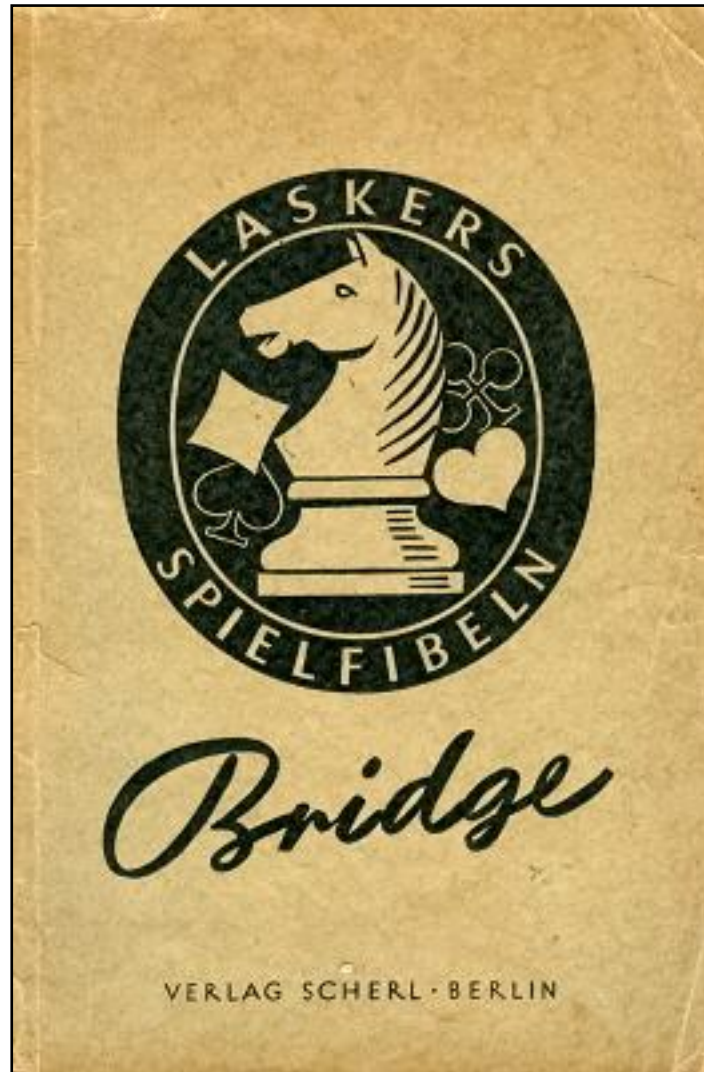


Chess and Bridge

Edward Winter



From an item by E. Baumer Williams on pages 193-194 of the April 1921 *Chess Amateur* :

'It was rather amusing lately after a pleasant game of bridge to hear the players going in for an animated discussion as to the respective merits of bridge and chess. Their endeavours to establish some sort of analogy between games so dissimilar struck me as about as illogical as the ancient attempt to discover what difference existed between "a herring and a half, and a scuttle of coals". My friends, however, were comparing them somewhat in the same fashion as they might have compared a pair of mid-Victorian chimney ornaments – almost identical, with a shade of difference here and there.

The interest in the game of bridge seems to consist mainly in the luck of the cards dealt to one; perhaps, also, in the shillings – won or lost as the case may be. We

chess lovers, however, would appear to "take our pleasures more seriously". The noble game, containing no element of chance whatever, and depending entirely on the brain-work of the two opponents, appears to me to admit of no sort of comparison with the other.'

Other writers have developed various comparisons. In his Preface on pages xi-xii of *Brains in Bridge* Gerald Abrahams wrote:

'Every chessplayer, it has been well said, has at least one other major vice. Some evidence of this is afforded by the fact that the list of acknowledged British bridge masters includes some chess players of at least County strength.

I recall that that brilliant chessplayer and excellent bridge player, the late Victor Wahtuch [*sic* – Wahltuch], expressed the view that bridge could involve some intellectual efforts comparable to those of hard chess. I expect that that utterance was biased by the fact that chess came very easily to him, who mastered it very early in life, and his bridge was a late acquisition. What is more important is the consideration that the intellectual activities involved in the respective games can be usefully compared and contrasted. If I am right in this, then it may well be that some player, chess conscious and bridge conscious, will from these pages acquire an extra insight into bridge. Who knows? The book may even improve his chess.'

Abrahams then added a footnote:

'I do not, in this book, seek specific analogies in bridge to chess. There are certainly some comparisons to be made. "Smothered mate" and "Smother play", for example; and "opposition" is suggested by many bridge endings. But what I am concerned with is the analogy between the mental process of persons engaged in manoeuvring, respectively with chess pieces, and the pieces of pasteboard that are used on the bridge board. One very important difference consists in the fact that, whereas most chess positions offer great range for thought, a very large percentage of bridge hands offer very little scope. But the two games have this in common: that it is easy to miss the demand for thought that is latent in the apparently simple position. On the other hand, a common factor is the large element of common sense which is basic to both games.'

C.N. 2591 referred to the bridge books of Abrahams and Wahltuch, and it may be wondered which other chess figures have written about bridge. In the early 1940s André Chéron brought out *Le système Culbertson*, and he also co-authored, with Emile Borel, *Théorie mathématique du bridge* (of which an English edition was subsequently produced). An article by Chéron entitled 'Les échecs et le bridge' appeared on pages 33-39 of the March-April 1935 issue of *Les Cahiers de l'Echiquier Français*. Emanuel Lasker wrote extensively on bridge in his late-1920s books *Encyclopedia of Games* and *Das verständige Kartenspiel*.

Alan Truscott, who has written a large number of books on bridge (as well as the Foreword to Abrahams' *Brains in Bridge*), was not a chess author

but he gained some prominence as a player in the 1940s and early 1950s.

A final jotting is that C.J.S. Purdy became involved in a dispute in the *Sydney Morning Herald* regarding the number of published books on bridge. As reported on pages 154-155 of the November-December 1965 *Chess World*, an article by Frank Cayley in the *Herald* of 4 January 1966 had suggested the existence of '10,000 books on bridge'. Since this figure exceeded the common estimate of volumes on chess, Purdy risklessly offered \$500 to the first person who could prove the 10,000 claim. ('He will have to write most of the books himself or pay other people to.') Purdy reported that M.V. Anderson was 'inclined to place the total number of books in and out of print in various languages at "under 500".'

(3280)

The following remark is by Harry Golombek in a review of *Schachgenie Aljechin* by H. Müller and A. Pawelczak (Berlin-Frohnau, 1953) on pages 160-161 of the May 1954 *BCM* :

'... [Pawelczak's] categoric statement on page 52 that "Aljechin war ein ausgezeichnete Brückenspieler" (Alekhine was an excellent bridge player) is quite false. I played quite a lot of bridge with Alekhine in 1939 in South America and, even by my modest standards, Alekhine was a very weak bridge player. I well remember his wife remarking to him, after he had made some particularly atrocious mistake, "If you go on like this you'll lose us our château in France".'

(4344)

C.N.s 4462, 4828, 5143 and 5151 referred to various persons who have written books on both chess and bridge: J.C.H. Macbeth, Emanuel Lasker, P. Anderton and S. Novrup.

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