

WOMAN RULES EMPIRE

"Victoria Gratia" Is the Head of Koreshan.

HER CAPITAL IS IN FLORIDA

Community Is Patterned After Apostolic Church of the First Century—Brotherly Love and Pure Life the Creed—Religious, Social, and Industrial Revolution the Aim of the Koreshanites.

From the New York Tribune.

Ask the first man you meet the quickest route to the capital city of the empire of Koreshan and he will probably regard you with something akin to suspicion. Ask him then if he happens to know who the preeminent and the prime counselor are, and after he has muttered something like "The funny nouse for yours," see if he doesn't try to sidestep and call a policeman. And yet the questions are not such extraordinary ones. Indeed, the very man who looks on you with suspicion may himself some day become a patron of equation, may sit with the signet chamber and the preeminent councilium may become the counselor's right-hand man, may even sit at the feet of Victoria Gratia herself. Who knows? It is, after all, more a matter of environment than anything else.

Down in the southern part of Florida almost every one knows that Estero is the capital of the "Koreshan Unity," that Dr. Cyrus R. Teed, the founder of Koreshanity, is the prime counsellor, and that Mrs. Annie Ordway, or "Victoria Gratia," as they style her in Estero, is the "preeminent." To those to whom the name of Koreshanity conveys a vague idea of a few scattered devotees to the belief that the universe is an overgrown hollow globe, inside which the earth, sun, moon, and stars move about as trained goldfish in a jar of water, there is much of interest to be learned of the Koreshan Unity, its rulers, its capital city, and the inhabitants thereof. Ezra J. Stewart, who has visited Estero, on the banks of the Estero River, about 16 miles south of Fort Myers, Fla., and 5 miles from the point where the river empties into Estero Bay, has written to the Tribune of his trip to that unique settlement.

Head of the Colonies.

Here, in the heart of the tourists' and hunters' paradise of South Florida, the several Koreshan colonies located in Chicago, San Francisco, and elsewhere have for the last decade been concentrating their forces, and under the leadership of Dr. Cyrus R. Teed, the founder of Koreshanity, the name of which is derived from "Koresh," the Persian word for Cyrus, are engaged in an attempt to establish what they believe to be the greatest religious, social, and industrial movement ever attempted in any age.

"For the present," writes Mr. Stewart, "a central nucleus practices celibacy, while other orders of the system sustain the monogamic marriage relation, with cooperation in industrial and social relations. They teach that 'heaven and hell are in humanity, and constitute the spiritual world; the spiritual domain is mental, and is in the natural humanity—not in the sky.'"

Of the life of the 200 or more inhabitants of Estero, Mr. Stewart says: "Here they have all things in common after the pattern of the Christian Apostolic Church of the first century. A common dining hall, kitchen, bakery, dairy, laundry, &c., help to supply ordinary needs, and go far toward the conservation of time and energy required by these people for the development of their social, educational, and spiritual ideals. Much attention is given to practical, as well as theoretical education in almost all branches of learning. A primary school is maintained for younger children, in which music, vocal and instrumental, is a prominent study. Higher classes, attended by adults and youth, are held hourly each day, in which algebra, bookkeeping, languages, music, science, art, and other branches are taught by competent persons.

"A practical surveyor demonstrates his art by taking boys into the fields and woods for actual practice; while carpentry, boat building, furniture making, pattern making, printing, mechanics, and other useful industries are taught in shops to youths and adults as a part of the daily routine. Books scattered about in different places are to be collected into a library building in the near future. I noticed some 250 volumes in a bookcase in the visitors' room, including the works of such authors as Gibbon, Burns, Emerson, Shakespeare, Goethe, Tolstoi, Dickens, Cooper, Smiles, Spencer, Max Muller, and Swedenborg, besides concordances, cyclopedias, and medical works.

Varied Industries.

"Besides agriculture, this industrious community is engaged in growing citrus and other fruits. Almost every kind of fruit which will grow in Florida is raised here. Most of the crop is consumed by the colonists. The building and equipment of electric launches, for use in surrounding waters, is a growing industry at Estero, where splendid facilities are at hand, including a dry dock, a sawmill, furnishes lumber for building, furniture making, and kindred industries. A complete outfit for the manufacture of concrete building blocks is in successful operation. The publishing house, containing two large presses, folders, &c., employs a number of the colonists in editing and publishing a monthly magazine devoted to the dissemination of their religious and social ideas, and a political weekly, devoted principally to the purification of local and national politics.

"A commodious, well-equipped machine shop affords employment to those of a mechanical turn, while an electric plant is in process of development. These varied industries are conducted by persons who receive no wages for their services. Those who had property, on joining this institution, sold it and placed the proceeds in the common treasury. The Koreshans have a novitiate order called the Society Arch-Triumphant, which which all persons aspiring to the communistic order must first join. This is similar to the novitiate order of the Shakers and other societies. Persons living in their own homes may become members of the Society Arch-Triumphant, and it does not involve giving up private property. The Koreshans also have the initiative and referendum.

Victoria Gratia.

"Going to the building in which resides Victoria Gratia, preeminent of the Koreshan Unity and female head of all orders of the system, we passed through a commodious, handsomely furnished room on the first floor and ascended a richly carpeted staircase to the floor above, where we were entertained by Mrs. Annie Ordway (Victoria Gratia). Mrs. Ordway, a tall, stately woman, past middle life, seemed well qualified for the duties of her position.

"'Yes,' she replied, in answer to my congratulations, 'we are now making considerable headway. It is now just twelve years since another sister and myself landed at Estero with little of this world's goods and started the settlement here. We lived in a one-room cottage, and a dry goods box served very well for a seat in those days. We had few of the comforts, not to mention luxuries, to which we are now accustomed.'"