

The Tarot; An Antique Method of Divination.

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UNDER the curious and philologically inscrutable title of the Tarot, there has come down to us from an undeniably considerable, and, as it is alleged, from a remote antiquity, a very curious and oracular method of divination by cards of a unique character, and which seem to have been the originals of our modern playing-cards. They are seventy-eight in number, containing, in addition to the four tens and ordinary court-cards, four damoiseaux or knights, and twenty-two highly symbolical keys, having designs of a remarkable and suggestive nature. The hearts, diamonds, and spades are replaced by cups, deniers, and swords. The figures represented on the keys are: (1) The Juggler, with the implements of his profession on a small table in front of him. (2) Pope Joan, or the Female Pontiff. (3) The Empress, a woman seated in the centre of a radiating sun, having a crown of twelve stars upon her head and the crescent moon beneath her feet. (4) The Emperor, a man seated on a cubic stone and wearing a helmet surmounted by a crown. In his right hand there is a sceptre surmounted by a globe. This symbol is also borne by the Empress. (5) The Pope, leaning on a cross and tracing the same sign, with the right hand, upon his breast. Two persons, wearing crowns on their heads, lie prostrate before him. (6) A man standing erect with arms crossed on his breast. Two women, representing Vice and Virtue, are on his right and left side respectively. (7) The Victor, a chariot of cubic shape surmounted by an azure and star-spangled canopy. A warrior stands therein, wearing his armour and a crown whose points are ornamented with pentagrams. In one hand he carries a sceptre, in the other a sword, and the chariot is drawn by a double sphinx. (8) Justice, with sword and balance. (9) The Hermit, or Capuchin, equivalent to Prudence. An old man in a monkish garb, carrying a lantern, which he partially conceals under his cloak. (10) The Wheel of Fortune, a Hermanubis

ascending it on the right, a Typhon descending it on the left, and a sword-bearing Sphinx resting unmoved at the top. (11) Strength, a virago closing the jaws of a lion. (12) Judas Iscariot, a man hanging by one foot from a gallows suspended between two trees. His arms are tied behind him. (13) Death reaping crowned heads. (14) Temperance, a woman pouring the contents of one urn into another. (15) The Devil, or Baphomet, goat-headed and waving inverted torches. (16) The Castle of Pluto, a temple filled with gold, which falls into ruins and overwhelms its worshippers. This symbol is also called the Tower of Babel. (17) The Burning Star, probably that of the Magi, surrounded by the seven planets. Their influence descends in a rainbow upon the naked figure of a girl, who is pouring water on to the earth from two chalices. A butterfly has alighted on a rose at her side. (18) The Moon, beneath which there is a tower and a footpath winding over a desert. In front of the tower are chained a wolf and a dog; the latter is barking at the moon. A crab is crawling between them. (19) The Sun, whose rays descend upon the naked bodies of two children, a male and a female, who join hands in a fortified enclosure. (20) The Last Judgment; an angel sounding a trumpet, at which the dead rise from their tombs. (21) (Also counted as zero in some calculations of the game) The Fool, carrying a wallet, and pursued by a savage animal from which he has not the sense to escape. (22) The Crown, a circle, generally of gold or of flowers, placed in a square at whose angles are the emblems of the four evangelists. The gauze-clad figure of a girl is often represented running within the circle.

The most curious and interesting point connected with these symbols is that many of them are evidently of a higher antiquity than their names would lead us to suppose. Pope Joan has, in some Tarots, all the attributes of Isis. She is crowned with a tiara, bears the horns of Isis and the Moon, has a solar cross on her breast, and holds the infant Horus in her arms. The figure of the Empress has striking analogies with the Grecian Venus Aphrodité. The Pope, also, who is seated between the symbolical pillars of Hermes,

or Jakin and Bohas, has little beyond his name to identify him with the successor of Peter. The twelfth symbol, vulgarly called Judas, is evidently misnamed, while that entitled the Devil has the attributes of Typhon rather than of the modern Satan.

The derivation of the word Tarot, as already hinted, is quite unknown. It is supposed to be in use among the gipsies, but is absent from Borrow's "Word-Book of the Romany Language." Those who are gifted in the discernment of curious analogies have discovered a correspondence between the Tarot symbols and certain tableaux of the Apocalypse, in which, according to the Kabbalist, Eliphas Lévi, "we find the sceptres, chalices, swords, and crowns disposed by determined numbers and corresponding to each other by means of the denary and sacred septenary; there we find the four kings of the four quarters of the world, and the four horsemen which figure on our ordinary cards; we find the winged woman and the Logos in kingly garments (here the supposed correspondence is certainly of the slenderest kind), afterwards in pontifical vestments, and with several diadems on his tiara. Finally, the Apocalyptic key, which is the vision of Heaven, is identical with the twenty-second symbol of the Tarot, and reveals to us a throne surrounded by a double rainbow, together with the four sacramental animals of the Kabbalah. These coincidences are, at least, very curious, and afford much food for thought."

Besides being a method of divination, the Tarot has existed as a popular game from a remote period in Germany, Italy, and Provence. Its existence was first discovered by the archæologist Antoine Court de Gebelin at the end of the eighteenth century, and in the eighth volume of his "Monde Primitif" he unhesitatingly ascribes it to an Egyptian origin. "The form, the arrangement, and the disposition of this game, and its manifestly allegorical figures, are so conformed to the political, philosophical, and religious doctrine of the ancient Egyptians that it is impossible not to attribute it to that nation of sages." In partial corroboration of this interesting theory—which modern archæology has, however,

in no way confirmed—may be cited the Egyptian character of the mythological animals on the Wheel of Fortune, the sphinx in the seventh symbol, and the sceptre of the high priest, with its triple cross, which is analogous to the triple phallus, symbol of the regeneration of nature, which was borne at the feast of the Finding of Osiris.

As a method of divination, the Tarot is declared by authorities in the science of cartomancy to be illimitably fruitful; it contrasts with modern playing-cards to the immense disadvantage of the latter. Court de Gebelin considered it admirably adapted to divination, "containing as it does in a certain sense the entire universe, and the different states of which man's life is susceptible." There are several methods of consulting its singular oracles, but none are conspicuously clear. The shortest is given as follows by Eliphas Lévi, who believed the Tarot to be the book of Thoth, Hermes, or Cadmus, transmitted to the masters in Israel by Moses, and betrayed into profane hands by some renegade Kabbalist. "The method of reading the hieroglyphics of the Tarot," says this writer, "is to arrange them either in a square or a triangle, placing the even numbers in opposition and conciliating them with the uneven." Minute directions will, however, be found in the works of more serious and methodical writers. There is a mass of curious information in "L'Homme Rouge des Tuileries," by P. Christian; in "Le Grand Livre du Destin," by Frédéric de la Grange; and in the "Monde Primitif."

The origin and actual antiquity of this curious game are a by-way of archæology to which considerable interest attaches, but from the absence of adequate materials it is scarcely possible to reach any definite conclusion concerning them.

