

THE beginnings of bridge, like those of most games, are doubtful. The term is apparently a corruption of a name given a game called "Biritch or Russian Whist," which appears to have originated in the Levant. It was called Russian Whist, probably by a spiritual cousin of the man who invented Chinese Checkers and Cream of Tartar.

It was introduced into the sanctity of London Whist Clubs in 1894, and, like the clubs, remained inviolately a man's game for nearly ten years. Admittedly, older club members, when asked to play this new-fangled game, freely expressed the opinion that cards were going to the dogs, that the country was ruined and that probably it was all invented by "those damned Liberals." (Labour was then only a cloud the size of a man's hand on Clubdom's horizon.)

In spite of their fulmination the game rapidly replaced whist, its chief difference being that the dealer, or his partner if the dealer permitted, could name a trump suit, and that, instead of the four players playing the hands, the dealer's partner was dummy and laid his hand on the table. This made it much easier to guess what your partner had. You now had a fifty per cent chance of being right instead of thirty-three per cent-even when you were too dumb to guess from his expression, nervous cough or the other well-known methods of signalling without actually being brought before the committee that make bridge what it is. Being dummy also gave one time out for having a drink and doing necessary things, greatly relieving the strain of a hard evening at cards. It is not surprising that the game took on.

In 1902, women heard of it, after which all music, art and literature disappeared from entertainment. Bridge became the favourite substitute for

conversation and a potent source of income to the shrewder and poorer members of the fair sex.

Bridge did not last long, as Auction Bridge appeared. This allowed the players to argue with their opponents. not to mention their partners, as to which suit should be trumps. This settled the bitter cry of the man with thirteen spades who heard his opponent placidly make clubs trumps and was instantly popular, especially with the semi-professionals who by a superior ability to bluff and much better judgment, were able to win more and win it more quickly than before. In those days 10/- a hundred and L5. on the rubber were quite normal Club stakes. and at these figures a good player could make his thousand or two a year without much trouble.

Auction has suffered a reverse also. Contract Bridge, whose main difference is that it only allows you to score towards game the tricks you actually bid, came in soon after the first European War. This required far greater exactitude in the bidding, a more precise meaning attached to responses, and a scientific method of bidding slams when they were attainable. This last has fortunately never quite been achieved, and as many people have never achieved any of them, the professional player, if anything, does better at the new game. fancied victims, in their as his expertness, bid even higher than before and get doubled even more often.

Most players in 2 NZEF stick to Auction, and wisely, as few Contract players really agree on the meaning of any bid except the opening ones.

This article will be followed by a series of short articles on fundamentals of play and of auction bidding. It is not intended to deal with contract unless an overwhelming flood of fan-mail deluges the Editorial Office with demands for such a series.