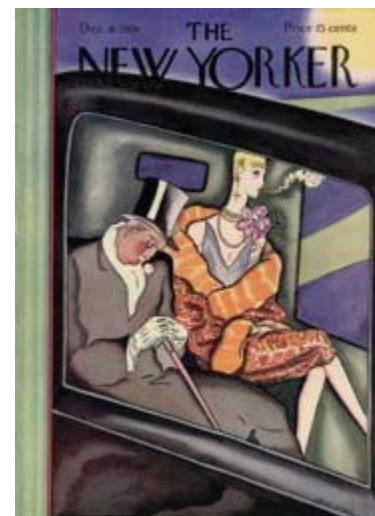


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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

OMINOUS

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In the hectic world of bridge a rumble as of distant thunder signifies the coming of Contract Bridge. Last spring it was a cloud no bigger than a man's hand, but during the Summer, Newport took it up—all of Newport that was able to graduate from Auction—and it spread to some of the smarter corners of Long Island too. One now hears of it in all parts of town; it has been more or less generally adopted in our most exclusive sets, and there are those who say that it will have swept the whole East Side and be threatening Great Neck before the season is done.

Intensive efforts made in our behalf to trace the history of Contract Bridge have failed, but it seems to have started somewhere in this country, going abroad from here. Men in their middle thirties report that they played it while at college; one man played it "in a St. Louis Club" seven or eight years ago; it was seen in China ten years ago, etc., etc. Unquestionably, it gained a real vogue in Austria after the war, when kronen were worth little, although it declined in popularity as money became worth more. And it is certain that the present American vogue is largely attributable to the popularity of the game in France, where it has been widely played under the name of *Plafond*. It is certain, moreover, that Contract is five times as steep as Auction and about five times as difficult; that if you play Auction for half a cent you must play Contract for one-tenth; that if you play an inexpert game and rely on drawing good cards you will lose your shirt. All of which is set down as a word of warning for those plebeians who are still ignorant and innocent.

The principal difficulty at present is that there are no official rules. The Knickerbocker and Cavendish Clubs haven't undertaken to father the game. It is played there, if a few of the members want to play it, but the most that can really be said for these clubs is that they are open-minded about it. Contract enthusiasts say they will be forced to take it up; the conservatives suggest that, at best, it will be years before they do anything much about the rules. In the meantime a set of rules devised by Mr. Harold Vanderbilt is accepted as final. Mr. Jesse Livermore of Wall Street has also worked out a set. These gentlemen are both great players. There are many who say that Mr. Vanderbilt is the best bridge player in the world—or the hardest to beat. He plays Contract in practically all his idle hours now—Racquet Club in the afternoons, private parties in the evening, and he is said to have cleared a sum equal to the salary of twenty-five minor executives at Newport last Summer. ♦

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