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PIRATE BRIDGE

Foster's Pirate Bridge: The Latest Development of Auction Bridge, with the Full Code of the Official Laws. By R. F. Foster. (McBride, Nast. 5s. net.)

Royal Auction Bridge: The Art and Practice. A Series of 45 Illustrative Hands played throughout with Explanatory Notes. By Ernest Bergholt. (Routledge. 1s. 3d. net.)

Mr. R. F. Foster's book on "Pirate" Bridge is the first detailed guide we have yet seen to this latest "development" of Auction, of which something has been heard in London for months past, though as yet it is little played here. It is written with all the skill and thoroughness and lucidity of style which we should expect from one of the "old masters," first of ordinary Bridge and then of Auction. Was not Mr. Foster indeed the "inventor" of that Eleven Rule which finally completed the enlightenment of the player whose partner leads from his fourth best? And as the compiler of "The Laws of Pirate Bridge" ("copyright, 1916, by R. F. Foster: all rights reserved") he now champions its superiority over Auction, as formerly he has helped to establish victory of Auction over "straight" Bridge, with all the zeal of a pioneer and of one of the players of the maiden rubber at the Knickerbocker Whist Club, New York, on November 3, 1916.

The credit for the "idea" of Pirate Bridge accords to the poet, **Mr. Aleister Crowley** (so that we need not apologize for reviewing it as a "literary" product); and the selection of its name he attributes to Mr. Frank Crowninshield, the New York editor whose articles "introduced" it to the American public last January. In the United States the new form of the game has apparently been taken up already at a good many clubs, as would be expected among so go-ahead a people. But somehow we do not fancy that Pirate is destined to oust Auction, as Auction has so largely displaced the earlier form of Bridge—certainly not in this country. We are indeed confirmed in this view by the very reasons which Mr. Foster gives for preferring it to Auction, since most of what he calls the "defects" of the latter seem to us its merits in the eyes of large numbers of average players, and the alleged "advantages" of Pirate calculated rather to enhance the

winning powers of the "expert," the professional, and (all too certainly) the card-sharper, than to improve the game for ordinary social purposes. At the same time *Pirate*, as explained by Mr. Foster, may well have its attractions as a variant for people who are well able to take care of themselves, when the rubber is made up of players of fairly equal caliber; and we can certainly commend his book, with this *caveat* on the new "development," to anybody who is sated with Auction and wants a new field to conquer.

According to Mr. Foster, the serious defects in Auction are:—(1) The frequency of "misfit" hands as between partners; (2) the fact that you may be drawn with, and tied to, an uncongenial and unskilful partner for a whole rubber or more; (3) the repeated losses in penalties through the defeat of what, on one of the hands at any rate, may be a perfectly legitimate bid; (4) the length of time to which a rubber may be drawn out, with continual penalties on both sides, without either party winning anything substantial at the end; (5) the consequent annoyance of other people waiting to play and unable to cut in for a game; (6) the utter helplessness of the "poor cardholder"; (7) the fact that it is not really a "good gambling game" because "no one can win without sharing all his good fortune with another person," and there is therefore no chance for "the display of individual skill"—"it is always *we* that won the rubber, never *I*." *Pirate*, he claims, removed all these objections. For the innovation introduced by *Pirate*, while in most other respects it follows the procedure of Auction, is that the bidding is not only, as in Auction, for the declaration, but is also for the partnership. Each player is out primarily for himself; even when he has obtained a partner for his declaration, he alone scores towards the game (his temporary partner, the dummy, though credited with the same aggregate in points on that hand, only scoring "above the line"); he wins, if finally successful on a rubber, from all three of the others.

All the novel features of *Pirate* really flow from two sources: the bidding for a partner and the position of that partner as dummy, when finally obtained, at the table. As regards this latter point, the dummy hand is exposed wherever the "partner" has sat, and is therefore not necessarily (as at Auction) opposite the declarer; so that it is important, for "leading up to a ten-ace," to have dummy next on the right or next on the left, according to the lie of the cards as either known to the successful declarer or indicated to him by the bidding. As for the procedure in fishing for a partner, the first essential after the opening bid (and before any competing declaration can be made) is that one of the other players, from the left in order

round the table, must "accept." A declaration which goes round without getting an acceptor is void, and the next player may then bid; if all bid without an acceptance, the deal passes. Somebody must have made your declaration good by accepting the position of partner to you on it before it can be over-bidden (this over-bid being similarly accepted—by anybody, including the earlier declarer and acceptor), and the final declaration thus eventually established. It will be obvious that nobody need become a partner unless he wishes, and similarly nobody who has been "accepted" by one whom he thinks an undesirable partner need play the hand with him, because there is always pretty sure to be a means of escape.

The general result is that the final declaration, as "accepted," represents (or should represent) a combination of the hands best fitted to carry out its contract, and that, in a large proportion of deals, somebody goes game each time, while slams are very common. Mr. Foster's experience is that very few rubbers last five deals, and that the average is three and a half. And, again, that the average rubber (won, of course, only by one of the players, who is paid differences by all the other three) runs to between 500 and 600 points, as against 400 at Auction, so that Pirate is "infinitely superior as a gambling proposition."

Frankly, this does not seem to us a merit. It may be to those who want their Auction to consist of what we may call the "get-rich-quick" type. But we do not believe that most players merely want that. The social enjoyment, combined with exercise of sufficient skill, for which Auction gives so much scope to card players, depends largely on the chance of its failures as well as its successes, on its adding a test of character—and tolerance of, or adaptation to, other people's characters—to its final end of winning or losing money. Whatever else must be clear about Pirate, its essential novelty is that everything is subordinated to making individual victory early and overwhelming, irrespective of any of the ups-and-downs of continued partnership, or the defensive fights, which commonly enhance the joy of the struggle in Auction. It is certainly not a game for "mugs"; and any two "experts" (to say nothing of unscrupulous confederates) would make short work of five rubbers out of six at a table where two inferior players happened to be associated with them. Mr. Foster, in his chapters on tactics, proves, we think, that the game contains some interesting new opportunities for cleverness alike in the declarations, the acceptances, and the play of the hand; but at the same time we also think that, in proportion to their offering themselves to the clever player only, they spoil the game, and make it distinctly inferior

to Auction for nine people out of ten who meet at the card table in ordinary conditions; and who are not habitually so anxious to finish every rubber in a strenuous hurry as he seems to suggest.

For most average players, therefore, we shall expect to see Auction retain its vogue, though the more advanced ones may avail themselves for a change. To the former we may take this opportunity of recommending Mr. Bergholt's new volume of illustrative hands. They are characteristic of difficulties constantly arising in games; and Mr. Bergholt's setting out of the proper playing of each hand, with notes on the why and wherefore could not be bettered.