



DARK TREES to the WIND

A Cycle of York State Years

by
Carl Carmer

Decorations by
JOHN O'HARA COSGRAVE II



William Sloane Associates
Publishers *New York*

Collier County
Free Public Library
Naples, Florida

The Great Alchemist at Utica

SIXTEEN MILES SOUTH OF FORT MYERS, FLORIDA, beside the Tampa-Miami highway called the Tamiami Trail, a sign reads—Esterro. Beyond orange groves lining the road a gas station faces toward a spacious store on the front wall of which is painted—The Koreshan Unity.

On the last day of a winter visit to Florida in 1948, keeping a promise I had made to myself, I stopped at this place because I had heard vague report that here was the remnant of another of the inspired communistic and religious groups that, like the Shakers, Mormons, Oneida Perfectionists, and Spiritualists, had developed during the nineteenth century in the psychically fertile earth of a broad mystic highway running across central New York State.

In the big store I saw a showcase devoted to pamphlets and books published by the Guiding Star Press of the Unity and I bought a copy of each.

"Where can I learn more?" I said.

"Across the road at the gas station," said the girl clerk promptly. "Lou Staton can tell you all about it."

Lou has pure-white hair, sea-blue eyes, and a quizzical, humorous look on his sun-tanned regular features. I bought gas, then said:

The Great Alchemist at Utica

"Can you tell me about this place?"

"Come out of that car," said Lou, "and come into my office."

A moment later I was seated before a world globe that was split open in the middle showing a map of the world spread on the inside.

"Life is in the kernel," Lou was saying. "It lies in the center of all natural spheres. It is the middle of the egg, the seed in the orange, the meat in the nut, the heart of the acorn. So mankind dwells in the inside of the world. This is what I call argument from analogy. More important is the fact that the Copernican Assumption has never been proved. It merely happens to provide what its believers consider adequate answers to questions about the universe. Ours is the only explanation of the world that has been actually proved by true and precise test. Now, come over to the Art Hall and see the paintings of Douglas Teed. You've probably seen his murals in the Arlington Hotel in Binghamton, New York. He was the son of Koresh."

"Koresh?" I said.

"Hebrew name for Cyrus. Dr. Cyrus Teed, born near Trout Creek, New York. He was the founder of Koreshanity and one of the greatest men who ever lived."

We walked across the road and through a level and well-planted lawn toward the Art Hall, stopping on the way to admire a tree my companion called a "bull acacia."

"Thorns interlock like horns of fighting bulls," he said. "Thomas A. Edison admired this tree. Sometimes Henry Ford came with him and once the two of 'em brought John Burroughs. We had a joke on Mr. Edison. He brought a lot of friends to our Bamboo Tea Garden for a dinner to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of his discovery

Dark Trees to the Wind

of incandescent light. We had our own electric plant and it worked fine till a thunderstorm came up. They ate their anniversary dinner by candlelight."

We wandered about the big raftered interior of the Art Hall. The paintings of Douglas Teed were academic landscapes, mostly of Venice.

"Rich lady in Binghamton sent him abroad and paid his way for a while," said Lou Staton. "His mother brought him up in that town while Koresh was out over the state getting started. Now if you've got time I'd like to tell you the first scientific principles of Koreshanity."

"First," I said, "I'd like to know how you were converted."

"I was barbering at the Sherman Hotel in Chicago. Left my room for a walk down State Street. The nineteenth-century elections were going on. Speakers were hollering about that on one corner and on another the Salvation Army was holding a meeting, but I wasn't paying anybody mind. I was out for a walk. Then I saw a fellow speaking beside a post that had a sign on it—same sign you see there on the wall—WE LIVE INSIDE. What he said made sense and I stopped to listen. I bought a copy of the *Flaming Sword* from a man standing beside the speaker. It was three cents but I gave him a nickel and said 'Keep the change.' I read it in bed that night. Before I went to sleep I was inside."

"That was simple."

"Just remember this," he said. "It's an easy experiment and you can do it yourself. Stand on the shore of Long Island Sound and look across to Connecticut. How far is it?"

"In one place I know," I said, "it's about ten miles."

The Great Alchemist at Utica

"Have you ever seen Connecticut from there?"

"Yes, on clear days."

"All right, and you know the curve of the earth's surface runs about eight inches to the mile. If we're living on the outside of the round world you couldn't possibly see it. There'd be a bulge in between taller than you are. How come you can see it?"

"I don't know," I said weakly.

"It's because we live inside," he said triumphantly. "The curve of the earth is eight inches to the mile but it curves up instead of down. We live on a concave surface—not a convex."

We walked back through a winding path among orange trees. On the porch of a neat cottage a white-haired woman, very pleasant of face, was sewing.

"Hello, Mrs. Lewis," said Lou Staton. "This is a visitor, Mr. Cramer."

"Cramer," I said.

"Are you Carl Cramer?" she said.

"Yes."

"I've read your books about York State. Your family came from Dryden. My husband's father ran a gristmill there before he died."

"On Fall Creek," I said.

"Exactly."

I felt the warmth rising within me that comes from meeting home folks in a faraway place. I began thinking, as I nearly always do after meeting a native of my home country, that York State folks look as if they come from York State.

"Mr. Cramer was asking about Koreshanity," said Lou Staton.

Dark Trees to the Wind

"I was never a member but my mother was one of the first converts and my sister Rose is a Koreshan. She and I live here. We'll be glad to tell you what we know."

"I'm afraid I have too little time."

"Come in for a moment and I'll try to remember the important things. I can give you a letter to a man who must live fairly near you in the North who could tell you about Koreshanity better than anybody else. Then, if you want to, you can get the facts from him after you've gone home."

"Wonderful," I said.



On a late October midnight in 1869, thirty-year-old Dr. Cyrus Read Teed sat alone in his electroalchemical laboratory in the little city of Utica in central New York State. He had been thinking on his recent considerable progress in "alchemical elaborations" when suddenly he felt a relaxation at the back of his head, a buzzing tension behind his wide brow. Gradually from the center of his brain a vibration, "gentle, soft and dulciferous," spread to his physical extremities and beyond into the aura of his being, which seemed to extend for miles outside his body. Impelled to recline upon "this gently oscillating ocean of magnetic and spiritual ecstasy," he was conscious of the fading of his senses and to test his hearing spoke aloud.

Lying upon the vibratory sea of his delight, he heard from his own lips a voice he had never heard before:

The Great Alchemist at Utica

"Fear not, my son," it said, "thou satisfactory offspring of my profoundest yearnings! I have nurtured thee through countless embodiments . . . in superlative attitudes of earthly glory and thence descending to the lowest depths of degradation into which the human animal can decline."

Then, as the young doctor, eyes closed in awe, knelt on the floor of his laboratory, the voice told him that through his many past incarnations the speaker had witnessed his triumphs and his defeats. She had seen him destroy his body by loathsome disease, had seen him fall before enemies whom his own ambitions and grasping ego had made. "Then," she said, "I have clothed thee in another body and watched thee therein."

Bidden to open his eyes, Cyrus Teed saw emerging from a sphere of purple and golden light the exquisite face of a woman, and the neck, shoulders, and arms "equally exquisite . . . to the very finger extremes adorned with the most delicate, matchless, consummate finger nails so framed as to challenge admiration." Her hair falling over her shoulders was long, luxuriant and golden, and she wore a robe of purple and gold whose folds fell in a long train behind her.

"I have brought thee to this birth," said the vision, "to sacrifice thee upon the altar of all human hopes, that through thy quickening of me, thy Mother and Bride, the Sons of God shall spring into visible creation . . . Thou shalt possess me henceforth . . . My Son, receive now the blessing flowing from my august Motherhood . . ."

This strange interview, much of it couched in metaphysical language, went on for some time. At its end, the physician accepted from his supernatural visitant his mission "to redeem the race."

Dark Trees to the Wind

"I shall achieve the victory over death," he said, "not for myself, but for those to whom I come as a sacrificial offering."

As the divine lady went from him she turned and pointed downward toward his material body lying on the laboratory couch and he soon waked to find he had re-entered it.

It was two-thirty in the morning when the bemused doctor ended his walk from the laboratory through Utica's deserted streets to his home. He was soon asleep in his bed, but was awakened two hours later by the high loud surging of a wind so violent that he was frightened. Abruptly it ceased and in the following dead stillness he heard a noise as of great wings beating, then—the rolling of chariot wheels. He rose and went to his bedroom window. Utica slept in the darkness before dawn. Again the wind, the wings, the chariot wheels—and again unearthly silence. A third time the sounds swelled and faded. When they did not return the listener went back to bed. As he lay upon it he felt that from the events of the night he had come to know the secret of immortal life.

The English ancestors of Cyrus Read Teed, early seventeenth-century immigrants, may have had within them a prophetic strain, for they also fathered another York State mystic, Mormon Joseph Smith. Soon after the birth of Cyrus on October 18, 1839, on the banks of Trout Creek, tributary of the Delaware River, Father Jesse Teed, moved his family to Utica on the Erie Canal, where he soon won recognition as an inventor of farm appliances, but much more for his miraculous cures of a plague called "black tongue."

Cyrus left school at eleven for a job "on the canal" and kept it until he began studying medicine in the Utica

The Great Alchemist at Utica

office of his uncle, Samuel Teed. By the time he was twenty-one he had married a girl from Meredith, fathered his son, Douglas, and enlisted in the Union Army Medical Corps. As soon as the war ended he completed his medical studies at the Eclectical Medical College of New York City in 1868. He had been practicing medicine in Utica about a year when the heavenly lady paid him her extraordinary visit.

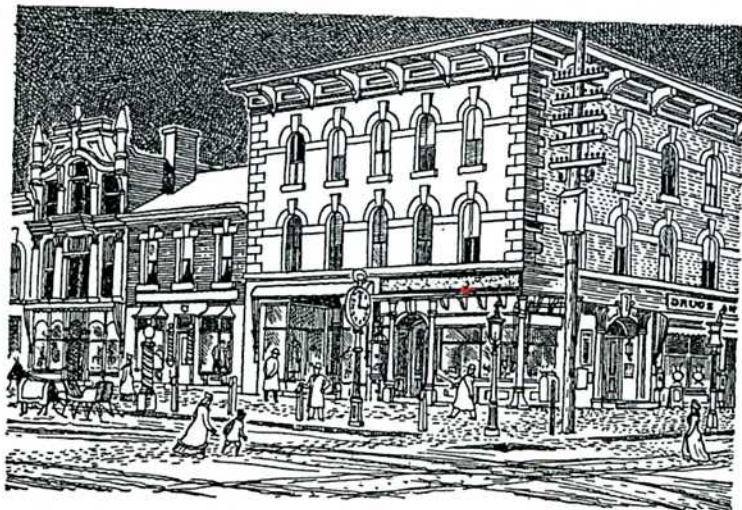
This incident, which he described and later published under the title *The Illumination of Koresh* with the subtitle "*Marvelous Experience of the Great Alchemist at Utica, New York,*" had immediate and extraordinary consequences. Next day he called at the place of work of a cousin, Myron Baldwin, to walk home with him to dinner. Myron saw him standing in an aura of mystic light and recognizing its origin spoke a blessing upon him. Then he took the new-made prophet along home and there his wife told them that just before their arrival she had seen on her pair of carved wooden wall brackets, ordinarily used for displaying bric-a-brac, two winged cherubim poised as if alighted momentarily from flight.

A few months proved that with his illumination other blessings had come to the illuminated. Like his distant cousin Joseph Smith, he had received on the day of his annunciation the gift of languages, being suddenly familiar with both Hebrew and Greek. More remarkable even than this was the revelation of the demonstrable scientific facts of the Cellular Cosmogony, as he chose to call his concept of the universe. He had for some time been interested in measuring the curve of the earth's surface. Doubting the assumption of Copernicus that the earth is a part of the convex outside shell of a world which is an infinitesimal

Dark Trees to the Wind

round in an infinite universe, he had come to the conclusion that human beings inhabit the inside of the shell of a decidedly finite sphere. And Cyrus Teed devoted the rest of his life to the education of men to the belief that they live on a concave surface and to his religious teachings.

Many of the towns and cities of New York State knew Dr. Teed after that. Scientific and religious heresies were not the best bedside talk for an ambitious doctor in Utica—household word for orthodoxy since President Lincoln had read to his cabinet Artemus Ward's tale of the visitor to a canalboat waxworks who had "kaved in" the sculptured head of the false apostle saying "Judas Iscariot can't show himself in Utiky with impunerty"—and the enthusiastic young radical soon found that much of the rest of his home state shared Utica's convictions. Wherever he went he told his patients of his new knowledge and immediately became to them a benighted heathen, a dangerous lunatic, or "that crazy doctor." They made life so dif-



The Great Alchemist at Utica

ficult for the Teeds that his wife, nervous and ill, went to live with her sister and the doctor worked on alone. Binghamton denounced him as a crackpot. At Trout Creek, his home town, he was without honor. He found few patients in neighboring Deposit, Rockroyal, Bartlett Hollow, or Apex who could tolerate his doctoring for his doctrine.

A new start in Sandy Creek on the shores of Lake Ontario, far north of the Delaware, ended in the same way. Once the people of nearby Ruralhill, Pierrepont Manor, and Lorraine heard the newcomer proclaim the true religion and the true science they looked at him oddly and the next time they needed a doctor sent to Pulaski for one.

He turned home again. His parents were living at Moravia (where old Bill Rockefeller, peddler and riflshot extraordinary, had unwittingly laid a foundation for a golden empire) and were eager to turn over to their unsuccessful son a small mop-making business. He grasped the idea hungrily. As plate silver and animal traps had enriched John Humphrey Noyes's Perfectionists at Oneida, as the sale of herbs and furniture had cared for the material needs of the Shakers at New Lebanon, Watervliet, Sodus and Groveland, making mops would support Koresh and the band of disciples he would organize. Three of the people who were present in Moravia when he established his first community in 1880 are still alive and living on community land—his sister Emma, now ninety-three, and the two daughters of convert Ada Welton, one of whom also became a Koreshan.

They left Moravia and the mop business two years later for the wider field of Syracuse. They forsook that unenthusiastic city for a third-floor New York flat at 135th Street near Eighth Avenue. Koresh established there the

Dark Trees to the Wind

nucleus of his colony—four ladies, of whom one was his sister and one his cousin. A year later he had failed again. Then came a sudden reversal of his fortunes.

Cyrus Teed was invited to address a convention of the National Association of Mental Science at Chicago in September of 1886. He accepted and made so eloquent and persuasive a speech that he was elected president of the organization. On demand of the members he gave another lecture at which by use of his miraculous powers he so aided a fat lady who could walk only a few steps that she walked all the way home. The mystic-minded of Chicago were at his feet.

A few years later his Chicago Community numbered one hundred and twenty-six, all living in or near a rambling and highly decorated mansion they called Beth-Ophra, surrounded by spacious and well-planted grounds, in Chicago's Washington Heights. Koreshanity was spreading. San Francisco had a thriving "branch communistic" and there were eager groups of converts in Denver, Baltimore, Portland (Oregon), Lynn and Springfield (Massachusetts).

Dr. Teed's star was in the ascendant and he was a happy man. When he paid a visit to Pennsylvania, the *Pittsburgh Leader* (October 25, 1891) described his physical appearance in detail, complimented him on his modesty, quiet dress, clerical manner, mastery of language, and its delivery, and answered current criticisms by saying:

"If Dr. Teed does not practice his teachings, if he is seeking personal gain for personal ends, if he loves his subjects with a more earthly than platonic love, he is the most consummate, polished and best educated rogue the world ever produced . . ." The reporter continued: "He says as

The Great Alchemist at Utica

soon as his system of government prevails, which he says will be within ten years, he will build a six track railroad between the Atlantic and Pacific coasts, in one year employing a million men in its work. He will also construct a pneumatic passenger way across the continent which will carry one to San Francisco in 12 hours; the cars will run without wheels. More wonderful than all, Dr. Teed says one of his members in the Chicago office has a device whereby he can, from his desk in that office in Chicago, set the type for every newspaper in this country by wire and that an application for a patent is now on file in Washington."

Koresh now felt that the movement was strong enough to reach the goal of which he had dreamed—a holy star-shaped city where all Koreshans might unite—a radiant center from which his teachings would flow in increasing power until they had brought truth to the minds of all men. He would select a place set apart from the pursuits of the worldly, where his followers might live according to his creed and by their example show the peoples of the earth what a heaven life might be if they did likewise.



Now enters into the Koreshan story another of the mystic incidents that embroider its whole fabric. In 1883 a native of Germany, Gustav Damkohler, seeking solitude for solace of a deeply religious nature, came to the isolated village of Fort Myers in Lee County, Florida. Exploring

Dark Trees to the Wind

Estero Bay in his rowboat, he moved one sunny morning across waters dotted with palm-grove islands and found, behind a screen of darkly matted mangroves, a tiny river that was the color of light-struck coffee. With difficulty he pushed his boat up the winding stream. Tropic fish swarmed the current. Alligators slept on banks which grew steeper and higher as he advanced.

Through sturdy pines and tall slender cabbage palms bordering the water he saw savannas of palmetto, rooted in firm and fertile land. Pausing in the shadows of a scrub-oak thicket he heard a voice from an unseen speaker saying "Take and dress until the Lord comes." Believing the voice divine, Gustav Damkohler bought land along the Estero River, brought his wife and children to its banks.

While for seven years he awaited the meaning of the strange message, his wife died and five of his six children. One day he sailed across the bay to Punta Gorda to get his mail and found there a printed pamphlet of the teachings of Koresh. Then he thought he knew why he had been waiting and he wrote a letter.

When, on the first day of the new year of 1894, Cyrus Teed of Trout Creek, New York, stepped ashore from the boat that had brought him across the bay, Gustav Damkohler knelt before him, called him master, and said, "Ich habe dich lang erwartet."

Teed and his party of three women, selected from the leading Koreshans of Chicago, lived for a while with Damkohler, ate the fresh fish from the river and the palmetto honey of bees from their host's many hives. Then they knew they had found the site of their holy city and began to prepare for its building.

Within a month twenty-four eager Koreshans had come

The Great Alchemist at Utica

from Chicago to rear the log house that was to shelter them. More followed and other structures rose among the water oaks, the pines and palms. Among them were Lee County's largest building, from the ground floor of which the communal dining hall and kitchen sent appetizing odors to two upper stories used as a sisters' dormitory; "The Temple," central home of the colony; the "Planetary Court" in which important officers had their dwelling. On Estero Island in the bay the Koreshans built a home they called "The Point" from logs drawn to the river by great logging carts and rafted downstream and across the bay to their new-built sawmill. Farther up the island they erected "Middle Carlos," the colony's farthest outpost.

Now came the golden age. The colony's approximately six thousand acres increased in value, converts to the Cellular Cosmogony and the other teachings of Koresh were plentiful. Estero's cycle of sunny days almost destroyed the memory of Chicago weather. Wisely, foreseeing possible future difficulties, Dr. Teed incorporated his colony under the laws of New Jersey as the Koreshan Unity, with a board of directors and the usual officers, reserving for himself the unique title of "Prime Counselor." At the same time, in the autumn of 1903, the Chicago branch moved, lock, stock, and barrel, to Estero.

In their isolated Floridian Utopia on the inside of the world about two hundred Koreshans were finding the secrets of happy and creative living under the benevolent direction of their prophet. Though Fort Myers, the nearest town, was a six- or seven-hour journey over a heavy sand trail through the woods, the businesses about which they set themselves prospered. Printers, machinists, carpenters, and boat builders were happily, noisily busy. Planters pa-

Dark Trees to the Wind

tiently worked a soil that demanded different treatment from that they had been accustomed to giving northern earth.

The Koreshan Unity was a gayer group than most of the communities that had their origin in New York State's psychic area. Koresh was a genial leader, a skilled and humorous raconteur, a strong believer in cultural pursuits. The Koreshans had their own schools and encouraged extracurricular study of the arts. They built a floating stage at a bend where the river had made from its banks a natural amphitheater and there they played dramas by Lord Dunsany and other modern playwrights. They formed a brass band and had so many young people tootling that they built a practice house out of earshot upriver. They were very proud when the band, which gave weekly concerts at their new "Art Hall," won as first prize of an all-Florida band contest at the State Fair in Tampa a team of blooded horses. Some evenings their string and wood-wind orchestra gave programs of classical music on the stage of their raft theater and the audience, sitting under the palms beside the star-reflecting river, found life as good as they had thought it would be when they left their northern homes to follow Koresh.

One of the reasons why the prophet had chosen the west coast of Florida as the site of his community was that on the long sand levels beside the sea he could make the experiment that would prove that men live on the concave interior surface of the round world. The geodetic staff of the Koreshan Unity left Chicago in mid-December, 1896, and began actual operations on the beach at Naples, Florida, on January 2 of the new year.

The experiment was based on the running of an abso-

The Great Alchemist at Utica

lutely straight line above a considerable arc of the earth's surface. If the earth curve was convex, as most people believed and as it must be if we live on the outside of a spherical world, the straight line would run off into space at both ends as the rounded surface dropped away from it. If we live on the inside of the sphere and the earth curves concavely upward, then the line would be a chord that would meet at each of its ends the circle that is the outer limit of the world-sphere.

For the purpose of obtaining a surely straight line, one of the engineers on the project invented what he called a rectilineator, a series of three rectangular twelve-foot panels each of which contained two T-squares set end to end. If one of these panels could be leveled above the established mean-tide level at the arbitrarily chosen distance of 128 inches—and this would be possible by the erection of tall standards on which its height could be adjusted to a nicety—and another panel could be fitted to it with great exactness and bolted there, a straight line would have been started. The third panel could then be fitted to the second in the same careful fashion and the first could be moved forward. Thus the inventor would have accomplished a moving straight line by the mechanical adjustment of right angles.

When he had advanced several miles across the earth's surface, contiguous to a body of water from the level of which all measurements would be taken, he would be able to measure any deviation of the water surface from the line, either up or down. Since the water surface conforms to the earth's contour, he would then have proved the true curve of the earth. If the earth were convex, the line at the end of a given distance (four miles was decided upon)

Dark Trees to the Wind

would be higher than at the beginning. If the earth were concave, the line would be lower than at the beginning. A great deal of care was taken that the first panel should be exactly level when the line was started, and work was painstaking and slow. Soon after it started it was handicapped by the death of the well-to-do Chicagoan who had financed the expedition, Mr. L. S. Boomer. This not only saddened the party but took from their midst their general manager, Mr. Boomer's son Lucius, who had been most active in the early preparations. (Young Lucius did not come back after his father's funeral but won himself fame as president of a New York hostelry, the Waldorf-Astoria.)

Five months were required to complete the four-mile survey but when the line reached Gordon's Pass, two and a half miles below Naples, the staff was cheered by discovering that it was already four feet nearer water level. At four miles it ran into the water and all hands celebrated their proving of the knowledge that had been given to Koresh on the midnight of his illumination over a quarter of a century before.

The triumphant leader was at the height of his happy career. In the community auditorium he spoke with the authority of the vindicated prophet. Through the years he had been teaching and clarifying the principles of Koreshanity and they were now accepted not only by the joyful two hundred but by many converts throughout the nation. His monthly magazine—the *Flaming Sword*—was carrying his message to a steadily increasing number of subscribers. He devoted himself to writing the volume that would establish the truths of the universe as he saw them—*The Cellular Cosmogony*.

“The mind that conceived the Copernican system arising

The Great Alchemist at Utica

in the dark ages was so simple as to take an appearance for a fact,” he wrote. “Koreshanity has the truth but the present humanity (steeped in tobacco, rum and sensualism) prefers to meet the truth of Koreshanity with ridicule rather than to give it candid consideration.” The sun, he stated, is a revolving disk with a dark side and a bright side, producing night and day. The claim that it is 93,000,000 miles from the earth is balderdash. It is less than 4,000. The moon is not, as Copernicans say, 250,000 miles away, but only 1,000. The universe is a cell, a hollow globe, and the sun, moon, planets, and the stars are all within it. Koreshanity provides the true explanation of all phenomena.

Reincarnation is the central law of life. To become immortal in the flesh is possible but only if one ceases to propagate life. Celibacy, however, is only for the higher ranks, not for the world at large. The human race would destroy itself by fecundation without the counterbalance of celibate conservation on the part of its leaders. The communism of the Christian church, sharing of the goods of life, is the true path. Money and the competitive system should be destroyed. All great music and all great art exist in the absolute in the spiritual world. Human beings are only the media by which such communications are “let down” from that world.

In a prospectus of the Estero Colony, giving “General Information concerning Membership and its Obligations,” the prophet wrote at about this time: “There is no difference between one who has placed one penny in the common treasury and one who has contributed a hundred thousand . . . We are celibate in doctrine and life; we are communistic in our possession of property . . . Many

Dark Trees to the Wind

wonder why we set ourselves down in Estero, Florida, with the idea of reforming the world. We have located a central point from which to promulgate our views and propagate our system . . .

“ . . . When a family comes into the Koreshan Unity it comes with the understanding that there is a separation; that the children no longer belong to the parents, but to the institution and that the Unity claims the right to direct the education, industry, and care of the children exclusively . . . The male children belong . . . until they are twenty-one, and the female children until they are eighteen . . . and all children should be taught that they belong to the Unity and not to their parents.”

The influx of two hundred active-minded and conscientious citizens had had a considerable effect upon the political situation in southwestern Florida. The supremacy of the Lee County Democratic machine, never before questioned, found itself opposed by a very articulate body commanding a considerable number of ballots. Flustered, the local politicians seized upon the fact that the Koreshans held private caucuses, at which they decided how their whole group would vote, as a basis for arguing that they should be disfranchised. They had mistaken the temper of these gentle-seeming people. Like angry bees the Koreshans poured from their hive in Estero to do battle. They formed a new party, which they called the Progressive Liberty Party, they established and printed in their own shop as its official organ a weekly paper called the *American Eagle*, and, brass band blaring, speakers shouting, they toured the county behind their prize horses.

Fort Myers was a rough, tough cowtown in 1906, and as elections drew near its political bosses were enraged to

The Great Alchemist at Utica

find that the Koreshans had won many adherents to the opposition party and that the outcome was in doubt. On October 13 of that year a Koreshan friend of mine, who lives not far from my upstate home, arrived for the first time in Fort Myers. A young member of the Unity at Estero met him and carried his suitcase for him up Main Street.

As they neared the center of town he saw a burly fellow in rough clothes and broad-brimmed Stetson hat walk up to a rather short, distinguished-looking man and speak to him. Apparently incensed by a reply, the fellow struck the smaller man viciously three times on the left side of the head, knocking him down. The newcomer, not realizing that he had witnessed an assault upon Koresh, was surprised to see his companion drop the suitcase and dash to the defense. In another moment the attacker had been struck to the street beside his victim. As my friend walked toward them then, he saw this man rise, throw back his coat to show his town marshal's silver star, and draw his gun. Then the Koreshans were forced to go to the police station, where after bitter and prolonged altercation they were released.

Koresh was more seriously hurt by the heavy blows than his companions realized. He had predicted his death fourteen years before in the *Flaming Sword* (March 26, 1892): “Dr. Teed will die; the termination of his natural career will be tragic. He will reach his death at the instigation of a people who profess the religion of Jesus the Christ of God,” but none of his people believed that the prophecy would soon be fulfilled as a result of his injuries at the hands of the marshal. A nervous disorder developed, however, and caused many months of severe pain. Then, de-

Dark Trees to the Wind

spite the inspired treatments of Koreshan Gustav Faber, an eccentric old German sailor who had been a nurse in the Spanish-American War and had invented a strange electrotherapeutic machine for the purpose of curing him, Koresh died at the Point on Estero Island, December 22, 1908.

The Koreshan Unity was shaken to its foundations by the loss of its leader. Strong differences arose. Many of the prophet's most devoted followers, remembering his teachings of immortality in the physical body, chose to disregard his prophecy of his own demise and demanded that all that was material of Cyrus Teed be permitted the opportunity of renewing itself. Convinced that as a messianic character he was capable of theocrasis (a process described by Teed as the incorruptible dissolution, without decay of the flesh, of the physical body by "electromagnetic combustion"), they insisted that no burial take place for at least three days.

The body lay in state. Christmas came and went, and some of the anxious watchers saw or hoped they saw evidences of a new body forming out of the remnant of the old one now fast decaying in a midwinter hot spell. At last, when decomposition was definitely advanced, Fort Myers's health authorities ordered interment. A sturdy rectangular concrete tomb was erected on Estero Island, the body was placed inside, and the tomb was sealed. In the center of the narrow front wall were engraved these words only:

Cyrus
Shepherd Stone of Israel

In the meantime the community began to fall apart. Gustav Faber claimed that as Koresh breathed his last he

The Great Alchemist at Utica

conferred upon him his spirit and the mantle of his leadership. Mrs. Annie G. Ordway, whom Koresh had looked upon as his highest ranking assistant and had designated Victoria Gratia, Pre-Eminent, also announced that she had received from the prophet the right of succession. A few followed her when she left Estero. Others still clung to their belief in the immortality of their human deity. They demanded to be allowed to prove that the prophet had dematerialized in the tomb and rematerialized outside. When they were refused they tried a surreptitious midnight raid to break open the cement sarcophagus. It came so near to success that the board of directors had a strong kerosene lamp with a mirror reflector placed high and directed on the tomb and stationed an old white-haired German, Koreshan Carl Luetlich, as lamplighter and night watchman. Night after night, among the wild mangroves and the coconuts and the mango trees, Carl Luetlich stared into the blackness that surrounded the circle of light in which he sat. Once, just before dawn, he fell asleep and the fanatics came again and opened a side of the tomb before sunlight frightened them away. Carl Luetlich was more alert after that, but watching the tomb was not necessary much longer.

One October day a still yellow light fell on land and sea and once again, if his senses had survived as he had said they would, Cyrus Teed heard a sound "like a terrific windstorm having reached the magnitude of a hurricane." There are those who say that this noise of a great rushing was followed by that of great wings flying and then "noise as of chariot wheels." When this had ceased the tomb of Koresh had disappeared and with it had gone whatever remained of the body of the prophet. There was no ques-

Dark Trees to the Wind

tioning now among true Koreshans. Theocrasis had occurred and Koresh would come again.



I returned to Estero about a year after my first visit. The Koreshan to whom Mrs. Anna Lewis had given me a letter proved to be a member of the board of directors of the community and had become my good friend. I bore a letter from him to the president of the board, Mr. Laurence Bubbett, and, advised of my coming, he met me at Lou Staton's gas pump. He is a slender man of about sixty, his hair is white and curly, his regular features have about them a look of asceticism and a sort of noble serenity. Mr. Bubbett was brought into the Unity at the age of four, both his parents having been converts. He has not lived at Estero all his life, however. He is an expert proof-reader and typographer and, while resident of New York in younger days was chief copyreader for *Life* magazine, then purposefully funny. He has now returned to the scenes of his boyhood as chief administrator of the affairs of the Koreshan corporation.

He guided me across the road and through the big store to a back office, where he introduced me to Hedwig Michel (he pronounced it Mitchell), a sturdy woman who looked to be in her mid-forties. She was seated at her desk and held in her lap a cat which differed from most cats in that she had one less tail.

When Miss Michel saw that my eyes were upon the ani-

The Great Alchemist at Utica

mal her sensitive face and expressive gray-blue eyes at once abandoned the air of impersonal objectivity with which she had acknowledged the introduction.

"She is Manx. There have been many generations of Manx cats here. Some of her kittens have no tail and some take after a father with a tail."

"Miss Michel is our executive secretary," said Mr. Bubbett. "She is also the youngest resident member of the Unity."

"That is not difficult," laughed Hedwig Michel. "Twelve of the members of the Unity—six men and six women—live here. The youngest is a boy of fifty-seven. The eldest is the sister of Koresh. She is ninety-three."

"Since Miss Michel came," said Mr. Bubbett, "she has put the store on a paying basis, she has had worthless buildings torn down and has restored those worth keeping. Leaky roofs have been repaired, rickety porches mended, new plumbing installed."

"It has been worth doing," said Miss Michel.

"And how do you happen to be here?" I asked.

Her reply gave me the last of the many psychic tales that illustrate the tapestrylike quality of the Unity's history.

In the city of Frankfurt am Main twenty-five years ago Hedwig Michel, a gay young girl, chattered and danced about the big house of her German-Jewish parents, owners and administrators of a prosperous children's school. Though too active to prepare herself for the university as her parents wished, her inclination led her to apply for a position at the Frankfurt Municipal Theater, where after employment as a secretary she rose in an incredibly

Dark Trees to the Wind

short time to the high rank of dramaturgist and manager and as such she helped initiate and establish the Open-Air Theater. At this time she was writing occasional articles for the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and short dramas, for one of which, a Christmas play, the distinguished composer, Paul Hindemith, wrote the incidental music. Next to the study of literature and art, botany was Hedwig Michel's major interest. On extensive trips to foreign countries she examined plant life, and specialized in cacti as the result of an expedition she made to Mexico in 1923.

Soon after the Nazis came to power they made her give up the theater work. She was allowed to found an orchestra for professional musicians who, like her, had lost their positions. This orchestra, conducted by William Steinberg, became eventually the Boris Huberman Orchestra of Palestine. Now she assumed the position of headmistress of a widely known Jewish children's school, Dr. Heinemann's Institute, which occupied her seventeen-room home. For some years then, at government order, she instructed about forty-five pupils, the youngest four, the eldest sixty-one, in the language and customs of countries to which they might emigrate.

Shortly before the beginning of World War II, having difficulty in finding a candidate for a position on her staff as teacher of mathematics and the English language, she came to America. While conferring in Philadelphia with prominent Quakers, who were aiding her, she received a letter of application from a German who had high qualifications and she decided her quest had ended and returned to Frankfurt.

Peter Bender, the new instructor, had been severely wounded when his plane had been shot down in World

The Great Alchemist at Utica

War I. Incapable of hard physical labor after that, he had devoted himself to the study of mathematics. He was a slim, tall, dark-eyed, handsome man and he and his young and pretty wife were a welcome addition to Hedwig Michel's faculty. Soon after he had begun his duties he told the headmistress that his mathematical researches had some years before brought him to the conclusion that men live on the inside of a concave world and that his chance reading of Cyrus Teed's volume, *The Cellular Cosmogony*, in a Worms am Rhein library had confirmed his reckonings in every respect. He persuaded her to listen to his arguments and to read the book, and she was soon a believer in Koreshanity. As time went on, Peter Bender corresponded at length with the Koreshans at Estero and his employer noticed a change in him. His study of the cult's messianic leader had so affected him that he believed himself the reincarnation of Koresh, and he assumed that august identity with authority.

Meanwhile the Nazi pogroms had begun and no Jew was safe in Germany. Knowing that Hedwig Michel had received her American immigration visa, Peter Bender wrote to Estero asking the leaders of the Unity if they could make use of a woman of her remarkable abilities. They replied that they could and she obtained passage on the last American ship (plying the Mediterranean) that brought in Jewish refugees through regular process of entry. Peter Bender and his wife stayed on and were murdered in a Nazi prison camp.

"It is a good life," said Hedwig Michel to me, smiling her infectious smile. "I like taking care of the old people and I love this country. At first many people were sus-

Dark Trees to the Wind

picious of me. They could not understand why I whose great activity had been the theater would be living here in this quiet spot. But I am happy here. Now let us go and see what we shall see."

She and Laurence Bubbett took me to my room in the old Planetary Court, a spacious frame building of the Victorian cottage type. Then we went to lunch in the community dining hall. The six old ladies sat at one table, the six old men at the other, in accordance with the celibate teachings of their prophet. They welcomed me cordially and I renewed my friendship with Lou Staton—the barber of Chicago.

All the ladies were gay and kindly. Mrs. Emma Norton, sister of the late Cyrus Teed, was especially chipper for her ninety-three years but she said that she did not remember the old days as well as she used to. The men seemed to feel challenged by my interest to bring out choice incidents from the colony's history and they told them with gusto. One tale of a rattlesnake, which ascended to the eaves of a building and lay there under a loose tin roof, causing, whenever anyone approached, a great thundering to seem to come from a clear and sunlit sky, gave all present a feeling that further narratives would be anticlimactic.

"We don't have as many rattlers as we used to," said Hedwig Michel brightly from the foot of the women's table. "When the scientists from the Chicago Zoo came here last spring looking for them they couldn't catch one. And all last winter at Planetary Court we found only three."

In the days that followed I wandered with Laurence Bubbett and Hedwig Michel beside the dark waters of the narrow meandering river and we talked of communities

The Great Alchemist at Utica

like this one that had failed and discussed the reasons for their failure.

"With the death of the leader they lost the dynamic drive that gave them their initial success," said Mr. Bubbett. "Here while Koresh was alive we were very much alive too and we made many converts. We could have many now but they would not be sincere. Though we are spending our diminishing capital to keep going, there is still something left, mostly in landholdings, and, since all our stock is held in trust for the use and benefit of the Koreshan Unity, many shiftless people would like to join us just to live out their days in idleness. We're worried, too, by dimwits. Why, we could keep this place filled with crackpots who couldn't possibly get along together!"

At night in my airy bedroom sleep came easily while I read in the pages of Josephus and in Orson Fowler's *Introduction to Phrenology*, both of which I found in the shadowy old library. By day I heard tales of the old days when the colonists used to tow skiffs behind their steam launch *Victoria* downriver at night and with flaring pine torches so frighten the schools of fish coming in on the changing tide that they would leap into the air and descending fill the boats.

On the morning I was to leave, Laurence Bubbett and Hedwig Michel took me in the old high-bodied station wagon, over a woods road so lost that we sometimes had to get out to search for its track, to a spot where suddenly tall trees ended and there was beyond them only a broad savanna of palmettos and scrub oak as far as my eyes could see. Directly in front of me then I saw a rectangle marked out by rocks and shells and in it stood a dozen modest gravestones. I read the names—Peter Blem, John S. Sar-

Dark Trees to the Wind

gent, Gustav Faber, and all the rest. Wind was blowing across the wild low level of green leaves. There was no other sound.

"This is where the twelve old folks will probably rest," said Mr. Bubbett. "We are planning to weed it and make it look nice and improve the road out here."

On our way back through the almost trackless waste we stopped at a sulphur spring bubbling into a liquid sphere above a pipe emerging from the ground.

"I wish I could tell you how grateful I am," I said, "and how fascinated I have been by Estero."

"It is like my old home city," said Hedwig Michel. "The slogan of the town is 'Frankfurt am Main steckt voll von Merkwuerdigkeiten.' I think it could be translated 'It is full of remarkable things.'"

"The Unity may lose in the material world," said Laurence Bubbett, "but its loss is a gain in the spiritual world. While old members may pass on, there will be a corresponding accretion in the spiritual spheres."

"Koreshanity is not of the past but for the future," said Hedwig Michel slowly. "It is a great truth and it will someday sweep across the world."

"It is our firm belief," said Laurence Bubbett, "that the Koreshan Unity will never die out. Its impetus and force will continue until truth is triumphant over falsity and the Golden Age will be ushered in and the human race will observe the divine rule: Do unto others as you would have others do unto you."

"Is there no one," I said, "who has assumed the place of Koresh as leader of the Unity?"

"No one," he said. Then he laughed. "Beyond the graveyard about ten miles into the scrub a man and a woman

The Great Alchemist at Utica

are living in a tent and I understand they claim to be a divine couple upon whom the spirit of Koresh has descended."

"How do they eat?" I said.

"They fish and hunt," said Hedwig Michel, "and a rich lady who lives in a West Coast city believes in them and sends them baskets of food."

Laurence Bubbett bent over the round globe of water at the top of the pipe and drank. Then, still looking at the water, he stood erect.

"It is like gazing into a crystal ball," he said.



"Road into Raquette Lake had about four or five miles of slack in it," said the mountain man. "Used to wear down the guides that was going in there to take folks fishin'. They asked the supervisor for a straight road and he asked the governor, but nothing happened. The boys had a crow-flight road all figured but the ranger kept his eye on 'em so that they couldn't do nothing about it. The ranger was a real honest fella but he had a fine tenor voice he was mighty proud of. Pretty soon folks in the little church the guides belong to decided to give a show and asked the ranger to sing in it. On the day after the dress rehearsal, the trees in the path of that straight road looked just the same but in the afternoon they all blowed down. Somebody'd sawed 'em most of the way through and left the job of fellin' 'em to the wind. Hadn't been so much

Dark Trees to the Wind

excitement in these parts since Captain Sam Patchin tried to jump Vicar Island in his iceboat.

"Mr. Osborne, he was commissioner then, he had a hard time gettin' anybody to own up to it. They was a load of pettyfogging but not much come of it."

The mountain man said, "Old Ben Barrett from near Luzern used to do some lumberjackin' over by Raquette Lake. Bet another jack he could throw him across the Hudson at Glens Falls. First time they was both in the town the fella says, 'Now's your chance.'

"Ben picked him up and dropped him in the water.

"The fella says, 'Give me my money. You can't do it.'

"Ben says, 'Mebbe not at the first try,' and started for him again but the fella seen a chance to slope and he sloped."

Part Five

People and Ghosts



Sources Consulted

- Dieman's Land during Three Years' Captivity*, New York: J. Winchester, 1844.
Geschichte der Deutscher in Syracuse und Onondaga County, Syracuse: Deutsche Verein, 1897.
"The New Yorker," H. Greeley & Co., Vol. VI, No. 14, Dec. 22, 1938.

THE GREAT ALCHEMIST AT UTICA

- Chester, Lord. *The Great Red Dragon*, Estero: The Guiding Star Publishing House, 1916.
Cyrus. *Emanuel Swedenborg, His Mission*, Chicago: The Guiding Star Publishing House, 1889.
Hinds, William Alfred. *American Communities*, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr & Co., 1902.
Koresh. *Cellular Cosmogony*, Estero: The Guiding Star Publishing House, 1922.
———. *Fundamentals of Koreshan Universology*, Estero: The Guiding Star Publishing House, 1927.
———. *Joseph, A Dramatization from Biblical History in Seven Acts Act the Second*, Estero. The Guiding Star Publishing House, 1904.
———. *The Illumination of Koresh*, Estero: The Guiding Star Publishing House.
———. *Interpretation of the Book of Revelation*, Estero: The Guiding Star Publishing House, 1925.
———. *Koreshan Science*, Chicago: The Guiding Star Publishing House, 1896.
———. *The Mystery of the Gentiles*, Estero: The Guiding Star Publishing House, 1926.
———. *Reincarnation*, Estero: The Guiding Star Publishing House, 1919.
Rahn, Claude J. "Brief Outline of the Life of Dr. Cyrus R. Teed (Koresh) and of the Koreshan Unity," Unpublished notebook, Nov., 1940.
Articles from *The American Eagle and Horticultural Review*, Estero: Koreshan Unity, Nov. 28, 1946; Dec. 5, 1946; Jan. 23, 1947; Aug. 7, 1947; Aug. 14, 1947; Oct. 9, 1947; Oct. 16, 1947; Oct. 23, 1947; Nov. 20, 1947; Nov. 27, 1947; Dec. 4, 1947; Dec. 11, 1947.
Articles from *The Flaming Sword*, Estero: The Guiding Star Publishing House, 1945; 1946; 1947; 1948.

Sources Consulted

THREE CROPS

- Christman, W. W. Scrapbook.
———. *Songs of the Helderhills*, Boston: Harold Vinal, 1926.
———. *Songs of the Western Gateway*, New York: Lewis Copeland Co., Inc., 1930.
———. *The Untillable Hills*, Montpelier: The Driftwind Press, 1927.
———. *Wild Pasture Pine*, Albany: The Argus Press, 1933.

MISCELLANEOUS

- Anonymous. *The Book of the Roycrofters*, East Aurora: Roycrofters, 1928.
Barber, John W. and Howe, Henry. *Historical Collections of the State of N. Y.*, New York: S. Tuttle, 1842.
Bunnell, A. O. (ed.). *Dansville, 1789-1902*, Dansville: Instructor Publishing Co.
Coonley, John Stuart (copyright by). *Chronicles of an American Home*, New York: Privately printed by J. J. Little & Ives Co., 1930.
De Veaux, S. *The Travellers' Own Book to Saratoga Springs, Niagara Falls and Canada*, Buffalo: Faxon and Read, 1842.
Devens, R. M. *Our First Century*, Springfield: C. A. Nichols & Co., 1876.
Fox, Dixon Ryan. *The Decline of Aristocracy in the Politics of New York*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1919.
French, J. H. *Gazetteer of the State of New York*, 10th Edition, Syracuse: R. P. Smith, 1860.
Goodrich, C. A. *The Family Tourist*, Hartford: Case, Tiffany & Co., 1848.
Gunther, John. *Inside U.S.A.*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947.
Hubbard, Alice (ed.). *An American Bible*, East Aurora: Roycrofters, 1918.
Moscow, Warren. *Politics in the Empire State*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948.
Nordhoff, Charles. *The Communistic Societies of the United States*, New York: Harper & Brothers, 1875.
Shambaugh, Bertha M. H. *Amana That Was and Amana That Is*, Iowa City: State Historical Society of Iowa, 1932.
Shay, Felix. *Elbert Hubbard of East Aurora*, New York: Wm. H. Wise & Co., Inc., 1926.