affectionately yours, dear Friend,

WILL.

P. S. By the way, you will be glad to know that Baron Tauchnitz is also going to bring out in 2 vols. a selection of representative tales by Fiona Macleod. The book called *The Magic Kingdoms* has been postponed till next year, but the first part of it will appear in *The Monthly Review* in December probably. Stories, articles, studies, will appear elsewhere.

Your friend W. S. has been and is not less busy, besides maturing work long in hand. So at least I can't be accused of needless indolence.

To his great relief October-end found us at Taormina once again; and on Allhallow-e'en he wrote to Mrs. Janvier:

William Sharp

Oct. 30th.

“ . . . We reached Messina all right, and Giardini, the Station for Taormina, in fair time; then the lovely winding drive up to unique and beautiful and wildly picturesque Taormina and to the lovely winter villa and grounds of Santa Caterina where a warm welcome met us from Miss Mabel Hill, with whom we are to stay till the New Year. . . . I have for study a pleasant room on the garden terrace, at the Moorish end of the old convent-villa with opposite the always open door windows or great arch trellised with a lovely ‘Japanesy’ vine, looking down through a sea of roses and lemon and orange to the deep blue Ionian Sea. The divine beauty, glow, warmth, fragrance, and classic loveliness of this place would delight you. . . . Overhead there is a wilderness of deep blue, instinct with radiant heat and an almost passionate clarity. Forza, Mola, Roccafiorta, and other little mountain towns gleam in it like sunlit ivory. Over Forza (or Sforza rather) the storm-cloud of the Greco, with rainbow hanging like a scimitar over the old, pagan, tragic, savagely picturesque mountain-ridge town. The bells of the hill-chapels rise and fall on the wind, for it is the beginning of All Souls festa. It is the day when

Lismore

'things' are abroad and the secret ways are more easily to be traversed.

"Beneath my Moorish arch I look down through clustering yellow roses and orange and lemon to green-blue water, and thence across the wild-dove's breast of the Ionian Sea. Far to the S. E. and S., over where Corinth and Athens lie, are great still clouds, salmon-hued on the horizon with pink domes and summits. An intense stillness and the phantasmagoria of a forgotten dreamland dwell upon the long western promontories of the Syracusan coast, with the cloud-like Hyblæan hill like a violet, and a light as of melting honey where Leontinoi and Siracusa lie. . . .

"Nov. 8: This is a week later. I have accidentally destroyed or mislaid a sheet of this letter. Nothing of importance — only an account of the nocturnal festa of All Souls, with the glittering lights and the people watching by the graves, and leaving lights and flowers on each, the one to show the wandering souls the way back to the grave, the other to disguise the odour of mortality and illude them with the old beauty of the lost world — and the offerings of handfuls of beans, to give them sustenance on this their one mortal hour in the year. We three came here yes-

William Sharp

terday (Elizabeth, Miss Hill and I) and enjoyed the marvellous mountain-climbing journey from the sea-level of Giarre (near Catania) up to beautiful Linguaglossa, and Castiglione 2,000 ft. high and so on to Randazzo and Maletto (3,000 ft.) where we got out, and drove thro' the wild lava-lands of this savage and brigand haunted region to Castello di Maniace where il Signor Ducino Alessandro gave us cordial and affectionate welcome.

“Sunday, 9th. The weather is doubtful, but if it keeps fine we are going to drive down to gorges of the Simalthos (the Simeto of to-day) and then up by the crags and wild town of Bronte, and back by the old Ætnean hill-road of the ancient Greeks, or by the still more ancient Sikelian tombs at a high pass curiously enough known not by its ancient fame but as the Pass of the Gipsies. As the country is in a somewhat troubled and restive state just now, especially over Bronte, all pre-arrangements have been made to ensure safety. . . .

“I hope you have received the Tauchnitz volume of *Wind and Wave*. The text of Selected Tales has been revised where advisable, sometimes considerably. The gain is very marked I think, especially in simplicity. I hope you will like the preface. The long

Lismore

collective-article in the *Contemporary* for October, 'Sea-Magic and Running Water,' I have already written to you about. One can never tell beforehand, but in all probability the following F. M. articles will appear in December (if not January) issues, viz.:

"In *The Monthly Review*—The Magic Kingdoms.

"In *The Contemporary*—The Lynn of Dreams.

"In *The Fortnightly*—The Four Winds of Eirinn.

"As soon as I can possibly work free out of my terribly time-eating correspondence, and am further ahead with my necessary and commissioned pot-boiling articles, etc., I want to put together two F. M. volumes, one a vol. of Gaelic essays and Spiritual studies to be called *For The Beauty of an Idea* and the other a volume of Verse to be called probably *The Immortal Hour and Poems* or else *The Enchanted Valleys*. But I have first a great deal to get off as W. S. and F. M.

"What is dear old Tom doing now? Give him my love, and affectionate hug, bless the old reprobate! I was delighted to meet an American admirer (and two hanger-on American admireses) of his in Florence, who spoke of his work with much admiration as well as personal delight. So I warmed to

William Sharp

them mightily in consequence, and had the pleasure of introducing the latest production — the delightful ‘*Consolate Giantess*.’

“What a letter in length this is! too long for even *you*, I fear.”

The following letter from Mr. Robert Hichens, another devoted lover of Sicily, reached William Sharp at Maniace:

DOVER,
Nov. 4, 1902.

MY DEAR WILL,

. . . The cold is setting in and to-day there is a fierce east wind. I scarcely dare think of what you are enjoying. I had hoped to join you at the end of this month, but the fates are unkind. When I do get away I may first have to go to the Desert, as I am meditating some work there. Then I hope to make my way there to Sicily but only late in Spring. Will you still be there? There is magic in its air — or else beauty acts on the body as powerfully as on the soul, and purifies the blood as well as the soul. . . .

Every sentence I write wrings my heart. I ought not to write about Sicily. *Felix* was begun in that delightful room at Maniace — with Webster, thoughtfully posed by Alec — on a side table within easy reach.

Lismore

Thank you again for your kind, inspiring letter. I value praise from you.

Yours cordially,
ROBERT HICHENS.

Miss Hill and I returned to Sta. Caterina and left my husband at Maniace, whence a few days later he wrote to me:

CASTELLO DI MANIACE,
15th Nov., 1902.

“ How you would have enjoyed to-day! . . . one of the most beautiful of its kind I've ever had. It was quite dark when we rose shortly before six, but lovely dawn by 6.15, and after a gigantic breakfast we all set off all armed with rifles and revolvers. We drove up to the cutting to the left, $\frac{1}{4}$ of a mile below Otaheite, and there diverged and went up the wild road of the Zambuco Pass, and for another five miles of ascent. Then we were met by the forest guard and Meli with great jennets (huge hill-mules as big as horses) and rode over the Serraspina (6,000 feet). To my great pleasure it was decided we could risk the further ascent of the great central Watershed of Sicily, the Serra del Rè (8,000 ft.) and I shall never forget it. All the way from about 4,000 ft. the air was

William Sharp

extraordinarily light and intoxicating — and the views of Central Sicily magnificent beyond words. When we had ridden to about 7,500 feet thro' wild mountain gorges, up vast slopes, across great plateaux, and at last into the beginning of the vast dense primeval beech-forests (all an indescribable glory of colour) we dismounted and did the remaining half hour on foot. Then at last we were on the summit of the great central watershed. Thence everything to the south flows to the Ionian Sea, everything to the north to the Tyrrhenian and Mediterranean.

“ And oh the views and the extraordinary clarity! Even with the naked eye I saw all the inland mountains and valleys and lost forgotten towns, Troina on its two hills, Castrogiovanni and Alcara, etc., etc. And with the powerful binoculars I could see all the houses, and trace the streets and ruined temples, etc., in Castrogiovanni on its extraordinary raised altar-like mountain plateau. Then, below us, lay all the northern shores of Sicily from Capo Cefalù to Milazzo on its beautiful great bay, and Capo Milazzo, and the Lipari Islands, so close with the glass I could see the few houses on their wild precipitous shores, from ‘Volcano,’ the original home of Vulcan, and Lipari itself to Strom-

Lismore

boli, and white ships sailing. Enna (Castrogiovanni) immensely imposing and unforgettable. And, behind us, Etna vaster, sheerer, more majestic, more terrible, than I had ever dreamed of it.

“Then we lunched, amid that extraordinary and vast panorama — seeing 2,000 feet below us the ‘almost inaccessible’ famous Lake of Balzano, with its Demeter and Persephone associations (itself about 6,000 feet among the mountains!) All enjoyed it unspeakably, except poor old Meli, very nervous about brigands — poor old chap, a ransom of 800 francs has had to be paid to the capitano of the brigand-lot to free his nephew, who is now ill after his confinement for many days in a hole under the lava, where he was half suffocated, and would have soon died from cold and damp and malaria.

“On the way down (in the forest, at about 6,000 feet) Alec suddenly without a word dashed aside, and sprang through the sloping undergrowth, and the next moment I saw him holding his revolver at the head of a man crouching behind a mass of bramble, etc. But the latter had first managed to hide or throw away his gun, and swore he hadn’t got one, and meant no harm, and that the ugly weapon he carried (a light, long axe of

William Sharp

a kind) was to defend himself from the wolves! His companion had successfully escaped. The man slunk away, to be arrested later by the Carabinieri.”

On his return to Taormina W. S. wrote to the Author of *Adria*, who had gone to Venice for “local colour”:

TAORMINA,
19th Nov., 1902.

CARO FRA GIULIANO,

To my surprise I hear from our common friend, Mr. Aurelio Da Rù, the painter of Venice, that you are at present staying at San-Francisco-in-Deserto. This seems to me a damp and cold place to choose for November, but possibly you are not to be there long: indeed, Da Rù hints at an entanglement with a lady named “Adria.” Perhaps I am indiscreet in this allusion. If so, pray forgive me. The coincidence struck me as strange, for only the other day I heard our friend Alec Hood speaking of an Adria, of whom, to say the least of it, he seemed to think very highly. By the way, I wouldn’t tell him (A. H.) too much of your affairs or doings — or *he may put them in a book*. (He’s a “literary feller” you know!)

I have just been staying with him — and

Lismore

I wish when you see him you would tell him what a happy time I had at Maniace, and how pleasantly I remember all our walks and talks and times together, and how the true affection of a deepened friendship is only the more and more enhanced and confirmed.

It is a lovely day, and very warm and delightful. Sitting by the open French-window of my study, with a bunch of narcissus on my table, there is all the illusion of Spring. I have just gone into an adjoining Enchanted Garden I often frequent, and gathered there some sprays of the Balm of Peace, the azure blossoms of Hope, and the white roses of Serenity and Happiness and sending them, by one of the wild-doves of loving thought and sympathy and affection, to Alec at Maniace.

Ever, dear Fra Giuliano, with love to Da Rù, the Graziani, the Manins, and above all to Alec,

Yours,
WILL.

And again two days later:

SHAR SHAN, BOR!

Which, being interpreted, is Romany (Gypsy) for "How d'ye do, Mate!"—I fear

William Sharp

you are having a bad day for your return to Maniace. Here, at any rate, 'tis evil weather. Last night the wind rose (after ominous signals of furtive lightnings in every quarter) to the extent of tempest: and between two and three a. m. became a hurricane. This lasted at intervals till dawn, and indeed since: and at times I thought a cyclone had seized Taormina and was intent on removing "Santa Caterina" on to the top of Isola Bella. Naturally sleep was broken. And in one long spell, when wind and a coarse rain (with a noise like sheep that has become sleet) kept wakefulness in suspense, my thoughts turned to Venice, to Giuliano in the lonely rain-beat wave-washed sanctuary of San-Francisco-in-Deserto; to Daniele Manin, with his dreams of the Venice that was and his hopes of the Venice to be; and to Adria, stilled at last in her grave in the lagunes after all her passionate life and heroic endeavour. And then I thought of the Venice they, and you, and I, love: — and recalled lines of Jacopo Sannazaro which I often repeat to myself when I think of the Sea-City as an abstraction —

"O d'Italia dolente
Eterno lumine
Venezia!"

And that's all I have to say to-day! . . . ex-

Lismore

cept to add that this very moment there has come into my mind the remembrance of some words of M^ontesquieu I read last year (in the *Lettres Persanes*), to the effect (in English) that "altho' one had seen all the cities of the world, there might still be a surprise in store for him in Venice,"—which would be a good motto for your book.

Your friend,

WILL.

The few entries in William Sharp's Diary for 1903 begin with New Year's Day:

TAORMINA.

Thursday, 1st Jan., 1903. Yesterday afternoon I ended literary work for the year, at p. 62 on my MS. of "The King's Ring" with the sentence: "Flora Macdonald saw clearly that the hearts of these exiles and New Englanders would follow a shepherd more potent than any kind, the shepherd called Freedom, who forever keeps his flocks of hopes and ideals on the hills of the human heart." Today, this afternoon, wrote till end of p. 70. In the evening we dined with Robert Hichens at the Hotel Timeo.

Sat., 3rd. Finished "The King's Ring." Revised: and sent off to Mary to type. We

William Sharp

lunched at the Timeo. After lunch we spent an hour or more in the Greek Theatre with Hichens. Then we walked to Miss Valerie White's villa and had tea with her. In evening "turned in" about 9 and read Bourget's *Calabria Ricordi*, and Lenormant on Crotone and Pythagorus.

Saturday, 9th Jan.

To the Editor of The Pall Mall Magazine:

DEAR SIR,

I have written a story somewhat distinct in kind from the work associated with my name, and think it is one that should appeal to a far larger public than most of my writings do: for it deals in a new way with a subject of unpassing interest, the personality of Flora Macdonald. "The King's Ring," however, is not concerned with the hackneyed Prince Charlie episode. It is, in a word, so far as I know, the only narrative presentment of the remarkable but almost unknown late-life experiences of Flora Macdonald: for few know that, long after her marriage, she went with her husband and some of her family and settled in South Carolina, just before the outbreak of the War of Independence: how her husband was captured and imprisoned: how two of her sons in the Navy were lost

Lismore

tragically at sea: and how she herself with one daughter with difficulty evaded interference, and set sail from a southern port for Scotland again, and on that voyage was wounded in an encounter with a French frigate. True, all these things are only indicated in "The King's Ring," for fundamentally the story is a love-story, that of Flora M.'s beautiful eldest daughter Anne and Major Macleod, with the tragical rivalry of Alasdair Stuart, bearer of the King's Ring.

Practically the facts of the story are authentic: save the central episode of Alasdair Stuart, which is of my own invention. I think the story would appeal to many not only in Scotland and England but in America.

Yours very truly,

FIONA MACLEOD.

The story was accepted and the first instalment was printed in the *Pall Mall Magazine* in May, 1904; but after its appearance the author did not care sufficiently for it to republish it in book form.

The Diary continues:

Sunday, 4th. Began article on "Thro' Nelson's Duchy" commissioned for *The Pall Mall Magazine*. Received *The Monthly Re-*

William Sharp

view for Jany. with the Fiona Macleod article, "The Magic Kingdoms": the *Mercure de France* for January: and proofs from the *Pall Mall Magazine* of my articles on Scott and George Eliot. Among several letters one from Mrs. Gilchrist, who says (apropos of F. M.'s "By Sundown Shores") "she always can send one back to the distance which is all the future."

Later, after a walk alone I looked in at Villa Bella Rocca and had a pleasant chat with M. et Mme. Grandmont about Anatole France, Loti, and treatment of sea in *Pecheur d'Islande*, Bourget's and Lenormant's *Calabria*, etc. Wrote after dinner from 9 till 11; and read some Bacchylides, etc. At 11.15 suddenly some five or six cocks began to crow vehemently: and about five minutes later abruptly stopped.

Monday, 5th. A day of perfect beauty. Divinely warm. In morning sat out on Loggia two hours or so working at revision. After lunch Hichens came for me and we walked down to Capo San Andrea and thence took a boat with two men (Francesco and his brother) across to Capo Schiso (Naxos) and thence walked some five or six miles back. Tea at H's. A divinely lovely sunset.

Tuesday, 6th. As beautiful a day as yes-

Lismore

terday. More could be said of no day. Worked at "Thro' Nelson's Duchy" material, and wrote a letter. A walk after lunch. Then again a little work. Had a charming letter from Joachim Gasquet, and to F. M. one from Stephen Gwynn (with his *To-day and To-morrow in Ireland*) — and an *Academy* with pleasant para. about F. M. saying just what I would want said (with an allusion to a special study of F. M. in the *Harvard Monthly*, by the Editor).

This afternoon, the Festa of the Epiphany, more great doings with the delayed Xmas tree treat of the School-children of Taormina. Much enjoyed it.

Thursday, 8th. Finished the P. M. Mag. commissioned article "Thro' Nelson's Duchy" — about 5,000 words — then revised: marked with directions the 8 fine Photos selected by A. N. H. (Alex. Nelson Hood) and sent off to be registered. . . .

After dinner wrote one or two letters including longish one of literary advice to Karl Walter. Read some Æschylus' "Eumenides."

This is the letter in question:

TAORMINA,
Jan., 1903.

MY DEAR WALTER,

. . . In some respects your rendering of

William Sharp

your sonnet is towards improvement. But it has one immediate and therefore fatal flaw. Since the days of Sophocles it has been recognised as a cardinal and imperative law, that a great emotion (or incident, or idea, or collective act) must not be linked to an ineffective image, an incongruous metaphor. Perhaps the first and last word about passion (in a certain sense only, of course, for to immortal things there is no mortal narrowing or limiting in expression) has been said more than two thousand years ago by Sappho and today by George Meredith. "The apple on the topmost bough" . . . all that lovely fragment of delicate imperishable beauty remains unique. And I know nothing nobler than Meredith's "Passion is noble strength on fire." . . . But turn to a poet you probably know well, and study the imagery in some of the Passion-sonnets in "The House of Life" of Rossetti — of Passion:

. . . "creature of poignant thirst
And exquisite hunger" . . .

— the splendid sexual diapason in the sestet of the sonnet called "The Kiss"— or, again, to "the flame-winged harp-player,"

. . . "thou art Passion of Love,
The mastering music walks the sunlit sea,"

Lismore

Perhaps I have said enough to illustrate my indication as to the opening metaphor in your sonnet. Apart from the incongruity of the image, it has no logical congruity with the collateral idea of Fear. The sonnet itself turns on a fine emotion in your mind: let that emotion shape a worthy raiment of metaphor and haunting cadence of music, *not* as the metricist desires but as the poet *au fond* compels.

Yes, both in sonnet-writing and in your terza-rima narrative (cultivate elision here, also fluent terminals, or you will find the English prosody jib at the foreign reins) you will find G. useful. But the secret law of rhythm in a moving or falling wave, in the cadence of wind, in the suspiration of a distance song, in running water, in the murmur of leaves, in chord confluent upon chord, will teach you more — if you will listen long enough and know what you listen to.

I hope I have not discouraged you. I mean the reverse of that. Your friend,

WILLIAM SHARP.

I add here a letter of criticism and encouragement sent by F. M. to another young writer, in the previous summer, to the nephew of William Black, the novelist;

William Sharp

LONDON, June, 1902.

MY DEAR MR. BLACK,

As soon as possible after my return from Brittany I read your MS. It is full of the true sentiment, and has often charm in the expression: but I think you would do well to aim at a style simpler still, freer from mannerisms, and above all from mannerisms identified with the work of other writers. As I am speaking critically, let me say frankly that I have found your beautiful tale too reminiscent ever and again of an accent, a note, a vernacular (too reminiscent even in names), common to much that I have written. You are sympathetic enough to care for much of my work, and loyal enough to say so with generous appreciation: but just because of this you should be on guard against anything in my style savouring of affectation or mannerism. You may be sure that whatever hold my writings may have taken on the imagination of what is at most a small clan has been in despite of and not because of mannerisms, which sometimes make for atmosphere and versimilitude and sometimes are merely obvious, and therefore make for weakness and even disillusion. Be on guard, therefore, against a sympathy which would lead you to express yourself in any other way

than you yourself feel and in other terms than the terms of your own mind. Mannerism is often the colour and contour of a writer's mind: but the raiment never fits even the original wearer, and is disastrous for the borrower, when the mental habit of mannerism is translated into the mental incertitude of mannerisms. You have so natural a faculty and so eager a desire, that I have no hesitation in urging you to devote your best thought and time and effort to a worthy achievement.

But no work of the imagination has any value if it be not shaped and coloured from within. Every imaginative writer must take his offspring to the Fountain of Youth, and the only way is through the shadowy and silent avenues of one's own heart. My advice to you, then, is, not to refrain from steeping your thought and imagination in what is near to your heart and dream, but to see that your vision is always your *own* vision, that your utterance is always your own utterance, and to be content with no beauty and no charm that are dependent on another's vision of beauty and another's secret of charm.

Meanwhile, I can advise you no more surely than to say, write as simply, almost as baldly, above all as *naturally* as possible.

William Sharp

Sincerity, which is the last triumph of art, is also its foster-mother. You will do well, I feel sure: and among your readers you will have none more interested than

Yours Sincerely,

FIONA MACLEOD.

To another friend he wrote in answer to a question on "style":

"Rhythmic balance, fluidity, natural motion, spontaneity, controlled impetus, proportion, height and depth, shape and contour, colour and atmosphere, all these go to every *living* sentence—but there, why should I weary you with uncertain words when you can have a certainty of instance almost any time where you are: you have but to look at a wave to find your exemplar for the ideal sentence. All I have spoken of is there—and it is alive—and part of one flawless whole."

From W. S. to Mrs. Janvier:

TAORMINA,

18th Feb., 1903.

" . . . In fact, letters are now my worst evil to contend against—for, with this foreign life in a place like this, with so many people I know, it is almost impossible to get anything like adequate time for essential work

Lismore

— and still less for the imaginative leisure I need, and dreaming out my work — to say nothing of reading, etc. As you know, too, I have continually to put into each day the life of two persons — each with his or her own interests, preoccupations, work, thoughts, and correspondence. I have really, in a word, quite apart from my own temperament, to live at exactly double the rate in each day of the most active and preoccupied persons. No wonder, then, that I find the continuous correspondence of ‘two persons’ not only a growing weariness, but a terrible strain and indeed perilous handicap on time and energy for work. . . .”

A little later William Sharp started for a fortnight’s trip to Greece by way of Calabria — Reggio, Crotona, Taranto, Brindisi to Corfù and Athens, with a view of gathering impressions for the working out of his projected book (by W. S.) to be called *Greek Backgrounds*.

En route he wrote to me:

23d Jan., 1903.

“Where of all unlikely places do you think this is written from? Neither Corfù nor Samothrace nor Ithaka nor Zante, nor any Greek isle betwixt this and the Peloponnesus,

but in Turkey! . . . i.e., in Turkish Albania, surrounded by turbaned Turks, fezzed Albanians, and picturesque kilted Epeirotes, amid some of the loveliest scenery in the world.

“You will have had my several cards en route and last from Târantô. The first of a series of four extraordinary pieces of almost uncanny good fortune befell me *en route*, — but it would take too long now to write in detail. Meanwhile I may say I met the first of three people to whom I already owe much — and who helped me thro’ every bother at Brindisi. (He is a foreign Consul in Greece.)

(“By the way, the engine from Târantô to Brindisi was called the *Agamemnon* and the steamer to Greece the *Poseidon* — significant names, eh?)

“I had a delightful night’s rest in my comfortable cabin, and woke at dawn to find the *Poseidon* close to the Albanian shore, and under the superb snow-crowned Acrokeraunian Mountains. The scenery superb — with Samothrace, and the Isle of Ulysses, etc., etc., seaward, and the beautiful mountainous shores of Corfù, here called *Kepkuga* (Kêrkyra) on the S. W. and S. There was a special Consul-Deputation on board, to land two, and also to take off a number of Turks,

Lismore

Albanians, and Epeirotes for Constantinople. We put in after breakfast at Eavri Kagavri — a Greco-Albanian township of Turkey. The scattered oriental 'town' of the Forty Saints crowns a long ridge at a considerable height — the harbour-town is a cluster of Turkish houses besides an extraordinary absolutely deserted set of gaunt ruins. Hundreds of Albanians and Epeirotes, Moslem priests and two Greek *papas* (or popes) were on the shore-roads, with several caravans each of from 20 to 50 mules and horses. Costumes extraordinarily picturesque, especially the white-kilted or skirted Albanian mountaineers, and the Larissa Turks. We were 3 hours — and I the only 'privileged' person to get thro' with the consul. We took many aboard — a wonderful crew, from a wonderful place, the fairyland of my Greek resident from Paris — who is on his way to spend a month with his mother in Athens, and has asked me to visit him at his house there. . . .

"Well, the *Poseidon* swung slowly out of the bay,— a lovely, exciting, strange, unforgettable morning — and down the lovely Albanian coast — now less wild, and wooded and craggy, something like the West Highlands at Loch Fyne, etc., but higher and wilder. When off a place on the Turkish Albanian

William Sharp

coast called Pothlakov (Rothroukon) the shaft of the screw suddenly broke! The engineer told the captain it would be five hours at least before it could be mended — adding, a little later, that the harm could probably not be rectified here, and that we should have to ride at sea till a relief boat came from Corfù or Greece to take off the passengers, etc.

“As no one has a Turkish passport, no one can get ashore except lucky me, with my influential friend, in a Turkish steam-pinnacle! (It is so beautiful, so warm, and so comfortable on the *Poseidon*, that, in a sense, I'm indifferent — and would rather *not* be relieved in a hurry.)

“(Later.) Late afternoon on board — still no sign of getting off. No Corfù to-day, now, though about only an hour's sail from here! *Perhaps* to-night — or a relief steamer may come. I'll leave this now, as I want to see all I can in the sundown light. It is all marvellously strange and lovely. *What* a heavenly break-down! *What* luck!

“Just had a talk with another passenger stamping with impatience. I didn't soothe him by remarking I hoped we should adrift ashore and be taken prisoners by the Turks. He says he wants to get on. Absurd.

Lismore

'There's more beauty here than one can take in for days to come' I said — 'Damn it, sir, what have I got to do with beauty,'— he asked indignantly. 'Not much, certainly,' I answered drily, looking him over. An Italian *maestro* is on board on his way to Athens — now playing delightfully in the salon. A Greek guitarist is going to play and sing at moonrise. No hills in the world more beautiful in shape and hue and endless contours — with gorgeous colours. Albania is lost Eden, I think. Just heard that a steamer is to come for us in a few hours, or less, from Corfù and tow us into Kêrkyra (the town) — and that another Austro-Lloyd from Trieste or Brindisi will take us on to-morrow sometime from Corfù to Athens. . . . The only perfectly happy person on board.

"Yours,

"WILL."

ATHENS, 29th Jan.

" . . . This lovely place is wonderful. How I wish you were here to enjoy it too. I take you with me mentally wherever I go. It is a marvellous *home-coming* feeling I have here. And I know a strange stirring, a kind of spiritual rebirth."

ATHENS, Feb. 1st.

" . . . Yesterday, a wonderful day at

William Sharp

Eleusis. Towards sundown drove through the lovely hill-valley of Daphne, with its beautifully situated isolated ruin of the Temple of Aphrodîtê, a little to the north of the Sacred Way of the Dionysiac and other Processions from Aonai (Athenai) to the Great Fane of Eleusis. I have never anywhere seen such a marvellous splendour of living light as the sundown light, especially at the Temple of Aphrodîtê and later as we approached Athens and saw it lying between Lycabettos and the Acropolis, with Hymettos to the left and the sea to the far right and snowy Pentelicos behind. The most radiant wonder of light I have ever seen."

On his return to Taormina he received the following letter from Mr. Hichens:

ST. STEPHENS,
CANTERBURY.

MY DEAR SHARP,

. . . Lately I recommended a very clever man, half Spanish and half German, to read the work of Fiona Macleod. I wondered how it would strike one who had never been in our Northern regions, and he has just written to me, and says: "I am reading with intense delight Fiona Macleod's books and

Lismore

thank you very much for telling me to get them. I ordered them all from London and cannot tell you how I admire the thoughts, the style, 'toute la couleur locale.' They are books I shall keep by me and take about with me wherever I go." I suppose he feels they are fine, as I feel Tourgène's studies of Russian character are fine, although I have never lived among Russians. I shall take *Anna Karénina* to Italy with me and read it once more. At Marseilles I saw the *Resurrection* acted. It was very interesting and touching, though not really a very good play. It was too episodic. In London it is an immense success.

Well, I hope you will really come to winter in Africa. You can stay at either the Oasis or the Royal and I think we should be very happy. We must often go out on donkey-back into the dunes and spend our day there far out in the desert. I know no physical pleasure,—apart from all the accompanying mental pleasure,—to be compared with that which comes from the sun and air of the Sahara and the enormous spaces. This year I was more enchanted than ever before. Even exquisite Taormina is hum-drum in comparison. I expect to go to Italy very early in May, and back to Africa quite at the beginning of No-

William Sharp

vember. Do try to come then, as November is a magnificent month. Don't reply. You are too busy. I often miss the walks, and your company, which wakes up my mind and puts the bellows to my spark of imagination.

Ever yours,

ROBERT HICHENS.

I can't help being rather sorry that you won't go to Sicily again for a long while. I always feel as if we all had a sort of home there.

For, as Mr. Hichens wrote to me, "I still think Taormina the most exquisite place in Europe. On a fine morning it is ineffably lovely."