

PLAYING CARDS AND THE TAROTS IN DIVINATION

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I FIND a record that I gave a lecture on the Tarot Cards to a College of Adepts on November 5th, 1910, and now I have been asked to send an Essay upon the same subject to be read to the Metropolitan Study Group.

I regret that I am not in a position, in this Colonial town, to add anything new to my notes of the previous lecture, as the Public Library here is but small, and I have left behind with you in London a large part of the books of reference which I used to possess, but you will be able to extend the information here given by referring to books upon Playing Cards and Tarots by Court de Gèbelin, Etteilla, W. H. Willshire, W. A. Chatto, P. Christian, Eliphaz Levi, Mathers, and Waite on Papus.

The date and country of origin of Playing Cards is quite unknown, but many and varied guesses may be found in modern books. In the early part of last century people were generally content to accept the story that they originated in France, and were invented by Jacques Gringonneur to amuse King Charles VI. of France about 1392.

But studies in literature have shown that much older references may be found and the conclusion now most generally accepted is that their origin was in Asia, either in China or in India, though Egypt and Arabia have also some supporters.

The Chinese Dictionary Ching-Tsze-Tung of 1678 tells us that they were invented in the reign of Seun-ho about 1120 A.D. to amuse the King's ladies. There are also early references in Indian books, and it has been suggested that the four Suits and several pieces were copied from the original Chess game called Chaturanga.

It is said that the earliest reference to Playing Cards in any Western book is found in the "Chronicles" of Nicolaus of Cavellazo in Italy, and this is dated 1379; he states that Playing Cards were first known at Viterbo, and had come from a Saracenic source in Asia Minor and thence through the Balkan States to Italy.

The earliest drawing of persons playing cards is of about the same date; it is in a manuscript preserved in the National (once the Imperial) Library at Paris.

The use of Playing Cards soon spread and they were probably familiar to the educated classes during the life time of Christian Rosenkreuz, and the reign of Richard the Second in England. It is certain that they were made, sold and used in France, Italy, Spain, Germany and England in the first half of the 15th century.

In the volumes written about Playing Cards will be found many suggestions that the race of the Gypsies introduced these series of cards, both the earliest 52 card pack and the Tarocchi or Tarot cards, not for use as a game but for purposes of divination or fortune telling, an art which has been associated with the gypsy race in all countries and from the earliest dates given as their arrival in Europe, now generally agreed to have been the 14th century. These early gypsy cards had each a nuptial meaning and each was emblematic of a number, element or of some factor in human life. In a way they took the place of the Roman *sortes*, a sort of prophecy by lots, a system which faded out with the growth of Christianity: but the Christian orthodoxy has never quite abolished the theory or practice of modes of discovering the future. The Jews of ancient Palestine were also forbidden to use methods of divination. The High Priest, however, was allowed to consult the Urim and Thummim, probably the stones of his Breastplate. We know, moreover, that these old Jews did rely on their own Teraphim, probably images belonging to each family, and Saul consulted the Witch of Endor.

The earliest cards in Europe appear to have been hand-drawn and painted, but before long they were produced from Wood-cuts and stamped out in colour; the art of printing became in use from 1450. It is also related that they were printed in colours by means of stencil plates, a slow and messy process liable to make smears upon outlines. It is not yet proved whether the ordinary pack of 52 cards or the special Tarot pack of 78 cards composed of 40 Numerals, 16 Court Cards and 22 Trumps, came first into general use.

The picture cards, Kings, Queens and Knaves of the ordinary pack were always called Court Cards, and the Chevaliers or Knights, the additional card of the Tarot Jack as well. Some persons have suggested that the original name was "coat" card, because they represented clothed persons, but this seems to me to be a foolish notion. Some of the earliest packs of cards had Kings, Knights and Knaves; but later the Queen replaced the Knight, while the Tarot pack had always the four sets of figures.

The Italians had also another pack of cards, mostly in use in Tuscany, this was known as the Minchiate pack of ninety cards, in which there were 40 special *atouts* or trumps in addition to the O (nought), Matto or Fool. These were played either by four persons or two against two or one against three.

Both Tarocchi, Tarots and the Minchiate are mentioned in

1526 by Berni in his "Capitolo del Gioco della Primera," examples of these are preserved at Milan. The "Carrer" Museum at Vienna has some very early examples.

The oldest known cards of Chinese workmanship were much longer and more narrow than ours. The packs had 30 cards; 3 suits of only 9 each, and 3 trumps which were named Tsinwan, Hengwa and Pihwa.

The Japanese had packs of four times twelve, and some cards representing the seasons of the year.

In Hindostan there were packs of seven suits:—swords, letters, harps, cushions, crowns, sun and moon. I do not know of any examples of cards or designs representing them, either on the monuments or upon papyri.

The four suits of the packs of cards have varied in name and design. The Playing Cards of England have not varied since 1560, always 52 in number and the suits—Diamonds, Hearts, Clubs, and Spades; the Court cards being King, Queen and Knave; and the numerals one to ten inclusive.

In olden times in Germany there were Bells, Hearts, Leaves and Acorns. In Italy they were Wands, Cups, Swords and Coins, and these are the suits found on our imported Tarots; occult students call the coin a Pentacle. The French suit names are Carreaux, Coeurs, Trefles and Piques—the English Clubs are drawn as trefoils, and not as handled weapons.

There have been notions that the cards and suits might be emblematic of persons in authority, social classes and events. For example it has been said that Hearts (and cups) referred to the Church and Clergy; the Swords (and Spades) to the Army and Soldiers; the Diamonds (and Wands) to commerce and merchants; and the Clubs (or Coins) to labour and the workers, the populace which receives coins as wages. Court de Gèbelin, a notable old-time French author, says the Swords meant the Nobles and Aristocracy; cups the clergy, the wands agriculture and coins commerce.

From time to time especially in France, packs of cards have been printed of fanciful designs, generally of political or satirical nature. In England such cards were issued during the quarrels of Cavaliers and Puritans, and regarding the South Sea Bubble in the reign of George the First. Political cards were also printed, replacing in France the Kings by Voltaire, Rousseau, La Fontaine and Moliere; and in the U.S.A. the Kings by Washington, Adams, La Fayette and Franklin.

The practice has been extended to the games of children, introducing various semi-comic ideals.

The Tarot cards used as a Card Game require a complex system of scoring: they may be seen in use in Italy, Spain and about the confines of South Germany and Austria. I do not know of any available volume which teaches any of the varieties, except that of

Chatto and the small tract of S. L. Mathers. I remember seeing a Tarot game being played at a cheap coffee house by men who looked like artisans ; on the bank of Lago Maggiore. The game is played by either two or three persons ; the cards are dealt out into three heaps ; this leaves three cards over : if only two persons play, the third heap is not used : the dealer has the choice of taking the three left-out cards in place of three of his own. The 22 Trumps vary in value, there are 5 greater numbers 17 to 21 ; and 5 lesser numbers 1 to 5 ; the four Kings have also a special value. The game is 100 points, and the Trumps in hand and the Trumps in each trick are added up with special values, a tedious affair.

It seems but little doubt that the chief use of the Tarot cards has been and is still as a means of divination alike by the gypsies, other fortune tellers, and by members of fairly recent societies of students of occult science, sometimes called Rosicrucian, as the R.R. et A.C. which came here from Belgium and France ; or Hermetic, suggesting a source in ancient Egypt from Hermes, such as the Hermetic Society of the G.D. which flourished in four centres in England from 1887 onward.

And now in regard to the Tarot packs of to-day ; almost always those procurable in England come from North Italy, the English have not printed any Tarot Cards with the ordinary English suits, but I hear that a lady has drawn some of her own designs for Tarot Trumps, but for these there is no general sale.

The Tarot pack now shown came from Italy, but I have other packs from Venice and obtained in Switzerland which are not identical.

This pack has the four suits of Wands, Swords, Cups and Pentacles (Coins) and the 4 Court Cards—Kings, Knights, Queens and Knaves. Then there are the twenty-two so-called Atouts or Trumps, or more properly considered as 21 Trumps, and the figure marked "O" nought and called Mat, the Fool. These 21 are both named and numbered. Students of Occult science associate them with the letters of the Hebrew Alphabet and with the symbols of Astrological and natural facts and ideals. These will be found, given wrongly in works by Gerard Encausse who wrote under the pen name of "Papus." I may not give the correct attributions, as I received them under a promise of secrecy.

The Tarot Trumps 0 and 21 others are shown as follows —

1. The Juggler or Magus ; his body and arms suggest the Hebrew aleph : he is said to symbolize the Will.
2. High Priestess holding a book ; knowledge.
3. Empress, is action which is knowledge plus Will.
4. Emperor, said to mean Realization.
5. Pope or Hierophant, Mercy and Benevolence.
6. The Lovers, gemini, proof and trial.

7. The Chariot, triumph, the victory of justice.
8. Justice ; equilibrium.
9. The Hermit, prudence.
10. Wheel of Fortune, destiny, fate.
11. Fortitude, the woman coercing the lion, strength.
12. The Hanged Man, so called, which he is not ; this means sacrifice and devotion.
13. Death, means change and transformation.
14. Temperance, combination with moderation.
15. The Devil, evil result.
16. The Tower struck by lightning, ruin.
17. The Star, hope.
18. The Moon, deception, error, half light.
19. The Sun, Health, Wealth, Happiness.
20. The last judgment, renewal, result, re-birth.
21. The Universe, completion, the All in One.
- o. The Mat, the fool, folly, neglect of opportunity, lack of energy and knowledge, uselessness.

I have quoted mostly the attributes given in the little tract by Mathers, but these notes on the Tarot were written in conjunction with me, especially the Hebrew symbolism, as may be seen noted in his preface, so I do not find it wrong to reproduce them, especially as the little volume is out of print and Mr. Mathers is deceased.

For purposes of divination many elements of emblematic nature are to be added, and every other card of the pack will also need to have an ideal allotted to it. An attempt to do this has been made on pages 24 to 36, with 4 pages of additional matter taken from Etteilla. It is a long and serious task to learn up the 78 attributions, so the Hermetic Society teachers used to advise that they be written on the pack used by the student, and the rule was made that the cards should be touched by no other person, this was because the ideal of Animal Magnetism was believed and that it led to error if the personal aura given to the cards was mixed with the aura of other persons, hence also these students refrained from common hand-shaking.

Occult Science teaches a wide reliance upon analogy and the representation of forces and things by emblems, ideals and symbols, so it has grasped at Playing Cards, and has noted that the 52 cards may have relation to the weeks of a year ; the four suits to the four seasons ; and the 13 cards of a suit to 13 lunations of a year, and 13 weeks in each Quarter ; the 12 Picture Cards to the 12 solar months and 12 signs of the Zodaic. It notes that every one in dealing goes around with the sun.

The four suits are related to the great Hebrew name, Jehovah, IHVH, yod, heh, vau, heh ; thus—Diamonds (Wands) to Yod,

Hearts (Cups) to heh, Clubs (Swords) to vau, and Spades (Coins) to Heh final.

As to the elements of the Alchemists,—Wands to fire, Cups to water, Swords to air, and Coins to earth.

In divination on the Hermetic system the Court Cards are taken as persons, the Kings are young men, unmarried, while the Cavaliers or Knights are full grown, married, and aged men. The Queens are women, and the Knaves (or Valets) also called in Tarot work Princesses, are counted as unmarried and young women. These Court card persons of Wands are good and high-minded ; of Cups, pleasure giving ; of Swords, full of strife ; and of Coins referring to money ; other qualities of persons are also assigned to all these.

In general Red card persons are preferred to Black, but in choosing a card to represent a Querent, the red cards are for fair-haired persons and the black for dark-haired and dark-skinned persons. In a proper card divination one card must represent the Querent because the cards on his right or left, or those that count to him, or count from, are of importance.

There are several recognised modes of Tarot divination, and when thoroughly performed it is a curious fact how often the result foreshadowed will occur. It is a difficult matter to formulate a mathematical problem as to what are the odds against success.

The performer must choose a suitable card to represent the Querent, and the querent must ask a quite definite question. The pack is then given to the Querent who is told to shuffle it as long as he feels inspired to do so, concentrating his mind all the time only upon the special question ; he may not only shuffle the cards in the usual sense, but may reverse any portion top to bottom, but the whole process without seeing any of the faces. The Querent then places them face downward in four heaps of fairly even size as he feels inspired to do.

The performer considers these four minor packs as representing the letters I. H. V. H. from his right to his left, these will also be thought of as Fire, Air, Water and Earth. He searches each part to find the Querent and the part in which he is found alone is used. These cards are then placed face upward beginning from the top unseen card in a semi-circle beginning at his right. The Querent card is then noted and the way the face looks, the card at its back shows what he has left in time, and the card he looks at shows his present and future in symbolic form. Then a count is made from the Querent card, a certain number being allotted by the system for the Querent and a certain number for each subsequent court card or Trump, so that the series may be gone through several times. I am not at liberty to give these numbers on the system I was taught.

There are many other systems, some of which order a certain

number in counting for all cards, nine used to be common, but then the whole pack was gone over and only once. Mathers gives two alternative methods, but with these I have had no experience. It is necessary for divinatory purposes that the court cards must be as those shown here to-day, and not double ended as they are in modern common cards.

It is obvious that for divination the Tarot pack of 78 cards is more likely to give fair results than that of 52 cards only, because a greater number of events and qualities can be represented. I think it probable that the majority of English persons living to-day have no belief in any power or mode of finding out either the future or the present state of persons and things at a distance, for such the cards are only of value as an amusement; for those who think otherwise the Tarots afford a chance of success.