

## SOCRATES TRIES CITY MANAGEMENT

BY WM. S. BAILEY

FROM a sample of mud to the spirit of Socrates seems a far cry, yet seventy-five years ago the mud and the scholarly ghost of the ancient philosopher led to the founding of a wondrous city in the western end of New York State. The city was to have been of unimaginable splendor and was to have ushered in a new civilization. Today its site is marked by a few circles of half-buried stones, and its memory is forgotten.

Harmonia was the name of the dream city, and its cathedrals and stately halls were to have towered heavenward from the valley of the Kiantone, a small stream that rambles through a region of pastoral beauty but a few miles from Lake Chautauqua.

Hither came, in 1852, a Milwaukee physician who, while in New York City, had heard of a spring of miraculous healing power on the bank of Kiantone Creek and who "turned aside from my homeward journey to examine the whole matter for myself," as he says. This Dr. Greaves was vastly impressed by what he saw and more particularly by what he was told. He learned that the curative value of the waters in the valley was known to the white settlers as far back as 1795 and to the Indians of a far earlier day.

It was but a few years before the coming of Dr. Greaves that the two little Fox sisters at Hydesville, near Rochester, New York, after becoming a village wonder with their rappings, had developed into the founders of modern Spiritualism, and during his visit to the Kiantone, Dr. Greaves learned that the latest and most marvelous spring had been located by a "good clairvoyant" and that the entire well-digging enterprise had been under spirit direction. And so Greaves reported that the results from the water and the use of an ointment made from its sediment were "truly remarkable." The waters were found to be "highly valuable for remedial and cosmetic as well as ordinary purposes."

And now comes into view the dominating figure of the fantastic colony that at once came into existence on the banks of the quiet stream.

John Murray Spear, christened by and named for the founder of the Unitarian faith, after all but losing his life at the hands of a Portland anti-Abolition mob, had devoted years to the outcasts and prison inmates of Boston. His biographer records that in his humanitarian work he was counseled and assisted by Wendell Phillips, Longfellow, Edward Everett, Horace Mann, and others of this group.

A sample of the sediment or mud obtained from the spring was sent to Spear at Boston, who had become a convert to Spiritualism, for "psychometrical examination." So remarkable was the effect upon Spear of what he divined from the mere contact with the muddy sediment from Kiantone that he straightway, with a group of followers, hastened to the scene of the wonder in the obscure little valley, 600 miles away.

Distinguished as had been his earthly associates, these were now outshone by his heavenly cohorts, for Spear soon became the earthly representative of the heavenly "Association of Beneficents." This association was no mean group for around its ethereal directors' table sat the shades of Socrates, Seneca, Emanuel Swedenborg, Benjamin Franklin, Benjamin Rush, Thomas Jefferson, Lafayette, John Hancock, John Adams, Daniel Webster, Martin Luther, John Quincy Adams, Roger Williams, and others of a famous heavenly host.

Spear's hand had been involuntarily moved to write a document, bearing the true and life-time signatures of this noble band, and in it he had been given the charter for the heaven-born city of Harmonia and his commission as the earthly mouthpiece of its ghostly founders and exalted aldermen.

For with Spear's visit to the little creek in Western New York, the site of the naive "government of love with innocence as its only protector" was settled beyond the peradventure of doubt. The spirit members by this time announced that they had chosen the little valley "because it combined greater advantages than appertained to any other spot on this globe, for the inauguration of a model social state, to be preferred above all other territories, locations and nations." The incomparable advantages were "peculiarly favorable electrical emanations, producing salubrious and spiritualizing atmo-

sphere; a soil rich in mineral and agricultural resources; highly valuable waters; and a topography admirably adapted to ornamental arrangements."

His association with the shades of the immortal departed must have seemed to Spear like contact with holy fire and he lost no time in ushering in the new and better era. Under the constant and voluminous revelations he received from the spirit directorate of the "association" the wonders began to unfold.

Life in the new city of Harmonia was not to be as life elsewhere. The benign spirits who wrote its city charter set out to show the world something new. So they started with a new school of architecture. Harmonia's noble temples, its great universities and halls of art and "every apartment to all possible extent constructed for habitable purposes" were to be circular. The circle, signifying the perfection of life in the dream city, was to be the dominant motive of the new art. With naive frankness it was stated that the invisible architect for the elaboration of this work was, in life, an individual "who had previously enjoyed no culture in this direction." The monument to this unknown was but shortlived. Harmonia's architecture never got beyond a group of eight or ten octagonal wooden shacks. Of these the seventy-five years that have passed have left but their foundations of flat stones.

The new city of light was to put an end to all competition in commerce. This reform was sponsored by the shade of Benjamin Franklin who delivered himself of the opinion that trade "now influences all the nations of the earth. It controls the pulpit; it muzzles the press; it fetters the freeborn mind. It declares war or it commands peace; and the powers that be obey its commands."

The attempt was actually made, through an "Association of Philanthropic Commercialists," under a "grand organizer," a man with "a grand, leading, harmonious, quiet, cultivated mind," to carry the new economic system into effect. Profits were to be limited. There was to be no such thing either as credit or bank paper and all transactions were to be upon a cash basis, and the "buyer must come with the precious metals." The working day was to be limited to eight hours.

But the world of 1850 was not ready for philanthropic commercialism and the new system of commerce appears to have had a short life, although Socrates and the other heavenly guides promised Spear individually and collectively to watch the growth and ex-

pansion of the new enterprise with paternal care and to "render it such aids as from time to time may be deemed requisite to promote its advancement and general good."

Here in Harmonia "the soil was to be free as the light of the sun and held in common." And education likewise. The new social order contemplated that "the rights, cares, affinities and attractions of man should be left to act with unlimited freedom."

There was to be a new science of agriculture, with practical revelations from the heavenly farmers; there was to be "perfect equality and balance of the sexes." Even government itself was to be but a temporary expedient to be outgrown with greatest possible speed, for a spirit communique assured Spear that "each person is a distinct individual, a sovereign, having a perfect right to do as he or she pleases, in respect to his or her person, his or her property, to follow his or her pursuits, to seek his or her happiness in his or her own individual way."

Crime was a disease to be regarded and treated. While Spear received the prophetic announcement that "nations holding important and highly influential positions on your earth will soon be engaged in most sanguinary strife from which the American nation will not be excepted," war in Harmonia was to be done away with, although the formula of the process does not appear to have been handed down. A "union of the United States with Canada and the neighboring provinces" was also foretold.

Of all the strange vagaries of the Harmonia world reformers none was more fantastic than their excursions into the realm of applied science. Under the tutelage of a spirit sub-group calling itself the "Association of Electric-Izers," of which the late B. Franklin was also the head, Spear was assured that perpetual motion was a reality and was given directions for the construction of a machine that was "to draw upon the great reservoir of the magnetic life of nature." The machine was constructed near Lynn, Mass. The new motive power, like the human body, with which it was compared by its founders, was to be a living organism, quickened by an indwelling spiritual principle.

Although the machine was made the center of a Spiritualist ceremony symbolic of the virgin birth, an observer of the affair, himself a famous Spiritualist, wrote that the thing had not moved, "obviously could not move and if it did move it couldn't so much as turn a coffee mill."

Still faithful to his spirit guides, Spear moved the machine to the locality of Harmonia, "that it might have the advantage of more terrestrial electricity." But the incredulous and unsympathetic neighbors looked askance at the invention as of unholy origin. One night the doubters formed a mob, broke into the shed, and smashed the device. After the tragedy Spear found comfort in the thought that "Garrison was mobbed and Birney's printing press was thrown into the river."

The Harmonian scientists also planned to harmonize the nations of the earth through a universal method of conveying thought. This international telegraphic scheme was to be a wireless system of long-distance mental communication. The beneficent scientists of the other world designated a nearby eminence as "a place highly suitable, on account of its peculiar electric character, for a central telegraphic station on this continent." We have no record of any success with the pre-radio wireless.

Woman was to come into her own in every sphere in Harmonia. "What reason can be assigned," the spiritual revelator asks, "why woman should not appear in the banking house and take charge of large sums of money or other property." The female of the species is also adapted to shine in agriculture and architecture. Speaking of the greater activity of man the spirit exclaims, "The wonder is that the world has hobbled along on one leg as well as it has."

Marriage was to be idealized in the new city of light. The sexes were to be so united—thus wrote the unseen hands—that love was to be universal. But their prescribed "Prayer for a Marriage Occasion" pleaded that "should they, from any cause, come to feel that they are no longer husband and wife, amicably may they withdraw from one another." And here was the flaw that later brought the downfall of the heaven-inspired city.

None of the spirit-directed enterprises of this strange community was the cause of as much ridicule as the cave or shaft the residents sank into the side of the valley in their search for buried treasure. Into the earth they burrowed to the depth of 270 feet. For what? No one knows. Writing at the time, the correspondent of the New York Tribune tells the most plausible story of the treasure hunt. The newspaper man of that day found that the spirit informant had revealed to Spear and the elect of Harmonia the existence, in prehistoric time, in the Kiantone Valley of "a refined and cultivated people." The site of Harmonia had been the metropolis of this

marvelous civilization. This metropolis had been a city magnificent beyond all earthly comparison. Reform had done its perfect work and evil and even disease were unknown. Every building had a circular ground plan with blue and vaulted domes illumed day and night by gorgeous and dazzling solar lights. The wondrous city was profusely adorned with these lofty domes and innumerable turrets, spires, colonnades, and battlements.

But by some ill wind the seeds of evil were finally blown into the valley. Wickedness and bloodshed led to a war with a northern race of semi-barbarians and the inhabitants were driven off to Mexico to be slaughtered by Cortez and other Spanish adventurers. "A remnant of the Kiantones remained in their native valleys and became the slaves of their conquerors. But full vengeance was not yet executed. It came at last. The earth rocked to and fro, palaces and temples fell, the multitude uttered piteous wailings, a deep dark chasm yawned like the jaws of a hideous monster, then closed again, and silence reigned throughout all the Kiantonian Valley. And the city—was gone! The Magnetic Springs were swallowed up. Thousands of people were buried deep in the bowels of the earth!"

And it was in search of the buried treasure—buried in the fearful prehistoric cataclysm—that the credulous souls of the spirit-led community dug for months into the valley hillside.

One profane writer of the time found the ceremonial at the completion—and also the abandonment—of the cave a subject for a satirical account of the proceedings. As the shaft neared the promised treasure, he writes, the spirit guides stopped the work where the next thrust into the earth was to penetrate the store house of wealth. At midnight the elect, in white robes, carrying flaming torches and bearing a receptacle for the find of treasure, entered the cave. When all was ready for the climax, pickaxes were driven into the earth wall—but only clay fell out. The failure was accounted for by the spirit directors of the treasure hunt who communicated the news that an error had been made—the shaft was to go ten feet further into the earth. According to the skeptical historian of the time, the excavators twice more sank their shaft an additional ten weary feet under the same explanation—and abandoned the cave as a dry hole so far as treasure was concerned, although the shaft was soon full of water, as it has ever since remained, a monument to the credulity of these sincere believers in their occult guides.

Harmonia was dedicated in 1853, the spirit minds having "pre-

pared a consecration of the spot with great deliberation and exactness." Five years later it appears to have become the nation's Spiritualistic center, for in 1857 the dwellers in the spirit world decreed that a year later a national Spiritualist convention should be held "in the pleasant vale, not henceforth to be desecrated with the footprints of the profane."

In September, 1858, practically all of the distinguished Spiritualists of the United States responded to the call from the silent land and gathered in the "pleasant vale" for the three-day session. The attendance was variously reported to have been from 5,000 to 20,000 notwithstanding the obscure Kiantone Valley was forty miles from the nearest railroad. The New York papers had their correspondents in the valley and for its little day Harmonia held the front page.

The great Sunday of the gathering of terrestrial souls and ethereal spirits dawned fair in Kiantone Valley. The "Domain," as the floor of the valley was called, was early filled with the throngs and all was ready for the inspired speaking in the grove of ancient trees. But all was not well in Harmonia. The exhortations of those possessed of speaking spirits had not been long continued when "a pale haggard looking woman who announced she was not afraid of man, woman, God or the devil" began a tirade upon freedom of the affections. The sturdy countryside, as well as the nation at large, seems to have been well represented in the attendance and these honest yeomen looked askance upon the already reputed free-love doctrines of the Harmonians. The natives, by this time a mob of 500, stormed the speaker's stand and pandemonium broke loose in the peaceful valley. The speakers of the day were powerless to control the mob. Lewis G. Clark, an escaped slave then living nearby and who Mrs. Stowe certifies was the original of the character of George Harris in *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, tried to restore order. Clark, at the time a famous anti-abolitionist orator, was a forcible speaker but the mob would not listen to him. Matters were in a bad way for the convention, when a slip of a woman from St. Louis climbed on a lumber wagon and getting the attention of the crowd lectured it on its bad manners. She succeeded where the men failed. The confusion ceased, silence reigned, and the great address of the national convention was the speech delivered by this little woman from the lumber wagon.

The national convention was the high water mark of Spiritualism

in the valley of the Kiantone. Although the plans of the new harmonial city of light were announced and the multitude was told of the costly temple to be reared, of the colleges, seminaries, and churches to be erected, of the commodious dwellings that were to house the favored inhabitants of Harmonia, the communistic scheme died with its telling.

Although founded upon the lofty idealism of Spear and his Boston group the city had a sorry end. The most able historian of the Kiantone movement was Emma Hardinge, an ardent Spiritualist, who visited the vale of the Kiantone during the existence of the strange community. Mrs. Hardinge found that "some of the inspired party who had assembled at Kiantone Springs, claimed to be the organs or human mouthpieces not only for spirits of an adventurous and scientific turn of mind, but also for others who proposed to establish a new social order upon earth, in which the marriage obligations were not treated with any great amount of reverence or conventional respect.

"It would be unfit to assert that all the Spiritualists who were there assembled, professed, or even favored these opinions, but it would be equally false to truth and the cause of Spiritualism to deny, that from this place, and at the time of the settlement narrated above, the propagandism of these opinions became most mischievously associated with Spiritualism, bringing a scandal and reproach on the heads of thousands of innocent persons, who loathed and repudiated the doctrine, and causing thousands of others to shrink back from the investigation of a belief which was so strangely associated with the most repulsive features of communism."

The city which was to have become the world center of the new-born religion and its idealized communism was soon a thing of the past—brought to its untimely end by the mutual recrimination of its promoters. Today the only occupants of its pleasant vale and the ancient grove that was its only temple are the peaceful cattle that graze on its domain and seek repose under its lofty trees.