

Bridge—Recreation or Racket?

HIGHBROWS who ridicule bridge surely have not stopped to consider the excellent effect the great American indoor sport is having upon the country. It is giving occupation to women who would otherwise be idle; it is a substitute for conversation; it is the one topic that a hostess may safely introduce in any group of cultured Americans; it provides a peg upon which husbands and wives may hang their quarrels; it diverts the mind from the unpleasant processes of living; it is supplying large incomes for a few worthy gentlemen who have wearied of the law and other unremunerative professions; it is helping newspapers to fill their columns; it is giving themes to cartoonists and other joke hounds; it is furnishing many feminine pocketbooks with money that can be put to a number of good uses; and the game is just another furtherance of that lofty objective known as American standardization.

We have organized our society in such a way that upper class women over forty have nothing to do. What little education they received twenty years ago was intended to be ornamental and not at all utilitarian. If their husbands' earnings supply the necessities of life, women join the great army of the unemployed as soon as the last child no longer needs maternal ministrations. Their houses are electrically equipped. They realize that the ready-made product is cheaper than the one manufactured at home. Having discovered that a man's love is neither permanent nor all-satisfying, they look naturally for some way of filling the long, dreary hours. Some foolish wives and virgins, after disillusionment, turn to secondary romances; while wiser women follow in the footsteps of the French king for whom cards were invented and they succeed in thwarting the plans of the devil who is ready to find mischief for their idle hands.

No honest woman rationalizes the game in terms of self-improvement. The players are not thinking beyond the hour's absorption. They are not interested in the making of cerebral convolutions which can be put to no other use in their vapid program. They play bridge in order to play better bridge, not in order to become brainier wives and mothers or citizens who are fitted to grapple with problems of state. To them bridge is its own excuse for

By EUDORA R. RICHARDSON

being and needs no other justification.

Women who acquire the middle-aged spread at the card table and men who thicken their waistline at the club in the afternoons and at home in the evenings realize perhaps only vaguely that bridge has relieved them of the tiresome necessity once involved in conversation—now happily a lost art among Americans. If speech were permitted about the hearth fire, there would always be the chance that some officious fool would distress the hostess by introducing world peace and disarmament or capitalism and unemployment or prison reform and juvenile delinquency as topics for discussion and thus embarrass guests who obviously have neither time to study such questions nor any personal interest in their solution. Now that bridge is second only to the depression in the public mind, the hostess can breathe freely during the most formal or the most intimate dinner, knowing that, after her cocktails have been served, prohibition will overcome depression and that concerning it there will be unanimity of opinion.

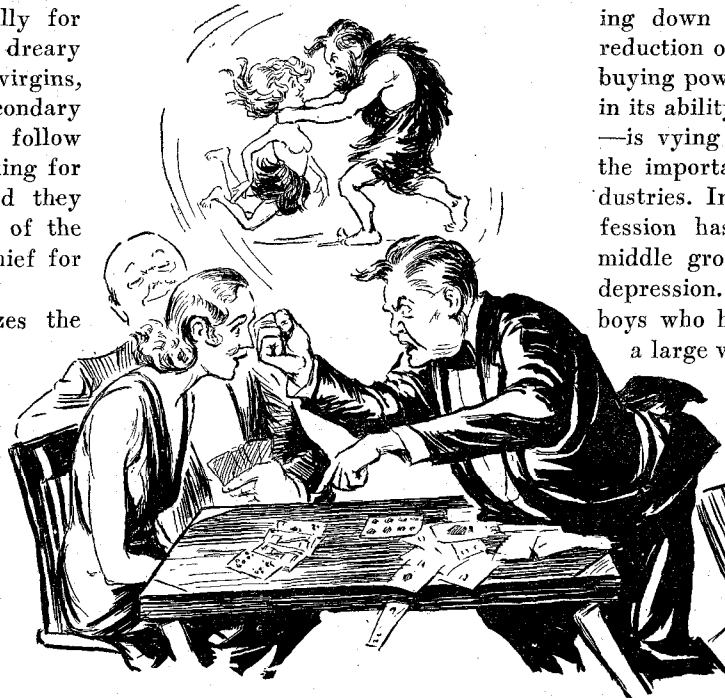
Bridge, moreover, is injecting spice into the lives of the long married. Love, which—despite all that can be said concerning its hypothetical possibilities of sublimation—is entirely biological, holds couples together for a short time without creating such community of interests as will furnish bases for intelligent conversation. Naturally, in the

earlier years problems of child-training and discipline give married people something to talk about over the dinner table and by the fireside. After the children—now with astounding precocity—have taken matters in their own hands, evenings would drag interminably for the aging mother and father if it were not for bridge. The years have carried men and women along divergent paths, which frequently meet and cross and clash only at the card table. The bridge quarrel, the occasional bridge murder, as well as the rare praise that some brilliant play elicits from a life partner, are the only oases in many a marital desert. Couples who abuse each other during the game are reenacting the lovers' quarrels that once delighted their sadistic or masochistic souls.

EVEN before Colonial statesmen attempted to make the thought articulate, Americans were claiming their right to life and liberty and pursuing happiness by methods calculated to drug the mind and prevent realization that they were enduring the processes of living. The Puritan escaped life through channels of morbid religion, the Cavalier by means of anaesthetic conviviality. Bridge and bad liquor seem to be serving the higher uses of the moderns. Of the two methods of escape, it should be admitted that bridge is preferable.

It is the practical uses, however, to which the game is being put that should recommend it to censorious Americans. What with stock market losses, the closing down of factories, the wholesale reduction of salaries, and the decreased buying power of the populace, bridge—in its ability to care for the unemployed—is vying with bootlegging as one of the important and stable American industries. In the cities bridge as a profession has assisted members of the middle group to weather the business depression. Then there are the few big boys who have cornered the market in a large way. What a boon their books

have been to the lagging publishing business. What a boon to the book sellers who cannot clear their shelves of less important literary productions than those that exposit bridge! How cleverly they change the rules for contract as soon as the playing public becomes familiar with one set of laws! Parisian stylists are



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no more astute in contriving new fashions in clothes than are the masters of cards in inventing bridge conventions. Thus it is that last year's bridge is as out of date as last year's frock.

Pegging away far below the artists are the lesser professionals who are content to bask in reflected glory. These are they who compose the annual conventions, who achieve private or group instruction from the great, and who win certificates that bear the awe-inspiring signatures. In their native towns they advertise that they are teaching Work or Lenz or Culbertson or Whitehead or VanDamm or the methods of some other celebrity. Lawyers and clergymen adhere no more strictly to authority than they. For every rule and convention, they are able to cite glibly page and paragraph from their Holy Writ. By their speech are to be known the consultants of the four or five oracles. They follow the words from Delphi in major and minor matters—even to the extent of adhering to Doctor Work's meticulous use of the subjunctive mood.

Capitalizing the game, stores employ instructors who attract prospective customers by courses of lectures given free or for a nominal charge. A woman who adds to pleasing personality certification from one of the authorities can now earn a very neat sum by giving private instruction and also by conducting classes held in daylight hours for women and at night for the contending couples. Some are able to support their husbands in enviable idleness. Some are educating their children or adequately meeting other financial emergencies. Having accomplished a measure of economic independence, all are conscious of elevation to the professional class, which at last stands in the social ladder several rungs above that of housewife.

The ladies who instruct should be congratulated upon their acquisition of high pressure tactics. They couldn't do better if they had taken courses in correspondence schools. Indeed, their methods do not differ greatly from those of any other expert salesman. Before you purchase an automobile, for instance, the dapper gentleman who attempts to get your name on the dotted line assures you that the car should last most of your remaining lifetime. A year later, however, he brings a new model and explains in detail the distressing obsolescence of the one in which you are riding. The bridge instructor, soliciting your patronage, assures you that contract can be mastered in six lessons.



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Two months later she calls you sweetly on the telephone to impart the news that her favorite prophet has just sent a great many new hints and a few stunning conventions of which you really must avail yourself. So the clever teacher, once having landed her fish, throws him overboard only to pull him in again and again. Her exigencies and the high priests', moreover, dovetail beautifully. When a great man writes a book or a pamphlet, expounding a new truth, the apostles have fresh themes to be used in missionary endeavor.

PERHAPS the bridge instructors are no more jealous of each other than are members of any other profession. There is really no reason, however, for their being jealous at all. It is easy to understand why real estate agents, general practitioners in medicine, lawyers and clergymen should claw at each other's throats, for the average person buys only one house for residential purposes, uses only one doctor for general ailments, appeals to the same lawyer in times of trouble, and joins just one church. In matters of bridge, however, his method is not so narrowly eclectic. One plays with many people as he moves about the world; therefore, if he desires to be considered well educated in bridge, he must be familiar with all the rules and signals in order that he may say wisely as he cuts for his partner, "Whose game are you playing today?"

Just as the cultured man speaks French in France and Spanish in Spain, so must he play Work with Work's devotees, Culbertson with Culbertson's, and so on through the brilliant galaxy. Consequently, from the entire bridge

playing public, no matter to what authority first allegiance seems to have been sworn, the instructors may make up their list of prospects. So it is passing strange that the ladies should speak so disparagingly of each other. Still in extenuation it should be noted that the profession is young. Just as real estate agents at last coined the fine title *realtor* and began to meet in rousing conventions, so it may be that some day all the opposing groups in the great fellowship of bridge may convene in one body actuated by the single purpose of giving good bridge to the world. Perhaps under such a name as *contracteurs*, the ladies may achieve an *esprit de corps* worthy of their calling.

Then it is possible that Mrs. Smith will no longer accuse Mrs. Jones of stealing her out-of-town engagements and Mrs. Jones will not feel sure that Mrs. Smith has solicited clients unethically.

In my defense of the game, I should like to subscribe to the current claim that bridge is teaching Americans better manners. Unfortunately, I can remember too well the violent repudiation of the nice whist parlance that was brought over from England. We had no time for such foolishness as "Partner, may I play to spades?" and the gracious rejoinder "Pray do." Not so long ago I sat in a game with an Englishwoman who inquired politely when the player opposite her failed to follow, "No trumps, partner?" "Well, if I had one," snapped the American woman, "why in the devil do you think I didn't play it?"

No, our bridge manners are not so good. Still, we have learned to accept insults at the bridge table and not to harbor them. Husbands and wives are by no means the only people who fight over cards—everybody fights. I have heard women who are quite decently inhibited in other relationships call each other, when playing bridge, names that once constituted grounds for the duel. Yet they continue the combat day after day without permanent resentment.

Bridge may not be training the mind to grapple with life problems, but it is aiding the memory. Amazingly, players remember their own skilful plays and their partners' errors. Days later the narrative omits no essential details. Of course I am not sure that memories of the kind that bridge develops are of any great value to the world. On

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►► Crossing the Color Line ◀◀

By CALEB JOHNSON

ONE out of every ten persons in the United States bears the visible tinge of the "tar brush," according to the last Federal Census. No statistics are available, naturally, of the number of persons who do not acknowledge their Negro ancestry but pass for white in their home communities and elsewhere, but it is a large and rapidly increasing number.

Crossing the color line is so common an occurrence that the Negroes have their own well-understood word for it. They call it "passing." It is less and less difficult for the young man or woman of African descent, whose skin, hair and features are not decidedly Negroid, to "pass" without fear of detection. The "passer's" Negro relatives and friends can be relied upon not to give the "passer" away. Their attitude is that it is a good joke on the white folks; coupled with this there seems to be a sense of pride that one of their race has achieved the social equality denied to themselves.

In New York, where only one person out of thirty-four is an acknowledged Negro, it is a matter of common repute among the colored folks of Harlem that more than ten thousand of their number have "passed," and are now accepted as white in their new relations, many of them married to white folks, all unsuspected. In Chicago, with a Negro population of one in twenty, and in Philadelphia, where one in thirteen is a Negro, the proportion of annual "passings" is said to be even larger.

The mating of white with black in America has, of course, been going on since the first cargo of African slaves was brought to this country, nearly three hundred years ago. These matings, always illicit in the South and usually illicit in the North, even where the marriage of white and Negro is legal, have so diluted the Negro strain that the Federal Government, since the Census of 1890, has given up the effort to distinguish between Negroes of pure African descent and those with an admixture of white blood; all who are regarded in their home communities as having a Negro strain are classified as such. At least one third of all the Negroes in America today have a strain of white blood, according to Dr. W. E. B. DuBois, foremost of Negro "intellectuals." This includes the "Black Belt" of the South, where in such states as Mississippi and South Carolina more than half the entire population is Negro, as well as the "all-white" states of the North, of which North Dakota, with only one

It is estimated that nearly 10,000 persons of fractional Negro ancestry each year "cross the color line" from Negro to white society. The Negroes call them "passers." Some of them are octoroons; others are "mustifees," the offspring of an octoroon and a white person and actually and legally white. Contrary to general impression, white ancestry is the dominant strain, as the author points out here in reporting the scientific investigations of Dr. Davenport of the Carnegie Institution.



Brown Bros.

THE LATE BOOKER T. WASHINGTON
Great Negro educator, who had a fraction of white ancestry and had in his Tuskegee Institute students of fractional Negro blood who could have "passed" as white persons

Negro to 1,371 population, is the whitest.

Scientific investigations by the Carnegie Institution of Washington have thrown new light on the results of the mating of white with Negro or part Negro, and have set at rest some of the popular misconceptions about these mixed relations. The belief that the white-and-black hybrid is less fecund than either pure white or pure black is regarded as incorrect by the Carnegie investigators, who present evidence to the contrary in an imposing list of very large families, offspring of two mulattoes, mulatto and Negro, mulatto and

quadroon, and the like. This theory (that the Negro race will eventually die out from infertility because of the increasing white mixture) seems to be based on a false analogy between the human white-Negro hybrid, the mulatto, and the ass-horse hybrid, the mule, notoriously sterile, and it has been cherished by many who believed that by such a dying-out process alone will the Negro problem be solved.

The results of this scientific investigation indicate that the Negro race is not dying out from infertility but is bleaching out through admixture with the white race. The white strain is the dominant one, and this fact has a direct bearing upon the increasing number of Negroes with three-quarters or more of white blood who "pass" every year and marry into white families.

This is, as the report of the Carnegie investigators puts it, "a matter of great social moment to hundreds of our citizens, namely the possibility of a reversion in the offspring of a white-skinned descendant of a Negro to the brown skin color. There is a current opinion that such an extracted white, married to a pure-bred white, may have a black child. This tradition has been used to create dramatic situations in novels and in newspaper stories; and the dread of this tradition hangs over many a marriage that might otherwise be quite happy. In our studies no clear case of this sort has been found and our fundamental hypothesis leads us not to expect it." And, in another place: "It follows from our studies that persons of African descent whose skin color contains ten per cent or less of black pigment will, if mated with a like person, produce only white-skinned children . . . Such persons constitute 'fixed white.'"

These are, indeed, facts of great social moment, not only to the man or woman who "passes" but to the white society into which he or she passes. The fear of becoming the parent of a distinctively Negro child is all that keeps many young octoroons of both sexes from crossing the color-line matrimonially; the same fear keeps many young white men from marrying young women to whom they are strongly attracted but who, they have reason to suspect, have a strain of Negro blood. The general realization that such "throw-backs" are biologically impossible when one of the mates is pure white and the other has no more than one-eighth Negro blood will certainly tend to accelerate the process of "passing."

While there are no statistics to sup-