

## · CHAPTER XII

### THE WINGED DESTINY

#### *Literary Geography*

Two important events of 1904 to William Sharp were the publication of *The Winged Destiny*, at midsummer, by Messrs. Chapman & Hall; and of his *Literary Geography* in October.

In the Dedication to Dr. John Goodchild of *The Winged Destiny* (the title of *The Magic Kingdoms* was discarded), the author set forth "her" intention:

"In this book I have dealt — as I hope in all I write — only with things among which my thought has moved, searching, remembering examining, sometimes dreaming. . . .

"It is not the night-winds in sad hearts only that I hear, or the sighing of vain fatalities: but, often rather, of an Emotion akin to that mysterious Sorrow of Eternity in love with tears, of which Blake speaks in *Vala*. It is at times, at least I feel it so, because Beauty is more beautiful there. It is the twilight hour in the heart, as Joy is the heart's morning.

*William Sharp*

“ Perhaps I love best the music that leads one into the moonlit coverts of dreams, and old silence, and unawakening peace. But Music, like the rose of the Greeks, is ‘ the thirty petalled one ’ and every leaf is the gate of an equal excellence. The fragrance of all is Joy, the beauty of all is Sorrow: but the Rose is one — *Rosa Sempiterna*, the Rose of Life. As to the past, it is because of what is there, that I look back: not because I do not see what is here to-day, or may be here to-morrow. It is because of what is to be gained that I look back: of what is supremely worth knowing there, of knowing intimately: of what is supremely worth remembering, of remembering constantly: not only as an exile dreaming of the land left behind, but as one travelling in narrow defiles who looks back for familiar fires on the hills, or upward to the familiar stars where is surety. In truth is not all creative art remembrance: is not the spirit of ideal art the recapture of what has gone away from the world, that by an imperious spiritual law is forever withdrawing to come again newly.”

To a friend W. S. wrote:

“ It is a happiness to me to know that you feel so deeply the beauty that has been so humbly and eagerly and often despairingly

## *The Winged Destiny*

sought, and that in some dim measure, at least, is held here as a shaken image in troubled waters. It is a long long road, the road of art . . . and those who serve with passion and longing and unceasing labour of inward thought and outward craft are the only votaries who truly know what long and devious roads must be taken, how many pitfalls have to be avoided or escaped from, how many desires have to be foregone, how many hopes have to be crucified in slow death or more mercifully be lost by the way, before one can stand at last on "the yellow banks where the west wind blows," and see, beyond, the imperishable flowers, and hear the immortal voices.

"A thousand perils guard the long road. And when the secret gardens are reached, there is that other deadly peril of which Fiona has written in 'The Lynn of Dreams.' And, yet again, there is that mysterious destiny, that may never come, or may come to men but once, or may come and not go, of which I wrote to you some days ago, quoting from Fiona's latest writing: that destiny which puts dust upon dreams, and silence upon sweet airs, and stills songs, and makes the hand idle, and the spirit as foam upon the sea.

"For the gods are jealous, O jealous and

*William Sharp*

remorseless beyond all words to tell. And there is so little time at the best . . . and the little gain, the little frail crown, is so apt to be gained too late for the tired votary to care, or to do more than lie down saying, 'I have striven, and I am glad, and now it is over, and I am glad!'"

A letter of appreciation to the author from an unknown Gaelic correspondent contained this beautiful wish:

"May you walk by the waters of Life, and may you rest by Still Waters, and may you know the mystery of God."

To Mrs. Helen Bartlett Bridgman, "Fiona" wrote in acknowledgment of a letter, and of a sympathetic, printed appreciation of *The Winged Destiny*:

MY DEAR FRIEND,

(For if deep sympathy and understanding do not constitute friendship, what does?) It would be strange indeed if I did not wish to write to you after what Mr. Mosher has told me, and after perusal of what you have written concerning what I have tried to do with my pen. There are few things so helpful, perhaps none so pleasant to a writer in love with his or her work and the ideals which are its source, than the swift understanding

## *The Winged Destiny*

and sympathy of strangers. So much of my work is aside from the general temper and taste, and not only in its ideals but in its "atmosphere," indeed even in its writer's methods and manner, that I have to be content (as I gladly am content) to let the wind that blows through minds and hearts carry the seed whithersoever it may perchance take root, and this with the knowledge that the resting places must almost of necessity, as things are, be few and far between. But it is not number that counts, and, as I say, I am well content — would be content were my readers far fewer than they are. It seems enough to me that one should do one's best in a careful beauty and in the things of the spirit. It is enough to be a torch-bearer, whether the flame be a small and brief light or a beacon — it is to take over and to tend and to hand on the fire that matters. As I say in my very shortly forthcoming new book, *The Winged Destiny*, I desire to be of the horizon-makers; if I can be that, however humbly, I am glad indeed. This would be so with anyone, I think, feeling thus. To me outside sympathy means perhaps more; for I stand more isolated than most writers do, partly by my will, partly by circumstances as potent and sometimes

more potent. It is not only that I am devoid of the desire of publicity, of personal repute, and that nothing of advantage therefrom has the slightest appeal to me (though, alas, both health and private circumstances make my well-being to a large extent dependent on what my work brings me), but that I am mentally so constituted that I should be silenced by what so many are naturally and often rightly eager for and that so many seek foolishly or unworthily. In this respect I am like the mavis of the woods, that sings full-heartedly in the morning shadow or evening twilight in secret places, but will be dumb and lost in the general air of noon and where many are gathered in the frequented open to see and hear.

It is for these, and other imperative private reasons, why I am known personally to so very few of my fellow-writers: and why in private circles the subject is not one that occurs. I cannot explain, though not from reluctance or perversity or any foolish and needless mystery. The few who do not know me, as you know me, but with added intimacy, are loyal in safe-guarding my wishes and my privacy. That explains why I refuse all editorial and other requests of "interviews," "photographs," "personal articles" and the like. In a word, I am blind to all

## *The Winged Destiny*

the obvious advantages that would accrue from my "entering the arena" as others do. I have all that frequently borne in upon me. But still less so do I ignore what would happen to my work, to its quality and spirit, to myself, if I yielded. I may be wrong, but I do not think I am. I am content to do my best, as the spirit moves me, and as my sense of beauty compels me; and if, with that, I can also make some often much-needed money, enough for the need as it arises; and, further, can win the sympathy and deep appreciation of the few intimate and the now many unknown friends whom, to my great gladness and pride, I have gained, then, indeed, I can surely contentedly let wider "fame" (of all idle things the idlest, when it is, as it commonly is, the mere lip-repute of the curious and the shallow) go by, and be indifferent to the lapse of possible but superfluous greater material gain. . . .

Dr. Goodchild, after a first acknowledgment of the dedication, again wrote to F. M.:

AUTHOR'S CLUB,  
July, 1904.

DEAR FRIEND,

. . . Yesterday I read your Preface to a friend of mine, and afterwards a lady (a

*William Sharp*

clever woman I believe) came into the room. I had never met her before, and she had never read anything of yours, but she picked up the book and asked what it was. "Just read the introduction" said my friend. The reader had an expressive face, and I wish you had seen it. "But this is something quite new. I never read anything like it before" she said as she finished: and I fancy that many will do likewise.

A woman said in my hearing not long ago, of one of your poems, "*I could not put out my heart for daws to peck at,*" and I said, "only the Eagle could do that, and not only daws, but blackbirds of all kinds will come to peck, and when the Eagles hear the call of their mates, there will be such slaughter of carrion crows as the World has not seen yet."

J. A. G.

A few days later William described to a friend the events of  
". . . one of the loveliest days of the year, with the most luminous atmosphere I have seen in England—the afternoon and evening divinely serene and beautiful.

"I had a pleasant visit to Bath, and particularly enjoyed the long day spent yesterday at Glastonbury and neighbourhood, and the



## *The Winged Destiny*

glowing warmth and wonderful radiance.

“As usual one or two strange things happened in connection with Dr. G. We went across the ancient ‘Salmon’ of St. Bride, which stretches below the hill known as ‘Weary-All’ (a corruption of Uriel, the Angel of the Sun), and about a mile or less westward came upon the narrow water of the ancient ‘Burgh.’ Near here is a very old Thorn held in great respect. . . .

“He put me (unknowing) to a singular test. He had hoped with especial and deep hope that in some significant way I would write or utter the word ‘Joy’ on this 1st day of August (the first three weeks of vital import to many, and apparently for myself too) — and also to see if a certain spiritual influence would reach me. Well, later in the day (for he could not prompt or suggest, and had to await occurrence) we went into the lovely grounds of the ancient ruined Abbey, one of the loveliest things in England I think. I became restless and left him, and went and lay down behind an angle of the East end, under the tree. I smoked, and then rested idly, and then began thinking of some correspondence I had forgotten. Suddenly I turned on my right side, stared at the broken stone of the angle, and felt vaguely

William Sharp

moved in some way. Abruptly and unpremeditatedly I wrote down three enigmatic and disconnected lines. I was looking curiously at the third when I saw Dr. G. approach.

“‘Can you make anything out of that,’ I said—‘I’ve just written it, I don’t know why.’ This is the triad:

*‘From the Silence of Time, Time’s Silence borrow.  
In the heart of To-day is the word of To-morrow.  
The Builders of Joy are the Children of Sorrow.’*”

To Mr. Stedman W. S. announced our plans for the coming winter:

Aug. 29, 1904.

DEAR POET,

This is not an advance birthday letter, as you may think! It is to convey tidings of much import to my wife and myself, and I hope of pleasure to you and other friends over-sea—namely that this late autumn we are going to pay a brief visit to New York.

It is our intention to spend January, February, and March in Rome—which for me is the City of Cities. But we are going to it via New York. In a word, we intend to leave England somewhere between 23rd and 26th October, according as steamers and our needs fit it. Then after six weeks or so in New

## *The Winged Destiny*

York, we intend to sail direct to the Mediterranean by one of the Hamburg-American or North-German Lloyd Special Mediterranean line, sailing to Genoa and Naples. . . .

I have been very busy of late, and for one thing have been occupied with collecting and revising the literary studies of some years past — and much else of which I'll tell you when we meet. My *Literary Geography*, which has been running serially in the *Pall Mall Magazine* for the last 14 to 15 months will be out in book-form in October. My wife's recently published little book on Rembrandt has had a good reception, I am very glad to say.

With all affectionate greetings to you both, ever, Dear Stedman,

Affectionately your friend,

WILLIAM SHARP.

Before we started for New York *Literary Geography* (by W. S.) was published. According to the critic in *The World*:

“It was a characteristically original idea of the author to combine descriptions of certain localities with criticisms and appreciations of those famous writers who had identified themselves therewith. It gives one a

*William Sharp*

fresher and keener insight, for instance, into Mr. George Meredith's poems to know how much they reveal of the lovely country in which he lives, and how many of his exquisite similes are drawn from observation of the birds and beasts and plants which he sees daily around his home under the shadow of Box Hill. 'The Country of Stevenson,' 'Dickens-Land,' 'Scott-Land,' 'The Country of George Eliot,' 'Thackeray-Land,' 'The Brontë Country,' 'The Carlyle Country,' and 'Aylwin-Land' are all both delightful and instructive, full of poetic description, sound criticism, and brilliant flashes of wit; and not less so are the chapters on the 'literary geography' of the Thames from Oxford to the Nore, the English Lakes, with all their associations with Wordsworth and his brother poets, and the Lake of Geneva, which might have been called Voltaire-Land were it not that so many other famous personalities and authors are identified with Geneva and its surroundings that the solitary distinction might seem invidious."

The book was dedicated to the author's friend of early days, Mr. George Halkett (then Editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*) with the reminder that

## *The Winged Destiny*

“More years ago now than either of us cares to recall, we were both, in the same dismal autumn for us, sent wandering from our native lands in Scotland to the end of the earth. I remember that each commiserated the other because of that doctor’s doom in which we both, being young and foolish, believed. Since then we have sailed many seas and traversed many lands, and I, at least, have the wayfaring fever too strong upon me ever to be cured now.”

The critic in the *Daily Chronicle* explained that the “book is all an affair of temperament, and the only thing which really matters is that Mr. Sharp has made excellent stuff out of his impressions. . . . For instance, the first time he saw Robert Louis Stevenson was not as it should have been, in the land of Alan Breck; it was at Waterloo Station. Is the literary geographer abashed by this conjunction of two sympathetic Scots in a dismal London shed? Not a bit of it:

“‘He was tall, thin, spare—indeed, he struck me as almost fantastically spare. I remember thinking that the station draught caught him like a torn leaf blowing at the end of a branch.’

“Mind you, at that moment Mr. Sharp did not know who the stranger was, but knew

William Sharp

by instinct that the station draught ought to make poetical use of him. More than that, Mr. Sharp saw that Stevenson had the air of a man just picked out of a watery grave. Anybody could see this:

“‘That it was not merely an expression of my own was proved by the exclamation of a cabman, who was standing beside me expectant of a “fare” who had gone to look after his luggage: “Looks like a sooercide, don’t he, sir? One o’ them chaps as takes their down-on-their-luck ’eaders into the Thames!”’

“When Stevenson could inflame a cabman with this picturesque fantasy, no wonder he turned Waterloo Station into the home of romance. But this was not all. The ‘sooercide’ had still more magic about him. Stevenson was waiting for a friend to arrive by train, and when the friend appeared, the drowned *revenant* became another being.

“‘The dark locks apparently receded, like weedy tangle in the ebb; the long sallow oval grew rounder and less wan; the sombre melancholy vanished like cloud-scud on a day of wind and sun, and the dark eyes lightened to a violet-blue and were filled with sunshine and laughter.’

“This extraordinary man was carrying a book and dropped it. Then happened some-

## *The Winged Destiny*

thing which expanded Waterloo Station into the infinite:

“I lifted and restored it, noticing as I did that it was the *Tragic Comedians*. . . .”

In 1902 W. S. had been greatly gratified by a request from the musical composer, Mr. MacDowell, couched in generous terms of appreciation:

COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY,  
NEW YORK, May 25th.

MISS FIONA MACLEOD,  
MY DEAR MADAM,

Your work has so grown into my life that I venture to ask you to permit my placing your name on some music of mine. Your poems have been an inspiration to me and I trust you will accept a dedication of music that is yours already by right of suggestion. By this I do not mean that my music in any way echoes your words, but that your words have been a most powerful incentive to me in my music and I crave your sympathy for it.

Sincerely yours,

EDWARD MACDOWELL.

At the end of 1904, F. M. wrote to Mr. Lawrence Gilman, the American Musical Critic:

*William Sharp*

22 ORMIDALE TERRACE,  
MURRAYFIELD, 31st Dec.

DEAR MR. GILMAN,

Some time ago a friend played to me one or two lovely airs by Mr. Loeffler, and I was so much impressed by their unique quality and their atmosphere of subtle beauty that I wrote to find out what I could about this composer, and also about another, Mr. MacDowell, whose beautiful Keltic Sonata I have heard. And now I have been sent a copy of your winsome and deeply interesting and informing little book, *Phases of Modern Music*. There I not only find much of deep interest to me about Mr. Loeffler and Mr. MacDowell, but find your whole book at once informing and fascinating. In addition I had the great pleasure of coming unexpectedly upon allusions to myself and my writings: and I would like you to know how truly I appreciate these, and how glad I am that a critic touched to such fine issues in the great art of Music, and with so keen a sense for the new ideals of beauty, the new conceptions of style and distinction, should care for what I am trying to do in my own art.

I hope you are writing another book. Whether on musical subjects only, or on literary and musical subjects in conjunction



## *The Winged Destiny*

(which of course would appeal to a wider section of the reading public), any such book would I am sure, be welcomed by all who know *Phases of Modern Music*.

I wish I knew more of the music of these two composers. There is a spirit abroad just now, full of a new poignancy of emotion, uplifted on a secret wave of passion and ecstasy, and these men seem to me of that small but radiant company who have slept and dreamed in the other world and drank moon-dew.

Let me thank you again for all the pleasure you have given me, and

Believe me

Most truly yours,

FIONA MACLEOD.

Mr. Lawrence Gilman replied:

NEW YORK,  
Jan. 14, 1905.

MY DEAR MISS MACLEOD,

It would not be easy for me to tell you, without seeming extravagance, of the keen pleasure I have had in your cordial letter concerning my book, *Phases of Modern Music*. The deep impression which your own work has made upon me must already have become evident to you through even the most

*William Sharp*

cursory reading of my book — an impression the extent and definiteness of which I myself had scarcely realised. You will know, then, how great a satisfaction it is for me to hear that you have been interested in my thoughts on musical subjects, and that they have seemed to you worthy of the friendly praise which you have spoken in your letter.

So you know and like the music of Loeffler and MacDowell! That is good to hear; for few, even in this country, where they have been active in their art for so long, are sensible of the beauty and power of their work. Do you know Loeffler's latest production — "Quatre Poèmes," settings of verses by Verlaine and Baudelaire? They are written for voice, piano, and viola: a singular and admirable combination. Mr. MacDowell will be glad to hear of your pleasure in his "Keltic Sonata," for he is one of your most sensitive admirers: it was he, indeed, who first made me acquainted with your work. Have you heard his earliest sonatas — the "Norse," "Eroica," and "Tragica"? They are not very far behind the "Keltic" in distinction and force, though lacking the import and exaltation of the latter.

You would be surprised, I think, to know how the Celtic impulse is seizing the imagin-

## *The Winged Destiny*

ations of some of the younger and more warmly-tempered of American composers. I am enclosing a programme of a concert given recently in Boston, consisting entirely of music written on Celtic themes.

Thank you again.

Very faithfully yours,

LAWRENCE GILMAN.

When in New York William Sharp had written to Mr. Alden "on behalf of Miss Macleod" concerning her later nature-essay work, and explained that "Some months ago, by special request from the Editor of *Country Life*, Miss M. began contributing one or two of these papers. From the first they attracted notice, and then the Editor asked her if she would contribute a series to appear as frequently as practicable—averaging two a month—till next May when they would be issued in book-form. As Miss M. enjoys writing them, she agreed."

In the same letter he spoke of a subject on which he had long meditated. He proposed it for *Harper's Magazine*:—"I have long been thinking over the material of an article on the Fundamental Science of Criticism, to be headed, say 'A New Degree: D. Crit.'" This project among many others

*William Sharp*

was never worked out. But the "nature-papers" were a great pleasure to him, and in 1904 and 1905 he wrote on many subjects for *Country Life*, over the signature of F. M., also several poems that were afterwards included in the second edition of *From the Hills of Dream*.

As month by month the number of nature essays grew, he planned to issue them in two, and later in three volumes. To the second volume he thought to give the title *Blue Days and Green Days* (from a line of R. L. Stevenson's), and to call the third, which was to deal with the stars and the skies at night, "Beyond the Blue Septentrion." Not all the projected essays for each book, however, were written; but those which appeared serially were published posthumously in 1906, by *Country Life* under the title of *Where the Forest Murmurs*. Concerning the titular essay, Mr. Alfred Noyes wrote: "It is one of those pieces of nature-study which, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, have that rarest of all modern qualities — 'Healing Power.'"

And according to *The Contemporary Review*:

"Fiona Macleod's prose baffles description. It is perhaps hardly prose at all. It is melody in words suggesting scenes as much

## *The Winged Destiny*

ly sound as by the passage of ideas. The ideas conveyed by the actual words are supplemented by the rhythm or melody conveyed by the sequence of words. But it is, when all analysis is ended, something quite alone: pure music of a strange and curious quality that is neither prose nor poetry, but thrilling with the pain and passion of a Gaelic chant. It conveys to the mind and heart the scenes and sounds of nature with almost magical accuracy."

The immediate object of our short visit to New York and Boston was that I should know in person some of the many friends my husband valued there, and I was specially interested to make the acquaintance of Mr. and Mrs. Stedman, who gave me a warm welcome, of Mr. and Mrs. Alden, Mr. and Mrs. R. Watson Gilder, Mr. John Lafarge, Mrs. Julia Ward Howe, and Miss Caroline Hazard whom we visited at Wellesley College. But winter set in with December. The cold proved so severe that we sailed for and reached Naples in time to spend Xmas Day with friends at Bordighera whence W. S. wrote to Mr. Murray Gilchrist: "We are back from America (thank God) and are in Italy (thank Him more). . . . For myself I am crawling out of the suck of a wave whose

William Sharp

sweep will I hope be a big one of some months and carry me far."

In Rome we took rooms at the top of Fischer's Park Hotel, whence from the balconies we had a superb view over Rome. There we saw a few friends—in particular Mr. Hichens who was also wintering there; but my husband did not feel strong enough for any social effort. As he wrote to Mr. Mosher:

11th Feb., 1905.

"Dubious and ever varying health, with much going to and fro in quest of what is perhaps not to be found (for mere change of climate will not give health unless other conditions combine to bring about the miracle) have, among other causes, prevented my writing to you as I had intended, or, indeed, from doing much writing of any kind. I have written a few articles for *Country Life*—and little else, published or unpublished. The days go by and I say 'at night'—and every night I am too tired or listless, and say 'tomorrow': and so both the nights and the morrows go to become thistles in the Valley of Oblivion. But with the advancing Spring I am regathering somewhat of lost energy, and if only I were back in Scotland I believe I should be hard at work! Well, I shall be

*The Winged Destiny*

there soon, though I may be away again, in the remote isles or in Scandinavia for the late spring and summer. . . .

“ F. M. ”