

How Horoscopes are Faked

Originally published in the November 1917 edition of The International under the pseudonym of "Cor Scorpionis."

I have always been opposed to the receiving of money for anything which has in any way to do with the occult sciences. Because they are so important and so sacred, one ought to be particularly on one's honor with regard to them. As the Scripture says: "Avoid the appearance of evil." The more serious one is about the subject, the more careful one should be to do nothing which can make any one justified in calling you a humbug.

The laws of the State of New York are supposed to prohibit fortune-telling, and they are, indeed, applied with great severity so far as the little fish are concerned. But the big fish, the most conscienceless swindlers of all, seem to dodge the police. A lot of bluff has been put up about "scientific" astrology. I propose to show how the game is really worked.

Let us pay a visit to one of the best known of them. We find an expensive apartment in one of the best parts of the city. We are not very much impressed by the furniture. There is a good deal of muddle, a good deal of junk, a complete absence of taste. The spider of this web is a grey-haired old woman of exceedingly shrewd expression. She explains to us by pamphlets and by word that she is a really "scientific" investigator. In setting up a horoscope, for example, she is very careful to calculate the places of the planets, not only to degrees but to minutes and seconds. That sounds wonderfully accurate, doesn't it? However, when it comes to making the real calculations upon which astrology is based, an error of ten or twelve degrees is of no account at all. Which is rather like announcing that a man took two hours, 33 minutes and 14 $\frac{2}{5}$ seconds to run *several*

miles. The alleged accuracy is quite meaningless. It is only a sham to impress the client. It is also to be observed that owing to the pressure of business she has these calculations made by her chauffeur! This, I suppose, is a point of war economy.

She is grotesquely ignorant of the first principles of astronomy. She has no conception, for example, of the Solar System as a Disk, but imagines that the planets are all over the place, like the raisins in a plum-pudding. She calls her country house the Zodiac — and doesn't know what the Zodiac is!

One word more on the "scientific accuracy" business. If astrology is to be done at all, if there is any sense in it whatever, which I do not for one moment deny, the calculations depend upon a fairly close approximation of the hour and minute of birth. For example, the Seventh house, the place of the setting sun, refers to marriage, so that if a person is born with an unfortunate planet like Saturn setting, he may expect an unfortunate marriage. It is obviously of vital importance for the inquirer to know whether Saturn was setting or not. There is a certain amount of latitude, from about one to two hours, for Saturn would remain in that house for about that period. But where the birth hour is not known within about an hour the horoscope becomes worthless. If the time were six hours earlier, Saturn would be in the mid-heaven and bring misfortune in business or reputation rather than in marriage. However, to the fashionable astrologer this must not matter. She has to get the dollars from the people who do not know in the least at what hour of the day or night they were born. She has the impudence to assure them that it doesn't matter, all the time insisting upon her wonderful scientific accuracy.

There is no need to cast any doubt upon the sincerity of the belief of the woman. She talks astrology day and night. She dreams of it. She sets up a horoscope

for her vast family of cats and dogs, and is scared out of her life when some planet threatens her horoscope.

But the people who deceive themselves most effectually are also those who deceive others most effectually. Whether it is knavery or folly does not matter very much. What I want to do is to explain to the people who are paying five dollars that they are not getting genuine astrology at all. It may be said that a horoscope (granting for a moment the genuineness of the science) is a complete map of the life and character of the native. To read one properly would mean at least a week's continuous work. But the demand is for \$5 and \$10 horoscopes; and obviously no more than a few minutes can be given to each one if the lady is to clear her forty or fifty thousand a year. It is also necessary to give a good deal of *apparent* value for the money. There are only 12 signs and only 9 planets to be considered. For the influence of the rising sign, therefore, one only needs 12 multigraphed pages. As each planet can be in any sign we shall need 9 times 12 multigraph pages to cover the action of the planets. Each planet can be, roughly speaking, in fortunate or unfortunate aspect, and 162 more pages will be needed. These pages need not be prepared right away. A new one can be dictated as each aspect turns up in practice. These pages are all pigeon-holed, and by means of a chart the astrologer can tell her secretary which paper to pick out for any horoscope that comes along. The secretary can then pick them out and pin them together in a very few minutes, and there is your horoscope.

The objection to this proceeding is fairly obvious. In practically all horoscopes there are indications which clash with each other. To judge such a horoscope properly, the whole thing should be taken into individual consideration, and a reconciliation obtained. With the "reach-me-down" method all this is necessarily ignored, and the client may be surprised to find on page two of the horoscope, that she is kind and considerate, and on

page 4, that she is selfish and inconsiderate. There is further a great theoretical objection; which is that a horoscope, to be a horoscope at all, must be a live thing. To get them out in this mechanical fashion is to offer a corpse instead.

It is true that the astrologer sometimes condescends to look upon the horoscope as a whole, and dictate one or two pages at the end, but this is not always done. There is no guarantee that it will be done.

It is probably difficult to take legal exception to this branch of the business, but it is only a very small branch. It is the thin end of the wedge. The fortune telling, pure and simple, comes afterwards. The astrologer issues a series of so-called monthly forecasts which explain how the actual position of the planets in the heavens at the time should react upon any given horoscope. Another set of multigraphed pages is of course required for this. These pages are carefully examined by a lawyer, for we are now getting into the danger zone.

The phraseology is very carefully chosen, for nothing must be said which would be indictable as a prediction. Thus, instead of saying, "you will be lucky in speculation during the first week of October," the phrase is "financial conditions seem to be operating favorably during the first week in October." These monthly forecasts are received at \$24 a year, and as they require a good deal of trouble in preparation, it is evident that the cheapness has something behind it. These forecasts are what you may call bait, and the fish to be caught is the "personal consultation."

Suppose I am told in my forecasts that financial conditions are favorable for a certain period, I am going to ask for more. I want to know exactly how to make the best use of the opportunity; so I ring up the lady and get an appointment. This appointment may ostensibly be a \$5 or \$10 one; but in reality I may have to pay much more for it. I may have to let the lady in on a

percentage of profits on the gamble in "war babies." Similarly, if I am an actress, or other easily exploitable person, I may have to pay a great deal extra. Once the fly is in the web, the spider can dictate its own terms.

Women are particularly foolish with astrologers. They tell all their love affairs. Again, even cautious Mrs. A. will tell one side of a story; prudent Miss B. next day, the other side. The astrologer becomes mistress of these women, body and soul. Perhaps she does not blackmail them; but she is in a position to do so if she wishes. At the very least, the victims realize their own position, and are careful to do anything the astrologer may ask.

Then, again, there is the matrimonial agency graft; and the highly profitable business of entremetteuse. (We do not assert that, in the particular case we are discussing, these things are done, but they could be done. It is immoral to permit the existence of a secret power of this kind.)

It is all done under the cloak of astrology. Mr. C., calls and looks for a soul-mate; the astrologer soon finds some woman, "whose Venus is on his Sun," and arranges a little dinner-party. All in the sacred cause of astrology — scientific astrology; the old lady would be genuinely shocked if you called her by her real name. But she takes her commission all the same, and superstition is so extraordinarily strong that when faith is established there is no limit to the amount of which the victim can be fleeced. This being the really dangerous part of the work, the astrologer is extraordinarily careful about making appointments. One has to have very good introductions. Word quickly goes round as to what the police are doing. For example, a few months ago it was rumored that a red-haired detective had been engaged, and all women with red hair, unless previously known, had to pass the 33rd degree before they reached the center of the web. There is no doubt in the mind of the astrologer that she is breaking the law. She

lives in continual terror of the police. She knows well enough that it was only a fluke that she was not convicted at her previous prosecutions. However, she boasts openly of her "pull" with certain society leaders who can protect her from the police. Properly managed, evidence is easy to obtain. Will not Mrs. Isabel Goodwin look to it?