

The Symbolism Of The Tarot



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WHAT IS THE TAROT?

No study of occult philosophy is possible without an acquaintance with symbolism, for if the words occultism and symbolism are correctly used, they mean almost one and the same thing. Symbolism cannot be learned as one learns to build bridges or speak a foreign language, and for the interpretation of symbols a special cast of mind is necessary; in addition to knowledge, special faculties, the power of creative thought and a developed imagination are required. One who understands the use of symbolism in the arts, knows, in a general way, what is meant by occult symbolism. But even then a special training of the mind is necessary, in order to comprehend the "language of the Initiates", and to express in this language the intuitions as they arise.

There are many methods for developing the "sense of symbols" in those who are striving to understand the hidden forces of Nature and Man, and for teaching the fundamental principles as well as the elements of the esoteric language. The most synthetic, and one of the most interesting of these methods, is the Tarot

In its exterior form the Tarot is a pack of cards used in the south of Europe for games and fortune-telling. These cards were first known in Europe at the end of the fourteenth century, when they were in use among the Spanish gypsies.

A pack of Tarot contains the fifty-two ordinary playing cards with the addition of one "picture card" to every suit, namely, the Knight, placed between the Queen and the Knave. These fifty-six cards are divided into four suits, two black and two red and have the following designation: sceptres (clubs), cups (hearts), swords (spades), and pentacles or disks (diamonds). In addition to the fifty-six cards the pack of Tarot has twenty-two numbered cards with special names:--

- 1 The Magician.
- 12 The Hanged Man.
- 2 The High Priestess.
- 13 Death.
- 3 The Empress.
- 14 Temperance.
- 4 The Emperor.
- 15 The Devil.
- 5 The Chariot. (7).
- 16 The Tower.
- 6 The Lovers.
- 17 The Star.
- 7 The Hierophant. (5).
- 18 The Moon.

- 8 Strength.
- 19 The Sun.
- 9 The Hermit.
- 20 judgment.
- 10 The Wheel of Fortune.
- 21 The World.
- 11 Justice.
- 0 The Fool.

This pack of cards, in the opinion of many investigators, represents the Egyptian hieroglyphic book of seventy-eight tablets, which came to us almost miraculously.

The history of the Tarot is a great puzzle. During the Middle Ages, when it first appeared historically, there existed a tendency to build up synthetic symbolical or logical systems of the same sort as *Ars Magna* by Raymond Lully. But productions similar to the Tarot exist in India and China, so that we cannot possibly think it one of those systems created during the Middle Ages in Europe; it is also evidently connected with the Ancient Mysteries and the Egyptian Initiations. Although its origin is in oblivion and the aim of its author or authors quite unknown, there is no doubt whatever that it is the most complete code of Hermetic symbolism we possess.

Although represented as a pack of cards, the Tarot really is something quite different. It can be "read" in a variety of ways. As one instance, I shall give a metaphysical interpretation of the general meaning or of the general content of the book of Tarot, that is to say, its metaphysical title, which will plainly show that this work could not have been invented by illiterate gypsies of the fourteenth century.

The Tarot falls into three divisions: The first part has twenty-one numbered cards; the second part has one card 0; the third part has fifty-six cards, i. e., the four suits of fourteen cards. Moreover, the second part appears to be a link between the first and third parts, since all the fifty-six cards of the third part together are equal to the card 0.

Now, if we imagine twenty-one cards disposed in the shape of a triangle, seven cards on each side, a point in the centre of the triangle represented by the zero card, and a square round the triangle (the square consisting of fifty-six cards, fourteen on each side), we shall have a representation of the relation between God, Man and the Universe, or the relation between the world of ideas, the consciousness of man and the physical world.