

Your Life and the Stars

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Do you know your star sign? Do you know under what "stars" you were born? Of course you do. All of us have learnt this peculiar information in recent years. We are living in the midst of a massive revival of astrology. Perhaps it was heralded years ago as the "Age of Aquarius", promoted with all the thumping and shouting of an almost forgotten rock musical.

Astrology is popular. It even creeps into the education of children. For example, in May 1980, a children's programme on the Australian Broadcasting Commission radio urged children to check up on their stars, to cast a horoscope and follow astrology. Young people show their interest in the trend by wearing star signs as jewellery. Priests giving Holy Communion have even noticed young Catholics with the sign of the goat or the ram worn on a pendant' in place of the Cross or some other Christian symbol. If only these young people knew the real meanings of the new signs they wear, how closely they are tied up with an even darker superstition, already dealt with in another A.C.T.S. pamphlet. (Seances, Spirits and the Supernatural, A.C.T.S. No 1718.)

Many Christians take a quick look at those short horoscopes in the newspapers and popular magazines. Some people may only do this to see how these astrological experts contradict one another. But other people are not so sure. They say that they want to check up on the stars, "just in case there might be something in it..."

If you read this scholarly analysis of astrology by Denys Jackson, you will understand what astrology really is. You will see that it is a form of fatalism, the pagan belief that our lives are completely controlled and determined by hidden forces, beyond our control, the belief that we have no freedom to choose. Denys Jackson explains how this star-gazing began, how it had changed, how people make money out of it at the expense of gullible folk.

Do not read this booklet if you want to remain a believer in the stars. This booklet will disturb you. After reading it, you may decide to get rid of that zodiac pendant, and replace it with a sign of real faith. If you have been more deeply involved in astrology, this sane exposure of your superstition may help to free you from a false religion and lead you back towards the proper practice of your faith. If you have never been involved in astrology, at least the accurate information given by Denys Jackson may help you to enlighten friends and relatives who have given in to a subtle superstition which is so fashionable today.

In the 1751 edition of the famous Encyclopaedia in which the French "philosophers" of the Age of Reason set forth their views, astrology is dismissed as a superstition so completely discredited that even among the least enlightened of the people it was hard to find any who believed in it or took predictions of its Almanacks seriously. The eclipse of this form of divination by means of the stars continued through most of the nineteenth century: as late as 1899, in a work on Greek Astrology, Bouche-Leclercq declared that it had "wholly disappeared" in France.

The modern boom in astrology

Actually, however, its revival had already begun, and through the next half century this ancient form of occultism made great strides in popularity, so that today it has almost as large a following as in the distant time of classical paganism in the Greek and Roman world. Recent opinion polls in the U.S.A. have revealed that some 76 per cent of the people "read their stars" regularly, while 29 per cent rely on astrology in important decisions, in particular in business matters. While Melbourne's "Dial a Prayer" attracts only between five and six thousand calls a week, "Dial a Horoscope" receives up to 70,000! In view of its success, this astrological feature is likely to be extended beyond Melbourne and Brisbane to other Australian Capital cities.

Professional astrologers can command large fees for consultations - up to \$150 a time: and it is reported that some men in business retain their services for as much as \$5000 a year. People seek advice from them on when to travel, the auspicious time for marriage, and concerning their choice of partners, as well as on the right date for starting a family. In recent years, works on astrology have been among the best sellers, and annual forecasts published in October are sold out in the course of the next three months. "Stars columns" have become a common feature in newspapers and magazines, and the space allotted to them tends to grow larger. We are likely to see cassettes on sale in the near future, giving personal characteristics and other information related to each of the twelve signs of the zodiac. Students of the art of astrology can attend classes held in the suburbs, up to intermediate level. A conference recently held in Sydney attracted astrological experts from the U.S.A., New Zealand and India.

Throughout the Western world the boom in astrology can be observed - indeed, Australia is far behind the U.S.A., France, Germany and Great Britain. The ancient art has been "modernised" and even computerised to speed up calculations. Today, it is easy to obtain a planetary "read-out", based on the time of birth, along with list of your own "personality features" and those of your friends, on enquiry. Finally a computer can furnish you with a "star preview" for any day you name up to the end of 1999! Do you want to fix a lucky day for your next trip to Europe or America? To find out your prospect for a pay rise, and when you should ask for it? Under what birth sign should you look for a sweetheart for the love relationship to be harmonious and the outcome successful? Or, contrariwise, what "star-crossed" intimacy is it prudent to avoid?

John Fonti of the Sun newspaper, an expert in computerised astrological calculations, has this to say about his art: "Once, people used religion to give them faith; but as that weakens, they search for another crutch. There is enormous uncertainty in today's world, and people who read horoscopes are looking for ways by which they can reduce it". He dates the existing upsurge to the "cold war" of the '50's, and the subsequent increasing social instability, and, in view of the prospects ahead, he feels sure the vogue will continue to increase.

Origins of astrology

So much, then, for the modern situation. Let us turn, now, to look briefly at the origins of astrology, and at the methods used by its practitioners in relating the movement of stars and planets to earthly happenings, and to the lives of individuals, in order to see whether the claim to be a genuine "science" can be accepted as valid, and whether it is socially useful, harmless or undesirable.

The practice of "reading the stars" in order to relate their positions, arrangements and movements to the state of earthly affairs and the fortunes of mankind, can be dated as far back as the ancient civilisations of the region we now call "The Middle East". Mesopotamia (the modern Iraq) a land of clear skies and bright nights, lent itself naturally to the study of the stars. The stars and

constellations observed were associated with divine beings who were held to control them. Our names of the planets - Venus, Mars, Mercury, Jupiter and Saturn, recall this association, as accepted by the Romans, to whom astrology was introduced by the Greeks. But its beginnings among the Babylonians date as early as 3000 BC. The art in its crude early stage involved observations of cloud formations and weather - particularly storms, with thunder and lightning. Predictions at this time related to the fortunes of Kings and nations, with wars, floods and droughts and pestilences. The early Babylonians gave the Moon precedence over the Sun, because of her phases, which became the basis of many legends, and were held to have important human effects as well as natural ones. This earthly significance of the Moon, of course, is not entirely mythical, since its phases are linked with the ocean tides.

It does not seem that the ancient Egyptians paid much heed to the stars; but after Alexander's conquest brought the Greeks to supremacy all over the East from the Mediterranean lands as far as India, astrology spread from Babylonia to the Egypt of the Ptolemies, where practitioners known as "Chaldeans" developed it to a highly sophisticated level. The famous Ptolemaic *Almagest* emanates from the city of Alexandria in this period.

Study of the stars

The movements and relationships in positions between planets and constellations were now observed and charted, a system of "signs of the Zodiac", twelve in number, being worked out, starting from the Spring Equinox of the northern hemisphere. On this basis, the heavens were divided into twelve "Houses", the positions of these, and the observed movements of the stars within them, being made the basis of calculations concerning "Aspects" to which traditional significances were attached. The occasional appearance of comets was also observed, with considerable apprehension, as well as the meteoric phenomena called "Shooting Stars".

The current belief was that the heavenly bodies received emanations from the earth, and that their emanations could influence earthly life in a number of ways.

While the lack of artificial aids, like the telescope, - limited the amount of knowledge concerning the heavens which the ancients were able to acquire by observation, they did surprisingly well in the course of ages. The foundations of the science of astronomy, in fact, were laid by the astrologers. Up till quite modern times, however, the true relationship between the earth, the sun and the planetary system was quite unknown. There was no conception whatever of the "open universe" with its vast extension of space, with the million million suns of the galaxies, as well as the "dark stars" and planets of whose existence only mathematical calculations based on the movements of others have made modern astronomers aware.

Ancient image of the universe

The view of the universe transmitted from classical pagan civilisation to the Middle Ages was based on a pattern derived from the so-called "Chaldeans" of Egypt in the Hellenistic age. The "Ptolemaic" model conceived the earth as the centre of a universe vast but finite. It consisted of a series of hollow, transparent spheres, in each of which was a luminous body. The order, starting from the Earth Centre, was the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Finally came the "Stellatum" of so called "fixed" stars, because their positions in relation to one another were invariable from the human viewpoint. Beyond this was the "Primum Mobile". Not being illuminated, it could not be observed: but its existence was inferred, in order to account for the motions of the other spheres.

Outside this last "heaven" - what? "Neither place nor void nor time" said the philosopher Aristotle - but Christian speculation later brightened it with the Light of God, setting His Paradise beyond the last frontier of the cosmos.

The whole art of astrology, as handed down through the ages, is based on this Ptolemaic "Model" which modern astronomical research has very completely proved to bear no relation whatever to actuality. It had charming features and was beautifully orderly, as well as brilliantly lit by the Sun, while the movements of the Spheres was considered as musical, though only angelic ears could hear it. Unfortunately, since it was not true, any "science" based on this elaborate concept of human ingenuity has no validity.

As has been said, the pagans "personalised" the influence of the planets and star-formations by relating them to gods, beneficent or malign. Correspondences were supposed to exist between the planets and certain metals and precious stones, animals and plants. As regards "judicial" astrology, related to the "judgement of the stars", four branches of the classical study may be named, without entering into complicated details.

Branches of astrology

Natural astrology dealt with phenomena supposedly regulated by stellar influences; its practitioners did become aware of one fact of major importance: the relation of the tides to the moon.

Social astrology applied horoscopic patterns to the destiny of States and their rulers, and political groups. In the Middle Ages, forecasts were even made concerning the Church: in our own time, the heavens have been consulted to determine the auspicious date for setting up new States or launching new companies.

Of natal astrology, concerning individuals, their birth times, characteristics and fortunes' more will be said below.

Horary astrology deals with the indications of stellar and planetary "Aspects" regarding particular decisions and events in human life.

In former times, the days of the week were held to be subject to astral influences: hence our names for Sunday, Monday (Moon) and Saturday (Saturn), and the French for Wednesday (Mercredi for Mercury) and Friday (Vendredi for Venus).

Medical astrology was taken seriously up to the eighteenth century. It was based on the supposed Zodiacal influences on the various parts of the human body: Aires (the Ram) governed the head, Libra (Scales) the intestines - and so on.

Roman critics

Astrology, though generally believed in among the Greeks and Romans, was not without some eminent critics. Cicero, for one, held that if the stars influenced human lives, they must logically be supposed to influence those of animals and birds - a notion which he regarded as ludicrous. Roman conservatives like Cato the elder objected to astrological divinations as an Oriental and "un-Roman" novelty. But these isolated protesters had little influence in checking the spread and prestige of an art favoured by Julius Caesar and the Emperor Augustus, as well as "enlightened" people generally.

Israel rejects astrology

By the people of Israel, the cosmos was conceived as earth-centred, just as by the other nations of the ancient world - as the first Chapter of Genesis clearly shows. But the fact that the astrology of the Gentiles was linked with the cult of their gods - especially in Mesopotamia, where in Ur, Abraham's first home, the moon-god was adored - made it anathema to the people of Jahve. In Genesis, therefore, it is emphasised that the "Greater and lesser lights" - the Sun and Moon - were placed in the heavens by God to light the earth - "and He made the stars also." They were just lamps, not divinities! Isaiah (43.17) refers to the Chaldean stargazers of his time, and their conflicting predictions, with contempt. Jeremiah, who had some familiarity with the highly developed "sciences" of the Chaldean astrologers and their systems of omens, insists that God's people should neither use them nor fear them. In the first Jewish "Book of Enoch", an error of the sinner is noted as believing the stars to be gods with control over the destinies of men.

Early Christian attitudes

The first Christians, like the ancient Jews, regarded the current astrology, associated with star-cults, as a pagan abomination. The "Diviners" associated with it were among their bitterest enemies. St. Paul's reference to the infection of the Galatian Christians with belief in "auspicious times" may well refer to pagan astrology rather than the Jewish Calendar: and his warning against the "propitiation of angels" given to the Colossians also seems to relate to a planetary cult. Later on, the Church Fathers urged Christian emperors to expel "Chaldeans" on the ground that they kept pagan concepts alive, including the fatalistic notions of a star-governed destiny.

It has been urged in defence of astrology that the Magi of St. Matthew's Gospel, who are described as having received a Divine message through a Star concerning the birth of "the King of the Jews", were obviously astrologers accustomed to "read the heavens". The answer can be made, however, that even if God used their pagan "science" as an instrument of His revelation, this by no means implies His approval of it. The Mosaic Book of Numbers shows God using the divination techniques of the hostile pagan "prophet" Balaam to convey a message of Divine blessing to Israel in his own despite. As the Portuguese proverb has it "God writes straight with crooked lines". Through Jeremiah, he even speaks of the Babylonian despot Nebuchadnezzar as "My servant", the instrument of His Divine Judgement, as the Persian Cyrus is later the instrument of His mercy to the remnant of Israel. He met the "Wise Men" from the East where they were, turning the pagan arts they innocently employed to serve His purpose of revelation.

Later Jewish and Christian views

But while the pagan associations of the older astrology brought it into disrepute with Christians during the first period of the Church's history, the current model of the universe remained earth-centred for all mankind: and in the writings of the Talmud and the mystic literature called the "Cabala", the Jewish intellectuals of the second dispersion developed an astrology no longer polytheistic, which could yet be used for purposes of divination. From them the renovated "Science" passed to the Moslem Arabs, and began to influence mediaeval Christendom through contact in Spain, and during the Crusades, from the twelfth century on. The most orthodox theologians found no difficulty in accepting the theory that the planets had an influence on plants and minerals in the earth around which they supposedly moved, as well as on events, and on human psychology.

What the Church did oppose as dangerous were three offshoots of this theory. First the practice of astrologically grounded predictions was held undesirable in itself, as well as a source of ill-gotten

gain to practitioners of the art. Secondly, there was a danger that the notion of any "influence" of the stars on human beings might be exaggerated to a point that virtually excluded human freewill and the grace of God, the true Lord of the destinies of men and nations.

Thirdly, the mediaeval Church had to wage a constant war against the remnants of pagan superstition, especially among the peasantry, but to some extent in all ranks of society: and the star-cults had been hard to overthrow. St. Albert the Great, a scholastic pioneer of sciences and the teacher of St. Thomas Aquinas, makes a careful distinction between the lawful and unlawful use of planetary techniques in agriculture. You might bury in your field a plate inscribed with the name of a planet to promote its benign influence - but to invoke or make incense offerings to it was the sin of idolatry.

Planets and the Gods

The danger of seeing the personalities from whom the planets were named as something more than mythical remained. Saturn, especially for the poets, was too much like a dark angel, promoting ill - luck and melancholy, and disaster - the very word is a reflection of astral influence. "Jovial" recalls the pleasant influence of Jove - that is, Jupiter - the state of a man cheerfully confident in his strength and magnanimous. His influence brought goodwill, calm weather and prosperity: his metal was shining tin. Mars, who gives us the words martial and martinet is the lord of iron and moulds warriors. Sol, the Sun, seen as lighting the universe, produces gold, most precious of metals, and his influence makes for wisdom, producing sages and theologians: his brilliance brings good fortune. Venus, from whom the old word "venery" was named, had copper for her metal, since she rose from the sea in Cyprus (Kupros) from which the metal, once abundant in the island, is named. As one might expect, her "influence" produces beauty and amorousness. The word "mercurial" reminds us that Mercury's influence - reflected in the metal also called "quicksilver" - was held to produce quickwittedness and "smartness" - useful in profitmaking. Those who come under the sign of Luna, the Moon, are changeable as she is. Her metal, like her light, is silver Wanderers over the earth and in their wits were held to be under her influence. The word "Lunatic", still in use, originally denoted periodical insanity, related to the Moon's phases.

The Renaissance

The revival of classical learning in the period called the "Renaissance" beginning in the fifteenth century, led to a heightened interest in the pagan civilisations and arts of the Greeks and Romans, whose writings were studied and admired, many "humanists" coming to regard the subsequent Christian ages as retrogressive and barbarous. Naturally, Astrology, which had been so prominent a feature of the ancient world, profited from this changed outlook among men of culture. Cultured leaders of the Church itself had no hesitation about resorting to astrologers and having their horoscopes drawn up; and several Popes kept these "experts" for consultation at court, as well as Kings, Queens and Princes. Louis XI of France patronised them in a big way: Catherine de Medici sought the advice of Nostradamus, whose predictions have enjoyed a posthumous fame in our own time. Genuine astronomers, like Tycho Brahe and Kepler, who were making discoveries destined to revolutionise man's knowledge of the heavens, did not hesitate to resort to the profitable arts of astrology as a means of earning a livelihood and continuing their genuine work of research. It was not till the eighteenth century that astrology fell into discredit among men of intelligence.

Even at the height of the renewed prestige of astrology, however, the powerful voice of Pope Sixtus V, untouched by the rampant craze for horoscopes among the great men of Church and State, was

raised to condemn the occult "Science" which had seduced so many. Like St. Augustine ages before, in his Bull beginning "The Creator of Heaven and Earth", issued in 1586, he points out the absurdity of believing that "by a most vain observation of the exact moment of an infant's birth, every detail of his career - his journeys, his quarrels, his financial successes or failures, his moments of danger, his children and all the rest, can be foretold". So far as any truth can be found in these predictions, it is due to the Devil's subtle knowledge of secret influences and conditions already at work, though not manifest to the world at large. He condemns books making such prognostications, and forbids Catholics to use them, though he is careful to except treatises dealing with navigation and medicine, certain illnesses and plagues being still ascribed by doctors at the time to planetary influences.

A century earlier, when the cult of astrology was growing, an English writer devoted fifteen chapters of a work "Dives and Pauper" to satirising its practitioners. He denounces their beliefs as "putting God out of His mastery and freedom" by bending Him to the stars.

Astronomy Refutes Astrology

The modern case against astrology is simply stated in regard to its claim to be a "Science". It is that its whole structure and procedures are based on a concept of the universe which modern investigations, conducted with instruments of precision and highly elaborate techniques of mathematical calculation, have completely refuted. The planetary and stellar systems are nothing like our forefathers supposed them to be: the "influences" they described in such detail simply do not exist. The earth is not the heart of a clearly shaped circular universe of spheres within spheres but a tiny grain in a cosmos inconceivably vast. The Sun, around which move the planets - more in number than the men of old knew - is one of countless millions: the limits and "shape" of the open universe seem to be humanly undiscoverable, and the positions and motions of the "galaxies" are unrelated to our own tiny planetary system. Because of all this, today's astronomers are at one in holding modern astrology to be a rank imposture - or, as Flammarion has expressed it "a vain survival of the geocentric system" long ago exploded.

To be sure, certain effects of the Sun and Moon on the earth are real and well established. Our relationship with the Sun produces seasonal variations of weather and day and night: the moon's pull is responsible for the Tides. But if it is argued that these facts serve to make other planetary influences on the world and individual lives more credible, the answer can be made that to draw arbitrary large generalisations of an utterly irrelevant kind from observed and scientifically established particular instances is to act unscientifically and unreasonably. Jupiter is a fine planet - but we have no ground whatever for supposing that its presence in the sky at the time of a person's birth improves his prospect of later winning a University degree!

What the Stars did not Foretell

But, it may be said, a number of predictions made turn out to be true - otherwise the art of astrology could hardly survive. However, as Voltaire quipped long ago, an astrologer cannot be expected to enjoy the privilege of always being wrong! If you invite ten people to forecast from pure imagination how the result of some particular matter will turn out in a year's time, the odds are that you will receive at least some correct answers.

For the rest, astrologers are not devoid of intelligence and powers of observation, and it can be assumed that they employ these in dealing with their clients and working out their patterns of stellar and planetary predictions. And the desire of people to be reassured leads them to accept and remember cases where the horoscopes have seemed to serve their purpose, and to ignore or accept

"explanations" of instances of gross error, as due not to astrology, but to some human miscalculation or lack of information in drawing up the horoscope on which the prediction is based.

A notable "gaffe" in forecasting can be cited in the horoscope of Hitler worked out by astrological consultants in 1933, and widely publicised by his propagandist, Josef Goebbels. It correctly forecasts the outbreak of World War II in 1939, with victories till 1941 and some later setbacks. But it named 1945 as Hitler's year of final victory - actually, of course, it was the year of his catastrophe, in which both he and Goebbels committed suicide!

Paul Couderc, a leading astronomer of The Paris Observatory, published in 1963 a work "Astrologie", which was re-edited in 1974. Beginning with a full and careful resume of astrological doctrines, he proceeds to a point by point refutation, drawing attention to the fundamental astronomical errors of the astrologers, and the fantastic character of the so-called "laws" of their art.

As regards the value of their predictions, he cites a series of events in 1968. In that year, there were grave revolutionary upsurges in Paris during May. In the U.S.A. Robert Kennedy and the black leader Martin Luther King were assassinated. In Europe, August saw the invasion of Czechoslovakia by the Communist "Warsaw Pact" forces under Russian leadership. The year's end was marked by a successful orbiting of the moon by astronauts in the "Apollo" Capsule. Not one of these important events had been predicted by the journals dealing with astrology!

Birth Horoscopes

The French journal "Science et Vie" called upon an astrological expert to cast the horoscopes of ten major criminals, giving the dates, times and coordination's of their births. The results were ridiculous - in particular, that concerning Dr. Marcel Petiot, born in January 1897 at 3 p.m. at Auxerre, who was executed on 26 May 1946.

The author, in conclusion, reflects upon the serious damage wrought by astrology in the French community, to public health as well as intelligence; and he calls upon genuine scientists, intellectuals and educators, to mount a crusade against it as a social evil. The United Nations Organisation UNESCO, to its credit, has urged the need to combat this "disastrous superstition", especially for the protection of the young.

But the business of casting horoscopes is far too profitable to yield readily to those who seek to explode the illusions of a public which plunges all too readily into this form of self deception. As Tacitus reflected long ago "Because of the credulity of the human mind, it is obscure matters which are most readily believed". In 1962 a former student of the French Ecole Polytechnique, Paul Choisnard, published a work on the planetary positions of that year and the previous one, attempting to furnish statistical confirmation of the astrological hypothesis. Expert statisticians were quick to point out the elementary flaws in his work - but the publication led to others.

"Astral Signals"

What was styled a "New astrology" emerged, substituting "Astral Signals" for the earlier concepts of causation. The human psyche, they claimed, was regulated by an "automation of repetition" similar to the starry revolutions of the planets. In his old age, the great psychologist Jung gave some encouragement to this development. In 1966 Michel Gauquelin, holder of a diploma of the Statistical Institute, aided by his wife Françoise, published nearly 100,000 observations, serving to confirm the existence of a real relationship between the planets Mars, Saturn, and Jupiter, as well as the Moon, and humanity. In the preface, Giorgio Piccardi of Florence University referred to a

correlation he said had been established between the planets of the Solar System and short wave radio in the Atlantic region. He claimed that an engineer, J. H. Nelson, had been able to confirm this relationship through five years of research. He had also amplified earlier investigations, resulting in a proof of the link between planetary positions and sun spots. In the light of these discoveries, according to Piccardi, it was reasonable to believe in the direct action of the planets on the earth also, and on the lives of its human inhabitants.

Whatever might be held about his conclusions, Gauquelin's patience and devotion in scientific research were unquestionable. His findings corresponded in general with those of traditional astrology, despite some differences in detail. Thus, he produced impressive lists of sportsmen, soldiers and painters born under the sign of Mars, and of actors, politicians and clerics born under that of Jupiter, claiming that a relationship had been established between planets and these persons' lives by strict methods of research.

Birth calculations criticised

But the astronomers did not abate their scepticism. Couderc pointed out first, the difficulty of verifying precisely the time of birth, all important in astrological calculations. The process was not instantaneous, and was seldom exactly reported. Official time itself had become a variable through a number of different decrees by Government between 1915 and 1946. By way of further criticism he asked why, if the influence of Mars determined the military careers of those born under it, there were so few of the French working class to be found at Military Colleges. Were workmen's sons never born under this "influence?" Surely, he said, to become a general it was more useful to have a family background of a military kind than to be born under a certain planet! He noted that Gauquelin had also facilitated the production of suitable answers by joining planets into "Binomes", so as to make Jupiter and Mars together preside over the births of his eminent soldiers.

In a letter to Alec Mellor, a lawyer of the Paris Court of Appeal, Couderc set forth in detail his view of the hopeless instability of the "hour of birth" as a basis for any conclusion with the least claim to be called "Scientific". He added his expression of regret that this so-called "New Astrology" should have helped to revive "grandma's old astrology". He referred to the case of a fashion magazine which had recently joined the ranks of those publishing predictive horoscopes, on the ground that the "Scientific" character of astrology was now fully recognised!

Along with "Scientific" fallacies, the old nonsense of occultism continues - thus, in 1978, Germaine Holleg, in "Clairvoyance" wrote of the reference in Genesis to the mating of the "Sons of God" with the daughters of men. The text is supposed by her to refer to "more highly evolved beings" from whom a knowledge of the "eternal verities" of the "most ancient of sciences" was derived. She refers too, to an imagined similitude between the disposition of human brain cells and those of stars in the galaxies.

The "Prophecies" of Nostradamus

A notable feature in the revival of astrology, in Australia as well as other Western countries, has been the publicity given to the "prophecies" of the sixteenth century Nostradamus, of whom it has been suggested by a recent press commentator that he may be held "the last in the line of Biblical prophets".

Michael de Notre Dame, whose name has been Latinised into "Nostradamus" after the fashion of intellectuals of his time, was born of a converted Jewish family in the south of France in 1503. He

studied medicine at Montpellier University as a young man, and was active in fighting the plague. He sensibly held that clean air and pure water would do more to counter it than the "mystery potions" then in common use.

Nostradamus also became an expert in the current art of astrology, and was employed to cast horoscopes for Catherine de Medici, the French Queen Mother, and other eminent personages of the period. While he never made any claim to be inspired by God, he did produce a series of predictions which were widely publicised, and have been reproduced in numerous editions in the following centuries, up to our own time.

During his lifetime, Nostradamus was a controversial figure: while he had powerful and Royal patrons, he was held by others to be a charlatan and impostor. His writings are in short verses and quatrains. Ten Chapters, his supporters claim, make forecasts up to the end of the world as we know it. He is said to have used the method of gazing into a bowl of water suspended on a tripod, during the night, in order to gain his insights. He wrote in an obscure and archaic style, claiming that his mysteries could only be unlocked by those who were prepared to read the work and ponder upon its interpretation.

Certainly the modern interpreters have contrived to draw clear meanings out of Nostradamus' "Mystical" maze as dexterously as a conjurer produces rabbits from his top hat. They have found in them submarines, air war, the rise of Bonaparte and Hitler, the assassination of the Kennedy brothers, and so on. These "fulfilments", however, seem to owe more to the credulity of the devoted students than to Nostradamus' prophetic powers.

Thus Quatrain 1.29 tells of a fish that travels over land and sea, its shape smooth and frightful. "From the sea, the enemies soon reach the walls". An admiring commentator assures us that here we have "a perfect description" of a Polaris missile fired from a submarine!

The reference to "Hister" is held by some to mean Hitler- but others point out that "Ister" is the Latin name for the Danube river. In an Australian TV special dealing with Nostradamus it was queried whether prophecy 3.65 where a Pope is poisoned from a chalice could refer to the sudden death of Pope John Paul I "in view of his good health". But the Pope's health was not good. He had been a sickly infant, had been twice treated for a lung ailment in a sanatorium, and had undergone surgery on four occasions. Only five days before his death, a doctor who had treated him for twenty years warned him that he was dangerously "overdoing it". In view of all this, the Pope's sudden death was not surprising, and there is not the least indication that it was anything but natural.

It has also been suggested that Nostradamus prophesied the "failure" of Pope Pius XII to protest against Nazi atrocities against the Jews. This "interpretation" is obviously an echo of the slander of the German Hochhuth in a play "The Representative" which caused a sensation in 1963. The truth - now made public in Vatican files, - is that the Pope did all in his power to help Jewish victims.

Professor Lapide, of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, has estimated that his secret diplomacy saved 860,000 from death - and Jewish leaders have been almost unanimous in supporting his public discretion on this issue. The same policy was followed by the International Red Cross - and with excellent reason. The open condemnation of the Dutch Bishops of Hitler's deportation of Dutch Jews provoked further deportations by way of retaliations. It was by keeping in touch with the sinister power dominant in Europe in the war years that the Vatican was able to achieve its work of rescue. So much for two supposed "predictions" concerning the Popes of this century!

A prediction about "a child born of poor family" who would entice many peoples by his speech, has been held to refer to either Napoleon - who spoke French badly and was no orator - or Hitler, or someone else. You can take your pick!

An admiring author who has written up Nostradamus, Erika Cheetham, admits that she can make nothing of a forecast of a forty years' drought to be followed by a forty years' flood! But, she says, for every ten like that there is one, impressive one - like the passage naming Pasteur, or (she claims) the "Hister" quatrain supposed to refer to Hitler - which is, in fact, a farrago about beasts wild with hunger crossing rivers, and a leader dragged in a cage of iron "When the Child of Germany observes no law".

Kennedy's assassination is held to be predicted in a passage about "a just man struck down by a thunderbolt". His brother was another who "falls at nighttime according to a prediction".

Erika Cheetham herself admits that 95 per cent of Nostradamus can be dismissed - and it seems, even the remaining 5 per cent is often not very "specific". It is interesting to note, incidentally, that one forecast is now held to point to Edward Kennedy as the next President of the United States, despite a "slander" which is supposed to refer to the Chappaquiddick incident. We shall know before this year's (1980) end whether this "prophecy" is to be fulfilled - but it seems unlikely. Another quatrain about Persia has been linked to the Ayatollah's revolution, which was originally launched from France.

Looking further, we are warned to expect a third "Antichrist" and other horrors. The prediction of "Antichrists" has been common enough in the Christian world since the era of the Apocalypse, and various personalities have figured in that role - Nero, Diocletian, Attila the Hun and the Emperor Frederick II among others. That some other nasty man may emerge, and atomic war break out, is unhappily, by no means unlikely but the relationship of the event with a sixteenth century prediction featuring "the imperial gods of Hannibal" (whoever they may be) is another matter.

The Social Effects of Astrology

So much, then, for the cult of Nostradamus, with which this study of Astrology can well be concluded. That it is scientifically baseless - "A Himalayan imposture resting on nothing" is very clear. This, in itself, with the fact that an enormous amount of money is being squandered by the victims of a fraud to the profit of its purveyors, is surely a good reason why Christians who care for truth should steer clear of it: for our Lord Himself has named Satan as "The father of lies".

But its dire social effect is a reason for not merely shunning astrology but crusading against it. A large number of people - including not a few who pass for highly educated - regulate serious decisions by consultations with astrologers or reference to horoscopes. An industrialist will make use of the nonsense in framing business plans. A candidate for a desirable post in private industry or the public service may find himself or herself rejected, without knowing why, because someone in a managerial position is affected in his choice by an adverse feature in the birthdate set down in the dossier submitted to him. The same obstacle of superstition may wreck the happiness of "starcrossed" lovers.

In Europe and America - and, no doubt, here also - the astrological cult is found among men of all kinds - including those with high responsibilities such as lawyers and doctors.

The pattern of a child's education and of his whole future may be determined by the nonsense of a "consultation" based on his horoscope. Speculators and gamblers rely on "the Stars" in their quests

for fortune. A malign personal forecast, or one concerning a dear one, may overshadow the life of one "condemned to wear mourning in advance" on its account.

Mumbo Jumbo v Reason

This mortal war against common sense too often succeeds in annihilating the power to exercise criticism. Instead of God-given reason, it is horoscopic mumbo-jumbo which determines the choices of self-blinded people. This kind of thing, it is hardly necessary to say, strikes against the whole Christian conception of man - in that sense, it can indeed be held "the work of Satan".

"We have said farewell to the Stars" was the word of the early Christian apologist Tatian. It should be the last word for Catholics today.

The fatalism of astrology, based on pagan concepts and an antique, discarded model of the universe, is a contradiction of the liberating victory of Christ, tending to place its credulous believers once again under the tyranny of an imagined "planetary law" - a tyranny not less sinister because of its absurdity.
