



The Pictorial Key to the Tarot

Arthur Edward Waite

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PREFACE

IT seems rather of necessity than predilection in the sense of *apologia* that I should put on record in the first place a plain statement of my personal position, as one who for many years of literary life has been, subject to his spiritual and other limitations, an exponent of the higher mystic schools. It will be thought that I am acting strangely in concerning myself at this day with what appears at first sight and simply a well-known method of fortune-telling. Now, the opinions of Mr. Smith, even in the literary reviews, are of no importance unless they happen to agree with our own, but in order to sanctify this doctrine we must take care that our opinions, and the subjects out of which they arise, are concerned only with the highest. Yet it is just this which may seem doubtful, in the present instance, not only to Mr. Smith, whom I respect within the proper measures of detachment, but to some of more real consequence, seeing that their dedications are mine. To these and to any I would say that after the most illuminated Frater Christian Rosy Cross had beheld the Chemical Marriage in the Secret Palace of Transmutation, his story breaks off abruptly, with an intimation that he expected next morning to be door-keeper. After the same manner, it happens more often than might seem likely that those who have seen the King of Heaven through the most clearest veils of the sacraments are those who assume thereafter the humblest offices of all about the House of God. By such simple devices also are the Adepts and Great Masters in the secret orders distinguished from the cohort of Neophytes as *servi servorum mysterii*. So also, or in a way which is not entirely unlike, we meet with the Tarot cards at the outermost gates--amidst the fritterings and débris of the so-called occult arts, about which no one in their senses has suffered the smallest deception; and yet these cards belong in themselves to another region, for they contain a very high symbolism, which is interpreted according to the Laws of Grace rather than by the pretexts and intuitions of that which passes for divination. The fact that the wisdom of God is foolishness with men does not create a presumption that the foolishness of this world makes in any sense for Divine Wisdom; so neither the scholars in the ordinary classes nor the pedagogues in the seats of the mighty will be quick to perceive the likelihood or even the possibility of this proposition. The subject has been in the hands of cartomancists as part of the stock-in-trade of their industry; I do not seek to persuade any one outside my own circles that this is of much or of no consequence; but on the historical and interpretative sides it has not fared better; it has been there in the hands of exponents who have brought it into utter contempt for those people who possess philosophical insight or faculties for the

appreciation of evidence. It is time that it should be rescued, and this I propose to undertake once and for all, that I may have done with the side issues which distract from the term. As poetry is the most beautiful expression of the things that are of all most beautiful, so is symbolism the most catholic expression in concealment of things that are most profound in the Sanctuary and that have not been declared outside it with the same fulness by means of the spoken word. The justification of the rule of silence is no part of my present concern, but I have put on record elsewhere, and quite recently, what it is possible to say on this subject.

The little treatise which follows is divided into three parts, in the first of which I have dealt with the antiquities of the subject and a few things that arise from and connect therewith.

It should be understood that it is not put forward as a contribution to the history of playing cards, about which I know and care nothing; it is a consideration dedicated and addressed to a certain school of occultism, more especially in France, as to the source and centre of all the phantasmagoria which has entered into expression during the last fifty years under the pretence of considering Tarot cards historically. In the second part, I have dealt with the symbolism according to some of its higher aspects, and this also serves to introduce the complete and rectified Tarot, which is available separately, in the form of coloured cards, the designs of which are added to the present text in black and white. They have been prepared under my supervision--in respect of the attributions and meanings--by a lady who has high claims as an artist. Regarding the divinatory part, by which my thesis is terminated, I consider it personally as a fact in the history of the Tarot--as such, I have drawn, from all published sources, a harmony of the meanings which have been attached to the various cards, and I have given prominence to one method of working that has not been published previously; having the merit of simplicity, while it is also of universal application, it may be held to replace the cumbrous and involved systems of the larger hand-books.

PART 1. THE VEIL AND ITS SYMBOLS

1: INTRODUCTORY AND GENERAL

THE pathology of the poet says that "the undevout astronomer is mad"; the pathology of the very plain man says that genius is mad; and between these extremes, which stand for ten thousand analogous excesses, the sovereign reason takes the part of a moderator and does what it can. I do not think that there is a pathology of the occult dedications, but about their extravagances no one can question, and it is not less difficult than thankless to act as a moderator regarding them. Moreover, the pathology, if it existed, would probably be an empiricism rather than a diagnosis, and would offer no criterion. Now, occultism is not like mystic faculty, and it very seldom works in harmony either with business aptitude in the things of ordinary life or with a knowledge of the canons of evidence in its own sphere. I know that for the high art of ribaldry there are few things more dull than the criticism which maintains that a thesis is untrue, and cannot understand that it is decorative. I know also that after long dealing with doubtful doctrine or with difficult research it is always refreshing, in the domain of this art, to meet with what is obviously of fraud or at least of complete unreason. But the aspects of history, as seen through the lens of occultism, are not as a rule decorative, and have few gifts of refreshment to heal the lacerations which they inflict on the logical understanding. It almost requires a *Frater Sapiens dominabitur astris* in the Fellowship of the Rosy Cross to have the patience which is not lost amidst clouds of folly when the consideration of the Tarot is undertaken in accordance with the higher law of symbolism. The true Tarot is symbolism; it speaks no other language and offers no other signs. Given the inward meaning of its emblems, they do become a kind of alphabet which is capable of indefinite combinations and makes true sense in all. On the highest plane it offers a key to the Mysteries, in a manner which is not arbitrary and has not been read in, But the wrong symbolical stories have been told concerning it, and the wrong history has been given in every published work which so far has dealt with the subject. It has been intimated by two or three writers that, at least in respect of the meanings, this is unavoidably the case, because few are acquainted with them, while these few hold by transmission under pledges and cannot betray their trust. The suggestion is fantastic on the surface for there seems a certain anti-climax in the proposition that a particular interpretation of fortune-telling--*l'art de tirer les cartes*--can be reserved for Sons of the Doctrine. The fact remains, notwithstanding, that a Secret Tradition exists regarding the Tarot, and as there is always the possibility that some minor arcana of the Mysteries may be made public with a flourish of trumpets, it will be as well to go before the event and to warn those who are curious in such matters that any revelation will

contain only a third part of the earth and sea and a third part of the stars of heaven in respect of the symbolism. This is for the simple reason that neither in root-matter nor in development has more been put into writing, so that much will remain to be said after any pretended unveiling. The guardians of certain temples of initiation who keep watch over mysteries of this order have therefore no cause for alarm.

In my preface to *The Tarot of the Bohemians*, which, rather by an accident of things, has recently come to be re-issued after a long period, I have said what was then possible or seemed most necessary. The present work is designed more especially--as I have intimated--to introduce a rectified set of the cards themselves and to tell the unadorned truth concerning them, so far as this is possible in the outer circles. As regards the sequence of greater symbols, their ultimate and highest meaning lies deeper than the common language of picture or hieroglyph. This will be understood by those who have received some part of the Secret Tradition. As regards the verbal meanings allocated here to the more important Trump Cards, they are designed to set aside the follies and impostures of past attributions, to put those who have the gift of insight on the right track, and to take care, within the limits of my possibilities, that they are the truth so far as they go.

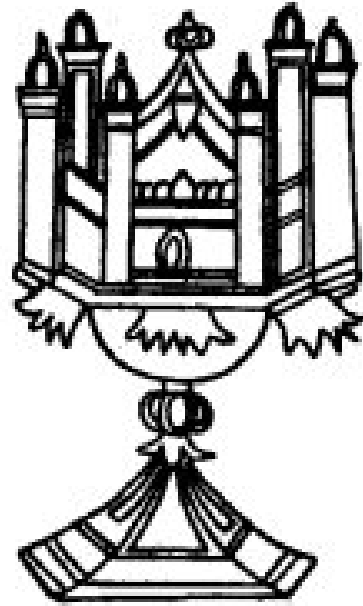
It is regrettable in several respects that I must confess to certain reservations, but there is a question of honour at issue. Furthermore, between the follies on the one side of those who know nothing of the tradition, yet are in their own opinion the exponents of something called occult science and philosophy, and on the other side between the make-believe of a few writers who have received part of the tradition and think that it constitutes a legal title to scatter dust in the eyes of the world without, I feel that the time has come to say what it is possible to say, so that the effect of current charlatanism and unintelligence may be reduced to a minimum.

We shall see in due course that the history of Tarot cards is largely of a negative kind, and that, when the issues are cleared by the dissipation of reveries and gratuitous speculations expressed in the terms of certitude, there is in fact no history prior to the fourteenth century. The deception and self-deception regarding their origin in Egypt, India or China put a lying spirit into the mouths of the first expositors, and the later occult writers have done little more than reproduce the first false testimony in the good faith of an intelligence unawakened to the issues of research.

As it so happens, all expositions have worked within a very narrow range, and owe, comparatively speaking, little to the inventive faculty. One brilliant opportunity has at least been missed, for it has not so far occurred to any one that the Tarot might perhaps have done duty and even originated as a secret symbolical language of the Albigensian sects. I commend this suggestion to the lineal descendants in the spirit of Gabriele Rossetti and Eugène Aroux, to Mr. Harold Bayley as another

New Light on the Renaissance, and as a taper at least in the darkness which, with great respect, might be serviceable to the zealous and all-searching mind of Mrs. Cooper-Oakley. Think only what the supposed testimony of watermarks on paper might gain from the Tarot card of the Pope or Hierophant, in connexion with the notion of a secret Albigensian patriarch, of which Mr. Bayley has found in these same watermarks so much material to his purpose. Think only for a moment about the card of the High Priestess as representing the Albigensian church itself; and think of the Tower struck by Lightning as typifying the desired destruction of Papal Rome, the city on the seven hills, with the pontiff and his temporal power cast down from the spiritual edifice when it is riven by the wrath of God. The possibilities are so numerous and persuasive that they almost deceive in their expression one of the elect who has invented them. But there is more even than this, though I scarcely dare to cite it. When the time came for the Tarot cards to be the subject of their first formal explanation, the archaeologist Court de Gebelin reproduced some of their most important emblems, and--if I may so term it--the codex which he used has served--by means of his engraved plates--as a basis of reference for many sets that have been issued subsequently. The figures are very primitive and differ as such from the cards of Etteilla, the Marseilles Tarot, and others still current in France. I am not a good judge in such matters, but the fact that every one of the Trumps Major might have answered for watermark purposes is shewn by the cases which I have quoted and by one most remarkable example of the Ace of Cups.

I should call it an eucharistic emblem after the manner of a ciborium, but this does not signify at the moment. The point is that Mr. Harold Bayley gives six analogous devices in his New Light on the Renaissance, being watermarks on paper of the seventeenth century, which he claims to be of Albigensian origin and to represent sacramental and Graal emblems.



Had he only heard of the Tarot, had he known that these cards of divination, cards of fortune, cards of all vagrant arts, were perhaps current at the period in the South of France, I think that his enchanting but all too fantastic hypothesis might have dilated still more largely in the atmosphere of his dream. We should no doubt have had a vision of Christian Gnosticism, Manichæanism, and all that he understands by pure primitive Gospel, shining behind the pictures.

I do not look through such glasses, and I can only commend the subject to his attention at a later period; it is mentioned here that I may introduce with an unheard-of wonder the marvels of arbitrary speculation as to the history of the cards.

With reference to their form and number, it should scarcely be necessary to enumerate them, for they must be almost commonly familiar, but as it is precarious to assume anything, and as there are also other reasons, I will tabulate them briefly as follows:--

2: CLASS I. THE TRUMPS MAJOR, OTHERWISE GREATER ARCANA

1. *The Magus, Magician, or juggler*, the caster of the dice and mountebank, in the world of vulgar trickery. This is the *colportage* interpretation, and it has the same correspondence with the real symbolical meaning that the use of the Tarot in fortune-telling has with its mystic construction according to the secret science of symbolism. I should add that many independent students of the subject, following their own lights, have produced individual sequences of meaning in respect of the Trumps Major, and their lights are sometimes suggestive, but they are not the true lights. For example, Éliphas Lévi says that the Magus signifies that unity which is the mother of numbers; others say that it is the Divine Unity; and one of the latest French commentators considers that in its general sense it is the will.
2. *The High Priestess, the Pope Joan, or Female Pontiff*; early expositors have sought to term this card the Mother, or Pope's Wife, which is opposed to the symbolism. It is sometimes held to represent the Divine Law and the Gnosis, in which case the Priestess corresponds to the idea of the Shekinah. She is the Secret Tradition and the higher sense of the instituted Mysteries.
3. *The Empress*, who is sometimes represented with full face, while her correspondence, the Emperor, is in profile. As there has been some tendency to ascribe a symbolical significance to this distinction, it seems desirable to say that it carries no inner meaning. The Empress has been connected with the ideas of universal fecundity and in a general sense with activity.
4. *The Emperor*, by imputation the spouse of the former. He is occasionally represented as wearing, in addition to his personal insignia, the stars or ribbons of some order of chivalry. I mention this to shew that the cards are a medley of old and new emblems. Those who insist upon the evidence of the one may deal, if they can, with the other. No effectual argument for the antiquity of a particular design can be drawn from the fact that it incorporates old material; but there is also none which can be based on sporadic novelties, the intervention of which may signify only the unintelligent hand of an editor or of a late draughtsman.
5. *The High Priest or Hierophant*, called also Spiritual Father, and more commonly and obviously the Pope. It seems even to have been named the Abbot, and then its correspondence, the High Priestess, was the Abbess or Mother of the Convent. Both are arbitrary names. The insignia of the figures are papal, and in such case the High Priestess is and can be only the Church, to whom Pope and priests are married by the spiritual

rite of ordination. I think, however, that in its primitive form this card did not represent the Roman Pontiff.

6. *The Lovers or Marriage*. This symbol has undergone many variations, as might be expected from its subject. In the eighteenth century form, by which it first became known to the world of archaeological research, it is really a card of married life, shewing father and mother, with their child placed between them; and the pagan Cupid above, in the act of flying his shaft, is, of course, a misapplied emblem. The Cupid is of love beginning rather than of love in its fulness, guarding the fruit thereof. The card is said to have been entitled *Simulacrum fidei*, the symbol of conjugal faith, for which the rainbow as a sign of the covenant would have been a more appropriate concomitant. The figures are also held to have signified Truth, Honour and Love, but I suspect that this was, so to speak, the gloss of a commentator moralizing. It has these, but it has other and higher aspects.

7. *The Chariot*. This is represented in some extant codices as being drawn by two sphinxes, and the device is in consonance with the symbolism, but it must not be supposed that such was its original form; the variation was invented to support a particular historical hypothesis. In the eighteenth century white horses were yoked to the car. As regards its usual name, the lesser stands for the greater; it is really the King in his triumph, typifying, however, the victory which creates kingship as its natural consequence and not the vested royalty of the fourth card. M. Court de Gebelin said that it was Osiris Triumphant, the conquering sun in spring-time having vanquished the obstacles of winter. We know now that Osiris rising from the dead is not represented by such obvious symbolism. Other animals than horses have also been used to draw the *currus triumphalis*, as, for example, a lion and a leopard.

8. *Fortitude*. This is one of the cardinal virtues, of which I shall speak later. The female figure is usually represented as closing the mouth of a lion. In the earlier form which is printed by Court de Gebelin, she is obviously opening it. The first alternative is better symbolically, but either is an instance of strength in its conventional understanding, and conveys the idea of mastery. It has been said that the figure represents organic force, moral force and the principle of all force.

9. *The Hermit*, as he is termed in common parlance, stands next on the list; he is also the Capuchin, and in more philosophical language the Sage. He is said to be in search of that Truth which is located far off in the sequence, and of justice which has preceded him on the way. But this is a card of attainment, as we shall see later, rather than a card of quest. It is said also that his lantern contains the Light of Occult Science and that his staff is a Magic Wand. These interpretations are comparable in every respect to the divinatory and fortune-telling meanings with which I shall have to deal in their turn. The diabolism of both is that they are true after their own manner, but that they miss all the high

things to which the Greater Arcana should be allocated. It is as if a man who knows in his heart that all roads lead to the heights, and that God is at the great height of all, should choose the way of perdition or the way of folly as the path of his own attainment. Éliphas Lévi has allocated this card to Prudence, but in so doing he has been actuated by the wish to fill a gap which would otherwise occur in the symbolism. The four cardinal virtues are necessary to an ideological sequence like the Trumps Major, but they must not be taken only in that first sense which exists for the use and consolation of him who in these days of halfpenny journalism is called the man in the street. In their proper understanding they are the correlatives of the counsels of perfection when these have been similarly re-expressed, and they read as follows: (a) Transcendental justice, the counter-equilibrium of the scales, when they have been overweighted so that they dip heavily on the side of God. The corresponding counsel is to use loaded dice when you play for high stakes with *Diabolus*. The axiom is *Aut Deus, aut nihil*. (b) Divine Ecstasy, as a counterpoise to something called Temperance, the sign of which is, I believe, the extinction of lights in the tavern. The corresponding counsel is to drink only of new wine in the Kingdom of the Father, because God is all in all. The axiom is that man being a reasonable being must get intoxicated with God; the imputed case in point is Spinoza. (c) The state of Royal Fortitude, which is the state of a Tower of Ivory and a House of Gold, but it is God and not the man who has become *Turris fortitudinis a facie inimici*, and out of that House the enemy has been cast. The corresponding counsel is that a man must not spare himself even in the presence of death, but he must be certain that his sacrifice shall be of any open course—the best that will ensure his end. The axiom is that the strength which is raised to such a degree that a man dares lose himself shall shew him how God is found, and as to such refuge—dare therefore and learn. (d) Prudence is the economy which follows the line of least resistance, that the soul may get back whence it came. It is a doctrine of divine parsimony and conservation of energy, because of the stress, the terror and the manifest impertinences of this life. The corresponding counsel is that true prudence is concerned with the one thing needful, and the axiom is: Waste not, want not. The conclusion of the whole matter is a business proposition founded on the law of exchange: You cannot help getting what you seek in respect of the things that are Divine: it is the law of supply and demand. I have mentioned these few matters at this point for two simple reasons: (a) because in proportion to the impartiality of the mind it seems sometimes more difficult to determine whether it is vice or vulgarity which lays waste the present world more piteously; (b) because in order to remedy the imperfections of the old notions it is highly needful, on occasion, to empty terms and phrases of their accepted significance, that they may receive a new and more adequate meaning.

10. *The Wheel of Fortune*. There is a current *Manual of Cartomancy* which has obtained a considerable vogue in England, and amidst a great scattermeal of curious things to no purpose has intersected a few serious subjects. In its last and largest edition it treats in one section of the Tarot; which--if I interpret the author rightly--it regards from beginning to end as the Wheel of Fortune, this expression being understood in my own sense. I have no objection to such an inclusive though conventional description; it obtains in all the worlds, and I wonder that it has not been adopted previously as the most appropriate name on the side of common fortune-telling. It is also the title of one of the Trumps Major--that indeed of our concern at the moment, as my sub-title shews. Of recent years this has suffered many fantastic presentations and one hypothetical reconstruction which is suggestive in its symbolism. The wheel has seven radii; in the eighteenth century the ascending and descending animals were really of nondescript character, one of them having a human head. At the summit was another monster with the body of an indeterminate beast, wings on shoulders and a crown on head. It carried two wands in its claws. These are replaced in the reconstruction by a Hermanubis rising with the wheel, a Sphinx couchant at the summit and a Typhon on the descending side. Here is another instance of an invention in support of a hypothesis; but if the latter be set aside the grouping is symbolically correct and can pass as such.

11. *Justice*. That the Tarot, though it is of all reasonable antiquity, is not of time immemorial, is shewn by this card, which could have been presented in a much more archaic manner. Those, however, who have gifts of discernment in matters of this kind will not need to be told that age is in no sense of the essence of the consideration; the Rite of Closing the Lodge in the Third Craft Grade of Masonry may belong to the late eighteenth century, but the fact signifies nothing; it is still the summary of all the instituted and official Mysteries. The female figure of the eleventh card is said to be Astræa, who personified the same virtue and is represented by the same symbols. This goddess notwithstanding, and notwithstanding the vulgarian Cupid, the Tarot is not of Roman mythology, or of Greek either. Its presentation of justice is supposed to be one of the four cardinal virtues included in the sequence of Greater Arcana; but, as it so happens, the fourth emblem is wanting, and it became necessary for the commentators to discover it at all costs. They did what it was possible to do, and yet the laws of research have never succeeded in extricating the missing Persephone under the form of Prudence. Court de Gebelin attempted to solve the difficulty by a tour de force, and believed that he had extracted what he wanted from the symbol of the Hanged Man--wherein he deceived himself. The Tarot has, therefore, its justice, its Temperance also and its Fortitude, but--owing to a curious omission--it does not offer us any type of Prudence, though

it may be admitted that, in some respects, the isolation of the Hermit, pursuing a solitary path by the light of his own lamp, gives, to those who can receive it, a certain high counsel in respect of the *via prudentiæ*.

12. *The Hanged Man*. This is the symbol which is supposed to represent Prudence, and Éliphas Lévi says, in his most shallow and plausible manner, that it is the adept bound by his engagements. The figure of a man is suspended head-downwards from a gibbet, to which he is attached by a rope about one of his ankles. The arms are bound behind him, and one leg is crossed over the other. According to another, and indeed the prevailing interpretation, he signifies sacrifice, but all current meanings attributed to this card are cartomancists' intuitions, apart from any real value on the symbolical side. The fortune-tellers of the eighteenth century who circulated Tarots, depict a semi-feminine youth in jerkin, poised erect on one foot and loosely attached to a short stake driven into the ground.

13. *Death*. The method of presentation is almost invariable, and embodies a bourgeois form of symbolism. The scene is the field of life, and amidst ordinary rank vegetation there are living arms and heads protruding from the ground. One of the heads is crowned, and a skeleton with a great scythe is in the act of mowing it. The transparent and unescapable meaning is death, but the alternatives allocated to the symbol are change and transformation. Other heads have been swept from their place previously, but it is, in its current and patent meaning, more especially a card of the death of Kings. In the exotic sense it has been said to signify the ascent of the spirit in the divine spheres, creation and destruction, perpetual movement, and so forth.

14. *Temperance*. The winged figure of a female--who, in opposition to all doctrine concerning the hierarchy of angels, is usually allocated to this order of ministering spirits--is pouring liquid from one pitcher to another. In his last work on the Tarot, Dr. Papus abandons the traditional form and depicts a woman wearing an Egyptian head-dress. The first thing which seems clear on the surface is that the entire symbol has no especial connexion with Temperance, and the fact that this designation has always obtained for the card offers a very obvious instance of a meaning behind meaning, which is the title in chief to consideration in respect of the Tarot as a whole.

15. *The Devil*. In the eighteenth century this card seems to have been rather a symbol of merely animal impudicity. Except for a fantastic head-dress, the chief figure is entirely naked; it has bat-like wings, and the hands and feet are represented by the claws of a bird. In the right hand there is a sceptre terminating in a sign which has been thought to represent fire. The figure as a whole is not particularly evil; it has no tail, and the commentators who have said that the claws are those of a harpy have spoken at random. There is no better ground for the alternative suggestion that they are eagle's claws. Attached, by a cord

depending from their collars, to the pedestal on which the figure is mounted, are two small demons, presumably male and female. These are tailed, but not winged. Since 1856 the influence of Éliphas Lévi and his doctrine of occultism has changed the face of this card, and it now appears as a pseudo-Baphometric figure with the head of a goat and a great torch between the horns; it is seated instead of erect, and in place of the generative organs there is the Hermetic caduceus. In *Le Tarot Divinatoire* of Papus the small demons are replaced by naked human beings, male and female ' who are yoked only to each other. The author may be felicitated on this improved symbolism.

16. *The Tower struck by Lightning*. Its alternative titles are: Castle of Plutus, God's House and the Tower of Babel. In the last case, the figures falling therefrom are held to be Nimrod and his minister. It is assuredly a card of confusion, and the design corresponds, broadly speaking, to any of the designations except *Maison Dieu*, unless we are to understand that the House of God has been abandoned and the veil of the temple rent. It is a little surprising that the device has not so far been allocated to the destruction Of Solomon's Temple, when the lightning would symbolize the fire and sword with which that edifice was visited by the King of the Chaldees.

17. *The Star*, Dog-Star, or Sirius, also called fantastically the Star of the Magi. Grouped about it are seven minor luminaries, and beneath it is a naked female figure, with her left knee upon the earth and her right foot upon the water. She is in the act of pouring fluids from two vessels. A bird is perched on a tree near her; for this a butterfly on a rose has been substituted in some later cards. So also the Star has been called that of Hope. This is one of the cards which Court de Gebelin describes as wholly Egyptian-that is to say, in his own reverie.

18. *The Moon*. Some eighteenth-century cards shew the luminary on its waning side; in the debased edition of Etteilla, it is the moon at night in her plenitude, set in a heaven of stars; of recent years the moon is shewn on the side of her increase. In nearly all presentations she is shining brightly and shedding the moisture of fertilizing dew in great drops. Beneath there are two towers, between which a path winds to the verge of the horizon. Two dogs, or alternatively a wolf and dog, are baying at the moon, and in the foreground there is water, through which a crayfish moves towards the land.

19. *The Sun*. The luminary is distinguished in older cards by chief rays that are waved and salient alternately and by secondary salient rays. It appears to shed its influence on earth not only by light and heat, but--like the moon--by drops of dew. Court de Gebelin termed these tears of gold and of pearl, just as he identified the lunar dew with the tears of Isis. Beneath the dog-star there is a wall suggesting an enclosure-as it might be, a walled garden-wherein are two children, either naked or lightly clothed, facing a water, and gambolling, or running hand in

hand. Éliphas Lévi says that these are sometimes replaced by a spinner unwinding destinies, and otherwise by a much better symbol—a naked child mounted on a white horse and displaying a scarlet standard.

20. *The Last judgment*. I have spoken of this symbol already, the form of which is essentially invariable, even in the Etteilla set. An angel sounds his trumpet *per sepulchra regionum*, and the dead arise. It matters little that Etteilla omits the angel, or that Dr. Papus substitutes a ridiculous figure, which is, however, in consonance with the general motive of that Tarot set which accompanies his latest work. Before rejecting the transparent interpretation of the symbolism which is conveyed by the name of the card and by the picture which it presents to the eye, we should feel very sure of our ground. On the surface, at least, it is and can be only the resurrection of that triad—father, mother, child—whom we have met with already in the eighth card. M. Bourgeat hazards the suggestion that esoterically it is the symbol of evolution—of which it carries none of the signs. Others say that it signifies renewal, which is obvious enough; that it is the triad of human life; that it is the "generative force of the earth... and eternal life." Court de Gebelin makes himself impossible as usual, and points out that if the grave-stones were removed it could be accepted as a symbol of creation.

21—which, however, in most of the arrangements is the cipher card, number nothing—*The Fool, Mate, or Unwise Man*. Court de Gebelin places it at the head of the whole series as the zero or negative which is presupposed by numeration, and as this is a simpler so also it is a better arrangement. It has been abandoned because in later times the cards have been attributed to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and there has been apparently some difficulty about allocating the zero symbol satisfactorily in a sequence of letters all of which signify numbers. In the present reference of the card to the letter Shin, which corresponds to 200, the difficulty or the unreason remains. The truth is that the real arrangement of the cards has never transpired. The Fool carries a wallet; he is looking over his shoulder and does not know that he is on the brink of a precipice; but a dog or other animal—some call it a tiger—is attacking him from behind, and he is hurried to his destruction unawares. Etteilla has given a justifiable variation of this card—as generally understood—in the form of a court jester, with cap, bells and motley garb. The other descriptions say that the wallet contains the bearer's follies and vices, which seems bourgeois and arbitrary.

22. *The World, the Universe, or Time*. The four living creatures of the Apocalypse and Ezekiel's vision, attributed to the evangelists in Christian symbolism, are grouped about an elliptic garland, as if it were a chain of flowers intended to symbolize all sensible things; within this garland there is the figure of a woman, whom the wind has girt about the loins with a light scarf, and this is all her vesture. She is in the act of dancing, and has a wand in either hand. It is eloquent as an image of the

swirl of the sensitive life, of joy attained in the body, of the soul's intoxication in the earthly paradise, but still guarded by the Divine Watchers, as if by the powers and the graces of the Holy Name, Tetragammaton, JHVH--those four ineffable letters which are sometimes attributed to the mystical beasts. Éliphas Lévi calls the garland a crown, and reports that the figure represents Truth. Dr. Papus connects it with the Absolute and the realization of the Great Work; for yet others it is a symbol of humanity and the eternal reward of a life that has been spent well. It should be noted that in the four quarters of the garland there are four flowers distinctively marked. According to P. Christian, the garland should be formed of roses, and this is the kind of chain which Éliphas Lévi says is less easily broken than a chain of iron. Perhaps by antithesis, but for the same reason, the iron crown of Peter may be more lightly on the heads of sovereign pontiffs than the crown of gold on kings.

3: CLASS II. THE FOUR SUITS, OTHERWISE LESSER ARCANA

The resources of interpretation have been lavished, if not exhausted, on the twenty-two Trumps Major, the symbolism of which is unquestionable. There remain the four suits, being Wands or Sceptres--*ex hypothesi*, in the archæology of the subject, the antecedents of Diamonds in modern cards: Cups, corresponding to Hearts; Swords, which answer to Clubs, as the weapon of chivalry is in relation to the peasant's quarter-staff or the Alsatian bludgeon; and, finally, Pentacles--called also Deniers and Money--which are the prototypes of Spades. In the old as in the new suits, there are ten numbered cards, but in the Tarot there are four Court Cards allocated to each suit, or a Knight in addition to King, Queen and Knave. The Knave is a page, valet, *ordamoiseau*; most correctly, he is an esquire, presumably in the service of the Knight; but there are certain rare sets in which the page becomes a maid of honour, thus pairing the sexes in the tetrad of the court cards. There are naturally distinctive features in respect of the several pictures, by which I mean that the King of Wands is not exactly the same personage as the King of Cups, even after allowance has been made for the different emblems that they bear; but the symbolism resides in their rank and in the suit to which they belong. So also the smaller cards, which--until now--have never been issued pictorially in these our modern days, depend on the particular meaning attaching to their numbers in connexion with the particular suit. I reserve, therefore, the details of the Lesser Arcana, till I come to speak in the second part of the rectified and perfected Tarot which accompanies this work. The consensus of divinatory meanings attached both to the greater and lesser symbols belongs to the third part.

4: THE TAROT IN HISTORY

Our immediate next concern is to speak of the cards in their history, so that the speculations and reveries which have been perpetuated and multiplied in the schools of occult research may be disposed of once and for all, as intimated in the preface hereto.

Let it be understood at the beginning of this point that there are several sets or sequences of ancient cards which are only in part of our concern. The Tarot of the Bohemians, by Papus, which I have recently carried through the press, revising the imperfect rendering, has some useful information in this connexion, and, except for the omission of dates and other evidences of the archaeological sense, it will serve the purpose of the general reader. I do not propose to extend it in the present place in any manner that can be called considerable, but certain additions are desirable and so also is a distinct mode of presentation.

Among ancient cards which are mentioned in connexion with the Tarot, there are firstly those of Baldini, which are the celebrated set attributed by tradition to Andrea Mantegna, though this view is now generally rejected. Their date is supposed to be about 1470, and it is thought that there are not more than four collections extant in Europe. A copy or reproduction referred to 1485 is perhaps equally rare. A complete set contains fifty numbers, divided into five denaries or sequences of ten cards each. There seems to be no record that they were used for the purposes of a game, whether of chance or skill; they could scarcely have lent themselves to divination or any form of fortune-telling; while it would be more than idle to impute a profound symbolical meaning to their obvious emblematic designs. The first denary embodies Conditions of Life, as follows: (1) The Beggar, (2) the Knave, (3) the Artisan, (4) the Merchant, (5) the Noble, (6) the Knight, (7) the Doge, (8) the King, (9) the Emperor, (10) the Pope. The second contains the Muses and their Divine Leader: (11) Calliope, (12) Urania, (13) Terpsichore, (14) Erato, (15) Polyhymnia, (16) Thalia, (17) Melpomene, (18) Euterpe, (19) Clio, (20) Apollo. The third combines part of the Liberal Arts and Sciences with other departments of human learning, as follows: (21) Grammar, (22) Logic, (23) Rhetoric, (24) Geometry, (25) Arithmetic, (26) Music, (27) Poetry, (28) Philosophy, (29) Astrology, (30) Theology. The fourth denary completes the Liberal Arts and enumerates the Virtues: (31) Astronomy, (32) Chronology, (33) Cosmology, (34) Temperance, (35) Prudence, (36) Strength, (37) Justice; (38) Charity, (39) Hope, (40) Faith. The fifth and last denary presents the System of the Heavens (41) Moon, (42) Mercury, (43) Venus, (44) Sun, (45) Mars, (46) Jupiter, (47) Saturn, (48) A Eighth Sphere, (49) *Primum Mobile*, (50) First Cause.

We must set aside the fantastic attempts to extract complete Tarot sequences out of these denaries; we must forbear from saying, for

example, that the Conditions of Life correspond to the Trumps Major, the Muses to Pentacles, the Arts and Sciences to Cups, the Virtues, etc., to Sceptres, and the conditions of life to Swords. This kind of thing can be done by a process of mental contortion, but it has no place in reality. At the same time, it is hardly possible that individual cards should not exhibit certain, and even striking, analogies. The Baldini King, Knight and Knave suggest the corresponding court cards of the Minor Arcana. The Emperor, Pope, Temperance, Strength, justice, Moon and Sun are common to the Mantegna and Trumps Major of any Tarot pack. Predisposition has also connected the Beggar and Fool, Venus and the Star, Mars and the Chariot, Saturn and the Hermit, even Jupiter, or alternatively the First Cause, with the Tarot card of the World.[1] But the most salient features of the Trumps Major are wanting in the Mantegna set, and I do not believe that the ordered sequence in the latter case gave birth, as it has been suggested, to the others. Romain Merlin maintained this view, and positively assigned the Baldini cards to the end of the fourteenth century.

If it be agreed that, except accidentally and

[1. The beggar is practically naked, and the analogy is constituted by the presence of two dogs, one of which seems to be flying at his legs. The Mars card depicts a sword-bearing warrior in a canopied chariot, to which, however, no horses are attached. Of course, if the Baldini cards belong to the close of the fifteenth century, there is no question at issue, as the Tarot was known in Europe long before that period.]

sporadically, the Baldini emblematic or allegorical pictures have only a shadowy and occasional connexion with Tarot cards, and, whatever their most probable date, that they can have supplied no originating motive, it follows that we are still seeking not only an origin in place and time for the symbols with which we are concerned, but a specific case of their manifestation on the continent of Europe to serve as a point of departure, whether backward or forward. Now it is well known that in the year 1393 the painter Charles Gringonneur--who for no reason that I can trace has been termed an occultist and kabalist by one indifferent English writer--designed and illuminated some kind of cards for the diversion of Charles VI of France when he was in mental ill-health, and the question arises whether anything can be ascertained of their nature. The only available answer is that at Paris, in the Bibliothèque du Roi, there are seventeen cards drawn and illuminated on paper. They are very beautiful, antique and priceless; the figures have a background of gold, and are framed in a silver border; but they are accompanied by no inscription and no number.

It is certain, however, that they include Tarot Trumps Major, the list of which is as follows: Fool, Emperor, Pope, Lovers, Wheel of Fortune, Temperance, Fortitude, justice, Moon, Sun, Chariot, Hermit, Hanged Man, Death, Tower and Last judgment. There are also four Tarot Cards

at the Musée Carrer, Venice, and five others elsewhere, making nine in all. They include two pages or Knaves, three Kings and two Queens, thus illustrating the Minor Arcana. These collections have all been identified with the set produced by Gringonneur, but the ascription was disputed so far back as the year 1848, and it is not apparently put forward at the present day, even by those who are anxious to make evident the antiquity of the Tarot. It is held that they are all of Italian and some at least certainly of Venetian origin. We have in this manner our requisite point of departure in respect of place at least. It has further been stated with authority that Venetian Tarots are the old and true form, which is the parent of all others; but I infer that complete sets of the Major and Minor Arcana belong to much later periods. The pack is thought to have consisted of seventy-eight cards.

Notwithstanding, however, the preference shewn towards the Venetian Tarot, it is acknowledged that some portions of a Minchiate or Florentine set must be allocated to the period between 1413 and 1418. These were once in the possession of Countess Gonzaga, at Milan. A complete Minchiate pack contained ninety-seven cards, and in spite of these vestiges it is regarded, speaking generally, as a later development. There were forty-one Trumps Major, the additional numbers being borrowed or reflected from the Baldini emblematic set. In the court cards of the Minor Arcana, the Knights were monsters of the centaur type, while the Knaves were sometimes warriors and sometimes serving-men. Another distinction dwelt upon is the prevalence of Christian mediæval ideas and the utter absence of any Oriental suggestion. The question, however, remains whether there are Eastern traces in any Tarot cards.

We come, in fine, to the Bolognese Tarot, sometimes referred to as that of Venice and having the Trumps Major complete, but numbers 20 and 21 are transposed. In the Minor Arcana the 2, 3, 4 and 5 of the small cards are omitted, with the result that there are sixty-two cards in all. The termination of the Trumps Major in the representation of the Last judgment is curious, and a little arresting as a point of symbolism; but this is all that it seems necessary to remark about the pack of Bologna, except that it is said to have been invented--or, as a Tarot, more correctly, modified--about the beginning of the fifteenth century by an exiled Prince of Pisa resident in the city. The purpose for which they were used is made tolerably evident by the fact that, in 1423, St. Bernardin of Sienna preached against playing cards and other forms of gambling. Forty years later the importation of cards into England was forbidden, the time being that of King Edward IV. This is the first certain record of the subject in our country.

It is difficult to consult perfect examples of the sets enumerated above, but it is not difficult to meet with detailed and illustrated descriptions--I should add, provided always that the writer is not an occultist, for

accounts emanating from that source are usually imperfect, vague and preoccupied by considerations which cloud the critical issues. An instance in point is offered by certain views which have been expressed on the Mantegna codex--if I may continue to dignify card sequences with a title of this kind. It has been ruled--as we have seen--in occult reverie that Apollo and the Nine Muses are in correspondence with Pentacles, but the analogy does not obtain in a working state of research; and reverie must border on nightmare before we can identify Astronomy, Chronology and Cosmology with the suit of Cups. The Baldini figures which represent these subjects are emblems of their period and not symbols, like the Tarot.

In conclusion as to this part, I observe that there has been a disposition among experts to think that the Trumps Major were not originally connected with the numbered suits. I do not wish to offer a personal view; I am not an expert in the history of games of chance, and I hate the *profanum vulgus* of divinatory devices; but I venture, under all reserves, to intimate that if later research should justify such a leaning, then--except for the good old art of fortune-telling and its tamperings with so-called destiny--it will be so much the better for the Greater Arcana.

So far as regards what is indispensable as preliminaries to the historical aspects of Tarot cards, and I will now take up the speculative side of the subject and produce its tests of value. In my preface to *The Tarot of the Bohemians* I have mentioned that the first writer who made known the fact of the cards was the archaeologist Court de Gebelin, who, just prior to the French Revolution, occupied several years in the publication of his *Monde Primitif*, which extended to nine quarto volumes. He was a learned man of his epoch, a high-grade Mason, a member of the historical Lodge of the Philalethes, and a *virtuoso* with a profound and lifelong interest in the debate on universal antiquities before a science of the subject existed. Even at this day, his memorials and dissertations, collected under the title which I have quoted, are worth possessing. By an accident of things, he became acquainted with the Tarot when it was quite unknown in Paris, and at once conceived that it was the remnants of an Egyptian book. He made inquiries concerning it and ascertained that it was in circulation over a considerable part of Europe--Spain, Italy, Germany and the South of France. It was in use as a game of chance or skill, after the ordinary manner of playing-cards; and he ascertained further how the game was played. But it was in use also for the higher purpose of divination or fortune-telling, and with the help of a learned friend he discovered the significance attributed to the cards, together with the method of arrangement adopted for this purpose. In a word, he made a distinct contribution to our knowledge, and he is still a source of reference--but it is on the question of fact only, and not on the beloved hypothesis that the Tarot contains pure Egyptian doctrine.