



years, returning to his native country in 1908, when he obtained the post of resident medical officer at the Home Sanatorium, Southbourne, Bournemouth, which he continued to hold until 1923, when, owing to the death of the proprietor, the Sanatorium was closed and Esslemont found himself without medical occupation.

In 1924 he received a warm invitation from Shoghi Effendi, Guardian of the Bahá'í Cause, asking him to spend the winter at Haifa, and early in November he left London, proceeding direct to Port Said. Writing from Malta, the only port of call, on November 15th, Esslemont spoke of a delightful voyage and of feeling much improved in health. He spent a day or two in Port Said, where he was most warmly received by the friends, and arrived at Haifa on November 21st. Here he at once devoted himself to the work of assisting Shoghi Effendi in his multifarious correspondence, which work he continued in spite of ill-health until the end.

Such is a brief account of the material side of Esslemont's life; it remains now to say something of the spiritual side, which continues and will continue for evermore. Whilst at Bournemouth in 1912 Esslemont, in association with several other doctors, took up the question of State medical service and in 1914 he read a paper on this subject before the British Medical Association at its meeting at Bournemouth, which by the attention it aroused helped greatly the deliberations of the Advisory Committee on Public Health. The wife of one of Esslemont's associates in this work, who had met 'Abdu'l-Bahá in London in 1911, first mentioned the Bahá'í Cause to Esslemont

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in December, 1914, and lent him some pamphlets. He had been searching for Truth in many directions, but without finding that which could satisfy his innate religious feeling; on hearing, however, the Bahá'í message he was at once impressed by its beauty and thoroughness; so much so that without delay he procured all books in English which dealt with the subject. Most truly applicable to Esslemont are the words of the Beloved Master: "Blessed is he that the Word of God had reached him and had found his soul 'awake.'"

His progress in the study of the Sacred Books was therefore rapid, for already in 1915 he was writing to the lady abovementioned recommending what books she should read; and in February, 1916, little more than a twelvemonth after he himself first received the Glad Tidings, he wrote at length to a Bahá'í friend in Manchester in terms which show how thoroughly he had accepted the Baha teachings and how profoundly he had already studied them. Thus he writes:

"We can each become like our friend if we make the great surrender of self and selfishness and become willing channels for the Divine Spirit. There is no limit to what the human spirit can achieve in the strength of Divine Inspiration. The germ of the Divine Nature is in every man; only most of us are not manifesting it. Instead, we are smothering it. It is like a plant, which needs sun and rain for its growth, the Sun and Rain of the Divine Love and Bounty. We have the power either to open our hearts to that Love and Bounty or

to reject them. Only by turning our attention and interest away from the world and turning them to God can we grow in spirit. Such turning means attending to the reality and inner significance of things instead of to the outward appearance. It means that our interest in and love for everything in all God's universe should vastly increase, but that we should regard all outward appearances but as the garments of the inner realities, as dawning places for the Glory of God. Oh! may people all over the world soon turn to God, as revealed in Bahá'u'lláh, with humble and contrite hearts, begging for His forgiveness and blessing and imploring His mercy and bounty! Then shall His Kingdom come in men's hearts and the whole world become one home and all mankind one family."

This extract from one of Esslemont's early letters shows so clearly the spirit which illumined: all his words and actions, that its insertion here will be forgiven by those who read his stirring admonition and appeal. That he himself did in very truth turn to God as revealed by Bahá'u'lláh, and that having so turned, he never deviated by one hair's breadth from the path of love and righteousness is a fact known to those who had the privilege of meeting him and listening to his glowing talks as well as to those who are acquainted with him only through his writings inspired as they are with that same loving spirit which was so apparent to those who knew him personally.

Esslemont's work as a personal teacher, apart from his letters, began in Bournemouth, where a group of adherents to the Cause gathered under his auspices, resulting in the formation of a Spiritual Assembly of which he was the first chairman, a position he continued to occupy until he left England in 1924. In this connection it may be mentioned that he was also the representative of the Bournemouth group on the National Spiritual Assembly of England, of which body he became

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Vice-President, and which benefited much by his counsel and advice.

Not satisfied with studying the Bahá'í writings for himself alone, which led him to learn Persian so as to read them in the original language, Esslemont set about writing for the instruction of others. The first nine chapters of his justly celebrated book, "Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era," which were written during the World War, were submitted to the Beloved Master when peace led to the reopening of communications with Haifa, with the result that Esslemont received an invitation from 'Abdu'l-Bahá to visit Haifa, which he did in the winter of 1919-20. During this visit the Beloved Master discussed the book with the author, making suggestions for its improvement, and indeed read through and revised some three and a half chapters, which had been translated into Persian for the purpose.

The third chapter relating to Bahá'u'lláh was first published as a separate pamphlet, and it was proposed to issue a new edition on the occasion of the Conference on some living religions within the British Empire which was held in London in the autumn of 1924; on consideration, however, it appeared that a

more general pamphlet would be both more appropriate and more useful, and thus “Bahá’u’lláh and His Message” came to be written by Esslemont, who also wrote the small leaflet, “What Is the Bahá’í Movement?”

It was not only by his printed works that Esslemont became known to the Bahá’í world, for he was an indefatigable and voluminous correspondent not only in English, but also in Esperanto, of which universal language he was a complete master. Amongst his last labors during his stay at Haifa in 1925 was the revision of the Esperanto translation of the abovementioned leaflet which had been prepared for the meeting of the Universal Esperanto Congress at Geneva in August of that year. Another work on which he was also engaged towards the close of his earthly career was the translation into German of his large book.

These evidences of Esslemont’s labors in the service of the Cause remain open to all, but of the loving services which he so gladly and selflessly rendered to all with whom he came into personal contact, only they can give full account from the inmost recesses of their hearts; but surely all whom he helped will forever bear in mind the inestimable benefits conferred upon them by his words, and more, perhaps, by his living example of what a true Bahá’í should be, for he was nigh unsurpassed in selflessness, in utter devotion and obedience to the Bahá’í teachings, in love and trustfulness to all his fellows.

No better appreciation of Dr. Esslemont and of his services to the Bahá’í Cause can be given than that contained in the following letter which the Guardian of the Bahá’í Cause wrote after the passing of him who loved the Cause so well and served it so faithfully:

“It is with feelings of overwhelming sorrow that I communicate to you the news of yet another loss which the Almighty, in His inscrutable wisdom, has chosen to inflict upon our beloved Cause. On the 22nd of November, 1925 — that memorable and sacred day in which the Bahá’ís of the Orient celebrated the twin Festivals of the Declaration of the Báb and the Birthday of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá — Dr. John E. Esslemont passed on to the Abha Kingdom. His end was as swift as it was unexpected. Suffering from the effects of a chronic and insidious disease, he fell at last a victim to the inevitable complications that ensued, the fatal course of which neither the efforts of

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vigilant physicians nor the devoted cares of his many friends could possibly deflect.

“He bore his sufferings with admirable fortitude, with calm resignation and courage. Though convinced that his ailments would never henceforth forsake him, yet many a time he revealed a burning desire that the friends residing in the Holy Land should, while visiting the Shrines, implore the All-Merciful to prolong his days that he may bring to a fuller completion his humble share of service to the Threshold of Bahá’u’lláh. To this noble request all hearts warmly responded. But this was not to be. His close association with my work in Haifa, in which I had placed fondest hopes, was suddenly cut short. His book,

however, an abiding monument to his pure intention, will, alone, inspire generations yet unborn to tread the path of truth and service as steadfastly and as unostentatiously as was trodden by its beloved author. The Cause he loved so well he served even unto his Last day with exemplary faith and unstinted devotion. His tenacity of faith, his high integrity, his self-effacement, his industry and painstaking labors were traits of a character the noble qualities of which will live and live forever after him. To me personally he was the warmest of friends, a trusted counsellor, an indefatigable collaborator, lovable companion.

“With tearful eyes I supplicate at the Threshold of Bahá’u’lláh — and request you all to join — in my ardent prayers, for the fuller unfolding in the realms beyond of a soul that has already achieved so high a spiritual standing in this world. For by the beauty of his character, by his knowledge of the Cause, by the conspicuous achievements of his book, he has immortalized his name, and by sheer merit deserved to rank as one of the Hands of the Cause of God.

“He has been laid to rest in the heart of that beautifully situated Bahá’í burial ground at the foot of Carmel, close to the mortal remains of that venerable soul, Haji Mirza Vakilú’d-Dawlih, the illustrious cousin of the Bab and chief builder of the Mashriqu’l-Adhkar of ‘Ishqabad. Pilgrims visiting his grave from far and near will, with pride and gratitude, do honor to a name that adorned the annals of an immortal Cause.

“May he eternally rest in peace.”

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