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Perils, Gold and Yellow: Cyrus Teed's *The Great Red Dragon* Adam Morris

Europe had been overwhelmed with the yellow peril; first with the yellow peril of gold,—the love of which had brought this great disaster; then by the yellow peril of Orientalism.

—Koresh, *The Great Red Dragon* (71)

I. The End

For much of 1908, Cyrus R. Teed, known to his followers as Koresh, lay dying on a private island in Estero Bay. The founder of the Koreshan Unity was in severe nerve pain, his condition allegedly the result of a blow to the head he sustained during a tussle in the street in Fort Myers, Florida, in October 1906. Although his anguish may have had as much to do with the electricity treatments he periodically took as a cure, the blame was squarely placed on Teed's political enemies and made to fit the narrative that he, like Jesus, was a persecuted messiah.¹

The assault occurred after Teed intervened in a disagreement between one of his Koreshan followers and a hotel proprietor in Fort Myers. This livestock port was the seat of Lee County, then controlled by a phalanx of the Democratic Party machine. The Koreshans, despite their overall disdain for party politics, had recently thrown their support behind one of their own, Ross Wallace, for country commissioner. They had formed their own Progressive Liberty Party for this purpose, and sought the alliance of anyone who, like they, believed that the Democrats could use some competition. Naturally, the Progressive Liberty Party stood for many central tenants of Koreshan orthodoxy, such as leveling the income distribution and public ownership of utilities.²

Wallace's candidacy was part of a grudge the Koreshans nursed against the Lee County Democrats, who had coordinated with Teed's enemies to thwart the growth of the Koreshan commune. Many of the locals,

Note: Parenthetical numbers in text are page numbers for Koresh, *The Great Red Dragon, or, The Flaming Devil of the Orient* (Estero, Florida: Guiding Star Publishing House, 1916, ©1908).

although they had little or nothing to do with the Koreshan Unity, did not take kindly to the idea of having the Estero settlement become any larger or more influential, particularly after the Koreshans had voted Republican in 1904. The Democrats managed to strip the commune in Estero of public funds to which it was entitled as an incorporated Florida town, and then proceeded to manipulate voting regulations to have Koreshan votes discounted in subsequent elections. As political tensions flared, Teed took to traveling with a bodyguard. However, this wasn't enough to prevent the disgruntled hotelier, answering to the name of Mr. Sellers, from striking the Koreshan master, albeit for motives not strictly political: Sellers slugged Teed because he believed his wife had been insulted by a Koreshan over the telephone.³



Portrait of Dr. Cyrus Reed Teed, founder of the Koreshan Universology.

Koreshan Unity collection N2009- 3, Papers, ca 1887-1990; Box 1, folder 8,
KOR0239, State Library and Archives of Florida.

Teed's resulting suffering soon proved too great for him to maintain his normally brisk calendar of travel between various sites of Koreshan activity. He deputized Victoria Gratia, Empress of the Koreshan Unity, to

oversee affairs in Washington, then repaired to the Unity beach house on Estero Island to recover while the Koreshans jostled with their opponents in the press. Teed doubtless hoped to rest and convalescence during his retirement on the island, but he was by no means idle. Rather, he began work on what would be the final book-length tract he authored in his lifetime. Unique among his output, this text was not a scientific treatise, in the manner of *The Cellular Cosmogony* (1898); nor was it a theological, pseudo-theological, or politico-spiritual text in the style of *The Immortal Manhood* (1902). Rather, it was a futurist war novel titled *The Great Red Dragon, or, The Flaming Devil of the Orient*. Teed signed it with the name “Lord Chester.” It was published under this pseudonym in 1909 by the Koreshans’ Guiding Star Publishing House, not long after Teed expired.

II. Red, Yellow, & Gold

Koreshans would have recognized that the title of Teed’s novel referred to the dragon which appears in Revelation 12, a passage of critical importance to Koreshan prophecy and lore. It describes a pregnant “woman clothed with the sun” who is flung by the monster’s tail from heaven to earth; her son is prophesied to do battle with the forces of Satan, represented by the seven-headed, ten-horned dragon. Teed associated this woman with the “goddess” who appeared to him in a spiritual vision he beheld after successfully transmuting base metals to gold in his Utica alchemical laboratory in the winter of 1869-1870. She was the goddess who revealed his messianic destiny.

For turn-of-the-century readers, the title of Teed’s novel evoked another color, in addition to the scarlet biblical beast; the dragon was symbolic of the “yellow peril” many Americans believed had been menacing Western society for decades. The phrase “yellow peril” generally refers to the fear-mongering that surrounded the perceived threat of rising Asian ambition in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The term is sometimes attributed to a dream in which Kaiser Wilhelm II saw the Buddha riding a dragon. This was a symbol of the Chinese-Japanese alliance that the Kaiser and other European leaders feared would result from their imperial incursions in Asia. The story of the Kaiser’s dream is an apocryphal tale, but the origin of the phrase matters less than its wide-scale adoption in the Western press at the turn of the century, and the historical consequences of the imperial aggression it fomented.

One of these was the Triple Intervention of 1895, in which Russia, France, and Germany pressured Japan to surrender territory it had recently conquered on the Chinese mainland. Imperial Russia wanted Japan off the Asian continent; the Germans wished to encourage Russia to focus its imperial expansions in Asia rather than in Eastern Europe; and French financiers were invested in Russian railroad projects that prospered from eastward expansion.⁴ All three powers additionally hoped to blunt British and American ambitions in the region.

There were too many players for this to be a stable arrangement: the Anglo-Japanese Alliance brokered in 1902 helped send the Russians to defeat in the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-1905, as France could not intervene to aid Russia in the conflict without plunging into a costly war with England. Theodore Roosevelt negotiated peace in 1905. The Russian loss, a stinging blow to European white racial supremacy, made the “yellow peril” seem more urgent in Europe.

Back in America, Teed regarded the Russo-Japanese war as part of a longer pattern of escalating tensions between the imperial powers, one that had more to do with capitalist exploitation of labor than with contests for civilizational predominance. He owed this perspective, in part, to his travels to California in the 1890s. Anti-Asian sentiment in the West had been mounting among labor activists since the 1870s, particularly in the wake of the economic recession caused by the Panic of 1873. Denis Kearney and other anti-Chinese labor leaders provoked a powerful and enduring response in California with their demands for Chinese exclusion from the workforce, on the grounds that Asian workers were being exploited to keep wages down for native-born whites. The 1875 Page Act and the even more explicit Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882 were two federal legislative responses to this “peril.”

In Teed’s view, the skirmishes in East Asia were orchestrated by the capitalist interests which controlled Western governments. So long as empires competed for economic dominance, and used force to open markets and subdue colonial labor forces, the pattern of racial fear and military aggression would continue. As he jotted on hotel stationery around the time of Roosevelt’s 1905 peace negotiations, “If the nations had left Japan to enjoy the fruits of her victory in her war with China, this present war with Russia would have been avoided.... Any peace established upon the basis of the present status of the human heart is but the postponement of the fateful day.”⁵ The “present status of the human heart” referred

to what Teed called “competism”: the regime of greed and avarice that controlled the actions of those who had not committed to a regenerate life of celibate communism, a commitment he sometimes called “circumcision of the heart,” following Deuteronomy 10:16.⁶

Teed blamed the corrupted spiritual condition of the Christian world on capitalist “money-power.” His use of this phrase was not original, and most likely derived from an 1890 text with which his novel shares a title: L. B. Woolfolk's *The Great Red Dragon: The Foreign Money Power in the United States*, a conspiracy theory which alleged that Jewish “money power” in the London finance sector was conspiring to control the global economy through coordinated ownership of public and private debt.⁷ Rev. Woolfolk



Koreshan Unity sculpture.

Koreshan Unity collection N2009- 3, Papers, ca 1887-1990; Box 6, folder 2, KOR2259A, State Library and Archives of Florida.

associated the diabolical plot with the dragon prophecy in the Book of Revelation.⁸

Along with Chinese exclusion, paranoid anti-Semitism was another of the reactionary and nativist responses to rising economic tensions and class conflict brought about by the concentration of wealth in the Gilded Age. Teed did not take the bait offered by imported anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, in part because the basis of his own messianic authority rested on the legitimacy of the Jewish and Christian dispensations. Aside from that, time spent in Chicago from 1886 onward had taught Teed that organized capitalist repression of labor was certainly not limited to Jews. But he adopted the rest of Woolfolk's theory whole-cloth, as confirmed by an undated, typewritten manuscript titled, "Conspiracies which threaten and imperil the Nation (Koreshe)." In this tract, archived with Teed's personal files, Teed rehearses a plagiarized version of Woolfolk's money-power thesis, minus the Jews.⁹ Throughout the Populist and Greenback movements, Teed focused instead on the role that gold played in this capitalist conspiracy. His belief that gold was the principal weapon that "money power" used to subjugate workers resulted from his personal study and practice of alchemy.

Gold played an important role in the way Koreshean theology developed alongside American progressive-socialist politics in the late nineteenth century. Immediately prior to Teed's alchemically induced prophetic vision in Utica, central and western European powers engaged in coordinated international monetary policy in response to the discoveries of gold in California and Australia, as well as the more recent discovery of the Comstock Lode of silver in Nevada. Teed came to view international negotiations over specie as part of a capitalist conspiracy to enslave workers with debt and prevent them from ever controlling the means of production. The economic Panic of 1873 was triggered in part by the move, made by numerous European governments from 1869 onward, to demonetize silver.

Conversations over specie took the form of contentious political argument in the United States, which since the Civil War had used a bimetallic system together with paper money not backed by specie, commonly known as greenbacks. The debate about how to move monetary policy forward was not split along party lines, but along sectional ones: wealthy New England and California financiers and industrialists, who had lent money, argued for contractive "hard money" policy, while

Midwesterners, who enjoyed new political power in both houses of Congress and who represented the most indebted constituencies, favored inflationary measures.¹⁰ In February 1873, Republican President Ulysses S. Grant signed his party's bill to demonetize government silver reserves, although the nation would not formally adopt a unitary gold standard until 1900. This decision became known by Grant's opponents as the Crime of '73. That May, the Vienna stock market exchange crashed, triggering a recession that quickly reached the United States.

One of the cities hardest hit by the Panic was Chicago, where the Koreshan Unity was based for the first decade of its existence. The European banking crisis had caused a withdrawal by European investors from risky investments, such as U.S. railroad securities. A September crash on Wall St. exacerbated the problem; it effectively killed the construction of the Northern Pacific railway, closed several other regional rail companies, and sent fifty-five others into receivership. Railroad construction ground to a halt, leading to a downturn in related iron, steel, and machine industries. The crisis and the debate over money led almost immediately to escalated class conflict and the further concentration of wealth, as thousands of people lost their jobs and real wages declined back to 1860 levels by 1880.¹¹

The Panic had the effect of reanimating the labor movement just as Teed was consolidating and publishing the core tenets of Koreshan ideology in upstate New York and in Chicago. As the crisis deepened, the middle and wealthy classes feared that laborers might attempt something like the Paris Commune, particularly during the Great Railroad Strike of 1877. The 1886 Haymarket affair had occurred the spring prior to Teed's arrival in Chicago, and reinforced the city's role as a principal battleground of class struggle. Tensions between labor and capital in the United States had never been higher, and would have confirmed Teed's preexisting opinions about capitalism, all of which were negative.

III. Novel Theories

The name of Teed's posthumous novel thus signaled his intervention in contemporary geopolitical concerns. The subgenre in which he couched the narrative, however, was already well-worn territory. *The Great Red Dragon* is a dystopian fantasy novel. It followed a tradition that had captivated readers since the sensational release of Edward Bellamy's 1888 novel *Looking Backward*, a bestseller that ignited a national political conversation

about the fair distribution of resources.¹² Massive interest in Bellamy's ideas led to the creation of dozens of Bellamy-oriented Nationalist Clubs throughout the country, which took up various methods for advancing a collectivist, industrial socialism, ranging in intensity from hosting lectures and reading groups to creating intentional communities.

Looking Backward portrays the United States in the year 2000, after capitalism has finally been deposed to make way for socialist utopia. Social class has more or less been abolished, industry is voluntary and fulfilling, and the bellicose armies of the world have been replaced with an Industrial Army that generates whatever goods are needed for the feeding, clothing, and sheltering the populace. Service in the army is mandatory for adults, except for those deemed suitable for non-industrial professions, like teaching. Progression to management within any segment of society is based on neither birth nor election, but merit.

As Arthur Lipow has persuasively demonstrated, Bellamy's novel has been misinterpreted by historians who confuse its anti-monopolist position with a call to for democratic-socialist revolution from below. If the society depicted in *Looking Backward* is socialist, it represents a bureaucratic, industrial, and nationalist socialism; it is certainly not democratic. Instead, people in Bellamy's novel live (happily) under regime of authoritarian collectivism governed by a technocratic elite.¹³ *Looking Backward* and the Nationalist movement were an expression of something nearly extinct from the American political landscape by the year 2000: a middle-class socialism that loathed the iniquities of monopoly capitalism, but feared even more the mob rule they supposed would follow a proletarian revolution. The positivist middle path that would steer Western society between the Scylla and Charybdis of labor and capital was the dispassionate and scientific organization of industrial society by benevolent elites.¹⁴

Bellamy's novel was not unknown to the Koreshans: Bellamyism and "Bellamy system" are mentioned often in the pages of *The Flaming Sword*, the Koreshan Unity newspaper, as early as January 1890. Bellamy's short-lived newspaper, *The New Nation*, advertised in the *Flaming Sword*. As someone who had been calling for authoritarian socialism for years, Teed found much to admire in Bellamy's scheme. The Koreshan Unity organized some of its programs, such as the Bureau of Equitable Commerce it incorporated in San Francisco in 1891, according to arrangements similar to those outlined in Bellamy's novel. However, Teed distinguished "centralizing and organic" Koreshanity from Bellamy-inspired Nationalism, which he dismissed as

“dissipating and inorganic”; that is, based on false and godless premises that could never bring about unity.¹⁵ The organicist metaphor indicates Teed drew upon Laurence Gronlund's *The Cooperative Commonwealth* (1884), which took the idea from Herbert Spencer and developed it into the basis of his program for collectivist society governed by an educated and qualified elite.¹⁶

As the name of the Koreshan economic Bureau suggests, Teed was likewise familiar with the work and theories of Josiah Warren and Stephen Pearl Andrews. Particularly after their orbits overlapped in New York's reformist circles in 1885 and 1886, Teed was preoccupied with winning over Andrews's supporters to theologically oriented socialism.¹⁷ Whereas in *Looking Backward*, hours of work are assigned according to the difficulty of the labor, Teed's Bureau proposed using a time bank or ledger in which the bureau would record “units” of labor and distribute its resources accordingly. It was a system that Warren and Andrews had already attempted at Modern Times, and one that functioned suspiciously like the monetary regime it was meant to replace.¹⁸

Looking Backward inspired an avalanche of literary responses, including alternative visions for how a socialist utopia was supposed to look and function. Two well-known exponents of this exploding genre were hot on Bellamy's heels: William Morris's 1890 novel *News from Nowhere* imagined the de-urbanized and ecologically revitalized London that emerged in the wake of a great war between labor and capital. William Dean Howells's novel *A Traveler from Altruria*, which began serial publication in 1892, introduced readers to a nation called Altruria, where poverty and joblessness were unknown. These literary works penetrated the popular imagination far more effectively than the theoretical writings of Andrews or Warren, who were in the process of being mostly forgotten.

Teed recognized that proposals for social and political reform, no matter how radical, were read with interest by the masses if they were narrated in stylish fiction. But it was not until midway through the first decade of the twentieth century that he set to work on a novel that might advance the Koreshan theory and prophecy of Imperial Socialism. His delayed response to the literary fad launched by *Looking Backward* allowed for a retrospective view of the late-Victorian canon of utopian and dystopian literature.

One tributary to this torrent of works was the futurist war novel, one that reached new heights, so to speak, with H. G. Wells's novel *The War*

in the Air (1908). In Wells's novel, New York is invaded from the East by the German aerial forces sent by Kaiser Wilhelm II, and from the West by united Japanese–Chinese forces known as the Confederation of East Asia. Lynn Millner, author of *The Allure of Immortality* (2015), the first comprehensive biography of Teed written by a non-Koreshan, rightly observes that *The Great Red Dragon* has “uncanny similarities” to *The War in the Air*.¹⁹ Indeed, the importance of a flying warships and a bicoastal invasion of the United States to the plots of both novels make accusations of plagiarism invitingly seductive. But Wells's influence is only narrowly plausible, given that *The War in the Air* was published in installments of *Pall Mall Magazine* between January and September of 1908, while Teed was revising a his manuscript for *The Great Red Dragon*. In the “Publisher's Note” that precedes the final 1909 text, Teed or one of his posthumous executors at the Guiding Star Publishing House claimed that his novel was completed in 1906-1907, then sent to various publishers who declined to print it, “but not, however, before they had retained it long enough to note the main points” and published them under the names of other authors. It appears that Teed referred to Wells, or to Jack London, whose 1908 novel *The Iron Heel* describes the implementation of a powerful monopolistic Oligarchy in the United States in the early twentieth century.

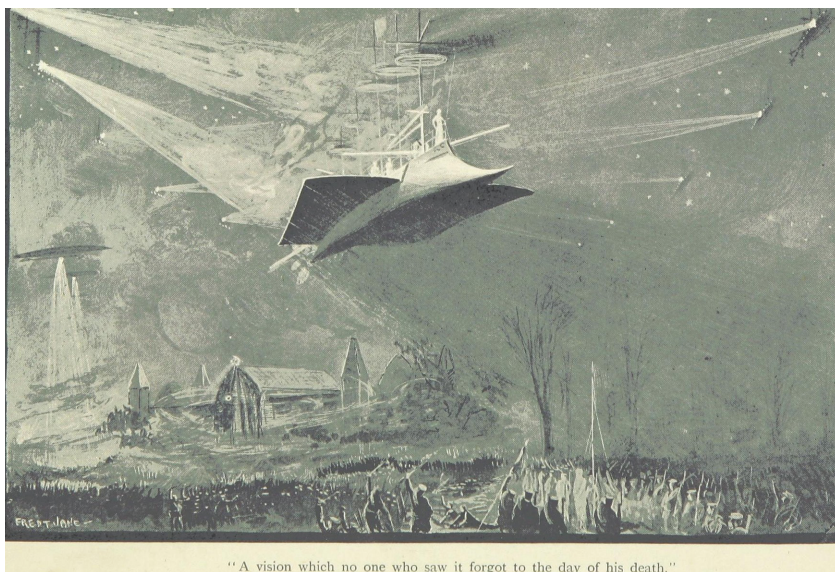
It is unlikely that Wells or London wrote at the suggestion of an editor who had seen Teed's manuscript, as the Koreshan publication alleges, and just as doubtful that Teed had taken principal inspiration from either London or Wells. The Koreshan Unity collection at the State Library and Archives of Florida contains a draft manuscript of *The Great Red Dragon*.²⁰ It is undated, but almost certainly predates 1908: according to Lyn Millner's archival research, Teed had begun reading this draft aloud to his followers by 1907.

Most likely is that all three novels drew upon the same source. While Bellamy, Morris, and Howells made up the genteel literary ranks Teed hoped to join with the publication of his novel, none of these was the scrappy literary dynamo who had the greatest influence on *The Great Red Dragon*. That distinction goes to a man who could add “congressman and literary critic” to his *curriculum vitae*. This was Ignatius Donnelly, the idiosyncratic author who gained notoriety for his promotion of the theory that Francis Bacon had written the works of “so-called” Shakespeare. Donnelly's 1890 novel *Caesar's Column* staged a version of some of the apocalyptic prophecies Teed had been developing since his 1870 illumination.

Along with other prescient predictions, such as the invention of air conditioning, biometric wristwatches, and a version of the fax machine or computer terminal, *Caesar's Column* had foreseen aerial warfare and deployed it as a plot device. In the novel's futurist setting, dirigibles are used both militarily and for commercially trans-Atlantic transportation. In the former context, they are called "Demons," and are used for espionage and to drop bombs containing poison gas. In Teed's novel, the airships were used "for the purpose of showering shells of the most destructive explosives," but do not engage in chemical warfare. (92) *Caesar's Column* sold out twelve editions in six months, and came at the height of the American controversy over precious metals. Wells either drew directly on Donnelly, or had borrowed his tropes by way of George Griffiths, whose novel *The Angel of the Revolution: A Tale of the Coming Terror* (1893), a futuristic late-Victorian war novel Wells admired, had lifted elements directly from *Caesar's Column*.²¹ Whether or not Teed read Wells, the idea of an "aerial navy" did not originate with either.



Ignatius Donnelly.



Aerial war, as suggested by Angel of the Revolution.

IV. Capital vs. Labor

The thematic concerns of *The Great Red Dragon* suggest that Teed drew heavily from Donnelly, as well as from other late-Victorian texts concerned with the perceived global struggle between the “races.” *Caesar’s Column* takes place in 1988. Its narrator, Gabriel Weltstein, is a visitor to New York from Uganda, where he lives among white colonists in a peaceful, bucolic mountain colony. While in New York, Weltstein is horrified to discover that because powerful monopolies were left to their own devices, a drastic concentration of wealth has created a society plagued by such extreme poverty that the masses have regressed to a dangerously primitive state of subdevelopment. Great “rings” and monopolistic trusts determine all aspects of economic life in this “utilitarian land.”²² The “iron law of wages” decreed by powerful economists determined that the masses were deprived of life’s necessities, made to beg and steal, subjected to the cruelty of the police, and forced to breathe polluted air while the rich pay for air piped into their parlors from high in the atmosphere.²³ Resulting high mortality rates, exacerbated by a high incidence of government-assisted

suicides, accelerated the process of their devolution into “undersized,” “hungry-looking,” “haggard,” and “hopeless” subhumans lowered to the condition of “Australian savages.”²⁴

This state of affairs was long in the making, but proves untenable over the short course of the novel. The global aristocracy, which was “almost altogether of Hebrew origin,” had decided to avenge its centuries of persecution by making the Christian world pay “in tears and blood, for the sufferings inflicted by their bigoted and ignorant ancestors upon a noble race.”²⁵ By forcing the Jews to be moneylenders and then denigrating them for it, Christians had foolishly given them both the skills and the motive to exact a long and slow revenge upon them. The secret Jewish society of manufacturers and financiers, known as “The Oligarchy,” no longer needed to conceal itself: in 1988, New York politics and police are commanded by “Prince Cabano,” the title assumed by a wealthy Jew called Jacob Isaacs, who had “purchased a principedom in Italy.”²⁶ The Prince and his confreres are in league with a global organization of aristocrats across the Western industrialized world; in conclaves like the one Gabriel witnesses while hidden among Prince Cubano’s cactus collection, “political parties, courts, juries, governors, legislatures, congresses, presidents are made and unmade.”²⁷ The Christian church, on the other hand, is corrupt and impotent, relegated to a role as the dummy state’s coarse propagandist.

Meanwhile, an international “Brotherhood of Destruction” plots the overthrow of the Oligarchy and its false government, even if it means being “crushed to death amid the ruins” and the total destruction of society.²⁸ Indeed, this is what ends up happening after the Brotherhood successfully bribes the commanders of the Demon air fleet to join their insurrection. Sent by the Oligarchy to destroy the uprising of the workers in the streets, the Demons instead surround and bomb the regiments of Oligarchy troops who have barricaded and laid siege to the workers. Coordinated efforts by the phalanxes of the Brotherhood abroad prevent the monopolists in Europe from sending reinforcements to their American counterparts. Prince Cabano and the city’s aristocrats are all savagely murdered in a bloody melee that concludes with the construction of “Caesar’s Column,” a tower built of the entombed corpses of the city’s monopolists, financiers, and their families. The monument is named after Caesar Lomellini, the hideous giant of Italian extraction who savagely leads the Brotherhood to victory. Unfortunately for all involved, the victory is Pyrrhic. Western civilization collapses when the triumphant masses,

degraded to the status of uncivilized brutes, fail to reconstruct a functional society after the war. Gabriel and his friend Maximilian, along with their families and sweethearts, escape in a Demon to Uganda, where along with Swiss survivors of the European war, they build a new society in the shelter of an encircling mountain range.

V. Gog vs. Magog

Donnelly and *Caesar's Column* both received favorable coverage in *The Flaming Sword*.²⁹ Teed was probably thrilled by Donnelly's novel: he had been predicting the simultaneous, cataclysmic fall of both the church and the state at least since his early days preaching and printing in Utica in the early 1880s: "The old church," Teed wrote,

must soon crumble to dust, and the old state must soon hear its death knell and go to decay. Upon their ruins shall arise from the ashes of the old dispensation such a religious and secular economy as shall provide, by the equitable distribution of God's material and spiritual blessings, for all such as are now, by man's inhumanity, made to suffer the consequences of a poverty which will be unknown to the new kingdom.³⁰

This early brew of the Koreshan elixir was concocted with uncertain parts of Warrenite "equitable commerce," vintage Millerite expectation, and a dash of incipient Social Gospel reformism, all blended into a late-nineteenth-century update on old-fashioned New Testament apocalyptic millenarianism. Teed would later identify this final cataclysm as the battle between Gog and Magog mentioned in the book of Ezekiel and associated with the Satanic forces of the apocalypse in Revelation 20:8. As he wrote in an introductory note to his unpublished text "The Coming Catastrophe": "These are two mighty forces in the near future to be arranged in deadly conflict, both moved by the same spirit of selfishness.... They constitute they powers of Gog and Magog, gathering themselves to the great and deadly battle for the day of God Almighty."³¹

This was prophecy, cobbled from Marx and St. John, but refashioned for a Populist-era public that naively hoped that reforms could save a society based on industrial capitalism. The reference to Gog and Magog wasn't something Teed tossed into the novel to distinguish himself from

Wells. For Koreshans, it was already an old saw, repeated often in Teed's voluminous writings in *The Flaming Sword* and elsewhere. A passage from his 1902 quasi-theological tract, *The Immortal Manhood*, a text which brought together many of the Koreshan teachings published in *The Flaming Sword* over the years, will suffice to illustrate. There, Teed writes:

The forces of Gog and Magog are marshaling for the combat. Upon the secular commercial plane of activity it will come in the conflict of labor against so called capital. The force of organic centralization is organizing. The money power controls the halls of legislation, and it is not within the power of any one man, either as the Executive of the nation, or any senator or congressman, or any one justice of the Supreme Court, to counteract the power of centralization which, serpent like, has ensconced itself in the legislative centers of the world. The fiat has gone forth; the monetary power, as relentless as death itself, will throttle industry. There can be no question that the money power proposes to control the commerce and industry of the world. Its power will take the control or bring the crisis. It will bring the crisis. The [Christian] dispensation began in conflict, it will end in catastrophe.

There never has been a time in the history of the world, when the fires of labor-unionism were so active as now.... "The industrial world shall be the slave of commerce." This is the fiat of the great serpent whose head is the gold power, which governs our centers of legislation. The money power controlling the Government and the military force, is the combination against which the industrial world has to contend. These forces of Gog and Magog, both belong to the competitive system, and both being the result of and product of antichristian paganism, will consummate the age in the disaster that cannot be escaped.³²

The labor system will be destroyed; there will cease to be a contest between that which is falsely called capital, and labor which it enslaves.....The employer and the employed both belong to the same pagan system of competism. It is flagrantly antichrist.³³

This passage neatly summarizes years of development in the Koreshan

ideology. But Teed's position vis-à-vis the anticipated cataclysm between labor and capital was not a unique stance, given the violent clashes that periodically erupted throughout the last decades of the nineteenth century. Consider the words of Lyman Abbot, published in *The Century* in 1885:

On one side of a narrow valley capital is concentrating its forces, small in numbers, compact in organization, powerful in equipment, and not always either scrupulous in its means or generous in its spirit. On the other side labor is concentrating its forces—an increasing host, loose in organization, but with a discontent in its heart which a great disaster might easily convert into bitter wrath—armed by modern science with fatally efficient equipment for destruction, and officered by leaders often both unscrupulous and daring. Every morning paper brings us the report of some strike or lockout, which is like the shot of a single picket along the line; and now and then we are startled by a riot such as that at Cincinnati, Chicago or Cleveland, which is like a skirmish between advance guards. *Who* can tell that the next skirmish may not bring on a battle?³⁴

Unlike Abbot and the Social Gospel reformers who believed in the possibility of reform, Koresh's writings disabused readers of their liberal-democratic beliefs in progressive improvement, and of the Universalist variety of Whiggish optimism that had flourished in the antebellum reform movements. He viewed the coming cataclysm as the inevitable result of the corruption of the true Christian church. *The Great Red Dragon*, he wrote in the Author's Note, "contains a prophetic vision of the future, not in the minutest details of its description of future events, but as to the general plan of the execution of the punishment of the Christian world for its departure from the communistic spirit in which the Lord inaugurated the Christian dispensation." (6)

The approaching cataclysm would mark the end of the Christian dispensation, and would come about "according to the natural course of events as predicated upon a system of competism, the very culmination of which is also the natural outcome of the inordinate commercial greed which actuates all of the incentives of modern impulse." (6) Teed stressed

that the crisis will not be confined to this or that capitalist country, but would affect the entire world. The purpose of his novel was not merely to warn of the coming crisis, but to answer a question he poses in his author's foreword—a question of central concern to contemporary geopolitics and the fears of “yellow peril.” There, Teed asks, “What part of the great catastrophe will Japan and China act, when the drama of a commercial supremacy moves the world into the vortex of the dissolution in which the age will culminate?” (6) Already skilled in the art of theological bricolage, Teed brought the rich array of his literary influences—Woolfolk, Abbott, Bellamy, and Donnelly among them—to bear on this question.

The answer is not subtle. The novel opens with a cabal of businessmen from “six of the greatest commercial enterprises in the world,” plotting to unite the governments of the industrialized Christian West against their common threats: domestic labor and aggressive Eastern competition. (12) As described by a Wall St. man called Mr. Leonard, this union would achieve “virtually the consolidation of the commercial power of the world against the common herd, which, if not checkmated, will bring anarchy and ruin to what must remain the stability of the monetary and commercial enterprises of the nations.” (9) It is no longer sufficient, Leonard explains, “that we have men to perform the bidding of the monetary combinations in our Congress and halls of legislation, and guards of these interests in our legislative lobbies; the doctrine of popular rights must somehow be eradicated from the public mind.” (9) These men represent the same interests defended by Donnelly's “Oligarchy,” but in Teed's version, they are not identified as Jews.

Across town the next day, and unbeknownst to the financiers and businessmen, the “labor organizations” hatch a plot of their own: the consolidation of trade organizations “to unite their strength for the purpose of fighting the industrial and monetary combinations with which they were in conflict.” (11) The speaker at this meeting, Mr. Mackintosh, tells those assembled, “Labor-unionism should be centralized and consolidated, and the industrial world made to understand that outside the fold of the labor-unionism consolidated, there can be no work undertaken.” (11) He later continues, “We cannot longer parley with the forces either of capital or the non-union element with which we have to contend. The solidarity of trades and labor-union organizations once effected, we can bid defiance to the commercial and money power of the world because there is greater power in human aggregation than in money owned and controlled by the

few who must finally yield to the force of numbers.” (12) The battle lines are drawn, and it remains only to be seen whether capital or labor will triumph.

A bigger problem distracts the capitalists from their plot: “another serious phase of commercial power,” the narrator explains, is:

looming up in the Oriental perspective. Indications were pointing to commercial rivalry between the East and West, between Oriental ‘paganism,’ which threatened more than a theoretical ‘yellow peril,’ and a new power in commerce—enterprising, subtle, and imbued with a spirit of independence on the lines of economic and industrial development. In fact, a new and formidable competitor had arisen on the horizon of Eastern civilization, brilliant and potent as the ‘orb’ which suggested the title for the new but growing and threatening danger to Western civilization and its commercial purposes. (12-13)

Aware of this danger, the capitalists wished to unite the Christian governments against both the internal threat posed by labor and the external menace in the East. This would be achieved first by a unification of armies, then reinforced by the imposition of a unitary money supply. As the narrator explains, “They had already discussed the propriety of even circumscribing the amount of gold to be defined as a basis of circulation. It was thought that an increase of the world’s output of gold might so cheapen the metal as to jeopardize the monetary interests.” (14) The capitalists of Lombard and Wall Streets thus hoped to thwart any designs by labor to devalue the gold-backed currency or inflate away their debts.

The labor unionists’ spies had already gotten wind of the capitalists’ plan, and liken their own situation to that of fragmented Germany before its unification at the conclusion of the Franco-Prussian war in 1870. Only together, the trade-unionists believe, can they turn back the capitalist assault. In secret, the Brotherhood has already founded an industrial center on the outskirts of Chicago: a hidden city capable of every sort of production. The commander of the industrial node is called Margrave; he coordinates with the Generalissimo of the labor-unionists’ cause, a New Yorker named Alexander Clinton, to marshal the working peoples of the country. Through their secret network of supporters, “Every city in the United States, under the auspices of these rival forces, was actively

operative in the metamorphosis of the old system of competition to the new system of greater and more definitely organized coöperation." (30)

Two leaders of the labor plot, Ellingwood and Mackintosh, are portrayed as intrepid brokers of workers' interests. Ellingwood is a double agent who manages to learn the capitalists' sinister methods for suppressing labor. He consorts with a young woman called Adelaide Colton, an employee of one of the Wall St. firms. Colton has amassed many of the industry's secrets, but changed her allegiance from Wall St. to the workers when she "became aware that the work in which I was engaged meant the slavery of the masses for whom I would yield my life." (33)

The latter portion of the novel features a character called "The Mystic," a man who is able to discern the impending crisis of the ages in the movement of the stars. This underutilized character is, of course, based on Teed himself: the narrator describes the Mystic's views as "revolutionary in all particulars. His knowledge of electrical science was beyond everything known in that line.... He knew himself as a scientist. He certainly was more than a prophet." (36) Those familiar with Teed's writings were already aware of his arcane astrological justifications for his messianic investiture, sometimes referred to as his "translation." This was scheduled to occur during the transition of Zodiacal eras, at which time Teed expected his spirit to enter a woman's body, presumably that of Victoria Gratia, and become a sexually biune diety. Teed taught that when Aries exited Pisces and entered Aquarius, it would inaugurate a Golden era when science would once more reign over human evolution: Koreshan alchemical science identified Aquarius with science, as water is the universal solvent.³⁵ Passage into the Golden Age would either result from or directly cause the final war between labor and capital, which would annihilate both "labor-unionism" and "money-power." The war would pave the way for the only form of government suitable to the new Koreshan dispensation: Imperial Socialism.³⁶

In *The Great Red Dragon*, the Mystic might also be the source of the mysterious propaganda circulating throughout the world, declaring the "final crisis" was about to bear down upon the United States, and that "all who would be preserved from the coming destruction were to aggregate in that country which God had chosen for the consummation of his purpose, and at the place that was being prepared for the chosen people." (36) Here Teed drew upon a scene familiar to any of his readers: the arrival of millions of immigrants to American shores, which had

caused the populations of many American cities to double or more in the latter half of the nineteenth century. He also drew a more covert line back to Andrew Jackson Davis's Harmonial philosophy, which had announced the United States as the home of God's chosen people, because the "combination of various Europeans in America" yields the "highest specimens of mankind," those closest to the principle of Unity.³⁷ However, immigration to the promised land was not open to everyone: Ellingwood and Mackintosh, the narrator reveals, are the masterminds in the labor movement who had engineered the exclusion of Chinese and Japanese labor from the United States. Mackintosh, who is described as having been a "labor-unionist, not a socialist" before he met Ellingwood, is likely based on Denis Kearney. (23)

All the while, in Florida, "there had been planted a colony on the Gulf of Mexico, which was in the process of rapid growth." (38) This clearly alluded to the Koreschan colony at Estero, which was thriving in the years Teed wrote *The Great Red Dragon*. To those living in the rapidly disintegrating capitalist world, the Gulf colony was still unknown, its existence being a secret and its purpose mysterious even to its residents.

VI. The Cataclysm

As labor and capital gird for collision, the Asian empires see their chance to gain upper hand in the imperial competition, and to avenge their exclusion from the West:

The Oriental nations had not been disinterested witnesses to the militant activity of the Christian world. They did not know what it all meant, but they were on the watch, and were as active in their preparations for the 'peace of the world' as their Christian brethren of the Occident. Military and naval activity was everywhere apparent in Japan and China. Both of these peoples had been excluded from American soil, as well as from England and other western countries. (39)

Reflecting geopolitical anxieties contemporary with the novel's publication, China and Japan in the novel had greatly militarized, although the Chinese army was "practically a Japanese army" staffed by Japanese generals and soldiers after the Japanese conquest and annexation

of China. (53) Having tired of fighting off Western incursions into their sphere of influence, the Japanese were as determined as the American workers to thwart the Imperial designs of Wall and Lombard Streets. As the narrator quips, "The Japanese were putting to the best possible use the education which they had derived from their contact with the peoples of the West; for they intended, at some period in the history of their progress, to let the nations understand to what extent their scholarship and tuition had given them the pre-eminence." (40-41)

The Eastern behemoth then initiates its revenge on the West for exclusion from their affairs. Whereas the transnational capitalist and worker conspiracies were adapted from *Caesar's Column*, this layer of Teed's storyline has a direct parallel in Wells: in *The War in the Air*, the United States is invaded from the West by a Sino-Japanese army and aerial navy from the "Confederation of East Asia," and from the East by airships from the German Empire. According to the narrator of *The Great Red Dragon*, the Japanese were known to have the most powerful navy in the world, and paid spies in the Western industrial countries to betray the industries for which they worked. In fact, one of the weapons that the Japanese navy uses to dramatic effect in *The Great Red Dragon* is a "galvanic dynamo, which disintegrated water in great volumes, converting it to hydrogen and oxygen, which ignited in the most intense combustion." (65) They deploy this machine to create a giant vacuum in the Pacific Ocean that swallows the American armada. The dynamo seems to be a fantastical version of a water pumping device invented by Teed's father, Jesse, and used at the Koreshan colony in Estero.

As occurs in *Caesar's Column*, war breaks out between the federation of labor and the government-corporate powers. This Federation had consolidated socialism and labor-unionism, theretofore two distinct movements, and equipped them with weapons of war. It had already developed all that was necessary for an army, was ready to capture the boats that would make up its navy, and planned to take control of whatever railways and means of transportation it could. Thus, as the narrator explains, "Socialism," although it lacked control of any government, "had become an imperial military power" and was under the control of Alexander Clinton. (55) The first battle in the war takes place in Chicago, where the socialists decide to confiscate capitalist wealth instead of burning the city to the ground. Chicago is then made capital of the new socialist government.

Drawn into the fray, England goes to war with its colonial possessions, and loses. Russia is weakened for having lent a hand in the suppression of labor in America. Meanwhile, the Islamic countries join the “Oriental” nations of East Asia and “looked forward to the destruction of Christianity throughout the world.” (51) In the world war that ensues, the Japanese capture U.S. imperial possessions in the Pacific, including the Philippines and the Sandwich Islands (now known as Hawaii). Europe, meanwhile, is thronged by Asian armies and colonists. But as the narrator comments, Europe was first overrun by the yellow peril of gold, which directly caused its fall to an Asian invasion.

The Europeans’ love of gold thus precipitates a period of colonization that reverses Western hegemony, with the Chinese and Japanese occupying Europe as well as the American coasts and, the narrator explains, “bent on the destruction of every male of the white race.” (71) Reiterating the “Author’s Note,” the narrator states that the West had been dealt this rough hand because “Christianity had been untrue to her professions,” making the battle of Gog and Magog inevitable. (52)

After the invasion of the United States, General Clinton moves his government to Washington, D.C., where over the next three years he implements a Bellamy-esque moneyless society in which the state directs industry to the greatest possible production, to be enjoyed equitably by all, while labor-saving devices allow men, women, and children to develop their intellectual and cultural faculties. This wonderful society appears destined to be besieged and short-lived, as hordes of invading foreigners were arriving simultaneously to its construction. The narrator again blames the arrogance of the West for its own downfall, explaining that,

America led the way to Japan’s military civilization. Christian Europe, with the United States to instill the primary lesson of commercial supremacy, showed the way to national glory, to be achieved through the application of the ethical principles of a civilization which placed the mighty dollar paramount, prostituted the moral law, and made null and void the commandment that men should love God and the neighbor, thus forcing upon her the impulse of universal empire. Japan saw no God in the European or American heart; and believing that either the Orient or the Occident must rule the world, found the way to consummate her destiny. The Christ inculcated the principles of communism, but

Christianity had substituted competition. (87-88)

The narrator skips over the destruction wreaked by these armies upon the nation's coasts, and returns instead to the Florida coast, where a fleet of armed dirigibles, each equipped with "anti-gravic aerial motor" is being prepared for engagement. The society in Florida is communistic; embraces both celibate and marital orders; believes sex energies could be conserved to achieve immortality; practices a religion descended from Christianity; is led by a "Messianic Leader"; eschews tobacco, alcohol, profanity, and vulgarity; is known to be persecuted and maligned; does not use money; and is cured of the curse of labor. In short, it is the Koreshan Unity. (Mentions of the Koreshan belief in a hollow earth are limited to a discussion of canals, which were destined to become "the world's great commercial thoroughfare." (102))

After three years, the Asian armies make their final march on Clinton's besieged utopia, all but certain to be annihilated, and a battle between the Asian and U.S.-European air fleets generates carnage unlike the world has ever seen. But before the Westerners are routed, Clinton prays to the God whose existence he doubted for deliverance. Salvation quickly arrives in the form of the air fleet from the so-called City of Restoration, which utterly destroys the "pagan" invaders. The Floridian fleet of war-blimps, powered by the hidden city's electro-magnetic dynamos, is commanded by a mysterious woman. After the battle, it's revealed that General Clinton is none other than Ellingwood, and Adelaide Colton is the Admiral of the fleet from Florida.

Victory is vouchsafed: "money power had failed in its purpose; labor-unionism had been relegated to the limbo of its consignment; Godless and experimental socialism had reached the climax of repression." (99) But the rest of the world wallowed in total chaos, its governments destroyed and its population scattered. With all government and economic order destroyed, "the venerable Director of the economics of the City of Restoration,"—the messianic leader also known as the "Prince Counselor"—took charge of "the creation of the new world, by which is meant the new dispensation to be inaugurated in place of the Christian dispensation now ended." (99)

The final battle Clinton must wage is one he loses: he fails to persuade Adelaide to marry with him and procreate. The Princess Admiral has already realized that eternal life depends on the messianic law of conservation of sexual energies for the purpose of reciprocal service,

which she intends to uphold. Adelaide lectures Clinton on the abuse of “sex use” in marriage and outside it, with a discourse obviously borrowed from Koreshan theology. She remains firm in her commitment.



Setting for the Koreshan Unity play “The Yellow Peril,” 1908.
Koreshan Unity collection N2009- 3, Papers, ca 1887-1990; Box 1, folder 14,
KOR0471, State Library and Archives of Florida.

VII. Conclusion

As a derivative literary work by a relatively obscure author, printed privately in the waning days of a literary fad that had mostly run its course, *The Great Red Dragon* did not make it into many readers’ hands. One notable exception was Jack London, who had a copy in his personal library.³⁸

As letters between Koreshans demonstrate, the debate over whether Teed’s theocrasis has occurred after his natural death long remained unresolved among the faithful. This debate was inflamed whenever a



Koreshans posing on the set of their play "The Yellow Peril," 1908.
Koreshan Unity collection N2009- 3, Papers, ca 1887-1990; Box 15, KOR1985A,
State Library and Archives of Florida.

pretender to leadership emerged or arrived in Estero. *The Great Red Dragon* was one of the texts scrutinized for justification by those who believed that Teed had not been translated. As A. J. Lowe wrote to Max Arendt in 1925, more than a decade after Teed's death, "If the flesh of Koresh has gone to corruption, then he cannot re-appear but as, per the 'Red Dragon,' his reappearance and resurrection are certain, then his flesh could not have been transmuted to mortal flesh."³⁹ Eight years later, Brother Henry Silverfriend, one of Teed's most loyal followers, hoped to warn Sister Bertie Boomer away from an interloper called Harry Manley, a German transplant who came to Florida to anoint himself the Elisha, the messiah of the Koreshan dispensation. Silverfriend tried to persuade Bertie that Manley's claims were wrong: the theocrasis had not occurred because the battle of Gog and Magog, during which Koresh had prophesied his own decisive participation, had not yet been fought.⁴⁰ These letters suggest that among the last of the original Koreshans, the novel had become Scripture.

Notes

1. Electric therapy was a mode of treatment taught at New York Eclectic Medical College while Teed was a student there, and he later specialized in it as a practitioner in upstate New York. The Koreshan Gustav Faber, formerly the captain of the Koreshan sloop *Ada*, treated Teed with an Electropoise, a patented, mail-order electric-therapy device. See Gustav Faber, "The Message," Part 2. Korshan Unity Collection, State Library and Archives of Florida (hereafter referred to as KUC), Box 234, Folder 38.
2. Lyn Millner, *The Allure of Immortality: An American Cult, A Florida Swamp, and a Renegade Prophet* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2015), 211.
3. The episode is recounted in Millner, 214-18.
4. Frank W Iklé, "The Triple Intervention: Japan's Lesson in the Diplomacy of Imperialism," *Monumenta Nipponica* 22, no. 1/2 (1967): 122-30.
5. Loose leaf stationery from the Hotel Endicott, New York City. KUC, Box 231, Folder 1.
6. *Herald of the New Covenant* (Utica, N.Y.) 1, no. 5, p. 8.
7. L. B. Woolfolk, *The Great Red Dragon: The Foreign Money Power in the United States* (Cincinnati: George E. Stevens, 1890).
8. Woolfolk, p. v.
9. KUC, Box 230, Folder 7.
10. Nicolas Barreyre, "The Politics of Economic Crises: The Panic of 1873, the End of Reconstruction, and the Realignment of American Politics," *Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 10, no. 4 (October 2011): 403, 410-12.
11. Barreyre, 408-9.
12. By 1889, *Looking Backward* had sold two hundred thousand copies and by the end of the nineteenth century had outsold all books published in America, except for *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. See Arthur Lipow, *Authoritarian Socialism in America: Edward Bellamy and the Nationalist Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). 30.
13. For "authoritarian," see Lipow, *passim*.
14. See Lipow, 21.
15. *Flaming Sword* 1, no. 7 (January 11, 1890): 1.
16. Lipow, 62.
17. Letter from Cyrus Teed to A. W. K. Andrews, June 11, 1885. KUC, Box 226, Folder 24.
18. *Koreshan Unity: Communistic and Co-operative Gathering of the People. Bureau of Equitable Commerce* (Chicago: Guiding Star, 1895), 10-11.
19. Millner, 221.

20. KUC, Box 236, Folder 22.
21. Nicholas Ruddick, "Introduction," in Ignatius Donnelly, *Caesar's Column: A Story of the Twentieth Century*, edited by Nicholas Ruddick (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2003), p. xl.
22. Donnelly, *Caesar's Column*, 17.
23. Ibid., 33.
24. Ibid., 31-32, 35.
25. Ibid., 27-28.
26. Ibid., 27.
27. Ibid., 50.
28. Ibid., 55.
29. See, for example, *Flaming Sword* 3, no. 16 (April 16, 1892): 5.
30. *Herald of the New Covenant*, 8.
31. "The Coming Catastrophe." KUC, Box 230, Folder 5.
32. Koresh, *The Immortal Manhood* (Chicago: Guiding Star, 1902), xcvi-xcix.
NB: Page numbers differ between simultaneous printings of this text.
Another edition uses non-corresponding Arabic numerals (44-45).
33. *Immortal Manhood*, ciii.
34. Quoted in Lipow, 21.
35. Koresh, *The Immortal Manhood: The Laws and Processes of Its Attainment in the Flesh*, 2nd ed. (Estero, Fla.: Guiding Star, 1909), 61.
36. After the conclusion of the Golden Age, human achievements and conditions would "involve" (i.e., devolve) back through the Silver and Bronze ages before returning once more to an Iron Age. Although Teed maligned "competism" as pagan, his theology was cyclical and therefore more similar in structure to pagan belief systems than was capitalism or socialism.
37. Andrew Jackson Davis, *The Magic Staff: An Autobiography of Andrew Jackson Davis*, 8th ed. (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1867), 374. Another of Teed's role models, Thomas Lake Harris, had also developed theories of racial evolutionism, but it is unclear whether Teed knew this.
38. Jack London Papers. Huntingdon Library, mss JL 1-25307
39. Letter from A. J. Lowe to Max Arendt, dated Portland Ore., July 15, 1925. KUC, Box 234, Folder 4.
40. Letter from Brother Henry [Silverfriend] to Sister Bertie [Boomer], March 1, 1933. KUC, Box 234, Folder 15.