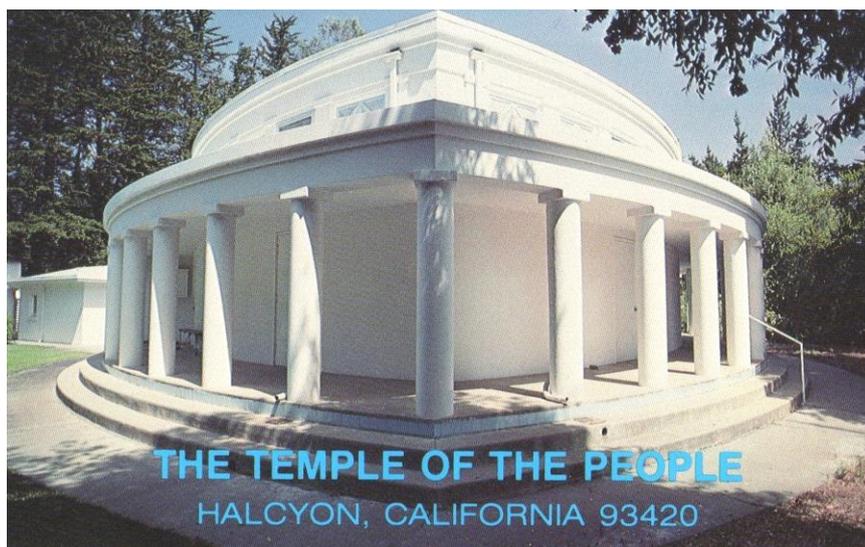


HALCYON AND ‘THE CITY OF LIGHT’

by Alan Senior

The Temple of the People is a small American spiritual community with world-changing beliefs, founded in 1898 in Syracuse by Dr William H. Dower and Mrs Francia La Due and, according to its members, spearheaded by three Masters of the Wisdom, advanced spiritual beings who work ceaselessly behind the scenes for the advancement of humanity... men who long ago, through many incarnations, surmounted the egoic level and are now able to radiate great power to aid mankind in its slow, evolutionary progress. In 1903 the community moved to a new locality at Pismo Beach, a dune area on the West Coast, north of Santa Barbara and south of Monterey, just off State Highway 1. It was named Halcyon.

This was due to a prophecy by their clairvoyant leader and first Guardian-in-Chief, Francia La Due, known as Blue Star after being adopted into the Turtle Clan of the Onondagas Indians. According to the Masters’ instructions, a New City – a place of harmony, peace and quiet - would be erected near the sand dunes at this coastal location. Later, thousands of miles away in similar sand dunes in the north of Scotland, the Findhorn Community received a comparable prophecy of a Planetary Village to be constructed there. Yet another prophecy, also on the other side of the world, occurred when Hazrat Inayat Khan, head of the Inner School of the Sufi Movement, had a similar ‘spiritual experience’ (also in the dunes – South Dunes in Katwijk) and told his students to meditate on a temple to be built there, proclaiming the dunes a holy place. In 1969 a temple *was* erected there where an annual Sufi Summer School now takes place.



Such synchronicity has occurred so often in the history of Halcyon to be more than mere coincidence. The Temple of the People was duly built soon after Francia La Due’s death in 1922 and devoted to Theosophy, Mysticism and Social Science, corresponding to ‘the Temple of Humanity’; that is, ‘*all humans who have awakened into a knowledge of their own divinity and have undertaken to tread the Path and devote their lives to the unselfish service of mankind*’ – identical to Alice Bailey’s New Group of World Servers, and the Templars’ parent Theosophical Society founded in New York in 1875.

The Temple was constructed on lines of mathematical and geometrical symbolism. Surrounded by white pillars it is triangular in shape, symbolizing the heart, the Unity of all Life, and the many Trinities at the core of all great spiritual teachings. The high windows symbolize the Divine Light from Above, their opalescent glass diffusing the sunlight to produce a golden glow. Its seven doors also reflect the important symbol of completeness, a key element in the Bible.

The Templars await the manifestation of the Avatar, or Christos, for the New Dispensation and the dawn of a new civilisation for all races. There is no mention in their beliefs of the year 2012 and they have focused on the healing arts where the beauty of their dune environment becomes part of the treatment. As they say: *'Our work is directed at helping all people who are hurting, who are searching – not just those who are interested in metaphysics or inclined to explore occultism.'* The community presently covers about 95 acres with about 120 residents. There are other Temple groups in London, Germany, West Africa and Russia (see info@creedsdisappear.org.uk for further information).

The universality of the non-denominational Temple services, with prayers and meditations directed toward the health and well-being of all peoples, is also reflected in the Temple tenet: 'Creeds Disappear, Hearts Remain'. They also believe in a prediction by their fourth Guardian-in-Chief, artist Harold Forgostein, that their 'City That Is To Be' would be situated here, far grander than anything at present on the physical plane – a 'new Jerusalem' because its magnetic centre is on the same latitude as that city. Forgostein painted a series of pictures depicting the League of the Six Indian Nations, said to be formed by Hiawatha about 1400 A.D. at what is now Syracuse, New York, the group's birthplace. Hiawatha's laws and principles inspired Benjamin Franklin to use them as a model for the Constitution of the United States. Forgostein also painted other series of works on The Life of Hiawatha, Indian Legends and The Four Winds, which travel regularly to many galleries in the USA.

Harold Forgostein stated that we should *'move beyond the boundaries of time into the freedom and responsibility of spirit'* and, like other New Age groups, the Templars await the coming of a new Avatar, a divine incarnation for the next 2,000-year cycle, to 'save' those who believe in Him. Thus they are preparing for such an expression, rather like the Adyar theosophists in the 1920s who were planning for Krishnamurti to become the new World Teacher, which ended in his rejection of the role... devastating for the Theosophical Society at the time, with no leader of his stature emerging ever since.

The Templars were also told that the future city would use a new kind of energy called 'ionospheric', which would revolutionize all industry (an idea which may have come from Bulwer Lytton's 'Vril Power', from his novel 'The Coming Race') and no land was to be sold since *'all the earth belongs to all of its people'*. This reminds one of Red Cloud's reply to the Washington Commission of 1875 when the Sioux were offered \$6 million for the Black Hills, where gold had been discovered, to which the chief replied: *"You cannot sell the ground on which the people walk."*

So is their plan hopelessly unattainable in the 21st century? The community is subject to pressures from surrounding, ever-expanding business ventures and housing projects (rather like the situation at the Theosophical Society's Indian headquarters at Adyar, Madras (now Chennai). Many criticisms have been directed at the group, such as 'myopic', 'isolationist',

‘provincial’, ‘illogical’ and ‘financially unwise’. But the Templars recognize the world’s need for the ‘City of Light’, which inspired the composer Alan Hovhaness (another theosophically-minded, non-materialist) to give his Symphony No. 22 that title. This is music evocative of light and space, nature and spirituality, penetrating the heart with a directness and clarity unique to the composer. Like the Templars’ vision, it depicts a city of the imagination, a shimmering image conveying, through intuition, the belief that there is a centre to everything in the universe. Hovhaness (1911-2000) was only one of many 20th-century American composers influenced by Theosophy, such as Dane Rudhyar, Torkom Saraydarian, Ruth Crawford and Edgard Varèse. Foremost was Henry Cowell (1897-1965) who stayed intermittently at Halcyon with his friend John O. Varian, amateur musician, mystic poet and an ardent theosophist, prominent amongst the sect. They had met at the Palo Alto branch of the Temple and Cowell set many of Varian’s texts to music, whilst his contact with the West Coast group helped shape his artistic personality.

Varian had convinced him that Halcyon was where he should be... *‘in a spiritual atmosphere of purer life currents and not the putrid ones.’* When he arrived there in 1914 Halcyon consisted of fewer than one hundred people living from hand to mouth in modest cottages, little more than squatters raising vegetables, sugar beets and flower seeds – the members viewing themselves as *‘a new dispensation, the Dawn Light of the Age of Aquarius’*. As it grew he participated actively, directing music recitals twice a month, serving as a piano instructor, giving a series of eight lectures on music, even writing a ‘Piano Instruction Course’ for the children. In an attitude of possessiveness they referred to him as ‘Brother Henry’, ‘Our Henry’ or ‘one of our Temple boys’. He was attracted by the prayers and meditations directed toward the health and well-being of all peoples, and the universality of that Temple principle: ‘Creeds Disappear, Hearts Remain’.

During the 1920s Cowell continued to visit Halcyon and in Europe he once served as a kind of ambassador for the group in Germany and Switzerland, visiting Berlin twice to give the German group the opportunity of having someone with them who knew the Centre thoroughly. In 1929 he wrote to Varian that he was delighted with his poem ‘Joy’ which had appeared in the quarterly magazine, *The Temple Artisan* (see below). He gave it to fellow composer Charles Ives, with the note: *‘thought you might enjoy this’*. Halcyon, true to the theosophical tradition, promoted the integration of science with spirituality and occultism, with the colony’s main enterprise involving a sanatorium, established by Dr Dower for the purpose of *‘reforming mankind and conquering abnormality and disease through love and harmony.’* Dower’s ‘Occultism for Beginners’ of 1917 outlines his preoccupation with the relation between medicine and the occult, rather like the English composer Cyril Scott’s 1938 book, ‘Doctors, Disease and Health’.

Cowell showed interest in these projects and participated in some of them. He published an article, ‘Tonal Therapy’, in *The Artisan* in 1922, describing experiments at Halcyon in which coloured lights were used to help cure diseases. This probably came from H.P. Blavatsky who had written in ‘Isis Unveiled’ of instruments that can ‘draw out disease’ and of prismatic colours ‘increasing the growth of animals and plants to a magical proportion’. Cowell also considered whether musical tones might also neutralize disease and hoped that future composers would write special music to be used in healing. This climate of experimentation was one of Halcyon’s attractions for Cowell, with members taking a keen interest in his music. Francia La Due had performed on the piano and written pamphlets on musical topics, stressing that knowledge of music was essential for anyone seeking attainment in Occultism

and she stated that music was a central component of a 'Mystery language' used by initiates, and that the voicing of a single wrong note during the performance of their Mantram or Lodge-Call could unleash destructive forces. She also believed that many additional tones beyond those traditionally recognized by the masses were available to the 'more highly evolved man'. But Cowell once told them that they ought not to be singing hymns at the Temple meetings "*which have nothing to do with the oneness of man and the universe,*" so they promptly adopted some of *his* music instead. He completed 20 symphonies and scores of other substantial works in his lifetime. His Symphony No. 13 (Madras) was no doubt inspired by his visit there and probably to the Theosophical Society's headquarters at Adyar. In 1962, near the end of his life, he described his experiences at the colony as '*a fruitful and interesting time*'.

John Varian touched upon many common theosophical themes, including a faith in the dawning of a New Age. He wrote: '*There is a new race birthing here in the West. In the ages coming, it will be a large factor in a new civilization now starting round the Pacific – of a quite different nature from that of the Atlantic. Oriental races will be in it. China, gigantic and enduring, will have its age-old mind and soul in its making... We are germic, embryonic seeds of future majesties of growth.*' 'Meanwhile,' say the Templars, '*when enough of the hearts of humanity cry out for its fulfilment, nothing can stop the materialization of the new city.*' Strangers and casual visitors to Halcyon (such as myself in April, 1993) find the place uniquely different from any other villages, towns or communities. It possesses an atmosphere which I, for one, would find beneficial... the thought of living in a whole new society of high standards, ethics and conduct... with no promiscuity, no violation of monogamy, no drug abuse, no personal building of ivory towers of self-concern... a haven where the Law of Harmony operates with total devotion to the common good.

The community's members are aware of the rapidity with which changes are taking place in the world around them, and of the recent events in the USA which have global repercussions. In language reminiscent of the 'twentytwelvologists' a spokesperson states: '*The agony of growth is upon us. The present seeming impasse arises from the need to recognize the direction of evolution. Even the seeming darkness upon us now cannot change the direction of the law of evolution, which is carrying all willingly or reluctantly toward the glory of a perfect universe. A gong has struck. The hour of recognition is upon mankind... Only as more and more individuals make the transition can all humanity be helped on its way. We are going through a very necessary aspect of evolution – that of opening up the fetid cesspools of man's inhumanity to man. Humanity reacts to this exposure in countless ways. Some do so through their preconceptions of materialism, or through pessimism. Others respond with the recognition that only through service to the whole can each one help the human family towards its goal... All mankind has arrived at the point in its evolution where we must tread the razor-edged path that leads to Light; there is no other way. Glamour and illusion may fog and ensnare us still, but not for long. Material enchantment or self-interest may lead us into by-paths – but not for long.*

'As we become more fully aware of our divinity, nothing can stop us... Let us not despair, let us not be distressed, for the power to achieve our goal lies in our inherent divinity. Our spiritual unfoldment is greatly hastened during this potent cycle... Our world is torn by serious and unhappy problems; but just the same, there is great individual opportunity for

creating a spiritual environment. Much of humanity is waiting, perhaps unconsciously, for Dawn, and birth of the Love which heralds a New Day.'

JOY

A poem by John Varian

Joy, I to be walking the glory-robed beauty of the Earth,
I to be here in Halcyon in the place of deep love,
Where faces shine with glad tenderness when you pass,
Where minds understand the deepness of existence,
Where souls have understanding sympathy,
Where hands are ever ready to help and comfort;

Where the ground is glad, welcoming the feet of the clan coming home,
Where mountains reveal themselves more and more, their robes of beauty,
Their whisperings in mysterious words of fellowship;

Where the ocean word in the pondering wave
Is a broad word of peace, strong peace, deep rest,
Where the sand whispers marvellous intangibilities,
Reveals itself in magical lights and colours that might be imagination,
Where they take us into their consciousness, put their vast arms about us,
Heal us, bless us.

It is joy I to be walking through the glory-robed beauty of the Earth,
I to be here in Halcyon in the place of deep love,
Where faces shine with glad tenderness as you pass,
Where minds understand the deepness of existence.



The dunes at Halcyon (Harold Forgostein)