



YOUR BID, PARTNER!

— By L.M.E. —

WHEN you shuffle that pack of cards you are playing a game which may have existed in the earliest days of Brahmin culture. Cards were played in the days of the Tudors and at the court of Charles VI of France. They have developed in a variety of uncertain and indefinite ways and have survived as one of the most uncertain of pastimes.

It is widely believed that the game of cards originated in Asia, having been invented in the reign of Seun-Ho about the year 1120 for the amusement of His Majesty's concubines. Another tradition has it that from time immemorial cards occupied the leisure hours of Brahmin society in ancient India. Still others believe that the Egyptians invented them as one of their many religious symbols; while yet another school of thought attributes their origin to the Arab tent-dweller.

Whatever their origin, cards eventually found their way to Europe. The Thirty-eighth Canon of the Council of Worcester is often quoted to prove that cards were known in England in the middle of the 13th Century but the game of "Kings and Queens" there mentioned is now thought to have been a variety of chess. The facts that Petrarch, writing about 1278, omits to mention them in his dialogue on gaming, and that Boccaccio, Chaucer, and other contemporaries are equally silent serve only to confirm the impression that the game, if known, had certainly not become popular.

The earliest authentic mention of a distinct series of playing cards is found in an accounting entry of Charles Poupart, Treasurer of the Household of Charles VI of France. Writing up the Cash Book for 1393 he states "Given to Jacquemin Gringonneur, painter, for three games of cards in gold, or in divers colours, decorated in several styles . . . for his dalliance . . ." This entry, it will be observed, refers only to the painting of a set of cards which were evidently already well known. It seems safe to conclude that, though possibly known to a select few in Europe about the middle of the 14th century, cards did not pass into general use for another fifty years.

The method of their introduction to Europe is suitably swathed in obscurity. Covelluzo of Viterbo, writing in the 15th century, said, "In the year 1379 was brought into Viterbo the game of cards which comes from the country of the Saracens and is with them called *naib*." The gambling spirit of the Crusader soldiery may have been instrumental in the importation of the game, but rather better authority has it that the Moors brought the pastime to Spain where, to this day, the pack is known as *naipes*. This is probably a corruption of the Arabic *nabi*—prophet. There is little doubt that whoever else may have adopted the game of cards the Arab tribes undoubtedly held it in high regard.