

The Game of Bridge.

SOME REFLECTIONS ON THE GAME

By "CUT-CAVENDISH"

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How is it that so many Bridge players take so little trouble to improve their game? They play often enough in all conscience, perhaps too often in the estimation of their numerous acquaintances, who doubtless regard them as possessed of no Bridge conscience at all. And now allow me to explain why every self-respecting disciple of the game should have what for want of a better term I have dubbed a "Bridge Conscience."

Take the case of the average member of society, who has none too much time for recreation. If he plays billiards or golf, chess or lawn tennis, he can be handicapped so as to make a good match of it, or, better still, he can engage in friendly combat with players of much about his own strength. In any event, he derives considerable enjoyment from the encounter, and if he be not a positive crank, his opponent has an equally enjoyable time of it. Very different is the position of things at the Bridge table. At the club a man may find his own level pretty soon. On the other hand, how often a rubber at Bridge may be completely spoilt for everyone concerned just because one of the four has never really studied the game. Even his opponents are to be sincerely pitied.

Do not misunderstand me in the matter. I do not advocate that Bridge should be all "hook." Much must be left to the initiation of a player. There are, however, certain conventions which should be common property. These, instead of adding to the difficulties of the game, simplify matters considerably, consequently a sound Bridge player who has acquired all that there is to be known about the game has not to tax his mind or memory over trivialities. His energies may be better employed.

A sound declaration covers a multitude of sins, but great importance must also attach to the play of the hand. The object of these articles is therefore to assist the Bridge aspirant to a knowledge of Bridge in all its phases, whilst striving not to make the game too elaborate a one.

WORDS OF WARNING.

Before settling down to my subject, just a few words of warning, which may just as well come now as later. Do not dwell at inordinate length over your cards or your declaration. The slow and tedious player is the greatest bore to be met with in the card room. Beware! the habit is one which grows, and it may be said that once a slow player always a slow player. Nor is there anything to be gained by the process, for you not only exasperate your opponents but your partner into the bargain, and a game of Bridge can be made to drag most horribly.

The man who instead of making the declaration when it is his call talks steadily about the fiscal policy or his fancy for the Derby, about his form that afternoon at golf, or how he strung up forty the other night at billiards, is another pet abomination. Then there are men who, when it is their turn to deal, are invariably filling their pipe or helping themselves to whisky. "I've got them on the list, and they'll none of them be missed."

Of course, the declaration comes first, and in this connection it is remarkable how many players err in the direction of caution, or rush to the other extreme. Playing, as you probably do, over and over again with the same players, one of your first considerations must be to note their characteristics in this respect and try to profit accordingly. It may af-

fect your doubling or redoubling, or actually influence you in your declaration. Be assured that your powers of observation may frequently be turned to account. A knowledge of the conventions supplemented by a fairly good card memory, will make you a decent player, and these attributes are to be acquired by anyone, for the card memory is largely a matter of practice. But before joining the ranks of the select body of first-class players, you must add to these very necessary qualifications the faculties of observation and deduction. Both are essential, as without the one the other could not be put into force.

Bridge has so long been an institution among us that every would-be player has some smattering of the game. Comparatively few people, however, have a thorough knowledge of its laws, which seems passing strange at first sight. There is after all some excuse for them, as the rules take a good deal of knowing, and so many players do not adhere to the strict letter of the law. Long sojourns in the land of "Family Bridge" have conduced to slackness in this respect. This state of things is rather misfortunate than their fault, and they are to be sincerely pitied. Outside such doubtful luxuries as "Family Bridge" and Progressive Bridge, a wider knowledge of the rules should exist, and the strict letter of the game be always enforced. Otherwise where is the line to be drawn, for some people are more generous than others. No; rules are made to be kept, and a player is sadly handicapped unless he knows what penalty to exact for each particular offence. "The Popular Bridge Player," published by Simpkin, Marshall, and Co., 4, Stationers' Hall Court, London, price one shilling, is one of the most recent books on the game which contains a complete code of the revised laws, and I would refer those of my readers, whose education has been neglected in this respect, to remedy the omission at once. When a point of law arises their opinion will then be worth having.

THE ETIQUETTE OF BRIDGE.

Then there are certain unwritten laws which should always be scrupulously observed, the chief of which can be briefly enumerated. They may be said to comprise the etiquette of Bridge. From the nature of the conditions which govern the game, acts may be so done, and words so spoken, as to carry a distinct intimation to a partner, and that such breach of etiquette carries with it no penalty should in itself ensure its faithful observance.

Fortunately, the demands made by etiquette are not very formidable, and we can shortly discuss them together. A player should always use the same formula as in "I make Diamonds trumps," "May I lead?" "Yes, please." "I leave it to you partner." "I double," etc., etc.

Try to take much the same time over one and all of your declarations. To leave it almost regretfully after lengthy consideration points undeniably to an attacking declaration having been in contemplation. Again, the leader should not hesitate over the question of doubling, for his partner might easily benefit, even unconsciously, by the information thus illegitimately obtained. In the event of your partner having accorded you such information as to his hand, on no account allow it to influence you in any particular. All information coming from the enemy's ranks may, on the other hand, be utilised to the full, although no player should hesitate over the play of a card

with the view of misleading an opponent. As may be well supposed, such a proceeding is absolutely contrary to all notions of fair play.

Never play a card ostentatiously, as much as to say "This is my trick," nor prepare to lead again until the trick is taken. In like fashion, a player, who desires the cards to be placed, should never do it with the object of attracting his partner's attention, even if at the time his partner be religiously studying his hand or the ceiling. If things go all wrong in consequence you can gently remonstrate with him at the close of the hand. It will probably do you good and him no great harm.

Do not lead to the first trick before you have asked your partner's permission to play. It would almost point to your holding a worthless hand and fearing a double.

As to Dummy, he should never talk during the progress of a hand, nor rise from the table with the intention of looking at his opponents' hands. To ask to see the dealer's cards is equally irritating and unnecessary.

How often Dummy draws the dealer's attention to the fact that the latter is leading from the wrong hand, and yet this affords a serious breach of the rules, and one which I should much like to see penalised. When will some "Dummies" learn that once their cards are exposed they must take no further part in the game save that they may ask the dealer whether he has none of a suit in which he may have renounced?

Having, as it were, skimmed the surface of things, next week will be given to the consideration of "No Trumps" declaration. The art of declaring may strike some folk as the simplest sort of concern, but I can assure them it is nothing of the kind. Nor can its bearings on the fortune of a rubber be over-estimated. An unsound declaration is very easily made, but once made, the mischief cannot be undone. To appreciate thoroughly the value of a hand and to know almost intuitively when to make an attacking declaration or when to adopt cautious tactics is a great step on the road towards success.

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Tourist (out West): "I presume this neighbourhood is full of exciting history."

Guide: "You bet. D'ye see that point o' rocks? When the sheriff's posse got after Buffalo Jim, they chased him to the top of that there peak, three hundred feet high, and the only way he could escape them was by jumping."

Tourist: "Goodness me! The fall killed 'em, didn't it?"

Guide: "No. He didn't jump."

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