CHAPTER II
A BIOGRAPHICAL STUDY OF THE POET

The mystic philosophy which George William Russell gave to others was not a kind of evangelical learning, nor was it passed down to him by his parents. It was a faith which he felt and saw deeply rooted in the depth of his consciousness, and he devoted his life to a successful culmination of these understandings into a natural living.

AE was born in the William Street, in the Ulster Town of Lurgan, County Armagh — the Northern Ireland. It was 10th April, 1867, when George, the third and the last child was born to Thomas Elias Russell of Armagh and his wife Marianne Russell. AE's father, a modest, respectable man in the society, was a book-keeper at a Quaker firm, while his mother worked at a general store. Russell's father had great love for music, and, despite his membership of the church of Ireland, he was considerably inclined towards the evangelical doctrines, and was known to have attended the primitive methodist church.
The countryside beauty and natural landscape, which were within easy reach from where George spent his early days of life, had a perennial impact on his formative mind. These early days of childhood at Lurgan attuned his mind to the manifested serenity of Nature, and, the natural provocation readily set up its task of building up a mystic character in the child. The people of Lurgan, the tutors at the Model School which he attended with his brother Thomas and sister Mary Elizabeth (died at the age of eighteen), and the simple, illiterate peasants of the rural district with their tales of mysterious past had awakened him to the magnanimity of Ireland's cultural history, rich with legendary heritage. As his mind responded to each story of the Gaelic past, so also his eyes were dabbled with the colour-impressions which symbolized beauty on earth. Since childhood he was consciously meditating on the magical effects of colour and sound which filtered into the inner chambers of his mind through visual or aural perception. A
perfect blending of colour and musical concord sublimated the faculties of his mind whereupon his sense of imagination was cradled. Later, as his poetic profundity gradually crept up, these visual and aural impressions found expression in the rhythm of language. Of his experimentation with colour, and its fascinating impact on mind, he wrote in *Song and Its Fountains*: 

But the harmony of blue and silver at once bewitched me. I murmured to myself, "blue and silver! blue and silver!" And then, the love of colour awakened, a few days later I saw primroses and laid the cool and gentle glow of these along with the blue and silver in my heart, and then lilac was added to my memory of colours to be treasured. And so, by harmony or contrast, one colour after another entered the imagination. They became mine or were denied, as they could or would not shine in company with those delicate originals of blue and silver.(1)
AE’s mind was analytic, not contented with the superficiality of objectivism. To him, each colour was symbolic and each sound had a music beneath. The sense organs received only the outward sensation while the mind recorded the inner message - the vibrations of the core thing. This is what he felt when he said, that he,

lay on the hill of Kilmasheogue and Earth revealed itself to me as a living being, and rock and clay were made transparent so that I saw lovelier and lordier beings than I had known before. (2)

AE’s early youth was packed with incidents significant in the development of his life and career as a mystic. Some of these, as they became lucid again through AE’s practice of retrospective meditation later, spoke convincingly of the mystic’s awakening to the beauty of self-sacrifice, and his deep love for the spiritual side of life. As AE was not
satisfied with the seeming and ostensible features of his visions, he attempted to look into the origin and depth of such mystic revelations which frequented his memory since childhood. In order to discover a missing link between the symbolic visions and the Celtic past he probed into the aesthetic and sublime values of Ireland's cultural background which he found to be slowly receding into oblivion through negligence and national apathy.

By 1879, the family had already shifted to a commercial and comparatively more industrially advanced place like Dublin. The Georgian architecture and the cultural riches of the town had enough to interest and fascinate the searching mind of AE — then in his early teens. There, in the Metropolitan School of Art, AE showed tendency towards painting — a form of fine art which continued with him even at a later stage of life. Painting, poetry, patriotism — these three later turned out to be the most absorbing fields of his life.
and his life was given equally for the cultivation of all these three artistic modes. This three-fold interest, however, did not create disillusionment in his spiritual pursuits of life, for basically and innately, he was a mystic. The mystic visions came to him ever since he was a child in schools and later, in the various walks of life he endeavoured to put these mystic verities into practice. As a painter, as a nationalist, an essayist, a critic — or, as a man overall — he was primarily mystical, his philosophy, as applied to various other fields, being essentially that of a mystic.

Discussing AE's early response to mystical instincts, Raynor C. Johnson, in The Light and the Gate writes:

It is clear that as a boy he felt some essence of solitariness within himself, because of which he could not remain content with the normal interests of youth. He said, "something of that ancientness of the psyche within, clung to the boy and began to part me from the thoughts of those about me." This element persisted throughout life.
Through such unfamiliar but serene solitariness AE came close to a mystic strain which mused all through his life and had its benevolent shade on him in every field of life. Even as a child AE was able to see the reality of a consecrated living in the world's ephemeral glory. Many years after, through Yogic methods, he recapitualated the intensity of such divine bliss which opened the path for the conjugation of his individual soul with the Divine Soul. There were many such ecstatic revelations which enamoured his boyish mind with a mystic conviction that was not shattered till death. In the opening chapter of Song and Its Fountains, he recollected the unforgettable account of one such encounter with the divinity.

When inner and outer first mingle it is the bridal night of soul and body. A germ is dropped from which inevitably evolves the character and architecture of the psyche. It is seed as truly as if it were dropped into earth or womb. Only what is born from it is a spirit thing, and it grows up and takes its abode in the body with its other inhabitants, earth-born or heaven-born.
There may be many other minglings of heaven and earth in childhood which beget a brood which later become desires, thoughts or imaginations, but the earliest are the masters and they lie subtly behind other impulses of soul. (4)

On another occasion, of a similar exalting experience, he wrote,

the sudden flashes of recollection, or looking out for a moment at the sun light over the houses, golden white, the blue ether, the distance, the haze, then it all comes over one, the sense of some divine thing missed, swift like a lightning flash incapable of analysis only leaving a blurred impression on the mind as the lightning does on the retina of the eye. (5)

In the fusion of the heaven and earth, AE saw the spark of his own identity. He believed that imagination was not emanated from the faculties of the biological constitution of the brain; it was, rather, that force, that part, which sipped into the psyche through inspiration from Nature. Even in the wane of life, the ageing process was never felt harshly on his mind, for,
he overcame the grip of apparent time by maintaining a life in eternity. His spirit derived vitality from the woods, the hills, the trees and the brooks, and the rejuvenating might flowed from Nature into his blood. As late as 1918, he wrote:

I felt the gaiety of childhood spinging up through weariness and age, for to come into contact with that which is eternally young is to have that childhood of the spirit it must attain ere it can be moulded by the Magician of the Beautiful and enter the House of Many Mansions.

I had not always this intimacy with nature. I never felt a light in childhood which faded in manhood into the common light of day, nor do I believe that childhood is any nearer than age to this being. If it were so what would be spirit have to hope for after youth was gone?(6)

In the Art School of Dublin AE exemplified his versatility in painting and verse-making. The various shades and colours which had so far dwelt in his dream helping only in enriching his imagination, now assumed both form and language. Verbosity and method became the conveyance of the psyche that responded to each aesthetic stimulation
of life. At this stage Russell's sensitive mind was made further translucent through the new company of a "Slender, dark-haired, and carelessly dressed" boy who was,

full of stories about Madame Blavatsky and her centuries-old Himalayan Masters, whose beards trailed down the mountainsides for birds to nest in.(7)

Both the boys, the other being known as William Butler Yeats, had at first, secretly revolted against the religious inheritance and scriptural dogmas. Together they enjoyed each other's attitude to spiritual turbulence and aesthetic sensitivity. They were not satisfied with a religion that would only prescribe. Their mind longed for a religion that might explore, reveal and appeal too. And they knew that no social religion would comply to their need unless it be of most unorthodox kind. Gradually, their formal friendship in the school culminated into serious debates on spiritual matters and long discussions on their own poems. Although in the later life Yeats and AE differed in their objects of goal, they had enough to hold them together in their common pursuit of the true spirit from the coarse body.
In 1885, AE joined the Royal Hibernian Academy which turned out to be the last of the academic institutions he attended. Thereafter, his education had been more of a spiritual observation than intellectual training. His tender mind was slowly awakening to spiritual maturity through his brilliant ability to paint and write, and to conceive life therein. As both these arts needed fresh inspiration from Nature, he kept the habit of visiting his aunt at Armagh. The scintillating journeys to and fro brought him directly in touch with the house of imagery stored in the bare earth and free air. Speaking of one of the formative and most significant spiritual encounters of AE, Summerfield observes:

The miracle which finally turned Russell into a seer of visions occurred on a summer day as he lay on Kilmasheogue, one of the hills just south of Dublin. He was relaxing in the sunlight making no attempt to exert his will power, when he felt with great intensity the presence of supernatural beings and heard their music passing into the earth. (8)
There, as he felt the strange feeling right in his veins, he saw eternity as the vulnerable earth lay open before him, as the mountains melted in the glory of attainment, as the valley dazzled with the brilliance of a thousand gems before his all-perceiving eyes. In short, he became a part of the creation, seeing the Creator in it. The veil of material perception was withdrawn, the opacity of ordinary human sight was removed from his eyes. His vision became all pervasive, and his mind, all-embracing.

Russell, in childhood, was strangely pre-occupied with the various sound effects in early languages and the etyma on which the entire arrangement of the vibratic impression of language rests. As early as 1886, he wrote in Carrie Rea,

"My proposition is that speech was originally scientifically constructed on the principle that every sound had in it something which would render it a suitable expression for a corresponding idea or form, and if we could get at the meaning of the forty or fifty primary sounds we could be enabled to understand much better than at present the early languages of the world." (9)
Such an etymological analysis had once led him to the discovery of a seemingly ambiguous word, 'Aon' or 'Aeon'. The name struck him quite miraculously, i.e., while he was undergoing a waking dream, sort of a trance, and, was originally meant to be captioned to one of his symbolic paintings. Later, to much of his surprise, he found the word (Aeon) to be a Gnostic term, used to connote the earliest emanation from the Mother Deity. Discovery of this Gnostic word interested him further in Oriental mysticism and the newly rising cult of Theosophy which opened a wide range of spiritual knowledge revealing glimpses of the hidden side of this temporal world. This eventually turned out to be the field in which AE meditated for a long time. Russell's pseudonym AE, a derivation of the initial of 'Aeon' was, as he believed, the real spirit that lay within the apparent identity of George William Russell. Of his two names, 'AE' represented the essence, the soul, or the indivisible part of the Logos, whereas the other (George William Russell) stood for incarnating self...
that changed and assumed various forms through numerous births. In 'AEon' — as he analysed it to be a circular movement of the power, homeward in direction but originality emanated from God in apparent revolt — he saw the possibility of the merger of the individual soul with the Original. For, the entire process, as suggests the word, is a journey through time from the place of origin and back again. In his analysis,

'A' stands for the Source, the Mover,
'AE' for the emerging ens from 'A',
O/An(sound) is the journey with continuity across time, and
'N' is a mode of transformation, change.

Having thus found the meaning and source of a word that struck him mysteriously, AE was somehow convinced of pre-existence of things which could not be comprehended in the short span of human-memory. Immediately he took to the practice of using 'AE' as a pen-name, and because of its association with spirituality, loved it more than his Christian name.
With the analysis of 'Aeon', the Hindu philosophy seemed more attractive to Bussell, for, it expounded a similar kind of doctrine where the soul is described as an ever awakened energy of the Godhead which, gathering experience in the world, would finally retire to its place of origin. Through his friendship with Charles Johnston of Ballykilbeg, who was later to be the founder of the Hermetic Society and also of the Dublin Lodge of Theosophy, AE was encouraged in his spiritual excursion; and it was only he who first stimulated AE to write for The Theosophist, published at Madras, India. It so happened that his first theosophical article, captioned 'The Speech of the Gods' was published in December, 1887, in The Theosophist, printed in Madras, India. Along with his waking dreams AE now awakened to the occult and theosophical knowledge. With rapt attention he read Madame Blavatsky's Isis Unveiled. The aestheticism and the beautiful lines of Sir Edwin Arnold's The Light of Asia left him in between the cravings for supernatural knowledge and the charms of Buddhist mysticism. Besides, The Esoteric Buddhism, The Light on the Path,
The Voice of the Silence, and Man: Fragments of Forgotten History were the (theosophical) books which helped him to steer his spiritually hovering mind towards its haven. Of the fascinating impact of The Idyll of the White Lotus on his mind in establishing rebirth as a veritable phenomenon, he wrote to Carrie Rea (Caroline Clements Rea) in 1886:

You should try and remember some of your previous existences. I remember slight fragments of my last; I was an Assyrian, I think I lived among the roses of life and passed my days in mystical reveries without any action either good or evil, except in so far as action was beautiful or good and evil seemed lovely to me. So I weakened the will which I have now to strengthen and made the life I now live distasteful to myself — O you must become a Theosophist! (10)

This gives evidence that AE believed in reincarnation and the fact that he wanted to maintain continuity between lives by recollecting past births. By 1889 AE had started attending meetings of the Theosophical Society at Dublin.
His reading of the translated versions of the Bhagavat Gita, the Upanishads and other Eastern theologies opened to him a new vista of wisdom. In 1889 he joined the Theosophical Society where he found still more material to absorb his speculative mind in the grip of certitude. On the 9th December, 1890, he enrolled himself as a member of the Esoteric Society. He was directly connected with the Society till 1898 when, because of his dispute with the new head of the Organisation, Mrs. Katherine Tingley, he left the Society. Discussing the importance of the theosophical movement on AE's early life, Monk Gibbon in The Dublin Magazine comments:

He attended the weekly meetings most regularly, and after a while seems often to have visited the Lodge room alone or with a single friend, probably to consult its books. (11)

Before he joined the Theosophical Society, in a letter to Madame Blavatsky in 1888, AE had written:

The danger which attends the desire to know is that the knowledge to be gained too often becomes the goal of our endeavours, instead of being the means
whereby to become perfect, And by "perfect" I mean Union with the Absolute. A young man, whose intellect is of the keenest, and with great power of assimilating and applying knowledge, is devoured by a desire to attain a lofty ideal. He feels there may be something beyond the facts of material science, beyond the anthropomorphic religions of the day. Drifting into that mysterious current which is now flowing through the century, he becomes attracted by Theosophy. For a while he studies it with avidity, strives to live "the life," to permeate himself with its teaching. (12)

AE believed that rebirth or reincarnation was not a mere chain of lives arbitrarily arranged in form of human bodies on this planet. Each birth, he said, had a very deep and causal relationship with the other; and, action or the direction of free will in one particular life, thus, was responsible for the nature and predestination of the next birth. In this way the Karmic theory of the Hindu philosophy became an accompanying guide to his spiritual expedition, and through it he saw how the deviated ray from the Infinite Deity moved in
the illusory plane of this world, known as Maya. At this period of life, he accidentally came across an article by Jasper Niemand, published in The Path, 1891 (The Purpose of Soul). The article had a lasting impression on his mind and was considerably responsible for giving birth to a distinct philosophic vision to AE's mind. It is quite likely that AE's firm belief that life was a passing spirit having pre-material existence, was contributed by Ms. Niemand's outlook as presented in that article. And AE, who fully supported and cherished the view, said that the communion between the inner self and the Absolute became easy when the individual consciousness was at a dreamless tranquilled state, often referred to as the way to purgation by Sufi mystics. Of this very emphatically he wrote to Carrie Rea in 1894:

"We live and move and have our being: in the Great Life (13)"

It is peculiar that almost all the philosophic doctrines he came across during this period advocated a singular view relating to man's spiritual dependence on the Supreme
Spirit. It was the time when, besides Hinduism and Theosophy, AS had an access into the Islamic and Chinese mysticism too. Both the Sufi and Tao mystics, as did other Oriental mystics, held the Union with the Absolute to be the culmination of life. Just as through the Buddhist and Tao path of self-realisation he learnt of the progressive evolution of the Soul. So also through Sufism he became aware of the final absorption of human entity in the God-head.

Apart from such scriptural influence, his mind was once again bathed in mystic bliss, rendered by his own divine visions and prophetic reveries. Along with his spiritual and philosophic fascination, a new interest was slowly emerging. It was politics — an outcome of his deep, passionate involvement with Ireland's drooping cultural heritage and social plight. It seems, he was for some time in a fix, deciding a just path of life between politics and spirituality. In this context following lines may be quoted from Summerfield's biography:
His desire to follow the path of mysticism had prevailed and he renounced artistic pursuits, telling Yeats that they would weaken his will, which was the only thing given to man as his own. (14)

In practical life AE was never forsaken by a discriminating sense to say the good from the evil. He resigned from his first job in Guinness's Brewery, and the ground was conscientious. Afterwards, he found himself comfortable in the post of an accountsman at Pim's Drapery Store in Dublin. The job was quite satisfactory and brought him an annual salary around £40. Though an efficient worker in the shop, the spiritual reveries became an indispensible part of his life. The waking visions he saw at that time transcended his mind, by the effect of which he felt the presence of the Omnipresent in his own self. Those visionary experiences were flashing, temporary but exalting, dribbling down his consciousness and radiating a strange consecrating feeling in the mind.

In practice, AE made effort to bring parity between conviction and action. As a staunch
believer in the doctrine of karmic retribution, he abstained from inflicting injury — physical or psychological — to others. He abhorred the idea of killing animals for eating purposes. He was against alcohol and, for some time, refrained from taking non-vegetarian food. No doubt, he had a very strong power of self-control and detachment from sensational feelings. As a Theosophist and as a reader of ethical philosophy he was away from unscrupulous living and materialistic gains. Commenting on his far-reaching hold on various religions and philosophies of the world, Henry Summerfield says:

He read not only the Indian scriptures and Hindu Philosophers of every school, but a broad range of Theosophical, secular and sacred literature, including Plato, the Hermetic writings, and the Chaldean Oracles. Either at this period or later he developed a special love for Lao Tzu and for the God-intoxicated poetry of the Sufis. Norman records that he was a constant student of Du Prel's Philosophy of Mysticism, a scholarly treatise on dreams and related phenomena. One of his favourite literary forms was the aphorism in which thinkers like Patanjali, the Chinese Philosophers
and Blake embodied a profound insight in a few brief phrases. (15)

During this period, as he was working at the Pim Brothers and was also an active member of the Theosophical Society, his views on spiritual doctrines and mystic faith were regularly being published, first in The Irish Theosopist, (started in 1892) and then in The Internationalist. Two of his collections of mystical verse, published in 1894 and 1897 were Homeward: Songs By The Way and the Earth Breath and Other Poems, respectively. By the time his Homeward: Songs appeared, AE was emerging as a mystic poet, with his concept of divinity slowly clearing itself into a well-knit, definite shape. Around the same time, in a letter to Edward Dowden, he wrote:

We are for the most part overpowered by material forms; whereas we ought to be free and to be able to oppose as vivid and rich a consciousness welling up within ourselves to that which day and sunlight give projected on us from without. To get free; to be able to rise from the region of dependent things into the self-existent spiritual life is the first need of the mystic. (16)
In some of the poems collected in *Homeward: Songs and the Earth Breath* there is a clear picture of AE's own mystic personality as built up through a gradual awakening of the psyche into a more beautiful and mysterious world which the physical perception was unable to detect. The "freshness, conviction and spontaneity of *Homeward* were due to a combination of circumstances in life which could not recur — the first excitement of Theosophy, companionship and probably some wishful love affairs, all coming together at the moment of youthful receptivity" (17).

By 1891, AE had shifted to a house at Upper Ely Place where he enjoyed the company of those who exchanged views and discussed things that interested AE most. Frederick Dick and his wife, Edmund King, Daniel Dunlop, Malcolm Magee, James Pryse and Arthur Dwyer were some of his co-residents at that time. But, the most important of them, perhaps, was Violet North — the English lady who accompanied James Pryse to Dublin, and there in June, 1898 got married to George Russell. The Theosophical Society,
at that period, was going through a troubled phase. Madame Klavatsky was dead, and the dispute between Col. Olcott and W.Q. Judge had been magnified to such an extent as the case being handled by the Judicial Committee. AE was in full support for W.Q. Judge, in whose defence he published a leaflet, 'To The Fellows of the Theosophical Society'. This internal rift finally landed them to the bifurcation of the main organization into two independent Theosophical Societies — one led by Anne Besant and the other by Col. Olcott. AE became the Vice-President of the latter, known as the Theosophical Society in Europe.

Along with his interest in supra-human existence, a new fascination had begun to seize his culture-adoring mind. In the Celtic history he discovered the potentiality of an age-old heritage of national importance. By then, a conviction was spreading its roots in AE's mind regarding the appearance of a spiritual incarnation (Avatar) in Ireland. With great optimism he waited for the time to ripe. The fancy became so strong in his mind that he started seeing its genuineness
in the folk lores and fairy faith of the country. The following portion from his letter to W. B. Yeats bears testimony to his belief in it. In the letter he wrote:

I note through the country the increased faith in the fairy things. The bells are heard from the mounds and sounding in the hollows of the mountains. A purple sheen in the inner air, perceptible at times in the light of day, spreads itself over the mountains. All this I can add my testimony to. Furthermore, we were told that though now few we would soon be many, and that a branch of the school for the revival of the ancient mysteries to teach real things would be formed here soon. Out of Ireland will arise a light to transform many ages and peoples. There is a hurrying of forces and swift things going out and I believe profoundly that a new Avatar is about to appear and in all spheres the forerunners go before him to prepare. It will be one of the kingly Avatars, who is at once ruler of men and magic sage. I had a vision of him some months ago and will know him if he appears.(18)

AE's concept of avatars was little like religious or scriptural figures. They, on the other hand, poineered the nation towards a new --- mostly a better --- spiritual era. Helen of
Greece, Alexander and Cuchulain had such avatar-like manifestations in them and possessed divine imagination in great amplitude.

AE's visions of avatars in Ireland were so strong and prophetic that he saw no lacuna between the dream and its feasibility. Again, in the same letter he asserted, "To me enchantment and fairyland are real and no longer dreams." (19)

AE had been seeing fairies from childhood and believed it wholeheartedly. Those tiny, glittering, non-human beings were often described, as Paul and Conaire saw them on a hill, during mid-Summer and described them as: "apparitions like silver stars that glowed and went out and glowed again and ran along the blackness of the ridge." (20)

This fairy-faith condensed in his early manhood as he traced its revelations in the numerous Irish legends and mythologies. He finally worked out a compatible doctrine between the fairies, gods and demi-gods of Celtism and Gaelic tradition and his own mystic vision. Druidism played an important role in the constitution of his structure of symbolism. AE's love for mysticism and adoration
for the country's mythological past worked as a counteraction against the arid materialism of the outside world. To him, divine imagination or visionary imagination was the Second Logos, emanated from Lir — the source of spirit as well as matter. At a lower level of his symbolic hierarchy, were there the Irish peasants in whom the gods and demi-gods were present in a state of oblivion. Of the magical power which the Druids have bequeathed into the Irish men, AE wrote:

Though to-day none eat of the fruit or drink the purple flood welling from Connla's fountain, I think that the fire which still kindles the Celtic races was flashed into their blood in that magical time, and is our heritage from the Druidic past. It is still here, the magic and mystery; it lingers in the heart of a people to whom their neighbours of another world are frequent visitors in the spirit and over-shadows of reverie and imagination (21)

These reveries or symbolic dreams, as he called them, were 'a portal to eternity' — a gateway to poetic consciousness which purified human soul. (22)
With the help of Celtism he anchored his cultural faith in an optimistic future which necessarily ensued from the footholds of a dynamic history of the ancient Eires. An article, published by AE around this time (1894-95) in The Irish Theosophist, further established the mystic's adroit handling of the themes of Ireland's cultural past. In this article he openly acknowledged his indebtedness to the native legends of his father land. Besides his gratitude for ancient culture there was an unmistakable note of nationalism, which grew prominent towards the end of the essay, when he boldly declared:

Things that were distant and strange, things abhorrent, the blazing dragons, winged serpents and oceans of fire which affrighted us, are seen as the portals through which the imagination enters a more beautiful, radiant world. The powers we dared not raise our eyes to — heroes, dread deities and awful kings — grow as brothers and gay children around the spirit in its resurrection and ascension. For there is no pathway in the universe which does not pass through man, and no life which is not brother to our life.(23)
For the time AE was so much occupied with these things that in his second compilation of lyrics, *The Earth Breath and Other Poems* — if compared to the former compilation — he showed a perceptible inclination towards the depiction and presentation of Irish culture, folk-lore and fairy faith — where both the visual and the aural impressions are prominent.

Russell's confidence in W.B. Yeats and Charles Johnston was soon proved unstable. Instead, he found a substitute in the American Theosophist, James Pryse — often known as his spiritual master. It was also the time when Russell took interest in nationalistic activities; and, the job of editor to *The Irish Homestead* — as arranged by Sir Horace Plunkett — came much to his help. During this period his idealistic interest had a rise above his imaginative pursuits and he saw the need of working for the benefit of a nationful of suppressed, ignorant farmers, toiling for bare necessities. He lay a helping hand to the cooperative movement of Horace Plunkett who pioneered the Irish Agricultural Organization.
Society (IAOS) in 1894. As the organiser of the Cooperative Banks AE became attached to the peasant-folk. In the core of his heart he felt the economic plight of the rural Ireland, of which he wrote fervently in *Cooperation and Nationality* (published first in 1912):

The thoughts of the world have been too much with the cities, and they have never spent out the missionaries of civilization into the country. Wealth has short out its offshoots: here and there a villa, a castle, palace; but these were rural exotics, and the countrymen had no part in them. There has been no fine civilization, no really well organized system of rural society. Civilization has passed the farmer by. Babylon and Nineveh sent up their towers to heaven, but the farmers on Chaldean plains toiled in the same way before the cities were built, while they were in their glory and long after they were heaps of ruins. (24)

And, as a remedy to this national problem, AE put forth and cherished the idea of an agricultural evolution. In the same context, he said again:

A revolution cannot be wrought at once. They will slowly melt into the new order which will slowly arise, and they will
find their place there. In Irish rural community of the future, I hope, will find a place for all its people. (25)

The active life in IAOS offered AE a new field to work for the betterment of his own people and the preservation of the culture he cared so much for. This period of his life was given either to political and social welfare of the rural inhabitants or, to the analytic interpretation of symbolic visions which came to him frequently, engrossing his interest. Of these haunting dreams and his concern for them he wrote to Yeats in the beginning of 1900:

I was up early in the morning in the hills a fortnight ago and I saw a harper of the de Danaans and heard him playing. The sounds were wonderfully clear and I was able to repeat them to myself. But when I got to the foot of the hill it had deserted me,

And, a few lines later he continued:

I have been hunting up old Celtic mythology and have got the skeleton of the Druidic philosophy and symbolism in my mind. (26)
These two statements confirmed not only the fact that AE had the power of clairaudience, but also that, the legendary stories provided a ground for stimulating his supra-sensuous perceptions, making them veritable. AE found the characters in the Irish Mythologies to have some amount of reality in themselves, and, in such stories and fables he discovered a store-house of aesthetic and symbolic potentiality. In two articles, contributed to The Irish Theosophist 1895 'The Legends of Ancient Eire' and 'The Legends of Ancient Eire'II, AE explored several cases in the Celtic mythology and made interpretations of one such story as an occult phenomenon corroborating with man's loss of the third eye — the centre of occult perception. Similarly, in 'The Legends of Ancient Eire-II', he reasoned out the peculiar description of one particular god, "surrounded by a rainbow and fiery dews"(27) to be the 'aura' or the hollow, perceptible to the clairvoyant only. AE rescued many such mythological figures in Celtic stories from lapsing into obscurity and oblivion and
treasured them as foundation to the rejuvenation of a dying national spirit. In many of his paintings there were fairies, elves, demi-gods, dryads, and hama-dryads; and, in most of his mystic poems there was an implicit indication to such mysterious powers which lived and worked through the poet. With amalgamation of harmonious shades he made his paintings symbolic and prophetic, and with deep faith in cosmic plan he made his poems mystic. His painting as well as his poetry, together, spoke of AE as a contemplative mystic—a distinguishable characteristic trait in him, irrespective of whether he worked as the organiser of IAOS or an active member of the Irish National Theatre Society (founded in 1902). His married life did not create any barrier to his spiritual vision. Two years after the birth of his second child, Brian (born in 1900), AE wrote to Yeats:

I have got, at last, the "Serpents of Wisdom", which I long wanted to see, and they are glorious beings. They were watching over my baby's cot one night, and I now understand the serpent myths. (28)
As the ideas ensuing from myths went on pouring into his mind with imagination, he decided to take one such theme and bring it into a literary fashion. The dramatization of one such legendary plot came out in 1905, *Dierdre: A Drama in Three Acts*, before the publication of which he wrote:

I would weave in a whole lot of druidism into it, and I could get a fine end. (29)

By the end of eighteenth century a number of literary and cultural organizations had already started working vigorously for the preservation and reawakening of Ireland's native culture. Douglas Hyde's Gaelic League (1893), Irish Literary Society, the Musical Festival of Ireland, Feis Ceoil, and the Irish National Theatre Society (1902) were the outcome of some of the bold steps taken by national-minded Irish patriots. They, with their best of ability endeavoured to keep par with the fast advancing languages of Europe, and particularly with the English. AE contributed his labour and skill to most of these
cultural organizations, and through these he kept looking for new poets and personalities who might keep the nation's cultural solidarity up. During this time he also enjoyed the intellectual company of some of his prolific contemporaries like Maud Gonne, W.B. Yeats, George Moore, and James Stephens. The sittings of the Hermetic Society, which AE attended, were important in bringing them together into fruitful discussions on art, culture, politics and also occultism. But, in 1904, the group ceased to be, and, along with many of its members AE joined The Theosophical Society run from Madras.

AE kept his political activities and mystical writings alive side by side. In December, 1903 some of his poems were edited under The Huts of Knowledge and in the following year two more works came out — The Divine Vision and other Poems, and New Songs (edited). AE's versatility was unanimously acclaimed by all his critics, and they all equally saw the spiritual greatness of the poet, which ranked him(AE) much
above any common painter or writer.

I think AE's greatness was essentially a spiritual greatness, and because the ego had so nearly vanished in him, he followed willingly the direction of his higher Self. He must have been inwardly aware that his task was pre-eminently that of a spiritual teacher: to this fact, his extra-ordinary conversational power as well as his writings in both poetry and prose are a witness. He was an advanced soul, a mystic, not remote from, but entering into life, and at this level there is a balanced wholeness not usually found in the great artist, musician or man of letters as such. He knew that this central path was his destiny and he followed it to the end.(50)

This is what Raynor Johnson wrote of AE's literary and spiritual personality; and, Earnest Boyd, who made a still deeper penetration into the mystic's character, observed:

It is the mark of the artistic and intellectual integrity of A.E. that he has not been spoiled by the very real success which has come to him. The form of the latter has been discriminate appreciation on the part of a public wide enough to escape the
designation of a clique, yet sufficiently narrow to ensure the freedom of the artist, who is not exposed to the danger of commercial popularity. A.E. still writes as he wrote in The Irish Theosophist, with no care for the financial prospects of his work, concerned only for the truest expression of himself. He is no longer impelled to speak with the frequency of those early years, when the fullness of a new revelation, and the enthusiasm of youth, made silence arduous; when to have refrained from speech must, at times, have seemed almost an act of cowardice. Were he not restrained by the consciousness of the nature of his inspiration, he might with profit become a mystic-monger to sururban drawing-rooms. But A.E. deliberately chose to dissociate his material from his literary welfare, the latter being quite independent of the former. He could not see his way to continue spinning words, when he had been accustomed to weave a poetic fabric of ideas.(31)

But, A.E.'s Philosophy is most convincingly documented by one of his critic-friends, John EGLINTON, who in the Memoir wrote:
we are gradually learning to distinguish between miracles which do not happen and those which initiate us into a world-order beyond our present comprehension. AE's was hardly a pure form of this idea, for it was mixed up with beliefs in all kinds of spiritual presences with which he held communion, on which a word must be said later. But he is certainly the poet of this idea; and if William James is right in believing that it is in this direction that we must look for any satisfaction of the instinct in the human being to think of itself as immortal, it may well be that Russell will one day rank far higher as a poet than he does to-day.(32)

True, as Mr. Eglinton suggests here, AE, though primarily a mystic, often brooded over the nature of a world, beyond this phenomenal activities. One could call him a practical mystic, who intended to apply his mystic ideology effectively to politics and cultural integration. As he became increasingly attached to the socio-economic conditions of his country, the tender poetic genius inside him was slowly being replaced by a more prosaic and factual form of literature.
During the time, he was most fervently involved in the problems of his country, his writings were chiefly political, though, never lacking the usual tone of passionate love for Nature and Natural Beauty. His interaction with Nature was as poignant in his politically fertile days of life as it had been in his most sensitive and mystically fertile days. AE's association with Donegal was always referred to as a place of divine calmness and natural beauty — an enchanted country. Johnson described it as,

a country of green hills and mountains of extensive sandy beaches, and of a very indented coastline. (33)

AE was very fond of this place; its solitude and serene grace inspired meditative feelings in him, and, he was a regular visitor of it during holidays. The natural surrounding and the untampered pastoral of Donegal acted as a fountain of mystic inspiration in him. There, he felt the presence of the Mighty Heart and its manifestation in the objects, all around. The place brought him ever nearer to the pursuits of heart, made his goal an easy reach.
In August, 1905 Russell was appointed the editor of The Irish Homestead, succeeding H.P. Norman. Through this new appointment he emerged as a distinguished journalist and efficient nationalist who could show others, as he himself believed, the immense of an optimistic future for Ireland. AE's originality and clarity of thought were apparent, both in prose and poetry. In prose-work he revealed a good deal of flexibility and conviction. In political writings, at times he was fiery and charging, and at others, prophetic, and compromising. As the editor of The Irish Homestead, he exemplified traits of dextrous journalism, combining both fact and faith together. Through the cooperative societies that had sprung up all over the country, he made a hopeful treatment of the grimness of the Irish farmers, vulnerable to sufferance and suppression. Through truth, faith and non-violence, he wished to extirpate corruption from the country. By means of journalism he preached tolerance and honesty to the literate, and, by means of personal contact he groomed up ethical consciousness in the
illiterate peasants. He believed in peaceful co-existence and perfection of human attitude. The democratic ideas were welcomed by him because in this form only he saw the growth of a healthy national life.

The root idea in democracy is the possibility of perfected humanity, where all will be wise and understanding, and the divinity now latent in the lowest will be apparent in all. It is some instinct in men reliant on their own possible perfectibility, which must come through experience, which makes the world turn a reluctant ear to appeals to come into communities or into a social order where the least person has not his admitted power in influence the government of the order he belongs to. Mr. O'Grady would drill people into happiness. They more wisely perhaps, prefer to go on unhappily even into wisdom. They will work out each one for himself in free conjunction with others their destiny. That is why we believe there is a permanent future before co-operation, which is purely democratic in principle. If there are men of fine character they will always have their due weight and influence in
the democratic assembly. We see no future before the estates of the new order except a short life of ten, twenty or thirty years, unless they are democratic and cooperative. The latter might be worse managed, but they would be permanent. (34)

It is true that AE was greatly concerned with the growing inhumanity and evil power in the world around. But his faith in the inherent goodness of man remained undisturbed till the end. While persuading people to be good and honest, he asserted on the general nobility in human character. In 1914 he was convinced that the real nature of man is good and as such, he observed:

His opaqueness to fine ideals is a temporary thing. If we examine any evil character it will be found to be the perversion of something which in the core of man's being is good and right and true. Our vanity is the shadow of the self-consciousness of the beauty in the Spirit. Our hatreds are the violent forms of wisdom which would regenerate. Our lusts are the baser forms of our loves, and it may truly be said that what is called moral cowardice in Ireland is the perversion
of a feeling for national or popular ideals. (35)

These lines, quoted from *The Irish Homestead*, explore the philosophy of AE at a matured age. His conviction of the inherent goodness of man and his faith in the mankind were the reasons behind his optimistic understanding of the ways of life. His writings were mystical, hopeful, and also a means of assuagement to the mind, writhing with material loss and illusory sorrow.

Fame and popularity, showered on him in profundity during life time, did not mar his humbleness and docility. On the other hand, he wished to live unidentified and obscure, so that his poetry could be the only identity of his personality. In this connection, it is interesting to note what Mr. William Daniel quoted from a part of the letter, AE wrote to his publishers who intended to popularize him through publicity:

I have been trying all my life to escape personal publicity and wrote under a pseudonym for this reason. (36)
Perhaps AE himself was aware of his own genius and therefore depended little on the recommendation of others. In this context he wrote a letter to T.B.Mosher, to rue the busy activities of his life, on account of which his writing was hampered,

I am horribly busy organizing agriculture, and inspiring farmers to do their business properly, when I am most melancholy in my soul, but an occasional lyric drops between the busy days. (37)

Of the various forms of literature, AE showed a deliberate inclination towards poetry, and particularly, towards mystic poetry. Full of praises for the serene beauty of the Sufi poetry, he wrote to Clifford Bax:

I prefer the Sufi poetry to any because of its intoxication with divine things; because romance and beauty and love which in our literature move on a path of their own are in Eastern mystical poetry rapt up into eternal things. (38)

Oriental Philosophy and literature captured AE's mind more than anything else. The various Eastern
Scriptures and mystical writings, which he came in contact with since early manhood, drew him ever towards their hidden charm and glory. Along with Theosophical and Hermetic writings, he discovered a perennial source of wisdom in the Hindu Philosophy as expounded in The Bhagavat Gita, and in the writings of the far Eastern land's enlightened philosopher, Lao Tzu.

They, together with the gospel of love and truth of Buddhism and serenity of Islamic mysticism, revealed the glamour of Oriental mystic literature. He was moved by the beauty and composure of Sir Edwin Arnold's The Light of Asia and A.P. Sinnett's The Esoteric Buddhism. His mind was steeped by the deep thought, propated in the writings of the Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi and by Fitzgerald's translation of The Rubaiyyat of Omar Khayyam.

He derived immense pleasure from reading and discussing the scriptural documents of different religions. As a writer he was prolific; as a social-worker he was efficient and effective; and as a man he was amiable and light-hearted. In
this context it is useful to quote a few lines from C.C. Coates's *Some Less Known Chapters in the Life of A.E.* "A.E. had a very strong sense of humour, but it was a very kindly humour, never ironic or sarcastic. In all the years I have known him," wrote Mr. Coates, "I never heard him speak unkindly of any one." (39) In fact, he had love and sympathy for mankind, and through his writings and speeches, he preached this very noble virtue to others. Full of appreciation for the mystic-poet's tolerant and sympathetic nature, a friend of his wrote:

AE was not one of those who can only be approached in certain moods. He seemed to radiate kindness at all times. He always used to enjoin us to think with our hearts. He recognized that without love one cannot think or see clearly. Moreover there never was the slightest trace of condescension in his companionship. (40)

Russell shifted to Rathgar Avenue with his family in 1906, and there he spent his time mostly in painting and writing. The new rural environment helped AE again to be natural and free
with the village-folk, providing him with ample scope to think on their improvement. Despite his work at the editorial table, he kept the habit of painting and discussing verse, as usual. A new star which had just entered their literary galaxy was James Stephens, whose literary talents and meditative philosophy attracted AE. There was a positive enchantment in Stephens's verse which conspicuously spoke of the poet's concern with Indian branches of philosphic idea—a field that had absorbed AE's interest too. Besides Indian mysticism, the other, and perhaps the topic of greater enthusiasm was the long, probing discussions into The Secret Doctrine (by Mme. H.P. Blavatsky,) at the meetings of the Hermetic Society.

By 1905, The Divine Vision and Other Poems (Jan, 14th 1904) and The Mask of Apolic (6th Jan, 1905) were published. Most of the stories, collected in the latter, had a former appearance in The Irish Theosophist and The Internationalist. The New Songs (edited) came out in 1904.
In 1900, in order to save the Irish farmers from the setback of primitive agricultural methods, Sir Horace Plunkett initiated the department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction — an organization, auxiliary to the bigger institution, I.A.O.S. Through sincere labour, AE saved it against the hard times. For, he, along with the organization's founder, believed that true help could be brought to the farmers, not by persuading them to toil harder in the fields, but by introducing the modern machinery into the rural areas. In a way, they insisted more on the adoption of progressive urban civilization than on preservation of rural procedures of living. AE's *Cooperation and Nationality* — a book published in 1912 was dedicated, in spirit, to the purpose of bringing the popularity and glory of the Society of Agriculture and Technical Instruction back, which had temporarily been feeble under political pressure. In this small book, sub-titled,
'A guide for Rural Reformers from this to the Next Generation', many of his fundamental ideas on national improvement through cooperation have been elucidated. The book was constructively revolutionary in its adumbration of an equalization of rural and urban development. AE said in the book, as he believed in heart, that the civic progress, confined only to the city-life would bring in an ultimate ruin to the nation. Conversely, he showed the role of country-inhabitants in the march of civilization. It, however, was not the only field where he advocated his ideas of equanimity. Exigency of women's emancipation and women's suffrage, too gained ground in the book, in order to bring down the social discrepancy that had affected the growth of a healthy society so far. AE's skill in socio-political writing and his efficiency in co-ordinating the sittings of I.A.O.S. had initiated several other cooperative societies, which sprang up to aid the original one.

The early decades of the twentieth century were days of great turmoil for Ireland. The great
strike of Dublin broke out in 1913. In James Larkin, who initiated and took the leadership of the strike, AE recognised a personality of tremendous potentiality. Both psychically and analytically he lauded the courage and initiative of this political leader. William Martin Murphy, on the other hand, supported the employers against the strikers. But the strike soon found its way through various business establishments and other fields of work, each time gaining further strength. Some of the deep-rooted social problems like low wages, labour exploitation and slum problems had triggered the labour unrest. AE was full of support with the labourer-group condemning the undue advantage the capitalists squeezed out of the lower-class. A few months later AE substituted himself for the role of Larkin when the latter was imprisoned; and successfully enough, he kept the spirit of the strike up. The valid grounds of the strike brought him the help of notable Irish figures — George Bernard Shaw, James Connolly, Mrs. Montefiore, including Larkin's sister, Delia.
In this pretext a very powerful speech, protective of the interest of the working-group, was delivered by AE in the Albert Hall. And, as is claimed, the listerners of the speech were charged with the voice of poignancy and sincerity of the speaker who fought for the labourer's ground totally on humanitarian view. This strike of Dublin, infact, contained the seeds of the Easter Rising of 1916.

After this involvement AE was more passionately in love and entwined with his own country's fate. His experience of the mammonistic society was sordid. Coming back from London, in 1913 he wrote in a letter to John Quinn (1870-1924):

I came back to Dublin loving Ireland more than ever. The size of London is appalling. The more humanity crowds together the more inhuman does it seem. I believe in the small communities. I think, with the Greeks, that a city should contain no more citizens than could be influenced by the voice of a single orator. I wish we could get self-government here and be quit of all the big imperial rascalities which draw us about like a small boat tugged by a rope after a mammoth liner. My ideal state would be about the size of County Sligo. (41)
Execution of three of AE's friends — James Connolly, Thomas Mac Donagh, and Padraic Pearse — following a demonstration on the Easter Monday, 1916, brought a severe blow to him. Consequently, he viewed the Great War (1914-18) which shattered most of the European countries, as a cosmic justice meant to expiate the act of martyrdom of the Easter Monday participants. AE was inherently a pacifist and he dreamt of bringing back peace to the country through non-violence and peaceful coexistence. In an open letter he addressed the Irish Republicans, imploring them to put an end to mutual hostility and crude methods of hateful passion. In the letter he wrote,

Some of you argue that it is only by suffering and sacrifice a people come to the highest in them. But that crown comes to those whose sacrifice is willing, not to those on whom suffering is forced. They feel only the wrong that is done to them and lose too often the belief in any ideal; and I think this country through civil warfare is lapsing into a bitter materialism. (42)
AE’s admiration and reverence were never meagre when he dealt with the martyrs of the Easter Rising. In their honour, he wrote the following lines in the poem ‘Salutation’:

Their dream had left me numb and cold,
But yet my spirit rose in pride,
Refashioning in burnished gold
The images of those who died
Or were shut in the penal cell.

Here’s to you men I never met,
Yet hope to meet behind the veil,
Thronged on some starry parapet
That looks down upon Innisfail,
And see the confluence of dreams
That clashed together in our night,
One river born from many streams,
Roll in one blaze of blinding light. (43)

In 1915 there were three more publications by AE — they were *Ireland, Agriculture and The War, Gods of War with Other Poems*, and *Imaginations and Reveries*. The collection of poems was originally meant for private circulation; and *Imaginations and Reveries* bore a beautiful sketch of aesthetic qualities in the form of prose.
In the following year appeared *The National Being* — a book in which he conveyed his faith in cooperative action and the subsequent effects of the action. Dedicating the book to Sir Horace Plunkett, he wrote:

> The Marriage of Heaven and Earth was foretold by the ancient prophets. I have seen no signs of that union taking place, but I have been led to speculate how they might be brought within hailing distance of each other. In my philosophy of life, we are all responsible for the results of our actions and their effects on others. (44)

Through political awareness the book preached a sort of moral consciousness which in the context was more important than anything else in bringing about dimensional change in a country. The chief objective of the book lay in the formation of a spirit of the nation — essentials of a free Irish state which he expected to emerge soon. The frame and title of the book vindicate the faith AE laid on the spirit or 'being' of an ideal democratic state. He also anticipated a spiritual manifestation in form that changes the fate of a country. In Earnest Boyd's opinion, the
book (The National Being) has "The fame and
popularity of a national gospel"(45); and to
Cain and O'Brien, it is a coherent "logical
presentation of policy and a summon to human
aspiration."(46)

AE believed that each man had within
himself a latent power of great national leadership.
He often identified the legendary and chivalric
figures of the Irish mythology with the national
heroes who saved the honour of their country.
Through valour and heroism they had control not
only over the country's history but also they
engrossed the mind of its inhabitants, as did
Ireland's Cuchulain and Oscar, and India's
Yudhisthira, Rama and Arjuna. A country that lacked
such heroic personalities was sure to be doomed
— and, he believed, so had been the case of his
contemporary Ireland. All he wanted to arouse in
the land, was a strong sense of national-feeling
and dynamic leadership, which could survive against
foreign exploitations and internal disturbances
resulting from it. He wanted to reactivate the
Irish consciousness which was, once upon a time
blazingly responsive in the mythological past; and,
through appeal to the legendary past, he succeeded in creating a mood of patriotism, giving to his countrymen the hope of happier days.

As AE's mystical writings fascinated those who wished to see life beyond the horizon, his political works interested people who worked out the problems of life facing the pangs of national exploitation, intending to fight against it. His *The National Being* had a tremendous impact on the public.

It was read alike by British statesmen, Sinn Fein leaders, and the general public; it established the author's fame as one of the few clear and absolutely disinterested minds engaged upon the Irish problem, as part of the general problem of humanity's evolution towards a new social order.(47)

The first World War had almost shaken England; and Ireland, as a supporting country had suffered too. Now Ireland anticipated two sorts of dangers threatening her social as well as economic stability. On the one hand, people were haunted by the shadows of an oncoming civil war, and, on the other, they saw the inevitability of
a famine, in case the peasants were forced off the fields to join the armies. In the face of this imminent disaster AE endeavoured to maintain peace and unity through appeal to Celtic culture. He felt strongly about the urgency both of national and cultural integration which alone could save the innocent civilians from plunging into sufferance and death. In his effort to rebuild the lost heritage, he wrote openly in one of his letters to Edward Maclysaght:

Let us two start an Irish or Celtic code of manners, liberate us from the despotism of what the English call good taste; that being their accumulation of rusty chains wherewith they chain themselves. (48)

1918 marks a landmark in the literary career of Russell. It was the year in which the autobiographical work, The Candle of Vision was published (October, 1918). It presented a thorough account of the autobiographer's evolution of the mind and the psyche. In the book, he discusses about a number of mystic experiences that had visited his mind ever since childhood and continued
to be with him even at a later stage of life, when he was going through days of hectic political activity. AE was a mystic, but his curiosity to explore the world's religious dogmas remained unabated till the end. With great interest he got himself introduced to the particulars of Oriental Philosophy which he prized above the Occidental. The Candle of Vision threw light on those spiritual aspects of AE's life which so far lay in obscurity. In this, as he proclaims, Yogic practices had helped him to recollect incidents of very early age that brought a harmony between the psychical phenomena of his life and the subsequent changes. Besides mysticism, AE mastered some amount of psychical perception too. James Pryse, describing his experience with George's occult power wrote in The Canadian Theosophist how once he (AE) could provide on paper and pencil an exact replica of the vision, Pryse saw in a dream but had not told him about. AE was also capable of seeing super-natural bodies and things imperceptible to ordinary human vision. Of his familiarity with
such things, he wrote in *The Candle of Vision*:

> the luminous quality gradually became normal in me, and at times in meditation there broke in on me an almost intolerable lustre of light, pure and shining faces, dazzling processions of figures, most ancient places and peoples and landscapes lovely as the lost Eden.

AE was deeply indebted to the Celtic heritage for inducing mystic vision in his mind. He knew that a sensitive mind ought to be free from materialism in order to receive message of the finer realms of the universe. Suppleness and sensitivity of mind needed two things: poetic imagination and dream. Imagination bathed the mind with a sort of divine bliss that embraced the natural beauty, and dream was prophetic when blended with the tranquillity of mind. Together, they enhanced the comprehending power of man, bringing him nearer to the greater truths of life.

As a nationalist AE often brooded over the justification of using ammunition to counteract other weapons. He firmly believed in the achievement of goals through an idealized method like non-violence. His post at the editor's seat, first of *The Irish Homestead* and then of *The Irish*
Statesman helped him to carry his mission ahead through articles published in these magazines. Ireland then was passing through a critical period in its freedom fight. It gained United States' support in opposing the British rule over the small island. The internal peace of the island too was threatened with political disturbances leading to civil war. Under such chaotic conditions AE's sole engagement was to muster national courage and unity by writing about the glorious past of Irish civilization, in anticipation of a like future. His attempts, however, could not prevent the country from going into a civil war. A clash between the Republicans and the Treaty Soldiers gave rise to this internal conflict, killing millions of innocent Irishmen, no way connected with politics. AE was offered a seat in the Senate by William Cosgrave — the successor to Michael Collins, a victim of the civil war. But, he refused the offer and took a temporary relaxation from the political activities. Now, he concentrated on the completion of The Interpreters which was published in November, 1922. Here he was more
concerned with thoughts and ideas that gave rise to action than with real action or the nature of it. The novel bears a sketch, both of the political unrest and the cosmic order, as the young poet Lavelle discussed the various interpretations of revolution with his companions. Though the allusion has never been made explicit, this fictitious character of the protagonist has an autobiographical identity; and, the revolution in the story tacitly represents the Irish rebellion of 1921. Henry Summerfield, pointing out some technical defects in the work, observes:

Though well constructed and intellectually coherent, The Interpreters is not a literary success. While the speakers have some individuality, AE'o prose still bears the marks of an art that does not conceal art, and is unredeemed by the impassioned conviction that inspires The Candle of Vision. In one of Rian's speeches, for example, the colloquial 'old grumbler that you are' sits uneasily beside the simile in the sentence, 'That divine architecture must have coloured their thought as a sunset makes everything in harmony with
its own light.' Both the narrative and the dialogue are too self-consciously melodious, and literary idioms, overpolished images, and rhetorical parallelisms come between the reader and the clear line of the argument. (50)

In 1923, Sir Horace Plunkett, in his endeavour to recontinue The Irish Statesman offered its editorship to AE, who eventually accepted it after much persuasion. This veteran editor's articles, filled with experiences of human nature and political conditions, assured the Irishmen of a hopeful socio-economic structure in future. Acknowledging his talents as the editor, Summerfield wrote in That Myriad Minded Man:

When he agreed to edit The Irish Statesman, AE was already the finest journalist in Ireland. Apart from producing purely literary articles which were far from negligible, he had for eighteen years preached his social philosophy to the farmers and to all who would listen, and had gradually acquired a mastery of persuasive prose in all its moods. (51)
During this period AE again had the joy of reviving the old friendship with W.B. Yeats, who had just come back. But the old points of difference were still prevailing in them. In fact, in their attitude to political goals, the two had more of dissimilarity than similarity. AE, by then, had grown tired of politics and the charms of power and prestige could not even lure him to come into prominence through an access into the Senate of the free Irish State. He was genuine in his pursuits and interests. When he laid his service for the country he expected little in return — all that he wanted was happiness and freedom to the people. Though he advocated the rise of a tendency against all sorts of exploitations — social, political and economic — he genuinely abhorred any kind of violence in achieving the goal. Blavatsky's *The Secret Doctrine* had contributed a lot in this sort of character building in AE. Both Mme. Blavatsky and W.Q. Judge were known to have put considerable impact on AE, through their ideas, as revealed in their books.
AE's collection of poems, *Voices of the Stones* was published in 1925, followed by *Midsummer Eve* in 1928, and *Dark Weeping* in 1929. After retiring from political weariness AE turned more visionary. Despite the ever-growing mammonistic outlook of the world with its materialistic pursuits, AE was hopeful of a future, that would smile upon the spiritualistic world. In a very enthusiastic letter AE wrote to Van Wyck Brooks:

> I would like to live for fifteen years more because I think we will react again to the imaginative and spiritual and we shall probably begin a fight for spiritual freedom. Our religions are outworn and we must find cultural substitutes. (52)

The traditional religion had no restriction over AE's philosophy. He could easily render himself free from the dogmas of religious authorities and, to compensate its hold on human life, he made efforts to refurbish the Irish culture. This culture provided him with a source of inspiration to write poems and to meditate upon the aesthetic values of the Gaelic past.
Poetry and preservation of culture — these two things were only left to him in the late manhood. In spite of all the glory and recognition brought to him from critics, for a time, AE felt uncertain of his own literary merit. Soon after the publication of *Voices of the Stones*, he expressed his fear to Earnest Boyd:

I found myself making verses though I had a feeling that when one is within a year of sixty one must have lost a great deal of the sensitiveness which is necessary for the writing of lyrics....I never am sure about the merit of what I do write.(53)

This he wrote in August, 1925; but nearly a year after, in June 1926, reviving his lost faith he seemed confident again of his ability and interest. He wrote to L.A.G. Strong:

Through I am close on sixty I still retain a love for poetry and like Herbert "relish versing."(54)

True, though he had reached sixty, his poetic talents did not delude him. His poems now maintained a balance between the Celtism and the wisdom he derived from the Eastern philosophies.
On the one hand he exhibited cultural brilliance, while on the other, he showed spiritual poignancy. Divine sensibility, forming an indispensable part of his life thus, had been indoctrinated into his individual philosophy.

By the beginning of 1928 AE had already left Ireland for America on a tour. There he was to deliver a series of lectures and on such occasions he got ample scope to illustrate his views on Celtism, politics and individual philosophy. His other visit to the United States in 1930 brought him further overwhelming acclamation from the American Citizens. AE was full of praise for the natural attractions of Arizona and San Francisco; and the Americans listened with rapt attention to this Ireland's mystic-nationalist's discussions on hidden aspects of Irish literary and cultural renaissance. To many of them, AE bore the apostolate of modern Irish literary culture.

Death of Russell's wife Mrs. Violet Russell in 1932 marked the closure of a happy, loving companionship in AE's life. In her memory he
he dedicated his *Song and Its Fountains* which was published in February 1932, the very month his wife died. The book brought him favourable comments from the critics. It abounded with references to the cult of mysticism and a unique fusion of the spirit and the sense. AE himself viewed the book as a particular exploration of the psyche. In AE's doctrine, the physical principle too had its role in bringing out the true personality of the psyche. The physical form was the preserver of the spirit through which it gained consciousness and experience as finally the soul rose to wisdom. Action and thought in the physical plane were the mother of divine wisdom which affected the spirit. Thus, he believed, the body and the spirit were complementary to each other. Poetry was the voice of the spirit and imagination gave rise to it. Without poetic sensitivity or divine imagination, evolution of the psyche was not possible. Like the Oriental and Continental mystics AE too recognized the spirit within the body and he wrote it down systematically in *Song and Its Fountains*. He believed that despite
the spirit's bondage to the physical contours
it had the power to soar upward to a union with
the spring of life wherefrom it had originated
to gather experience.

"Explore the River of the Soul, whence
or in what order you have come; so
that although you have become a servant
to the body, you may again rise to the
Order from which you descended, joining
works to sacred reason."(55)

The very fact that he quoted the above lines
from *The Chaldaean Oracles*, at the beginning of
the book, shows that the poet wanted to bring the
truth of spiritual manifestations into actuality.
A similar kind of allusion is frequent in the
Oriental theories where the 'soul' has been
described as separate from the 'body', and that,
man's salvation lies in the freedom from the
apparent or visionary illusions caused by 'Maya'
(the great illusion). He believed, the
individual life to be a deviant spark of the
Ultimate Life which made a seven-fold manifestation
in human being. Music or poetic imagination was
contained in that ray of life which illuminated
the human-psyche. As such AE thought:

poetry is one way in which it answers
aspiration, and we receive, interpret
or misinterpret the oracle as our being
here is pure or clouded. To me it was
only after long reverie that a song
would come as a bird might fly to us
out of the vast hollows of the air.(56)

Soon after Song and its Fountains

The Avatars was ready. Though fictional in
outline, as suggested the subtitle, it was a
futuristic fantasy — primarily based on the
philosophic convictions of the novelist. In the
novel the 'Avatars' that revealed themselves to
Paul Heron, were intimately connected with the
history of Ireland. As Michael, another character
explains, their appearance heralded the rise of
a new spiritual era in Ireland — a notion very
much akin to the one AE had started his early
dreams with. Even at this later stage of life
it served as a solace to assure him of the
spiritual importance of his country. He had been
a little dejected and lonely after the death of his wife, a faithful companion. For some time he was known to have cherished a desire to visit India, a country he looked upon as a shaper of his spiritual being. In a letter to Captain Bowen, his successor to the Hermetic Society, he acknowledged his deep indebtedness to the Indian philosophies and the teachings of the Theosophy — both of which helped him in the successful presentation of *The Avatars*. To Bowen he wrote:

I had no private doctrine, nothing but H.P.B. (Watts), W.Q.J. (Judge),
The Bhagavad Gita, Upanishads,
Patanjali, and one or two other
scriptures.(57)

For his holidays at Donegal he had reserved the twelve volumes of *The Mahabharata* (translated) and a book of Chinese mysticism, *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. Quite likely, along with Hindu and Tao books he continued his interest in the Sufi literature too. It is reasonable to presume that by then he had already discovered the overpowering literary
excellence of a Sufi contemporary, Kahlil Gibran. His appreciation of Gibran's *The Prophet* (1923) bears evidence to his love for the Sufi's poetic trend which without exaggeration, could be matched with AE's.

On 13th December, 1934 AE set out on his last trip to America where he had been invited to lecture on various topics, ranging from the motivating speeches on cooperative organization to philosophies of life. As AE passed from town to town in the American soil, his life was slowly ebbing away through the malignant growth inside. On examination, cancer was detected and as per his own wish, AE was brought back to London. Despite physical debility AE was mentally strong enough to take the journey back as lightly as possible by enjoying the intellectual company of Fred Henderson. He was still at his skill in versification, and concentrated on the compilation of *The Selected Poems*. *The House of Titan and Other Poems* had been published in October 1934. Death was knocking close at hand; the body had
given itself to the disease. His health was fast deteriorating but the mind was fresh and receptive as ever. He knew, with death the body would cease to be but not the chain of living which manifested through various stages of evolution. Probably, it was a belief in after life which could hold him so brave and contemplative against the face of death. As he often expressed, he knew that soon he would be passing into another realm — a place nearer to the soul's ultimatum. Only a few days before his death he wrote to James Stephens:

Don't think I feel anything melancholy. I hold to the spiritual verities I have believed all my life and indeed would be glad and more cheerful if my time was shorter. (58)

And, to Henry Wallace he wrote:

death does not make much matter.
There is an eternal pilgrimage and a return (59)

Time drifted away giving way to a sombre, loving atmosphere where AE lay patiently on. His last days were spent at Haven-hurst — a nursing home at Bournemouth. It was a beautiful spot
with a wreath of natural scenery around. AE loved the place as he had ever loved sites of rich natural glamour. Even at this precarious stage, discussions on poetry, personal philosophy and Ireland's cultural history had been his joy and entertainment. On the 17th July, 1935, AE died a most peaceful death, and after death he was honoured by his friends and foes alike. Just a day before death, he had been honoured with the Gregory Medal by the Irish Academy of Letters.

His country knew him as an eminent nationalist, a great poet and a mystic of all times. But the entire world looked upon his literature as a monolithic creation, as in it was contained a relief to this fast-growing materialistic cult of the society. AE's mysticism was practical, and that is why he could imbibe the wisdom of mind in the various fields of action. Even, his participation in politics grew out of a sincere devotion to truth and his love for the humanity. In mystic
literature he appreciated beauty; in political writings he sought to treasure this beauty in human life. Besides his indebtedness to Theosophy, Hindu Philosophy, Sufi Poetry and Taoism, as a man, he possessed a tremendous personality—all bathed in love and sympathy, truth and sensitivity. And, though now dead, his poems still bear the stamp of deep-rooted wisdom and mystic awareness which only a poet of rare celebrity exhibits.
NOTES

10. Ibid, p-5.
15. Ibid, p-36-37.
27. AE, 'The Legends of Ancient Ere II', p-121.
29. Ibid, p-41.
35. Ibid, p-408.
38. Ibid, p-57.
39. Coates, G.C, Some Less Known Chapters in the Life of AE (George Russell), (Being the substance of a Lecture delivered at Belfast, Nov. 1936,) privately printed, Dublin, 1939, 0 p-6.
41. Denson, Letters, p-83.
42. Ibid, p-159.


50. Summerfield, Henry, That Myriad Minded Man, p-213.

51. Ibid, p-216.

52. Denson, Letters, p-166.


54. Ibid, p-173.

55. AE, Song and Its Fountains, Title page


57. Summerfield, Henry, That Myriad Minded Man, p-270.
