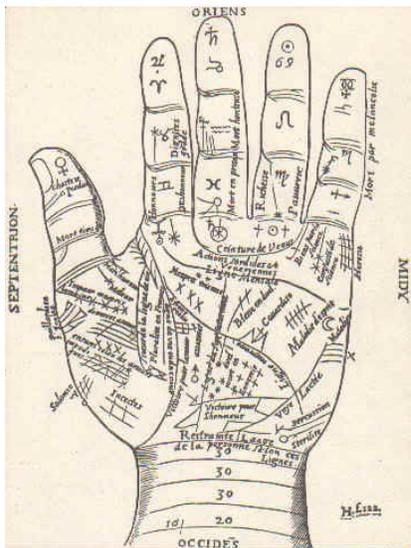


Richard Saunders & C17th Century Chiromancy

Richard Saunders (1613-1692) was perhaps the foremost chiromancer in England in the seventeenth century. He was close friends with the two most prominent astrologers of the day, George Wharton and William Lilly, and was also a doctor of physic and an accomplished astrologer himself. Saunders' first work, *'Physiognomie, Chiromancie, Metoposcopie'* of 1653 has an introduction and approbation written by Lilly himself in which Lilly goes overboard to esteem Saunders as the greatest chiromancer of this time. However, one is not long in reading this work when one begins to realise that much of this supposed greatness is due almost entirely to the work of the French chiromancer Jean Belot. For although Belot is not mentioned in the commendation from Lilly and is unacknowledged by Saunders in his preface, it is perfectly clear that this work is almost an exact copy of *'Les Oeuvres de Jean Belot'* of 1640 in translation!

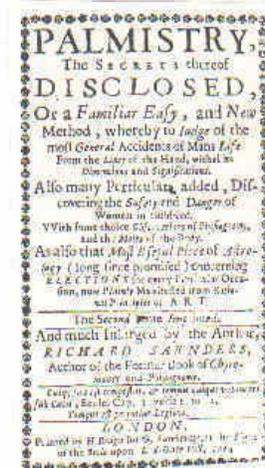
The first part of the book is the chiromancy over 136 pages - and the first 81 of these are an exact copy of Belot. The only section Saunders leaves out is how to know your genie/guardian angel from the hand. Moreover, Saunders also copies Belot for the physiognomy, the section on the interpretation of dreams.... and the section on the Lullian Art of artificial memory. In fact this whole book is a copy of Jean Belot, with a few ideas and diagrams added by Saunders. The only section that is entirely different is the treatise on divination from the location of moles. In the chiromancy, Saunders even reproduces an exact copy (in translation) of Belot's famous diagram of the hand with the zodiacal signs on the finger phalanges!



The only part of the chiromancy which can be seen to be Saunders' is the section of illustrations and aphorisms that follows the theoretical part of the text. Here he gives 47 diagrams of hands marked with various lineal inscriptions, with 700 aphorisms carefully numbered against them to give their interpretation. These consist of the traditional 'sign and symbol' approach and cover all the usual themes and superstitions, quite against the relative sophistication of the astrological theory that precedes it. Many of the interpretations are simply rehashes of old chiromantic lore that first arose centuries ago.

One innovation Saunders does make though, is to give planetary rulers to the main lines of the hand. The life line is given to the sun, the head line to Mercury, the Heart/Table line to Jupiter, the Girdle of Venus to Venus and the line of death to Saturn, one of the first times a clear astrological association has been made to the lines of the hands. However, it is less clear as whether Saunders actually used these designations in his interpretations of the lines of the hands.

Like Belot, his chiromancy is very astrological - indeed, Saunders was something of an astrologer himself and included a treatise on electional astrology in one of his later works. However, in other respects, Saunders simply follows Belot in astrological assertions. Like Belot, he looks for 'sacred letters' in the lines, and each letter is considered in detail according to where it might be found. For instance, a T on the back of the thumb is given to be an indication of sodomy and bestiality whereas an S in the plain of Mars signifies victories and honour in war. Saunders even includes the section on how one might know the day of birth from the lines of the hand; if one's head line ends on the mount of the moon with a cross, then this shows you were born on the tenth day of June on a Monday... but if it ends there with two crosses, then you were born on the twentieth day of June, on a Monday!!



A later and more popular work by Saunders was published in 1663 under the title '*Palmistry, the Secrets thereof Disclosed*'. This was intended as a pocket book and wherein Saunders says his intention is to write a chiromancy in plain language for all. The first edition of this work only had two sections, the chiromancy and a treatise on electional astrology, but a third section on physiognomy and moles was added for the second edition of 1664. The palmistry covers some 131 pages and has a rather rambling beginning in which he lambasts the gipsies and other quacks and ignorants, interspersed with bits of (inaccurate) history and descriptions of various parts of the hand. The main part of the book consists of diagrams of hands with many markings, grouped together under various headings as if the text were designed as a

handy work for quick referencing. Sections include all the known chiromantical markings of Violent Deaths, Riches and Fortune, Poverty and Loss, Misfortune and Imprisonment, Length of life and marks that signify Lust, Whoredom and Easy or Difficult Childbirth.

At one point in this text, Saunders makes a list of the qualities he thinks are necessary for one to become a good chiromancer. In addition to having a good memory and being a good observer he suggests that one should also be a good philosopher, astrologer, mathematician and linguist and have a good knowledge of such things as history, geography and religious customs. He also suggests that one should be 'prudent, discreet, honest and esteem the truth in all things..' We have seen that he is both a good linguist and is intensely discreet; it is a shame he has proven himself to lack honesty and esteem for the truth in all things....

A further treatise on palmistry written by Saunders can also be found as a short chapter included in a work entitled '*The English Fortune Teller*', thought to have been published sometime around 1680. This the most populist of all his writings, which is unsurprising given that the book as a whole is a general work on the art of civility and courtship. Titles included within the book include 'The Maiden's Faithful Counsellor or, the Speediest Way to get Good Husbands', 'Cupids Soliciter of Love' and 'The New Way of Wooing!' Sixteen pages on divination are included, from the hand, from moles and from dreams, written especially for wives, widows, maids and bachelors.

Although the text is relatively short, Saunders has clearly picked out those chiromantical aphorisms from his larger works which he knows will be of especial interest to this particular audience. He does not dwell only on markings of fortune, riches and honour, wives, husbands and children however, for he also includes those salient lineal indicators of poverty and losses, of length of life and untimely death. All in all a little potboiler for the interest and titillation of the amorous and over-sexed! There is a further page on chiromancy also to be found in this book entitled 'Palmistry Displayed', giving eight further chiromantic aphorisms in amongst some remarks on the interpretation of moles and dreams. Although the author of this little tract is anonymous, it was originally included in a pamphlet entitled 'The Court of Curiosities and the Cabinet of Rarities' published in c.1680.

Due to the fact that Lilly, Saunders and Wharton were all at one time or another based in Oxford and that Ashmole maintained close links with Oxford University, much of the original material by this close circle has found its way into the vaults of the Bodleian Library. However, the demise in interest in the occult sciences at the end of the seventeenth century has meant that much of this material has remained untouched and unexamined for over three hundred years. For the latter end of the seventeenth century was to be the final culmination of a mystical world view that had predominated for over four hundred years.

The English Fortune Teller

c. 1680

Two Goatsworth of Wit for a Penny, or the
English Fortune Teller
discovering to Wives, Widows, Maids and Bachelors
their Good or Bad Fortune
by the Moles in the Face and the Lines of the Hand
and by Dreams.

And whether a man shall be rich or poor?
Whether he shall live long or not?
Whether he shall ever marry?
And how many wives or husbands a man or
woman shall have?
What sickness or infirmities attend any one?
And likewise, what losses and crosses
are likely to befall any person.
And lastly, whether a man or woman shall
die a natural or untimely death.

Published by those famous astrologists
Mr Richard Saunders and Dr Coelson

Licensed and Entred according to Order

Printed for J Conyers at the Black Raven
over against Ely House in Holbourn

Bodleian Reference: Wood 69(3)

The English Fortune-Teller

Palmistry is a most excellent and noble science and it is as ancient as man himself: by which is discovered good and bad fortune that may befall either man or woman during the whole course of life, by observing the lines and characters or marks that appear in the hand; from which lines and marks are drawn many certain conclusions as touching the full length of life, riches, inheritance, children, sickness, marriage, honour and preferment, enemies or imprisonment with all other accidents that happen to mankind. Of all which I shall treat in a brief but most exact and delightful manner. In the first place, I shall demonstrate the effects of such characters, lines and signatures that portend and foreshow riches, honour or other good change and happiness.

It is to be observed that the Right Hand is of the most signification to those persons that are born by daylight and the left hand to those that are born in the night. Let the hand on which you give your judgement be washed very clean and the party whose hand you inspect be either fasting or one that hath eat and drank but little. So, having brought you thus far, I shall proceed to the most remarkable significations of good and happy signatures appearing in the palm of the hand and on the joynts of the fingers.

Of Riches and Honour

The letter A in the root or lower part of the forefinger promises much riches and gain to him that is in a mean and low condition and though at present he be as poor as Job he need not doubt but to arrive at a competent estate in a short time.

A mark or character like a star on the outside of the thumb shews a man to be a spendthrift, yet shall get both riches and honour by womens means, so that the kindness of the female sex shall outstrip his prodigality.

The letter **B** in the mount (that is under the root) of the forefinger portends much riches and very great fortune and he shall continually add to his plenty, that he shall be as happy as if he had Fortunatus his wishing purse.

A character like a cross or star in or near the line of life towards the wrist denotes riches in old age.

Many lines from the root of the thumb between the thumb and the line of life, pointing towards the ring finger, promiseth great riches, as if like a second Midas he converted everything into gold with the touch of his hand.

A cross under the natural or middle line that lies under the line of fortune, signifies riches to man or woman, but as it is said they must be acquired by the sweat of the face, that is, great labour and industry of the hand.

A line pointing from the table line, between the first and middle fingers, shews the person to be favoured by fortune yet certifies withal that the person through dissimulation useth one only friend as the rise to his fortunes; or as the proverb is, he has a friend in a corner.

The table line forked in the ends intimates the person to sustain a labourious life, until 20 years of age, afterwards his sorrows ceasing, he shall experience much good fortune and, like a ship that lately escaped some dangerous rock, shall steer a safe and pleasant course.

Two lines deep and straight, crossing the first joynt of the ring finger, does plainly discover much riches by wives.

A star in the mount of the forefinger or ring finger promises honour and preferment.

Of Long Life

The line of life reaching to the wrist, of equal breadth deep and well-coloured denotes a long life.

The hands big and well-proportioned in every part, argue length of life.

A certain line passing from the wrist through the hollow of the hand, towards the little finger, called by some the Milky Way, intimates length of days.

The mount or rising of the thumb, decently round and well-coloured confirms a long life.

Few lines in the mount or rising of the thumb indicate few diseases, health of the body and consequently long life. The table lines casting two or more branches to the middle of the forefinger and line of life argue long life. Fair lines in the root of the forefinger declare long life if they arise from the root over the mount.

Of Wives, Husbands and Children

Lines reaching from the mount of the thumb over the mount (towards the line of life) shew the number of wives or husbands; therefore assert how many there be; and if it be a man, he shall certainly have so many wives or (as the fashion is) town misses; if it be a womankind, she shall have so many husbands, or at least a Bolus to keep her from the green sickness.

As many lines as cut the first joynt at the ring finger, so many husbands or wives shall the party have. Certain little lines cutting the line of life, being well coloured, so many as there be, so many children they promise either in man or woman.

Now having laid upon the significations of those lines and signal observations which tend to prosperity, I will proceed to those which portend or foreshew want or poverty, infirmities, imprisonment, untimely death and universal misfortune; of this I shall treat more largely than of good hap, it being far more requisite to prevent or lessen an evil than to be fond of pleasant or profit.

Of Poverty and Losses

A mark like a ladder on the mount of the forefinger signifies a poor man subject to great losses, who (as the saying is) was born under a threepenny planet never to be worth a groat.

The fingers standing at a distance and much dispersed notes poverty, misery and one that has a great stock of confidence, all which is manifest in the generality of beggars and unfortunate persons that wander from country to country.

A triangle in the first joynt of the middle finger threatens detriment or loss; let such be aware of evil servants and flattering persons.

A line in the beginning of the line of life reaching towards the hollow part of the hand shews the person shall be in a very low, poor condition and one who shall undergo ill fortune.

The lines of the wrist crooked, broken off and cut with other lines denote one of an unstable and unsettled condition, a wanderer or a vagabond.

The letter **E** placed in the midst of the hand denotes adversaries and experience of many evils; who no sooner is free from one misfortune but another is ready to assault him, like unto a fish who escaping the angler today is caught in a net tomorrow.

Four or five lines cutting the table line against the mount of the middle finger implies labours, sorrow and trouble, caused by great men with lots of estate; let such beware of ambitious attempts lest whilst they aim at honour and greatness they procure their own utter ruin.

More lines on the mount or rising of the middle finger, than on any other mount, do testify losses, labours and many inconveniences.

Fingers thick at the joynts and small elsewhere denote one that useth ailments to get into debt but never cares to come out of it; this is a notable rule and it would do well if victuallers, tradesmen and vinnners would diligently observe it, that they let no such person run too far on tick, or blot their shop calender with the unpleasant characters of such troublesome saints.

Of Short Life

The line of life, if it be short, indicates a short life and by how much the more it inclines to brevity so much the more it is feared; but if there be a good appearance of the sister of the line of life (viz. the line hard by it on the mount or rising of the thumb) the effect will be somewhat abated, the like is to be considered of any other significant line or mark. If the line of life be cut off or broken in any part, if the sister of the line of life be on that side where the fraction is, it doth signifie the less prejudice.

Of Sickness

A figure like a ringworm in the mount of the thumb indicates much sickness, if not death.

Three, four or five or more little crosses on the mount of the hand (viz. that rising which extends from the wrist towards the little finger) foreshew sickness suddenly to ensue and the person having such marks arising there will hardly escape death.

Of Untimely Death

A line from the line of life reaching to or beyond the middle finger and dividing or crossing the table line threatens a miserable death or egregious villanies; and all his actions bespeak him a booty for the hungrey crows.

A circle or round figure on the backside of the thumb, near the nail, tells you he's coyned for a knave and carved out for the gallows.

The half circle or figure C appearing on the mount of the ring finger shews hurt or death by fire.

A crooked line on the mount of the ring finger shews that person shall die by water.

If that a line cut the table line over against the mount of the middle finger, it threatens imprisonment; observe how many such lines there be and so many times Old Nick's setting dog will scratch his cassock.

The letter **C** in the mount of the ring finger or the thumb signifies a violent death.

Of Whoredom and Lust

The sister of the line of life, on the mount of the thumb, long and reddish in the hand of a woman, intimates she will kiss in a corner, or (in a plainer sense) is a little whorish.

The mount or rising of the thumb big and elevated with many cross disordered lines, is a sign the person is a light huzzy.

The table line small and forked and the mount of the forefinger rising high, in the root of which are little marks like pricks, usually signifieth a man to tread more hens than his own, and a woman to beat her puff-past with her neighbours rolling pin.

Lines chequerwise near the wrist of the hand denotes a woman excessively wanton, one that cannot fix her humours to a constant diet but wholly delights in variety.

Palmistry Displayed

Anon c. 1680

Or, some choice rules and directions to know good or bad fortune by the lines and marks of the hand.

The party who in the hand has the line of life longe and full has health and long life promised thereby.

To have the girdle of venus fair signifies a desire of marriage and that the party shall be prosperous.

To have the ball of the thumb or mount or venus fair signifies riches and love.

To have a star between the two middle joints of the forefinger or figure of saturn signifies riches and wisdom. The figure of a **G** on the little finger or finger of mercury denotes inconstancy.

A bloody line in the hollow of the hand or plain of mars denotes the person to be fortunate in war.

The figure of moon as thus on the mount of the brawn of the hand, denotes the party fortunate in navigation and by traffick.

Three crosses at the root of the thumb betokens divers marriages.

From: *'The Court of Curiosities and the Cabinet of Rarities'* a pamphlet published c. 1680, printed for P Brooksby at the Golden Ball in Pye Corner.

Bodleian Reference: Wood 69(3)