

The Awakening of the Fires: a Survey of George Russell-AE's Mystical Writings (1897-1933)

Jerry Nolan

Abstract: A chronicle of the development of George Russell-AE's philosophical and theological powers is established by means of a survey of seven of his major mystical prose works between 1897 and 1933. The exploration of the profound relationship between AE's mysticism and the turbulent Irish politics of the period suggests that AE was indeed a most remarkable Hindu-type teacher in Ireland where the power of his message should still inspire followers.

AE wrote a letter, dated the 2nd June 1896, to W.B. Yeats from 3 Upper Ely Place Dublin which was then a small residential community of theosophists: 'Dear W.B. Y- I am not going to bother you about any derved thing this time but simply tell you some things about the Ireland behind the veil. You remember my writing to you about the awakening of the ancient fires...The gods have returned to Erin ... They have been seen by several in vision, they will awaken the magical instinct everywhere, and the universal heart of the people will turn to the old druidic beliefs...Out of Ireland will arise a light to transform many ages and peoples...I believe that a new Avatar is about to appear...It will be one of the kingly Avatars, who is at once ruler of men and magic sage...' The 30 year old AE would go on to develop these ideas over the remaining 37 years of a very active life in the service of Ireland's national enlightenment.

AE wrote seven mystical books between 1897 and 1933 wherein may be traced the line of AE's philosophical and theological development during a period of great changes in the state of Ireland . The first work was the essay *The Future of Ireland and the Awakening of the Fires* – in essence, an elaboration of that 1896 letter to W.B. Yeats. The second work was the 1905 collection of short stories *The Mask of Apollo* which showed AE freely drawing inspiration from Greek, Indian, Irish and Jewish sources. The third work was the 1916 social and economic study *The National Being* which put most emphasis on the spirit behind national movements. The fourth work is the 1918 philosophical study *The Candle of Vision* about the nature of mystical vision and imagination with a special emphasis on Ireland's ancient myths and legends. The fifth key work is the 1923 novel *The Interpreters* which presented a lively debate between

people with different views about the new Ireland where the politics of the characters was traced back to motions in Anima Mundi. The sixth work is the 1932 autobiographical reflections *Song and Its Fountains* about the search for the fountain-source of poetry in his own experiences. The seventh work is the 1933 novel *The Avatars* which was AE's valedictory variation on his favourite recurring dream, that of the possible appearance of Hindu-type Avatars in Ireland.

The Future of Ireland and the Awakening of the Fires expressed a strong sense of national mission.² AE began with a provocative comparison between general attitudes in the Ireland of the late nineteenth century and the mentality of a child: 'Though so old in tradition, this Ireland of today is a child among nations...There is all the superstitions, the timidity, the lack of judgement, the unthought recklessness of childhood; but combined with what generosity and devotion, and what an unfathomable love of its heroes.' AE's dream was that the Irish people would live up to the destiny of 'The Sacred Isle'- 'not to be a petty republic, nor a miniature duplicate in life and aims of great material empires.' AE glimpsed the opportunity for Irish revival after 'its long cycle of night'; but warned in particular, against the threat of industrialisation and mechanisation already looming across the sea in England: 'those black centres of boasted prosperity, factory smoke and mine, the arid life and spiritual death.' The visible lives of the urban workers in industrial Britain caused AE to warn the Irish about going down such a route with some of the apocalyptic fury of a William Blake or a Thomas Carlyle: 'Do you call those miserable myriads a humanity?...There is nothing but a ceaseless energy without; a night terrible as hell within. Is this the only way for us as people?' AE put three suggestions forward as the better way forward for Ireland: learn from the love of nature to be found in Druidic religion; adopt the ancient Celtic heroes as models of human action; and gather wisdom from the lore preserved in Celtic legends and fairy tales.

In 1897 AE was introduced by P.Hannon to Horace Plunkett who was seeking an organiser to set up the rural cooperatives which would enable the Irish farmer to become independent of profiteering moneylenders. AE was happy to become assistant secretary in the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society, or the IAOS, a post which he held for the next thirty years, most notably as the editor of *The Irish Homestead* from 1905 to 1923 and as the editor of *The Irish Statesman* from 1923 to 1930. From the 1890s AE sought to express heroic ideals not just in literature but in social and political action.³ For AE, economic problems were never merely economic because he regarded the economic exploitation of workers as primarily the problem of how to address their spiritual degradation in mechanical employment. AE firmly believed in a cooperative commonwealth based on the inherent dignity of every Irish person's ancestral self.

While he may be said to have been a theosophist all his life from the first moment he joined a Theosophical Society in 1890, AE was well aware of the sectarian excesses of the followers of Madame Blatavsky but ever remained true to the promptings of his inner self. This fidelity was sealed in the choice of the name AE. In 1888, George William

Russell saw the word AEON in a book and later discovered that it was a word used by Gnostics to represent the earliest being separated from the gods: AEON, finding himself mirrored in space, became master of the world. Russell's pseudonym was planned as the full AEON, but when the compositor at the printers split the diphthong and omitted the last syllable, Russell took the printer's error as a divine prompting to use AE as the symbol of his individual emanation from the world-spirit. ⁴

The openness of AE to various world cultural influences was made clear in his collection of short stories *The Mask of Apollo*. ⁵ The title story, 'The Mask of Apollo', was based on the Greek legend about the God Apollo descending to earth in the form of a village priest to explain to the villagers how all human beings have a spiritual origin and destiny. (3-6) In 'The Cave of Lilith', a parable derived from Rabbinical literature and the Kaballah, there was an account of the evil possibilities of the man who settled only for sexual appetite under the influence of the seductress Lilith. (9-13) In 'The Story of a Star', there was reference to the Indian philosophy of Maya, or illusion, when the central character Robert in a little cathedral town saw in a vision the birth of the planet and learnt that life on earth could become a divine breath in the infinite life of God. (17-31) The story 'A Dream of Angus Oge', taken from an Irish legend, was about a boy who had a vision of life among the Immortals. (25-30) In 'The Meditation of Ananda', an Indian tale, recounted the amazing results of an Indian ascetic's love of meditation: a king forgave an enemy; a prisoner was given hope by children's flowers; an old woman was reminded of her happy youth by two lovers; and a leper began to feel happy in the presence of a guru teaching his disciples. (33-37) In 'The Midnight Blossom', another Indian tale, four pilgrims accompanied a yogi up a mountain where they see the holy flower, the midnight blossom, as it turns into the symbol of the lost innocence of the world and the promise of universal harmony. (41-45) In the last story 'The Childhood of Apollo' there was the simple telling of the story of how Diotime, the sybil, first reveals to the Greek God Ancient Beauty in the form of a light from Heaven. (49-53) All of the stories in *The Mask of Apollo* were short and simple, and clearly showed how AE was seeking not just a Celtic Past but the Past of Humankind wherein each culture could be seen as partial manifestation of the great world spirit.

In his capacity as editor of *The Irish Homestead*, the official newspaper of the IAOS, AE developed his own economic and social theories all of which were grounded in his mystical view of the place of human beings in the universe. Above all else, AE hoped that Revival or Rebirth in Ireland would not be based on violent hatreds but would grow out of a love of the universal gods and a remembrance of Ireland's heroic past. AE argued relentlessly in the columns of *The Irish Homestead* about the desirability of building up a just rural civilisation in Ireland by means of the slow consolidation of small cooperatives into general purpose societies wherein the Irish of every background would work together and wherein an aristocracy of talent would replace the politics of the demagogue. The period beginning in 1913 was a confusing and disappointing time for AE as events began to happen in Ireland which distressed him. Until 1913 AE had

mainly stayed out of what he called 'the politics of time'; but then his great preoccupation with rural matters was transformed by the Dublin Strike and lock-out. The perceived tragedy of labour in Dublin, in particular the behaviour of Murphy and the arrest of Larkin, provoked AE to speak out: he wrote an article for *The Irish Times*, spoke in London's Albert Hall and published an article in the *London Times* when it was turned down by Dublin newspapers.⁶ Yet AE had mixed feelings: on the one hand, forebodings about the probable violent alliance of labour activists and republican nationalists, of the Citizen Army and the Irish Republican Brotherhood, united in the face of such massive injustice; but on the other hand, a sense of a new beginning for his own mission as he found himself at last including both the rural and the urban workers in his plans for the New Ireland.

AE began to respond to the Third Home Rule Bill of 1914 by contemplating the prospect of a free Ireland under Home Rule in the new world order which would follow the ending of the First World War. He titled the work in which he gathered together his ideas about the New Ireland *The National Being*. The mystical term 'The National Being' referred to the soul of the Irish people waiting to express themselves distinctively in new civilised institutions. AE was hopeful that Ireland might achieve a civilisation comparable to the ancient Greeks. To achieve that distinction, Ireland needed to produce original thinkers and trusted leaders, at a time when AE had to admit that Ireland seemed an intellectual desert 'where people read nothing and think nothing'. In the vanguard of national development were the challenges facing rural and urban workers who needed to grow in the ways of cooperation. For AE, the only true emancipation of labour would be achieved not by revolution but by evolution towards the creation of cooperatives which would eventually be independent of interference from the state, the press and the banks; and capable and confident enough to foster the civic virtues of a common citizenry.

AE argued an Irish National Being which would combine democracy and aristocracy as in ancient times: 'Any system which would suppress the aristocratic independent intellect should be regarded as contrary to the Irish genius, and inimical to the national being'⁷ A little later AE asserted: 'An aristocracy of lordly and chivalrous heroes is bound in time to create a great democracy by the reflection of their characters in the mass, and the idea of the divine right of kings is succeeded by the idea of the divine right of the people.'⁸ According to AE, the urge to express nationality came from the divine world; and the creation of a national being was the best way to release the incorruptible spiritual atom of each free citizen into the universe: 'The spirit in man is wrought in the likeness to Deity, which is the that harmony and unity of Being which upholds the universe; and by the very nature of the spirit, while it asserts its freedom, its impulses lead it to a harmony with all life, to a solidarity or brotherhood with it.'⁹ The voice of AE in *The National Being* was predominantly prophetic, rather than very specific: he was striving to anticipate the forms of the institutions of an Irish state which would create a Gaeldom made up of a commingling of various races, peoples and creeds on the island. *The National Being* presented a rare vision of a harmonious fusion of cultural

and political nationalism which seemed not only desirable but which was beginning to work in the activities of the cooperative societies.

But the politics of the time continued to diverge from AE's politics of eternity. The brutal executions of the 1916 leaders greatly increased popular support for revolutionary violence as the only way of achieving Irish independence. At first AE wrote nothing about the Rising. In 1917 the British government convened a Home Rule Convention in July to which AE was invited to represent the nationalist viewpoint, in the absence of the Sinn Fein delegates.¹⁰ AE attended a few meetings of the convention, but resigned as the way towards Home Rule seemed to be increasingly blocked by politicians on both sides. Then AE stood back from the politics of time to explore further the politics of eternity: this he did in his longest book about mysticism *The Candle of Vision*.

The Candle of Vision began with AE's reminiscences of the discovery of the spiritual life within himself when he was sixteen or seventeen years of age: 'I began to be astonished with myself, for, walking along country roads, intense and passionate imaginations of another world, of an interior nature began to empower me. They were like strangers who suddenly enter a house, who brush aside the doorkeeper, and who will not be denied. Soon I knew they were the rightful owners and heirs of the house of the body.'¹¹ The image of 'The Candle of Vision' represented the consciousness of divinity within the self, achieved by the means of vision and imagination. AE referred to Plato's idea of the One in his description of the source of the divine vision which was 'a memory greater than our own, the treasure-house of august memories in the innumerable being of Earth.' AE's idea was somewhat similar to the Yeatsian idea of 'anima mundi' or 'spiritus mundi'. According to AE, there was a great range of images to choose from in the vast storehouse of Humanity's Great Memory: 'The beauty for which men is still shining; Helen is there in her Troy, and Deirdre wears the beauty which blasted the Red Branch.'¹² In his only play in 1902, AE had portrayed Deirdre as a seeress in the manner of a Greek tragedy.¹³

AE's interest in the origin of creation led him to speculate on the origins and nature of dreams which often became windows into the ancient and primitive archetypes of human experience. In the chapter 'The Architecture of Dreams', AE suggested that dreams had their origin in transcendental forces at work within individuals. In sharp contrast to Freud's 'The Interpretation of Dreams', where dreams were mostly explained in terms of repressed sexual desires, AE's interpretation lay most emphasis on dreams as the preordained method of releasing visionary energies.¹⁴

There was speculation in *The Candle of Vision* about the nature of language and the nature of power. One of AE's great hopes was that the primitive language, the language of the gods which must have once mirrored more clearly visions of divinity in the universe, might be one day discovered and deciphered. For AE, power, which could be used for good or ill, was at its most potent in the poet's visionary power which AE dubbed 'The Candle in the Forehead'. In the chapter 'Celtic Cosmogony', AE used his

own visionary power to conjure up the gods from the Celtic storehouse of memories. His God of All Creation was Lir. Out of Lir came Mananan Mac Lir, the god of divine imagination associated with the sacred hazel which was the Celtic Tree of Life. There was Dana, the mother of the gods and the first spiritual form of beauty. There was Angus, the god of love. *The Candle of Vision* climaxed in the celebration of Celtic deities because AE expected the new Gaels to wish to reclaim their lost birthright. Such a wish needed to replace a Christianity which had failed to inspire vision and imagination in Ireland: 'Our religions make promises to be fulfilled beyond the grave because they have no knowledge now to be put to the test, but the ancients spoke of a divine vision to be attained while we are yet in the body.'¹⁵

The Interpreters, published in 1922 during the year in which AE refused to become a member of the Irish Free State Senate, had a Preface in which AE distanced himself from the contemporary turmoil by claiming that the action was set in an European city and in a future century; but clearly for the Irish, the historical context can be only Dublin at the time of the 1916 Rising. All the emphasis fell on ideas: 'I am not interested in the creation of character but in tracking political moods back to spiritual origins.'¹⁶ The narrative started with a young poet Lavelle hurrying through the streets of the unnamed European city on a mission connected with the revolt of a small country against the tyranny of an empire which had long held it in subjection: 'After centuries of frustrated effort the nation long dominated by an alien power which seemed immutable, had a resurrection... It would become like Egypt, Assyria, Greece, or Rome.'¹⁷ Lavelle's band of rebels managed to commandeer a city arsenal only to find that the unguarded gates were an inviting trap. As the rebels were arrested, airships appeared over the city to quell the insurrection. The airships were like 'winged shapes of dusk and glitter' suggesting a perverted vision of extraterrestrial winged beings. Lavelle and the others were thrown into prison. During a long night, the prisoners rehearsed the reasons for the abortive rebellion which revealed various interpretations of events. AE linked the speakers with viewpoints which can be easily linked with prominent figures at the time: indeed, one critic has claimed justly that *The Interpreters* is a virtual handbook of attitudes in Revival Ireland.¹⁸ What was most exposed in the symposium-type discussion were the differences in the disunited nation; 'the scattered portions of the one nature dramatically sundered as the soul is in a dream.' The one very contrived addition to the prisoners was the character of Heyt who was included to represent the imperialist standpoint.

Lavelle, poet and idealist, had a vision of a heroic society and a strong sense of group identity. Leroy, anarchist and idealist, wanted to escape from imperialism and nationalism. Lavelle's most eloquent defence of the rebellion was set out in terms of a heroic and spiritual culture struggling against an alien and mechanistic culture. Heyt, the President of the Air Federation, spoke passionately in favour of the ideal of a controlled world state as the inevitable result of evolutionary processes in an age of complicated scientific and technological development – even as he spoke, Heyt's airships were continuing to obliterate all traces of rebellion in the society outside of the prison cell.

Lavelle and Leroy were in agreement about opposing an unitary world state but for opposite reasons. Lavelle's argument was cosmic: 'if the universe is a spiritual being, everything finally must be in harmony with it, and wild creatures, the elements even, undergo a transfiguration, fierce things becoming gentle.' Leroy's argument was individualistic: 'The Shark becoming vegetarian...There would be no place in your universe for an individualist like myself. I would be a gnat irritating its spiritual body.'¹⁹

The book's central cultural debate crystallised in the debate between Lavelle and Heyt: between myth, history and patriotism, on the one side; and science, moderisation and internationalism, on the other side. Other prisoners joined in the debate. There was Rian, the architect dedicated to beauty in this world. There was Culain, the socialist, who argued that the common people's demand for beneficent institutions to relieve human suffering and injustice must be addressed not by individual effort, nor by legends of the past, nor by a world state but by policies of enlightened social planning where altruism must replace selfishness. A prisoner named Rudd interjected at one stage to say that he depended on his priest to tell him all about matters like God and the next world. Finally, the historian Brehon was asked to reconcile somehow the conflicting ideas. Brehon began by claiming that he himself had held all these views at some stage or other of his life and went on to declare a reconciliation in terms of the dialectic of human intellectual evolution: Lavelle was the earth spirit celebrating the differences in nations and cultures; Culain was the power of Logos, the moving spirit in history which wins equality and welfare for the oppressed; Leroy was a Promethean figure who stood firm for the absolute autonomy of the individual and the integrity of the indefinable element in each soul; Heyt was the agency of materialist science subordinating individual interests in the name of progress. Brehon himself stood for evolution not revolution in human affairs: 'The avatars of the spirit, the Christs and the Buddhas, do more by single gentleness than conquerors with armies fo, and build more enduring kingdoms in the spirit of man.'²⁰ In listening patiently to the warring opinions of his fellow-prisoners and in separating the essential from the incidental patterns, Brehon in his judgements became like Socrates in prison surrounded by his argumentative followers.

One of the most important moments in the prison-cell symposium occurred near the end when Lavelle was inspired by Brehon's judgement to add lines to his already composed poem 'Michael'.²¹ The completed poem was one of over 400 hundred lines written in four beat couplets. In the poem, Michael comes from Donegal where medieval tales of voyages inspire him to embark on a visionary voyage to Ildathach, the many-coloured land of ancient Irish myth. Afterwards Michael has to work in a city's dingy air in a warehouse where he feels like a wild creature in a net. After Michael has read about one who 'with his single sword/stayed a great army at a ford', Michael becomes a revolutionary at Easter who is shot among the city's burning piles: 'Yet Michael felt within him rise/ the rapture that is sacrifice.' The lines added in prison by Lavelle included: 'So it may be that Michael died/for some far other countryside/than that grey island he

had known./ Yet on his dream of it was thrown/ some light from that consuming fire/ which is the end of all desire...all shadows are thy of one thing/to which all life is journeying.' Through this final imagery, Lavelle was endeavouring to transform even revolutionary violence by the consuming fire of an AE vision of the National Being.

At dawn, the prisoners were informed that the arsenal in which they were imprisoned was about to be destroyed just as they themselves were about to be destroyed. Then Lavelle revealed the identity of Heyt: The prisoner is not one of us. He is here by error. He is for empire and is not worthy to die with us', whereupon Heyt left 'to make the world in his own image'.²² AE left a question hanging fire at the end of the work: how would the dream of the martyred rebels catch fire in the National Being of the new Ireland?

Inevitably Irish readers will reflect on the 1916 Easter Rising in the light of *The Interpreters*. AE felt so passionately involved in the sentiments of Lavelle's poem 'Michael' that he printed it in *Selected Poems*, immediately followed by the poem 'A Prisoner (Brixton, September 1920) about the death of Terence MacSweeney on hunger strike. In the latter poem MacSweeney's will power was compared to the Promethean Will 'even as the fabled Titan chained upon the hill' and later there was a salute to Mac Sweeney as Hero: 'The candles of God already are burning row on row:/ Farewell, light bringer; fly to thy fountain again.'²³ AE's attempts to transfigure the republican violence of the contemporary maelstrom in terms of heroic myth, Celtic and Greek, now suggests to me a form of blindness, rather than of vision.²⁴ With the gift of hindsight, the Rising itself is probably best seen mystically as an enactment of the heroic Christian blood sacrifice on Good Friday in the hope of an Easter resurrection. The ultimate consequences of Patrick Pearse's 'triumph of failure eventually led to a narrowly-based version of the National Being very far removed from AE's Ideal for Ireland What most outraged AE was that the new Irish Free State tended to disguise its true self behind pseudo- Celtic heroic masks. AE never convincingly confronted this triumph of republicanism ; the less painful alternatives were to encourage the new Irish realist writers like Frank O'Connor and Sean O'Faolain, or to imagine the triumph of Heyt which he did in his last prose work *The Avatars*.

Before *The Avatars*, there was *Song and Its Fountains*. From the vantage point of a mellowed late middle age, AE ranged through his life reflecting on incidents, friendships, visions, books, his own poetry. In contrast to *The Candle of Vision*, there is less emphasis on the persuasion of others to find the truth and much more emphasis on the desire for intellectual understanding of himself. At the root of the central quest lay the urge to find the fountain-source of his experiences of invisible worlds: 'to see our lives over again is to have memories of two lives and intentions of many others, to discover powers we had not imagined in ourselves who were the real doers of our deeds, to have a sense that a being, the psyche, was seeking incarnation in a body.'²⁵ AE clearly demonstrated that his approach to life's ultimate questions was by now far removed from the Western preoccupation with formulating the laws of physical nature; what lay

at the heart of his enquiry was an understanding by means of self-analysis and devotion which had as its goal, that final state of spiritual freedom and harmony in the Hindu-god Bramah.

In remembering his life experiences, AE found much evidence of a dual nature in the psyche; 'it was a being in part avidly desirous of life, while another part was cold to this, but was endlessly seeking for the Spirit.' Everywhere there was evidence of intuitions in instants when 'we receive, according to our capacity, vision, imagination, knowledge of past and future, illuminations about the nature of things, wisdom and poetry. The fountain of all these lies within us where the psyche in ceaseless ecstasy responds to the Will that moves the Universe.'²⁶ From his reflections on the multitudinous intuitions in his life, AE's most paradoxical discovery was that as he became aware of himself as an enlightened and compassionate individual, his soul became aware of the Soul of the World, of the Divine Essence, which permeates and informs everything from the smallest atom of matter to men and gods.

Believing himself to be an enlightened and compassionate, AE still longed to be a powerful instrument in the service of Ireland. In *The Avatars*, AE claimed to be writing a futurist fantasy, but he was actually going back to the time when he believed in the close connection between the kindling of the fires and the future of Ireland. The strongest impulse in the work was the quest to recapture the excitement, the romance and the faith of the summer of 1896 when AE and friends prepared for the coming of the Great Avatar, in anticipation of Madame Blavatsky's prophecy of an imminent great growth of cosmic consciousness and human solidarity. The Avatar in Hindu belief is a god who descends to earth in human form: the word is from the Sanskrit which means literally 'he hoes down or passes beyond'. For Hindus the avatars are the creative geniuses of the human race, as well as the compassionate heroes and enlightened leaders who decisively affect the destiny of cultures. The work of the Avatars is always in visible and hidden and is recognised only in the human lives which they have utterly changed. The earliest Avatar in recorded history, in the Hindu Sacred Book 'The Bhagavad Gita', was Lord Krishna who descended amidst humanity on the eve of the Age of Iron to reveal the attributes of the Sage. AE story was set in a country where the scientific state exercised strict technological control within the cities but were prepared to yield the rural areas to protest minority groups. Two friends escape from the nightmare city and head for the West of Ireland. Paul Heron is a painter and Michael Conaire is a philosopher. A community of artists develop who are visited by avatars in mysterious and elusive ways – the avatars are Aodh, a changeling youth with magic powers, and Aoife, a beautiful girl fires with vision all about her: 'The strangers had come to those communities who were creating through the arts a culture in harmony with their spiritual intuition.'²⁷ In addition to Paul Heron and Michael Conaire, other members of the community include Felim Carew, a poet; Mark, a sculptor; and Michael Gregor, a skeptical philosopher among the mystics. Gregor is the one who warns Heron about the state's sudden decision

to crack down on all rebels. At a festival in honour of Aodh and Aoife, the state police strike: Has any beauty been in the world which was not pursued by beasts?'²⁸

In the skirmishes which follow, Gregor is killed as the first martyr for a faith he did not hold. The state fails to crush creative dissent. The dissenters put themselves under the protection of the Avatars and plan to build a great temple, filled with works of art, to honour their gods: all of which will be made possible by the financial support of an American millionaire by the name of Clubborn. A musician Rory Lavelle, the nephew of the rebel Lavelle in *The Interpreters*, joins the community and proclaims that the rebellion must now be against a monstrous state which is stifling human creative energies. While the philosopher Conaire warns against the beasts within the movement who may distort the mysteries into forms of sentimental or sexual gratification, the greatest problem for the community is that the artists have to live on the margins of a state, while ideally they should be at its active centre. Yet the novel ends on a note of supreme personal fulfilment for Paul: 'He thought of that great adventure he and his friends were beginning, and what transfiguration in life and nature it would mean... He knew out of what anguish of body and soul, through what dark martyrdom, came the resurrection and the life but he thought of these in peace.'²⁹

A perceptible sadness coloured *The Avatars*: AE was only too aware of how far short of his National Being the Irish Free State had fallen; and of the fact that so many of his old idealistic friends had passed out of his life by the 1930s as he himself recognised in an introductory note: 'The friends with whom I once spoke of such things are dead or gone from me. If they were with me, out of dream, vision and intuition shared between us, I might have made the narrative to glow. As it is, I have been able to light my way with my own flickering lantern.'

To sum up: Undoubtedly AE remained passionately interested in cultural ideals throughout his life. As an intellectual, he explored, most often in the context of the Irish Revival, three important areas of philosophical interest: the cultural centrality of a heroic ancestral self; the cosmic challenge to the individual to develop visionary and imaginative powers; and the daunting political task for states to create living communities for citizens within nations and across nations in an increasingly state-centred scientific age. The method of discourse most favoured by AE was debate, an approach which an editor who inspired many differing writers to want to be published in 'The Irish Homestead' and 'The Irish Statesman'. AE's strong tendency to practise inclusiveness worked best as an editor, but was less successful in his attempts to harmonise too quickly serious political differences within the National Being. Nevertheless AE's intellectual drive towards cultural synthesis was the great strength in his form of cultural nationalism.

The prophetic and apocalyptic tones of AE's writings suggest a religious teacher. The lines of his poetry which best reveal the first awakening of AE's fires of perception were included in the 1897 pamphlet when he was at the very beginning of his formation as a Hindu-type teacher in an Ireland whose concerns became his concerns:

The child of earth in his heart grows burning
 Mad for the night and the deep unknown;
 His alien flame in a dream returning
 Seats himself on an ancient throne.
 When twilight over the mountains fluttered
 And night with its starry millions came,
 I too had dreams; the thoughts I have uttered
 Came from my heart that was touched by flame.³⁰

Notes

- 1 *Letters from AE*, ed. Alan Denson (London: Abelard-Schuman, 1961), 17-18.
- 2 'The Future of Ireland and the Awakening of the Fires' was first published in *The Irish Theosophist* and then as a pamphlet in 1897 (12pp at 3p). The text appears in *The Descent of the Gods* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1988) ed. Raghavan Iyer & Nandini Iyer, 354-361.
- 3 See Chapter 111 'The Disciple Becomes an Irishman (1894-1897) in Henry Summerfield, *That Myriad-Minded Man: a Biography of G.W. Russell-AE*, 59-85.
- 4 *ibid.*, 30-1.
- 5 AE, *The Mask of Apollo* (London: Macmillan, 1903).
- 6 Summerfield, *op.cit.*, 160-166.
- 7 AE, *The National Being: Some Thoughts on Irish Polity* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1916), 131.
- 8 *ibid.*, 165.
- 9 *ibid.*, 163.
- 10 Summerfield, *op.cit.*, 182-186.
- 11 AE, *The Candle of Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1918), 4-5.
- 12 *ibid.*, 61.
- 13 AE, *Deirdre* (Dublin: Maunsel, 1907).
- 14 *The Candle of Vision*, 89-101.
- 15 *ibid.*, 156-161.
- 16 AE, *The Interpreters* (London: Macmillan, 1922), viii.
- 17 *ibid.*, 5.
- 18 John Foster Wilson, *Fictions of the Irish Literary Revival* (Syracuse: Univ.Press, 1987), 68.
- 19 *The Interpreters*, 20.
- 20 *ibid.*, 140.
- 21 *ibid.*, 161-172.
- 22 *ibid.* 179-180.
- 23 AE, *Selected Poems* (London: Macmillan, 1935) for 'A Prisoner', 128; and for 'Michael', 129-139.
- 24 For an interesting critical comment of AE's view of the 1916 Easter Rising ,see 'Writing "Easter 1916"' by Peter Kuch in *That Other World*, ed. Bruce Stewart (Gerards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1998), Vol. 2 , 1-17.
- 25 AE, *Song and Its Fountains* (London: Macmillan, 1932), 2-3.
- 26 *ibid.*, 66-7.
- 27 AE, *The Avatars* (London: Macmillan, 1933), 114.
- 28 *ibid.*, 172.
- 29 *ibid.*, 188.
- 30 *The Descent of the Gods*, 354.