

**EPIISODES FROM AN  
UNWRITTEN  
HISTORY. SECOND  
(ENLARGED) EDITION**

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Episodes from an Unwritten History. Second (Enlarged) Edition by Claude Bragdon

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## INTRODUCTION

About two years ago there was slipped under my office door an announcement of a series of lectures to be given under the auspices of the Theosophical Society by one C. Jinarajadasa, of Columbo, Island of Ceylon. On the front page of the folder was his portrait in half-tone: a dusky young gentleman with curly hair, an untroubled intellectual brow, eyes dreamy yet penetrating behind gold-bowed glasses, a sweet mouth, and a firm chin. It was a face to which I took an instant liking, but the announced lectures did not attract me, for they appeared to deal with matters with which I had been long familiar through the theosophical literature I had read when it was first given to the world in the eighties. I had been interested in that literature, but in common with many others I had been deterred from following up my interest by the bad odor which soon afterwards came to be attached to the very word Theosophy by reason of the internecine warfare of the Society, and of the alleged exposure of Madame Blavatsky, its founder, by a member of the London Society for Psychological Research. The Theosophists I happened to have known did not particularly attract me; I had no means of testing the validity of the claims made concerning the giving of this alleged ancient wisdom to the Western world; moreover, the reiterated insistence upon Mahatmas and their miracles, with so little said about conduct of life, had seemed to me a dangerous inversion of the

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true order. I had therefore ceased my trafficking with latter-day Theosophy altogether, though the belief still lingered that behind that fantastic curtain lay some vital, some illuminating truth.

I was sufficiently interested in the leaflet to which I have referred, to attend one of the lectures it advertised, and gained my first view of the man who was to unlock a closed door of my consciousness. The subject of his lecture was *The Law of Karma*; there was nothing new in it for me, since the law of karma was to my thinking as much a part of the general scheme of things as the law of gravitation itself. The exposition was adequate, but not eloquent, delivered in excellent English, in a wonderfully pleasant voice. The lecturer as he progressed gave glimpses of a remarkable and charming personality, of great earnestness, refinement, spirituality, and intellectual power. I have heard the comments of many persons who attended his lecture, upon whom he seems to have made the same deep impression, not so much by what he said—for to many that seemed nonsense—as by what he was. At the end, my curiosity being gratified, I went away counting it an evening not ill-spent, though far from lively, and dismissed the matter from my mind.

On the following morning, as I was walking down the street I encountered my young Sinhalese aimlessly wandering in the opposite direction. I was seized by an impulse not to let him vanish out of my life, and under pressure of it I spoke to him, explaining that I



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had heard him lecture, was interested, and knowing something of Theosophy, craved first-hand information which I had reason to believe he could supply. He was pleasant and accommodating, but at the same time showed a certain reserve, which I afterwards found to be characteristic of the man, or perhaps of his race. We were soon facing one another from opposite armchairs in the club library, for all the world like two friendly but wary antagonists about to begin some absorbing game for a high stake. It was, in point of fact, a game which we were playing: part of the great game of life. The stake was the most precious a man can play for—the soul's salvation; our cards were our knowledge of life: if his proved higher I lost; but all paradoxically, if I lost I won, for if he converted me to his way of thinking I asked nothing better; but I believed that I held a good hand (to carry out the figure), and I was keen to play it for all it was worth. The opening being mine, I led from my long suit first: my knowledge of the undignified history of the Theosophical Society and of the eccentric personality of its founder. He answered all my questions directly and well, mitigating nothing. In speaking of Madame Blavatsky he did not claim that she had never made mistakes, nor did he deny that she had faults of character, but sketched the portrait, with all the reality of life, of a great and puissant personality attempting, amid treacheries, misrepresentations, and discouragements of every sort, to carry out a singularly difficult mission

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for which she was in many superficial ways unfitted: making mistakes, suffering from them, learning by them, and finally delegating her task to another (Mrs. Besant), whom she had trained for the purpose. The dissensions which had at various times rent the Society he seemed to regard as the reverse of unfortunate, for though they had interfered with the rapid spread of Theosophic knowledge, like certain diseases they had purged the organism, in that they had discouraged triflers and faddists, and drawn together into a compact and workable body those earnest and devoted persons who perceived their mission to be not the forcing of their teachings upon reluctant minds, but the offering of them to those who felt the need of them. The Society, as he phrased it, existed for the sake of Theosophy, and not Theosophy for the sake of the Society, that being only the small, self-conscious center, as it were, of a new stirring of the soul of the world, as yet only in its beginnings, of which Spiritualism, Christian Science, the New Thought, the mystical and humanitarian movement within the churches, and the altered attitude of science towards the mysteries of existence, are so many outward and more unconscious pulsations. Every reaction against the purely materialistic conception of life was, to my young man's view, essentially theosophic, and what he looked for was not so much the growth of the Society into a rich and powerful organization, as the silent and unconscious assimilation through it by the world of the fundamental Theosophic tenets:

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karma, reincarnation, man's finer bodies, and the like. America was destined to be the stage on which would be enacted the next great world drama: the attempt to develop a people and a government of which human brotherhood would be the central and controlling idea. America, therefore, was the most favorable field for a propaganda the avowed chief aim of which was "to form a nucleus of the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity without distinction of race, creed, sex, caste, or color."

All this and more I gathered from my many talks with Mr. Jinarajadasa, for we saw one another often. The more I saw of him the better I liked him, and the more remarkable he seemed. At times it was as though his lips had been touched by a coal from the altar, for he talked like one inspired. The very presence of a man of his race and type in a society such as ours seemed to me highly significant, even dramatic. A graduate of Cambridge University, and therefore equipped with that learning which the Anglo-Saxon gives his most favored sons, gifted with that ease and polish which extended travel and much contact with cultivated people alone impart, he used these accomplishments, and all the others which were his by nature, solely in the service of his spiritual message—the gift of Asia to the West.

He had few belongings, lived, so to speak, in a trunk: a wanderer, an ascetic, yet I think I never met a happier man. All consecrated lives, no matter how hard, are happy, but the secret of this man's happiness, I gathered, lay