

THE BOOK OF THE SECRET WORD AND THE HIGHER WAY TO FORTUNE

[This article first appeared in 1909 in *A Manual of Cartomancy* by Grand Orient (a pseudonym of Arthur Edward Waite), which was a greatly expanded and revised edition of the earlier *A Handbook of Cartomancy* (1891). In 1912 the *Manual* was again reissued with two additional articles and only minor changes to this article, which have been noted. Ed.]

It is difficult to offer a comprehensive handbook of divination, fortune-telling and the connected curious arts without making at least some reference in passing to the so-called *Book of Thoth* which has been accepted by numerous authorities as the most richly productive mode for the automatic induction of prophetic insight that has been transmitted from the past. As it is impossible, however, in the present place to do the first thing which is essential in respect of the subject- that is, to provide the cards themselves¹- I propose only to say a few words concerning them and the use to which they can be put from a new point of view. It must be explained in the first place that Tarot cards are the precursors of our ordinary playing-cards and that a complete pack contains 78 symbols or talismanic and hieroglyphic pictures, as follows:-

A. 22 Special Trump Cards, which have no analogy with anything in their extant descendants.

B. 5 ordinary Court Cards in each of the four Suits, and these are: Ace, King, Queen, Prince or Knight, and Novice, Page or Squire.

C. The small Cards of the 4 Suits, numbered- by the fact of their Symbols- 2 to 10, it being understood that the Suits are Cups, replacing Hearts; Swords, corresponding to Spades; Wands, substituted for Diamonds; and Pantacles, representing Clubs.

All the cards indifferently are covered with hieroglyphs or signs, following particular laws of sequence and connected intimately with the mysteries of occult science and philosophy. The use of the cards is (1) for playing in the ordinary sense at a game of skill and hazard- but it should be added that as a mere diversion they have long since passed out of vogue; (2) for the usual art of fortune-telling in its several varieties, a particular method being occasioned by the multiplicity of the elements; (3) for those other practices which are included by the term Divination; and (4) for the higher uses of the imagination in the mystic oracles of the soul. In this department the true mode of their application is reserved by certain sanctuaries of adeptship; and if for the purposes of the present review it were assumed that I- whose identity has been concealed for many years of occult life under the name of Grand Orient- hold any place or office in these Secret Temples, it must be obvious that I

¹ The version of 1912 adds ", which should be obtained separately".

could not- supposing that I had even the wish- betray their mysteries. But as one who has followed in many departments of research the science of the soul and her different paths of light, I have found other mysteries which can be attached to the Tarot cards, and these- if they are followed faithfully- will open many secrets to those who have the needful gifts of intuition, or sight within.

The student must, in the first place, set aside all that has been said upon the archaeology of the *Book of Thoth*; it does not signify for our purpose whether the cards are very ancient- though this they are undoubtedly- or whether they are an invention of yesterday. It does not matter whether they originated in Egypt or much further East. In fine, all published philosophical and practical explanations as to their scope or application must be set out of court entirely, without prejudice to their value within measures for other purposes, though it should be stated that no one has been in a position to tell the truth concerning them.

I must assume now that the cards are in the possession of my reader, for they can be obtained by those who seek². In commencing his operation he will separate the 22 Trump Cards from those of the Four Suits, and after this sifting he will further extract the card which is numbered Nothing in the Trump Series and which bears the title of THE FOOL. Despite the miserable appearance and name of this symbolic figure, the student must understand that this is a very important card. It signifies in a triple sense: (a) The wisdom of this world, which is foolishness with God; (b) the folly of the Cross; and (c) the uninitiated person, which- as we shall find in the sequel- can be understood after two manners. In accordance with these three meanings there are as many primary operations possible: (1) concerning matters of worldly prudence; (2) concerning the life of devotion in the things of religion, but understood rather conventionally- that is to say, ancient, accepted and orthodox, with a tendency towards the formal side; (3) concerning the soul's progress towards the term of its research. Now, it must be understood that it is not lawful to make the same demand a second time in the first series till, by the event declaring itself up to a certain point, there has been a new situation created and therefore a new warrant for such enlightenment. To do otherwise would invite that which is understood by fatality, or at least make void all element of true foresight in both operations.

The demand may be regarding the operator himself or a Querent who is seeking knowledge at his hands. In either case indifferently, he is represented by the Fool, the reason being that in respect of the inquiry he is in a state of ignorance.

As we are not dealing with elements of common fortune-telling, our next task is to ascertain the limits of the three worlds of inquiry. In matters of ordinary human prudence, it is assumed that the Querent is in a state of doubt and solicitude

² The footnote to the 1909 reads, "The prices of complete Tarot packs may be obtained on application to the publishers of this *Manual*.", while the footnote to the 1912 (subsequent to the publishing of the RWS) reads, "*The Key to the Tarot*, together with the complete pack of cards, may be obtained on application to the publishers of this *Manual*."

concerning some question of grave importance by which the course of his material life is likely to be affected. He is not seeking information on his chances at the next lottery or the winning horse at an immediately forthcoming race. The life of devotion is more especially allocated to cases of conscience, and it should be understood that the oracle, for example, reveals nothing on new matters of doctrine. It does not solve doubts concerning the Trinity or explain mysteries of eschatology- except indeed indirectly, by counsel, interpretation, and turning the intention of the seeker towards those holy things in which doubt and difficulty dissolve. On the other hand, the soul's progress is concerned with the highest spiritual things, and these are exclusive to the third world of research. The answer in all cases is found by the dealing of the Trump Cards in direct relation to the Prime Card of the Fool in the particular matters, and the process shows the evolution of that symbolic personality from a state of darkness and ignorance to one of light and understanding concerning it. Before any attempt at working, the Querent and the Operator, if two persons are concerned, or otherwise the Querent who operates on his own account, should spend a certain time in recollection and silent prayer for guidance. As no special form is necessary, none will be given here; it is the contemplation and prayer of the soul. The 21 Trump Cards, are then shuffled and dealt, but what follows is an experience of the intuitive faculty, the gift of inward sight, and the interpretation of signs which possess a wealth of meaning.

It is because the whole experiment constitutes an experiment in intuition and not a counsel of adeptship that, although the cards may be arranged after several manners, I have adopted the most simple mode. They could be grouped, for example, about the central figure, which is that of the Querent, but this would involve a particular distribution of the symbolism belonging to a higher grade of the whole experiment. I say therefore that the Cipher Card being placed on one side, to stand throughout for the Querent, the 21 Trumps must be dealt after shuffling in a single line, and from the place of the various symbols contained therein, they are constructed by the gift of the operator into an intelligible revelation according to the testimony of the arrangement thus fortuitously secured and according to the plane of the question. It will serve no purpose to limit the range of the symbols in the three worlds, and I will give therefore seven typical examples allocated to each; but in the first place I will enumerate the mystic titles attributed to the cards themselves:-

1. The Juggler.
2. High Priestess.
3. Empress.
4. Emperor.
5. Pope, or Hierophant
6. Lovers.

7. Chariot.
8. Justice.
9. Hermit.
10. Wheel of Fortune.
11. Fortitude, or Strength.
12. Hanged Man.
13. Death.
14. Temperance.
15. Devil, or Typhon.
16. Ruined Tower.
17. Star.
18. Moon.
19. Sun.
20. The Last Judgment.
21. The World.
- 22 = 0. The Fool.

It should be understood that the long sequence of lesser cards does not enter into the scheme of the present operation, not that they are beside its issues, but because they would involve the statement of certain facts in occult divination which have never been made public, while if I furnished some idle substitute it would tend to the deception of the student, with whom I am seeking here to deal in all sincerity.

There follows thus and now the signification of the Trump Cards in the three worlds of research.

I. WORLD OF HUMAN PRUDENCE

1. *The Juggler*.- Skill in any department within the sphere of the subject; subtlety; *savoir faire*; on the evil side, trickery; also occult practice, apart from the wisdom of adeptship.

2. *High Priestess*.- Nature generally and particularly also as regards her operations, including therefore the material side of generation and reproduction; fertility; change.

3. *Empress*.- The sphere of action; the feminine side of power, rule and authority; woman's influence; physical beauty; woman's reign; also the joy of life, and excesses on the evil side.

4. *Emperor*.- Logical understanding, experience, human wisdom; material power on the male side, and all involved thereby.

5. *Pope, or Hierophant.*- Aspiration, life, power of the keys; spiritual authority developed on the external side; temporal power of official religion; on the evil side, sacerdotal tyranny and interference.

6. *Lovers.*- Material union, affection, desire, natural love, passion, harmony of things; contains also the notions of *modus vivendi*, concord and so forth; equilibrium.

7. *Chariot.*- Triumph of reason; success in natural things; the right prevailing; also predominance, conquest, and all external correspondences of these.

8. *Justice.*- Equilibrium on the mental side rather than the sensuous, for which see No.6; under certain circumstances, law and its decisions; also occult science.

9. *Hermit.*- Caution, safety, protection; wisdom on the manifest side; and the isolation thereof; detachment; the way of prudence; sagacity; search after truth.

10. *Wheel of Fortune.*- Mutation, circumstances; revolution of things, vicissitude; time and its variable development; all that is understood by the external side of fortune.

11. *Fortitude, or Strength.*- Courage, vitality, tenacity of things, high endurance.

12. *Hanged Man.*- The symbol of renunciation, for whatever cause and with whatever motive.

13. *Death.*- Contains naturally the meaning implied by its name and illustrated by its pictorial symbol, but not only and not at all of necessity; transforming force, independent of human will; may signify destruction; power behind the world which alters the face of the world, but it is this power in one of its respects only.

14. *Temperance.*- New blood, combination, admixture, with the object of amelioration; providence in desirable change.

15. *Devil, or Typhon.*- Fatality, evil, the false spirit; can indicate also the good working through evil.

16. *Ruined Tower.*- Destruction, confusion, judgment; also the idea of Divine Wrath.

17. *Star.*- Light descending, hope; the symbol of immortality.

18. *Moon.*- Half-light, mutation, intellectual uncertainty, region of illusion; false-seeming.

19. *Sun.*- Full light, intellectual and material; the card of earthly happiness, but not attained individually.

20. *The Last Judgment.*- Resurrection; summons to new things; a change in the face of everything.

21. *The World.*- The glory thereof under the powers of the higher providence, the sum of manifest things; conclusion on any subject.

II. WORLD OF CONFORMITY

1. *The Juggler*.- The official side in religion, but containing the warrants thereof; also the arbitrary, mechanical side, and formalism.

2. *The High Priestess*.- The Church as an organism; the growth of the man therein; Church doctrine.

3. *The Empress*.- The sphere of Church action on the spiritual side; also desire and its wings; spiritual principle.

4. *The Emperor*.- Executive power of religion; its work in realization upon man; active mind of the Church; the Church as a power in the world and in the life of the individual.

5. *The Pope*.- Doctrine, and especially its admitted and orthodox side; the agreement of minds in faith; the teaching power.

6. *Lovers*.- Love of religion, union therewith, but on the external side; marriage of the Church and the natural heart; the power which draws from natural things; also grace which makes for conversion, but is not conversion itself.

7. *Chariot*.- Reason exalted in religion; victory of the moral faculties; apotheosis of the logical understanding in faith; first conquest of the natural man.

8. *Justice*.- The power which makes the best of both worlds; middle path; lesser salvation; balance between good and evil; goodness, but not raised above the sphere of temptation.

9. *Hermit*.- Asceticism, denial, detachment; the state attained by these; but also a light which enlighteneth; one who has isolated himself that in fine he may lead others; the principle which all this signifies.

10. *Wheel of Fortune*.- The sword and the crown; another symbol of equilibrium, in this case over the mutations of fortune; the angel of true life, the spirit of religion ruling over the flux of circumstance.

11. *Fortitude, or Strength*.- The conquest of Nature by those who can say with their heart and their will: *Esto mihi turris fortitudinis*; the soul overcoming.

12. *Hanged Man*.- Crucifixion and self-crucifixion; atonement.

13. *Death*.- Mortal sin; resurrection to the life of Grace, as an antitype- depending on the environment of the card.

14. *Temperance*.- The principle of sacramental life; the mixture of things Divine with things human, for the transmutation of the latter; the increase which Grace gives; in fine, this card is a Symbol of the Eucharist, the entrance of the Divine into the nature of man.

15. *Devil, or Typhon*.- Rebellion; the spirit which denies; especially, false doctrine, which is the worship of Satan.

16. *Ruined Tower*.- The Fall, and here especially the fall from Grace; also judgment on sin; the ruin of the house of life, when evil has prevailed therein; but the

symbolism is that of a Divine act or consequence, and the power which destroys the Temple of God can rebuild it in three mystical days.

17. *Star*.- Holy works- spiritual and corporal- poured upon the earth of humanity; also the gifts of the Spirit poured upon the earth of the individual; the soul manifesting by works.

18. *Moon*.- Sufficing Grace; the soul mourning over the sadness of material life and the lapse into matter.

19. *Sun*.- Lord of Glory; efficacious grace; spiritual joy; the life of holiness poured over the life of man.

20. *The Last Judgment*.- Separation of good from evil; summons to ascend; examination of conscience; resurrection in the soul.

21. *The World*.- The Law and State of Paradise; Shekinah; Divine Presence; the soul in the condition of attainment; end of religion in the individual, but this is not to be understood as Divine Union; it is more properly the state of Grace.

III. WORLD OF ATTAINMENT

1. *The Juggler*.- That which must be overcome; the will in this connexion; the motive of this world.

2. *The High Priestess*.- Divine intuition; the holy soul, having the book of the Mysteries opened, and reading therein; the first form of personal illumination.

3. *The Empress*.- Higher soul of man; woman clothed with the sun; she who is born of aspiration, who comes in the signs of power and perfect rule; the soul that has attained wings.

4. *The Emperor*.- Lord on the higher planes; the fulfilment of the Great Work of spiritual adeptship; the victory over all things.

5. *Pope, or Hierophant*.- The life which leads to the Doctrine; the power which leads the individual into all truth; the priesthood that is within.

6. *Lovers*.- Spiritual marriage; the union of man with his soul; the state of conversion.

7. *Chariot*.- The triune man, having consciousness in his three worlds; the living symbol of the invisible God; he that overcometh.

8. *Justice*.- Higher grades of the narrow path; equilibrium on the spiritual side; greater salvation; the perfect life.

9. *Hermit*.- The secrets of the King; Divine Science; the light of the world within.

10. *Wheel of Fortune*.- Divine rapture; triumph over the circle of necessity; in this world, the wheel has ceased to revolve.

11. *Strength*.- The will to go forward; the world overcome; the fortitude of those who are established in God.

12. *Hanged Man*.- The path of choice; reversion of the natural man; he who has not loved his life even to the loss thereof; conquest of the fear of those who can kill the body.

13. *Death*.- Mystical death; the price of immortality; that which is entered with the will that there may be life evermore.

14. *Temperance*.- Immergence of the consciousness; realization of the Divine Immanence; super-added Grace.

15. *Death or Typhon*.- The last enemy; the demon of spiritual pride; the abyss opening; the spirit of Antichrist.

16. *Ruined Tower*.- The rending of the House of Doctrine in the heart of the individual; final impenitence.

17. *The Star*.- Life of life; descent of the Divine; waters of life freely.

18. *Moon*.- Spiritual fantasy.

19. *Sun*.- Plenary consciousness in God; the Spirit rules; God encompassing; Orient from on high.

20. *Judgment*.- The state of one who says: Behold, I come quickly- that is, in answer to the call from the heights; resurrection in the complete man.

21. *The World*.- Unveiled mystery; term of research; redeemed Nature; Divine Consciousness; the Beatific Vision.

As regards the Fool, this card, which has been sufficiently explained already, signifies the consummation of everything, when that which began his initiation at zero attains the term of all numeration and all existence. The card which bears no number passes through all the numbered cards and is changed in each, as the natural man passes through worlds of lesser experience, worlds of devotion, worlds of successive attainment, and receives the everlasting wisdom as the gift of perseverance.

It is further to be understood that the significance of all the cards in each of the three worlds is modified by the cards in their immediate vicinity, and this to such an extent that the present section of the *Manual* might be increased into a large volume if an attempt were made to expose even the major variations. It is not to be expected therefore that the operator will read correctly from the beginning, since he is learning a new alphabet, and its combinations exceed calculation. He must attain familiarity by practice; he must have also the second sight of the mind- the power of discerning analogies and distinctions in the midst of analogies. I now proceed to give a few specimen questions belonging to each of the series, after which I shall reach a conclusion of the matter for the present purpose by three constructions of the sense attributable to three assumed distributions of the Trump Cards, as the result of a hypothetical dealing.

WORLD OF HUMAN PRUDENCE

1. What will be the consequence on my life of a marriage which I now contemplate- it being understood that I am not actuated simply by personal attraction, or solely by physical desire?
2. My affairs have passed into disorder, and finding that my fortune is imperilled on the material plane, after what manner shall I try to meet the difficulty?
3. What must I do to ensure success in life and the improvement of my worldly position, having full regard to my moral and spiritual duties?
4. Is it desirable to embrace the opportunity which offers for my removal into a foreign country?
5. The world is wide before me, and the best years of my life: what light can I obtain on the question of vocation or business?
6. What course shall I pursue in the serious emergency which has arisen?
7. Shall I have the necessary health and strength to pursue those projects which have become so important in my life?

WORLD OF CONFORMITY

1. I am troubled about questions of doctrine and desire light thereon: in what direction shall I look?
2. I am in a state of serious temptation- in what shall I find help to withstand?
3. My sins have found me out: what course shall I pursue?
4. I have resolved upon a better life: to what means of grace shall I have recourse above others?
5. I am in the state that is called by spiritual writers one of drought and dryness: how can I find consolation?
6. Shall I improve my chances of salvation by a change in my external religion?
7. I feel a certain vocation towards the ministry, and I desire light on the subject.

WORLD OF ATTAINMENT

1. What is, literally speaking, that kind of life which does lead to the Doctrine, and what form of it applies to my individual case?
2. I am conscious of substantial increase in intellectual light upon spiritual mysteries, but not of increase in holiness. What shall I do?
3. Wherein lies the path of rebirth?

4. What must I do to attain eternal life?
5. How shall I exchange the disposition towards spiritual things for their real experience?
6. In what does the Beatific Vision consist?
7. What is the great secret of the Inward Life?

It should be laid to heart, firstly, that these specimen questions do not exhaust the possible subjects of research, which are indeed innumerable: they are cited only to show the things that belong to the three several worlds. Secondly, it should be understood- at least as regards the Worlds of Conformity and Attainment- that it would be an act of sacrilege to ask from curiosity, or as if to test the powers of an oracle. This is no question of ordinary Divination, but of a prayerful search after light on the things that concern the soul, and it is to the higher soul within us that we must look for the answer. When the Aspirant has become familiar by practice with the inexhaustible deeps of enlightenment which lie imbedded in the Tarot Cards, he will find that a triple answer is possible to every question- that is to say, in its relation to each of the three worlds of mystical philosophy. So elaborate a quest must not be attempted in the present instance, but only a guide in outline for purposes of study. The threefold meanings attributed to each of the cards are the key of the whole process, and any operation is not an inquiry into future chances or an attempt to unveil futurity, on however high a plane, but is the analogical and mystical explanation of the law which inheres in the symbols, however combined.

The first hypothetical case will be taken from *The World of Human Prudence*. Question 7: A young man inquires what light he can obtain as to his future course in this world. The results of the dealing are 3, 4, 1, 17, 9, 14, 12, 15, 16, 8, 13, 10, 11, 19, 2, 5, 6, 7, 21, 20, 18. The cards 11 and 18 are upside down, reducing that which is good and accentuating that which is evil. It will be seen that the cards work out very curiously, with the predominance of woman's influence (3) at the beginning, and change (20) in the face of everything having the term of the whole subject (21) on its left, while the latter has success and triumph. But the card which precedes this final triplicity is that of marriage. The object being therefore to know the Querent's future course, it is clear that his welfare depends on a material union. The first triplicity shows that his own powers have, as predominating factors, his own skill on one side and the feminine side of power on the other. His hope (17) has all his tact (1) on the left and the safety of caution (9) on the right, indicating that to attain his end subtlety and *savoir faire* must be checked by prudence. Reasonable unselfishness (12) is threatened by the evil and false spirit (15), but it has combination (14) suggested by the idea of marriage on the other side, so that his saving will be in the altruism of his union with a woman. That equilibrium which is the desirable path of life (8) is threatened by destruction (16) and by the symbol of death (13). It is a very bad

combination, and he must seek to unite himself with the transforming force which is independent of human will (13 alternatively)- otherwise, with the law of the universe. Unfortunately, his courage (11) is reversed, with vicissitude on the one side, though earthly happiness is signified on the other. I gather that he has one way of escape in the consolations of official religion (5), which again has a marriage card (2) on its left, namely, fertility, and marriage itself on the right. It is no happy outlook unless there is happiness in his marriage, which is not the subject of inquiry. It is in any case by marriage that he must begin.

The World of Conformity.- Question 7: The Aspirant feels a certain vocation towards the ministry and desires light on the subject. The results of the dealing are 5, 6, 15, 10, 14, 4, 7, 16, 12, 1, 18, 3, 9, 8, 20, 21, 19, 17, 11, 13, 2. Card 11 is reversed. The first card which comes out (5) is that of doctrine on the orthodox side and of the teaching power. The second is that of the love of religion, of marriage between the heart and the Church (6). With these on the one side and the ruling spirit of religion on the other (10), the tendency to false doctrine (15) is held in check, and the man will be a safe teacher, one who may administer the sacraments efficaciously (14), one possessing the capacity to influence his fellow-man for good (4). The chances of fall from Grace (16) are counterbalanced by reason exalted in religion (7); but this depends upon crucifixion of self (12), and this in turn can check formalism in religion (1), while such formalism is balanced on the other side by Grace (18), coming from communion with the Church. Goodness (8) has detachment (9) on the one side and spiritual rebirth (20) on the other, showing plainly how natural virtue is exalted into the supernatural. The end of research (21), being the question put, but also life in Grace, has the summons to ascend (20) and Efficacious Grace (19) on either hand, the result of which is the life of holiness. Good works (17) come before and can be made to overrule what is lacked in strength (11 reversed), and if the latter card shows that the Querent is by no means outside the sphere of temptation, he has the Church (2) to aid him and to change sin (13) into resurrection into new life and Grace. In fine, the cards, which begin in doctrine and end in the ecclesiastical assembly, show throughout that the Aspirant is meant for the ministry.

World of Attainment.- Question 1: What is the kind of life which leads to the doctrine? The results of the dealing are 11, 19, 18, 15, 3, 5, 17, 13, 9, 8, 16, 10, 7, 6, 2, 20, 4, 21, 14, 1, 12. Card 20 is reversed. In the search after attainment in the soul, the sequence of the symbols begins with the will to go forward (11) and concludes with the path of choice (12) in the conquest of the natural man. Between these two lies the sum of all perfection. The end is Divine Consciousness (21), which is the life of knowledge. It has the victory over all things (4) on the one side and realization of the Divine Immanence (14) on the other. The dawning of the Orient from on high (19) is beheld on entering the path, and this rules on the one side over (18) spiritual fantasy, while the ruling of the spirit (19) is well placed between fantasy (18), which

it suffuses, and the conquest of the world (11). Spiritual pride and the spirit of Antichrist (15) have, it is true, the symbol of illusion on the one side, but the higher soul of man (3) is on the other. It is clear, however, that the last enemy is also a very strong one. The life which leads to the Doctrine (5) is between the ascent of the soul (3) and the life of life (17). It is on the ascent of the one that the other comes down, namely, the Divine, and the union of the two is that life which does lead to the real know-ledge. Mystical death (13) is overshadowed on the one side by Divine Grace communicated (17) and on the other by Divine Science (9). The possibility of fall from righteousness (16) is checked by perfect life (8) and the rapture of aspiration towards the Divine (10). The three-fold nature of man (7) has that aspiration (10) on the one hand and on the other its end, which is the mystical marriage of God and man (6). In this connexion the card (20) of rebirth reversed, having the Holy Soul (2) and the victory over all things (4) on either side, must be taken to mean rather that it is judgment against the soul which is reversed, if the man follows the path. That which must be overcome (1) stands between superadded grace (14) and the sign of him (12) who has not loved his life to the loss thereof. I say therefore that the sequence of cards has indeed set forth the kind of life which not only leads to the Doctrine but to the whole term of spiritual knowledge.

And these are the first indications to those who can see concerning the *Book of Thoth*, which I have called the *Way to Fortune*.

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