would pass. He brought me to see another doctor whose name I forget. As we sat in this man's little dispensary near Tottenham Court Road, he told us of a working man who had just gone out. The working man, coming out of a music hall with his wife, had been arrested on a charge of drunkenness. He had chaffed the policeman. It had all happened that moment and he asked for a certificate of sobriety. 'Was he sober?' said Dr Ryan. 'Oh, perfectly.' 'And did you give him the certificate?' 'Oh no, the police are the best friends I have.' I did not feel that he would go far with us in our work, but in Dr Mark Ryan I discovered a very touching benevolence. He was not an able man but had great influence because during his long life he had befriended many Irishmen, often giving them the money to set them up in business. Lionel Johnson, my most intimate friend through these years, came with me to see him and felt the charm of that man who tolerated fools too gladly because of a nature naturally indulgent. I found he had a naive and touching faith in men who were better educated, and as yet he had not, as a little later, fallen under the influence of a clever, rather mad rogue.\(^1\) His associates in this new secret society were almost all doctors, peasant or half-peasant in origin, and none had any genuine culture. In Ireland it was just such men, though of a younger generation, who had understood my ideas. Rolleston and Johnson and I had perhaps the instrument we had been looking for.

A few weeks, however, after my initiation — not a very ceremonious matter — Rolleston resigned. A young poetess, a Miss Alice Milligan,\(^2\) had dreamed one night that he was in danger of arrest — no doubt his handsome face had set her dreaming. He had not much belief in dreams, but then it was plain that his belief in his cause was even fainter, and I had even to return to him every scrap of writing I had ever had of him for fear that his pleasant, innocent correspondence contained anything which [the] government might use against him.

At the debates of the Irish Literary Society I made violent speeches. The Society was supposed to be non-political; that had been my own decision, for I had thought that whereas the Dublin

---

\(^1\) See p. 110, n. 1, on Frank Hugh O'Donnell.

\(^2\) Novelist, poet, playwright (1866–1933), a friend of George Russell (AE) who edited her *Hero Lays* (Dublin, Maunsel, 1908).
Society would stagnate without politics the London Society could best hold together as an Irish meeting-place in a strange land. I never broke the rule, which applied to the politics of the hour only, but politics was implied in almost all I said. Besides my quarrel with the older men, I had a blind anger against Unionist Ireland. They had opposed to our movement their mere weight and indifference, and had written and spoken as if the finest literature of Ireland — certain old ballads in English, the Gaelic heroic tales, the new literature of AE and Johnson, Standish O'Grady, or myself — was itself provincial and barbarous. They had done this not in the interest, I repeated again and again, of Shakespeare and Milton, but of those third-rate English novelists who were almost their only reading. What was happening in literature, I repeated again and again, was happening through the whole life of the country. An imitation of the habits of thought, the character, the manners, the opinions — and these never at their best — of an alien people was preventing the national character taking its own natural form, and this imitation was spread by what I called a system of bribery. Appointments, success of all kinds, came only to these; the springs of national life ran dry.

I found myself unpopular, and suffered, discovering that if men speak much ill of you it makes at moments a part of the image of yourself — that is your only support against the world — and that you see yourself too as if with hostile eyes. I remember some judge resigning from the committee after some speech of mine. I had not come to understand that fine things cannot be torn out of the hostile netting, but must be slowly disentangled with delicate fingers. What made things worse was that I had, a romantic in all, a cult of passion. In the speech that made the judge resign I had described the dishonest figures of Swift’s attack on Wood’s half-pence and, making that my text, had argued that, because no sane man is permitted to lie knowing[ly], God made certain men mad, and that it was these men — daemon-possessed as I said — who, possessing truths of passion that were intellectual falsehoods, had created nations.

In private conversation if politics were the theme, or above all any of those ideas of my own movement which implied politics, I would lose my temper, and [bc] miserable afterwards for hours.

In committee meetings, on the other hand, where the technical forms gave me time to deliberate, I had great influence and was generally the governing mind. I asked Lionel Johnson to criticize my manner there, and he said, ‘It has but one defect; it is somewhat too suave.’

XXX

I had received while at Sligo many letters from Diana Vernon, kind letters that gave me a sense of half-conscious excitement. I remember after one such letter asking some country woman to throw the tea leaves for me and my disappointment at the vagueness of the oracle. (I think Mary Battle, my uncle’s second-sighted servant, was again ill and away.) She was to tell me later on that my letters were unconscious love-letters, and I was taken by surprise at the description. I do not know how long after my return the conversation that was to decide so much in my life took place. I had found the Rhymers who had introduced me under the influence of drink,1 speaking vaguely and with vague movements, and while we were speaking this recent memory came back. She spoke of her pagan life in a way that made me believe that she had had many lovers and loathed her life. I thought of that young man so nearly related. Here is the same weakness, I thought; two souls so distinguished and contemplative that the common world seems empty. What is there left but sanctity, or some satisfying affection, or mere dissipation? — ‘Folly the comforter,’ some Elizabethan had called it. Her beauty, dark and still, had the nobility of defeated things, and how could it help but wring my heart? I took a fortnight to decide what I should do.

I was poor and it would be a hard struggle if I asked her [to] come away, and perhaps after all I would but add my tragedy to hers, for she might return to that evil life. But, after all, if I could not get the woman I loved, it would be a comfort even but for a little while to devote myself to another. No doubt my excited senses had their share in the argument, but it was an unconscious one. At the end of the fortnight I asked her to leave home with me. She became very gay and joyous and a few days later praised me [for] what she thought

1 ‘drugs’ deleted. 2 Diana Vernon.