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Title of extract: **Alan Leo: From stars to the street**

Name of Author: **Curry, P.**

Title/Author of book/edition (if applicable): **Confusion of Prophets. Curry, P.**

Name of Visual Creator or other acknowledgement (if applicable):

Journal details –title/Vol/Year (if applicable):

Publisher: **Collins and Brown**

Pages scanned: **122 - 159**

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Course of Study (Module name and number): **Sky and Psyche AHAN7022**

Name of Designated Person  
authorising scanning:

Date authorised: 09.09.13

Moodle/Powerpoint

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## CHAPTER V

# ALAN LEO: FROM THE STARS TO THE STREET

THE GREAT BETRAYER OF ASTROLOGY, according to Pearce and Garnett, seems at first blush a pretty innocuous character. He was portrayed at work, sometime around 1900, thus:

It was a hot day in June. Seated before a roll-top desk in an upstairs room, the window of which opened out into a conservatory, in a large house in one of the Northern suburbs of London, was Albanus Leon . . . He was a short thickset man of some forty summers, possessing an open countenance, hair turned slightly grey, and a pair of small steel grey eyes which always twinkled when he spoke. There was an air of dignity about his personality, which tended to make him somewhat proud and self-important, but on the other hand he possessed much geniality and there was a certain magnetism about his presence which had a soothing influence on all around him.

The morning mail had just been delivered, and Albanus Leon was busily engaged in sorting out a large pile of letters of all shapes and sizes . . . Most of them contained money orders, for Leon had an immense clientele, and the income from his business had now reached four figures a year and bid fair to greatly increase as time went on. The mail this morning was an exceptionally heavy one and the pile of postal and money orders was rapidly mounting up.

The writer, E. H. Bailey, had been until two years earlier an employee

of 'Albanus Leon', or to use his proper adopted name, Alan Leo. Bailey's picture rings true, if a touch acerbic, but it is potentially misleading — Leo's geniality masked a formidable will and his profits went for the most part straight back into his business. The latter was the publicity machine for his life-mission, which he announced in 1895, declaring: 'The time has come to modernise the ancient system of Astrology.' And to a remarkable extent, he succeeded. Modern astrology is difficult to imagine without his intervention. That Leo's idea of modernity gave pride of place to a revived 'Wisdom-Religion' may seem bizarre, of course, but it made perfect sense to him and his considerable, and by no means uneducated, following in early twentieth-century London. Indeed, it is with us still.

Alan Leo was born William Frederick Allen at 6.10 a.m. on 7 August 1860 in Great College Street, just behind Westminster Abbey. His mother was a dedicated member of the Plymouth Brethren, a tiny but ferocious Protestant sect; his father was a Scottish ex-soldier, who soon tired of his wife's religious fanaticism and disappeared when Leo was about nine. Neither parent was wealthy, and from the age of sixteen Leo was obliged to fend for himself, working variously as a draper, chemist's assistant, grocer, sewing machine salesman and shop manager. His professional fortunes varied enormously — a fact he attributed to the presence of Uranus in the tenth house of his nativity — and these jobs alternated with bouts of unemployment and poverty. They also ran in tandem with what seems to have been an unrelated inner life, perhaps impelled by his mother's religiosity. He had rejected that, but retained a lifelong concern with the larger questions of life.

Leo first became interested in astrology when he was about eighteen. At twenty-one, while managing a grocery shop, he was treated for a minor complaint by one Dr Richardson, a herbalist-astrologer in Nottingham, from whom he learned more. Four years later, now the manager of an engineering firm in London, he encountered the concept of reincarnation. By the age of twenty-eight, Leo wrote later, 'I had plunged very deeply into the private study of Natal Astrology.' He had also learned about the idea of karma — roughly, a chain of cause-and-effect whereby one's present actions determine one's future nature and circumstances, just as

one's past actions, which may or may not include those of previous lives, have already determined those of one's present. Undoubtedly it was this discovery that led him to a closer involvement with Theosophy.

We have already encountered Madame Blavatsky as a young woman in London, hungry for a glimpse of her favourite author, Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton. Since then she had travelled far, absorbing mystical and occult philosophies, and arousing fascination and denunciation in about equal measure. In 1875, together with Colonel Henry Olcott, she founded the Theosophical Society in New York. Two years later, she published *Isis Unveiled: A Master Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*. This was succeeded in 1888 by *The Secret Doctrine: The Synthesis of Science, Religion and Philosophy*. These *monstres sacrés* were made up of a mass of Neo-platonism, Hermeticism, Gnosticism, magic, alchemy and astrology, topped up with a hefty dollop of Hinduism and Buddhism. Much of it was attributed to the 'Mahatmas', a spiritually evolved brotherhood living in the Himalayas, contact with which, or even membership of, was the ambition of every Theosophical novice.

Scholarly criticisms that Blavatsky's work was derivative and erroneous had little impact on its appeal. Indeed, its success was partly due to its being so turgidly complex that it offered something for almost everyone, and so deliberately comprehensive that its invented or re-invented terms (all the important ones) could only be checked against other firmly internal elements. In this sense, Blavatsky provided a model for many succeeding occultists, from Alice Bailey to L. Ron Hubbard.

But there were other powerful appeals: more than a hint of Eastern promise, for example, for the jaded and cosmopolitan. Reincarnation and karma were central to Blavatsky's theory of human evolution, and she daringly pooh-poohed the uniqueness of both Christ and Christianity. At the same time, she also attacked scientific materialism, arguing that while the 'exoteric' scientist is limited to the study of nature's exterior, only spiritual perception can penetrate her inner mysteries. To many late Victorians, worried about the impact of scientific and especially

Darwinian beliefs, this sounded just the right note. However different their suggested solutions, such worries were also a major impetus to the Society of Psychical Research, as it continued to garner members from the *crème de la crème* of British scientific, political and social leaders.

In the words of Max Beerbohm; 'For those who like this sort of thing, this is the sort of thing they like.' Many did. The T.S., as the Theosophical Society was known, together with its colourful founder 'H. P. B.', set the pattern for virtually all such subsequent societies and sects, and in that sense its influence extended well beyond the 100,000 or so members world-wide that existed by the late 1880s.

A London Lodge of the T.S. had opened for business opposite the British Museum in 1878, led by A. P. Sinnett. Brisk sales of Sinnett's *The Occult World* in 1884 revealed a receptive audience for these daring 'new' ideas. It was not until the spring of 1887, however, when Blavatsky herself arrived on the scene, that Theosophy in London really took off. Settling in at 17 Lansdowne Road in Holland Park, the property of a wealthy follower which now became her 'lomasery' (as in the abode of a Tibetan lama), she quickly opened her own 'Blavatsky Lodge of the T.S.' in preference to the original group. It was no contest; the glamour of the former soon prevailed and it became a magnet for both the relatively committed — mesmerists, spiritualists, magicians, etc. — and the curious. The latter included an impressive array of urban gentry and *haute bourgeoisie*, especially, but by no means only, middle-aged to elderly wealthy and titled ladies. Among those who joined was the poet W. B. Yeats, who had just moved to London. Yeats's uncle, John Varley Jr, was already a Theosophist.

The vice-president of the Blavatsky Lodge, and a member of the coveted 'Inner Circle' — one of twelve members, to be precise — was a young astrologer named Walter Richard Old. He renamed himself W. Gorn Old and Blavatsky nick-named him 'The Astral Tramp', on account, she said, of his habit of 'roaming about in his astral body at night'. But he was best known by his astrological *nom de plume*, 'Sephariel', borrowed from yet another Hebrew angel. In the small circle of metropolitan astrologers,

he and Leo met soon after the latter had moved to London; and it was Sepharial who introduced Leo to the Theosophical gatherings led by Blavatsky in Lansdowne Road during the summer of 1889.

The following May, Leo formally joined the T.S. and remained a devoted member for the rest of his life. He overlapped briefly with Yeats, who resigned that same year and joined the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn instead. Unlike the T.S., this was a small and secretive organization, which for two years from 1898 included the notorious magician Aleister Crowley. However, its co-founder, Dr W. W. Westcott, was a colleague of Sepharial's in H.P.B.'s Inner Circle. Both groups were part of the explosion of occultism and magic in England in the late 1880s and '90s. It was neither the first nor the last outbreak, of course, being reminiscent of the Swedenborgianism, Behemism and millenarianism of the 1780s and '90s; and not at all dissimilar, in our own time, to the renaissance of astrology, magic and interest in Eastern philosophies during the late 1960s and '70s.

Sepharial was an interesting person and a noteworthy astrologer in his own right. Born into relatively comfortable circumstances at about 1.30 a.m. on 20 March 1864 at Richmond House in Handsworth, Birmingham, he seems, in the words of a contemporary, to have 'arrived here with a very strong bias, which early led him to the study of occultism and allied subjects'. After an education at King Edward's School in Birmingham, he tore through Hebrew and the Cabalah, Swedenborg, alchemy, Sanskrit and the Western magical tradition in general; but from the age of fifteen 'astrology was the main string to his plait of thought'. After burning too much midnight oil and neglecting his health, he suffered a nervous breakdown at twenty-one.

Old must have felt considerable relief upon finding a material toehold for all these ineffable preoccupations, when he moved to London early in 1889 and found himself in the thick of Theosophy — literally, since he and Blavatsky became very close and, when she moved to 19 Avenue Road, St John's Wood, in October 1889, he moved in too. This large and well-appointed house belonged to Annie Besant, Blavatsky's successor as leader of the T.S. Indeed, when H.P.B. died there, on 8 May 1891, Old

was present — despite the fact that his own mother was also ill and died, rather uncannily, on the same day. His heart was never really in Theosophy after that and, five years later, he left the T.S. to pursue an insecure existence as a freelance writer. Writing as Sepharial, he produced three short-lived astrological magazines, countless articles and more than forty books. These included the obligatory textbook, *The Manual of Astrology*, which remained a standard text for the first three decades of the twentieth century. More frequent, however, were such works as *The Birthday Book of Destiny*, *The Great Devastation: A Prophecy of the Times that are Coming Upon Europe* and *Astrology for Beginners . . . Study Astrology! Forewarned is Forearmed*, the wartime reissue of his earlier *Elementary Astrology*. These provided his bread and butter and, from their profusion, it seems that Sepharial was continually on the verge of going without. One cannot avoid the impression that he was wasted on them, given the degree of learning and application that his articles in various specialist occult publications reflect; and he may well have felt so too.

Sepharial's views also came rather more down to earth. He quickly fastened on to Sir Oliver Lodge's recent observation that 'If once we grasp the idea that *past* and *future* may be *actually existing*, we can recognize that they may have a controlling influence on all present action.' But Sepharial had long maintained that astrology was founded on 'the imperishable rock of numbers' and should therefore be susceptible to precise verification. 'It is because of this mathematical basis,' he wrote, 'that the science is rendered so easy of proof, in contradistinction to many other less scientific modes of divination.' So, combining the necessity of commerce with the virtue of 'proof', Sepharial increasingly concentrated on devising complicated systems of astral forecasting for the stock-market and the turf, attracting both fans and detractors.

Undiscouraged by this mixed reception, Sepharial insisted that 'the gospel of true science is *utility*' and even that 'the sooner we bring the science [of astrology] down from the clouds where the would-be esotericists have incontinently harried it, the sooner will it gain a proper recognition in the practical world'. However, he died in Brighton on

23 December 1929 without ever seeing, or achieving for himself, such recognition. It might have consoled him to know that, nearly a century later, eleven of his books are still in print in Britain and America — a record many authors might envy.

Following Sepharial, Alan Leo joined Theosophical circles after moving to London in 1888. He took a small house at 12 Lugard Road in Peckham. At around this time, he also changed his name by deed poll to reflect his new life, as well as the preponderance of planets in that sign at his birth. In his daytime, 'exoteric' life, Leo was now the chief salesman for a confectionary firm. Reading through a shoe-string periodical called *The Astrologer*, he noticed a letter from F. W. Lacey (also known as 'Aphorel'), another astrologer living not far away in Brixton, and wrote to him.

Lacey turned out to be a kindred soul and fellow-Theosophist, whose own initiation into astrology was revealing. He had started off on Pearce's *Textbook of Astrology*, 'but not being a mathematician, I made very little progress'. He wrote to Sepharial 'and enquired whether he could recommend a simpler work . . . [He] advised me to start with Raphael's *Guide to Astrology*.' How many others were discouraged or defeated by Pearce's admirably but uncompromisingly stern and 'scientific' approach? Lacey and Leo, in this respect, were probably typical of most astrologers of the time.

The two decided that things should be easier for others like themselves and, equally important, that those others constituted an untapped market — a powerful combination. On 21 November 1889, after carefully noting the time, they decided to start a new astrological monthly periodical. Leo happened to mention the plan to Sepharial, who then quickly produced a rival, *Fate and Fortune*. Its first issue appeared in June 1890, one month before *The Astrologer's Magazine*. Sepharial's attempt failed after only four issues, however, confirming his remark that 'Left to myself, I would wreck the best business that was ever founded inside of twelve months.' In any event, it seems to have resulted in no ill will, and Leo and Lacey invited him to contribute to their own venture, which

went from strength to strength and started to break even by June 1891.

Part of *The Astrologer's Magazine's* broad appeal can be judged from the clever choice of nativities to be discussed in the leading issue: those of Christ, taken from a seventeenth-century English astrologer; the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VII; and the African explorer Henry Stanley. Another reason for its success was probably the intemperate attacks made on it both by A. J. Pearce in *Zadkiel's Almanac*, and the *Daily News*. Most enticing of all, however, was the offer of a free horoscope for all new subscribers. These amounted to about 1,500 in the first year alone — a mixed blessing, since Leo and Lacey had to work flat out to provide even the brief delineations promised. By the end of 1891, Lacey felt obliged to resign, leaving Leo as the sole proprietor. Meanwhile, the latter somehow managed to carry on as a commercial traveller, combining his travels around the country with what is now sometimes called 'networking' with fellow Theosophists and astrologers. He also gave free lectures on the subject all over the country. In early 1891, for example, he lectured in Leamington, Liverpool, Burnley, Manchester, Bristol and Gloucester.

An unforeseen consequence of Leo's free offer was his own marriage. One of the circle of Theosophical astrologers that he had by now attracted, H. S. Green, interested a friend in the lodge in Bournemouth, who in turn convinced a fellow-member there to subscribe. Ada Elizabeth Murray Phillips, soon better known as Bessie Leo, was living in Southampton with her father. She was already well known locally as a palmist and phrenologist. In 1891, she read Sinnett's *Esoteric Buddhism* and, feeling just as many eclectic occultists of the time must have felt, upon encountering a capacious and comprehensive spiritual system that could accommodate them, immediately became, in her own words, 'an ardent Theosophist'.

In the winter of 1892, writing anonymously, Bessie sent off for her horoscope. The result so impressed her that she asked Green's friend to write to Leo, asking if he would consent to see her. In February 1893, in the course of one of his commercial peregrinations,

he stopped off in Southampton one evening and called on his admirer. They 'at once plunged into occult and metaphysical subjects, until the hour of midnight had struck', he later recalled. In Bessie's words; 'We began to talk: Theosophy and astrology on his part, Phrenology and Palmistry on mine, for the latter two were my own studies; and time flew . . . I did not sleep much that night. It was all too wonderful. How I admired Mr. Leo's mind!'

But Bessie was already engaged to be married, on the understanding that the relationship was to be strictly platonic. In May, she and her husband moved to Bournemouth. Correspondence and occasional visits from Leo continued, in the course of which, he recollected, 'they sat conversing on very deep subjects, when the room became filled with a peculiar subtle influence enveloping them in a psychic aura which recurred on each meeting . . . it held them spellbound for about an hour.' Towards the end of 1894, Bessie's husband apparently tried to break the terms of their contract and the marriage was annulled the following spring. Bessie discussed remarriage with Alan, but she told him she feared that 'my father will never consent. You are a Christian, or at least a Theosophist, and he is a Jew, and very orthodox.' He replied,

I am really an Astrologer and the Great Solar Logos and the star angels are my religion . . . If you decide to marry me, I will not let you work any more for money. You must give up your professional work, for I hold that a woman should be sheltered, protected and guarded within the home, and that she should leave the fight for maintenance and work to the man; then she has more power to develop her spiritual nature, and can help him to unfold his.

This was music to Bessie's ears, it seems, and as for the other little problem, marital celibacy, Alan had already declared his prior allegiance to the spiritual over the carnal life. I should add that he was neither hypocritical nor inconsistent in this vow. Within a few years, he had also become a vegetarian, teetotaller and non-smoker, all of which he remained until the end of his life. As Bessie put it: 'His ideal was purity, physical, mental and moral.'

So, on 23 September 1895, Bessie and Alan Leo married. It seems to have been a success for both partners. After Alan's death twenty-five years later, Bessie wrote rather touchingly: 'He was the sunshine of my life and home, he never once failed me in any event in life, and made me completely and entirely happy. Ours,' she added, 'was an astrological marriage, my Sun being on his Moon in the same degree of Aries.'

Celibacy for the purpose of transmuting sexual energy into spiritual was not rare among committed Theosophists, although more widely recommended than practised. It was part of a more general doctrine according to which, as Leo wrote, 'Woman is *not* woman, if she does not contain in her nature pure love, and man is not man who is not in his essence wisdom.' This view was apparently advocated with equal enthusiasm by many male and female Theosophists. It would strike a modern observer as confining women to a ghetto of nature and 'female-ness', leaving culture and initiative to men. At the time, however, it may have helped to create a valuable if temporary respite for women as recognized mistresses in their own and related spheres, at least. In any case, Alan frequently transgressed in practice, Bessie recalling that he 'was a great home lover and a real server in home life, quite as capable as a woman in the domestic sphere'.

Theosophy supplied people like Leo with a general social theory, embracing not only the question of sex but also that of class. Most important was the idea of one's karma, which accrued throughout different incarnations of the same soul and resulted in appropriate circumstances for the soul's growth at the next birth. 'I am convinced,' he wrote, 'that the problem of the inequalities of the human race can only be successfully solved by a knowledge of Astrology' — i.e. what he called esoteric astrology. The alternative, that one's circumstances were not 'earned', but random and arbitrary, was simply unacceptable: 'The law which gives to one soul a nativity of good environment in which refinement, opportunity, and sound moral training are uppermost; and to another poverty, disease, and immoral training, is manifestly unjust, to say the least, apart from its being without any apparent purpose.'

In this scheme of things, astrology supplied a symbolic key to the

individual's temperament (the prime circumstance for the present life), and thereby both the traces of his or her past and the possibilities for future development. All this was encoded in the nativity for the moment of birth and needed only skilful interpretation to be laid bare . . . but not by just anyone. As Leo came to see it, there were two schools of astrology: 'The *esoteric* and the *fatalistic*'. The latter teaches that the individual is

the sport of an arbitrary power termed 'planet' . . . The former on the other hand, proclaims that 'character *and character alone*, determines destiny. It is not prediction, however accurate, that is needed at all, but what is needed is, the knowledge that each man is the law unto himself, that within each is the power to create his own destiny.'

Thus, for example, the first, fifth and ninth houses of a person's nativity constitute, for Leo, 'the Mystic Triangle. Whoever can interpret this can read the Past, the Present and the Future.' The eyes of the older traditional astrology, however, would have perceived 'only' references to one's physique, children and travels, respectively.

The marriage of natal astrology and Theosophy, therefore, seemed not only provident but also necessary. Not surprisingly, Leo concluded: 'An astrologer must be first an occultist before he can become in any real sense of the word an astrologer.' Everything conspired to facilitate this consummation. As a theory, it explained Leo's own life-work, beginning with the way he had immediately taken to the subject. 'I ought to know something about Astrology,' he used to say modestly, 'for I believe I have been an astrologer in several former lives.' Another problem it solved was the fatalism of the old astral prophecy in an age that so valued individual freedom and the ability to rise above one's circumstances. Even before discovering Theosophy, Leo had found he 'could not reconcile the fatalistic notions of materialistic Astrology with [my] own optimistic views of free-will, and the value of individual effort'. Far from being an irrational aberration, the new occult astrology was perfectly suited to the capitalism and individualism of the age.

Finally, it also supplied an answer to one of the problems that

most vexed late Victorians or, at least, those with sufficient leisure and inclination to feel so vexed. To adapt a more recent adage, it was as if they felt: 'Science — you can't live with it, you can't live without it.' In Leo's vision, however, 'Astrology — the "Wisdom of the Stars" — reveals a true Science, the beginning and the end of all scientific knowledge. In this sense Astrology is the philosophic link between Science and Religion.' This put science in its place and saved religion at a stroke, while ensuring a place for spiritual entrepreneurship. In short, he wrote: 'Although there is no system of thought more practical in matters concerning everyday life than Astrology, it is also the most transcendental study in the Universe.' What more could one want?

In 1895, shortly after their marriage, Alan and Bessie toured England, calling on other astrologers. Despite the fact that by now many if not most had allied themselves to his cause — A.J. Pearce being the leading exception — the results were disappointing. 'Some few astrologers there certainly were,' wrote Leo, 'who studied their science with reverence, but the majority paid more attention to the paper upon which their maps were drawn than to the Spiritual Intelligences connected with the planets.'

Already that year, *The Astrologer's Magazine* had also arrived at a crisis. During the five years of its existence, Leo and Lacey had sent out over 4,000 free horoscopes. Many of these resulted in requests for more detailed interpretations, combined with offers of payment. The result, as H. S. Green recalled, was 'so much additional work that eventually a small charge had to be made although there had originally been no intention to make the work professional, but it was practically unavoidable'. Beginning in 1893 with an anonymous request for a full reading accompanied by a £5 note, followed by a similar demand from the wife of a mayor in a provincial town (probably a fairly typical example of their constituency), Leo accepted money for anything more than the most basic horoscopic delineation. As we shall see, this proved to be a momentous decision. Even so, after five years, the amount of work involved showed no sign of diminishing and, despite the charges, the profits amounted,

according to Leo, to the sum of £13! Understandably, he felt obliged to rethink things. And, as his tour confirmed, he had another reason for dissatisfaction: namely his inability, as yet, to convert enough astrologers to his vision of a truly spiritual science. In short, what he needed was a vehicle that was at once more popular, and therefore remunerative, and more Theosophical.

The result was the appearance, in late July of 1895, of *Modern Astrology*. 'The Editor,' it began, 'respectfully introduced this magazine to the intelligent portion of humanity' — a category, presumably, from which few would wish to exclude themselves — 'and particularly those for whom symbolical and metaphysical studies exercise a peculiar attraction. The time has come to modernise the ancient system of Astrology.'

Leo then opened another front. At noon on 14 January 1896, he founded the Astrological Society. Meeting at the magazine's new offices at 1-2 Bouverie Street, London E.C., the current Raphael, Robert T. Cross, agreed to act as vice-president and H. S. Green as treasurer, other officers were confirmed at the first annual general meeting. Meetings took place on the first Friday of every month and membership slowly grew to just over a hundred by the end of that year.

The new astrology, now fully and openly Theosophical, met with a mixed reaction. Some, especially among the Leos' extensive network of fellow-Theosophists, agreed with their friend Mrs Campbell Praed. She used, she said, to class astrology 'with *Fortune-telling*', but 'taught as Mr Leo taught it, Astrology now seems to me to be one of the best possible *guides to right living*'. However, there was plainly some resistance too, among astrologers used to a more down-to-earth approach. Bessie Leo, a frequent contributor to the new magazine, was obliged to note:

In the pages of *Modern Astrology* articles have appeared, from time to time, containing what some of our readers term 'too much Theosophy'. It seems a curious fact that astrologers, and students of astrology, believers in the influence of the stars, should be orthodox. . . Yet again and again have readers expressed their opinion that there is too much 'Divine Wisdom' given out in the form of Astrology.

With characteristic bluntness, Bessie chastised such laggards for failing to appreciate 'a GREAT CENTRAL TRUTH'. 'Surely,' she wrote, "practical" Astrology is the use of the science for *self-knowledge*, and the application of its wisdom to *self-unfoldment* . . . IT IS THE ATTITUDE OF MIND TOWARDS EVENTS THAT MATTERS, AND NOT THE EVENTS IN THEMSELVES.'

Be that as it may — and there is a lot to be said for Bessie's comments, if not necessarily for the way she expresses herself — Theosophical astrology continued to attract an increasing following of fairly well-educated, middle-class readers, especially but not only women, with a passionate interest in themselves and at least a general interest in astrology. The small community of professional astrologers became more divided than ever, however, and as the Leos' approach became increasingly more occultist and simultaneously popular, arousing suspicions of imperialism, so its hostility grew too. A. J. Pearce continued to fly the flag for a strictly scientific and mathematical astrology; Raphael resigned from the Astrological Society; and Sepharial too fell away, his disenchantment with the Theosophical Society growing after the death of his beloved Madame Blavatsky.

Alan and Bessie were undeterred. In 1898, they bought a terraced house, modest but adequate for their needs, at 9 Lyncroft Gardens in West Hampstead; and, towards the end of the year, aged thirty-eight, Alan Leo finally wound up his other commercial interests and turned to astrology full-time. This was a brave step, because serious problems remained. Since launching *Modern Astrology*, Leo had sunk almost £1,000 into it in four years. It was only beginning to attract sufficient subscribers to cover its expenses. As he knew from his experience with the earlier offer of free horoscopes, something similar would prove a good, even crucial draw. But how to exploit it without being overwhelmed by the sheer volume of work? Leo already employed someone to do the mathematical calculations and others to write down his judgements while he dictated, but, as he recalled, 'even then I was a slave, bound hand and foot'. Finally, illness from exhaustion obliged him once again to reconsider his entire *modus operandi*. Writing in 1903, he decided:

... the horoscopes were *too long*. In fact, I was giving too much for the money. So I made arrangements with my clerk to stop me when a certain number of lines were written, according to the amount paid for the delineation.

Mr Strutton (who was then my chief clerk) is no longer in my employ, but to him belongs the credit of inventing an ingenious scheme for regulating the flow of my eloquence. He let me run on for just so many pages under each heading, and took carbon copies for reference. One day he pointed out, to my astonishment, the fact that in all cases when treating of the same rising sign, or lunar position, etc., there was a similarity in style and matter — the sheets were in fact virtual *facsimiles* ... Several hundred of these carbon copies were collected, and the idea then occurred to me to have them arranged, and the essence of each separate page specially typed and then mimeographed.

What Leo realized was that in response to a request for a horoscope he, or rather his employees, could simply staple together and send off the relevant mimeographed sheets for the Sun's sign, the Moon's, the ascendant and its ruling planet, and so on — the higher the price, the more detail and therefore the greater number of sheets. Furthermore, this method solved the age-old problem of an unknown birth-time. Leo 'was daily writing to say that I could not give a horoscope without the time of birth, but almost invariably the reply came back: "Please try your best for me, I want you to help me if you can."' Now any sheets containing information depending on a time were simply omitted and a note attached saying that the delineation was the best that could be provided.

Having left Bouverie Street in 1900 (the building was torn down for redevelopment) and returned to work at Lyncroft Gardens, Leo fitted out his study with lockers containing nearly a hundred 'Stone Patent Drawer Boxes', each with its pile of delineation-sheets, and the production-line was ready. Thus was born the first modern astrological business. The boxes have been replaced by computers and the analyses

are now 'interactive' rather than simply additive, but the basic model has not changed a bit.

Then,

One day, while calmly thinking the matter over, a suggestion was dropped into my mind by some kind intelligence to try the public with a 1 shilling 'test' horoscope ... My first advertisement appeared in *Light*, and the Test Horoscopes quickly 'caught on'. I then extended the advertisement to the monthly journals, for I now saw a means of introducing the science to many who had never heard of Astrology before. The result was that upwards of 20,000 test horoscopes were sent out in three years, each advertisement offering to return money if the horoscope was not true.

The test horoscopes for one shilling not only led indirectly to more subscriptions to *Modern Astrology*, they also brought in orders for more detailed readings for five guineas each and more, all the way up to twenty-five pounds. For the first time, financial security, 'four figures a year', was in sight. Did the Leos celebrate in style and move into something bigger?

Hardly; most of the profits were ploughed straight back into publishing a series of books, seven in all, and cheaper pocket manuals. Leo's aim is clear enough from their titles. The series and its first volume, appearing in 1901, were entitled *Astrology for All*. They were priced at twelve shillings and sixpence each, and together constituted a fairly complete if oversimplified means whereby someone could learn to draw up and interpret a nativity. And, painlessly enough, 'The first map a student should study will be his own.' Introducing the project, Leo declared defiantly: 'The day is past for writing a defense of Astrology ... The best test that can be applied, to this as to all other subjects where first-hand knowledge is required, is that of experience.'

The pocket manuals, beginning with *Everybody's Astrology*, sold for one shilling and eightpence each. Most such guides were pitched at the most elementary level possible — for example, from *Astrology*

*Explained:*

- 1 *What is Astrology?* A knowledge of the Stars.
- 2 *How may we obtain that knowledge?* Through an open mind and ordinary study.
- 3 *What are the Stars?* The Mansions of Spiritual Intelligences.\*  
(\* 'In my Father's house are many mansions.' John. xiv, 2.)

This was Leo at his most populist, aiming to put astrology into the hands of as many people as humanly possible, who could then act as their own astral interpreters.

The following year, with this project under way, Leo abruptly resigned from the presidency of the Astrological Society, which without his driving force quickly collapsed. Then, on the evening of 5 December 1902, in a meeting at 28 Albermarle Street, the Society for Astrological Research came into being. The council included Bessie, Green, Sepharial and Bailey, the sub-editor of *Modern Astrology*; Pearce had been invited, but wrote to say that he could 'only unite with those who followed the Placidian method of *Primary Directions*'. Within less than a year, however, Leo had decided to withdraw from this organization too, explaining to his readers:

I have failed in my attempt to bring together those whom I had hoped were strong enough to place truth and their love of Astrology before petty personal bias, and narrow-minded adherence to exclusive 'systems', and I am not at all sure that the new Society for Astrological Research will prove a sufficiently advanced body in which to form the nucleus of an Esoteric School of Modern Astrologers.

Another crisis now blew up. Leo employed nine people, excluding Bessie, in his astrological cottage industry at Lyncroft Gardens. Sensitive to charges of crass commercialism, they had been growing increasingly restless about his mass-marketing methods and, very possible, the work-load. Finally, in 1903, there was a walk-out led by Bailey. He issued his own more traditionalist magazine, *Destiny*, the following year, in which there appeared the portrait of Leo at work

quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Bailey continued to be highly critical of Leo. In 1907, he started an upmarket version of *Old Moore's*, which in 1914 evolved into *The British Journal of Astrology*. Sepharial, equally disaffected, became a principal contributor to both titles, which maintained high standards until the *Journal's* demise in 1939.

Bailey's other project, a British College of Astrology, ultimately came to nothing, but he continued to represent a particular kind of astrologer — waspish, obsessed with mathematical and empirical precision, alternately self-important and craving wider recognition — who always seems to pop up somewhere. In 1919, he is described giving a public lecture on the degenerative influence of Neptune:

instancing Cubists and Futurists in art, syncopated music, Jazz bands, and various American dances, which he ascribed as due to Neptune, and which were lowering the standard of both art and music. He also spoke in very strong terms of the Neptunian idea of Democracy, which, he stated, was a wild, mad delusion, of wild, mad men and women . . . who were turning the world upside down by their utopian and inverted ideas of liberty and equality.

Not much spirit of the Aquarian Age there! And rather more, albeit with hindsight, of the early fascism of the 1920s.

The collapse of the society and the walk-out proved but temporary setbacks to Leo. Other helpers, inspired or charmed by his charisma and loyal to Theosophical ideals, quickly replaced the disaffected. The ranks of followers continued to grow, with or without a formal body, and the books rolled out — *The Horoscope and How to Read it* and *Practical Astrology* in 1902, *How to Judge a Nativity and Theoretical Astrology* by H. S. Green in 1903, *Casting the Horoscope* and a new edition of *Astrology for All* in 1904. In January 1909, *Modern Astrology* and Leo's horoscopic production-line returned to the City of London, taking offices at 42–3 and 50 Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus. On 24 April, seventy-five people attended a meeting he called to initiate yet another organization, the Astrological Society, and the

second by that name; meeting weekly, it soon attracted about 200 members.

We get some idea of what Leo promised his members from his address to the first annual general meeting of the Astrological Society held at the Food Reform Restaurant on Furnival Street, E.C., on 28 May of the following year. Leo here speaks in a rather more unbuttoned way than he usually permitted himself to write:

I do not think anyone in this room realises what a power one gets the moment one realises what pure Astrology is. It is undoubtedly one of the great occult forces in the world, because you know exactly the time when great things are operating in the world, and if you knew a little more you would know just how to act at those times.

... The first and most essential thing for every Astrologer is that he should live a pure life ... I know for a positive fact that there are great Beings connected with Astrology with whom you have only to come into touch for whole worlds to be unsealed, and whose influence is so mighty and vast as to be quite impossible to put into words, and you can quite see that unless you have a pure magnetism yourself, what an enormous power you have for harm.

In June 1909, the Leos found themselves in the probate and divorce courts, sitting before Sir John Bigham and a special jury. Bessie's father had died on 8 March 1908 and his will, which he had only recently made out, named Bessie as his sole heir and left her in possession of his property, valued at about £80,000, a considerable sum. Some distant relatives decided to contest this will, asserting that he had been unduly and deliberately influenced by the Leos, who were 'adventurers in Spiritualism, Palmistry and Astrology'. This was the basis of the relatives' case and their solicitor hammered away at the point, describing the Leos — in terms unchanged since Zadkiel's trial nearly fifty years earlier — as 'the greatest possible humbugs, making their living by the rankest kind of imposture'. Bessie's counsel, however, insisted that the only question to decide was whether her father was of sound mind when the will was executed; and the evidence showed that he had been. In his summing-up,

the judge, as we might expect, severely castigated astrology, but advised a narrow interpretation of the legal question at hand. The jury found for Bessie.

It was a favourable verdict, then, but an unpleasant experience none the less, and one which opened Leo's eyes. 'In regard to the insinuations of the plaintiff's Counsel,' he wrote afterwards, 'and the apparent bias and prejudice of the Judge, I must confess my amazement. It seems to me manifestly unfair ...' However knowledgeable about the spiritual and even business worlds he may have been, Leo was still remarkably naïve about the world of social and cultural power. And of history; was he unaware, for example, of the prosecution of R. H. Penny?

Penny contributed occasional astrological items to *St Stephen's Review*, *The Tribune*, *Society*, *The Review of Reviews* and *Borderland*, to whose readers he appeared as 'Neptune'. He was a close friend of W. T. Stead, the adventurous and open-minded editor of *The Pall Mall Gazette*. In 1886, he was entrapped by a police 'client' and successfully prosecuted at Bow Street for fortune-telling. He received twenty-one days' imprisonment and a five-pound fine. His appeal, heard the following year, was rejected. Neither Penny's many character-references nor his impeccable naval background provided any defence; nor did the representations of C. C. Massey, an articulate member of a distinguished political family and first president of the British Theosophical Society, who acted as his solicitor. Indeed, the judge at the appeal, Justice Denman, remarked that it was 'incredible that any sane person in the present age could conceivably believe in astrology'. To add to the incongruity, which he evidently relished, Penny was later picked to be among the veterans presented to the queen at Windsor on 16 May 1898.

Thus, when Alan and Bessie left London on 12 November 1909 for India, it was perhaps as much for an unwonted holiday after the trial as for spiritual enlightenment. They joined Annie Besant, now president of the T.S., in Madras. In between seeing the sights and comparing notes with Indian astrologers, Leo found time to ponder

upon something from home. It was the matter of the Test Horoscopes.

This problem was a consequence of their success. By now they had spawned dozens of imitators. Seven were described in an article in the journal *Truth* on 13 April 1910, entitled 'Star-Readers and Moon Calves', four of whom worked London's West End: 'Madame Chester' (63 Bessborough Place); 'Old Sol' (155 High Street Kensington); 'Professor Zazra' (90 New Bond Street); and the felicitously named 'Newton Verity' (4 Duke Street). Responding to their notices in various monthly magazines (six out of the seven advertised in *The Woman at Home*), the writer sent in his birth-data along with a one-shilling postal order and two penny stamps. In return, he received sketches of the barest, vaguest and most flattering nature, including some rather contradictory information on his lucky stone (ranging from turquoise to diamonds and opals), colour (covering the entire spectrum) and day (Thursday or Friday), along with invitations to send larger amounts for more of the same: five shillings to Madame Chester for "a larger and more carefully calculated horoscope", together with "a moon-table for daily use"; and Old Sol 'as a very special favour will give you a "daily guide horoscope" for half his usual fee of 15s.' Newton Verity, the writer continued, 'has a very complete thing for a guinea, and Zazra has a speciality, highly recommended, at the reduced figure of 15s., and if you do not care to invest that amount he will sell you a Crystal Gazing Outfit for half a crown by which you can read the future for yourself, or an Indian Fakir Mirror as used by Jadoo Wallah of Hindoostan'.

The *Truth's* report attracted much comment from other newspapers, including the complaint about 'a confusion of prophets'. The writer noted chivalrously that woman 'is far more amenable to suggestions of occult or pseudo-occult lore than the mere male, and there is a very real danger that she may be led to waste her money on the idiotic advice and warnings of the star-readers. Hence the need for protecting her against the insidious wiles of the fortune-teller . . .' He concluded, ominously:

I wonder that the law on the subject is not more frequently enforced. If a gipsy woman is caught bamboozling a servant girl at a back door she is hauled before the magistrates and sent to prison without the option of a fine, but the fortune-teller who has sufficient capital to insert an advertisement in a newspaper or magazine . . . is allowed to carry on business without let or hindrance. The law holds that both the gipsy and the advertising astrologer who purports to read the future are equally 'rogues and vagabonds', and there is no reason why if one is punished the other should be allowed to go scot free.

This article was placed before Leo upon his return to London on 21 April. He had already been aware of the problem before his departure, but it must have made very uncomfortable reading, particularly since all these artists called themselves astrologers, and used 'a circular taken from a stock of common forms', in other words, precisely the system he had pioneered. In the next issue of *Modern Astrology*, he announced the end of the test horoscopes. Already, while abroad, he had written, 'I had the opportunity of seeing several of the "test horoscopes" that were being sent out by so-called "professors", the majority of whom it was quite evident had no actual knowledge of Astrology, but were mere imitators of our methods.' Owing to this abuse, therefore, 'from now onward this method of advertising will be abandoned, and propaganda work, if continued, will take another form'.

Leo was unapologetic: 'The purpose and intention of the Test Horoscope was to prove to the casual but sceptical "outsider" that there really was "something in Astrology". Having done this, it has served its purpose.' But he was bluffing. Despite their success, the horoscopes had failed to remedy what was arguably the root problem, namely the view of astrology as fortune-telling. For that reason, he admitted, 'I am reluctantly continuing the professional work I had hoped to discontinue about this time, and until the general public are educated into a better knowledge of what Astrology really is, I shall continue to judge horoscopes and write books on the subject.' Thus did Leo, aged fifty, sense that despite his desire to move on and 'further the cause from a much

higher altitude', he was becoming yet more firmly nailed to the cross of his cause. Meanwhile, in response to the newspaper revelations, a storm was brewing in other kinds of high circles in London. A keen ear could have detected the sound of copies of the Vagrancy Act being brought down from an upper shelf and the dust being blown off.

Of that, Leo was still oblivious. His involvement with Theosophy continued to deepen; as he had written in *Modern Astrology* a few years earlier: 'I must admit that I have been swinging very much in the direction of the esoteric side of the science, for, to speak candidly, it is the only part of the science that really interests me.' In the early spring of 1911, he and Bessie travelled a second time to India.

Meanwhile, the Theosophical Society was at a fever pitch of excitement. Madame Blavatsky had once intimated that its real purpose was to prepare the world for the reappearance of the Lord Maitreya, otherwise known as the 'World Teacher', whose last public tenancy had been the body of Jesus. His arrival would coincide with that of a new 'sub-race' in human evolution — the sixth sub-race of the fifth root-race, to be precise — probably in California. (The smart money is still on Marin County.) This idea was enthusiastically adopted, although the timetable was somewhat speeded up, by Annie Besant. And sure enough, early in 1909, her colleague and occult mentor, C. W. Leadbeater, clairvoyantly discovered the long-awaited 'vehicle' in the person of a handsome fourteen-year-old Indian boy, Jiddu Krishnamurti.

On 5 May 1911, shepherded by Annie Besant and a bevy of devotees, including Alan and Bessie, Krishnamurti arrived on his first trip to England. They were met at Charing Cross Station by a large and emotional contingent of English Theosophists. Among them was Emily, Lady Lutyens, wife of the architect Edwin Lutyens and granddaughter of the late but still ubiquitous Sir Edward Bulwer-Lytton, whom Leadbeater had already declared, on the strength of *Zanoni*, to have been an initiate. In the next few days, she became the national representative of the new organization centred on Krishnamurti, the Order of the Star in the East. The Leos were in the first rush to join. Sepharial was not,

bitterly remarking: 'It says very little for the inspired actions of the Theosophical leaders that they should choose the very lamest of lame ducks to represent for them the *avatar* (Messiah) of a new spiritual movement.'

This was the heady milieu in which Alan and Bessie lived and moved during these years. Pausing only to beget his fourth organization in 1912 — the Astrological Institute, for professional astrologers — Alan Leo continued his occult studies. The following year, the seventh and final volume of the *Astrology for All* series was published: *Esoteric Astrology*. By now, the thread connecting Leo's populism and occultism in his overall programme had at last snapped, leaving the former stranded. The book was intended to be his final testament to the integration of Western astrology and Eastern philosophy, but with its welter of auras, etheric doubles and a seemingly arbitrary re-ordering of traditional astrological significations, *Esoteric Astrology* was later described by one of his most loyal adherents, Charles Carter, as 'Leo's least satisfactory work . . . a big volume containing virtually nothing worth reading'.

The long-intended blow finally fell on the afternoon of 29 April 1914. Two men called on Leo as he was working in the *Modern Astrology* offices in Imperial Buildings. They were shown in and one of them handed him a piece of paper, which read:

INFORMATION has been laid this day by Hugh McLean of the City of London Police for THAT YOU, on the twenty-seventh day of February, 1914 in the said City of London did UNLAWFULLY PRETEND TO TELL FORTUNES to DECEIVE and IMPOSE upon the said Hugh McLean and others of His Majesty's subjects contrary to the Statute.

Leo was summoned, in conclusion, to appear at the police courts, Mansion House, on Wednesday, 6 May at 11.15 a.m. The order was signed by Sir T. Vansittart Bowater, the lord mayor.

The first thing Leo did (and if a test is ever required to detect hidden astrologers, this one would do) was to glance at his watch to note the

time. The second was to exclaim, 'This, after twenty-five years! Who is Hugh McLean?' 'I am,' the detective present answered. 'I have not told your fortune,' Leo replied. 'I have never seen you before, and I do not tell fortunes.' Then, after bidding them good day and showing them out, he asked one of his assistants to make out a horoscope for 4.15 p.m. and returned to finish his work.

Upon returning home that evening, Leo considered the resulting map. He decided that it boded well and left him in a strong position. After discussing the matter with Bessie and the next morning calling on his solicitor, who took a gloomy view, Leo engaged a legal firm and asked Mr W. R. Warren to appear as his counsel. He gave instructions that, if he was convicted, his case should be taken to a higher court and a final appeal, 'in order that the distinction between Astrology and fortune-telling could be definitely decided'.

The court-room, now unused, at Mansion House was small and austere. The accused was led up some stairs and through a hatch-door to sit on a wooden chair behind an iron railing, looking up at the judge. Apart from counsel and clerks, there was space on either side for a few witnesses and members of the public. On the day of the hearing, the lord mayor — not, apparently, a happy man — was sitting and Mr Vickery, the assistant city solicitor, prosecuting. Leo pleaded not guilty. Annie Besant, A. P. Sinnett and Sepharial attended to speak on his behalf and reporters were there from *The Times*, the *Star*, the *Globe*, the *Evening News* and the *Evening Standard*, as well as from *The Occult Review*.

The hearing opened at 11.15 a.m. sharp. After the charge had been read, Mr Vickery opened the case for the prosecution by saying that the defendant carried on the business of fortune-telling in 'an open and flagrant way' at Imperial Buildings, Ludgate Circus. Detective-inspector McLean had written to him in February asking for a list of horoscopes and their prices. He received in reply a booklet entitled *The Stars and How to Read Them*, which listed charges from five shillings to five guineas, the latter for a ten-year look-out. Using the name of William Hammond, McLean wrote back asking for the complete horoscope for

ten shillings, giving his birth-data as 6 a.m., 22 February 1875, at Ryde on the Isle of Wight.

In return, he received a 'Delineation of Nativity', with a covering letter, which was read aloud in court. It began thus: 'This abridged delineation is only a brief sketch of your nativity, but it may be considerably enlarged either by purchasing a special and complete judgement or by judging it yourself from *The Key to Your Nativity*.' The witness said that, among other things, he was advised 'to avoid accidents and to keep his blood pure'. (Some laughter in the court at this.) One section was entitled 'Future Prospects' and addressed the next five years in the life of the subject. A forecast that in 1914 the inspector would 'come into contact with peculiar strangers' would be hard to deny. Not surprisingly, Mr Vickery passed over the character analysis to emphasize this kind of prognostication. Mr Warren, however, denied that any fortune-telling had taken place. After pointing out that at the time the letter had been written and sent Leo had in fact been abroad, he proceeded to cross-examine Inspector McLean. Did he know that Mr Leo had been casting horoscopes for twenty-five years and had written many books on the subject? At which the lord mayor remarked: 'I do not care if a thousand books have been written, I have no doubt that there has been an endeavour to tell fortunes.' Was the inspector aware, then, that Mr Leo had received testimonials from some 20,000 persons, some of them holding the highest positions in this country? Mr Warren then elicited the fact that the inspector had not only used an assumed name but had also invented his birth-data. Here the lord mayor again interrupted Mr Warren to say: 'What you are trying to prove is that if the Inspector had given the right date you would have been able to tell what was going to happen in the future.' To which Mr Warren replied: 'I am not saying so, and the book does not say so.'

Then, before either Leo or any of his witnesses had been called to the stand, the lord mayor announced: 'I cannot see that this letter of February 27th has been proved, and so I shall dismiss that summons.' He refused Mr Warren's request for costs. Regarding a second summons, for a similar offence in April, Mr Warren again argued that the defendant

had no case to answer, since there was no evidence that he had had any knowledge of either the inspector's application or the horoscope sent in response. The lord mayor responded: 'On that technical objection, I feel I am bound to dismiss this summons. At the same time,' he added, 'I am fully convinced in my own mind that there is no doubt that this is endeavouring to tell fortunes.' There was applause in the court, but costs were again refused.

Thus, after about two hours, both summonses were dismissed on technical grounds, which left everyone unsatisfied: the prosecution, for obvious reasons, but also the astrologers. One astrologer was even unhappy for the same reason as the prosecution. Showing on a minuscule scale how dogmatic rivals often prefer the common enemy to win, Leo's ex-employee, Bailey concluded sternly that 'the majority of the prosecutions have been, some wholly and others in part, quite justified, and secondly, that those who have been prosecuted have only themselves to blame'. Sepharial rallied round, however, asking in *Modern Astrology* how it was possible to class 'a tax-payer, a payer of Education and Poor Rates, a house-holder, and . . . a reputable publisher of numerous works in every sense educative with the other objects of the Vagrancy Act such as "keepers of houses of ill-fame", "poultry thieves", "itinerant fortune-tellers" and "vagrants".'

According to an astrologer from Sheffield, George Wilde, the whole thing had resulted from 'public opinion, fed by the Press exposures of the West End horde of dubious foreigners':

Incalculable mischief was done by some American astrologers (who knew little about the art and less about the science) arriving here hoping to reap a rich harvest. They made no calculations, but merely looked into the almanac to see which sign the sun was in; then after giving a stereotyped reading from that they actually copied the birthday information from almanacs and sent the same predictions to a thousand people born on the same day, but in different years. That this was deception cannot be denied. And so the victims realized the humbug of it all, when they compared their readings. The Home Secretary took the opinion of the Law Officers of the Crown,

and they are the authorities who have instructed the Commissioner of Police to take proceedings.

Wilde's account may not have needed the addition of interfering foreigners to be effective, but it rings true. The police had indeed been instructed to act, and as the country's most visible if not eminent astrologer, Leo — whose test horoscopes were the inspiration to this flock of illegitimate imitators — was the obvious choice of target.

No one was more dissatisfied with the verdict than Leo himself. 'I had resolved to retire from professional work next year,' he wrote in *Modern Astrology*. 'I have now however no intention of retiring until I have done my best to free the science of Astrology from the taint of common fortune-telling, and I hope this will be accomplished within the next three years.'

Immediately after the trial, Leo supplied his barrister with copies of everything he had published and a full range of typical horoscopes, asking him for a legal opinion. Mr Warren had replied, in part, that without expressing any opinion on the subject of Leo's works he would be ready to contend that the aims of his books were 'far higher than and widely different from fortune-telling or mere peeps into the future. And if ever Mr Alan Leo should be attacked on the ground of his PRINTED WORKS I am of the opinion that he would have an incontrovertible answer to any such charge.'

As Leo knew, however, that was not enough. The problem lay with the horoscopes he supplied, since in a climate of disbelief in occult means of discerning the future, even in broad outline, any such prediction whatsoever — whether based on a card trick or pages of mathematical calculations — must inevitably count as fortune-telling. Therefore, he resolved:

Let us part company with the fatalistic astrologer who prides himself on his predictions and who is ever seeking to convince the world that in the predictive side of Astrology alone shall we find its value. We need not argue the point as to its reality, but instead make a much-needed change in the meaning of the word and call Astrology the science of *tendencies*, thus

giving a more elastic interpretation of the old but very good astrological word 'influence'.

This position had the advantage of bringing astrology into line with the general position of the discipline of psychology, which, even without legal pressure, was finding it equally necessary to allow for human beings' stubborn insusceptibility to precise 'scientific prediction'. In fact, Leo was arguably in advance of academic psychology here; suffering from a bad case of physics envy, it was still resisting any such realism by either concentrating on more manageable trivia (physiological reaction times etc.) or fixing tight and highly artificial experimental parameters.

Leo already disliked astral prediction anyway, having identified it with the materialistic and deterministic old astrology which he was trying to replace. *The Key to Your Own Nativity*, the very book which the first letter to 'William Hammond' had recommended, stated that 'the horoscope shows influences at work, be the subject peer or peasant; but to the peer honour means the purple, to the peasant at best but the parish council. The horoscope is written in a symbology that speaks of *principles*, not particulars . . . ' Unfortunately, as Leo once complained:

friends, clients, and those interested, are not satisfied with character delineations, and invariably we heard the exclamation: 'Oh, yes, I know all about my character, but what I want to know is my future' . . . To satisfy this demand the astrological student begins to dabble in forecasting, and he is fortunate if he remembers that CHARACTER IS DESTINY and keeps the radix or nativity before him.

But to the extent that Leo actually carried out his promise to eliminate prediction, the appeal of his popular revolution was bound to encounter its limits.

Sometime around 1914, Alan and Bessie left Lyncroft Gardens for 'Dollis Lodge', a much larger detached house, built in mock-Tudor style, on Dollis Avenue in the northern suburb of Finchley, London. It is still the sort of street where the houses have names instead of

numbers.

On the evening of 13 July 1914, they held an informal meeting to which about seventeen other people were invited. After refreshments in the garden, the gathering withdrew to the Leos' drawing-room and, at about 7.15 p.m. Alan spoke, saying that it seemed to him and Bessie that the time was ripe for the amalgamation of Theosophy and astrology in a new lodge of the Theosophical Society. Those present were therefore offered the privilege of being its founding members. Bessie was to be its president and he the vice-president; meetings would be held every Monday evening at 2 Upper Woburn Place. Bessie spoke briefly of her pleasure in being the mother to this new enterprise, founded to 'teach Astrology to Theosophists and Theosophy to Astrologers'. After a little discussion, the proposal was unanimously agreed.

Among those present was a young solicitor, Charles E. O. Carter, who displaced Bessie seven years later as president of the Middlesex Lodge, or the Astrological Lodge of the Theosophical Society, as it became four months later. Carter held that position for thirty years. Writing many years later, after the death of both Bessie and Alan, he recalled: 'Properly speaking, our Lodge was founded at his instigation, by Mrs Leo.' At the time, Alan was reported to have confided that he had 'set it in motion to give Mrs Leo something to occupy herself with'. Carter portrays Bessie in a rather unflattering light: 'She was possessed by an itch for power but she was totally incompetent and very indolent. This led to an attitude of constant ineffectual interference.'

Things got off to a good start. At the first meeting on 13 September, A. P. Sinnett was the honoured guest. Speaking informally, he stressed the importance of astrology and hinted that he had 'evidence that the Masters themselves base prediction for the future on astrological conditions'. Lady Lutyens was a guest speaker a couple of months later, addressing the lodge on 'The Coming of the World Teacher', i.e. Krishnamurti.

In addition to his membership of various Masonic lodges, this was

actually the fourth Theosophical lodge Alan, together with Bessie, had created. As Carter remarks, he also 'had' an astrological society and a professional institute, *Modern Astrology* and a thriving professional practice. 'He certainly does not appear to have had any inkling that, of all his work, only the [Astrological] Lodge would survive his death for any considerable time.' Even that was in doubt for a while, as after Leo's death dissatisfaction with Bessie's heavy-handed Theosophy grew steadily and membership dwindled to about thirty. Finally, Bessie was ousted as president in 1922. The fact was, as Carter put it, 'people came to an astrological lodge to hear astrology, and that is what we gave them'. With its weekly Monday evening meetings and quarterly periodical, the lodge hung on and its membership slowly grew again. Other groups split off, for the most part amicably: the overtly non-Theosophical, and soon larger Astrological Association; a teaching body, the Faculty of Astrological Studies; and most recently the Company of Astrologers — in other words, almost every major English astrological organization.

But Alan Leo's trials were not yet over. The issue of *Modern Astrology* for September 1917 was headlined 'REX v. LEO' and began: 'A "bomb" more cruel than the German air raiders' bomb fell into the astrological camp on July 2nd, when we were served with a summons to appear at the Mansion House at 11.30 a.m. on July 9th on a charge of "pretending and professing to tell fortunes".'

Evidently, the public prosecutor had decided, or been instructed, to bring back a prosecution. This must have been a real blow for Leo. Aged fifty-seven, his 'three years to clear Astrology from the taint of common fortune-telling' were almost over; but he was no nearer even retiring to write full-time, let alone achieving that greater goal.

At the request of his counsel, still Mr Warren, Leo wrote off to ask for help, especially letters of character-reference, to be sent c/o Warren's clerk, Mr Attenborough. Among the replies came this one, dated 4 July, from Shute End Lodge, Wokingham:

Dear Mr Leo, I am so sorry to hear these Jupiterians are at it again — when will they learn sense? If you want an influential witness why not try Baillie Weaver, Lady de la Warr and Miss de Normann? As directors of the Theosophical Educational Trust they are supporters of astrology in schools, and can testify that the children's horoscopes are invaluable. Baillie Weaver is a lawyer himself, and with his aristocratic and penguin-like manner will appeal to the other penguins at the Mansion House. Graham Pole and his brother are also directors of the Trust. — Wishing you a triumphal scoring off silly Jupiterians — Yours sincerely, Ch. M. Adam.

More typical and revealing, if less apt, was that of William Learoyd, writing on the following day from Chester: 'I am quite unable to suggest the name of any influential people who would openly venture to support you in this. You know how many upon whom the claims of astrology have compelled acceptance shrink from this fact being publicly or generally known.' As if to underline the point, C. Audrey wrote on the 9th: 'I did not see my way to give help exactly in the way suggested in your letter — but I gave help by giving spiritual assistance which you personally deserve and I feel sure you will be protected and no harm will come to you.' And although E. M. Machattie, upon receiving Leo's letter on 7 July, 'hastened to town early to ask leave from my principals to attend Mr Attenborough's office . . . Much to my distress and concern they expressed a wish that I would not act in the matter at all — even in so far as writing to Mr Attenborough.'

The trial opened on 9 July, once again at Mansion House. As before, reporters from several newspapers were present, including *The Times*, the *Daily News* and the *Star*; and the witnesses for Leo, who once more pleaded not guilty, again included A. P. Sinnett, now aged seventy-five. The judge was Mr Alderman Moore. Mr Travers Humphreys, acting on behalf of the Director of Public Prosecutions, said that the defendant advertised horoscopes 'and things of that sort'. Inspector Nicholls of the city police had sent in five guineas, and obtained in return a document of about 25,000 words in length which contained predictions for the next ten years. 'A great deal of this,' he said, 'was unintelligible jargon,

but upon specific passages the present proceedings were instigated.' He then read several such passages out, including at least one specific and personal prediction, namely that 'at this time a death in your family circle is likely to cause you sorrow'. In short, it was 'preposterous that persons for the sake of money should be allowed to make a living by professing to be able to predict the future'. The defendant may even be sincere, but to quote Mr Justice Denman, dismissing R. H. Penny's appeal in 1887, where something was asserted that was so ridiculous that 'no sane man could possibly believe it', then it was not necessary to prove intent to deceive.

Mr Wild, for the defence, said he was basing his client's case upon two propositions. Firstly, the defendant had had no intention to deceive or impose which, he argued, must be the case for a conviction. Astrology was believed in by millions of people, including many of learning and renown — Dr Richard Garnett, the late Keeper of Printed Books at the British Museum, for example. (Garnett would not have appreciated being cited in this context, but he was no longer able to object.) His client was thus practising a science in which he had a bona fide belief. He was the author of seven large works and fourteen smaller manuals on the subject, and he, Mr Wild, would bring forward evidence to show not only the high character of the defendant, but the value of the astrological advice he had given in the past. As for Mr Justice Denman's point, in 1887 'no sane man' would have believed in ever seeing the bones of one's hand by Röntgen rays, or that an enemy could have dropped bombs on London from flying machines! Who knows whether the next thirty years might not bring a general recognition of astrology?

At about this point in Mr Wild's address, he was obliged to break off for the rising of the court. Adjourned for a week, the case resumed on 16 July. Mr Wild now turned to his second proposition: his client did not tell fortunes. That involved predicting future events, whereas Mr Leo merely discussed tendencies. Indeed, Mr Leo not only did not claim to predict the future but also declared himself unable to do so, since — in accordance with the ancient dictum, 'The stars incline, they do not compel' — free-will was integral to astrology. The Sun in astrology, Mr

Wild continued, waxing lyrical, really represented a great onnipotent intelligence, whose outposts were the encircling planetary angels — the fingers, as it were, of one great hand.

This time, Leo was called to the witness stand. He affirmed that he did not claim to be able to predict the future and agreed that his personal clients were mainly among 'the rich and intellectual classes'. Confirming his belief in the truth of astrology, he added: 'I most emphatically say that I do not tell fortunes. I tell *tendencies* from the horoscope, and in every horoscope I send out I make that statement.' When Leo was cross-examined on this point, and in particular on the technical basis for the predictions in question, he asked Mr Humphreys; 'Do you wish me to explain Astrology to you?' To which the latter replied; 'God forbid!' Mr Humphreys concentrated his fire rather on the defence of 'tendencies', asking Leo sarcastically; 'Is this death a tendency, or is there a tendency to be dead?'

Leo's loyal sub-editor Alfred Barley, sitting in the court, later felt that in the end, 'the whole case had hinged round this point'. Neither Leo's bona fides nor his sincerity had been questioned; indeed, at one point the judge said that he was quite prepared to admit that astrology was a science that was studied by a great many people. But against the charge of predicting the future, i.e. 'fortune-telling', the defence of 'tendencies' proved, as Barley wrote, 'but a broken reed', being portrayed as 'a mere "get-out"'. Given the unfortunate example of a 'death in the family' showcased by the prosecution, it is not hard to see why. Despite his unusually disinterested, even sympathetic attitude, which softened the blow somewhat, Mr Alderman Moore evidently agreed. This was his judgement:

After a very patient hearing of the able and ingenious arguments of Mr Wild, the defendant's counsel, and evidence for the accused, I find the defendant did unlawfully pretend and profess to tell fortunes, contrary to the form of the Statute, and on this finding the question is one of penalty. The maximum penalty under the Statute is three months' imprisonment, but under my extended power under the Summary Jurisdiction Act, 1879,

in lieu of imprisonment I fine the defendant £5, and £25 costs.

So saying, he granted leave to appeal the decision in a higher court, remarking that he 'would be very glad to see the whole question thoroughly threshed out'.

The second 'bomb' that fell into the astrological camp shortly afterwards was Leo's decision, announced in the next issue of *Modern Astrology*, not to appeal. Many astrologers, perhaps most, were flabbergasted and, anticipating that response, Leo and Barley attempted to explain. Firstly, they said, it must be admitted that however unrepresentative, the sentence that had most offended the public prosecutor was indeed predictive. That subjected any appeal to considerable uncertainty. Secondly, wrote Leo, and this was 'the reason why all genuine astrologers must for the time being abide by this Mansion House decision':

There has been too much loose and irresponsible prediction by a few professional astrologers who have not only been reckless in their language, but also we regret to say immoral in their statements, proof positive of which we received (in private) during the process of our case. And in the face of this sad realisation we are only too well aware that to allow these persons unbridled licence, as might have been the case had the summons been dismissed, would prove utterly fatal to the immediate welfare of Astrology.

(It might well be replied, of course, that if its abuse represented a fatal threat, astrology had already died a thousand deaths.) Thirdly, and more pragmatically, it was hinted that the legal costs, amounting to about fifty pounds a day, were objectionable, if not insurmountable.

The issue was not the taking of money. Reflecting a change in tactics by the public prosecutor, the summons was brought — and allowed to stand, said Leo, as a test case — solely on the charge not of deceiving and imposing but of telling fortunes; and in any case, as he remarked with unusual asperity, the idea that astrologers should not charge for their time and effort was 'sanctimonious nonsense'. Alfred Barley added that it was now clear that 'fortune-telling is making any specific statement about the

future'. But since many people of all kinds, business consultants, weather forecasters, etc., make such statements without fear of prosecution, the problem was really the use of astrology to make them. To this problem there was still no simple solution. The public frequently wanted supernatural predictions; the educated mainstream condemned them. To wean both away from such a conception of astrology was far beyond one man's or even one organization's resources. Therefore all that astrologers could do was to offer no such purchase, no chinks in their armour. For that reason, as Barley wrote; 'Astrology, if it is to flourish in this country, must be shorn altogether of its predictive side.'

The truth was, Leo had also decided not to appeal because he saw that it would not address that central problem. And since the re-education of public and élite opinion could not be achieved by force, as it were, he decided that he must start again with what *was* under his control: his own work. As Leo's colleague H. S. Green put it, after the Mansion House prosecution:

It became evident that his whole system of reading horoscopes would have to be revised, because what he regarded as no more than truthful and legitimate advice to clients the law insisted upon treating as fortune-telling. Therefore he decided to recast the whole system and make it run along the lines of character reading and less as the assertion of an inevitable destiny; referring to events as for the most part a natural outcome of the type of character, which most of them actually are. This entailed a tremendous amount of rewriting of reference-books and sheets.

Of course, Leo had already long inveighed against what he saw as astrology's fatalistic and materialistic tendencies; his crusade was to modernize astrology, in large part, by getting rid of such 'residues'. As Barley admitted; 'This question of foreseeing the future — at its best, was it ever more than a lure, a bait to tempt the unthinking to a study of astrology?' Leo's conviction for fortune-telling really only pushed him further down the same road.

Green was correct when he stated that rewriting hundreds of pages to eliminate any lingering attachment to predictions and events promised a

great amount of work. The Leo's had already decided to rent a small cottage at 10 Burn View in the Cornish seaside town of Bude, for a much-needed holiday in August. Typically, however, Leo took all the work with him and spent five hours a day on it. At one point, Bessie objected: 'Why don't you send some of that to Mr Green to do? You are overworking yourself — you will break down.' He replied; 'No, he would take too long. This has to be done quickly, and I must do it myself.'

On the morning of 27 August, Leo complained of feeling unwell. He had a tightness in his chest, he said, and swollen glands and he was running a temperature. The doctor, called a day later, was reassuring; Leo had a bad chill, but would be fine in two or three days. On the morning of the 30th, however, he had convulsions and was violently sick. He apologized to the doctor, whom Bessie had summoned again, and asked him; 'Am I going to die, doctor? I don't mind if I am, I'm not afraid of death.' 'No, certainly not, Mr Leo,' came the archetypal reply, 'you will be quite alright bye and bye.' Ninety minutes later, Leo had another violent fit and passed out. His heart stopped at 10 a.m.; the cause of death was a brain haemorrhage. His 'three years' were up.

Two years later, Bessie, Green and other colleagues and admirers of Leo published a book of biographical reminiscences. Florence Higgs, the secretary of his 'lessons department', recalled:

There comes to my mind a dream that he told me he had had during the early days of July while the Mansion-House case was pending. In his dream he found himself walking by the sea-shore, carrying something in his hand, and looking at it he became conscious that it was lifeless, and so said to himself, it's no use carrying a *dead* thing, and threw it far into the sea. He watched it splash into the water and disappear, but from the place of its disappearance there came up a water bird, whose head shone with vivid peacock blue colouring; and it swam to the land and walked about, shaking itself free of the water and growing larger and more brilliant as he watched it.

Perhaps Leo had already sensed the trial's probable outcome and the

phoenix-like bird represented his hopes for an astrology reborn. Or was the dream a premonition of his own imminent death?

Alan Leo was a sincere, moral and hard-working man. True, he was no giant intellect; as Green wrote, when he first knew Leo: 'Except Madame Blavatsky's *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, which he studies seriously, and Raphael's *Guides*, he never interested himself much in any books.' He knew this, of course, and in a familiar move among popular occultists built some protection into his system: 'We attach far more value to one word of the true occultist than a thousand of those who are merely intellectual, and scholars from the physical standpoint alone.' On the other hand, these are also the sentiments, suitably adapted, of many writers, artists and musicians about critics.

Leo also seems to have been almost unable to open his mouth without saying something trite or banal: 'Take it all as just a vibration'; 'It's all experience, and therefore must be for the best'; and so on. But to emphasize these aspects would be to miss the larger point. His tendency to oversimplify was of a piece with his ability to keep his theories simple, for example, 'Character is Destiny'. As the proverbial American preacher advised, Leo 'told 'em what he was going to say, then he said it, and then he told 'em what he'd said'. That knack was central to his genius for, to a remarkable extent, Leo succeeded in his ambition to 'modernize' astrology. He did so by integrating popular astrology with esoteric occultism. The result was an enduring new creation: astrology as a kind of popular, or rather, broadly middle-class occultism.

