

Transcript ~ Mysticism, Imagination, and Social Responsibility

The Life and Writings of George William Russell (A.E.)

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Today we have set ourselves an impossible task. There is no conceivable way in which we could pretend to do justice to the subtitle given for our talk. For one, G.W. Russell was an extremely prolific writer. Over a 41-year period of his adult life, he published 14 books of poetry, a short play, two books combining poetry and prose, a handful of pamphlets, many letters of correspondence, and over 120 articles for three philosophical journals. In addition, his extensive body of writings for two of the most widely read and influential weekly periodicals of his day, *The Irish Homestead* and *The Irish Statesman*, are now collected in three large volumes published by Colin Smythe, which we have only glanced at.

In addition, Russell's life cannot be well encapsulated or summarized. Behind each song there are notes not heard and verses too precious to sing. Even the biographies written by those who knew him seem to provide but partial glimpses through distorted lenses. Russell's public life was a paradise in motion, touching the lives of famous movers of literature, art, and politics and many others uncounted with names unknown. But that seems to be only the visible portion of an enormous iceberg. Ours will likewise be a partial sketch whilst precariously perched on the shoulders of giants.

Those giants are in the form of two main books from which the material for this forum has been drawn. First and foremost is *The Descent of the Gods: Comprising the Mystical Writings of G.W. Russell "A.E."*. Edited by the two founders of the Institute of World Culture, Nandini and Raghavan Iyer, it is the only literary work of this magnitude that was co-authored by them. Completed in 1978 but not published until 1988, this neglected volume of diligent scholarship and spiritual insight is an example of the Iyers' tireless devotion and collaboration. With a 78-page introduction and over 100 pages of footnotes, it includes a brilliant and succinct summation of the nonsectarian, mystical philosophy of which both Russell and the Iyers were luminous expounders. And it brings together all the mystical prose of Russell into one collection—arguably the heart and essence of his contribution to the Irish literary revival.

In my view, this is the finest and most penetrating overview you will ever find of Russell's mystical quest. That quest, as mentioned in their preface, was "to bridge eternity and time". Russell is vibrantly portrayed here as not only belonging to a long lineage of "the homeless tribe" of mystics and spiritual exiles, but also as a true Hero and Seer, whose "greatness of soul and

love for humanity was exemplified in his calm renunciation of personal goals and single-minded commitment to a life of altruistic service".

Secondly, we are drawing heavily from the work of Henry Summerfield, published in 1974: *That Myriad-Minded Man: A Biography of G. W. Russell "A.E."*. In the opening chapter a two-paragraph summary of Russell's life is cast: "mystic and patriot, poet and discoverer of poets," painter, journalist, practical rural economist, and "proponent of a more humane social order". But Summerfield warns us that, especially when inserted into historical context, none of his activities were insignificant and "...no résumé of his achievements does justice to him or explains why he was for many years one of the best loved men in Ireland. His greatest accomplishment was the creation of his own character". This helps to explain the extraordinary affection bordering on hero-worship which he inspired in the most diverse persons. Not only does Russell glowingly appear in the memoirs of dozens of his talented literary contemporaries, but he was beloved by countless common folk—including hesitant soldiers who knocked at his door in Dublin seeking his blessing before joining the troops in WWI. To some he was both sage and saint.

Never having been to college, such were his insights into both literature and the practical details of social and political reform that, in later life, he was given two honorary doctorates, one from Yale and one from Trinity College in Dublin. He was offered a position in the Senate (which he refused) as Ireland gained its independence, and was repeatedly consulted by two British Prime Ministers. In 1934, at age 67, he was called to Washington, D.C., to personally advise President Roosevelt and Henry Wallace, the Minister of Agriculture, among others, regarding the national crisis of 20 million unemployed. Clearly, his prophet-like ardor was combined with the capacity of enabling others to share his own vision. Moreover, he had the rare ability, not only through his writing and painting, but by his presence and words, to impart a living, visceral sense of the divine dimensions of nature and of the noble grandeur enshrined in human purpose. Summerfield documents how A.E.'s overflowing magnanimity found friends everywhere, many who left his company feeling enchanted and uplifted, more educated in the best sense of the word, and somehow transformed, having been ushered into a realm "in which they had never before believed".

George William Russell was born on 10 April 1867, in the small Ulster town of Lurgan, Ireland, a market town surrounded by lush countryside. The youngest of three children, his parents were devout members of the Protestant Church of Ireland, with strong evangelical leanings. While little is known about his early life, in the first chapters of *Song and Its Fountain* (a collection of his essays published in 1932), two experiences are recounted. Those memories were activated

later in life as a result of the diligent practice of Pythagorean review and self-examination (in the reading). When properly cultivated, he explains, such a practice will activate latent capacities of recollection and allow us to travel back in time to the earliest years of our lives with clarity, recalling even soul memories, both inward states and outer events.

Two golden moments were thus recovered by him. The first was around the age of four or five, he says, "where beauty first dawned on me". Lying in the tall grass, he became enchanted by the glittering gold of a clump of daffodils. The radiant beauty of pure color appeared to his young eyes as the expression of a higher mind and suffused with heavenly meaning. Because of this soul-nurturing experience, for Russell, Goodness and Truth would be ever-linked to Beauty. The second experience he relates was that which opened his heart to the ethics of selfless service. Still a child, he was deeply touched by the story of a dying woman who wept a quarter of an hour before she died because she could not leave her bed to help a sick neighbor. According to Russell, both of these events repeatedly reverberated throughout his life.

At the age of 10 his family moved to Dublin. And in his middle school years, Russell was recognized as having rare literary and artistic instincts. He was nicknamed "the Genius," winning prizes for mathematics, French, Classics, English, and handwriting. He was gifted with a nearly photographic memory for the written word and, despite the sectarian focus of his education, he nurtured the imagination by his private reading of varied literature. This included the stories of Kipling and the Arabian Nights, medieval romance novels, and the poetry of Tennyson.

Around the age of 15 or 16, while on holiday, Russell underwent another spiritual awakening, beautifully described in the first chapter of *The Candle of Vision*. Published in 1918, *The Candle of Vision* is a deeply moving collection of essays and Russell's most popular and acclaimed prose work. The Iyers called it "the autobiography of a mystic" which "stands with other timeless mystical texts as a compelling diary of the inner life, intimate yet accessible". In the first chapter, titled "Retrospect," Russell describes the "pure, holy and beautiful" experiences which washed over him in his teens. Through them, he became distinctly aware of an "eternal pilgrim," the immortal soul within his own nature, who was "the true owner and heir" of the body. Though not yet purified of all worldly dross, this inner "self" was inextricably bound to other immortals of a like nature. Gazing upon him from "the true home of man," for brief moments, he "seemed to mix with their eternity". This was accompanied by a profound sense of the divine presence pervading the whole of nature.

The visible world became like a tapestry blown and stirred by winds behind it. If it would but raise for an instant I knew I would be in Paradise. Every form on that tapestry appeared to be the

work of gods. Every flower was a word, a thought. The grass was speech; the trees were speech; the waters were speech; the winds were speech. They were the Army of the Voice marching on to conquest and dominion over the spirit; and I listened with my whole being, and then these apparitions would fade away and I would be the mean and miserable boy once more. So might one have felt who had been servant of the prophet, and had seen him go up in the fiery chariot, and the world had no more light or certitude in it with that passing.

Russell initially thought these temporary raptures were of his own creation and ownership, but soon realized that such vanities made him outcast. They no more belonged to him than the mountains and oceans. And in the years that followed, as he loosened his inverted, egotistic grip on the experience, deeper veils lifted.

So did I feel one warm summer day lying idly on the hillside, not then thinking of anything but the sunlight, and how sweet it was to drowse there, when, suddenly, I felt a fiery heart throb, and knew it was personal and intimate, and started with every sense dilated and intent, and turned inwards, and I heard first a music as of bells going away, away into that wondrous underland whither, as legend relates, the Danann gods withdrew; and then the heart of the hills was opened to me, and I knew there was no hill for those who were there, and they were unconscious of the ponderous mountain piled above the palaces of light, and the winds were sparkling and diamond clear, yet full of colour as an opal, as they glittered through the valley, and I knew the Golden Age was all about me, and it was we who had been blind to it but that it had never passed away from the world.

When Russell left formal schooling in 1884, he was, by his own account, untrammelled by the least trace of skepticism, quietly guarding his desire to discover "the alchemist's elixir of life and the philosopher's stone". His first love being drawing and painting, at 13 his parents had enrolled him in evening classes at the Metropolitan School of Art in Dublin. At 18 he also enrolled in the Royal Hibernian Academy, where he startled teachers and fellow students alike with renderings of his visionary experiences. He actively drew upon mythic archetypes and ancient landscapes as stimulus. The gift of seeing radiant and majestic visionary beings remained with him throughout his life, and their clear and distinct forms are preserved in many memorable sketches. Had he pursued painting with greater singularity, art critics later suggested, he might have been among the greatest painters of his era.

The first two years at the Art Academy marked a turning point in several ways. Not by chance, but by a karmic law he later called spiritual gravitation, he met William Butler Yeats and Charles Johnston. Yeats was two years his senior, also at the Academy, and already a fiery poet. Like many distinguished minds of his day, Yeats' longing for spiritual nourishment was left unsatisfied by orthodox Christianity. Though they had many differences of outlook in later

years, Yeats at first was both comrade and mentor, encouraging Russell's poetic explorations and introducing him to many literary circles in Dublin. Thirteen years after they first met, Yeats also introduced Russell to Horace Plunkett, an educated and devoted philanthropist who partnered with Russell in a well-conceived system of rural poverty amelioration and cultural renewal. Despite his own lifelong efforts at poetic verse, Russell always considered Yeats as "the best and most beautiful" poet in all of Irish literature.

Charles Johnston was to become a skilled classical scholar, with a working knowledge of Latin, Greek, and later Sanskrit, who had already begun translating sacred texts of the ancient world into English. Through Johnston and Yeats, Russell received his first introductions to Eastern Philosophy and Theosophical writings. This appears to have begun with the *Upanishads*, the *Bhagavad Gita*, and *The Light of Asia* by Sir Edwin Arnold. In a letter to a friend, he wrote, "to contain such Godlike fullness of wisdom on all things...I feel the authors must have looked with calm remembrance back through a thousand passionate lives ... ere they could have written with such certainty of things the soul feels to be sure".

Russell was also introduced to A.P. Sinnett's works on *The Occult World* and *Esoteric Buddhism*, along with Mabel Collins' mystical guidebook *Light on the Path*. Russell was deeply inspired by the rules of discipleship and nonviolence, requiring complete self-conquest and renunciation, found therein. He wrote to his friend Carrie Rea that there was more religion in this little book than in the entire Old Testament. But it was due to *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, by H.P. Blavatsky, first published in 1877, that Russell began to apprehend the logic of an overarching philosophical framework that helped him to interpret what he had already stumbled on through internal visions. In Blavatsky, he found that his own "first crude guess...about the nature of God" corresponded to the conceptions of the early Rosicrucians, the Pythagoreans, as well as the sages of Tibet. In doing so, he realized his kinship with countless mystics and seers throughout the ages.

Later in life, Russell also became certain that spiritual verities would provide the basis for radically new forms of harmonic social and political organization. *The Interpreters*, a work of fiction by Russell published in 1922, suggests that political systems and human institutions alike have their rightful hidden basis in spiritual cosmology and transcendental law.

By 1885, age 18, Russell had begun immersing himself in a disciplined intellectual regimen and a deliberate fostering of his spiritual experiences through meditation. He longed to go to India in order to study under adepts. Illumined by the idea that esoteric wisdom was the common origin and undercurrent of every great religious and philosophical tradition, he read

deeply and widely. He returned to the New Testament and Plato, and later explored the Chaldean Oracles, Hermetic writings, the *Tao Te Ching*, Sufi poetry, and Celtic mythology, as well as poring over many ancient Hindu texts and their commentaries. He also extended his exposure to poetry and literature in general, including Whitman, Emerson, and Thoreau (1887). For Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, he expressed an enthusiasm almost as great as he showed for other scriptures. "... I look upon Whitman as the greatest friend I have," he wrote. "He is the new evangelist of love and of universal brotherhood...."

Around the same time, Russell began a series of paintings depicting the gradual evolution of primitive humanity within the mind of God. Several of these he discarded as failures, but one picture captivated him. It was of the archetypal man newly emerging in the Divine Mind (Essay: Imagination). As far as we know, the painting was not preserved, but it may have looked something like this—a portion of a mural painted years later. During a holiday in Armagh, he sat intently awake through the entire night, inwardly seeking a proper name for the image. While thus dilated, he felt a presence beyond his own mind about to speak. Finally it whispered to him, "Call it the Birth of ÆON". The following day, still meditative, he glimpsed the archetypal mystery which the name evoked. It was a drama later connected with what he called "the Hero in Man," the myth of Prometheus and the divine light of *Christos*. These, he asserted, were in fact different names for a singular host which rebels against the mere beatitude of heaven to wrest out of the elemental chaos of human life a world for the spirit of wisdom to manifest.

Two weeks later, while searching for an art journal in the Dublin Library, he chanced upon an open dictionary of religions. The first word that caught his eye was "ÆON". It was defined there as a mystic name the Christian Gnostics used for the first beings emanated from the Godhead. He trembled. Here was confirmation that his inner communications were more than mere fancy and perhaps even recollections drawn from previous lives. When he began submitting verse and prose to the public press, he signed them with the diphthong Æ, the first sound of Æon, though it was split into the initials A.E. by the printer.

And here we touch upon one of the key themes of the day, which was a perpetual inquiry for Russell: the mysterious origin, nature, right use, and function of imagination. Up until this point, Russell himself was uncertain whether, and in what manner, the mystic experiences which washed over him were the self-deluded, psychic fancies of egotism or authentic mirrorings of divine truths.

I believed then, and still believe, that 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. I remember how pure, holy and beautiful these imaginations seemed, how they came like crystal water sweeping aside the muddy current of my life, and the astonishment I felt, I who was almost inarticulate, to find sentences which seemed noble and full of melody sounding in my brain as if another and greater than I had spoken them; and how strange it was also a little later to write without effort verse, which some people still think has beauty, while I could hardly, because my reason had then no mastery over the materials of thought, pen a prose sentence intelligently. I am convinced that all poetry is, as Emerson said, first written in the heavens, that is, it is conceived by a self deeper than appears in normal life, and when it speaks to us or tells us its ancient story we taste of eternity and drink the Soma juice, the elixir of immortality.

The Descent of the Gods, pp. 116–117

According to the late professor Henry Corbin, who spent his life devoted to studies in comparative philosophy, religion, and esoteric Islam, the vast and complex idea of Imagination and its field of activity was called ‘*Ālam al-mithāl*’ by the Sufis. It is a multilayered metaphysical world between the phenomenal world and that of pure unity. It is composed of "Idea Images," essential meanings, and "confraternities of spiritual beings ... by which divine realities are made intelligible". Corbin cites it as "an organ of knowledge," which does not so much create as discover.

In both Christian and Islamic mysticism as in the theosophists and Neoplatonists of the Renaissance, he wrote, we "encounter the idea that the Godhead itself possesses the power of Imagination". By imagining the universe, (he or it) brings it into manifestation through the eternal virtualities and potencies of his own being. The more consciousness is aligned with truth and pure love, the more the active imagination becomes a self-conscious organ of this deific, cosmogonic Imagination. This coincides with what is said of the Rishis of ancient India, of the Buddha, Pythagoras, and other great spiritual teachers and adepts. They were Seers, not fabricators of new religions, who with a vision grown sun-like, could penetrate the veils of visible nature, even witnessing the spiritual birth of suns, planets, and humanities. These are experiences beyond what language or art can express, and so we are left with myth, allegory, and symbol. We find all this suggestively echoed in A.E.'s poem on Karma, written in simple, accessible verse.

Karma

*All that was harsh or sweet
To me was brought
Through some affinity
With soul or sense or thought.
I complain not nor wonder.
Just was my lot.*

*I ask the wise to say
Why are we heir
To the wonder of the sky,
The shining there.
What justice gave to me
This star-enchanted air?*

*Is there still in us
A heaven-descended ray
Of that which built the palaces
Of night and day?
Do our first works, sun, moon, and stars,
Shine on our clay?*

*O, how my heart leaps up!
It can laugh. It could fly,
Even in dream being knit
To that majesty!
Though long passed from our glory,
I can sing! I could fly!*

In 1885, Charles Johnston started the Hermetic Society in Dublin for the study of Eastern philosophy and kindred subjects. Yeats became its chairman and Russell an avid contributor. Other seekers, writers, poets, and mystics began to gather round. Later that same year, the group adopted a charter to establish itself as the Dublin Lodge of the Theosophical Society.

Though Russell called himself a Theosophist, he did not join immediately, seeking to rely more on his interior experiences. However, in addition to his deepening studies, he took occasional trips to London where he met and heard the brilliance of the incomparable H.P. Blavatsky, the founder of the modern Theosophical movement. Russell referred to Blavatsky as "a Cosmos in an ailing woman's body". At that time, Blavatsky was engaged in finishing her magnum opus *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion, and Philosophy*, published in 1888. Once it was sent to the publishers, she visited the Dublin Lodge.

Around this time, W.Q. Judge, a co-founder of the Society who was born in Dublin, also visited. Judge possessed an unmatched brilliance in translating and condensing the challenging teachings and technical language of *The Secret Doctrine* into literature more accessible to the common reader. Russell later wrote that Judge "never spoke of what he did not know," was the "wisest and sweetest" man he had ever met, and for whom he had "more reverence...than any other human being". Shortly thereafter, Russell formally joined the Society.

For the next seven years, his life revolved around it. Besides attending thrice-weekly meetings, while writing poetry and prose for Theosophical journals and doing his share of lecturing, A.E. became part-time vice president, secretary, and treasurer. Though he had been slower than his comrades to formally commit, once he did so, he never turned away. However, after the death of both H.P. Blavatsky in 1891 and Judge in 1896, Russell found the leadership of the international Society intolerably lost. As the head of the Dublin Lodge in 1896, he withdrew the charter, changed the name to The Hermetic Society, and continued to write and lecture on Theosophy, nurturing other students and inquirers.

From many accounts, his was never a cold repetition of doctrine, but a synthesis of intellectual acuity with poetic elocution that sought to awaken awareness of vibrant hidden realities. This continued until the last years of his life. The Society which Russell led should not be confused, as it sometimes is, with the earlier group led by Johnston, nor with a secret society centered in Great Britain which Yeats had joined and which called itself the "Hermetic Students of the Golden Dawn".

Late in life, and despite his own extensive literary outpouring, in characteristic modesty Russell wrote:

I had no private doctrine: nothing but H.P.B. eked out, for beginners by W.Q. Judge; the Bhagavad Gita; Upanishads; Patanjali; and one or two other classics...My own writing is trivial, and whatever merit is to be found in it is due to its having been written in a spiritual atmosphere generated by study of H.P.B. and the sacred books of the East.

The Canadian Theosophist, XVI, 163–4, Aug. 1935

By 1890, Russell decided his loyalties to his mystical commitment and his aspirations to be a painter were in conflict, and he gave up painting for a time. He took a post as a clerk at Pim Brothers & Company, a large Dublin drapery, working 9-hour days, six days a week, making the equivalent of a mere \$50 a year. But this was sufficient to give him the economic security he needed during the next seven years as he poured his energies into an altruistic path of self-knowledge. His experience with the word "Æon" led him to believe in the divine origins of

classical language roots, and he spent months brooding over the letters of the alphabet, hoping to discover their primeval meanings. In 1887 he co-authored an article with Charles Johnston entitled "The Speech of the Gods," which conveyed the fruit of their explorations. And despite the hot, dreary, gas-lit interiors of Pim's, Russell's visionary experiences did not wane.

These waking dreams would fall upon me at any time, while I was at work, or in the streets, or in the country roads at night. Once I was walking down a passage in the great building where I was employed over forty years ago, a passage which led from one office to another; and in that dim lighted corridor my imagination of myself was suddenly changed, and I was a child and was looking upwards to a dawn of faintest yellow behind snowy peaks made blue and shadowy by that glow. The mound on which I stood was brown and bare as if it had been baked by the heat of fierce suns. The boy I had become was gazing in adoration at the high and holy light. He was celestially transparent, pure and virgin. He chanted a divine name, and a fire that was heaven-born leaped up from the heart, and for an instant the child was a delicate lyre whose strings quivered echoing the song of Brahma. Then all that faded and I was again in the offices at Pims; and I am afraid for the moment I was not doing their work, but was finding words which might hold that remote ancestral memory:

Faint grew the yellow buds of light Far flickering beyond the snow. As, leaning o'er the shadowy white, Morn glimmered like a pale primrose.

Before that glamour had obliterated the corridor I was intent on the work I had to do, and this interruption of vision was like the sudden flowing into a cloudy river of crystal clear water from some tributary descending from high hills.

In 1891, Russell moved from his parents' home to "The Homestead". This was a Georgian row house which a Scottish engineer and his wife had purchased and put at the disposal of the Dublin Lodge and a resident community of seekers. In this congenial atmosphere, he gradually felt his weaknesses and uncertainties beginning to fall away.

The seven years I lived there were the happiest in my life. How fortunate I was to be drawn into companionship with six or seven others all as I think wiser and stronger than I then was... seeds born in me began to blossom in that gracious air, and what before was but flickering of a mystic communion began to glow to almost steadfast light. Out of this companionship came all that was best in my poetry, every delicacy of perception had its growth among these friends of my youth.

Russell never regretted skipping a university education, for his life at the Lodge more than compensated. During his years with the Homestead and beyond, he wrote of his training and self-discipline as centered on the study of *The Secret Doctrine*. This is evident in many of his articles and poems. In 1892 he resumed painting, including murals on the walls of the Lodge,

every aspect of which was precisely chosen and carefully placed within the larger composition as symbolic of some aspect of the philosophy he had embraced.

Despite his shyness and modesty, Russell's capacity to move audiences became evident. P.L. Travers, the famed author of *Mary Poppins*, and Ella Young, a mythologist, poet, and author of children's books, both contributed to the Celtic literary revival. And both were among three generations of Irish writers befriended and mentored by Russell. In 1925 Ms. Young emigrated to the U.S. to hold the chair in Irish Myth and Folklore at UC Berkeley for seven years. In her memoirs, she writes of being deeply impressed by A.E. while attending the Dublin Lodge, the "tall, slender, bearded man" who rose at the back of the room and who "did not seem to be human, but rather the vehicle through which some Being, rainbow-hued and unearthly, manifested itself". Such was P.L. Travers' love and respect for Russell that she traveled to his bedside to help nurse him in his final days.

One of Russell's favorite literary forms was the aphorism, in which thinkers like Blavatsky, Patanjali, the Chinese philosophers, and others embodied a profound insight in a few brief phrases. He would often ponder over one of these sayings for weeks at a time, endeavoring to fathom its deeper meaning. To an Indian who later complimented him on his insight into Hindu thought, he replied: "There is nothing to be surprised at. I've had to sweat for it". The Bhagavad Gita became A.E.'s favorite scripture—"the essence," he called it, "of human wisdom"—with its call to meditation, selfless devotion, and renunciation in action. It became one of the chief inspirations of his work for Ireland, as it was of Mahatma Gandhi's devoted labors for India. Its teaching lies behind many simple sayings A.E. often repeated, such as, "Let the joy be in the doing and not in the end".

The intensity of A.E.'s efforts at meditation are beautifully characterized in a chapter by that name in *The Candle of Vision*:

There is no personal virtue in me other than this that I followed a path all may travel but on which few do journey. It is a path within ourselves where the feet first falter in shadow and darkness but which is later made gay by heavenly light. As one who has travelled a little on that way and who has had some far-off vision of the Many-Coloured Land, if I tell what I know, and how I came to see most clearly, I may give hope to those who would fain believe in that world the seers spake of, but who cannot understand the language written...None need special gifts or genius. Gifts! There are no gifts. For all that is ours we have paid the price... Our religions make promises to be fulfilled beyond the grave because they have no knowledge now to be put to the test, but the ancients spake of a divine vision to be attained while we are yet in the body... Though I am blind I have had moments of sight. Though I have sinned I have been on the path... Day after day, at times where none might interfere, and where none through love or other cause were allowed to

interfere, I set myself to attain mastery over the will. I would choose some mental object, an abstraction of form, and strive to hold my mind fixed on it in unwavering concentration, so that not for a moment, not for an instant, would the concentration slacken. It is an exercise this, a training for higher adventures of the soul. It is no light labour. The ploughman's, cleaving the furrows, is easier by far. Five minutes of this effort will at first leave us trembling as at the close of a laborious day. It is then we realize how little of life has been our own, and how much a response to sensation, a drifting on the tide of desire...Let us persevere...(and) the turmoil increases; our whole being becomes vitalized, the bad as well as the good. The heat of this fervent concentration acts like fire under a pot, and everything in our being boils up madly...What man is there who thinks he has self-control? He stands in the shallow waters, nor has gone into the great deep, nor been tossed at the mercy of the waves...But the ancients who taught us to gain this intensity taught it but as preliminary to a meditation which would not waver...The meditation they urged on us has been explained as "the inexpressible yearning of the inner man to go out into the infinite." But that Infinite we would enter is living. It is the ultimate being of us. Meditation is a fiery brooding on that majestically Self. We imagine ourselves into Its vastness. We conceive ourselves as mirroring Its infinitudes, as moving in all things, as living in all beings... We try to know as It knows, to live as It lives, to be compassionate as It is compassionate. We equal ourselves to It that we may understand It and become It... "What a man thinks, that he is: that is the old secret," said the wise. We have imagined ourselves into this pitiful dream of life. By imagination and will we re-enter true being, becoming that we conceive of. On that path of fiery brooding I entered.

Like many mystics, A.E. was convinced that individual consciousness was but a tributary of the collective consciousness of humanity. In one of his early poems titled "Deep Sleep," he wrote: "... And all my thoughts are throngs of living souls". In the whole body of his verse, he said, this was the line that carried the most meaning. Because unity is a fact in nature, proper meditation would begin to unveil our divine origins. The deeper our union with our boundless Self, A.E. affirmed, the closer our bond with seen and unseen persons, thus doing them incalculable good.

He assured his lifelong friend, Carrie Rea: "You will find yourself much closer to humanity in your inner nature than in your material contact with them. I felt this some few evenings ago when within myself and far away the stir of the long imprisoned souls of men seemed to reach me". "When we sink within ourselves, when we seem most alone, in that solitude we may meet multitudes...."

In his short story "The Meditation of Ananda," Russell tells of a lone ascetic who hears of "the most noble of all meditations ... ordained by the Buddha". It is that in which the mind imagines pervading "one quarter of the world with thoughts of Love unstinted, and so the second, and so the third, and so the fourth. And thus the whole wide world, above, below, around, and

everywhere, does he continue to pervade with heart of Love far-reaching, grown great and beyond measure". In Russell's tale, through this self-conscious attunement to boundless compassion, Ananda thereby inspires a king to release his enemy, a child to relieve the loneliness of a prisoner, and a teacher and his disciples to share the sacred *dharma* with an outcast leper.

A thought is a real force. The universe was born out of the Divine thought, and man when he really thinks or truly imagines an ideal is setting real forces to work which will finally bring about events and happenings in his life and the life of his country..." So it comes that there are ties which bind us to people other than those whom we meet in our everyday life. I think they are most real ties, most important to understand, for if we let our lamp go out some far away who had reached out in the dark and felt a steady will, a persistent hope, a compassionate love, may reach out once again in an hour of need, and finding no support may give way and fold the hands in despair. Often we allow gloom to overcome us and so hinder the bright rays in their passage; but would we do it so often if we thought that perhaps a sadness which besets us, we do not know why, was caused by some one drawing nigh to us for comfort, whom our lethargy might make feel still more his helplessness, while our courage, our faith might cause "our light to shine in some other heart which as yet has no light of its own"?

The Hero in Man (CGP), p. 13

A.E. found in Theosophy an additional confirmation of the intuitions he carried since his early teens. It was the conviction that every human soul was a king in pauper's clothing, a fallen god who had willingly abdicated its heavenly station, descending into the world of matter with the intention of remolding it to a divine, salvific pattern. Through the inevitable suffering the descent entails, the elixir of a deeper, eventually perfected wisdom would be garnered. This is why there is both purgation and sweetness that comes with suffering. His faith in this innate heroism and perfectibility of the human soul meant a reverence was due even towards the most mean and wretched of persons. All this was fundamental to his conception of the ideal of human brotherhood and sisterhood, which was the aspect of Theosophy that always meant the most to him.

In 1895, Russell discovered for the first time his Celtic heritage. In 1878 and 1880 an Irish barrister named Standish O'Grady published two volumes titled *History of Ireland*, a retelling of Celtic myths largely centered on the story of Cuchulain, the greatest of the legendary Gaelic warriors:

... there was the soul of a people, its noblest and most exalted life symbolized in the story of one heroic character... When I read O'Grady I was as such a man who suddenly feels ancient memories rushing at him, and knows he was born in a royal house, that he had mixed with the mighty of

heaven and earth and had the very noblest for his companions...I felt exalted as one who learns he is among the children of kings.

In *The Secret Doctrine*, H.P. Blavatsky drew upon many of the world's mythologies to demonstrate how a single, once universal cosmological science underlies them all. She does mention the ancient Celtic tradition, but without much detail. By 1895 A.E., his imagination captivated by O'Grady's *History*, began to follow her example, though without claiming authority or finality. Articles on this topic began with "The Legends of the Ancient Eire," "Celtic Cosmology," "In the Shadow of the Gods," and many others, along with dozens of poems.

The Iyers confirm and help clarify many of the correspondences suggested by A.E. The boundless Lir, for example, the Celtic God of the Ocean, is identified with "the Face of the Deep" of the Gospels, the Hindu *Parabrahm* or One Reality beyond all dualities. It is called *Ain-Soph* in the *Kabbalah*, the Chaos of Homer and Hesiod. It is also the night of time, from which the Celtic Sacred Hazel, the tree of being, arises. The symbol of the Great World Tree is found in many traditions, such as the *Ashvattha* tree of Hinduism, called *Yggdrasil* in Nordic mythology.

The primordial children of the unknowable Lir, called Manannan, Dana, and Angus, correspond to the divine trinities found in many traditions, the triune aspects of the Word or *Verbum*—the Pythagorean *Logos*, both precosmic and cosmic. Manannan was the Father of the Celtic gods, the Ancient of Days, corresponding to primordial consciousness, the Cosmic Mind or *Mahat* of Hinduism, and for A.E., the divine imagination. It is Manannan who emanates seven divinities, the branches of the Hazel Tree of Life. The sacred seven, also found in many traditions, are the primordial differentiations of a singular trunk, called the *Dhyanis* in Theosophical thought. They are said to be the agents of karmic and cosmic law, the intelligent noumenal causes emerging from their divine home to animate the entire hidden architecture of nature before becoming what we call visible nature.

The Celtic Dana or Danu was the mother of the gods, collectively called Tuatha (too-hoth) Dé Danann (Old Irish for "The Peoples of the Goddess Dana"). Danu corresponds to the Greek *Gaia* and, in her ultimate character, the Hindu *Mulaprakriti*: undifferentiated primordial substance providing the material basis for all life forms. The Gnostic Sophia is *Aditi-Vāc*, also divine wisdom and the hidden properties of spiritual sound and light, inseparable from the third person of the Celtic triad, Angus. Angus at one level corresponds to the Tibetan *Fohat*, cosmic energy, the Greek *Eros*, and Hindu *Kamadeva*. It is the Vedic principle of divine love which first connects being with non-being and binds spirit to matter, heaven to earth, on every plane. In the Gaelic myths, Aengus Óg is the Celtic spirit of love and beauty whose golden harp draws away all persons to discover their own relation to Deity.

A.E. gave a series of poetic names to this triune source of the Great Chain of Being: the Magician of the Beautiful, the Mount of Transfiguration, and the Mighty Mother. In line with its innumerable aspects and personifications found in the tales of Celtic mythology, he saw it as the inexhaustible fountainhead of aesthetic expression, heroic action, and mystic illumination giving rise to diverse expressions of creativity in the arts, religion, and philosophy. The search for its origin, summarized the Iyers, was A.E.'s hallowed mission as mystic and artist.

Just as H.P.B. explained regarding the Greek and Hindu pantheons, A.E. taught that the Celtic "gods" are not only universal metaphysical abstractions. They are also ever-active potencies in human and cosmic evolution as well as beings who descend into incarnation as Avatars, Adept Kings and Queens, sages, heroes, and spiritual teachers. This descent of the gods was allegorically depicted in the various cycles of Celtic Mythology recorded in medieval texts, though degraded from their origins in the oral traditions of the druidic bards. Like the Hindu Rama and Krishna, such god-like beings appear at critical turning points in human history in order to overcome the forces of darkness and ignorance threatening to envelope humanity and to guide the wheel of evolution towards universal enlightenment, "revealing the spiritual character of the race to itself".

A.E. became convinced that Ireland was as sacred as India or Tibet, one of the pivots on which mankind's spiritual destiny had turned, and was destined to soon turn again (Éire = Ireland). After his first visit to the United States in 1928, he felt the same was true of America.

The genius of the Gael is awakening after a night of troubled dreams. It returns instinctively to the beliefs of its former day and finds again the old inspiration. It seeks the gods on the mountains, still enfolded by their mantle of multitudinous traditions, or sees them flash by in the sunlit diamond airs. How strange, but how natural is all this! ...Hence, it may be, the delight with which we hear Standish O'Grady declaring that the bardic divinities will remain: "Nor, after centuries of obscurity, is their power to quicken, purify, and exalt, yet dead. Still they live and reign, and shall reign." After long centuries—the voice of a spirit ever youthful, yet older than all the gods, who with its breath of sunrise-coloured flame jewels with richest lights the visions of earth's dreamy-hearted children...no other voice has power to lure: there remain only the long heroic labours which end in companionship with the gods.

These voices do not stand for themselves alone. They are heralds before a host. No man has ever spoken with potent utterance who did not feel the secret urging of dumb, longing multitudes, whose aspirations and wishes converge on and pour themselves into the fearless heart. The thunder of the waves is deeper because the tide is rising. Those who are behind do not come only with song and tale, but with stern hearts bent on great issues, among which, not least, is the intellectual liberation of Ireland. That is an aim at which some of our rulers may well grow uneasy. Soon shall

young men, fiery-hearted, children of Eri, a new race, roll out their thoughts on the hillsides, before your very doors, O priests, calling your flocks from your dark chapels and twilight sanctuaries to a temple not built with hands, sunlit, starlit, sweet with the odour and incense of earth, from your altars call them to the altars of the hills, soon to be lit up as of old...These heroes I see emerging. Have they not come forth in every land and race when there was need? Here, too, they will arise. Ah, my darlings, you will have to fight and suffer: you must endure loneliness, the coldness of friends, the alienation of love; warmed only by the bright interior hope of a future you must toil for but may never see, letting the deed be its own reward; laying in dark places the foundations of that high and holy Eri of prophecy, the isle of enchantment, burning with druidic splendours, bright with immortal presences, with the face of the everlasting Beauty looking in upon all its ways, divine with terrestrial mingling till God and the world are one.

There waits brooding in this isle a great destiny, and to accomplish it we must have freedom of thought. That is the greatest of our needs, for thought is the lightning-conductor between the heaven-world and earth...But this high spirit is stifled everywhere by a dull infallibility which is yet unsuccessful, on its own part, in awakening inspiration...There are despotic hands in politics, in religion, in education, strangling any attempt at freedom.

With the young men who throng the literary societies the intellectual future of Ireland rests. In them are our future leaders. Out of these as from a fountain will spring—what? Will we have another generation of Irishmen at the same level as today, with everything in a state of childhood, boyish patriotism, boyish ideals, boyish humour? Or will they assimilate the aged thought of the world and apply it to the needs of their own land? I remember reading somewhere a description by Turgenieff of his contemporaries as a young man; how they sat in garrets, drinking execrably bad coffee or tea. But what thoughts! They talked of God, of humanity, of Holy Russia; and out of such groups of young men, out of their discussions, emanated that vast unrest which has troubled Europe and will trouble it still more....What is the ideal of Ireland as a nation? It drifts from mind to mind, a phantom thought lacking a spirit, but a spirit which will surely incarnate...Meanwhile we must fight for intellectual freedom; we must strive to formulate to ourselves what it is we really wish for here, until at last the ideal becomes no more phantasmal but living; until our voices in aspiration are heard in every land, and the nations become aware of a new presence amid their councils, a last and most beautiful figure, as one after the cross of pain, after the shadowy terrors, with thorn-marks on the brow from a crown flung aside, but now radiant, ennobled after suffering, Eri, the love of so many dreamers, priestess of the mysteries, with the chant of beauty on her lips and the heart of nature beating in her heart.

"Priest or Hero?", May 1897

At the end of the nineteenth century, two monstrous issues racked the Irish countryside: poverty and faction. The Great Famine of the 1840s was still a living memory, and large-scale emigration had dwindled the population to about half the pre-Famine level. The bulk of the population worked the land and tried to make a meager living by farming inefficiently on tiny

plots. Many of them lived in small cottages and some in one-room mud or stone cabins with a single window. Some shared their homes with farm animals, even pigs and cattle. A journey to the nearest small town did little to brighten peasant life. Devoid of culture, such villages had nothing to offer but drab, dirty streets, shops meagerly stocked with a jumble of overpriced goods, and the false solace of a public house.

The poverty was greatly aggravated by fierce antagonisms, both economic and religious. While the bulk of the land was owned by a Protestant aristocracy, most of the tenants, except in Ulster, were Catholic. While the proximate cause of the Great Starvation had been a potato blight that infected crops throughout Europe, the longer-term cause in Ireland was the narrow-sighted policy of wealthy British absentee landlords who insisted on a crop of potatoes only—in order to maximize profits. Fishing was also made illegal. Once the potato went bad, there was little else to eat. The question of Home Rule thus often dominated political discourse.

Sir Horace Curzon Plunkett (1854–1932) was an Anglo-Irish Oxford graduate who devoted his adult life to the service of his countrymen. His altruistic devotion made it easy to see why he and A.E. should have been mutually attracted. Plunkett was well aware that land reform alone would not make the small farmer prosperous. The typical Irish farmer was technically backward in both method and financial practices. So were the country shopkeepers on whom they depended. Plunkett warned that the gombeen man—the moneylender who was usually also a shopkeeper—would replace the greedy landlord. Instead, he sought to establish a series of small, community-based Raiffeisen cooperatives.

Friedrich Raiffeisen founded the first rural credit union in 1864 in Flammersfeld, Germany. Motivated by the misery of the poor during the winter famine of 1846–1847, he founded a community-built bakery and distributed bread on credit to the poorest amongst the population. This was not simple charity, but benevolent assistance. Credit meant the poor would also need to assist with bread-making or other labor in payment. Raiffeisen was convinced that in order to fight poverty one should fight dependency first. Based on this idea, he came up with the three "S" formula: self-help, self-governance, and self-responsibility. This applied to the policy of communal microlending as well. The Raiffeisen system became the basis of co-op banking all over Europe, America, and eventually India.

In 1894 Plunkett founded the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS) to promote the development of such cooperative institutions in rural Ireland. He soon began to feel that its greatest benefits were moral. Catholics and Protestants, Nationalists and Unionists were

beginning to work harmoniously together in the cooperative societies, and members were becoming more self-reliant and self-confident, taking a new pride in their country.

In 1897, A.E. accepted a position under Plunkett, fully concurring in his aims and ideals, and was determined to work for human brotherhood through the cooperative movement. Two other students of the Hermetic Society took employment in the IAOS as well. Along with organizing on behalf of communal material welfare, Russell sought a cultural renewal through rural education. In his eyes, this was inseparable from a true spiritual revival centered on Gaelic ancient history and folklore. These were no fairy tales at all, he was convinced, but druidic wisdom clothed in story, still rich with the mysteries of nature, with moral ideals and nobilities that would lift the spirit. Revived through literature, art, and theater, knowledge of Ireland's ancient heritage could be made available to the poor. In this way, he was convinced, he would help prepare Irish men and women for the great destiny which awaited them. Russell accepted only a small salary for his commitment, claiming that no man deserved more for his labor.

Already well versed in business methods, A.E. mastered the principles of communal credit without difficulty and set off for Mayo in December 1897, at a time when only three credit banks existed in Ireland. Years later, using the editorial "we," he wrote an account of his first formal encounter with the peasants of the West:

...we prepared our first co-operative speech with great care, and delivered it with fervour, and, as we believed, eloquence, to an audience of Mayo farmers, and sat down flushed and expectant of many converts. Out of a brooding silence rose the parish priest, who put matters straight. 'What he means to say is, that if any of you want a pound to buy young pigs he can get the loan of it by paying one penny.' And he went on to reduce our eloquence to the simplest English. That was a never to be forgotten lesson. It was that boiling down of our remarks which created the society in that district. Never again did we strive to be eloquent when organizing...

The Irish Homestead, Jan. 1909

A.E.'s early fury against the priests was softened by his discovery of the loving care with which the Irish clergy of all denominations ministered to the needs of their poorest parishioners. With their assistance, Russell became a beloved prophet of the cooperatives, traveling each year all over Ireland. Along with a keen understanding of the practicalities, he always emphasized that the basis of the cooperative movement "was the divine law of brotherhood, and if each lent a hand to each, the industrial redemption of Ireland would be a certainty".

Thirteen years later, there were over 900 cooperative societies in Ireland representing over 100,000 members and 300 agricultural credit banks with an annual turnover of £3.3 million pounds (over 100 million in today's currency). Besides devising unique plans for district

cooperatives, counseling their establishment and maintenance, A.E. later envisioned a day when the whole of Ireland would be united in a great Commonwealth. Within each district, individuals would develop a deep sense of local community while sharing an intensity of life such as had existed in the city-states of ancient Greece and medieval Italy. At the same time, each district would be linked in a vast network of such cooperatives, allowing for both socialist and capitalistic enterprise.

Though the Irish cooperatives were adamantly apolitical, A.E. envisioned them as the basis of a harmonic system wherein a democratically elected central parliament would arbitrate when separate interests clashed, would rule in other fields, and would maintain the personal liberty of citizens. The greatest need of a democracy, he felt, was for a respected elite, an "aristocracy based on merit, on clarity and brightness of intellect, altruistic insight and purity of moral character," for authentic voices that could speak and inspire on behalf of the whole. He believed this to be a model in line with that established by the ancient Gaelic clans.

Despite the immediate successes, this was grueling work, with travel by open carriage or by foot, without healthy meals or a clean place to rest. But Russell was seeking to reawaken the latent soul-force of a nation, still flickering in the heart of many a peasant. Occasionally Russell also encountered comic incidents. In one case a man asked for a loan from the credit union in order to buy a suit. When the democratically elected committee appointed to decide on such matters warned that this was not productive, the young farmer explained that it would result in his marrying a girl who owned two acres, a pig, and twenty-five pounds. He was given the loan.

In 1908 H.F. Norman, a coworker in the co-op movement, hearing A.E. address a meeting of about forty farmers in County Cavan, observed:

...the spare figure bent above a listening audience, to whom listening seems indeed an unwonted activity ... As he diagnose[s] for them their common economic infirmity, patiently and simply expounding the technique of the remedy, his face is grave and taut...eloquent the message but never rhetorical, though now, at the close, as his voice ascends into its treble notes, he is appealing to these rough handed, dark visaged, sombre, realistic, unprosperous men of the spade and hoe to think rather of each other and of their mutual hopes and difficulties than of their own several toils and needs ... the audience sits tense, rapt, elevated. His dream of brotherhood descends on them. They rise to it. When he ends, there is a relief of emotional tension, an intake of deep breath, such as follows the close of a big symphony.

Some peasants once missed the church service on a minor festival to hear A.E., and one of them made the excuse to the parish priest: "Shure, an' wasn't we doin' just as good as to be at

Mass, listenin' as we was to Jarge's sermon...?" The priest who told the story concluded by admitting, "And, in the name of God I think they were".

Horace Plunkett wrote of A.E.: "I have never seen such a natural self-effacement – and this for the service of humanity upon no scheme of compensation here or hereafter...he outdreams us all..."

Russell also thrilled in befriending farming families who, like himself, could sometimes glimpse the elemental fairies and the immortal presences in their midst. On one occasion a handsome old farmer named Caden More told him how in his youth he had spent a night in a faery palace underneath Mount Nephin, and how he had once seen Queen Maev, whom he called "the Beauty of all beauty," a local personification of the earth goddess representing the Sacred Isle itself. This inspired A.E.'s lilting poem "The Gates of Dreamland".

The Gates of Dreamland

*It's a lonely road through bogland to the lake at Carrowmore, And a sleeper there lies dreaming
where the water laps the shore. Though the moth-wings of the twilight in their purple are unfurled,
Yet his sleep is filled with music by the Masters of the World...*

*'Though your Colleen's heart be tender a tenderer heart is near, What's the starlight in her
glances when the stars are shining here? Who would kiss the fading shadow when the flower face
glows above? 'Tis the Beauty of all Beauty that is calling for your love!'*

*Oh, the mountain gates of dreamland have open once again, And the sound of song and dancing
falls upon the ears of men, And the Land of Youth lies gleaming, lit with rainbow light and mirth,
And the old enchantment lingers in the honey heart of earth..."*

Is this dream or real? Russell asked the reader. His reply: "Do not ask me too strictly. All things are dream save only the spirit which gazes on the phantasmagoria, and those dreams endure most which most fitly accord with its immortality".

After only a few months, Plunkett realized that A.E.'s extraordinary abilities fitted him for more than the founding of credit banks, and he now appointed him Assistant Secretary to the Organisation in the Dublin office. In 1905, this led to his becoming the editor of The Irish Homestead, a nonprofit weekly newspaper founded by Plunkett, which served to disseminate both world news and cooperative news, rural science, and technical details of progressive farming practices.

The editorship was an exacting task, and A.E. transformed it into a more broadly educative one. Increasingly, it included poems and short stories, historic or mythic, along with

commentary on cultural events. In time, the newspaper grew to an international readership. George Bernard Shaw called it "the best weekly paper of its kind in the world".

When government and advertising funding subsided in 1923, *The Homestead* evolved into *The Irish Statesman*, also a weekly paper which went on for another seven years. Besides articles by Russell, contributors included the best in contemporary Irish writing, including poetry, fiction, and nonfiction. In these pages A.E. solidified his international acclaim not only as spokesman of the agricultural cooperatives, but as a leading intellect, creative idealist, wise connoisseur of world culture, and voice of the national conscience.

In addition, besides Plunkett, A.E. found himself in company with President Theodore Roosevelt, the Russian anarchist Kropotkin, as well as Gandhi and Tolstoy, all of whom were seeking a humane alternative to the grim, machine-like society based on urban industry. Russell pointed to an awful warning: the life of Britain's industrial masses, a life "further off from beauty, more remote from spirit, more alien from deity than that led by any people hitherto in the memory of the world".

In June 1898, Russell had taken an hour off work to marry Violet North, a poet, mystic, and devoted student of Theosophy. So little publicity was given to the occasion that when Yeats met the couple a few days later, A.E. casually announced, "By the way, I may as well tell you we are married!" In the years following, the couple gave birth to four children, two of whom tragically died in childhood. With all this going on, A.E.'s family home was at the same time becoming one of the intellectual hubs of Dublin, a city which was on the threshold of a period so brilliantly creative that it now is almost legendary.

Despite incessant travel to attend cooperative meetings throughout Ireland and his work as editor, while also painting and writing both poetry and prose, A.E. was tirelessly active in several literary, dramatic, and artistic circles in Dublin and still running the Hermetic Society. It was in these circles, wrote Summerfield, that the embryo of a new Ireland was being born. While A.E. enjoyed both friendship and opposition from some of the brightest minds and mature writers like Yeats and James Joyce, Lady Gregory and Austin Clarke, he also gathered round him a circle of young men and women who were just discovering the pleasure of putting words together. To these poets in the making, he was mystic prophet, schoolmaster, and companion. From the testimony of the many who benefited, A.E.'s generosity in suggesting ideas, subjects, and plots to other writers was boundless, and he never revealed what he had contributed to their works.

Both his office and home became places of pilgrimage for innumerable travelers, Irish and foreign—statesmen, artists, playwrights, and farmers who wished to meet the "formidably accomplished but invariably approachable sage". In a country seething with many hatreds, men

who were irreconcilable political enemies met peacefully there. On Sunday nights in the Russells' crowded living room, ideas of all kinds—economic, political, mystical, and literary—were freely discussed and intertwined. The uninterrupted discourse would continue into the early hours of the morning. L.A.G. Strong, an author and art critic for the *Irish Times*, declared that A.E. "was the best, wisest, and wittiest talker I ever listened to in Paris, London, or elsewhere"; his mind seemed to be "a fountain of fire casting beauty up everlastingly into the air".

An attempt to summarize the historic changes that took place in Ireland, Europe, and America in the last 22 years of Russell's life would require several essays. This period included the events leading up to the establishment of the first National Theatre in Ireland, the Dublin Lock-Out, the First World War (1914–1918), the Easter Rising (1916), the Irish War of Independence (1919), and the founding of the Irish Free State (1922). In his book on this period, Nicholas Allen traces the impact of Russell's ever-flowing waterfall of ideas and keen observations. In an era prior to radio and television, where pamphlets, periodicals, and books were the most effective means of widespread public influence, he finds A.E.'s voice as writer and editor to be focused upon and impacting every major controversy.

Even prior to WWI, A.E. realized the Commonwealth he envisioned would not be realized in his lifetime. Deeply opposed to violence as a form of conflict resolution, he watched while much of what he helped to build was destroyed by his countrymen. He became "...quite certain that the spirit of the modern world and modern education will very soon put an end to the folk imagination and the folk memory... After that the farmer's boy will be thinking of scientific farming and his literature will be the modern novel and the daily newspaper".

In late July 1914, A.E. declared that the fate of Europe depended on a handful of mediocrities, ignorant middlemen posing as leaders who perhaps wielded the power of life and death over civilization itself. He reflected: "...when people have no clear conception of a social order or a peculiar civilization to be built up, and are maneuvered into a conflict which may result in the destruction of such forms of civilization as they possess, it seems to us that the struggle is like 'a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury signifying nothing'".

Forty-eight hours after these words were published, Germany invaded Belgium, and a day later, on August 4th, the United Kingdom declared war on Germany. As Ireland sank into chaos, Russell turned his attention and hopes towards America, his last trip to the U.S. occurring just weeks before he passed away.

As William Penn wrote: "They that love beyond the World, cannot be separated by it. Death cannot kill what never dies". Russell never lost faith in the ideals and living mystic realities which he found at the roots of life, buried beneath the veils of the visible twilight. His visionary

experiences in the Irish hills, in the halls of Pim's, and in deep meditation convinced him that the cosmic forces and immortal heroes which ancient bards, rishis, and seers intimated are ever present and can make themselves known to the inner eye of the watchful mind and heart. Sustained by a boundless love and perpetual fountainhead of beauty, truth, and goodness, they will rise again to move our souls to help give birth to civilizations yet unguessed.

In the midst of WWI, A.E. published his eighth book of poetry, titled *Gods of War*. Echoing the affirmation that Blavatsky made regarding the periodical renewal of ancient wisdom, the final poem ends with a plea for such an incarnation before the world enters the longest, darkest portion of the Kali Yuga or Iron Age:

*Send forth, who promised long ago,
'I will not leave thee or forsake,'
Someone to whom our hearts may flow
With adoration, though we make
The crucifixion be the sign,
The meed of all the kingly line.*

*The morning stars were heard to sing
When man towered golden in the prime.
One equal memory let us bring
Before we face our night in time.
Grant us one only evening star,
The iron age's avatar.*

Oliver Gogarty was a lifelong friend, poet, author, and later Senator of an independent Ireland who, along with P.L. Travers, came to Russell's bedside in his final days as he was dying from cancer. Gogarty called Russell "the Angelic Anarchist" and was irresistibly reminded of the death of Socrates:

His calm fortitude, his loveliness, made even his surgeon, whose skill must defend itself against sentimentality, turn away for a moment in tears ... His friends were broken-hearted, but he was unmoved. The change in his countenance was remarkable, and the way the mind threw off the veils of death to deepen the great blue light in the eyes as he rejoiced at seeing for a moment a friend's face was something to impress the memory for ever. The hero in the man looked out, and it was his friends who had to brace themselves against life with its loss.

Kirk Gradin