

A STUDY OF A.E. AND HIS PHILOSOPHY,
AS REVEALED IN HIS WORK.

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PREFACE

Two fields of literature, that of poetry and that of the essay, have always been of particular interest to me. When in the fall of 1925, I had to decide upon a thesis subject, the ground for the research work was, therefore, already limited to some extent. Modern poetry made an appeal, and that of the Anglo-Irish poets particularly. This interest had been stimulated by the friendship of Miss Nellie Barns, an extremely well-read and appreciative student of these writers. Dr. W.S. Johnson, who had been in Ireland that summer, made several suggestions. In one of these, he mentioned the similarity of thought in Emerson and A.E.* The choice was made of

*I chose the form A.E. to designate the pseudonym under which Mr. Russell is best known. In some of his early writings, he used the symbol, \mathcal{A} . In later works he used the two initials. All of his published books now use the form A.E. on covers, title pages, and for preface signatures. The Irish Statesman, however, has on its cover: "Edited by G.W. Russell (\mathcal{A})." Mr. Russell, himself, seems absolutely indifferent as to the form his pseudonym takes. When he was in Lawrence, he autographed four

necessity then. To find my thesis subject in the work of a man much like Emerson, whose name is written deeply in my heart--that was joy indeed.

But in studying A.E., I came to the realization that there would be many who would, or could, not appreciate, or, at least, enjoy him because of their intellectual and temperamental characteristics.

A.E.'s philosophy pervades his work to such an extent that the feeling must often come to a reader that his writings are, after all, but pure philosophy clothed in beautiful phrases. If it were an ordinary philosophy--one commonly held--it would not need an

books for me: three of them have the initials thus, 'AE', below his signature, while one has them, 'AE'. The limited, autographed edition, Midsummer Eve, which I have, bears his name and the initials below, like this, 'AE'.

Although most of his writings are published under the pen name A.E., he frequently signs his writings in The Irish Statesman by the initials O.L.S. and Y.O. The latter is used almost entirely for his art criticisms. These pen names, I suspected, and finally verified in two undisputable ways: first, by the comparisons of poems printed in his weekly under these last two pseudonyms with poems in Voices of the Stones, 1925, and in Midsummer Eve, 1928. They were identical. Then, April 2, 1928, I questioned Mr. Russell about it, and he laughingly admitted even still using several other signatures besides A.E. Now I wonder if I've missed some.

"apologia"; but A.E.'s thought transcends transcendentalism until it is quite difficult for most of us to follow him with understanding into that rare land where he lives and has his being.

For this reason, it was deemed necessary to give a brief discussion of the man's life and of the main tenets of his philosophy, before going into a study of his work, his poetry in particular. I have attempted to do this in a spirit of love and appreciation, presenting his views, as often as possible, in his own words. Most of the passages quoted are from The Candle of Vision, the book in which he tells in prose of his mystical experiences, his belief in the Oversoul, in the ancestral memory, in intuition, in cyclic life, and in the verity of his visions. To many of us in this twentieth century, and especially to us in America where we seldom come into contact with the purely Celtic mind and character, these will often seem like the most veritable inanities. A.E. has realized this himself, and has written in "The Memory of the Spirit":

I have written down some of my own thoughts and experiences that others may be encouraged to believe that by imagination they can lay hold of truth. ...I

know that I have not been alone in such imaginations for there are few whose intent will has tried to scale the Heavens who have not been met by messages from the gods who are the fountains of this shadowy beauty, and who are, I think, ourselves beyond this mirage of time and space by which we are enchanted. I have spoken to others, seekers like myself upon this quest, and recognize identity of vision and experience. ...Our Gaelic ancestors had the gift of seership. ...I think meditation is beginning anew, and the powers which were present to the ancestors are establishing again their dominion over the spirit. ...Let no one who requires authority read what I have written for I will give none. If the spirit of the reader does not bear witness to truth, he will not be convinced even though a Whitely Stokes rose up to verify the written word. Let it be accepted by others as a romantic invention or attribution of divine powers to certain names to make more coherent the confusion of the Celtic myth.

There will be many readers who will see in A.E.'s writings examples of careless or indifferent rhetoric. To these the plea is made that there are seemingly unsurmountable difficulties in putting down into clear, concise English, understandable in every way to everybody, mystical experiences which belong much more in the realm of the appreciation of the intuitive emotions, than in that of the understanding, the intellect. May not then a few such blemishes, failings, that are purely in the field of

technique be forgiven a man as busy as A.E. is, and particularly in a book written not for critics but for those interested in the spiritual and mystical experiences of the soul?

I wish to acknowledge my sincere thanks to Miss Nellie Barnes, who not only first interested me in the Anglo-Irish literary field, but who gave me to use her books, relevant to my thesis research, and the copies for four years of The Irish Statesman, the weekly edited by A.E.; to Dr. W.S. Johnson, who made the suggestion for my thesis subject, and who also many times gave helpful information: to Professor R.D. O'Leary who, as always, gave generously of his interest and time, when already over~~ly~~-busy, to correct, to suggest, and to help in every way; and to Dr. S.L. Whitcomb, who also kindly helped in the final work of revision.

There are still others to whom I am much indebted. To them I wish to express my most grateful appreciation: to my father, mother, and sisters who have by many happy sacrifices, and through unfailing interest and sympathetic understanding made this thesis possible; to Emma Louise Kube, "Mother" Kube, who through many years of rare friendship has held

steadily before me the desire for learning--the desire to live deeply, culturally and spiritually; and lastly to A.E., himself, whose visit to the United States last year stimulated and intensified interests born some four or five years ago, whose personality made an unforgettable impression, and whose voice, melodiously chanting, carried at least one of his friends to the "Many Coloured Land" where:

When twilight flutters the mountain over
The faery lights from the earth unfold:
And over the caves enchanted hover
The giant heroes and gods of old.

Lucile J. Cleveland

August 10, 1929.

A STUDY OF A.E. AND HIS PHILOSOPHY,
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CHAPTER I.

A BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE LIFE OF A.E.

I asked myself what legend I would write under the picture, ...something whispered to me, "Call it the Birth of Aeon." The word "Aeon" thrilled me, for it seemed to evoke by association of ideas, moods, and memories most ancient, out of some ancestral life where they lay hidden; and I think it was the following day that, ...a myth incarnated in me, the story of an Aeon, one of the first starry emanations of Deity, one pre-eminent in the highest heavens, so nigh to Deity and so high in pride that he would be not less than a god himself and would endure no dominion over him save the law of his own will. This Aeon of my imagination revolted against heaven and left its courts, descending into the depths where it mirrored itself in chaos, weaving out of the wild elements a mansion for its spirit. That mansion was our earth and that Aeon was the God of our world. This myth incarnated in me as a boy walking along the country roads in Ar-magh.

Taken from The Candle of Vision.

In Ireland--Innis Fáil--land of clouds and fogs,
but yet of reefs and hard seas as well, where even
the saints of old talked to returned wayfarers from

Tir-na-Noge, and where the "good people" still come from out the enchanted mounds of the Sidhe to do good and to answer Ireland's need--here in the small town of Lurgan was born on April 10, 1867,¹ George William Russell, better known as A.E., the pseudonym which grew out of a printer's inability to decipher more than the diphthong of the word Aeon.² He was a child whose life was to be as versatile, as paradoxical as even the ancient Gaelic gods or the enchanted faeries could wish.

He was the second son of Thomas Elias Russell³-- a statement which contains about all the information one may find in regard to his family. He spent his boyhood among the lovely, low hills of Ireland in county Armagh, but a few miles from Lough Neagh, the largest lake in Ireland if not the most beautiful. He was a boy who "saw" (as they say in the Emerald Isle), and as he read the ancient Gaelic myths he found in them his friends: friends with whom to populate what seemed to outsiders his solitary world.

¹Figgiss' A.E., p. 12.

²Ibid., p. 25.

³Encyclopedia Britannica, Eleventh Edition, p. 308.

Even as a child God had given him the power to walk alone and to meditate.

Lurgan is in the heart of the Ulster country and is notorious for its violence of religious dissension.⁴ The Russell family were Protestants as were most of the people of Armagh, but formal religion of the narrow, dogmatic tenets of the Irish Evangelical Church⁵ was a creed to which even as a child George could not subscribe. George Moore, who is called A.E.'s Boswell, tells us that when but a boy walking along a country road near Armagh, A.E. had suddenly begun to think. In a few moments, he

had thought out the whole problem of the injustice of a creed which tells us that God will punish him for doing things which he had never promised not to do.

The day was a beautiful summer's day, the larks were singing in the sky, and in a moment of extraordinary joy A.E. realized that he had a mind capable of thinking out everything that was necessary for him to think out for himself, realizing in a moment that he had been flung into the world without his consent, and had never promised not to do one thing or another. It was hardly five minutes since he had left his

⁴Current Opinion, January 17, 1922, p. 75: "The Spiritual Leader of New Ireland."

⁵Tynan's Twenty-Five Years' Reminiscences, p. 282.

aunt's house, yet in this short space his imagination had shot up into heaven and defied the Deity who had condemned him to the plight of the damned because--he repeats the phrase to himself--he had done something which he had never promised not to do. It mattered nothing what that thing was--the point was that he made no promise; and his mind embracing the whole universe in one moment, he understood that there is but one life: the dog at his heels and the stars he would soon see (for the dusk was gathering) were not different things, but one thing.⁶

The Russells moved to Dublin in 1874, for which A.E. says he is most grateful to Providence, "I like the people," he adds, "but I cannot breathe in the religious and political atmosphere of the North-East corner of Ireland."⁷ He was sent to school to Doctor Benson in Rathmines.

When he was sixteen, he went to the Dublin School of Art. During his one year here he met William Butler Yeats and they became warm friends. Masters and students alike were amazed at young Russell's talent for drawing and composition. He could with ease sketch the naked model from sight and then turning away design a great assembly of gods about the shores

⁶Moore's Ave, p. 101.

⁷Harris's Latest Contemporary Portraits, p. 76.

of the lake renowned in Celtic tradition.⁸ Yet despite his extraordinary fluency of expression, abundant inspiration, and the belief of the whole school that there was a great artist in him, he laid aside his brushes and determined not to pick them up again until he had mastered the temptation which art presented to him at that moment--that of self-indulgence.

At seventeen, we find him keeping books at Pims, a drapery house, in Dublin.⁹ At this time, too, he became interested in the Scriptures of the world, all of which he held in equal reverence and affection. For the next twelve years he read scarcely anything but the Sacred Books, Brahminical, Buddhist, Egyptian, and Chinese philosophies. He met an Indian missionary and in a few months was writing the Vedas and Upanishads in English in both verse and prose--the metrical version the better of the two. His thoughts seemed to flow as easily into rhyme and metre as they had into line and color. His conscience again bothered him and it was not long before he was asking his disciples--he had become the leader of the Dublin

⁸Moore's Salve, p. 25.

⁹Figgis's A.E., p. 13.

Lodge of the Theosophical Society¹⁰--whether he should contribute essays or poems to their magazine, The Irish Theosophist, which first appeared in the fall of 1892 and continued until 1897. They wisely decided for the metrical form, and to this we owe his inspired volumes, Homeward, Songs by the Way, 1894, and The Earth Breath, 1897.

The Theosophical Society, organized in 1886 by Charles Johnston, was an organization of earnest young people who met, and even lived together for a while, in Ely Place, where they discussed and studied everything mystic from the Upanishads to Thomas Taylor. From the study of the Universal they came at last to the national--to the study of the ancient folk-lore and stories of their people. Several members of this society have become prominent in Irish literature, including: W.B. Yeats, Charles Johnston, John Eglinton, Charles Weekes, and A.E. In 1897 the Lodge terminated when a majority of the members were reorganized into the newly-formed "Universal Brotherhood." The Theosophical movement was an intellectual melting pot from which the true and solid elements of

¹⁰Moore's Salve, p. 26.

nationality appeared while the dross was lost. It was also as vital a factor in the evolution of the Anglo-Irish literature as the publication of Standish O'Grady's History of Ireland, because it provided a rallying ground for all of the older and younger intellects.¹¹

A.E.'s first two volumes were published at the instance of Charles Weekes and under the now famous pseudonym. All of these poems, as well as much prose, had been published in The Irish Theosophist and The Internationalist and had attracted much favorable comment. Publishers both in England and the United States quickly brought out new editions after the two Irish ones were exhausted. This established him as second only to Yeats in the poetry of the literary revival. Nuts of Knowledge appeared in 1903 in a semi-privately printed edition; it contained only ten new poems. In 1904 another slender volume, The Divine Vision, was published, and in 1906, By Still Waters, a volume mostly of reprints as it contained only six new poems. In 1913 his Collected Poems appeared. Only twelve poems of the former volumes were

¹¹Boyd's Ireland's Literary Renaissance, p. 216.

omitted and about twice that number of new ones added.¹² This was to be his final word, but the turmoil of the world in the next few years determined it to be otherwise and so in 1925 another small book was added: The Voices of the Stones. In 1926, a new edition, containing his latest poems as well as the earlier ones, Collected Poems, was published; and late in the spring of 1928, a tiny privately printed and limited edition of ten new poems, Midsummer Eve, came to gladden the appreciation of his many interested friends.

Despite the fact that at one time he thought marriage the invention of the enemy, he married in 1888 or 1889.¹³ Mrs. Violet Russell is herself an author of considerable imaginative talent. Her book, Heroes of the Dawn, contains stories of the Fionn cycle related with such pleasant sympathy for children's interests that it is accounted one of the two best in Irish Folk tales. George Moore describes her as a woman of "very gracious presence and personality, too distinct to seem invidious to her husband's genius

¹²Ibid., pp. 219-20.

¹³Tynan's Twenty-Five Years' Reminiscences, p. 288.

or to deem it an injustice to herself that he should be loved by all."¹⁴ She had written some beautiful phrases in her pages for the Theosophical Review and these with the rare qualities of her intellect and character were what attracted A.E. In Moore's Trilogy, Hail and Farewell, A.E. alone remains unscathed of all the people depicted. He resented this being made the hero of a young girl's novel, as it were,¹⁵ so George Moore deliberately set out to find some fault. He thought perhaps since most wives liked money and A.E. was indifferent to it, or that they enjoyed listening to their husbands tell of their daily business exploits, that Violet Russell would call these blemishes, but to her there are no blemishes in her husband's character,¹⁶ so Mr. Moore after much consultation with friends gave up. John Eglinton did tell him that in a conversation with an English economist A.E. exhibited a surprising ignorance--he did not know that the Athenian Society was founded on slavery.¹⁷ This seems to be a lack in

¹⁴Moore's Vale, p. 204.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 203.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 204.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 206.

knowledge rather than in character, as even A.E. cannot know everything.

The Russells have two sons,¹⁸ one interested in

¹⁸The dedication in Mrs. Violet Russell's book, Heroes of the Dawn, leads one to think the sons' names may be Brian and Diarmuid. It reads--

TO BRIAN AND DIARMUID

When you were small, and could not read for yourselves, and the long winter twilights were wearisome to you--sitting by the fire while the shadows played with each other over the room I told you these stories of ancient days, when magic and mystery and the folk of the other world were part of everyone's life and everyone's belief.

It is because you cared for them that I have re-written some of those about Fionn and his warriors, thinking that other children might wish--as you did--to know something about the old gods so often mentioned in the legends, and about Fionn and the Fionna Eireann.

I would like to think, too, that in these old stories you will find something more than mere adventure or enchantment, for I would have you see in them a record of some qualities which the heroes of ancient times held to be far greater worth than anything else--an absolute truthfulness and courtesy in thought and speech and action; a nobility and chivalry of mind which refused to believe evil of any one, and was ever ready to praise the good in an enemy; and a generosity which would give to the very end. For the heroes knew that in possessing these qualities they owned a greater wealth than any king of the world had power to bestow, and this is the wealth I desire for you beyond all else.

science and the other in engineering. The younger one has some talent for literature, but has done little with it so far. Both young men are interested in India and have been in that country in connection with their work, so the father's interest seems to be reappearing in them.¹⁹

In 1894, Sir Horace Plunkett instituted the Irish Agricultural Organization Society--usually called I.A.O.S.--to make a more complete organization of the various co-operative societies and agricultural banks which he had established. A Mr. R.A. Anderson, well known as an organizer, helped him in the work; but in several years they had failed to inject much breath into the body of their idea.²⁰ In 1897, Yeats, hearing of their bad fortune, told them that Ireland was deaf to their economics because they didn't know her folk-tales and couldn't croon them by the firesides. A poet was necessary, and he suggested A.E., who though still an accountant at Pims, had such influence that it pervaded the shop, from

¹⁹The information about the two sons was obtained from Mrs. W.S. Johnson's diary of the summer of 1925 when she and Dr. Johnson were in Ireland and visited A.E.

²⁰Moore's Salve, p. 72.

the smallest clerk to the manager--and yet was not, Yeats said, one who preached.²¹ So it was that A.E. joined the Plunkett movement; and he soon started out on a bicycle to convert rural Ireland to the idea of co-operation.

It is said that as soon as he arrived in a village he won friends through his personal magnetism and eloquence, and everybody's heart became a little warmer, a little friendlier, a little less lonely as he talked to the people, giving them shrewd advice and making them feel that he loved them and that they were worthy of his love. Protestants and Catholics alike united in loving him, and before the year was out the co-operative movement was stirring in what had seemed a lifeless body. A newspaper, The Express, had been purchased by Mr. Plunkett and to it A.E. made contributions ranging from articles on topics such as how to raise better pigs or to make sweeter butter, to tales of Celtic and Indian folk lore.²²

He was happy as he went on his bicycle rides through the hills and valleys and around the lake

²¹ Ibid., p. 72.

²² Ibid., p. 73.

shores, as it gave him frequent opportunities to come into more intimate contact with the Earth Mother and the visions she at times vouchsafed him. He had received her first visions while yet at Pims, when he went out into the hills surrounding Dublin on Sundays and holidays, and where he had often talked to crowds of people about the old Gaelic gods and heroes, and of man's divinity.²³ But there was always the return next day to the old monotonous treadmill of his accountant duties. So despite the fact that once in a rare while the shop, his ledgers, all were whirled away, or blotted out, by the blinding light of celestial visitations,²⁴ he was happy to leave this work to travel from village to village, taking his economic message of hope to the farmers through the establishment of creameries and banks, while at the same time giving them his spiritual message of man's natural godhood.

In a few years, he was made secretary of the I.A.O.S., and in 1905 there were 275 creameries and

²³Figgis's A.E., p. 1.

²⁴Ibid., p. 33.

42,000 members in his organization.²⁵ At this time he became editor of its official organ, The Irish Homestead, a position he still fills, although in 1923 the name of the weekly was changed to The Irish Statesman.

Being editor and extensive contributor to this weekly--which has the reputation of being one of the greatest literary reviews in the British Isles, if not the greatest--has not wholly taken up his time or energy or interests, by any means. His office at Plunkett House in Dublin is the meeting place for the troubled ends of the earth. Unionists, Sinn Feiners, Nationalists, Protestants, Catholics--all bring their problems and worries to A.E. to be talked over and solved. He is never too busy to stop his work to listen to a friend--and everyone is that--and to take on an extra burden, whether it be to find a house in Dublin to suit George Moore and his requirements,²⁶ or to take care of a precious package of verse, which under no circumstance must be lost to the world, for

²⁵ Encyclopedia Britannica, (Eleventh Edition), vol. XIV, p. 749.

²⁶ Moore's Salve, p. 10.

the egotistical James Joyce.²⁷

His home at 17 Rathgar Avenue is the rallying ground, especially on Saturday and Sunday evenings, for the intelligentsia--native and visiting--of Dublin. He is said to be the greatest conversationalist in this city renowned for its talkers. His speech at its best is a great rhythmic torrent which carries away its hearers who in most cases are reduced to rapt attention. When he speaks verse, one realizes he has never before heard poetry. Young poets find in him an eager, earnest, helpful friend. He can always find some good thing to say in criticism, and so to keep black despair away from the young who he thinks have genius. He found James Stephens after reading a poem of his in a Sinn Fein paper, and published his verse to the public's eternal gratitude, in the face of destructive criticism from such literary men as W.B. Yeats and George Moore.²⁸

Just as the younger writers turn to him, so have, and do, those interested in Ireland's national future. Ernest Boyd says of him: "In all the plans and hopes

²⁷Colum's Road Round Ireland, p. 314.

Also Boyd's Portraits Real and Imaginary, p. 259.

²⁸Moore's Vale, pp. 200-201.

and dreams which have transformed Ireland in his lifetime, A.E. has been concerned or indirectly involved. But his name will not be found on any roll of official honors, nor in any spectacular distribution of rewards for service."²⁹ He would have Ireland return to the clan system of her earlier days, although those were military rather than economic. To approximate these to the new basis is his problem, and he would model these communities on the old Greek City States.

He believes in the divine potentialities of man and is opposed to state socialism. His political and social writings have been mostly collected into The National Being, 1916, and The Interpreters, 1922, with the exception of a few, such as the very remarkable "Thoughts for a Convention", which have been included in the prose volume, Imaginations and Reveries, 1921. He was a member of the Dáil Eireann and was asked to become a senator. He refused, saying that he could not accept a senator's pay when he could not do a senator's work.

²⁹Wilson Bulletin, June, 1929, (vol. 3, no. 22), p. 658.

Poet, essayist, teller of tales, dramatist,³⁰ editor, economist, politician in the true meaning of the word--surely this would seem to be, even to a man of rare and versatile gifts, enough ways in which to express himself; and yet since 1903, he has returned to his first loved mode of doing so, and in the last quarter of a century has usually spent one day a week in painting and sketching. The walls of his office and of his home give silent testimony both to his rare ability and to his productiveness. His friends and critics are not so silent. Someone has said that Mrs. Russell is a saint to be able happily to go on her way leaving the stacks and piles of her husband's artistic efforts around as she does. Be that as it may, he is credited by Padraic Colum with being "chief among painters as he is among poets."³¹ No Irish exhibition is ever held without his pictures being hung.

³⁰ He has written one play, Deirdre, which was produced first in April, 1902, by the Fay Brothers, in "The Irish Literary Theatre." George Moore gives interesting information of the conception, writing, and rehearsals of this play in Salve, pp. 109-111.

³¹ Survey, November 26, 1921, (vol. 47, p. 344), "Tendencies in Irish Art."

Is it not, then, easy to understand Ireland's fears of national loss when A.E. followed his trip to the United States in 1928 with another in less than two months? Ireland did not seem to recognize him fully as her first citizen until America had not only recognized him but honored him as the great man that he is, when Yale conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Letters in June, 1928. In the winter he lectured in New York, Washington, and other Eastern cities, and through parts of the Middle West, reaching Lawrence, Kansas, the first of April where the writer of this paper had the inestimable privilege to see and hear him. He talked on the social, political, and literary conditions and factors in Ireland, and, best of all, gave some readings of his own poems. He slowly chants his verses in soft, sonorous cadences that melt into the heart like the melodies of a muted cello that lingers over each vibrating tone until the next is softly touched. One feels rather than hears, and it is a never to be forgotten experience to listen to him as he chants:

"Come away," the red lips whisper, "all the
world is weary now;
'Tis the twilight of the ages and it's time
to quit the plough."³²

³²A.E.'s Collected Poems, (1919), "Carrowmore", p. 106.

This Druidic man, more than six feet tall, with his silvering brown beard and his depthless, dark grey, "hope-inspiring"³³ eyes is called the soul of Ireland--Innis Féil. If he is that--and he is, more than any other living man today--is it not wise for us to strive to appreciate and to understand his theories of life and poetic creation? In any case, it can hardly be felt to be a waste of time to go with him to where behind the gateways of the day,

...the Land of Youth lies gleaming, flushed
with rainbow light and mirth
And the old enchantment lingers in the honey-
heart of earth.³⁴

³³Moore's Vale, p. 192.

³⁴A.E.'s Collected Poems, (1919), "Carrowmore",
p. 107.

CHAPTER II.

MAIN TENETS OF A.E.'S PHILOSOPHY.

A.E. has developed his philosophy through wide reading, frequent meditations, and intuition. It is not to be wondered at then, that in it we find ideas similar to those held by Plato and his followers, by the Christian mystics, and by Swedenborg, Fichte, and Emerson, while through it all runs the gleaming warp which he gathered from the ancient East. Through intuition he has been able to weave his own pattern of singular beauty and meaning.

As a very young man he undertook definite exercises of intuition

in order to evolve intellectual order out of a chaos of impressions and to discover the innate affinities of sound with idea, element, force, colour, and form. I found as the inner being developed it used a symbolism of its own. Sounds, forms and colours, which had an established significance in the complicated artifice of our external intercourse with each other, took on new meanings in the

spirit as if it spoke a language of its own and wished to impart it to the infant Psyche. If these new meanings did not gradually reveal an intellectual character, to pursue this meditation, to encourage the association of new ideas with old symbols would be to encourage madness. I tried to light the candle on my forehead to peer into every darkness in the belief that the external universe of nature had no more exquisite architecture than the internal universe of being, and that the light could only reveal some lordlier chambers of the soul, and whatever speech the inhabitant used must be fitting for its own sphere, so I became a pupil of the spirit and tried as a child to learn the alphabet at the knees of the gods.¹

Many other things, beside a partial alphabet,² did he learn through the visions which came to him as he meditated alone in his room or while wandering through the hills at night. In brooding over the grassy mounds which are all that remain of the duns in which the old Gaelic ancestors lived, he saw again their ancient civilization, saw the people, how they

¹A.E.'s The Candle of Vision, pp. 115-116.

²In The Candle of Vision there is a chapter entitled, "The Language of the Gods." In this, he discusses the roots of human speech--the vowels and consonants--, and in many instances, what he believes to be the affinities of each in idea, force, color, and form. These ideas came to him through deliberate meditation and through intuition.

were dressed, and in what kind and colors of material, how they ate, and other details of daily living.

He says:

This is not, I am convinced, what people call imagination. ...It is an act of vision, a perception of images already existing breathed on some ethereal medium which in no way differs from the medium which holds for us our memories; and the re-perception of an image in memory which is personal to us in no way differs as a psychical act from the perception of images in the memory of earth.³

Many of his visions he could not interpret, and others had only dark meanings; but there were some in which he lost himself in rapturous life in the ancestral self. In these he saw the gods of old in bodies pervaded with light, as if sun-fire rather than blood ran through their limbs. They had faces of ecstatic beauty and immortal youth. In one vision, he saw the Divine Kings sitting on thrones "which faded, glow by glow to the end of a vast hall." They were shining and starlike, mute as statues, and at the very end of the hall was^a higher throne on which sat one greater than the rest.

³A.E.'s The Candle of Vision, p. 58.

A light like the sun glowed behind him. Below on the floor of the hall lay a dark figure as if in trance, and two of the Divine Kings made motions with their hands about it over head and body. . . . There rose out of that dark body a figure as tall, as glorious, as shining as those seated on the thrones. As he woke to the hall he became aware of his divine kin, and he lifted up his hands in greetings. He had returned from his pilgrimage through darkness, but now an initiate, a master in the heavenly guild. While he gazed on them the tall golden figures from their thrones leaped up, they too with hands uplifted in greeting, and they passed from me and faded swiftly in the great glory behind the throne.⁴

From such visions as these, it is easy to realize that to him men are strayed heaven-dwellers--"the gods who have forgot themselves to men" in order to win from out chaos a new empire for the spirit. It is this idea of natural divinity in man--the relationship of the soul to the Eternal, to the Oversoul--that underlies all of A.E.'s poetry, painting, and politics, yes, even his life. He seems to have borrowed the term Oversoul from Emerson just as he borrowed one--the Ancestral Self--from the Brahmins. He uses other figures of speech to convey the same

⁴A.E.'s The Candle of Vision, pp. 36-7.

thought, such as the Everlasting, the Ancient Life, the Ancient of Days, the Unknown, the Light of Lights, the Ever-Living, to mention but a few.

A.E. is essentially a mystic with many of the same ideas, beliefs, and thoughts in regard to man's ineffable union with God as Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, and Wordsworth held. Man does not possess reason, but partakes of it through the universal intuitive faculty. Man is but a particle of God; his mind is but a spark of the divine one. Like Emerson,⁵ he believes that the Oversoul is expressed through man in three ways: through the intelligence, by the activities of genius; through the will, by means of virtue; and through the affectious, by the exercise of love. They both believe that nature is the intermediary between God and the soul, but A.E. transcends this doctrine as he feels that the earth, itself, is divine. Through nature, especially in her moments of greatest beauty, such as at twilight or dawn, we are led back to God and to the realization that she

⁵The comparisons with the ideas of Emerson are made through a knowledge of these gained while studying the course, "Carlyle and Emerson", taught by Dr. W.S. Johnson in the University of Kansas.

is part of the divine nature just as we are.

We are brought into closest union with the Over-soul, he believes, in moments of ecstasy, when the Self melts into the Ancestral Self, and wild words fly up in the brain and make their own affinities there.⁶ Such cultivation of the spirit, A.E. believes, may be gained through meditation as he records in The Candle of Vision. In these moments of ecstatic union with God there came to him creative power through which he wrote his poems and often painted pictures.

Emerson felt that inspiration was the soul's education, and, if we would but let God act in us, we could know all things. More than this even, he felt that God was always accessible to us if we would only keep the avenue of the soul open to Him. Plato thought that inspiration was a divine madness attained by those who have kept the soul sensitive to beauty. He explains the vision of the mystic by his beautiful fable of the heavenly chariot ride of the unborn soul.⁷ This experience is never truly forgotten, but is latent always, and so accessible to us if we but

⁶A.E.'s The Candle of Vision, p. 168.

⁷Morris's The Celtic Dawn, p. 27.

endeavor to call it forth.

Just as these moments of ecstasy are reunions with God, so does A.E. feel that life is but a temporary separation from the Eternal, and that the soul comes from, and returns to, Him when its labors are finished. He holds with Plato and the Brahmins that the life of the soul is cyclic, and that its physical birth and re-birth are but conditions of its pilgrimage from the Eternal to the Eternal, and that the spiritual memories of its divinity are the motivating forces of physical life. A.E. wrote in 1894 in the preface to his Homeward: Songs by the Way:

I move among men and places, and in living I learned the truth at last. I know that I am a spirit and that I went forth in old time from the self-ancestral to labours yet unaccomplished; but filled ever and again with homesickness I made these songs by the way.⁸

A.E. fuses Plato's idea, expressed in his Phaedrus, of spiritual memory as the recollection of the visions seen by the soul in its heavenly ride with his doctrine of ancestral memory. This is the recapitulation of the evolution of the race consciousness

⁸Quoted from Morris's The Celtic Dawn, p. 27.

that is sub-consciously present in each of us. In "Imagination", A.E. writes:

the immortal in us has memory of all its wisdom, or, as Keats puts it in one of his letters, there is an ancestral wisdom in man and we can if we wish drink that old wine of heaven. This memory of the spirit is the real basis of imagination, and when it speaks to us we feel truly inspired and a mightier creature than ourselves speaks through us.

Emerson felt that within one's own soul is the latent power of all knowledge and experience and that historical events exist there as laws of the mind. In the essay, History, he writes:

Thus in all ways does the soul concentrate and reproduce its treasures for each pupil, for each new born man. He, too, shall pass through the whole cycle of experience. . . . History no longer shall be a dull book. It shall walk incarnate in every just and wise man.

The doctrines of incarnation and re-incarnation have been developed by A.E. in many of his poems, and he also tells us in prose of experiences he has had in his own life which have led him to feel that he has

⁹ A.E.'s The Candle of Vision, p. 75.

lived in many ages and in various conditions and countries. In "The Memory of the Spirit" he writes:

Looking back upon that other life through the vistas of memory I see breaking in upon the images of this world forms of I know not what antiquity. I walk out of strange cities steeped in the jewel glow and gloom of evening, or sail in galleys over the silvery waves of the antique ocean. I reside in tents, or in palace chambers, go abroad in chariots, meditate in cyclopean buildings, am worshipper of the Earth gods upon the mountains, lie tranced in Egyptian crypts, or brush with naked body through the long sunlit grasses of the prairie. Endlessly the procession of varying forms goes back into remote yesterdays of the world.¹⁰

In the passage quoted he refers to his belief in the re-incarnation of the body; a little later, he questions--

is it only on earth there has been this long ancestry of self? For there is another self in me which seemed to know not the world but revealed itself to the listening bodily life in cosmic myths, in remote legends of the Children of Darkness and the Children of Light, and of the revolt against heaven. And another self seemed to bring with it vision or memory of elemental beings, the shining creatures of water and wood, or who break out in

¹⁰A.E.'s The Candle of Vision, pp. 145-146.

opalescent colour from the rocks or hold their court beneath the ponderous hills. And there was another self which was akin to the gloomy world of the shades, but recoiled shuddering from them. And there was yet another self which sought out after wisdom, and all these other selves and their wisdom and memories were but tributary to it.¹¹

Such tenets as these are a charm to prevent the world wearying him and they have given him a serenity of spirit almost past our ordinary human comprehension. He feels that the body is merely lent to man to accomplish some definite mission in a long education and shriving of the soul; therefore, the worries and troubles of a mere lifetime are not able to disturb his spiritual calm.

Just as moments of ecstasy are vouchsafed man to bring him into union with the Lights of Lights, so also are pain and sin means of purification and experience through which the soul passes to attain the Everlasting. In the study of Emerson, one finds that he, too, believed that evil is part of the divine plan. Sorrow must be known in the happy world and evil, in the moral one, until finally in the evo-

¹¹A.E.'s The Candle of Vision, pp. 146-147.

lution of both the world and of man, these things will remain only as a memory--an experience the race went through to reach the final harmony. Death to A.E. has, of course, no terrors. It is the consummation of the soul's desires--its return home to be absorbed into the high ancestral self.

Although Sin and Pain do exist, so does Beauty. To A.E., Beauty is. It is more than an externality of the apparent world; it is an all embracing reality. Notions of time do not apply to it--it is above, superior to time. In this thought, he is in true accord with Plato, as he believes that when the mind gives itself up to reflection upon beauty it becomes one with it. Beauty of the natural world is the symbol by means of which one may understand and love the Universal Beauty.¹²

One other point in his philosophy must be touched upon before we leave this chapter to go into the next in which the application of his doctrines as found in the various works of A.E. will be considered. In

¹²More's Platonism, p. 171-3. In these pages, Mr. Paul Elmer More discusses the world of Ideas as revealed in the fifth book of Plato's Republic.

what at first seems to be a contradiction to his idea of the unity of all men and nature with God, we find that he believes very earnestly in the individuality of each of us, and of our rights as individuals. He feels that the individual is under the necessity of breaking through for himself to the life-giving Idea--no one else can actually do it for him. He gives utterance to this thought more often in his political writings than in his poetry, and yet in "Rescue"¹³ he tells the soul to "Gird on the armoury of fire" and break the chains that hold it in the "pit's abysmal mire."

Like Emerson, he holds to the natural divinity of the individual man, and consequently, believes that government best which governs least. The state tends to produce men of a pattern because it is more interested in property than in men. It is for this reason that he advocates the small unit of government--the clan--so that each individual may be heard and take part in it and do that for which he was sent on earth. In such a community, the poet, the musician, the painter, the architect, and the historian

¹³A.E.'s Voices of the Stones, p. 13.

will each find his honored place and so be able to make his own contribution to the general good. This concept of the worth and dignity of the individual man is, we may see by careful scrutiny, not very far removed from his doctrine of the Oversoul in which, and through which, all are united. The Oversoul is the hidden source of all, the light shining through us; and it is A.E.'s belief in this Light of Lights which underlies and illuminates all of his work and his life.

CHAPTER III.

THE APPLICATION OF A.E.'S PHILOSOPHY IN
HIS ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL WRITINGS.

A long time ago, A.E. came to think that the artist or philosopher should, besides working out his own particular conception, forward some interest of his own nation. This is, of course, a Greek idea--that everyone, be he poet, sculptor, artist, historian, or philosopher, is first of all a citizen. When A.E. joined Sir Horace Plunkett's I.A.O.S., he decided that agriculture was Ireland's paramount interest. In Chapter I. his bicycle journeys through Ireland to spread the doctrine of co-operation in the rural sections were described. Those rides were a vital expression of his belief; in this chapter, his economic policy will be discussed in the light of his philosophy as it is seen in his books on national economy. Besides expressing his ideas in these books, he uses the editorial columns of The

Irish Statesman to keep the same ideas and ideals alive. In this weekly, Mr. Robert Lynd tells us, A.E. gives us

the only agricultural journal in the world which non-agricultural citizens can read not merely without boredom but with delight.

The secret of Mr. Russell's appeal is fairly obvious. His whole work, whether as poet, philosopher, or co-operative propagandist, is an expression of a divine vision--the vision of the republic of God, here built in the heart of an individual man and exhibiting itself as a heroic life, and there built in the heart of a whole people and exhibiting itself as a heroic civilization. For A.E. is not a mystic in order that the soul may indulge herself in bizarre experiences, and he is not a co-operator in order that the farmer may get a penny a pound extra for his butter. His mysticism is allied to the genius of the earth and the common day, and he aims at illumining agricultural co-operation with something of the light of heaven.¹

In Co-operation and Nationality, A.E. declares,

The soul of Ireland has to be kindled, and it can only be kindled by the thought of great deeds, and not by the hope of petty parsimonies or petty gains. ...The true significance of the movement promoted by Sir Horace Plunkett is that it is an attempt to build up a new social order in

¹Lynd's Ireland A Nation, pp. 237-238.

Ireland.²

So upon this co-operative basis of economic conditions and through the spreading and dissemination of this ideal into institutions and sentiments, he would bring into being a strong, social constitution. In the rural sections he would join the small local co-operative societies into district federations, which would not only market all the products of the community but would also purchase all the necessaries and commodities used by it. In the cities he would apply the co-operative system to the problems of the industrial and casual workers. Here, however, he would begin with the principle applied to the selling of food, clothing, coal, and other necessaries through the co-operative stores. Through these the workers could gradually apply the theory to production, and, moreover, they would also be able to enter into alliances with the workers in the countryside. This economic initiative would easily develop into the spirit of nationalism.

In The National Being, he has formulated and

²Quoted from a quotation in Lynd's Ireland A Nation, p. 239.

discussed this doctrine with much skill and beauty of thought and expression. He believes that labor unions should use their funds, not for the conducting of numerous strikes, but for the conducting of stores from which their members must buy their commodities. These co-operative stores would be compelled to buy from co-operative wholesalers, and these latter from co-operative manufacturers. Through this means a new economic dignity for workers would be created. He thinks that men will gladly labor if they feel that their work is united to that of all other workers for the general good of them all. It is loathsome to the spirit to feel that the labor of one's hands or mind is a mere commodity to be bought or sold.

The poet-economist elaborates the ideal of a state that is possible in every step and is democratic in the business of living. It leaves freer play for the aristocracy of thought and emotion by withdrawing the individual from absorption in money-grabbing. It would make space for spiritual flowers to grow in, for beauty in every aspect, and it would provide a new inspiration for art. From these would come a new inspiration in life.

This is nothing more than a translation into

modern conditions of the ancient clan system of Ireland. The ideals of this old, long ago polity sleep in the intuitions of the race, he believes, and all that is needed is the awakening of the fires of consciousness in men--consciousness that there is a higher mind in humanity which cannot act through individuals but only through brotherhoods and groups of men. When this awakening is accomplished, a distinct nationality with its own conception of civilization, built through the voluntary efforts of united men will arise--a civilization, which is, after all, only the externalization of the soul and character of the race, and will, therefore, have its own unique contribution to make to the world.

The State, to A.E., is a

physical body prepared for the incarnation of the soul of a race. The body of the national soul may be spiritual or secular, aristocratic or democratic, civil or militarist predominantly. One or other will be most powerful, and the body of the race will by reflex action affect its soul, even as through heredity the inherited tendencies and passions of the flesh affect the indwelling spirit. Our brooding over the infant State must be dual, concerned not only with the body but the soul. When we first essay self-government in Ireland our first ideas will, in all probability, be

borrowed from the Mother of Parliaments.... After a time, if there is anything in the theory of Irish nationality, we will apply original principles as they are from time to time discovered to be fundamental in Irish character.³

He has also written:

I cannot believe that the legend of the Gael, which began among the gods, will die out in some petty, peasant republic or dominion as a river which arose among the mountains might eddy at last in mud flats and the sewage of squalid cities. What began greatly will end greatly, and there will be some flare-up of genius before the torch of the Gael is extinguished and it becomes like the torch once held by the Greeks and other races of genius which are now but memories in Eternal Mind.⁴

He believes that representative government is the ideal form and that it, to give good government, must have two kinds of assemblies running concurrently, with their spheres of influence well defined. One, the supreme body, should be elected by counties or cities to deal with problems of general interest--taxation, justice, education, the duties and rights

³A.E.'s The National Being, p. 2.

⁴Current Opinion, LXXII: 74-7, January 1922. Quoted from p. 77.

of individual citizens as citizens. The other bodies should be elected by the people engaged in particular occupations. They should control the policy of the state institutions created to foster particular interests. The machinery of the government should be simple so as to be understood easily by the citizens. Sectional interests should be discussed and decided upon in these assemblies and unless particular interests clashed with general ones, the supreme assembly should not interfere. In this way, the varying colors of national life will harmonize and still keep their own peculiar lustre and not mix into the drab gray of human futility.⁵

No policy can succeed, he thinks, unless it be in accord with national character. The political character of a people emerges only when they are shaping in freedom their own civilization. In each nation, some one idea is predominant. In England, it was the idea of personal freedom; in ancient Attica, it was that of beauty, proportion, or harmony in life; in Germany, it was the thought of the State as

⁵A.E.'s The National Being, pp. 110-121.

power; in ancient Israel, it was the cry of righteousness that ever rang out; in the Ireland of old, it was the idea of the clan, which was aristocratic in leadership and democratic in its economic basis.

In the co-operative principle, the communal character is preserved. It brings into prominence the aristocracy of character and intellect, and the democracy of its economic life. A.E. thinks that Ireland's failure to achieve great things in the last centuries has been due to her reversing of the natural positions of these two elements in her life. For leaders in the legislature, she usually chose and elected not those that were aristocratic in character, intellect, and will, but energetic, common place, average types. In the economic life where democratic ideals should have held sway, the aristocratic ones flourished.

The old literature disclosed what A.E. believes is the national character--a love for truth-teller and hero, a reverence for wisdom, whether in king, bard, or serf, and at the same time a desire for communal, economic life. Such thoughts are again conquering the mind, and he says

We shall succeed or fail in Ireland as we succeed or fail to make democracy prevail in our economic life, and aristocratic ideals to prevail in our political and intellectual life. ...Our ideal should be economic harmony and intellectual diversity.⁶

Militarism has small place in A.E.'s state. Some military power may be necessary to strengthen the national being and to allow it to defend its ideals when they are assailed; but military and political institutions in a small country are easily displaced, while a national being based on a social order, democratic and co-operative in character, would be about as impossible to destroy as a religion, which of all things is most unconquerable by physical force. The aim of all nations is to preserve their immortality. When Irish culture and national ideals are widely spread and not the possession of a few, Ireland will have as inexhaustible sources of inspiration and sacrifice as the individual has who believes he is immortal, and his temporal life here but a temporary foray out of eternity.

In "Ideals of the New Rural Society", he says--

⁶A.E.'s The National Being, pp. 129-130.

We must go on imagining better than the best we know. Even in their ruins now, Greece and Italy seem noble and beautiful with broken pillars and temples made in their day of glory. But before ever there was a white marble temple shining on a hill, it shone with a more brilliant beauty in the mind of some artist who designed it. ...Can we be contented in Ireland with the mean streets of our country towns and the sordid heaps of our villages, dominated in their economics by the vendors of political animosities?

...The countryside in Ireland could blossom into as much beauty as the hillsides in mediaeval Italy, if we could but get rid of our self-mistrust. We have all that any race ever had to inspire them, the heavens overhead, the earth underneath, and the breath of life in our nostrils. I would like to exile the man who would set limits to what we can do, who would take the crown and sceptre from the human will and say, marking out some petty enterprise as the limit: "Thus far can we go and no farther," and here shall our life be stayed."⁷

In this essay he also calls attention to the fact that women as well as men are needed in this Irish national movement. He feels that they have had their consciousness centred too closely on the dark and obscure roots of the Tree of Life and that they must branch out more to the sun and wind as men

⁷A.E.'s Imaginations and Reveries, pp. 103-104.

have done. They must not be separate from the ideals and inspirations of men. "Men and women," he writes, "have been companions in the world since the dawn of time. I do not know where they are journeying to, but I believe they will never get to the Delectable City if they journey apart from each other, and do not share each other's burdens."⁸

In "Thoughts for a Convention",⁹ he begged Unionists, Sinn Feiners, and Constitutional Nationalists to strive to find common ground and to make the necessary compromises in order that Ireland may be in harmony within itself. In "The New Nation", he begs that North and South Ireland join and to do it in good temper, as a nation is finally what it loves. The South has heretofore wanted the North from pride; it must learn to want it from love. In the old Irish heroic tales the warriors paused to praise and embrace one another. If that spirit could be brought into today's politics, national life would

⁸A.E.'s Imaginations and Reveries, pp. 109-110.

⁹This ^{is} published separately as a small book, and is also included in the prose volume, Imaginations and Reveries.

be ennobled. The repudiation of one section of Ireland by another must cease. In a poem at the close of this essay he writes of the dreams of Pearse, who fell in the Easter Week Rebellion, of Alan Anderson, who died in France, and of the Irish patriots McDonagh, Kettle, Connolly, and Redmond. In the last stanza he says of others unknown--

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 sees the confluence of dreams
That clashed together in our night,
One river, born from many streams,
Roll in one blaze of blinding light.¹⁰

In The Interpreters, perhaps his most beautiful prose political work, he gives us a philosophical study of political motives and activities. It can be compared only to Plato's Republic, and not to its discredit, particularly when taken in the light of today. The story of this in brief is--a small nation, demanding self-government, rebels against a world state. The four leaders of this revolt are the poet-nationalist, Lavelle; the anarchist, Leroy; the his-

¹⁰A.E.'s Imaginations and Reveries, p. 160.

torian-philosopher, Brehon; and the socialist, Culain. They have been arrested, imprisoned, and condemned to die. They discuss with Heyt, a supporter of the world-state, who has been mistakenly imprisoned with them, the motives that have led them to risk their lives for a political ideal.

Lavelle, the poet, is a visionary who believes in the authenticity of his visions. He is the voice of A.E., himself--the A.E. we hear speaking in The Candle of Vision. In one passage, he tells his companions:

The Earth spirit throws itself into innumerable forms of life. ...For every race its own culture. Every great civilization, I think, had a deity behind it, or a divine shepherd who guided it on some plan in the cosmic imagination. ...So arises that unity of character which existed in the civilization of Egypt or Attica, where art, architecture, and literature were in such harmony that all that is best seems almost the creation of one myriad-minded artist.

In a later paragraph he speaks of visions he has had in which figures in that interior light enchanted him with their beauty. These messengers of the gods made sacred to him the woods, hills, lakes, and rivers because he saw the eternal beauty behind them

"as the flame is seen within the lamp."

The socialist, Culain, also expresses many thoughts that are distinctly those of A.E., such as that in sleep and death we go back to ourselves, and the meanest one here is as a god there; and that all that is substance in us aspires to the ancestral beauty.

Other thoughts and ideas of his own, A.E. puts into the speech of the historian, Brehon, when he tells his fellow conspirators that the Universe exists for the purposes of soul, not the soul for the universe; that the eternal law imposed by the greatest of states must finally give way before the instinct for self-rule which alone is consonant with the dignity and divinity of man; and that politic is a profane science only because we have not yet discovered its sacred roots and realized that it is but a groping through the symbols of earth to the Kingdom of Heaven.

Leroy, the anarchist in the story, is used more as a foil to enable the other three to bring out ideals and ideas in argumentation with him and Heyt, the imperialist.

A.E.'s longest poem "Michael"¹¹ is in this book, and is written, supposedly by Lavelle. It is the story of a voyager to the Heavenworld. He was killed in an insurrection in his country and was carried, when dying, to the "Many Coloured Land" by his divine kin. To most of us, to die for the freedom of one's own country would be enough, but the poet--and A.E.--goes further and gives to this sacrifice the value of a Universal--of a Platonic Idea,--as the last lines show very clearly:

This was the dream of one who died
For country, said his countryside.
We choose this cause or that, but still
The Everlasting works its will.
The slayer and the slain may be
Knit in a secret harmony.

....
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.
If men adore It as the power,
Empires and cities, tower on tower,
Are built in worship by the way,
High Babylon or Nineveh.
Seek It as love and there may be
A Golden Age and Arcady.
All shadows are they of one thing
To which all life is journeying.¹²

¹¹"Michael" is also published in Voices of the Stones, and in Collected Poems (1926).

¹²A.E.'s The Interpreters, p. 167-8.

CHAPTER IV.

A.E.'S PHILOSOPHY AS REVEALED
IN HIS PAINTING

"A man will communicate his character in everything he touches."¹ That is true in all ways of all men, but to few is it given to reach out and to touch life deeply through so many and so varied channels, as it is to A.E. While he is eloquently beckoning with one hand to the farmers and artisans of Ireland to follow him along the road of co-operation to Tinnan-Oge--the Land of Promise--with the other hand, he is writing poems or painting pictures which not only depict the divine folk of that land but which reveal their kinship to men--the strayed heaven dwellers, who willed in silence their own sentence to be mortals, and now like kings in exile, await the hour of their restoration.

¹A.E.'s Imaginations and Reveries, p. 64.

A.E. says,

There are no gifts. For all that is ours we have paid the price. There is nothing we aspire to for which we cannot barter some spiritual merchandise of our own. Genius! There is no stinting of this by the Keeper of the Treasure House. It is not bestowed, but won.²

Was it then not wise bartering which he did, when he gave up art at about the age of twenty because he felt it to be, to him, a spiritual temptation? One cannot help feeling it was wise, since it allowed him to develop other talents through which he could, perhaps, better serve his country and his fellow-men, and particularly since he was able to re-assume, some twenty years later, his brushes and palette, when they no longer presented to him difficulties in soul development. To this youthful sacrifice--for that it must have been, although so happily and so quiescently made--the world may owe the wealth of mystical philosophy he has given it, cloaked in economic propaganda as well as in poetry of rare beauty.

Even that brief early period in his youth which he gave to art, was an expression of certain tenets

²A.E.'s The Candle of Vision, pp. 19-20.

of his philosophy. He tells us that by the time he was seventeen or eighteen, his brain began to flicker with vivid images which he tried to paint. He

began with much enthusiasm a series of pictures which were to illustrate the history of man from his birth in the Divine Mind where he glimmered first in the darkness of Chaos in vague and monstrous forms, growing ever nigher to the human, ...until at last the most perfect form, the divine idea of man was born in space.³

The series was to end with man, descended finally, after long conflict with the elements, into a minute philosopher watching "the skies ruining back into their original chaos and the stars falling from their thrones on the height."⁴ He admits that most of these pictures were but the fancies of a boy. In one, however, in which he was trying "to imagine the apparition in the Divine Mind of the idea of the Heavenly Man", he felt that he was in alliance with a deeper consciousness--something ancient and eternal which breathed through his fancies. He was blinded by the intensity of his feelings to the demerits of the pic-

³A.E.'s The Candle of Vision, pp. 71-72.

⁴Ibid., p. 73.

ture, he says, and brooded over it long. It was while brooding over this painting that he heard a voice whisper, "'Call it the Birth of Aeon.'" This was, he is certain, the first time that he had heard the word, "Aeon", and after learning, the next day, that it was the term used by the Gnostics to designate the first created beings, he trembled at the thought of pre-existence and believed that it had been the memory of the past speaking in him in the whisper "Call it the Birth of Aeon."

He painted other visions that he had; many of them he put on the ceilings and walls of the Theosophical Society's rooms while he was living there in Ely Place with the group of young men interested in that religious cult. He also often illustrated both his poetry and prose with the visions that had prompted their writing.

When he returned to Dublin to assume the duties of the secretary of I.A.O.S., after his organization work in the West for the society, he again began to paint. This time, it was with a more systematic effort to put into color what he had seen so clearly, and to record his visions, intuitions that had stirred in him through the reading of prophetic books

and through his meditations.

He cared, and cares, little what became of his pictures, and those that were not given away, he sold cheaply, so that the poor could have them if they desired. He would not charge rich men more because that would be dishonest!⁵

Count Markiewicz, who came to Ireland about this time, saw A.E.'s paintings, and, liking them, persuaded the unwordly artist to join him in an exhibition. The pictures were so well-received that exhibition after exhibition has followed through the years, until now art critics call the poet-economist "chief among Irish painters."

The growth of public interest in his work turned him from the purely visionary type of art toward that of landscape painting. He thought it better to keep his mystical experiences for his poetic work, because there the casual public was not so likely to pry; for often, he felt that the purpose of the casual public's prying was merely that of derision.

Figgis says of A.E.'s earlier pictures, that the

⁵Tynan's Twenty-Five Years' Reminiscences, p. 284.

matters of technique, such as composition, symphony, perspective, and brush work, are only of incidental interest. That which grips the mind and holds the deeply-interested appreciation is that feeling of certitude which comes to one

that the artist was in labour to communicate a part of his assurance with regard to the spiritual beings in the midst of which we are set, of the spiritual beings we ourselves truly are; however fantastic his designs may at first sight seem to us, that certitude of ours is the first thing we have; and the result is that we hear the voice of the critical exponent or analyst like a vague murmur in our ears while we bend our minds to search into things that become incomparably more than the artist and his art.⁶

Mystic visionary that he is in his painting, he is yet also a nationalist in it. Only in Ireland could one conceive pictures in which the beings drawn--in reality perhaps suggested rather than drawn--are done so through the use of light and rhythm of line. His faeries, and folk of the Sidhe, are not just smaller or greater human beings--they are the elemental beings described in the ancient Gaelic

⁶Figgis's A.E., p. 65.

legends and heroic tales, and the books of prophecy. His angels have their wings on the backs of their arms and feet, as he saw them in his visions, and not on their shoulders as other artists place them.

As these divine kin of man are spiritualized, so are his landscapes. A.E. himself writes in "Art and Literature"--

Art is neither pictured botany or geology. A great landscape is the expression of a mood of the human mind as definitely as music or poetry is. The artist is communicating his own emotions. There is some mystic significance in the colour he employs;... We are looking into a soul when we are looking at a Turner, a Corot, or a Whistler,... All this, I think, is undeniable; but perhaps not many of you will follow me, though you may understand me, if I go further and say, that in this, art is unconsciously reaching out to archetypes, is lifting itself up to walk in that garden of the divine mind where, as the first scripture says, it created "flowers before they grew in the field and every herb before it grew."⁷

To A.E. the final test of any work of art is its enduring charm. He does not believe in ethical pictures, as he feels that they are immoral, if anything, in their influence, since they forsake the

⁷A.E.'s Imaginations and Reveries, p. 70.

laws of their own being and but "add to the vanity of people so righteously minded as to be aware of their own virtue."⁸ He believes that art is spiritual, that its genuine inspirations come from a higher plane of our being than the ethical and intellectual, and that when ethics, or literary criticism of art, so dominate the mind of the artist that they change the form of his inspiration, his art loses its own peculiar power while it gains nothing. Art, in reality, is immoral--

the first impulse to paint comes from something seen, either beauty of color or form or tone. It may be light which attracts the artist, or it may be some dimming of natural forms, until they seem to have more of the loveliness of mind than of nature.⁹

Again he writes--

"If we were wise enough, we would see that in art the light on every cloud, and the clear spaces above the cloud, and the shadows of the earth beneath are made out of lights, infinitudes, and shadows of the soul, and are selected

⁸A.E.'s Imaginations and Reveries, p. 68.

⁹Ibid., pp. 63-64.

from nature because of some correspondence, unconscious, or half-felt."¹⁰

So it is, that A.E. gives us paintings, "visionistic" or merely interpretive, of a spiritual world--a state of the soul--bathed in the pearl and opalescent colors of twilight and dawn. His landscapes are steeped in the mystery which could only have been felt by one who looked at them in love; his bogs are seen through a mist-laden air and are filled with haunting suggestions that the earth itself is the divine being--"that goddess to whom men should pray"¹¹; his trees emerge "like vapours"¹² from a delicate haze; his figures in the fields, one feels, might turn only to reveal themselves as the old Celtic gods--Midir, Lugh, or Angus. He has painted and drawn, in crayon and pastels, the lovely countryside from Sligo to Donegal¹³ and that around

¹⁰The New Republic. June 8, 1918, (vol. XV, p. 173), "A.E., Poet, Painter and Economist."

¹¹A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), "The Virgin Mother", p. 35.

¹²Moore's Salve, p. 34.

¹³Colum's The Road Round Ireland, p. 204.

Coole, and the Druidic, legend-haunted fields where the old tumuli of the Sidhe are still to be seen and explored, and also scenes along the banks of one of Ireland's most famous rivers, the Boyne.¹⁴

Mr. St. John G. Ervine has a picture of A.E.'s, "The Mountain Road." There is an ascending road, he says, up the side of the mountain. Rain is in the air and the road has a lonely, unfrequented look, and "though there is no living creature visible in the picture, Life fills it." He feels, he continues, that there are divine beings behind the bushes, and that if he could only climb the road and turn the corner, he should come upon the Golden Age. Few there are, indeed, who could make so skeptical a man as Mr. Ervine feel the invisible world and "almost believe in the Shining Ones."¹⁵

¹⁴Mr. George Moore in his Salve, pp. 33-67, tells of a bicycle trip of several days' duration that he and A.E. took to see the "sacred places" in Ireland. They visited several of the famous tumuli--small grassy hills in which are the remains of Druidic temples--, and Tara, one of the higher mountains. A.E. climbed to the top of this "to meet Finn" by the holy lake, but the climb was too strenuous for Mr. Moore and he stopped to rest several miles from the top.

¹⁵Ervine's Some Impressions of My Elders, p. 60.

A.E. says his pictures are the artistic recreations of a writer who slipped into painting when he was forty,¹⁶ because when he closed his eyes he saw pictures. They were all painted either from memory or imagination, and more to please himself than to please others. He says that he would never have dared to exhibit them in companionship with those of artists who have studied their craft and have technical accomplishment as well as character and imagination, except that collectors like Sir Hugh Lane and John Quinn desired him to and found something personal in his work.¹⁷

It is fortunate for Ireland that he has not followed his personal inclinations, but those of the collectors who realized the worth of his pictures--at least of many of them. It has been difficult to find disinterested criticism--everyone in Ireland is his friend and lover, and although even such different personalities as George Moore, Padraic Colum,

¹⁶A.E. seems to disregard entirely his brief, early period of painting in this article. He has said that the drawing in them was bad, but since it was in this period of his artistic career that he had his only technical training, it seems rather whimsical to disregard it completely.

¹⁷The New York Times, March 24, 1929, Section X, p. 13.

St. John Ervine, and Ernest Boyd unite in praising him, since they are all Irish, one hardly knows just what is the par value of their statements in regard to A.E. Here, at least, is one prophet who is not without honor in his own country.

Though one may be a little skeptical in regard to the ultimate value of all his artistic efforts-- he has done so much and often so hurriedly--still one can but be glad that he has left us his rich heritage as he is one of the few artists who has seemed to catch a glimpse not only of the Faeryland of old that we should all like to see, but also of the Silver-Cloud Land, the Tir-nan-Oge, the Land of Heart's Desire, which rose like dreams out of the human soul. And because he has seen these and believed in them, we, knowing his absolute sincerity, believe in his belief, and his art becomes but one more channel through which he communicates to us something not only of character, but also of his philosophy.

CHAPTER V.

A.E.'S PHILOSOPHY AS REVEALED IN HIS POETRY.

To A.E. poetry is not the creation of the poet, but the translation of a thought or idea in the Divine Mind through a vision granted to the poet. He has written,

I once wrote that all fine poetry was written on the Mount of Transfiguration and there was revelation in it and the mingling of Heaven and Earth.¹

Again in a criticism of Tagore, who he thinks most upholds the dignity of poetry in this Iron Age, he writes:

All great poetry, I think, was written first for one only, some other self of the poet, and because of the humanity which unites us all, we all understand.²

¹The Irish Statesman, vol. VII, no. 9, p. 205.
"Poetry of James Stephens."

²The Irish Statesman, vol. IV, no. 25, p. 792.

But do we all understand? Is it not rather that those only who have also stood on the mountain top will understand? And there are so many of us who have never made that steep ascent--to us it will be given to understand in less degree, at best.

Robert Lynd, literary editor of the London Daily News tells us that,

A.E. is a writer in a curious position. About nine-tenths of those who admire him most passionately are a little uncertain whether at times he is humbugging them or not--whether, indeed, he is not humbugging himself. They are carried away by the large images of his poetry; they are moved by the twilight beauty of his landscapes; they respond to his eloquence as a seer of the co-operative commonwealth. But when it comes to the demi-gods, fairies, spirits or whatever you care to call those plumed and fiery creatures of his vision, all but a few out-and-out disciples smile questioningly at one another. In their hearts they regard these things as the eccentricities of a great man rather than as inhabitants of earth, air, or eternity. They think of them as rather comic. ...The truth is, in hearing of visions of this kind, most of us are like children hearing a stranger speak a language we do not know. We are amused, as at gibberish, never pausing to reflect that the sense may be in the stranger's speech and the lack of understanding in ourselves. ...We are by nature unbelievers in a great part of our being. We even regard our unbelief as a proof that we possess a sense of humor.

In a world in which death and distress

are all about us, however, we need a faith as well as a sense of humor; and we cannot afford to dismiss in a flurry of prejudice the faith of any man who writes in good faith. We should be especially foolish to be impatient of the faith of a true poet who comes making us such bounteous offers as A.E. ...What warrant have we that A.E. is not asking us to chase a will-o'-the-wisp? What warrant have we that he has not been chasing a will-o'-the-wisp himself with the genius of an imaginative man? We can but listen attentively to his story and ponder it, ringing it on our sense of truth like a coin on a counter.³

The writer of this paper realizes that there will be readers who cannot reconcile the thought of A.E., the practical man of affairs in Ireland, with that of the mystic poet whose poems more than any other medium which he uses, breathe his belief in vision, the Oversoul, and the essential divinity of man, who, through cyclic life filled with pain and suffering, may regain his lost godhood. These readers may see, if they but look closely, the same beliefs and doctrines in his economic and political writings. That these are not so esoteric as his poetry is true; they were written with the definite purpose of winning a nation to the ideas and ideals

³Lynd's Ireland A Nation, pp. 249-251.

promulgated in them. His poems have no such purpose. They are his personal expression and were written more for himself than for others. That he has shared them with us is due to the desire and will of his friends rather than to any decided wish of his own.

In The Interpreters, he states quite clearly his theory of the divine origin of poetry and, also perhaps, the explanation of his sometimes imperfect technique. He believes very little in revision; is it not sacrilegious for the finite mind to revise in cool deliberation that which it has received in a moment of ecstasy in union with the infinite mind? He says,

I feel it to be true about poetry that it is born in the dream consciousness and made perfect there before it enters the waking consciousness. If a verse or even a line I think beautiful sounds in my brain, I know that by brooding upon it I can draw down the complete poem.⁴

He also says in this book that it is difficult for a poet to give substance to a multitude of feelings, so that when they are passed through a filter of

⁴A.E.'s The Interpreters, p. 56.

words they "will not sound like planetary murmurs", though he feels that "they come out of the soul of the world."⁵

In "Breaghy" he voices this theory in poetic form:

When twilight over the mountains fluttered,
And night with its starry millions came,
I too had dreams: the songs I have uttered
Come from this heart that was touched by
the flame.⁶

In the preface to Collected Poems (1919) he writes:

I have omitted what in colder hours seemed to me to have failed to preserve some heat of the imagination; but in that colder mood I have made but slight revision of those retained. However imperfect they seemed, I did not feel that I could in after hours melt and remould and make perfect the form if I was unable to do so in the intensity of conception, when I was in those heavens we breathe for a moment and then find they are not for our clay.

In an essay he gives us an answer to a criticism often made of his poetry--that while he tells us of his ecstasy and visions he does not always communi-

⁵A.E.'s The Interpreters, p. 44.

⁶A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 226.

cate that ecstasy or vision to the reader. He writes in "Intuition",

We may have a momentary illumination yet retain almost as little of its reality as ocean keeps the track of a great vessel which went over its waters. I remember incidents rather than moods, vision more than ecstasy. . . . Thought, from whatever it set out, forever led to the heavenly city. But these feelings are incommunicable. We have no words to express a thousand distinctions clear to the spiritual sense. If I tell of my exaltation to another, who has not felt this himself, it is explicable to that person as the joy in perfect health, and he translates into lower terms what is the speech of the gods to men.⁷

Keeping in mind then this acknowledged inability to convey in words to everyone his own sense of ecstasy, we will examine some of his poems in which he tells us of these experiences. We must also realize that what often seems, at a cursory glance, to be extravagant imagery, is in reality only a meticulous faithfulness in detail, to what he has beheld. Most of his visions have come to him in the exquisite times of day: twilight and dawn; again they have come when he was lying on the hillsides far away from

⁷A.E.'s The Candle of Vision, pp. 113-114.

men and trying deliberately to enter into the Over-soul through meditation. In "Dana", he tells us how the goddess of that name--the Hibernian mother of the gods--"the tender voice calling 'away'"--weaves her spells usually in the evening, folding with dim caress,

The lonely wanderer by wood or shore,
Till, filled with some deep tenderness, he
yields,
Feeling in dreams for the dear mother heart
He knew, ere he forsook the starry way,
And clings there, pillowed far above the
smoke
And the dim murmur from the duns of men.⁸

In "Symbolism", it is the loved things--the common things of life, home, the hearth-fire, wife or parents--that lead one to God:

Now when the spirit in us wakes and broods,
Filled with home yearnings, drowsily it
flings
From its deep heart high dreams and mystic
moods,
Mixed with the memory of the loved earth
things:
Clothing the vast with a familiar face;
Reaching its right hand forth to greet the
starry race.

Wondrously near and clear the great warm
fires
Stare from the blue;...

⁸A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 37.

...

We rise, but by the symbol charioted,
Through loved things rising up to Love's
own ways:
By these the soul unto the vast has wings
And sets the seal celestial on all mortal
things.⁹

"The Voice of the Waters" tells of a vision that
came to him while watching his image in the waters as
he lay on the grass,

Where the Greyhound River windeth
through a loneliness so deep,
Scarce a wild fowl shakes the quiet that
the purple boglands keep.

A sighing voice came from out the waters and
passing through him bore him to ages dim.

Ere the void was lit with beauty breathed
upon by seraphim,
We were cradled there together folded in
the peace in Him.

while

Flame and flood and stars and mountains
from the primal waters broke.¹⁰

Sometimes the vision has come to him like the

⁹A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 47.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 59-60.

sudden lifting of a veil, while he has been weaving
dreams in silence in the dawn with a kindred spirit.

By a hand of fire awakened, in a moment
caught and led
Upward to the heaven of heavens--through
the star-mists overhead
Flare and flaunt the monstrous highlands;
on the sapphire coast of night
Fall the ghostly froth and fringes of the
ocean of the light.
Many coloured shine the vapours: to the
moon-eye far away
'Tis the fairy ring of twilight, mid the
spheres of night and day,
Girdling with a rainbow cincture round
the planet where we go,
We and it together fleeting, poised upon
the pearly glow;
We and it and all together flashing
through the starry spaces
In a tempest dream of beauty lighting up
the face of faces.

So they fly over the fields of space while life and
joy and love have vanished and they are

Lost within the Mother's being. So the
vision flamed and fled,
And before the glory fallen every other
dream lay dead.¹¹

In "Babylon" he walks the ancient streets of
that city and sees the glory

¹¹A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), pp. 86-88, "A Vision
of Beauty."

Of a red sunset that was dead and lost
beyond a million days.

The myriad beauties and sins of some three thousand
years ago are revealed to him. He sees, too, the
young Babylonian maid whom he loved then. His view
of cyclic life is felt in this, that when the vision
fades he sees that

...that young Babylonian maid,
One drop of beauty left behind from all
the flowing of that tide,
Is looking with the self-same eyes, and
here in Ireland by my side.¹²

In "The Mountaineer" he rejoices:

Oh, at the eagle's height
To lie i' the sweet of the sun,
While veil after veil takes flight
And God and the world are one.

Oh, the night on the steep!
All that his eyes saw dim
Grows light in the dusky deep,
And God is alone with him.¹³

"The Fountain of Shadowy Beauty", a poem longer
than most of his poems are, relates that in a vision
he saw a crystal boat piloted by one

¹²A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 98.

¹³Ibid., p. 136.

Ancient with glad eternal youth
Like one who was of starry race.

His face was rich with dusky bloom;
His eyes a bronze and golden fire;
His hair in streams of silver light
Hung flamelike on his strange attire,

Which, starred with many a mystic sign,
Fell as o'er sunlit ruby glowing:
His light flew o'er the waves afar
In ruddy ripples on each bar
Along the spiral pathways flowing.

The pilot beckoned to him to enter the boat and
"like a silver star" he rose and entered into the
heart of the spirit in the boat and knew

My Brother-Self who roams the deep,
Bird of the wonder-world of sleep.

They then hasten through arched aisles to jewelled
cities to join the "Father Light of Light" where

We knew our time-long journey o'er
And knew the end of all desire,
And saw within the emerald glow
Our Father like the white sun-fire.

We could not say if age or youth
Were on his face: we only burned
To pass the gateways of the day,
The exiles to the heart returned.

He rose to greet us and his breath,
The tempest music of the spheres,
Dissolved the memory of earth,
The cyclic labour and our tears.
In him our dream of sorrow passed,
The spirit once again was free

And heard the song the morning stars
Chant in eternal revelry.

This was the close of human story;
We saw the deep unmeasured shine,
And sank within the mystic glory
They called of old the Dark Divine.

The dawn brought an end to the vision, but the feeling remained that in a far off world his brother, "The Dream Bird", is rayed with a golden light and that some day he will join his brother-self to hide in the Father.¹⁴

Other poems that tell us of his mystical experiences are "Om"¹⁵, a lyric about Brahma; "Ares"¹⁶ in which is portrayed the power of the god of war; "The Invisible Kings"¹⁷ which tells of their power to bring to him a sense of his own kingship; "The Robing of the King"¹⁸ in which he gives us what he felt in his vision to be the meaning of the crucifixion; "Tragedy"¹⁹ that relates a vision in which the "giant

¹⁴A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), pp. 200-208.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 155.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 241.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 260.

¹⁸Ibid., pp. 215-217.

¹⁹Ibid., p. 253.

children of the blue" scorn him for his loss of power. This poem came to him as he left his work for the day. Was he then at Pims, keeping books, and was it these petty tasks that made him feel the slave the divine children called him? We cannot answer as A.E. has not arranged his poems in the collected edition in chronological order; but some details mentioned lead us to think that it was while an accountant in the drapery house that he saw this vision.

Poems, such as "The City"²⁰ and "Transformations"²¹ tell us that visions came to him at rare moments while walking disconsolately along the gray streets of Dublin. Then the bright host sweeping by him "like a blazing wind" would lead him to where "the lost ecstasy lights up each hill and glade."

Although most of his poems tell us of his visions, many of them, as may often be seen in the selections quoted, are carriers as well of other doctrines in his philosophy.

His belief in the Oversoul is seen in the poem

²⁰A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), pp. 30-33.

²¹Ibid., pp. 283-286.

of that title:

And earth and air and wave and fire
In awe and breathless silence stood;
For One who passed into their choir,
Linked them in mystic brotherhood.²²,

or in "Unity",

One thing in all things have I seen:
One thought has haunted earth and air:
Clangour and silence both have been
Its palace chambers. Everywhere

I saw the mystic vision flow
And live in men and woods and streams,
Until I could no longer know
The dream of life from my own dreams.²³,

or again in "Answer",

Out of the vast the voice of one replies
Whose words are clouds and stars and night
and day,
When for the light the anguished spirit cries
Deep in its house of clay.²⁴

Other evidences of his faith that the Oversoul
is that divinity of which we are all apart and
through which we are all united is seen in such lines

²²A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 8.

²³Ibid., p. 294.

²⁴Ibid., p. 17.

as those in which Dana says:

I can enchant the trees and rocks, and fill
The dumb brown lips of earth with mystery,
Make them reveal or hide the god. I breathe
A deeper pity than all love, myself
Mother of all, but without hands to heal:
Too vast and vague, they know me not.

But yet,
I am the heartbreak over fallen things,
The sudden gentleness that stays the blow,
And I am in the kiss that foeman give
Pausing in battle, and in the tears that fall
Over the vanquished foe, and in the highest,
Among the Danaan gods, I am the last
Council of mercy in their hearts where they
Met justice from a thousand starry thrones.²⁵

or in lines, very similar in expression, taken from
"The Master Singer."

"I am the sunlight in the heart, the silver
moon-glow in the mind;
My laughter runs and ripples through the
wavy tresses of the wind.
I am the fire upon the hills, the dancing
flame that leads afar
Each burning-hearted wanderer, and I the
dear and homeward star.
A myriad lovers died for me, and in their
latest yielded breath
I woke in glory giving them immortal life
though touched by death.

....

It matters not the name, the land: my joy
in all the gods abides:
Even in the cricket in the grass some dim-
ness of me smiles and hides."²⁶

²⁵A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), pp. 37-38.

²⁶Ibid., pp. 139-140.

In many other poems, the doctrine of the Oversoul is so closely woven in with that of the divinity of earth and also with that of the divinity of man that it is difficult to exemplify them separately. Many of his most beautiful poems are expressions of "the God-root within men"²⁷, and of the feeling that even

...the restless ploughman pauses,
Turns and, wondering,
Deep beneath his rustic habit
Finds himself a king;
For a fiery moment looking
With the eyes of God
Over fields a slave at morning
Bowed him to the sod.²⁸

In "The Seer" he sees that

Something beneath yon coward gaze
Betrays the royal line.²⁹

One of his most beautiful expositions of the idea of the Oversoul is seen in "Krishna" where the King of Kings is found in a baby playing in the grass, in a

²⁷A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 15. "Star Teachers."

²⁸Ibid., p. 39. "The Earth Breath."

²⁹Ibid., p. 144.

reeling drunkard, in a mis-shapen, fearful being, in a cold-hearted miser, in one going down into the dust of the grave. He is in all these, and yet, He is the Ancient and Unborn, the Prince of Peace, the Light of Lights which is the blossom of Paradise, the Prodigal--the Spendthrift of the Heavenly Gold--, and the life within the Ever-living Living Ones.³⁰

Man realizes his divinity, A.E. feels, in those moments of ecstasy that the Oversoul, the Great Mother, God, grants him. Life here in time is but a temporary separation from the Eternal; it is really a dream life, which is broken at intervals by those glimpses of eternity in which the individual soul recognizes that from which he came and into which he will return. The melting of the Self into the Ancestral Self--the return home--this is the leit motif of all but a few of his poems. A.E. feels that in sleep the soul makes this return and so refreshes itself to carry on its work here. He asks in "The Hour of the King",

Who would think this quiet breather
From the world had taken flight?³¹

³⁰A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), pp. 61-62.

³¹Ibid., p. 77.

In "The Heroes" he writes,

Those who are lost and fallen here, to-
night in sleep shall pass the gate,
Put on the purples of the King, and know
them masters of their fate.
Each wrinkled hag shall reassume the plumes
and hues of paradise:
Each brawler be enthroned in calm among the
Children of the Wise.
Yet in the council with the gods no one
will falter to pursue
His lofty purpose, but come forth the cyc-
lic labours to renew;
And take the burden of the world and veil
his beauty in a shroud,
And wrestle with the chaos till the anarch
to the light be bowed.³²

In "Night" he tells us:

Heart-hidden from the outer things I
rose;
The spirit woke anew in nightly birth
Unto the vastness where forever glows
The star-soul of the earth.³³

Morning brings a return to earth--the planets divide
again.

Closely related to the idea of the soul regain-
ing its strength in sleep is his feeling that death,
too, is merely a going home. This is seen in the

³²A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 80.

³³ibid., p. 11.

long poem "Michael", which was discussed in connection with his philosophy as revealed in his economics and political works, as the poem is a part of The Interpreters. In "A Last Counsel",³⁴ he says one should go from this "place of wounds and weeping" gladly, as in going he will be sustained by the mother-bosom. "On the Waters"³⁵ reminds us that the grave can't own the spirit; it breaks above the sod and goes to crouch at the feet of the gods. In "Battle Ardour" he writes:

....He dies!
Yet has he conquered in that very hour.³⁶

as in the skies he will keep his tryst with the foe-man he had here on earth.

His most beautiful expression of his belief in the immortality of the soul is perhaps in "A Midnight Meditation", where he reminds one grieving:

How often have I said,
"We may not grieve for the immortal dead."
....

³⁴A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 188.

³⁵Ibid., p. 233.

³⁶Ibid., p. 239.

Why be with fate at strife
Because one passes on from death to life.

....

Ah! grieve not; she becomes herself again,
And passed beyond thy sight
She roams along the thought-swept fields
of light,
Moving in dreams until
She finds again the root of ancient will,
The old heroic love
That emptied, once the heavenly courts
above.³⁷

"Endurance"³⁸ relates how one grieved over a
dead loved one until, walking alone under the stars,
he is given through vision the knowledge that whether
moving through light or darkness the spirit of each
individual was immortal and alone, and only found
itself within the universal spirit.

Is it a request that he makes in "When"?

When mine hour is come
Let no teardrop fall
And no darkness hover
Round me where I lie.
Let the vastness call
One who was its lover,
Let me breathe the sky.³⁹

Death to him is the fulfillment of the soul's

³⁷A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), pp. 276-277.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 279-280.

³⁹Ibid., p. 282.

desire; but before this may come to pass, the spirit must have purified itself and become worthy of this return to glory, hence to A.E. pain and suffering have a real place in life--even in cyclic life. All life is a "becoming" for him; and stainless purity that has never grown to new heights through error is not so beautiful to him as the soul that has struggled to the

Truth we learn in pain and sighs:

In this poem "The Man to the Angel" he also says:

I have wept a million tears:
Pure and proud one, where are thine,
What the gain though all thy years
In unbroken beauty shine?

....

Pure one, from your pride refrain:
Dark and lost amid the strife
I am myriad years of pain
Nearer to the fount of life.⁴⁰

In other stanzas of this poem he develops the idea that they who have never known the gloom are merely slaves of light, and that to enter the circle of the wise and to sit upon the throne of might one must

⁴⁰A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 84.

dare the fires.

Many other poems, for example "Blindness"⁴¹, "Pain"⁴², "Hope in Failure"⁴³--all give testimony to his belief that suffering is needed by man and that though there is anguish in the touch of the god of pain, "yet his soul within is sweet."

Even as A.E. gives to the thought of death and sleep and suffering, transcendental qualities, so does he give these also to other factors in life--the love of man for woman, of the citizen for his state, and of all men for beauty--the universal.

Many poets have felt that through love, man reached his highest aspirations, but still it was of the earth, earthy. To A.E., however, the love between a man and a woman is but a reflection of the Divine love again. In "Echoes" he writes:

We liken love to this and that; our thought
The echo of a deeper being seems:
We kiss, because God once for beauty sought
Within a world of dreams.⁴⁴

⁴¹A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919) p. 170.

⁴²Ibid., p. 82.

⁴³Ibid., p. 273.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 14.

Is it not well that Mrs. Russell is a transcendentalist, too, and more interested in the spirit of man than she is in the mortal, when her husband says,

Turn not from the stars your brow
That your eyes may rest on mine.⁴⁵

or

I did not deem it half so sweet
To feel thy gentle hand
As in a dream thy soul to greet
Across wide leagues of land.⁴⁶

Still, may not the wife of the poet feel well recompensed if she should feel some lack in most of his love poems when she finds others in which he affirms that she is the same one he has loved in many ages, that his love is not that of the god whose arrows wound with bitter smart and may bring to it death. He gives not that which wanes

But love itself that flies as a white-winged star
on winds of gold and which is the "heart-way to Para-

⁴⁵A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 93. "Warning."

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 94. "Dream Love."

dise."⁴⁷ In "Affinity" is shown his belief that they, two, cannot be divided by time, or space, and that they today have trod the backward way to the love they felt in ages past, which is still to endure as it has since "the angel childhood of the earth."⁴⁸

In "Faces of Memory", he declares that around the face of his loved one "bloom" many others,

Like flowers upon one stem;

the faces that he loved in Egypt, in Eire, in Cyprus in other reincarnations, all are there:

Your tree of life put forth these flowers
In ages past away:
They had the love in other hours
I give to you today.⁴⁹

"Michael"⁵⁰ as has already been told, deals with the love of a young man for his country--a love so great that he willingly sacrifices his life for it, but beyond this love for Ireland, A.E. felt, was the

⁴⁷A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 100. "The Message."

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 103.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 99.

⁵⁰A.E.'s Voices of the Stones, pp. 50-61.

love for "some far other country side," and in the dream land Michael saw Ireland.

A.E. does not believe strongly in war and found little inspiration in the World War, yet there are a few poems which reflect his thoughts during this time, and in the dark years, for Ireland, following it. He felt in "Gods of War"⁵¹ written in 1914, after the war had begun, that no matter who failed it was "the Dark Immortal's" victory and that the world in the war years should be acknowledging its rightful god--Zeus--not the Prince of Peace to whom now only lip reverence was being paid. He felt that Christ should not have come when he did, but in the twilight of the world when people would have been ready to receive his message and the kings would greet him without scorn. One wonders in thinking over this rather startling idea just what Christ's mission to the world then would be. In "Tragedy" he expresses his feeling that heroic mankind loses the very faith it would defend--the high soul, through passion, descends to work the evil it has willed must die.

⁵¹A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), pp. 236-238.

None ever hated in the world but came
To every baseness of the foe he fought.⁵²

This thought is also shown in "Statesmen", in which
he holds that in nations as well as in all forms of
life,

The thought, the deed, breed always true

the beauty that the Greek loved was seen in his cities,
and if the empire is built in pride, it must fight
with itself for empire of the earth.⁵³ In "Ireland,
1924", he admonishes his countrymen to remember:

Whatever things you loved were one
What was not loved is still denied.
That Law whose writs forever run
Will make no sacrifice to pride.

....

If to be vanquished is your part
And all the fortunate stars withdraw,
Through the red chaos of the heart
Still breathes the music of the law.
It gives to you what is your own,
If still you be of slavish mind
You ne'er shall sit upon a throne
And sway a sceptre unconfined
And if you be the slave of hate
Within yourself you fall and fall
Until the heart be desolate
And love is dead beyond recall.

⁵²A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 253.

⁵³Ibid., pp. 254-255.

A nation is whate'er it loves.
If love be dead, it too must die.
Go, give an offering of doves
To win its immortality.⁵⁴

To A.E., beauty is an all embracing concept--beauty is; and notions of time do not apply, for, as a con-
ceptual idea, beauty is above, superior to time.
Plato's conception of beauty was that when the mind
gives itself up to reflection on beauty, it becomes
one with that beauty. A.E. says in "The Symbol Se-
duces" that one must beware of the symbols of the
world's desire that strive to bind the soul to earth
through quaint and lovely wiles. The image dazzles
for a moment, then the poet cries:

Away! the great life calls; I leave
For Beauty, Beauty's rarest flower.⁵⁵

The great deep thrills him because everywhere in it
he feels the breath of beauty. In "Carriers"⁵⁶ he
even personifies beauty--calls her the Dawn Maiden--

⁵⁴The Literary Digest, vol. LXXXI, April 19, 1924,
p. 36.

⁵⁵A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 27.

⁵⁶A.E.'s Voices of the Stones, p. 33.

Usha--the beauty beyond dream. "Night Wind"⁵⁷ also strongly expresses the Platonic concept--even gives it a corporal embodiment--the aether provides a perpetual medium through which the Idea of Beauty may exert its recurrently energizing power.

Just as he follows the symbols of beauty, to the concept of it, the Idea, so he follows the symbols of earth, beautiful or rude, to the divinity of earth. In "The Virgin Mother"⁵⁸, he tells us men have turned away from that goddess to whom they should pray, from whose virgin being they were born, but whose very mother nature they have scorned in "calling its holy substance common clay." Everything we love had its birth within that dark divinity which we despise. To A.E., the rudest sod is thrilled with "the fire of hidden day" and haunted with all mystery. The gray road he treads is holy ground. In "Creation", he pleads:

O, Master of the Beautiful,
Creating us from hour to hour,

⁵⁷A.E.'s Voices of the Stones, p. 27.

⁵⁸A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 35.

Give me this vision to the full
To see in lightest things thy power.⁵⁹

"Reconciliation", one of his most exquisite lyrics begins,

I begin through the grass once again to be
bound to the Lord;
I can see, through a face that has faded,
the face full of rest
Of the earth, of the mother, my heart with
her heart in accord,
As I lie 'mid the cool green tresses
that mantle her breast
I begin with the grass once again to be
bound to the Lord.⁶⁰

A.E. is a cosmic poet, perhaps more so than any other one of our contemporary poets. Everything that he knows or sees or feels has a history that was before the stars and sun. The sorrow and pain of the world are due to the fact that she is now in the dark age, but if man would but realize his own divinity and that of earth, the great gates of the mountain would open once again and he could return to the Land of Youth, where "the old enchantment lingers in the honey-heart of earth." This must be so, he firmly believes: and he has voiced it well in

⁵⁹A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 119.

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 298.

these lines:

It would be unjust,
Unjust, if we
Could dream of a beauty
We might not be.
Life is becoming
All we see.⁶¹

There is but little change in his thought that one can detect, through the more than forty years he has been writing poems. Perhaps there is even less change in his technique. May it not be so, as Professor Dowden says of him:

"I do not know that we should expect much progress in such art as his. One who has found the secret doesn't need to grow in the common way of growth."⁶²

In many of his later⁶³ poems there does seem to be a note of deeper reflection--he has seemingly saddened

⁶¹A.E.'s Voices of the Stones, p. 36.

⁶²North American Review, CCII, August, 1915, p. 253.

⁶³The order of the poems in the collected edition has not been made chronological, so by later poems are meant the last two volumes, Voices of the Stones and Midsummer Eve and a few war poems in Collected Poems (1919) which have the dates of their composition below them.

with the years and this he acknowledges in a preface to Collected Poems in which he says that he has made the way of the spirit seem thorny, though when he had first discovered the King in His Beauty, he had thought to be the singer of the happiest songs.

CHAPTER VI.

CONCLUSIONS DRAWN FROM THIS STUDY

A.E. is a mystic poet, painter, economist--but most of all, and in all, a philosopher. In studying and examining his various works, for the purposes of this paper, it was the philosophy that was searched for. It was not difficult to find--it pervaded every expression of himself in every form of utterance. The difficulty came in, in making the selections from his works that would most clearly and concisely define the tenets of his philosophy. That these tenets were the same in every field--economics, politics, art, and poetry--was rather to be expected even in a man so unconventional as A.E.

Whether or not A.E.'s work will last depends, the writer of this paper feels, upon the estimate placed in the coming years on his philosophy. Of his artistic work, she knows only what Irish critics have said. They were almost invariable favorable;

only George Moore gave voice once to a remark that may or may not be of prophetic value. He said, in the early years of the twentieth century, that

A.E. could have been a painter if he had wished it, and possibly a great painter; but a man's whole life is seldom long enough for him to acquire the craft of a painter; and setting life above craftsmanship, A.E. denied himself the beautiful touch that separates the artist from the amateur, and he did well. Accomplishment estranges from the comprehension of the many, and for the first time (perhaps) in the world's history we get a man stopped midway by a scruple of conscience or love of his kindred--which?¹

If Moore was right in calling A.E. an amateur twenty years ago, and if he has not developed his art beyond that stage in these later years, then his art will not live, except in a slight way in the private collections of a few, who will find in some certain pictures the satisfaction of a personal want. If Padraic Colum is right in implying that A.E. is really a very fine painter, then his art will last throughout his country's history, because it is the intense expression of an Irishman who foresees a

¹Moore's Vale, p. 198.

great destiny for the Gael, and who has endeavored by every means possible to him to bring the beginning of that destiny into the light of today. The art of such a one, if it be great art, will not be allowed to accumulate dust in forgetfulness.

The future of his political and economic writings also depends upon the value placed upon his philosophy of life in regard to both nations and individuals. If Ireland follows along the paths he has tried to blaze through the I.A.O.S., if she tries earnestly to discover within herself, and to develop, what to A.E. is her national soul, and so make her unique contribution to the world's civilization, if she comes to his belief that nations exist for purposes of soul--then his position as a true politician and economist is assured, and his writings will attain high place. If Ireland does not follow along his idealistic paths, then his writings in these fields that are not mere contemporary propaganda, will most likely join the company of the works of those other mystics--Plato, Plotinus, and Emerson--who have also written concerning these subjects, and whose books are not guide books for the many, but

volumes of inspiration for the few who, in every century of time, hold to the belief that man is here to fulfill a higher destiny than mere earthly living.

The place of A.E.'s poetry, this writer feels, is more assured than that of his work in any other form. It is true that there is no great unusualness in his handling of form--most of his poems are admirable in this respect, form being happily married to the sense and feeling expressed, but they are not remarkably outstanding. There are but few purple patches in his poems to linger in the reader's mind, although his imagery and rhetoric are often exquisite and are invariably marked by a loftiness of expression. There is a sensuous, unearthly note in many of his lyrics that does not lend them an appeal to some people. His dwelling on mystical experiences will ward off many, and what is termed his coldness, his forever leaving the loved things of earth to go beyond them into the transcendental universals for which, to him, they stand, will always alienate others. Notwithstanding these limiting faults, if such they might be called, there will always be a large group of people who will enjoy and even love his poems because in them they will find strength to

uphold soul and body, and inspiration for living. They will find these things in his poetry because his poems satisfy A.E.'s own rules of criticism-- that they must speak from a deep life and that they must be transparent, not opaque, so that one knows the poet has seen through the surface into reality, into the heart of things. None in Ireland and few in the contemporary world have led lives so full both in practical and spiritual experiences as he has. He is a practical idealist, and though he may tell us of the Many-Coloured Land, and even take us to it--the land where under skies of murky citron we see pools of heavenly blue and green leaping up into gray forests of wild spray and hiding celestial beings--still he always brings us back to this world, and divine though she is to him even in this Iron Age, she is a world where man, the king in exile, must work and labor in sorrow, sin, and pain, helping his brothers to regain their lost throne.

Such is A.E.'s philosophy, and whether one believes in his doctrines or not, they are worthy of our deep consideration as the sincere utterance of a man whom Ireland is proud to call her first citizen although he writes of Irishmen like himself:

"We are less children of this clime
Than of some nation yet unborn
Or empire in the womb of time.
We hold the Ireland in the heart
More than the land our eyes have seen,
And love the goal for which we start
More than the tale of what has been."²

May we not leave the final judgment of the value of A.E.'s philosophical work to that one which is infallible--Time? In the words of the poet, himself:

I should have parted the true from the false, but I have not yet passed away from myself who am in the words of this book. Time is a swift winnow, and that he will do quickly for me.³

We refrain, in any case, from prophecy as to his future fame; though, even in refraining, we may wonder if there can ever be a period in time when his essential beliefs will not be of value to men, and when his message of hope will not be gratefully received by some of the best among them.

²A.E.'s Collected Poems (1919), p. 230. "On Behalf of Some Irishmen Not Followers of Tradition.

³Ibid., Preface.

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