

# THE BEGINNING OF CARD GAMES

By North Overton Messenger



TUCHIM  
AN EARLY KNAVE.

CIVILIZED mankind has been playing cards since the year 1200, or thereabouts, and it is probable that the prototypes of the fascinating pasteboards had held their sway over the minds and fortunes of men, among those whom we are pleased to term the benighted people of the dim ages, for as many years before. In all climes, and through all the periods that furnish a record of card playing, their fascination seems to have been paramount. Cards were brought into Europe by the witches, the soothsayers and the mysterious people suspected of being in league with the evil one, and it does not take a great stretch of the imagination to conjure the idea that the cards, too, were possessed of the spell, and wrought the influence of their first masters upon all who subsequently came within the range of their potency. For what whist player will deny the influence akin to witchery, of the cards upon him, even in this day and generation, when it is no longer necessary to burn witches? What poker player will not admit the devilish attraction of two kings that imperatively command him to draw for a third; or the siren appeal of the queen who clamors for a sister to keep company with the two knaves, already in hand?

It would be no exaggeration to say that cards have been the standard form of amusement for all classes for nearly eight hundred years. There have been high-water periods in the era, when card playing reached the extent of a craze, but there has been no low water mark.

It is interesting to follow the development of card playing from its inception in

the fortune telling stage, through the gambling era beginning around the soldiers' campfire and extending into the palaces of kings and the homes of fashion; so on to the family circle where it begins to take an intellectual form requiring skill and science; and the relegation of the hazard to the club room and the substitution of small stakes for the large sums won and lost in the old times. In all these ramifications covering so many years, the variety of the games varies but little. There is improvement in method, the cultivation of the mind as education progresses, demanding amusements consonant with improved standards. Whist goes through evolution until it appears in the product of the day, still capable of apparently illimitable thought and study. The game of the gambler evolves into the American poker, combining the highest form of commingled chance, character study, perception, inference and self control.

When the antiquaries, whose researches cumber the shelves of the British Museum and the Library of Congress, agree upon the origin of cards, it will be well to go into that subject. They go back, hand in hand, over a beaten track for 700 or 800 years, through England, Germany, France, Spain and Italy. Then they separate. One describes the trail leading across the Caucasus, the route traveled by early man as he came down from the Asiatic plateau. Another sees it plainly in Africa, back over the same road which the invading Moors took into Spain. Another loses it, to pick it up in China, or Egypt, with uncounted centuries intervening. There is no biblical reference to card playing, but there is little doubt that the prodigal son wasted a part of his substance in draw poker, or something like it, if cards existed in his day.

Records of card playing begin to appear in Europe about the year 1300. The cards in use in the preceding century were in the hands of the wandering gypsies who came across the mountains of southern Europe,

from whence no one knew. These cards were known as tarots, and were used for fortune telling, as shown by their symbols. Tarot cards signified the "Royal Road of Life." Thus there are found on their faces symbols or the emperor, the pope, knights, clowns, jugglers; emblems of justice, temperance, fortitude, the world, the stars, and the devil. Gradually the symbols are changed. The old Moorish packs contained thirty-six cards and had a king, a knight, a prince and the common soldiers. When card playing worked its way north, the gallant Frenchman, recognizing woman's potency in high affairs, added the queen. The imaginative sons of Provence gave the knave its first distinctive character. It was called "Tuchim," after a most precious bandit who ravaged the country side, and was a knave in very truth. Card playing received its first recognition in the law when John I., of Castile, prohibited it by royal mandate. It had gained such a foothold that it was the absorbing pastime with all, from the field marshal of the royal troops to the scullions in the royal kitchens.

were pique, point, of a lance, for the nobles; cœur, hearts, sounding like chœur or choir, for the clergy; the trefoil for the husbandman and carreau, the head of an arrow for vassals. In Germany there were bells, hearts and acorns. Finally these symbols and the words describing them evolve through different stages into the hearts, clubs, diamonds and spades of to-day, the simple suits in the train of the present king, queen and "Tuchim," the knave.

As the cards and suits begin to take formative shape, the records of the games commence. All the games of early days were of military origin, bespoken by their titles and method of playing. They were birthed around the campaigners' camp fire, and reflected the ideas and practices which mar begets. Piquet and lansquenet, both martial in character, were among the earliest games and long were favorites. When card playing extended into the walks of civil life and after it reached England, there were numerous modifications of these games to suit the tastes of the different



NOBILITY.



CLERGY.



CITIZENS.



PEASANTRY.

EARLY ITALIAN CARDS.

It, would be a dizzy dance to follow the changing character of the cards; the evolution of the spots and the face cards. In the beginning the spots were symbolical of the walks of life. In Italy they were spade, or swords, typifying the nobility; cappe, chalices or cups, the clergy; denari, money, or the citizens; and bastoni, or clubs, the peasantry. In France they

classes that took them up, from the drawing-room to the servants' hall.

The perihelion of card playing, for money, was reached in the days of the French Louis's. It was the court amusement and was carried on with the luxurious extravagance that marked the age. The nobles of the court emulated the lavish customs of the royal households. Entire

suites of rooms were furnished for the card players. The walls and ceilings were decorated with designs suggestive of the game and its features; triumph, loss, and despair were depicted. The tables in the card rooms of Louis XIV. were made for the purpose, and were covered with green cloth embroidered with gilt. The green cloth is to-day, the wide world over, the gambler's color. In the houses of rich men the card tables, of curious shape, were often inlaid with rare woods or mother-of-pearl. Some packs of cards were printed on satin, others painted by the most popular artists of the period. Jacquemin Gringonneur was a famous card painter and charged Charles VI. of France "cinqant-six sols, Parisis" for painting three packs of cards. In the heyday of card playing in France it was popular to give balls at which the dancers were attired to represent the cards. At the court the stakes were high and disputes were frequent, resulting in duels. A distinct etiquette and code of honor was instituted for gaming, which has survived in spirit. To this day, among gentlemen, the man who cheats at cards becomes a social outlaw. In pioneer regions, death, quick and inevitable, is the portion of the trickster.

Naturally the amusements in vogue in Paris soon crossed the channel and were taken up by fashionable England. The solid Britisher fell as easy prey to the witchery of the gay pasteboards as the mercurial Frenchman, adapting the game to his temperament. Where else than England could one expect so ponderous a game as whist to originate?

Ombre was for some time a favorite game in England. Pope's description of ombre in "The Rape of the Lock" will keep its terms alive should Hoyle be forgotten. It originated in Spain, where it was known as *Il Hombre*, "The Man," and probably commended itself to Englishmen on account of the deep thought and attention required to play it. Primero was also popular in Britain during the reign of Henry VIII., Edward VI., Mary, Elizabeth and James I. Quadrille succeeded ombre and was followed by whist, at first called "whisk." Much gray matter has been wasted in efforts to trace the origin of the name. One researcher gives up the quest and falls back upon the supposition that it must have come from the

exclamation "Whist!" denoting silence which is well known to be an essential feature of successful play. Whist was common in England as early as 1680, and in 1730 was given the stamp of fashion by a select circle of gentlemen who gathered to play in the Crown Coffee House, Bedford Row, London. In 1737, Hoyle's treatise on whist was printed and the game was recognized as a scientific form of pastime.

Card playing in England had quite as pronounced a run as in France. Bath was the center of gambling in the days of Beau Nash. The Earl of Chesterfield was the most notable gamester who frequented Bath and he was thoroughly fleeced by one Lookup, a gambler, who with his winnings built "Chesterfield Row." Card making grew to be an extensive industry in England, although the first attempts were crude enough, as witnessed by some stenciled cards, now preserved in the British Museum. In the reign of Edward IV., however, "The worshipful company of playing card makers," as the guild of London was then and is still called, was powerful enough to induce that monarch to prohibit the importation of French playing cards in competition with the homemade product.

In Germany card playing had gained great headway by the year 1400 and the burgher books of the fifteenth century contain municipal prohibition of card playing. It is recounted that in 1452 a Franciscan friar preached in Nuremburg against gaming with the result that the penitent populace burned in the market place great quantities of playing cards, along with other so-called devices of the devil. The oldest German game was *landsknecht*, which means foot soldier. It was taken up by the French who called it *lansquenet*.

Card playing is essentially a social game in America, the gambling feature being subordinated. A separate chapter could be made of the growth and extent of whist in this country. To-day it is undoubtedly the most notable game; periodicals are published in its behalf, many newspapers make it a feature in their columns, and whole factories are devoted to turning out whist appliances.

There is no evidence that in this, the beginning of the ninth century of card playing, there is any diminution of the witchery exercised by the entrancing bits of pasteboard.