

## Notes and Reflections on the Tarot Cards

THE history of playing cards and the possibility that these symbolical devices have a religious or philosophical significance have intrigued esoteric thinkers for more than two centuries. There are several hypotheses, each supported by groups of research students and enthusiasts. As is so often the case in a matter of this kind, the critical investigator arrives at conclusions in conflict with the transcendentalists. It seems wiser, therefore, to present impartially the evidence variously accumulated and allow the reader to form his own conclusions.

Some may feel that an impartial approach reveals a lack of devotion to the subject, but we prefer not to indulge in the kind of directional writing which obscures facts in an effort to defend opinions. The lack of a sober scholarship in the spheres of esoteric arts and sciences has led to a confusion rather than a clarification of the issues involved. We must learn to bestow our allegiance upon that which is true and not trust to the productions of wishful thinking. In this spirit of honorable inquiry, we shall attempt a reconstruction of those mystical traditions which deals with the origin and development of Tarot symbolism, and then compare our findings with available historical data. In this way nothing relevant or necessary to an honest evaluation will be neglected.

There is a persistent rumor that the Tarot cards formed an integral part of the symbolism of the Arabian Mysteries, especially the arcane doctrines of the dervishes. Although conclusive evidence is unavailable, it is reported that pictorial devices, arranged in the form of a deck of cards, were in circulation among the mysterious wise men of Fez and Damascus. It was among these elusive adepts that the equally elusive Father C. R. C. of Rosicrucian manifestoes is said to have been initiated.



3 L'IMPERATRICE 3

When conquering Christendom destroyed the pagan sanctuaries of Serapis, Isis, and Osiris, the magic and sorcery of Egypt retired into the desert lands of the Near East and were given asylum among the mystics of Islam. In the *Book of Revelation* it is written that the woman, clothed with the sun and carrying the man-child who was the hope of the world, fled into the desert to escape the great dragon, which sought to destroy her and her progeny. This may be a prophetic allusion indicating that the author of the *Apocalypse* (himself an initiate of the Phrygian Rites) realized that the ancient arcana was in danger of extinction.

The *Book of Revelation* is dominated by the doctrine of anthropomorphism. As far back as religio-philosophic thought can be traced, two forces have struggled to dominate the human mind by controlling its reasoning power. The anthropo-

morphic deity of the early Persian magi fought in space with its own shadow for dominion over the world. This shadow, the evil spirit Ahriman, or Satan, forever opposing the principle of Good, set up a strife which extends into every department of the creation.

The war in heaven between Ormazd, the benevolent principle of light, and Ahriman, the spirit of negation, was reflected downward into human society as the eternal conflict between the ancient mysteries as institutions of philosophic, religious, and aesthetic culture and enlightenment, and that primitive ignorance which sought by tyranny, ambition, and greed to engulf the ancient temples and extinguish the sacred fires upon their altars.

As an organic structure of institutions, the pagan mysteries sank into historic oblivion about the 6th century A. D. A night of spiritual darkness descended upon the world, and the theological dogmas eventually eclipsed the light of reason. Certainties were obscured by uncertainties. Practices surrendered to theories, and the dictates of a blind and fanatical faith supplanted the noble doctrine of the initiated philosophers. Thus came the Dark Ages, long centuries of benightedness, in which man tortured and destroyed his fellow man for the glory of an all-merciful God. Out of the religious and ethical chaos that followed the collapse of classical learning emerged the dark-cowled form of the Inquisition. Theology retrograded to the condition of a pious sham, until humanity with one despairing gesture repudiated the thrall-dom of an unendurable dogmatism, and rushed to embrace the materialism and skepticism of modern times.

From the comparatively mental security of the 20th century, it is difficult to understand the terror which burdened the intellectual atmosphere of medieval Europe. Bigotry sat in the seat of the mighty, and the rack and gibbet chilled the zeal of the dissenter and the heretic. The Dark Ages not only extinguished the graces of gentle, spiritual conviction, but contributed to the decline of all the physical arts and sciences with the possible exceptions of music and painting.

The fundamentals of logical thinking, developed with such meticulous care by the Greeks and Egyptians, were buried under the common ruin until rediscovered and restated by such courageous intellectuals as Paracelsus, Paré, and Vesalius. Ignorance generated plagues of the flesh, and whole communities and nations were wiped out through their own filth and degeneracy.

Intoxicated with a false culture, rendered pompous with petty power, and encouraged and condoned by a misinterpreted faith, Europe built its tower of Babel. Then the lightning bolts of an avenging Providence struck the monstrous structure. Throne after throne crumbled. Prince after prince was tortured and murdered, that another equally worthless might take his place, enjoy his privileges for a little while, and then meet a similar fate. Even in this far-off day, Europe still suffers from the vengeance of an outraged destiny. Her fields are strewn with the bodies of her dead; her streams have run red with human blood, and the hearts of her people have ached from the burden of their sorrows.

But the martyred heroes of those Dark Ages, whose bodies fed the flames of the Inquisition, did not die in vain. Out of this travail of the flesh and the soul emerged the ideals of liberty, tolerance, fraternity, and democracy. Science was born in a dungeon surrounded by the most dangerous of beasts—evil men. Retiring from those intolerant institutions which enslaved and corrupted the human soul, those few of clearer vision sought the answer to life's mysteries in far places. Even in an age of ruthless tyranny, there were some with larger foresight than others who realized that evil times would pass away and that the human purpose would rise victoriously, like the fabled Phoenix from the ashes of its own dead.

While the intellectual life of Europe waned, the beacon fires of a higher and more sufficient concept were kept alight in remote parts of Syria, Arabia, and adjacent lands, beyond the dominion of European princes. In hillside caves and desert oases, communities of the wise



KNIGHTS FROM AN EARLY PORTUGUESE DECK

congregated as did the patriarchs and sages of old. The great body of Platonic lore, the Orphic traditions, the laws of Zarathustra, the mysteries of primitive Islam (later to be reformed by the prophet (Mohammed)), the Hermetic arcanum, the secrets of alchemy: all these and many other orders of knowledge were safe-guarded by the wise men of the desert, the descendants of the ancient magi and Sabians - - - the stargazers of Chaldea and Phoenicia.

The Crusades brought Europe into vital contact with the Near East, and the soldiers of the cross, while far from their native lands, were indoctrinated with those traditions and philosophies so painstakingly obliterated from the states

of Christendom. Many of the crusaders were devout men who rejoiced in being servants of the true God, and who left their homes and families, sacrificing all that was near and dear to free the Holy Sepulchre from the hands of the infidel.

The feudal lords and petty barons, with their knights and squires, who had come to fight the devil in the guise of a loathsome brigand, found instead the refined and chivalrous Saracen, whose delicately chiseled features bore witness to centuries of culture, and who was not only a valiant foe but all too often a generous victor. When they returned to Europe, the disillusioned knights-crusaders served as a wedge by means of which Eastern culture so long diverted from the

West flowed back again into chaotic Europe. The heraldic arms of many an Anglo-Saxon and Teutonic lord reveal that these nobles took brides from among the Saracens, and brought these accomplished ladies back with them to their feudal castles.

The Knights Templars, of Jerusalem in particular, applied themselves studiously to the Syrian Mysteries. Contacting the secret Brotherhood of Mt. Lebanon, where were preserved the original traditions of the Jewish and Christian cults, they discovered that the Jesus of the Church was not the Jesus of Nazareth. Initiated into the more profound principles of their faith, these crusading knights returned to Europe as men of vision and power and suited to advance the civilization of their day. The Templars became a real menace to the structure of European intolerance, and jeopardized the solidarity of existing political and theological orders. The entrenched nobility and clergy gathered their resources, combined their forces, and by recourse to the most despicable means destroyed the Templars and confiscated their extensive properties.

The heroic figures of the guardians of the Sepulchre were rendered more heroic, however, by their martyrdom. The last Grand Master of the Temple, Jacques de Molay, died avenged. For even from the stake he imperiously ordered his executioners to appear with him before the Everlasting Tribunal. As Albert Pike, the distinguished Masonic scholar, so well points out, the sword of the Templar was broken to become the poniard of the Revolution. Rendered doubly powerful by death, the Templars marched on, and eventually contributed a powerful impetus toward the liberation of Europe. The wisdom which they brought from the hills of Lebanon, from the Druses, and from the Sons of St. John avenged them many fold.

Among the philosophical mysteries which these Templars contacted among the old mystics of Syria and Arabia appears to have been the Tarot cards. In *The Devil's Picture Book*, Mrs. John King Van Rensselaer, who has made diligent investigation of the origin of

playing cards, writes: "That cards were brought by the home-returning warriors, who imported many of the newly acquired customs and habits of the Orient to their own countries, seems to be a well-established fact." The Templars are said to have brought these cards with them because they realized that all the knowledge of the ages was epitomized in this little loose-leaf picture book.

In his *Tarot of the Bohemians*, the French esotericist, Papus, reminds us that we cannot but admire the great wisdom which has entrusted truth to the keeping of the thoughtless. Men of every age will change faiths and renovate their notions. They may overthrow their governments and slay their closest friends, but as long as men remain men they will gamble; and as long as they play cards, the secret doctrine cannot be entirely lost. Thus the greatest good has been concealed beneath the instruments of one of man's besetting sins.

The learned books which the Templars wrote, translated, or imported from distant lands were burned, their symbols destroyed, their organization disrupted, until today it is difficult to restore even an outline of their beliefs. But playing cards have become so popular that it is impossible to remove them even by legislation. True, the decks have been mutilated, so that all the doctrine is not immediately revealed, but enough remains to serve as a useful guide for those who desire to investigate the profundities of the subject.

In the light of this tradition the transcendentalists insist that the Tarot cards should be regarded as the leaves of some sacred book of the ancient pagan world. Seldom do we associate decks of cards with books, but among many ancient nations books were not bound or sewed; they consisted merely of loose leaves, confined by cover-boards on the top and bottom, and bound around with cords. The hieroglyphical figures upon the cards are supposed to pertain to certain Arabian philosophic systems, which in turn were based upon still earlier esoteric orders. Hence the Tarot deck is an eclectic book—many philosophies and systems united into one general pattern.

The Tarot cards are considered a picture book of essential truths, setting forth figuratively those fundamental verities about which all enlightened faiths are in common agreement.

Of these cards, the great French Magus of the 19th century, Eliphas Levi, writes that if a man were imprisoned in a dungeon with nothing but a deck of the Tarot, he could, if acquainted with the correct keys, reconstruct from them alone the entire body of learning. How potent, then, he points out, are these bits of pasteboard which reveal all that has been, all that is, and all that yet shall be! Called variously the bible of Bibles, the book of books, the scripture of Scriptures, the Tarot is by no means, however, the first instance in which men have gambled with the word of God or perverted the issues of sacred things.

Though numerous authors have written upon the subject of the Tarot, almost without exception they have promised that which they could not give; namely, the original keys to the meaning of the cards. It is noteworthy that in this field of speculation nearly every writer has formed very definite opinions. All too often he advances his opinions as facts, thereby hopelessly clouding the issues. The less information available upon a subject, the more certain men are to dogmatize, evidently upon the presumption that if nothing is known, anything may be true, and none will dare to contradict.

The great secrets of the Tarot still await solution. Some believe the original keys perished with the Templars; others affirm that these keys remain in the possession of the dervish mystics. The cabalists are likely candidates, when seeking for the keepers of the lost *clavis*. However, all interpretations, although they may lead in the right direction, are to some measure unsatisfactory. We may point out the broad spirit of disagreement which divides "authorities" and the rather unhappy practice of each interpreter supporting his own conclusions by disparaging the deductions of others.

If Socrates were correct in teaching that men are only qualified to instruct in such subjects as they mutually agree upon, the whole sphere of education requires considerable renovation. Though modern mystics have been explaining the Tarot for over a hundred years, no method has emerged sufficiently certain in its structure to receive universal acclaim and acceptance. It remains for someone to bring out of this confusion of speculation a system that can satisfy the minds of the majority of scholarly investigators.

It is neither my intention nor desire to condemn anyone, for most writers on the Tarot are undoubtedly sincere. Many have produced interesting and stimulating works, and some of them may be approaching the facts. All we wish to do is to warn the student that it is dangerous to addict oneself completely to findings as yet far from complete.

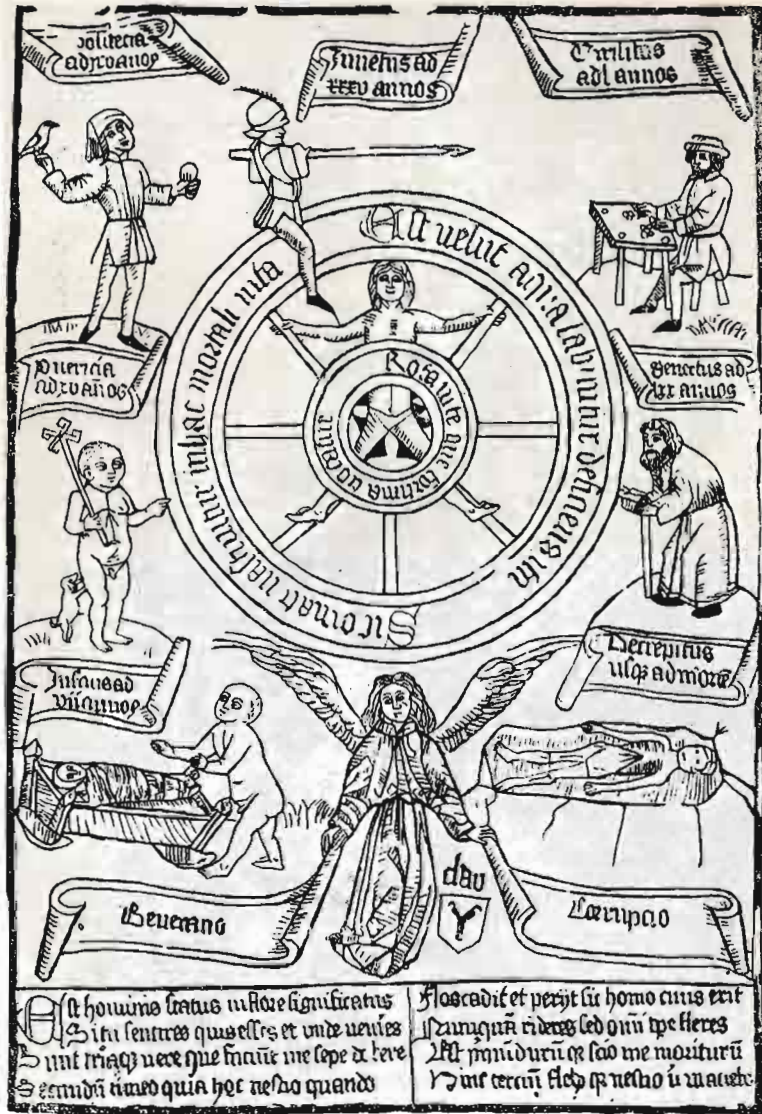
It is neither our purpose to complicate further the uncertainties of this difficult subject, nor to add one jot or tittle to the already ponderous mass of presumed "certainties." We desire to direct the student's attention toward two important items which do not appear to have as yet received sufficient consideration. First, there is definite evidence that we should search for the philosophical keys to the Tarot among the esoteric groups of the Near East, for they most certainly possessed a sacred book of figures and symbols which was believed to reveal to the informed the mysteries of the heavens and the earth. Second, we should search for the origin of the modern deck of playing cards with its Europeanized figures and symbols among the early Templars, Rosicrucians, alchemists, cabalists, and Freemasons.

If we accept the esoteric premise that playing cards were originally intended as symbols of philosophic principles, we must proceed to the justification of this premise by supporting it with adequate evidence. Cards made their appearance in Europe at a time when a number of schools devoted to the occult arts were flourishing. It is nice to regard the Tarot as the supreme gesture of persecuted medieval occultism that decided,



#### THE CHARIOT

From a deck of Tarot cards painted especially for Charles VI, King of France



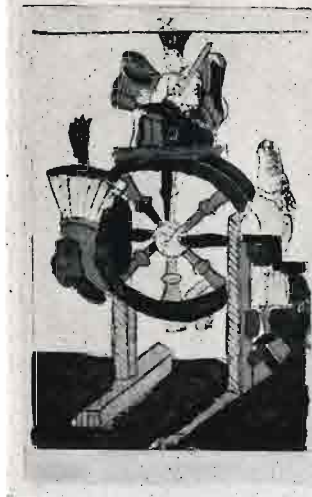
THE SEVEN AGES OF MAN

From a woodblock print of the 15th century preserved in the British Museum. Compare with figure on page 36.



THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE

From the *Margarita Philosophica*, the first encyclopedia published in Europe. Compare with figure on page 36.



—From *Witchcraft, Magic & Sorcery* by De Giury

OLD TAROT CARDS, 15TH TO 17TH CENTURIES

Upper left, The Fool; upper right, The Juggler; lower left, The Wheel of Fortune; lower right, Death.

paradoxically, to conceal itself by rendering its symbols too common for serious consideration.

Obviously, if the cards were the text of a mystery doctrine, only one acquainted with the mysteries of the ancient world and their doctrines would be qualified or equipped to discover the actual meanings of the Tarot symbols. None but a student versed in the lore of antiquity, who has discovered the cabalistic keys of Solomon and who has unveiled the whole elaborate pageantry of mythology and fable, can successfully assay the enigma of the Tarot.

The cards can never be explained solely by the study of the hieroglyphics themselves, for the symbols have passed through many stages of modification. Each succeeding generation has redrawn the Tarots, until frequently only the roughest outline of the original idea remains. The student must look behind the cards for the psychology which produced them. Consequently, only one versed in the origins of philosophies and religions can hope to understand the grand system which the cards were intended to perpetuate.

Like all other forms of symbolism, the Tarot unfailingly reflects the viewpoint of the interpreter himself. This does not detract from its value, however, for symbolism is one of the most useful instruments of instruction in the spiritual arts, because it continually draws from the subjective resources of the seeker the substance of his own erudition. The greatest of all symbolic books is Nature itself; for by contemplating the manifold wonders of creation, the human being is inclined to thoughtful inquiry about the substance and operation of the universal plan.

Although the process is not especially pleasant, we must in all fairness attack certain false reports in order that they shall not deceive the sincere. The so-called Egyptian Tarot solemnly presented as a veritable seven-day wonder is a modern fabrication, and would cause any well-informed Egyptologist to turn over in his grave. The deck is rather cleverly drawn, it is true, but it is the contribution of French wonder-workers, who

have attempted to build some rather shaky framework upon the Court de Gebelin's wild shot in the dark as to the Egyptian origin of the Tarot cards. De Gebelin was far too eminent and conscientious an archaeologist to have been party to any such representation. The Tarot figures appearing in de Gebelin's *La Monde Primitif* show no intentional distortion, but he planted a seed in the popular mind which grew and flowered into a most fantastic shrub.

The Tarot figures of this eminent member of the French intelligentsia have been gloriously Egyptianized and caused to take on a most venerable appearance. In fact, the project was so overdone that the purpose was completely undone. It is one of those achievements entirely too remarkable to be true. It must be a wonderful thing to have an imagination such as that of Paul Christian, another member of the French esoteric world, who was able to see Tarot cards carved along the walls of the subterranean passages of the pyramids. He is only exceeded by M. Vaillant, whose powers of discernment enabled him to perceive a deck of these remarkable Tarots under the arm of one of the archangels, who descended upon the top of the mountains as related in the *Book of Enoch*.

While these dilettanti of the occult romantically affirmed the origin of the Tarot cards to be concealed in the very night of time, we may pass lightly over their well-intentioned absurdities. It is quite impossible to disillusion these Tarot enthusiasts who seem to consider it not only probable but demonstrable that the gods on high Olympus played celestial cribbage with these remarkable pasteboards, during those peaceful ages which preceded the creation of man. While some of the symbols upon the Tarots are undeniably very old, the cards themselves in their present form can scarcely be regarded as antedating the costumes and customs represented on the earliest known decks.

The gypsies (who may have been the wandering descendants of the priests of Serapis) preserved books or manuscripts filled with the lore of Egypt. Many believed that among these remains was the

sacred *Book of Thoth*, a priceless manuscript of ancient magic rescued from the burning of the Serapeum at Alexandria and carried by the gypsies in their wanderings across the face of Europe. We must not be too resentful against those who have immediately decided that the Tarot is the *Book of Thoth*. Likely enough, any of us would be inclined to speculate on such a possibility.

Even if the gypsies had cards of divination, this would not necessarily conflict with the records associating the Tarot with the Knights Templars. The mysteries of gypsy magic have been carefully preserved within the group, and very little is available to the general public relating to this interesting subject. Several authors have mentioned the strange rituals of the gypsies, and the way in which this wandering tribe has maintained its isolated existence. Many gypsies are credited with second-sight, and it is possible that such psychic sensitivity can be traced to their custom of inbreeding.

The gypsy cards, even if they be the Tarot and even if they had an Egyptian origin, are not, however, the so-called Egyptian decks now in circulation. While all Tarot cards are worthy of consideration, none is sufficiently accurate to permit much dogmatizing about the original meanings of the symbols. The preponderance of evidence suggests that the Tarot cards in their present form are not more than four or five hundred years old. It is a legitimate question, nevertheless, to ask whether these medieval figures were designed from some more ancient pattern. If this were true, unfortunately no prototypes of the decks consisting of similar numbers or sequences of cards have ever been discovered.

A possible origin for the Tarots is the mysterious Table of Cebes. The ancient Greek philosopher, Cebes, is said to have designed a hieroglyphical figure setting forth the entire history of mankind. There are some old descriptions of this Table, but all pictorializations of it are more or less fanciful.

Where, we may ask, did the designers of the ancient or original Tarot secure

the mass of symbolism which has led men to attribute so great an age to the designs? Were the card symbols accidentally incorporated or accumulated, or was there a distinct purpose in the combinations? Is the medieval Tarot possibly a product of the craftsmen of the Freemasonic Order and enriched with the archaic symbolism so abundantly apparent in the rituals and the trestle board?

Without committing our minds to any final opinions, it is useful to select a likely site for our philosophical excavations. Realizing the pattern of the Secret Societies operating in Europe, it seems not only possible but consistent with known practices that decks of cards, variously marked with esoteric emblems, could have been privately circulated among the members of Secret Brotherhoods. The Count di Cagliostro was of the opinion that these cards were the sacred and supreme symbolic book of these affiliated movements; and in his *Morals and Dogma*, General Pike declares Cagliostro to have been an emissary of the Knights Templars.

Turning to the Rosicrucian angle of the Tarot problem, when Father C. R. C., who is said to have founded the Brotherhood of the Rosy Cross, returned to Europe from Arabia, he brought with him a remarkable book called *M*. According to the Rosicrucian manifestoes, this book contained all the knowledge of the world. Reports about this book are believed to have inspired the Encyclopedist movement in France.

In a work entitled *Conspiracy Against the Catholic Religion and Against Crowned Heads*, published anonymously in 1792, a pious writer hurls the following accusations against the Rosicrucians: "They claim to possess a volume, wherein they can learn all that is to be found in other books, which now are, or which can ever come into existence. This volume is their own reason, in which they find the prototype of all that subsists by their facility in analyzing, summarizing, and creating a kind of intellectual world, and of all possible beings. See the philosophical, theosophical, and microcosmic cards." This is indeed a

significant allusion, but we must be careful not to build an illusion upon it.

As an additional commentary upon the possibility that the Rosicrucians were acquainted with the Tarot cards, it may be mentioned that it was the dream of that great scientist and philosopher, Sir Francis Bacon, to gather the whole knowledge of the world into one great reference work. The French Encyclopedists are believed to have been influenced somewhat in their project by Bacon's effort to integrate this vast program of knowledge.

Is it possible that there is some connection between the Tarot cards and the great encyclopedia of the Rosicrucians? They announced their book containing the entire knowledge of the world as a kind of symbolic work, through the study of which all scientific and philosophical speculations were integrated into one mathematical pattern.

If the Rosicrucian legend of the Tarot has any foundation in fact, the cards are lifted from the lowly and ignominious roles of fortunetelling and gambling devices to the higher and more dignified realms of philosophy and science. It obviously behooves studious and open-minded philosophers, in the light of this possibility, to give more than a passing investigation to this curious deck, in the hope that among its confused mass of symbolic devices may be discovered certain definite keys to the sealed mysteries of the Masonic arcana, and those procedures and disciplines termed by the ancients the "life of wisdom."

The fact that no authentic material is available concerning the Tarots prior to the Middle Ages and that they remained in complete obscurity until the Court de Gebelin projected them into fame, further suggests the possibility of the prior concealment of their philosophical value for a definite purpose. The mathematical formulas involved in the organization of the Tarot cards belie the probability of an accidental origin. Considerable time and thought must have been devoted to them before the finished product made its public appearance.

The Court de Gebelin was a man of unimpeachable integrity, an eminent

scholar of his day, and a high Freemason of the Grand Orient of France. He certainly did not invent the cards nor make any essential changes in their emblems. There is sufficient evidence at hand to render such an assumption of imposture untenable. Renowned as an antiquarian, de Gebelin was appointed by the Grand Orient of France to interrogate the mysterious Count di Cagliostro respecting the Egyptian Rite of Freemasonry. It required but a few moments of interrogation, however, to convince de Gebelin that he was no match for the illustrious Italian in the realm of polemics.

The student of European politics must realize that during the 18th century the whole Continent seethed with political, philosophical, and religious intrigue. Mysterious groups were constantly springing up in the most unlikely places. Then, after serving some obscure end, these fugitive sects disappeared as unaccountably as they came. The Court de Gebelin may have been appointed by one of these Secret Orders, with which he had considerable contact, to publicize in a quiet and dignified manner the existence of the Tarot cards.

Old decks of the Tarots and even well-designed modern decks are extremely difficult to secure, and when they appear in bookstalls they command high prices. An authentic deck of the Court de Gebelin's design will fetch ten pounds in England. Some time ago in England an engraved deck brought two hundred fifty dollars, and even comparatively modern Tarots are expensive. The most easily secured cards of the Tarot type are the common Italian *tarocco* decks. These, however, are very crude and are usually double-headed cards, with the symbolism so mutilated that it is of comparatively little value. The Italian attitude toward religion has somewhat interfered with the designs, for in the modern *tarocco* decks the two cards, *Le Pape* and *La Papesse*, are usually removed and two other figures inconsistent with the general design, called Jupiter and Juno, are substituted.

However, the demand for Tarot cards has produced several decks, most of which unfortunately vary in essential de-



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tails from the original designs. In some instances these departures were motivated by an effort to beautify the cards, but often they represent a definite effort to design a deck which would substantiate the preconceived notions of their inventor. Such a course of action is both misleading and unethical. If an individual wishes to publish a deck of cards to please his own concept of what symbolism should reveal, that is perfectly within his individual rights, but to declare that these innovations are the original Tarots simply confounds the prevailing confusion.

One such popular set of Tarots has departed so far from the original deck that it is almost unrecognizable. If these cards are analyzed for the merit of their drawings, much can be said in their defense. The artist was a good craftsman, with a lively imagination, but the quaintness and the authenticity of the originals are hopelessly lost. Many people have wasted valuable time working out symbolisms that never existed except in the fertile imagination of the modern card designer.

In order to pursue their investigation of the Tarots, students of card symbol-

ism have found it necessary to cut pictures of the major trumps out of books and mount them on pasteboard, thereby creating a makeshift deck. Some have had the cards photostated or gone through the slow and laborious process of drawing them by hand. Under such conditions the minor cards are usually slighted or entirely ignored, and the result is unsatisfactory and incomplete.

It may be well to summarize the conclusions of several outstanding writers who have attempted to define the Tarot. According to these interpreters, the word *Tarot* signifies "the Royal Road," "the Way of Wisdom," "the Tablets of the Doctrine of Mercury," "the Book of the History of Time," or "the Tables of the Year." De Gebelin enthusiastically piles up evidence to substantiate the theory that the Tarot was indeed the lost *Book of Thoth*. Some believe the Tarots to have been the symbolical child of Hermes, that production of Egyptian genius that was to endure through countless generations. We are indebted to Egypt for so many legends and fables that it is difficult to know just where a line should be drawn. The Court de Gebelin was an Egyptologist, and it is an almost universal human limitation to be influenced by our personal interest when attempting to arrive at impersonal conclusions.

The *Book of Thoth* is famous among the ancient annals of magic. It was conceived to be a most potent work resplendent with spiritual power. Only the highest grade of initiates were permitted to gaze upon the curious hieroglyphics which it contained. So majestic were these sacred symbols that but to look upon them was to be elevated to the highest parts of wisdom. The book was kept in a golden casket, the key to which was part of the insignia of the High Priest.

Only by speculation, however, can we relate this sacred *Book of Thoth* to the modern Tarots, yet the rumor has been so persistent that it may have some foundation in fact. If the Tarots are indeed leaves from the *Book of Thoth*, it is evident that the original work has been mutilated out of all superficial semblance

to its original design. The hierophants of the mysteries would never have permitted an unabridged work containing the inner secrets of the sanctuary to fall into the hands of the profane. Those accepting the ancient origin of the Tarots are confronted with a most perplexing problem, for they can only speculate upon the particulars of the mutilation through which the book has passed. It is quite possible that cards were either added to or subtracted from the original number to complicate interpretation and foil the ends of numerologists. It is also reasonably certain that the cards have been renumbered and rearranged so as to be out of their original sequence, and thus disrupt their continuity. Some writers believe that the unnumbered card is the key to the whole enigma, and that the reading of the Tarot symbolism depends entirely upon the discovery of the proper position of *Le Fou*, or the zero card.

Court de Gebelin apparently sensed the magnitude of the problem, but being bound by Masonic obligations could only hint at the true significance of the symbols. His descriptions are ingenious but extremely far-fetched, and those who have followed in his footsteps have demonstrated their intellectual shortcomings by imitating his errors. The extremely flexible nature of the Tarot symbols is a common cause of bewilderment to would-be interpreters. Each of the cards can be explained in a dozen different ways, and as several of these interpretations are contradictory, it becomes evident that they cannot all be right. The problem as to which of them may be right is only second in importance to the problem: Is any one of them right?

The present Tarot deck consists of 78 cards and may be divided into three sections. The first division contains only one card, unnumbered and designated *Le Fou* (the fool). The second division consists of 21 cards, now numbered and lettered for mystical purposes according to the Hebrew alphabet, and called the major trumps. (In this connection, it should be borne in mind that neither the numbers nor the letters appear on the most ancient decks, and we are in-



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debted to the ingenuity of such minds as Eliphas Levi and Papus for these additions.) The third division consists of 56 cards, divided into four suits of fourteen cards each. These make up the minor trumps, and are similar to modern playing cards with the exception of one extra court card in each suit.

It is possible that the universal monad or indivisible unity may be signified by "the fool." If so, from it are suspended 21 principles which together constitute the secret and spiritual number of the powers of the Sun. These 21 powers (or letters) represent the *anima mundi*, or the soul of the world, while the unnumbered card, *Le Fou*, in whom wisdom is so perfect that man cannot comprehend its implications, represent the divine Causal Being.

The 21 major trumps, when distributed throughout the sidereal system, constitutes what Paracelsus referred to as the solar agencies. The 21 powers and 7 triads into which they form themselves are represented in the celebrated Bembine Table of Isis, and are resident in the Sun, from which they manifest forth their spiritual activities. The body of Nature or the material universe, which William Blake called "the vegetable



THE GREAT MANTEGNA DECK OF SYMBOLIC CARDS

mirror," consists of four great waves of life which, conspiring together in the creative processes, are symbolized by the four-headed cherubim of Ezekiel. Thus, four orders are fundamental in Nature, for which reason the inferior universe was represented in ancient symbolism by a square.

The sphere of the soul is a triad consisting of three sevens (or seven threes) being the 21 major trumps, and the spiritual universe, which may not be internally analyzed, is a cipher or zero, appropriately signified by an unnumbered card. Thus in both the ancient Tarot symbolism and the *Mensa Isiaca*, or Bembine Table, the circle, the triangle, and the square become the symbols of the three Pythagorean divisions of the universe. A similar plan underlies the Platonic concept and is recalled by the words of Paracelsus: "Man's spirit is from the stars, his soul from the planets, and his body from the elements."

Containing but one card—*Le Fou*—the first order is a reminder that the origin of all things is that definitionless Infinity which precedes the one and from which the numbers flow, as from a

Father-Fountain. In the Bembine Table of Isis the seven planets are the apexes of seven triads; each consisting of a Father, a Power, and a Mind. These seven triads, which Eliphas Levi relates to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, are fractional rays of the solar power, having their origin and nature in the Sun. Thus it would appear that the 21 cards called the major trumps are the planetary triads of the Chaldean system. These triads issue from the "abiding destiny" which is their First Cause and from which they are suspended, according to the theory of the Pythagorean Tetractys.

Thus the trinity, whether pagan or Christian, rules over these three orders. God the Father presides over the three-fold darkness signified by the blindfolded fool. God the Son presides over the 21 powers, which by Pythagorean deduction become three, or the power of the soul, which is always found either in its own nature or inclined toward its polarities and consequently exists in three states: divine, rational, and irrational. The 56 minor trumps are under the control of the demiurgus, or Lord of the World, whose name whether it be Zeus



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or the Tetragrammaton IHVH (Jehovah) consists of four letters, which are the four regions or angles of heaven, from which pour out streams which are seven within and seven without. From the compounding of this numerical mystery, we derive the 56 cards.

If we question that the minor trumps are symbolic of the inferior universe under the demiurgus, we have but to apply the Pythagorean process of reduction, by which we secure symbolical numbers by adding together the numerals of any given sum. Thus, the number 56 becomes five plus six or eleven, being the number of a cycle or a new beginning. The number 11 in turn becomes one plus one, or two, which is the symbol of diversity, matter, discord, dissention, and death. In the Hebrew system we have four emanations or streams, called the Sephirothic trees, which descending through four worlds constitute forty mysterious steps. We also have the fifty gates of light through which the soul must ascend to the contemplation of reality.

John Heydon, generally included among the Rosicrucians, declared the number 11 to be the most evil agent in

that it was greater than the number of the commandments, which is ten, and less than the number of grace and perfection, which is twelve. It is also the number of Lilith, the demon wife of Adam. She signifies the physical nature of the world before spirit was imparted to it. In the secret writings it is stated that when the spirits of men descended into Nature, they were of a different creation from the substances which enveloped them.

Before the coming of these rational spirits, called in the Bible "the sons of God," the natural creatures generated themselves according to a strange disorder producing by their interminglings the races of demons and monsters mentioned by Berosus, whose ancient history was translated by Cory, in his *Ancient Fragments*. Even after the spiritual life descended into Nature, these strange creatures persisted for some time, for man had to accustom himself to his elemental environment. Accordingly, we are told that there were giants upon the earth in those days and a wild riot of forms and fantasies. Lilith was the symbol of the earth born. She was the mother of monstrosities, whose creation



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passed away but whose activities are preserved in the esoteric mystery of the number 11.

From the above fragment, it may be concluded that the Tarot cards were not intended originally as fortunetelling devices, but rather, like the esoteric astrological symbols of the Egyptian hierophants, were the keys to the sciences of universal procedure. From the Chaldean and Phoenician mysteries certain truths are revealed which exhibit remarkable parallels to the Tarot symbolism. Time alone will establish whether there is any actual connection between the two. While these stray bits of really worthwhile information exist they should be gathered and applied to the Tarot problem in the hope of establishing some of the early philosophical landmarks, which, now lost to mankind in general, may survive obscurely in the symbolism of these cards.

We, therefore, advise the studiously inclined to approach the Tarot as a sacred book primarily intended to illumine the mind through the instrument of a mathematically ordered symbolism. To those versed in the ancient philo-

sophies it appears unfortunate that these cards should be collected and examined mainly in the interest of fortunetelling. Man's place in the universe is far more important than the outcome of his daily concerns.

Several eminent writers have investigated Tarot symbolism and have written extensively on the subject. Although they are in considerable conflict they invite serious examination of their hypotheses. Probably the most complete work on Tarot symbolism available in English at the present time is *The Tarot of the Bohemians*, by Papus. This book is largely indebted to stray hints, intimations, implications, and curious references contained in *The Doctrines and Rituals of Transcendental Magic*, by Eliphas Levi. Levi's book is divided into sections numbered according to the major trumps of the Tarot, and is illuminating in a general way. There is a persistent belief, however, that Levi intentionally confused his readers, and that his true method is not faithfully recorded in his writings.

Mr. Arthur Edward Waite, the translator of Levi and also his editor and



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critic, may have been intrigued by the confused but dramatic productions of the French magus. In any event Mr. Waite apparently sponsored the creation of a highly artistic Tarot deck. When this appeared it was accompanied by his little book entitled *A Pictorial Key to the Tarot*. The "revised" cards are eminently successful artistically speaking, but the authority for the innumerable changes and enlargements of the designs appears much less certain. Mr. Waite's little essay informed the student of Mr. Waite's opinions; beyond that the whole matter is decidedly dim.

One of the most sincere and thoughtful modern investigators of Tarot symbolism is Mr. Paul Foster Case, whose writings deserve careful consideration. There are several other authors whose works do not exist in English or are extremely difficult to secure. Profound interest will lead to them in the natural course of inquiry. Such study is determined by individual taste. Each investigator must sharpen the mental tools at his command and attack the problem for himself. If he should be fortunate enough to solve the mystery of the Tarot,

he will settle one of the most heated controversies in the field of the esoteric arts.

In an effort to be factual and practical, certain difficulties relating to the Tarots should be clearly stated before students are led astray by modern enthusiasts. The essential difficulties may be summarized under three headings:

1. The original number of cards is unknown, but it is quite within the range of possibility that the modern deck lacks several vital cards. The removal of one or two symbols would corrupt the sequence of the figures, and thus hopelessly confuse would-be interpreters. As decks with different numbers of cards do exist, and the history of the Tarot is hopelessly incomplete, this doubt is more reasonable than might at first appear probable.
2. There are numerous uncertainties as to the original order of the cards of the present deck. Many modern conclusions are based entirely upon what may prove to be coincidence; as for example, the association of the



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Hebrew letters with the major trumps, because there are 22 of each. The cards may be the elements of a secret writing; that is, they may form together a philosophic cipher, and until the elements of the cryptic alphabet have been accurately established the subject must remain debatable.

3. Most of the earlier writings on the subject of the Tarot are by persons bound by the obligations of Secret Societies. As these writers were required to conceal the esoteric keys, we cannot tell with certainty to what degree they have confused the facts. There is no doubt that such intentional confusion does exist in the most prominent texts.

While on the subject of difficulties, we should also mention the lack of certainty about the original designs appearing on the cards. No ancient decks of Tarots are known to exist. The earliest we have date from medieval Europe. If these cards were brought from Arabia as is generally suspected, it is obvious that these Arabian originals were not or-

namented with essentially Christian and European figures. We cannot imagine the magicians of Fez or Bagdad including a figure of the Pope in one of their esoteric manuals. It is equally unlikely that they would use an obviously Christian form of marriage, or represent the Last Judgment in theological form. None of the symbols on the modern Tarots are essentially Arabic, although a few show pseudo-Egyptian influence. The least that we can say then is that the cards have been strongly Europeanized. This leads to a natural inquiry: how strongly? Does it imply that the original symbols were damaged beyond recognition, or merely modified?

I have not been able to learn that the Arabian nation now preserves any equivalent to the Tarot cards. We see many Oriental decks, mostly modern, certainly not older than the European forms. These are artistically superior but there is no obvious trace of Tarot symbolism. There is an East Indian deck based upon the incarnations of the god, Vishnu. It is quite possible that these circular cards have a deep symbolical meaning, but they are not close enough to the Tarots for the meanings to be interchangeable.

Although the American market alone absorbs more than 75,000,000 decks of playing cards a year, the possibility of cards having more than recreational significance remains unsuspected. Some authorities feel that the concept of playing cards developed parallel with the concept of paper currency. In China particularly, early cards closely resemble early money. The most conservative attitude is to assume that cards originated early in the development of the graphic arts. Probably they developed spontaneously in several areas and were almost immediately adapted to gambling. One school of research is inclined to suspect that games of chance were closely associated with the divinatory arts. The almost infinite number of combinations into which the cards could fall, the streaks of luck always evident in gaming, and the association of the designs with the circumstances of life led almost inevitably in the direction of fortune-telling.

More recently, the factor of antiquity has contributed to the popular veneration for the traditional figures and ornaments upon the deck of cards. As a result, they have been changed but little in general appearance from the decks popular in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Various pictorial decks and numerous educational, humorous, historical, and even religious designs have gained temporary popularity. Most outstanding events have affected either the obverse or the reverse of playing cards. Considerable imagination has been devoted to the subject, but since the turn of the present century there have been few changes on the faces of the cards. The backs, however, have been subject to countless modifications for artistic and commercial reasons. Most old cards have extremely plain backs or designs primarily geometric. The marking of the backs of cards to cheat in gaming has influenced the patterns to a considerable degree.

From what we can learn, the court cards were cut in complete sets of sixteen on one block of wood, and separated later. Spaces often were left for the insertion of special material. The knights (knaves), for example, might carry

shields, which remained blank, so that the purchaser could insert his own crest. The pips or markers in the corners showing the suit were usually added by hand after the printing. When professional card printers came into existence, devoting all their resources to this type of artistry, some very handsome and dramatic decks were produced. The best printing of this type was done between 1475 and 1550. This period agrees closely with the finest epoch in the art of book printing. Not infrequently, fragments of early decks of playing cards are found in the bindings of old books. Most of the cards actually in use have vanished from long handling.

The French, in designing their first playing cards, often gave names to the court cards, so that the decks combined historical and mythological characters according to popular fancy. In one deck the kings, David, Alexander, Caesar, and Charlemagne were honored, and among the knights were Hector and Lancelot. Among the prominent ladies were Joan of Arc and Judith of Bethulia. When the court cards were not actually named, space was sometimes provided for the honoring of local heroes, and in surviving examples the same design is frequently associated with several dignitaries.

About 1490, the city of Lyon attained almost a monopoly on the manufacture of playing cards, which were then distributed by itinerant merchants throughout Europe. The cardmakers of Lyon were responsible for numerous modifications and improvements, and their common agreement and standardization of the designs has influenced all subsequent manufacturers.

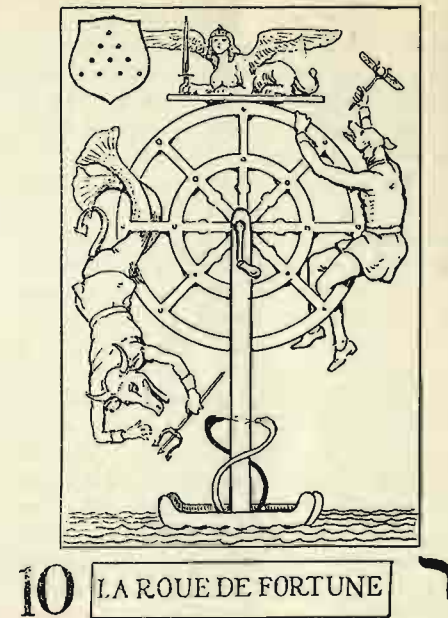
It is now believed that the Tarot deck, especially the 22 Tarot cards which were added to the standard deck of the period, thus forming the Tarots, or *tarocco* cards, first appeared among the Italians, and from Italy spread to France, Germany, and even the Balkans. If, therefore, we seem to ramble about in a maze of historical contradictions, we are merely presenting a factual diagram of the conflicting "authorities" who have attempted to trace these almost untraceable bits of pasteboards.

Assuming that the card makers of Lyons and their less celebrated competitors in other districts were competing to please the public taste and supply the avid market, it would be interesting to discover if possible the source of their artistic inspiration. Certainly some of them should be included among the emblemists and those so frequently called upon to embellish various tracts and treatises with appropriate figures and symbols. To indicate the practice they appear to have followed, we might mention the tenth card of the Tarot deck which is usually referred to as the Wheel of Fortune.

*La Roue de Fortune* is represented as a wheel, with four or eight spokes, and two figures, one good and the other evil, clinging to its rim. Above sits an immobile character sometimes carrying a sword or scales. In the pseudo-Egyptian Tarots, a sphinx sits on the top of the wheel, and on the rim Anubis is ascending and Typhon descending. The wheel is supported on a small ship floating in the sea and the support is entwined with serpents. Obviously, this is a comparatively late and sophisticated form of the design, but is based upon earlier and cruder concepts.

An exceedingly rare and curious woodblock print of the Seven Ages of Man is preserved in the British Museum. This print appears to belong to the middle of the 15th century. The central design represents a wheel with eight spokes, one of which is concealed behind the human figure spread on the wheel. The eight-spoke design is unusual as it does not conform with the European structure of a wheel, and is reminiscent of the Buddhist Wheel of Life, or Wheel of the Law, which invariably has eight spokes. On the wheel in our block print the figure of a knight, bearing a lance, rides the rim.

Several designs which occur on conventional Tarot cards surround the wheel motif. At the upper right is a man seated at a gaming table, or possibly a banking board. He is most reminiscent of the card called the Juggler. Below him is a decrepit elder with a staff, suggestive of the ninth Tarot called The



Hermit. On the opposite of the wheel is a child carrying what seems to be a pinwheel. A dog is biting at his legs. This is almost exactly the design of the unnumbered Tarot card called The Fool. One cannot examine this old woodblock without arriving at the conclusion that a series of familiar designs occupied the public mind and influenced early engravers of both pictures and playing cards.

While on this subject, we might mention the *Margarita Philosophica*, which was the first encyclopedia published in Europe. We have in our Library the edition which appeared in Basil, Switzerland, in 1508. Here, again, is the wheel form of the tenth Tarot. In this case, four figures are attached to the wheel, and the design in general is very close to the Tarot design. A figure in equilibrium sits on top of the wheel. Life ascends and death descends, and in the midst is Fortuna, depicted without eyes and carrying two vases. On the fourteenth Tarot a figure called Temperance carries two vases, pouring a liquid from one to the another. It would be an interesting project to examine outstanding collections of 15th-century woodblocks, paintings, and sculpturings to ascertain

if possible if the various Tarot designs were in use with other meanings prior to the actual invention of the deck of cards. It is evident that some designs or parts of them were relatively common.

The thirteenth card, bearing the reaping skeleton, suggests the great cycle of the Dance of Death. The 20th card, the Last Judgment, occurs in Church symbolism from an early time. The figure of the devil portrayed one of the outstanding characterizations of the medieval period. Justice occurs in its conventional form, and the figure of the Pope is equally familiar. The selection of various emblems may have been influenced by the divinatory vogue that was sweeping across Europe. Astrological and alchemical symbols on the cards also invite examination.

It is not our intention to dismiss the symbolism of playing cards as merely the product of the competitive ingenuity of the early card printers; rather we may wonder what devices they rejected or changed in their efforts to increase the popularity of what the pious like to call "the devil's picture book." The moment theologians suggested that the devil had a hand in the manufacturing of these curious bits of pasteboard, they assumed new importance. The so-called Prince of Evil has always been a progressive, and the inventions which he fathered were seldom trivial. Usually things attributed to his satanic majesty originated among pagans; hence the anathema pronounced upon them.

If a symbolical deck of cards reached Europe from Tatars or other Eastern nations decorated with the "horrible" emblems of heathen doctrines, a critical situation could well have arisen. The cards offered a splendid instrument of magic and divination, and an admirable and attractive means of keeping money in circulation. Of course, good Christian nations could not gamble with the hideous relics of some barbarous tribe of unbelievers. It was necessary to substitute approved designs, at the same time preserving whatever values or particular devices were essential to gaming or fortunetelling with the cards. If the Templars were responsible for the importing

of the cards, all traces of the doctrines of the Temple had to be eradicated. It would be nice to know how this censorship of Christian morals was accomplished and who did the censoring.

We cannot agree with the enthusiastic French Transcendentalists of the 19th century that the cards descended to the Court de Gebelin comparatively unmutated. There are too many evidences that point in a contrary direction. It is rather evident that Asiatic cards would not be decorated with such figures as the devil of the Brocken, or the four beasts of the Apocalypse. The shift to Egypt is a little too smooth and easy to be entirely convincing. At the time the shift could have been made, the Egyptian civilization was already long dead and Europe was completely uninformed as to the essentials of Egyptian philosophy and religion. The hieroglyphics had not yet been correctly decoded, and European intellectuals were dependent upon the misinterpretations of the Latin writers for most of their misunderstanding of Egyptian life. Even today popular metaphysical concepts of Egyptian religion are extremely faulty. We may, therefore, hold certain reasonable doubts. This does not mean that the card designs could not have originated in Egypt, but rather that we have no actual proof of such a hypothesis.

W. F. C. Wigston, who did so much research on the Baconian riddle, is convinced that Lord Bacon used the Tarot symbolism in his ciphers. In his *Columbus of Literature*, Wigston points out that the important cryptic numbers, 21, 56, and 78 are all important Tarot numbers. There are 21 major trumps, not counting the unnumbered card, 56 cards in the minor suits, and 78 cards in the total deck. As an example, Wigston demonstrates that in the 1623 edition of the Shakespearean folio Lord Bacon's Christian name Francis appears 21 times on page 56 of *The Histories*.

Does this mean that the descent of Secret Societies, which culminated in the plan for the universal reformation projected by Lord Bacon, was involved in the symbolism of the Tarot cards? Certainly these cards existed prior to the

17th century, but so also did many of the emblems and figures which appear in the Rosicrucian and alchemical books published by these 17th-century mystics.

The descent of the esoteric Orders in Europe from the Templars, the Troubadours, and the Albigensian heretics is generally acknowledged by scholars. Playing cards could well have been a useful instrument in this program and a subtle means of promulgating a universal philosophy through a popular gaming device. Unfortunately, research on playing cards up to the present time has not been directed in any specific course, and no effort has been made to establish direct links with particular groups of philosophers or scholars. Such efforts might prove profitable.

As many works are available dealing with present conclusions about the symbolic meanings of the cards and their arrangements for purposes of divination, we do not intend to repeat the findings here. We restrict ourselves to the important questions of origin and development, and hope sincerely that others will extend this field toward the discovery of the facts.

Among nearly all nations where cards, dice, and other mathematical, symbolical games have been developed, a generally consistent pattern has been followed. The factors, like the chess men, the checkerboard, and the spots on dice, are based upon principles of universal symbolism. The very law and order which make the exact operations of these games possible are derived from formulas relating to the cosmos, the solar system, the elements, and the basic divisions of human society. There is every reason to assume, therefore, that the Tarot cards began in some concept of universal dynamics. Even modern playing cards show indebtedness to the calendar, with their four suits (seasons), thirteen cards (lunar months) to a suit, fifty-two cards (weeks of the year), and three hundred sixty-five spots (days of the year). So many coincidences cease to appear coincidental, and undoubtedly reveal a pattern.

The use of numbers and their combinations, progressions, and sequences as

a means of restoring or representing a concept of the world originated in India, was communicated to the Egyptians, and perfected by the Greeks. According to Pythagoras, numbers have particular virtues or powers, and if these principles are mastered by the human mind, all existing compounds in nature may be discovered. This is the premise which has inspired research in the Tarots. It is very probable that the premise itself is correct, but the efforts to extend this premise into the field of particulars have been, up to the present time, conflicting.

Perhaps greater emphasis should be placed upon the discovery of the principles themselves before attempting to identify the principles with the different cards. The key is in the fact, and not in the symbol used to represent the fact. Until the fact is known, its correct symbol cannot be distinguished with certainty.

The happy coincidence that the Hebrew alphabet contained 22 letters has already been mentioned. It is inevitable that this apparently supporting fact should excite a wide field of speculation, but we must not jump to conclusions. Almost any number can be fitted into some system of philosophy. Once we have addicted ourselves to a concept, it becomes our duty to protect and expand that concept in every possible way. Sometimes defense becomes a light obsession, and we begin to disregard such details of our hypotheses as fail to conform with our dominant convictions.

It is easy to assume that the different religions and philosophies are merely expressions of one idea, especially if some parallels do appear. Actually, while in the abstract there is only one universal stream of wisdom, most existing systems of religious philosophy have some degree of basic incompatibility. The fact that the Hindus and the Jews both held the number 22 as highly significant cannot be extended without a great deal of study to the conclusion that both nations were in agreement as to the meaning of this number. If we wish to be true to the convictions of various peoples and to benefit from these convictions thus enlarging our philosophies, we should con-

sider the meanings of these beliefs as they were held by the peoples among whom they originated.

There is much to recommend the idea that the Tarots offer a convenient symbolic textbook with the advantage that the separate leaves are susceptible of innumerable arrangements. Through the designs upon the cards, ideas are substituted for numbers, and the mind becomes aware of a new dimension of thinking. Always, however, symbols draw their meanings from those attempting to interpret the designs. In this way, symbolism stimulates imagination, strengthens the observational faculties, and invites the intellect to practice reflection and contemplation.

Each human being must interpret formal symbols as he interprets life; that is, in the light of personal experience. Meaning is not inherent in material forms; it is bestowed upon them. It follows that each interpreter arrives at somewhat different conclusions, applying a censorship of interests at each step of his interpretation. Thus an Orientalist could be impressed by the vestiges of Eastern symbolism in the Tarot designs. An Egyptologist could be equally certain that the figures originated in the sanctuaries along the Nile. The student of the cabala finds cabalism in everything, and the alchemist would not hesitate to defend the cards as genuine remains of ancient alchemy.

The average layman confronted with what appears to be the evidence of a universal symbolism can be excused for failing to realize that the enthusiastic interpreters have held up the cards as mirrors before their own faces. Each has seen his pet concept supported and justified, yet the very concepts themselves may be in hopeless conflict. It might be wiser and safer simply to acknowledge that playing cards are a relic of antiquity, probably of sacred origin, and offer considerable material for study and reflection. Anyone attempting an analysis of the cards should first acquaint himself with their historical descent in order to protect his conclusions from popular er-

rors and conceits.

We are often asked why we should waste precious time that might be devoted to abstract meditation upon such a vulgar and prosaic problem as historical descent, when we can assume the numerous accounts attributing the invention of cards to ancient priesthoods to be correct, and proceed to the fascinating pastime of daydreaming about mystical content? Such vague practices unfortunately have insufficient scholarship, and the daydreamer drifts along from one incredible notion to another. If however, he had made a sensible project out of his research, he would have a reference frame of reasonable probabilities with which to censor and circumscribe his inspirations. Only when we unfold sequentially the descent of a doctrine can we be confident that we understand that doctrine in the terms of those who devised and promulgated its teachings.

Most of the decks of Tarot cards now available have been subjected to recent "improvements." Those unable to locate standard decks, which now bring a considerable premium, are referred to the *Tarot of the Bohemians*, by Papus. The cards reproduced in this work are about the best now obtainable, and give a fair idea of the consummation of the Tarot tradition. Efforts have been made to interest large manufacturers of playing cards in issuing a Tarot deck uninfluenced by modern opinions. To the present time, however, the market has not been sufficient to justify the heavy initial expense.

It might be well to note that many celebrated decks of playing cards used in divination have no resemblance to the Tarot. Sometimes in reading about old cards the student is misled. There have been hundreds of different decks of fortunetelling cards, of which one of the most famous is that invented and used by the French seeress, Mlle. Le Normand. It would also be interesting to revive a few of the earliest card games. It is quite possible that these games might supply a clue to the more serious use of the symbolic pasteboards.