



## The Allure of Immortality: An American Cult, a Florida Swamp, and a Renegade Prophet

**Lyn Millner**

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Over the centuries, the exceptional God's-grace-shed-on-thee United States has shown an extraordinary talent for nurturing wackadoodle religious fanatics. You can pick your own favorite, but one that certainly belongs on the A-list is the little known Cyrus Teed, who turned lead into gold in the wee hours of a night in late October of 1869 and then received a visitor in the form of an "exquisitely chiseled" angel. Well, she of "zephyr breath" blessed him from her "august motherhood," and he felt the "supersensual vibration ... to the extremities of [his] being." When she spoke, "the words proceeded from [his] own natural organs of articulation," and thus, through Teed's lips, she said: "Thou are chosen to redeem the race."

In *The Allure of Immortality*, Lyn Millner relates the headshaking tale of how Teed converted two hundred seekers into celibate Koreshans and led them from Chicago to a Southwest Florida promised land, based on a religion-science "mix of millennialism, mesmerism, the beliefs of Swedenborg, theosophy, spiritualism, mind healing, Buddhism, the primitive Christian church, Egyptian myth, gnosticism, electromagnetism," and the irresistible idea that the entire universe was contained in a hollow earth.

No, you can't make this stuff up—unless you're Teed, of course.

MATT SUTHERLAND (Winter 2016)

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