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## PLAYING CARDS.

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Of the many pastimes that mankind has invented to while away the tedium of life none is more ancient than chess and cards. Games played for exercise have altered enormously down the ages, but games played to exercise the intellect (though perhaps in the case of cards one should also add the gambling instinct), though they too have altered, remain in essence the same. Cards have been used, particularly in Asia, from time immemorial. But it is not till the Middle Ages that we hear much of them in Europe. The method by which they came into fashionable use in France—by being used to soothe the madness of King Charles VI.—is a well-known story, but the story of their introduction, as a recognised pastime, into England is scarcely less interesting. Cards became very popular in this country during the reign of James I., but the demand for packs was largely supplied by the Continent. English producers were annoyed by this, and appealed to King James for protection, suggesting—with what justification we know not—that foreigners gave to the initiated illicit hints about their opponents' hands. James took no action, but Charles I. granted a charter of incorporation, which absolutely forbade the importation of playing cards, limited the rights of production to freemen of the Worshipful Company of Makers of Playing Cards, and stipulated for a fee to the Crown for every gross of cards made and sealed. To-day is the tercentenary of the granting of that charter; and, though the Company has gone out of business in so far as control is concerned, it continues to foster the making of playing cards in this country. Moreover, even the tribute to the Crown still has its representation, for an Excise duty is paid on every pack of cards. Let the vast legion of people who will sit down to bridge to-day reflect that the game they play is not merely a frivolous method of passing the time. It has behind it the Royal sanction.