

SHINING LAMP

A Bahá'í who served humanity with radiance

Dr. John E. Esslemont (1874–1925)



“The Bahá'í Teachings have filled me with new hope for the world,” wrote John Esslemont, soon after learning about the Faith. He turned his hope into action, sharing the Faith's teachings with people around the world.

Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, in 1874, John studied medicine at the University of Aberdeen. During college, he became ill with tuberculosis, a dangerous and often fatal disease. Still, he was intensely curious and worked hard in school. He was fluent in English, French, Spanish, German, and Esperanto.

John worked as a physician in Australia and South Africa. In 1908, he returned to England to work at Home Sanatorium in Bournemouth, a treatment center for people with tuberculosis. He was devoted to his patients, and his cheerful sense of humor lifted their spirits.

Author and Friend

John studied many religions before learning about the Bahá'í Faith in December 1914. He later wrote about the Bahá'í teachings, “I was at once struck by their comprehensiveness, power and beauty. They impressed me as meeting the great needs of the modern world . . .”

He soon became a Bahá'í, and within a few months, he was giving public talks about the Faith with a friend from London.

John longed for more Bahá'í books, so he began writing his own. In 1919, he brought a draft to Israel for 'Abdu'l-Bahá, the leader of the Faith. John eagerly accepted 'Abdu'l-Bahá's suggestions. He also became friends with 'Abdu'l-Bahá's

grandson, Shoghi Effendi, who was 22.

In November 1921, Bahá'ís around the world were shocked by the passing of 'Abdu'l-Bahá. Shoghi Effendi, studying at Oxford University in England, was devastated. John wrote to him, “I can well imagine how heart-broken you must feel . . .”

Shoghi Effendi spent five days with John at Bournemouth before leaving England. He gradually gained strength from the feeling that 'Abdu'l-Bahá's spirit was still near.

Two years later, John's book, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era*, was published. Shoghi Effendi, now the head of the Faith and known as the Guardian, called it the Faith's “finest presentation that has so far been given . . .”

A Lovable Companion

In 1924, John moved to Israel. He studied Persian and helped Shoghi Effendi translate Bahá'u'lláh's writings. But his health grew worse, and he was hospitalized.

John died on November 22, 1925, at age 51. Shoghi Effendi stayed up with him through his last night on Earth and placed his own Bahá'í ring on John's finger.

Shoghi Effendi named John a Hand of the Cause of God.* He expressed sorrow at losing “the warmest of friends, a trusted counselor, an indefatigable collaborator, a lovable companion.” He said that his book will “inspire generations yet unborn to tread the path of truth and service . . .”

Today, *Bahá'u'lláh and the New Era* is a treasured book that has been translated into 58 languages.