

Henry Link was an eminent psychologist of the 1930s, director of the Psychology Service of New York, he pioneered the idea of "Employment Psychology" and authored the Personality Quotient (a measure of the extent to which a person has acquired by practice the skills and habits which interest and serve other people). This is what he had to write on bridge from his own peculiar point of view.

On Playing Bridge

by Henry C. Link, Psychologist , published in the Nec Cup Bulletin 4,2004

People have said to me: "No, I don't play bridge. I consider it a waste of time." Others have said: "Yes, I play bridge, but I hate to play with people who take it seriously." Yet I have recommended to hundreds of clients that they learn to play bridge or that they take it more seriously, on the ground that bridge is one of the most fruitful disciplines in acquiring unselfish habits and desirable personality traits.

The person who does not like to play bridge seriously is one who doesn't like to be reproved if he trumps his partner's ace, ignores his partner's discard, fails to return his partner's lead, or forgets what is trumps. Such a person is thoroughly selfish in his disregard for the pleasure of three people. He lacks the habits, and sometimes even the desire, of paying strict attention to the acts and remarks of his coplayers.

He insults them by saying, in effect: Your concentration and pleasure in this game is silly. Why don't you take it lightly as I do?

A person who lacks the sensitive habits of tact or consideration in bridge probably lacks them in other social activities. If he plays bridge at all, he should take it at least as seriously as the people with whom he is likely to play. Learning bridge involves the acquisition of a whole collection of definite extrovert habits: I have counted fifty three and there are more of paying attention to other people and their acts. I have recommended the game particularly to introverts lacking in social charm and effective social techniques. If such a person learns to play a fair game of bridge, it means first of all the concentration of his mind on something outside himself, something that gives many other people considerable pleasure. Being able to play the game gives him a wider opportunity to meet people on a common ground. If his game is acceptable, the fact that he is not a brilliant conversationalist will not be so embarrassing to him. In such favorable circumstances, the acquisition of collateral social graces is made easier.

I hold no brief for those who consider bridge a matter of life and death, or for those to whom bridge is an end in itself. But as a discipline in unselfish social habits and as a tonic for an able intellect, it ranks high in the category of worthwhile human activities. Children should be taught to play bridge at an early age. They may not like it. The process may involve compulsion.

A father and mother, asking their two children to sit down to a game with them, may be met by the remark: "I want to listen to the radio." When this issue has been settled, the children may play in a spirit of silliness, and with a deliberate lack of attention or cooperation. Soon they will want to stop. Then it behooves the parents to say: "If you will give the next four hands your complete attention, you may stop. If not, we shall play another four hands. A year later, one of the children may come home from an evening's visit at a friend's house and say: "What do you think? We played bridge and my partner and I made a grand slam."

From being an effort and a bore, bridge has become a pleasure, a step in the building of a more effective personality, an achievement in the techniques of social cooperation—indeed, a step in the direction of greater peace and harmony among the nations. Few human activities require such meticulous attention to the rules of good behavior as does bridge.