



"The prayer seemed to answer all the longings of my heart.

After that we met for three successive evenings. ... The third evening after meeting with Mrs. Dixon, when I retired to my room, sleep did not come. "That night (Nov. 26, 1900) an overwhelming realization came to me, which was neither a dream nor vision, that Christ had come on the earth.""

When Agnes told Mrs. Dixon of her epiphany she was taught some details of the Bahá'í revelation. It was the practice in those days to apply for membership directly to the head of the Bahá'í Faith, Abdul-Baha1. Ms. Alexander wrote to 'Abdu'l-Bahá and He accepted her membership in the Bahá'í worldwide community.

Ms. Alexander received further deepening in her new faith through Bahá'í groups in Paris, France and in Eliot, Maine in the U.S. On December 26, 1901 she returned home to Hawaii thereby becoming the first Bahá'í to set foot in those islands.

In the spring of 1913 Agnes Alexander's parents died. She left Hawaii with the intention of becoming a teacher of the Bahá'í Faith in some foreign land. Sometime in October, 1913 Ms. Alexander was visiting Mrs. May (Bolles) Maxwell in Montreal, Canada when she came across a passage from 'Abdu'l-Bahá in which he encouraged the study of Esperanto.<sup>2</sup> "From that moment there was ignited in my heart the desire to obey His request."<sup>3</sup>

During the winter of 1913-1914 Agnes lived in Brooklyn, New York. It was there she received a Tablet from 'Abdu'l-Bahá directing her to take the Bahá'í teachings to Japan. He said, "if thou travellest toward Japan unquestionably Divine confirmations shall descend upon thee. . ."4 During that same winter in Brooklyn she received her first instruction in Esperanto from Mr. and Mrs. Rufus W. Powell, two Brooklyn Bahá'ís.<sup>5</sup>

In May, 1914, Ms. Alexander sailed from New York to Genoa, Italy. Mrs. Rufus Powell came to see her off. She brought Agnes "an Esperanto student book, which she had covered with linen on which she had embroidered a green star. The precious little book . . . gave me the foundation of the Esperanto language."<sup>6</sup> From that time forth Ms. Alexander studied Esperanto on her own becoming accomplished in the new language.

While in Locarno, Italy during the summer of 1914, Ms. Alexander joined the Universal Esperanto Association (UEA). It was through her UEA membership that she met a Russian Esperantist in Geneva. When Agnes told the woman that she was headed to Japan the lady asked her to look up Vasily Eroshenko<sup>7</sup>, a blind Russian Esperantist living in Tokyo.

When Agnes reached Tokyo she found the twenty-four year old Mr. Eroshenko. "He is the first fruits of my joining the Universal Esperanto Association."<sup>8</sup> Eroshenko became the means by which Ms. Alexander was able to teach the Bahá'í Faith to both the blind and female Japanese. "It was he who helped me to learn English and Esperanto Braille,<sup>9</sup> bringing me in

close touch with the blind of Japan. It was through his effort that I had the joy of sharing the Bahá'í Message with Tokujiro Torii<sup>10</sup> and through him with the blind of Japan. It was he who introduced me to the writer, U.[jaku] Akita, who was sympathetic to the Cause, and wrote magazine articles through which the first Japanese young woman accepted the Bahá'í Message."<sup>11</sup>

Ms. Alexander would read the Bahá'í teachings in English to Eroshenko and he would take them down in English Braille. From these Braille renderings he then translated the words into Esperanto so they could be published in the Japanese Esperanto newspaper, *La Orienta Azio*. This collaboration also resulted in the translation of Bahá'u'lláh's mystic composition *The Hidden Words* into Esperanto.

Ms. Alexander attended her first Esperanto meeting in Japan on February 4, 1915. She took along a copy of the Bahá'í Revelation in Esperanto. She later wrote of Esperanto:

God used this language, which came into the world through the Revelation of Bahá'u'lláh, to spread His Message in Japan. That night, two weeks after I had reached Tokyo, when I attended the first Esperanto meeting in Japan, was the beginning of my work in making the Bahá'í teachings known among the Esperantists of Japan. From the northern island of Hokkaido to Nagasaki in Kyushu, as well as Korea, the Message of Bahá'u'lláh was heard, for Esperanto was more widely spread in Japan than in any country outside of Russia.<sup>12</sup>

In the summer of 1918 Ms. Alexander was the invited guest of the Esperanto Association of North America which met at Green Acre in Maine. She spoke on the Esperantists of Japan. "This gave me a wonderful opportunity, not only in making a better understanding between the Esperantists of the two countries, but in bringing to their attention the Bahá'í teachings and words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá concerning a universal language. When I quoted the words of 'Abdu'l-Bahá, they were received with great applause."<sup>13</sup>

Ms. Alexander was ever thankful to Esperanto as it was her connection to the Japanese people and the precious means for disseminating the Bahá'í teachings. She said, "Through the wonderful means of Esperanto, the Bahá'í Message became known in the important centers of Japan, where it met with keen response and no prejudice."<sup>14</sup>

Agnes was also active in promoting the Bahá'í teachings through Esperanto in Korea and China. As early as 1921 a China-born Korean who was living in Tokyo asked Ms. Alexander if she would teach Esperanto to a group of Chinese at the Chinese YMCA. She accepted and taught the sixteen students Esperanto conversation.<sup>15</sup> Following the great Japanese earthquake of 1 September 1923, which took place during the Esperanto convention, Agnes left Japan with her sister and teamed up with the famous Bahá'í, Martha Root,<sup>16</sup> in Peiping (Beijing) China. On a number of occasions they spoke of the Bahá'í Faith at an Esperanto school in Peiping where Martha had been

assisting in the teaching of English.<sup>17</sup>

Ms. Alexander was a good friend and correspondent of Lidia Zamenhof, 18 daughter of Esperanto's creator who had become an ardent Bahá'í. Ms. Zamenhof translated the basic Bahá'í text, Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era, by John Esslemont, into Esperanto. Ms. Alexander's review of the translation was published in the Japanese Esperanto magazine, *Oriente Revuo* along with a picture of Lidia.<sup>19</sup>

Agnes Baldwin Alexander moved back and forth between Hawaii and Japan numerous times between 1914 and 1967. All the while she continued her Bahá'í work through its conduit: Esperanto. In July 1965, as she was preparing to attend the World Congress of Esperantists in Tokyo, she fell and broke her hip.<sup>20</sup> She was brought home to Honolulu in 1967 where she lived out her last four years in a retirement residence that overlooked the site of her birth.

On the first day of January, 1971 her spirit winged its flight to the world of never-fading splendour. She was 95. She was buried behind Hawaii's historic Kawaihāo Church with her missionary forebears with whom she was united by service both in life and in death.

Ms. Alexander's contributions to the cause of Esperanto in Southeast Asia would be difficult to exaggerate. It became her principal means of piercing the barrier of traditional languages. With it she extended to women, the blind and mainstream Japanese, Chinese and Koreans the healing Message of Bahá'u'lláh. She taught its language in schools, assisted in its Esperanto translations of key Bahá'í works, gave radio broadcasts<sup>[21 Ibid. p.76.22]</sup> in its tongue, sang its songs and shared warm fellowship with its adherents in many lands.

Notes:

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Family tree, from Wikipedia:

William P. Alexander

(1805–1884)

Mary Ann McKinney

(1810–1888)

Amos Starr Cooke

(1810–1871)

Juliette Montague

(1812–1896)

Dwight Baldwin

(1798–1886)

Charlotte Fowler

(1805–1873)

J. W. Smith

(1810–1887)

David Dwight Baldwin

(1831–1912)

W. O. Smith

(1848–1929)

William D. Alexander

(1833–1913)

Abigail Baldwin

(1847–1912)

Samuel T. Alexander

(1836–1904)

Martha Eliza Cooke

Ann Elizabeth Alexander

(1843–1940)

Henry P. Baldwin

(1842–1911)

Emily Whitney Alexander

(1846–1943)

Agnes Alexander

(1875–1971)

Annie Montague Alexander

(1867–1950)

C.W. Dickey

(1871–1942)

Belle Dickey

(1880–1972)

James Dole

(1877–1958)

Henry Alexander Baldwin

(1871–1946)

Ethel Frances Smith

(1879–1967)

J. Walter Cameron

(1895–1976)

Francis Baldwin

(1904–1996)

Colin C. Cameron

(1927–1992)

(Kapalua)

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