

THE KORESHANS IN FLORIDA

The Sect Which Follows Dr. Teed, Who Claims to be a Christ.

JACKSONVILLE, Fla., Feb. 29.—Among other things, the end of the century will record several false Christs. They are branded by the world as frauds and impostors. At the same time hundreds of intellectual, apparently level-headed people vouch for the genuineness of their claims, as in the case of Schlatter of Denver.

Dr. Cyrus Teed, the Chicago Christ, has been here about two years. He owns Estero Island, in Lee County, has established the "New Jerusalem" in its groves and hammocks, and is gradually centralizing his other colonies at that point. His followers are "Koreshans." Himself is Christ incarnated; his mansion, very imposing in the midst of a village of rough and primitive habitations, is called by the Hebrew-sounding name of "Beth-Ophrah"; his minister, whose office it is to see that his orders are executed, is a queen of heaven bearing the awe-inspiring title of "Victoria Gratia Horesh."

There are no other offices in the kingdom. It is a one-man power; a rule as absolute as that of the Turk, and, to hearken to the accounts of those who sometimes make their way to the island, quite as unfeeling and severe. Having signed away their fortunes, souls, and bodies, these wretches are slaves in truth, suffering all the horrors of slavery in its most cruel and degraded form. They are merely work cattle, forced to dig and delve unremittingly in field and shop, regardless of weather, personal fitness, or family circumstances. Age, bodily pain, or a sick child do not excuse from the daily toil; the sick may die untended and the laborer drop in his or her track—for the women and children are subjected to the same hard and unremitting toil as the men—it is all one to their leader. In the midst of plenty of their own raising, they are fed principally on mush and hominy; where wood is abundant, they are not allowed time from their work to gather it and sit by a fire, no matter how cool or damp it may be. Little by little they have been required to yield such comforts and luxuries as they brought with them from happier homes and a conventional state of society.

The passage of time being no longer of any moment to them, their watches have been taken and converted into a bright and beautiful sword, which was presented to the Queen, or Empress, on her fifty-first birthday, the 10th of last April, when they celebrated the august event by a grand reception and banquet. Teed is said to keep the laboring Koreshans at a distance, and to bear himself in rather a veiled-prophet manner, without the veil. Beth-Ophrah they must not approach too near. They may only raise their eyes to the sacred walls and worship from afar. Therefore, they were not in the splendid halls to see how the sword made from their watches flashed in the many lights as it was presented to the "Empress of Heaven." Teed has his Court, composed of the most congenial of the male slaves and the most beautiful and adventurous of the females. These dwell with him at Beth-Ophrah in ease and luxury, and were the only guests at the brilliant birthday party.

"Victoria Gratia Horesh" was once a resident of Chicago, where she left a husband and son to become an Empress on a small, obscure island of Florida. She is soon to be crowned; that is, when the gold and silver ornaments and jewels of the common people have been made into a crown. As many families of wealth left the world to follow this "Christ," the quantity will not be inconsiderable.

Their creed is of the simplest. They worship Teed as the actual incarnation of Jesus Christ, and him alone. They are angels, and without sex, so there is neither marry-

ing nor giving in marriage, and the children brought into the colony are first taught that Teed is their only parent. One hears of but two laws—worship of Teed as very god, and blind, unquestioning obedience to his word, as carried out by the Empress. He expects to die, and any "cross-line" of love between himself and his disciples will tend to weaken his power to rise again from the dead. If the accounts of his rule are true, he will remain invisible to the faithful throughout time and eternity. He says his hour is approaching, and he is busy getting his "New Jerusalem" in proper shape before his death and ascension.

The Koreshans are practically independent of the outside world running farms and having their own shops for the various though simple mechanical needs of an agricultural people. They have a small printing office, whence issues Teed's tracts for the promulgation of his peculiar religion, and two newspapers, *The Flaming Sword*, and *The Pruning Shears*, all unique, to say the least. Teed claims to heal by the laying on of hands, and the ability to duplicate any and all of the miracles told in the Bible. He professes to have power over the forces of nature, and all the material things of life; that his wishes, however extravagant, are granted as soon as made; that he can create, destroy, and create again, as he lists; all of which and much more is religiously and fearfully believed by the Koreshans. It is asserted that he has accomplished some remarkable feats, acknowledged by those most opposed to him to be entirely out of the common. Teed is said to be a man of intelligence and culture, yet the claim is made that, previous to his incarnation, which took place in his thirtieth year, he was an ignorant, uneducated, country-bred person. He asserts that at the moment Christ Jesus became incarnated in him, this extraordinary learning and worldly wisdom was imparted to him instantaneously. By means of these pretensions, very well carried out, it is admitted that Dr. Teed preserves his authority over the Koreshans and adds recruits from time to time, despite unfavorable stories of his rule.