

WHAT'S on the cards? A question common enough when the actual knowledge of

the moment does not afford a positive answer; a question, too, which has an origin taking us back to the earliest use of playing cards. But to how many of those to whom playing cards as a means of recreation are familiar is it known what *may* be found on the cards? Yet upon these "bits of painted cardboard" there has been expended a greater amount of ingenuity and of artistic effort than is to be found in any other form of popular amusement. Pope's charming epic, "The Rape of the Lock," gives us, in poetic form, a description of the faces of the cards as known to him and to the card-players of his time:—

"Behold four kings in majesty revered,
With hoary whiskers and a forky beard;
And four fair queens, whose hands sustain a flower,
Th' expressive emblem of their softer pow'r;
Four knaves in garbs succinct, a trusty band,
Caps on their heads and halberds in their hand."

It is not our purpose to historically trace the evolution of cards—this is a subject beyond the reach of the present article—but a look farther afield will give us evidence that during the last three centuries there has been a constant adaptation of cards to purposes which take them beyond their intention as the instruments for card playing only. The idea that playing cards had their origin in the later years of Charles VI. of France may be disposed of at once as a popular error, though it is true that the earliest



FIG. 1.

authentic examples which still exist are parts of the two packs of cards which were produced for the amusement of that King, by the hands of Jacques Gringonneur, and of which seventeen are preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale of Paris.

These are the most early forms of playing cards, and are known as "Tarots" (as distinguished from "Numerals," or cards which have the consecutively marked "suit" signs), and which had evidently a purpose outside the ordinary games of playing cards as known to us. The "Tarot" pack consists variously of seventy-two, seventy-seven, or seventy-eight cards, including the "Tarots," which give them their distinctive name. "Tarot" as a game was familiar three centuries ago in England, but is so no longer, although it has a limited use in other parts of Europe still. One of the "Tarot" cards, of the Bibliothèque Nationale, "La Mort," is shown as the first of our illustrations (Fig. 1).



FIG. 2.

Familiar to those who are conversant with the literature of playing cards will be the Knave of Clubs, shown in Fig. 2, which is one of the fragments of a pack of cards found, in 1841, by Mr. Chatto, in the waste-



ZINTILOMO V.

FIG. 3.

paper used to form the pasteboard covers of a book. These cards are printed in outline from wood blocks and the colour filled in by stencilling, a method employed in the manufacture of cards down to a very few years ago. The date of these cards may safely be taken as not more recent than 1450, and they are most interesting as being coeval with, if not antecedent to, the most early form of printed book illustration as shown in the "Biblia Pauperum."* The archaic drawing of the features, with its disregard of facial perspective, and the wondrous cervical anatomy, do not lessen our admiration of the vigour and "go" shown in this early example of the art of the designer and wood engraver.

* A "block book," with its illustrations and text cut on a wood block, and which is regarded as the immediate precursor of the type-printed book.



FIG. 4.

It is in interesting relation to the knaves of a pack of cards to note the curious conservatism which has belonged to them during the last four centuries and a half. In a MS. in the British Museum, written in the year 1377, the monkish writer, in a moralization on the life of man, suggests its resemblance to a game of cards; and he gives us a description and the attributes of some of the cards. Of those which we now know as knaves, he says two of them hold their halberds or arms downwards and two of them upwards—a distinction which is retained on many of the playing cards still manufactured.

In Fig. 3 we have one of the cards from a series of "Tarots" of Italian origin, also preserved in the Bibliothèque Nationale, and which may be dated about 1470. These are very beautiful in design, and indicate that they were thought worthy of the employment of the highest artistic talent.

We have an example of a somewhat more modern date in the Knave of Diamonds (Fig. 4), in which the costume and character point to the early part of the sixteenth century as the period of their production. This also is from a fragment discovered in the boards of an old book—a source which

may be commended to the watchfulness of the bookbinder, as the bindings of old books are still likely to provide other interesting examples.

Before us are parts of two packs of cards which were discovered in Edinburgh, in 1821, pasted up in a book of household accounts, one of its leaves bearing the date of 1562; and it would be no great stretch of fancy to believe that they were taken to Edinburgh by some follower of Mary Queen of Scots on her return to Scotland a year before this date. These cards are of Flemish make; on one of them is the name "Jehan Henault," who was a card-maker in Antwerp in 1543, and in passing we may remark that at this period there was a considerable trade between London and France in playing cards of Flemish manufacture. Old playing cards may be looked for in most unlikely places; a few years ago two nearly complete packs were found wedged in an old cross-bow, for the purpose of securing the bow where it had worked loose in the head; they were of sixteenth century manufacture, and had doubtless been the means of relieving the



FIG. 5.

tedium of many a weary watch or waiting, in field or fortress, before they found their resting-place of a couple of centuries in the

obsolete missive weapon where they were discovered.

We find on many cards some attempts at portraiture. Thus we have in Fig. 5 Clovis as the King of Clubs, but depicted in a costume of the time of Henry IV. of France,



FIG. 6.

the card itself being of that period. This, as well as Fig. 4, is from a pack of fifty-two "Numeral" cards, printed from wood-block and stencilled in colour.

Returning to "Tarots," we have in Fig. 6 (Le Fou) one of the cards designed by Mitelli about 1680, it is said to the order of a member of the Bentivoglio family (parts of whose armorial bearings are to be found on many of the cards), for the "Tarrocchini di Bologna," a special form of the game of Tarot, a series of spirited designs of vigorous and careful drawing, and the most artistically valuable of any of the Tarots with which we are acquainted. In them not only the Tarot series but the ordinary suits display a

quaint conception and generally elegant design.

It is curious to note that in the eleven packs or parts of packs of these Bolognese cards which we have met with in various parts of Europe there is not any uniformity of manufacture, but while the designs are the same and evidently produced from the same copper plates, the making of them into cards for the purpose of play bears indication of what might be termed a "domestic" manufacture. For some time the game was interdicted in Bologna, and it is possible that this may have induced a surreptitious production and illicit sale of the cards. Fortunately, the interdict did not prevent the preservation to us of this interesting series.

At different periods between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, but notably in the two earlier of them, card "suits" have been used other than the familiar ones of Hearts, Spades, Clubs, and Diamonds, and much ingenuity and imagination have been exercised upon them. Among the most beautiful of such cards we take the set designed and engraved by Virgil Solis, the celebrated Nuremberg artist and engraver, in which the suit signs are Lions, Peacocks, Monkeys, and Parroquets. In Fig. 7 we have the Ace of

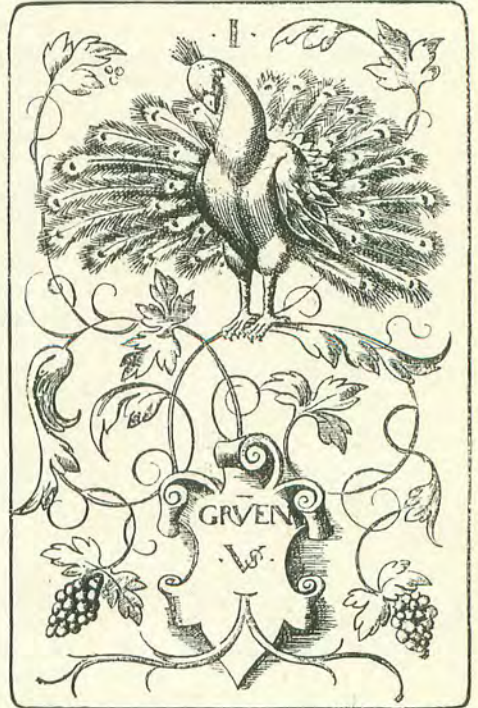


FIG. 7.

Peacocks. The aces are lettered with the distinctive suit-titles of the German cards, viz., "Grun," "Eicheln," "Schellen," and "Herzen." The pack consists of fifty-two, divided into four suits of thirteen cards each; the date of these cards is between 1535 and 1560, and they are an important and valuable item in the artistic history of playing cards.

Another example of this variation in the suit signs, as well as of a variation from the ordinary rectangular form, is to be found in the round card (Fig. 8), of a somewhat earlier date than the preceding, where the suits are Hares, Parrots, Pinks, and Columbines, and which when complete make also a pack of fifty-two, the value of the cards following the sequence of King, Queen, and Knave being indicated by the Arabic numeral



FIG. 9.

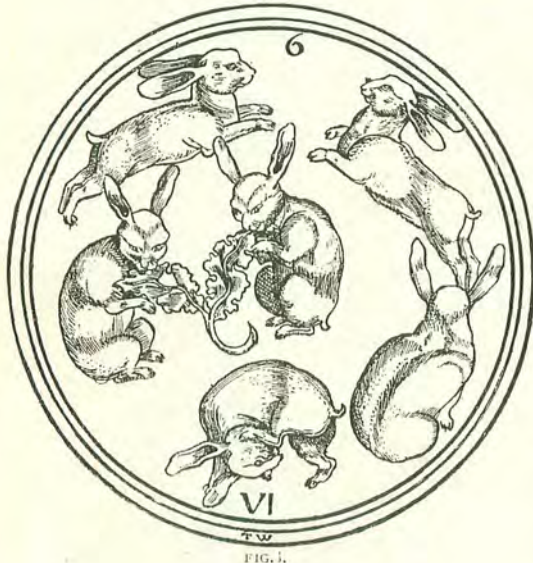


FIG. 1.

at the base of and the Roman figure at the top of each, the card shown being the Six of Hares.

In both of them there is a great decorative facility and clever adaptation to the form of the card. To indicate the coincidence of idea, in the next (Fig. 9) we have a round card from India—one of the "Coate" cards of a pack, or more properly series, of 120 cards. The material used in their manufacture is matted vegetable fibre coated with lacquer and painted by hand. Most of the playing cards of Persia are also round, and are similarly decorated by the same means. About a dozen years ago round playing cards were patented in America

as a novelty, in ignorance of the fact that cards of that shape had probably been in common use in the East, centuries before the discovery of that great and inventive country!

As an illustration (Fig. 10) of the suit signs of Southern Europe, we take a card from a Portuguese pack of 1610, the "Cavalier de Bâtons" (Clubs); the other suit signs are Swords, Coins, and Cups. The anatomy of the charger and the self-satisfied aspect of the Cavalier are striking; and as to the former, we are reminded of the bizarre examples of hippic adornment which,



FIG. 10.

on a summer Bank Holiday, may be seen on the road to Epping Forest.

Among the secondary uses to which playing cards have been applied, we find them as political weapons. Among such cards are those which were produced to commemorate what is historically known as the "Titus Oates Plot" in 1678, one of the most prominent incidents being the murder of Sir Edmond Godfrey, who is here shown (Fig. 11), carried on a horse, the day after his murder, to Primrose Hill, where the body was put into a ditch, the carrying on the horse and the discovery in the ditch being shown as coincident. They were



FIG. 11.

produced, probably, as one of the means of inflaming the public mind against the Roman Catholics, which led to the execution, among others, of the Viscount Stafford in 1680. As illustration of costume and of stirring incident, these cards are, apart from their intention, an admirable and interesting series, and are worth study from their historic and artistic aspects.

We come now to playing cards designed as methods of education, of which a considerable number have been produced—and which cover the widest possible range—from cookery to astrology! In the middle and latter half of the seventeenth century, England, France and Germany abounded in



Arion

Excellent musicien fut jeté dans la mer par des marchands pour avoir son bien, et ayant joué de sa lyre avant que d'estre jeté, vn dauphin le recut et le mit au bord:

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FIG. 12.

examples, the most attractive being the series of "Jeux Historiques," invented by Desmarests, a member of the French Academy—acting under the instructions of



FIG. 13.



FIG. 14.



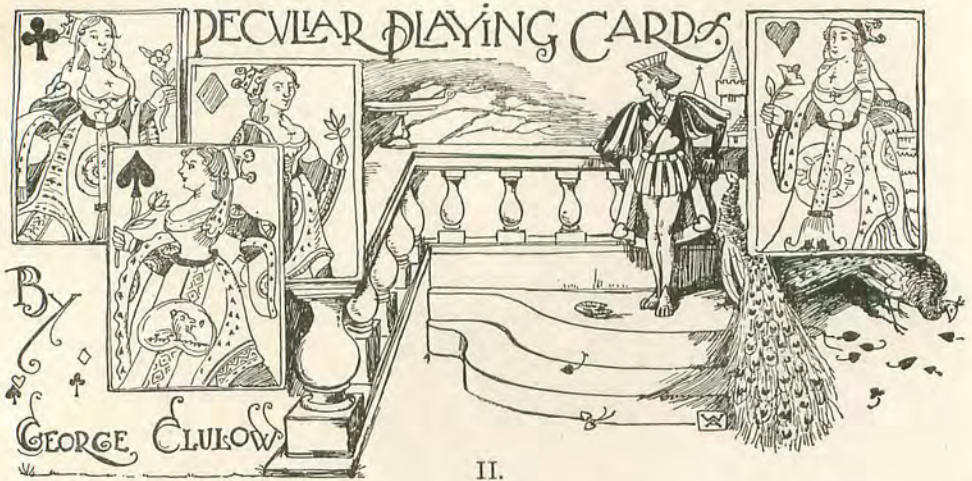
FIG. 15.

Cardinal Mazarin—as aids to the education of the boy King, Louis XIV. In Figs. 12, 13, 14, and 15 are given examples from the four packs so designed, and they afford a good instance of the primary use of cards being subordinated to the educational. The first of these is the “Jeu de Fables,” with representations and short notices of the heroes and heroines of classic history, the four Kings being Jupiter, Neptune, Pluto, and Saturn. The second is the “Jeu de Géographie,” the four suits being formed by the division of the world into four quarters, each having its distinctive group of thirteen designs, with brief geographical descriptions; Great Britain being shown as the Eight of Hearts. If designed by an Englishman, it would surely have been as Queen of that suit that our country would have appeared. We have then the “Jeu de Rois de France,” intended to teach the

history and succession of the Kings of France, whom we find depicted in their numeric order, from Pharamond to Louis XIV., with the length of their reigns and short biographies.

The third and fourth of these packs are singular in consisting in the one case of all Kings, and the other of all Queens, in the “Jeu de Reynes Renommées,” the famous Queens of history, from the Queen of Sheba downward, furnishing the design, and who are classified under the descriptions of Good, Wise, Holy, Clever, Brave, Happy, Cruel, Licentious, Capricious, and Unfortunate; our Queen Elizabeth being placed as “clever,” and Mary Stuart as “unfortunate.” They are beautiful examples of design and workmanship, and are the work of the Florentine artist-engraver, Stefano de la Bella.

(To be continued.)



II.

THE "foolish business" of Heraldry has supplied the motive for numerous packs of cards. Two only, however, can be here shown, though there are instructive examples of the latter half of the seventeenth and beginning of the eighteenth centuries from England, Scotland, France, Germany, and Italy. The example given in Fig. 16 is English, of the date of 1690, and

the fifty-two cards of the pack give us the arms of the different European States, and of the peers of England and Scotland. A pack similar to this was engraved by Walter Scott, the Edinburgh goldsmith, in 1691, and is confined to the Arms of England, Scotland, Ireland, France, and the great



FIG. 16.

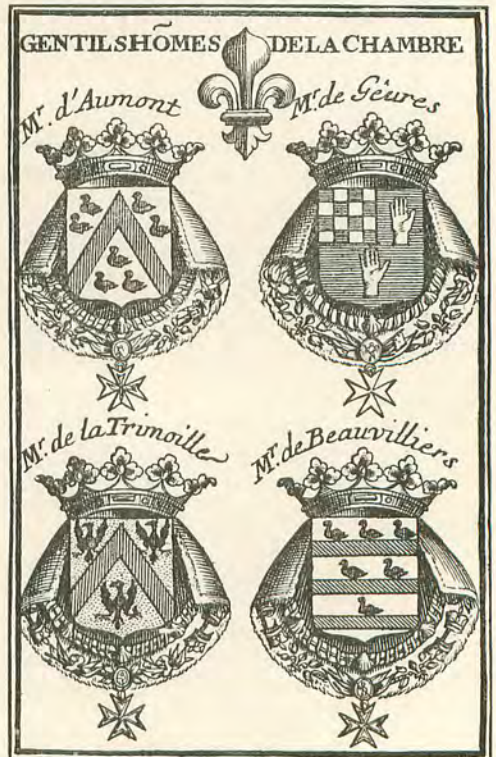


FIG. 17.

Scottish families of that date, prepared under the direction of the Lyon King of Arms, Sir Alexander Erskine. The French heraldic example (Fig. 17) is from a pack of the time of Louis XIV., with the arms of the French nobility and the nobles of other European countries; the "suit" signs of the pack being "Fleur de Lis," "Lions," "Roses," and "Eagles."

Caligraphy, even, has not been left without recognition, for we have a pack, published



Ein böser Berg-Schott

FIG. 18.

in Nuremberg, in 1767, giving examples of written characters and of free-hand pen drawing, to serve as writing copies. We show the Nine of Hearts from this pack (Fig. 18), and the eighteenth century South German graphic idea of a Highlander of the period is amusing, and his valorous attitude is sufficiently satisfying.

Biography has, too, its place in this playing-card cosmography, though it has not many examples. The one we give (Fig. 19) is German, of about 1730, and is from a pack which depicts a series of heads of Emperors, poets, and historians, Greek and Roman—a summary of their lives and occurrences therein gives us their *raison d'être*.

Of Geographical playing cards there are



FIG. 19.

several examples in the second half of the seventeenth century. The one selected for illustration (Fig. 20) gives a sectional



FIG. 20.

map of one of the English counties, each of the fifty-two cards of the pack having the map of a county of England and Wales, with its geographical limitations. These are among the more rare of old playing cards, and their gradual destruction when used as educational media will, as in the case of horn-books, and early children's books generally, account for this rarity. Perhaps the most interesting geographical playing cards which have survived this common fate, though they are the *ultima rarissima* of such cards, is the pack designed and engraved by H. Winstanley, "at Littlebury, in Essex," as we read on the Ace of Hearts. They appear to have been intended to afford instruction in geography and ethnology. Each of the cards has a descriptive account of one of the States or great cities of the world, and we have taken the King of Hearts (Fig. 21), with its description of England and the English, as the most interesting. The costumes are those of the time of James II., and the view gives us Old London Bridge, the Church of St. Mary Overy, on the south side of the Thames, and the Monument, then recently erected at the northern end of the bridge to commemorate the Great Fire, and which induced Pope's indignant lines:—

"Where London's column, pointing to the skies
Like a tall bully, lifts its head and—lies."



FIG. 21.

The date of the pack is about 1685, and it has an added interest from the fact that its designer was the projector of the first Eddystone Lighthouse, where he perished when it was destroyed by a great storm in 1703.

Music, too, is not forgotten, though on playing cards it is seen in smaller proportion than other of the arts. To the popularity of the "Beggar's Opera" of John Gay, that satirical attack upon the Government of Sir Robert Walpole, we are indebted for its songs and music appearing as the *motif* of the pack, from which we give here the Queen of Spades (Fig. 22),

*Tune of Now ponder wellye Parents dear .
Sung by Polly Peachum*

*Oh ponder well! be not severe;
So save a wretched Wife!
For on the Rope that hangs my Dear
Depends poor Polly's life .*

Flute.

FIG. 22.

and the well-thumbed cards before us show that they were popular favourites. Their date may be taken as nearly coincident with that of the opera itself, viz., 1728. A further example of musical cards is given in Fig. 23, from a French pack of 1830, with its pretty piece of costume headgear, and its characteristic waltz music.

France has been prolific in what may be termed "Cartes de fantaisie," burlesque and satirical, not always designed, however, with due regard to the refinements of well-behaved communities. They are always spirited, and as specimens of inventive adaptation are worth notice. The example

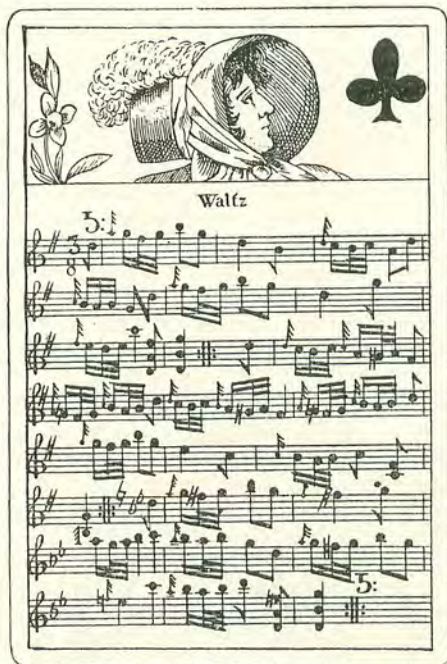


FIG. 23.

shown (Fig. 24) is from a pack of the year 1818, and is good of its class.

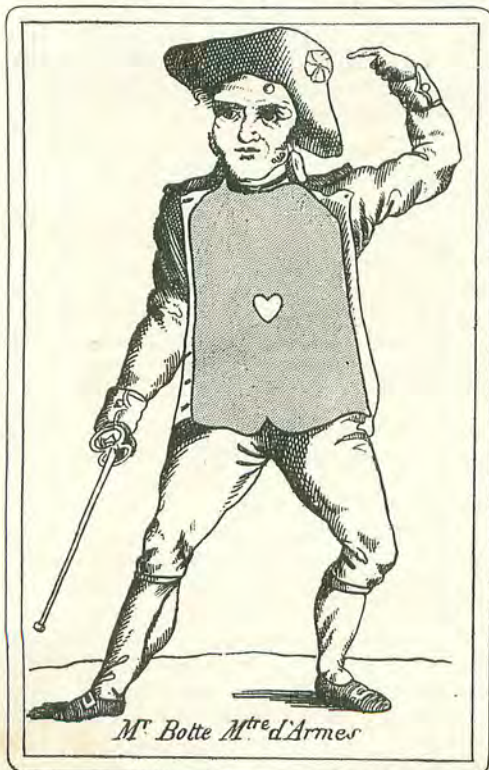


FIG. 24.

Of these "Cartes de fantaisie," each of the card-producing countries of Europe has at different dates produced examples of varying degrees of artistic value. Although not the best in point of merit, the most generally attractive of these are the packs produced in the years 1806-7-8 and 9, by the Tübingen bookseller, Cotta, and which were published in book form, as the "Karten Almanack," and also as ordinary packs. Every card has a design, in which the suit signs, or "pips," are brought in as an integral part, and admirable ingenuity is displayed in this adaptation; although not the best in the series, we give the Six of Hearts (Fig. 25),



FIG. 25.

as tending itself best to the purpose of reproduction, and as affording a fair instance of the method of design.

In England numerous examples of these illustrated playing cards have been produced of varying degrees of artistic merit, and, as one of the most amusing, we select the Knave of Spades from a pack of the year 1824 (Fig. 26). These cards are printed from copper-plates, and are coloured by hand, and show much ingenuity in the adaptation of the design to the form of the "pips."

Of the same class, but with morè true



FIG. 26.

artistic feeling and treatment than the preceding, we give the Deuce of Clubs, from a pack with London Cries (Fig. 27), and another with Fables (Fig. 28), both



FIG. 27.



FIG. 28.

of which date from the earlier years of the last century, the former with the quaint costume and badge of a waterman, with his cry of "Oars! oars! do you want a boat?" In the middle distance the piers of Old London Bridge, and the house at its foot with overhanging gallery, make a pleasing old-time picture. The "Fables" cards are apparently from the designs of Francis Barlow, and are probably engraved by him; although we find upon some of them the name of J. Kirk, who, however, was the seller of the cards only, and who, as was not uncommon with the vendor of

have referred as attaching to some of them, the cards are very interesting as studies of costume and of the manners of the time—of what served to amuse our ancestors two centuries ago—and is a curious compound survival of Puritan teaching and the license of the Restoration period. We give one of them in Fig. 29.

The Ace of Clubs, shown in Fig. 30, is from a pack issued in Amsterdam about 1710, and is a good example of the Dutch burlesque cards of the eighteenth century. The majority of them have local allusions, the meaning of which is now lost; and many of them are of a character which will not bear

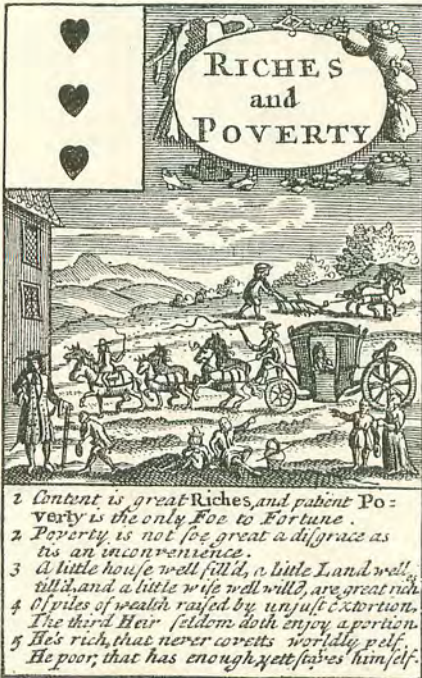


FIG. 29.

reproduction. A better-known pack of Dutch cards is that satirizing the Mississippi scheme of 1716, and the victims of the notorious John Law—the “bubble” which, on its collapse, four years later, brought ruin to so many thousands.

Our space forbids the treatment of playing cards under any but their pictorial aspects, though the temptation is great to attempt some description of their use from an early period as instruments of divination or fortune telling, for which in the hands of the “wise man” or woman of various countries they are still used, and to which primary purpose the early “Tarots” were doubtless applied; but,



FIG. 30.

as it is among the more curious of such cards, we give the Queen of Hearts from a pack of the immediate post-Commonwealth period (Fig. 31). The figure is called Semiramis—without, so far as can be seen, any reason. It is one of a mélange of names for cards in



FIG. 31.

which Wat Tyler and Tycho Brahe rub shoulders in the suit of Spades, and Mahomet and Nimrod in that of Diamonds!



FIG. 32.

In the pack we find the Knave of Clubs named "Hewson" (not the card-maker of that name), but he who is satirized by Butler as "Hewson the Cobbler." Elsewhere he is called "One-eyed Hewson." He is shown with but one eye in the card bearing his name, and as it is contemporary, it may be a fair presentment of the man who, whatever his vices, managed under Cromwell to obtain high honours, and who was by him nominated a member of the House of Lords. The bitter prejudice of the time is shown in the story which is told of Hewson, that on the day the King was beheaded he rode from Charing Cross to the Royal Exchange proclaiming that "whoever should say that



FIG. 33.



FIG. 34.

Charles Stuart died wrongfully should suffer death." Among the quasi-educational uses of playing cards we find the curious work of Dr. Thomas Murner, whose "Logica Memorativa Chartiludium," published at Strassburg in 1507, is the earliest instance known to us of a distinct application of playing cards to education, though the author expressly disclaims any knowledge of cards. The method used by the Doctor was to make each card an aid to memory, though the method must have been a severe strain of memory in itself. One of them is here given (Fig. 32), the suit being the German one of Bells (Schnellen).

It would seem that hardly any branch of human knowledge had been overlooked in the adaptation of playing cards to an educational purpose, and they who still have them in mind under the designation of "the Devil's books," may be relieved to know that Bible history has been taught by the means of playing cards. In 1603 there was published a Bible History and Chronology, under the title of the "Geistliche Karten Spiel," where, much as Murner did in the instance we have given above, the cards were used as an aid to memory, the author giving to each of the suit signs the distinctive appellation of some character or incident in Holy Writ. And more recently Zuccarelli, one of the original members of our Royal Academy, designed and etched a pack of cards with the same intention.

In Southern Germany we find in the last century playing cards specially prepared for gifts at weddings and for use at the festivities attending such events. These cards bore conventional representations of the bride, the bridegroom, the musicians, the priest, and the guests, on horseback or in carriages, each with a laudatory in-

scription. The card shown in Fig. 33 is from a pack of this kind of about 1740, the Roman numeral I. indicating it as the first in a series of "Tarots" numbered consecutively from I. to XXI., the usual Tarot designs being replaced by the wedding pictures described above. The custom of presenting guests with a pack of cards has been followed by the Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards, who at their annual banquet give to their guests samples of the productions of the craft with which they are identified, which are specially designed for the occasion.

To conclude this article — much too limited to cover so interesting a subject — we give an illustration (Fig. 34) from a

pack of fifty-two playing cards of *silver*—every card being engraved upon a thin

plate of that metal. They are probably the work of a late sixteenth century German goldsmith, and are exquisite examples of design and skill with the graver. They are in the possession of a well-known collector of all things beautiful, curious, and rare, by whose courteous permission this unique example appears here.



THE ARMS OF THE WORSHIPFUL COMPANY OF MAKERS OF PLAYING CARDS, 1629.