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# House Of Cards

Whist, bridge and a cruise; Vanderbilt invents contract; the game sweeps the world; great tournaments and winning hands; life at home

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Harold Vanderbilt is now 72—an age most people associate with retirement. But the doctrine of the easy and relaxed life seemingly is not one which he understands. It would not be hard for Vanderbilt to retire to a world of pleasant memories. Many of the rooms of his Virginia residence and his Florida home near Palm Beach are decorated with cups, framed photographs and paintings of yachts—so many of them that it would seem hard to escape the past. But to watch Vanderbilt stalk by them, to note his lack of interest in them is to guess that the memorabilia are mere decoration rather than the personal record of a great sporting career. Vanderbilt's dedication is to the present—and he continues to live each day with amazing vigor.

His day starts early and with typical intensity. He rises, rolls a mat out full length beside his bed, and on it performs a half-hour series of yoga exercises. Vanderbilt's exercises begin simply enough with controlled breathing but continue through to such awesome backbreakers as balancing on the base of his spine with legs outstretched and occasionally to standing on his head for minutes at a time, until finally he topples over, rolls up the mat and proceeds to the first of his day's swims. This over, he sits down to a frugal breakfast of prunes, a straw-like dry cereal and yogurt. He has been on this morning diet, which he dislikes but believes best for his health, for over 20 years. The exercises have been almost a daily habit since 1920 when he was introduced to them by a yogi who billed himself as the Great Oom. The Great Oom tried but he couldn't get Vanderbilt to study the more advanced mental considerations of yoga and had to be content with having one of his disciples teach Vanderbilt the physical aspects.

Physical fitness is an essential doctrine in Vanderbilt's life. Minutes after his J boats moored following a race, Vanderbilt would invariably head for Newport, there to exercise in the fading afternoon light on the tennis courts at the Casino. His yoga mat was always with him aboard his motor yacht Vara. He enjoys getting his friends to do the physical exercises, but few of them—even such athletically inclined companions as Rod Stephens, Vanderbilt's after-guardsmen aboard the Cup defender Ranger—take more than one or two turns on the mat. Stephens used to rise at a startling hour to leave Vara and putter around Ranger, a handy excuse for escaping the rigors of yoga.

Following breakfast Vanderbilt sits down to his business affairs until high noon, when the Florida sun outside is at its blazing height. He then dresses in white shorts and floppy white hat and strides down to his tennis court through gardens breathless in the heat. As his wife says: "Only mad dogs, Englishmen and Vanderbilts go out in the noonday sun."

To watch Vanderbilt play is to see in its most marked form the intense concentration he gives his yachting, his bridge, indeed any undertaking. His mind is completely absorbed in the game. He awaits service balanced on his toes, leaning slightly forward, his body moving in a slight, cobra-like motion, seemingly deploring the delay before he can leap forward to hit the ball. Left-handed, his wrists circled with the colorful handkerchiefs he uses as sweat bands, he plays an effective game, hitting looping lobs which keep his opponents well back toward the green canvas-covered backstop.

He plays as many as three sets before taking another swim. For the water he affects a gray bathing cap and earplugs, and, disdaining the steps of his pool, he dives in, barking out "hup!" in mid-flight. Occasionally, the "hup!" somewhat louder, he goes off the high board, some 12 feet above the water.

Lunch is held by the pool, an informal buffet, with Vanderbilt sitting at the head of the table swathed in a blue beach robe. Guests are usually friends of the Vanderbilts who live nearby. Often, though, particularly during an annual institution known as Bridge Week, the guests are bridge players—the best bridge players in the country. Lunch concluded—and no bridge player can remember a departure from the ritual—Vanderbilt stands and says, "Well, now...how about a digestive rubber or two?" The chairs scrape back and the bridge players head for the living room and its picture-window view of the Gulf Stream. There they will remain until 6 in the evening, when they take time out for a swim, dinner and then return to the tables where they stay long into the night.

Bridge is for many a form of relaxation; but this is not a term one would associate with Vanderbilt's type of play. The small armchairs quartered around the bridge table have been recovered four times since the yearly invitations to Bridge Week started in 1930, an attrition caused mainly by long hours of play, and more particularly by the wearing action of the so-called "squirmers"—players whose agony of concentration manifests itself in the creak and sway of the furniture. Almost all the great players have at one time in their careers journeyed either up from Miami or down from the north to participate in Bridge Week. They enjoy the hospitality of not only one of the best bridge minds in the country, but of the originator of the card game itself. Though it is a title he abhors, Vanderbilt is, as the press often described him in the '30s, the "father of contract bridge."

The game was devised one autumn evening in 1925 aboard the liner Finland on a cruise from San Francisco to Havana. Three friends were traveling with Vanderbilt—Dudley L. Pickman, a Boston lawyer, Francis M. Bacon, a New York broker, and Frederick S. Allen, a longtime resident of Paris. Together the four sat down and played the first game of contract—scored almost precisely as it is today, and now played, according to the most recent survey of the Association of American Playing Card Manufacturers, by an estimated 32 million people in the United States alone.

Vanderbilt is a strong booster of contract bridge, but the personal pronoun never seems to creep into his praise of the game. Even his own bidding system, popularly called the Vanderbilt convention, he has always referred to as the club convention—modesty of a type which makes it no surprise that the majority of the bridge-playing millions are not aware that Vanderbilt contributed the game they play.

It is true, of course, that contract bridge did not spring into being, Athena-like, from the head of Vanderbilt. He played many hours at the card games which are the forebears of contract: auction bridge, bridge whist and whist—the latter the farthest removed from contract but itself the font of derivative four-handed contract card games in which a trump is selected and victory depends on the number of tricks won in play.

Whist—and it was so titled, the legend goes, from the practice of hissing out "whist" to call for silence in 17th century cardrooms—was played as follows: as in contract the dealer distributed 52 cards equally among the four players, turning up the last card to determine trump. There was no bidding, no dummy, no no-trump. Though considerable ingenuity could ferret out the lie of the cards, the outcome of the game depended largely on luck.

Whist was a popular game, though, widely played not only in England but throughout the Continent. In fact, it was somewhere on the Continent that further variations led to a game known as bridge. Some historians say that bridge was originally played in Istanbul, Turkey by the Russian colony there. In any case, judging from one familiar story, it was from the Mediterranean that the game of bridge was brought to England. A certain Lord Brougham, visiting in Cairo, was introduced to a derivative of whist which, he was informed, was called bridge. The differences between the whist he knew and the new game were several. The last card was no longer turned up. Instead, the dealer, after inspecting his hand, named the trump or no-trump, or, if his hand was unsuitable to do either, he would say, "Partner, I leave it to you"—"bridging" the decision across the table (which is, of course, the prosaic version of the origin of the game's name). If his partner could find no suitable bid, he would say, "I make it a spade," the cheapest declaration, and one that was usually doubled. The dealer always played the hand, and, after the opening lead, his partner became dummy. In the scoring, each trick above six that either side won counted toward the 30 points required for game; when spades were trump they counted two points, clubs four points, diamonds six points, hearts eight points, royal spades (introduced in the late days of auction) nine points, and no-trump 12 points. Doubling was allowed, and, since there was no restriction on the number of redoubles until auction bridge was introduced, the trick score in a bon vivant game frequently mounted to awesome proportions.

Lord Brougham was delighted by the game, realizing quickly that it required a mental skill not involved, in whist. The story goes that he returned to London in the autumn of 1894, and one night joined a game of whist in the Portland Club, then a whist strong-hold and now a world-famous center of contract bridge. To the consternation of the other players at the table, Lord Brougham, neglecting to turn up the last card on his deal to signify the trump, picked up his hand, peered into it and announced the trump. The other players must have thought Lord Brougham addleheaded from the Mediterranean sun. Whist was a game conducted in rigorous formality. Lord Brougham is supposed to have apologized profusely for his oversight and told the group that his mind was on another game—bridge, he told them it was called. The whist players were intrigued and when the rubber of whist was completed, Lord Brougham showed them how to play it. Bridge was almost certainly known in England before Lord Brougham's arrival from Cairo, but his evening in the Portland brought it to widespread attention in whist circles. Within a few years bridge had supplanted whist in popularity.

When Vanderbilt was 15 he and his mother received their first bridge lessons from the noted expert Joseph Elwell. Elwell in later years was Vanderbilt's favorite auction bridge partner, until his murder on June 11, 1920, a mystery that was never solved. He was found slumped in an armchair in the living room of his New York apartment with a powder-stained bullet hole in his forehead. He was clad in pajamas and wrapper, and—an insult to his notorious vanity—missing his toupee and false teeth.

The game in which Elwell partnered Vanderbilt was called auction bridge. It succeeded bridge and was the predecessor of the game Vanderbilt introduced aboard the Finland in 1925. The bridge historians are surprisingly in accord that auction bridge originated in India at a British post in the hill country. Three members of the British civil service were stationed there, with—to their despair—no fourth within 100 miles. The three—the names of two of them survive: a Mr. F. Roe and a Mr. Hudson—were avid bridge players, but although they tried all sorts of variations of three-handed bridge they never hit on anything which was completely satisfactory. Finally, one of them suggested that they bid as at an auction for the declaration of trump—thus giving each side, rather than simply the dealer, a chance to determine the final contract. They christened the game "auction bridge." Roe published a short treatise on the game in Allahabad in 1904 under the pseudonym "John Doe." The pamphlet found its way to England, and its innovations were adapted to four-handed bridge, first at the Bath Club in 1906, and then in the Portland Club in 1907.

The new game spread rapidly, submerging whist to a large extent, the old bridge completely, and continued to enjoy popularity until 1925 and the cruise of the Finland.

Auction bridge came to Vanderbilt's attention while he was attending the Harvard Law School in 1908. He became proficient at it almost immediately. Card games are almost second nature to him. Vanderbilt thinks that anyone possessed of normal intelligence can become a good card player, but that the really good player—and he believes that the Mendelian law of inherited characteristics has much to do with it—must have some card sense born in him regardless of the diligent application he may give the game.

His own success and his card sense he attributes to an instinct and liking for cards that he has enjoyed since he was able to distinguish a jack from a queen. Card games absorbed him. As a boy he kept badgering his family's maids and gardeners for a game of slapjack, or casino, or old maid, and later hearts. He kept at his cards through school, college and law school (both at Harvard University). By the time he moved to New York in 1910 to enter the law department of his family's New York Central Railroad, he had established a considerable reputation as an auction bridge player. Of course, there were some—mainly habitués of the old Whist Club on West 36th Street in New York—who couldn't believe his reputation could hold up in expert play. In fact, when they heard there was a card-playing Vanderbilt, they rubbed their hands in delight and in anticipation of bulging their pocketbooks. But they found to their sorrow that his reputation was well founded. "They used to pay up regularly," Vanderbilt recalls with a grin.

As much as he enjoyed auction bridge and his success at it, Vanderbilt felt that the game could be more stimulating. The Finland cruise gave him a chance to try out a game he had been mulling over in his mind for some years. He realized that auction bridge was defective chiefly in that, although it had introduced the excellent principle of competitive bidding between the two sides to determine the final contract, it had retained the bridge principle of scoring toward game all tricks won in excess of the contract. Vanderbilt had played the French card game *plafond* and recognized the merit of its greatest asset: having to bid game in order to make it. He decided to introduce this feature in his new game, and saw what a fascinating field it opened up in connection with slams—not as in auction scoring a slam bonus because the slam was made, but having to bid the slam and risk sacrificing a sure game in order to obtain the bonus.

Since the slam bonuses in auction were too small to make the risk of bidding a slam worthwhile, Vanderbilt changed the scoring system. He increased the slam bonuses 20-fold, raised the game requirement from 30 to 100, and changed the trick values: no-trump at 35 points per trick, spades and hearts at 30 and diamonds and clubs at 20—the same as today except for the change in no-trump scoring. The premium for rubber was jacked up, and so were the penalties for undertricks. As for undertricks, Vanderbilt foresaw the necessity of protecting the underdog—the side that had lost the first game. He therefore kept that side's undertrick penalties low enough to enable it on occasion to save the rubber or a slam at a not too excessive cost by outbidding the opponents. But Vanderbilt was at a loss to describe the partnership which was subject to higher penalties because it had won a game. It was aboard the Finland that the descriptive word was supplied him—by a young girl whose name neither Vanderbilt nor his three friends can remember. From a card game she had once played (she couldn't remember its name) she offered the word—since used by millions daily—"vulnerable."

With his innovations in the bidding and scoring, Vanderbilt took the whist derivatives one step further away from the point where luck is predominant and into the realm of mental stimulation—toward the intellectual treat Vanderbilt and a great many other people believe well-played bridge to be. There were some in the early days of contract who thought that accurate bidding put such a premium on mental endeavor that the game was for experts alone. The 1929 *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, for example, describes contract bridge as "not a good game for a club cardroom ...

it is a game where happy coordination between two partners is very necessary...[something] not always easily obtained in a club cardroom."

It was a criticism which was not generally accepted. Following the Finland cruise Vanderbilt and his three friends casually introduced their intellectual treat to acquaintances along the eastern seaboard. The game seemed to catch on by itself. Within months it had monopolized card tables across the nation, and by 1927 the New York Whist Club's Card Committee, of which Vanderbilt was a member, published the first official Laws of Contract Bridge and incorporated Vanderbilt's scoring schedule into them. Vanderbilt did comparatively little to boost the game he had invented. He wrote three short books—one of them sold some 11,000 copies—on his contract bridge and on his bidding convention (see opposite page), but he remained more or less in the background, in fact so much so that many bridge players associate contract bridge with the professional promoters who stepped in and made their fortunes and their reputations with publicity campaigns. Such men as Ely Culbertson, for example.

As unlike Vanderbilt as the colorful Sir Thomas Lipton of the Cup defender days (SI, Oct. 15), Culbertson was an enigmatic figure. Vanderbilt knew him and played bridge with him, but, like many Culbertson acquaintances, is at a loss to describe him. Culbertson had a remarkable career, rising from complete obscurity to a position where his name was practically synonymous with bridge itself. He started by capitalizing on the confusion of bidding systems in the early days of contract. In those days players bid by any method they pleased to arrive at game. A partial list of these systems—of which the Vanderbilt convention was one—would include such names as the Barton Club, The Eighteen System, The Acol System, The Winslow, the Joshua Crane Common Sense System, the Bulldog System, Picture Echo Calling, the Carson-Roberts Step Ladder System, the Power Control System and others—all designed, of course, with varying success, to help their users bid accurately to the proper contract. Culbertson sat down with a deck of cards and, backed by his experience with the prevailing systems, devised his own, the Culbertson system, and set out with a vigor that would astonish the best of today's publicity agents. His aim was to popularize it and make it the standard bidding system, and he put it to the first test in England. It had come to his attention that a British bridge expert had maligned the standard of play in America. With typical sassiness Culbertson proclaimed himself the defender of American honor and challenged the British to a match. He put what little reputation he had on the line, and, as was to happen many times, his gamble paid off. He took his wife Josephine with him, and two young men who could play the Culbertson system—one of them Theodore Lightner and the other Waldemar von Zedtwitz, who was later Vanderbilt's partner in tournament play using Vanderbilt's club convention. Culbertson's team won handily against the British, by almost 5,000 points, and Culbertson came back to America a famous man. His Blue Book sold over a million copies; his syndicated columns appeared in hundreds of papers; he launched The Bridge World magazine, he founded the United States Bridge Association, the Crockford's Club, a number of schools from which teachers, after paying for their course, graduated with a diploma certifying them as qualified to teach the Culbertson system. From all of this, plus movie shorts, radio lessons, patented bridge accessories and endorsements, Culbertson made, by his own estimation, a yearly income often upwards of a half-million dollars.

Culbertson was remarkably frank about his propaganda methods. He once described them as follows before the Sales Executive Club of New York: "I have formed the greatest advertising and publicity organization in the world. I have sold bridge by appealing to the instincts of sex and fear and by false presentation of my own character and that of my wife. I am not the cocky, smart-alecky, conceited and ready-to-fight person I have tried to make the world believe. My wife is not the shy, diffident, cool, calculating woman I have tried to make the public believe. It is all a stunt to make the name Culbertson synonymous with contract bridge. First we had to build a system. That took six years. Then we had to sell the system. We appealed to women,

to their natural inferiority complex. Bridge was an opportunity for them to gain intellectual parity with their husbands. We worked on their fear instincts. We made it almost tantamount to shame not to play contract.... I have sold bridge through sex—the game brought men and women together. I used the words 'forcing bid' and 'approach bid' because there is a connotation of sex to them...."

Whatever people thought about his principles of exploitation, Culbertson made the nation bridge-conscious. Two extravagantly publicized challenge matches—one against Sidney Lenz and Oswald Jacoby, which was billed as "The Card Battle of the Century" (SI, Dec. 20, '54), and then against the brilliant husband-wife team of P. H. and Dorothy Sims—kept his name on front pages in a type size ordinarily reserved for earthquakes or the World Series. Players who barely knew enough to separate the jokers from the pack before dealing learned the Culbertson (quick trick) count for hand evaluation, a system still well known though superseded to a large extent by the point system popularized by Charles H. Goren (four points for aces, three for kings, two for queens, one for jacks).

Vanderbilt never challenged Culbertson publicly with his own club convention. But he played Culbertson a number of times, and in 1937, with Baron Von Zedtwitz as his partner and paired with the team of Oswald Jacoby and David Burnstine, he defeated the Culbertsons and their teammates—then self-styled world champions—by over 6,000 points in a single evening team-of-four duplicate match.

The club (or Vanderbilt) convention is not often played today. Vanderbilt is convinced of its qualities and toys with the idea of bringing out a book to prove its value and bring it back into vogue. Despite claims by other experts that the careful bidding of the club convention can be blocked by preemptive or jamming bids, Vanderbilt believes it to be the best and most accurate bidding route to game, and particularly to slam. "Nonsense," he says of the criticism of his convention. "Any bidding system can be blocked by such bids." He has made a careful study of the hands played in last year's world championship to point out how often the Vanderbilt convention would have produced a better contract than the one actually reached.

Vanderbilt rarely gets a chance to play his convention unless, of course, he is playing with Von Zedtwitz, who has been his regular partner in tournament play since 1929. Von Zedtwitz was born in Germany, of an American mother and a German father. He served in the German cavalry in the First World War with a distinction for which he was decorated. But he hated the whole business, distrusted the unfolding political scenery of postwar Germany, and in the '20s came to this country. Vastly informed and widely traveled, he is working at present—when he is not seated at a bridge table—on a dictionary.

As partners, Vanderbilt and Von Zedtwitz are similar only in that they employ the Vanderbilt convention, and deliberate at great length over their cards, each of them, when the situation calls for it, going into what bridge players call a huddle—a silent and nerve-racking concentration which may continue for as many as five minutes. But there the similarity ends. Vanderbilt inspects his cards with the brooding melancholy of a cast-iron Indian, motionless in his chair, a momentary annoyance sometimes constricting his facial muscles into what his friends call his stench face, with only occasionally only his hand drifting up to stroke his chin. Von Zedtwitz, on the other hand, is a squirmer—jiggling in his chair and on occasion leaping up from it to stalk about the room. Vanderbilt remembers him on one occasion parading up and down in front of the picture window at Palm Beach, looking out at the Gulf Stream for inspiration for perhaps five minutes to make a bid which he later considered the most important of the evening. The bid: "Pass."

In the old days the baron's most characteristic peculiarity was a constant and ferocious tugging at his ear lobes—a habit he was broken of by a friend who warned him a malignant growth

might result. Von Zedtwitz has since shifted the point of attack to his large mop of white hair, darting his long pale fingers into it, twisting, kneading, knitting almost, as in the concentration of his play he remains completely unconscious of his surroundings. Vanderbilt recalls that some springs ago in Hollywood, Florida a waiter spilled an entire pitcher of water over Von Zedtwitz during tournament play with no apparent reaction that Vanderbilt, or the waiter, or anybody else there could note. "Well, he was in a huddle," Vanderbilt says matter-of-factly.

"A partnership is never better than its worst member," is an old bridge adage, and a good one. Vanderbilt and Von Zedtwitz have proved themselves a happy combination—their most notable achievements being the winning of the Vanderbilt Cup for the knockout team-of-four national championship in 1932 (the other members of their team were P. H. Sims and Willard S. Karn), in 1940 winning it with Edward Hymes Jr., Charles S. Loch-ridge and Robert McPherran.

The Vanderbilt Cup is an open duplicate tournament for teams of four or five players. Eight teams are seeded. After two qualifying sessions, the remaining 64 (formerly 32) teams play knockout matches, as in a tennis tournament, to determine the winner. A pair of one team plays against a pair of the other team at each of the two tables. The same hands are played at both tables but in reversed positions; for example, if a pair of one team bids and makes a slam in spades at the first table, the pair of the other team at the second table will have an opportunity to recoup their loss by bidding the same slam later, thus offering the best possible gauge of relative skill. If the pair at the second table fails to make the slam after bidding it, there occurs what bridge players call a "swing"—a difference of points scored on the same hand.

One such swing occurred in what was perhaps the most famous hand in Vanderbilt's 1932 victory for the Vanderbilt Cup. It happened in the quarter-final round, one of the most publicized hands in the entire history of tournament bridge, a hand full of drama and the one which is still Baron Von Zedtwitz's favorite.

The Vanderbilt group was playing against a team captained by Mrs. Ely Culbertson. Mrs. Culbertson and her partner, Mr. Huske, had long finished playing against P. H. Sims and Willard Karn, the other members of the Vanderbilt team. All of them were pacing up and down the Ritz-Carlton ballroom waiting for the Vanderbilt-Von Zedtwitz table to finish. Finally, as the last board was placed down, the official scorekeeper announced: "One board to go. Mrs. Culbertson's team leads by 210 points."

When Mrs. Culbertson and Mr. Huske had played the hand, they had arrived at a contract of four spades and had been set two tricks, not vulnerable, or 100 points, by Sims and Karn. It seemed an impossible situation for the Vanderbilt team. Sims, a big burly man built like a football tackle, muttered that the jig was up as he strode heavily around the ballroom, looking up from time to time to see Vanderbilt and Von Zedtwitz brooding over their cards. The suspense was increased by the fact that no kibitzers were allowed. Only one man was privileged to watch the players—the tournament director Alfred M. Gruenther, then a lieutenant, now the chief of NATO, and in bridge circles renowned as the dean of tournament directing. It was from Gruenther that the crowd had to await news of the progress of the match, and his next bulletin was electrifying. He announced that Von Zedtwitz had the contract at five diamonds.

P. H. Sims threw up his hands in despair. He had played the board in setting the Culbertson-Huske pair, and it seemed impossible to make five diamonds with the same cards that had resulted in a two-trick set at four spades. Pausing in front of his wife he said: "It can't be done. It's all over. They have to lose a spade, a heart, and..." Suddenly he grabbed a deck of cards, and with Mr. Culbertson, a crowd of players, kibitzers and reporters wedging him in so tightly against a bridge table that he could hardly manipulate the cards, Sims laid out the hands as he

had remembered them (actually giving one too many trumps to the dummy). "He has a play for it," Sims whispered. "He has a play for five diamonds."

Vanderbilt was unaware of the suspense until, dummy on that last board, he walked across the ballroom to compare notes with his teammates. Informed of the dramatic circumstances in which the hand was being played, he crept back to his seat. Three tricks had been played. The baron had lost two, and was in a huddle—lost in concentration. Then suddenly he began to play his cards quickly and with authority, and with the announcement from Gruenther "the baron makes five diamonds!" the ballroom erupted into shouts better suited to the boxing arena. The crowd rushed for the bridge table. The cards were left in such a mess by the excited players that Gruenther had to call them back to straighten the hands out for proper recording. Mrs. Culbertson pushed through to congratulate Von Zedtwitz. For years he had been a member of the Culbertson team, making the journey to England that propelled the Culbertsons to fame. "As long as it was you, Waldy," she said to Von Zedtwitz, "congratulations!"

Following their victory in the quarter-final round the Vanderbilt team went on to win the tournament, playing a brand of bridge that prompted Charles Lochridge, who played against them in the finals, to say: "In all my experience in playing in bridge tournaments I have never encountered such perfect card playing as was displayed by our adversaries. I think it can be safely said that during the entire 30 boards there was not a bad bid or play made by either Mr. Von Zedtwitz or Mr. Vanderbilt."

An average bridge partnership fortunate enough to play a rubber or so against Vanderbilt and Von Zedtwitz would not have the uncomfortable and disastrous experience they might expect in playing against an expert team—unlike, say, taking on Gonzales and Segura in a tennis match. In fact, the bridge partnership might win a rubber or two, or even a number of them, depending on the luck of the cards; but in the process of play they would become increasingly aware of the vast weight of mental equipment brought to bear against them. By the time four tricks have been played an expert can come close to telling his opponents exactly what cards they hold. An expert's card memory is prodigious. P. H. Sims used to warn people who challenged him at gin rummy. "It wouldn't be an equal contest," he'd say. "Unless you get a perfect shuffle some cards will stay in the same order, and I'm the kind of fellow who can't help remembering the exact order in which the cards turned up for the previous three deals."

Vanderbilt has no less remarkable a card memory. He can remember a great number of his Vanderbilt Cup hands, and all of the 16 hands he and Von Zedtwitz played against the world champion English team two years ago—not only the cards in each hand and the bids, but the order of play.

Naturally, in order to keep his brain attuned to such feats as this, Vanderbilt's approach to bridge is markedly impersonal. He is not likely within five minutes of leaving a bridge table to remember the names of either his partner or his opponents if he is playing with them for the first time.

"Never heard of him," Vanderbilt will say of a name his wife mentions in conversation.

"You cut him for a partner two nights ago," his wife will reply, and that is enough to associate the man if not with his features, or his name, or his jokes, or his demeanor, at least with the cards he held. "Oh, yes," Vanderbilt will recall. "I remember on one hand he doubled a slam bid holding the following cards: the queen-small of spades...four little hearts...."

Vanderbilt's opinion of a bridge evening depends largely on his enjoyment of a good partnership. He will play bridge at almost any level, and often does with house guests who

are more at home with canasta. Even bad bridge is better than no bridge at all, says Vanderbilt, and he plays it, if grimly. Naturally Vanderbilt is constantly on the lookout for a good partner and topflight competition. When he is in New York, Vanderbilt seeks out the experts in the bridge clubs—either the Cavendish or the Regency.

The Cavendish started in the early days of contract. It moved all over New York—to the Mayfair House, the Ambassador, East 62nd Street, and is now holed up in the cellar of the Ritz Towers. The Cavendish is starkly utilitarian, its quiet fluorescent-lighted cork-and-leather atmosphere broken only by the slap of cards, the scratch of matches, the quick spoken flurry of comments following the play of a hand, and an occasional belch from an old-fashioned water cooler set in a corner. The Regency Club, just east of Fifth Avenue on 67th Street, is a swankier club, with ornate furniture, private cardrooms and an excellent restaurant.

These places are a home away from home for most expert bridge players, and as soon as Vanderbilt steps through the door of one of the clubs, he is recognized and greeted with pleasure. No matter what the hour, Vanderbilt can almost be sure of getting a game from such famous bridge players as John Crawford, Howard Schenken, Charles H. Goren (of the Goren system), Alvin E. Roth, Tobias Stone (the latter two the inventors of the Roth-Stone system), Helen Sobel, George Rapee and Oswald Jacoby—names, in short, familiar to anyone who reads the bridge columns in the nation's press.

Perhaps most remarkable about Vanderbilt's bridge play—and it is something constantly remarked on by the experts—is the fact that theoretically he is an amateur. Bridge is not Vanderbilt's profession as it is with the vast majority of the experts he plays with in the bridge clubs. For example, to the bridge experts the so-called master points are of utmost importance. These are awarded the top finishers in tournaments sponsored by the American Contract Bridge League and are highly coveted, since they supply an index by which one's play can be judged. The pinnacle of success is to achieve the title Life Master, which is held by about 1,000 bridge players and signifies that they hold over 300 master points. At the moment the top man on the index is Charles H. Goren, with over 5,000 master points to his credit. Vanderbilt, on the other hand, is not presently credited with enough master points to qualify as a Life Master. That he is not, of course, is due to the in-frequency of his tournament play since the master points scheme was evolved, but it attests to his amateur status in the highly professional world that is big-time bridge. Many of the players Vanderbilt finds in the Cavendish have immersed their waking hours in bridge. They write bridge columns, bridge books, invent systems, give lectures and lessons, and when they are not making money at bridge or trying to increase their master points total in tournaments, they talk bridge incessantly, or kibitz in one of the bridge clubs, and if their play has gone badly, they brood in a corner over ill-played hands. When they do sit down at a bridge table to play—and an expert averages upwards of 50 hands a day—they play for as much as 5¢ a point, pitting their skill against others who lead an equivalently absorbed life. Their skill is a matter of practice and keeping their brains tuned up to the demands that the standard of bridge they play will require.

Vanderbilt, however, is an exception to the rule. He can walk into the Cavendish after a trip abroad during which he has not touched a deck of cards and play on a par with men for whom bridge is a daily profession. "When Vanderbilt comes in here from a cruise or something," said one player last winter, "he is certainly the best player in the country for the first 15 minutes. For the rest of the evening he probably is." The qualification is simply a disbelief in Vanderbilt's ability to sustain the awesome concentration that he practices at the bridge table. Vanderbilt himself thinks that the quality of his bridge falls off after sustained play, and lately he has tried to slack off on overlong bridge evenings. The hands, possible plays and bids whirling in his mind long after he has left the bridge table make it difficult for him to get a night's sleep.

The intensity with which Vanderbilt attacks bridge is summed up well by his wife. She used to play with her husband but gave up for reasons she made clear in a verse she wrote entitled, simply enough, Bridge.

*There's the baron and Schenken and Os Jaco-bee,  
And they talk about bridge hands from breakfast to tea.  
Then they play the darn game 'til a quarter past three;  
They've purloined my boy friend from me.  
There's the Vanderbilt club and the Culbertson two;  
There's the one over one and the Sims' ballyhoo.*

*I've studied them all 'til my brain's in a stew;  
They've purloined my boy friend from me.  
Whatever I bid, it's too strong or too light;  
I can tell by his stench face I never am right.  
And it usually ends in a marital fight;  
It's a hell of a game for a wife!*

Watching Vanderbilt at the bridge table or at the wheel of a yacht one can hardly believe that both bridge and yachting are simply what he calls pastimes. Though undeniably Vanderbilt has brought to all his activities the rigor of the professional outlook, he considers his true occupation businessman. Until the New York Central proxy fight two years ago he was the fourth generation of his family to be actively engaged in the management of the New York Central Railroad. He was one of the leaders in the proxy fight to keep Robert Young from gaining control of the Central, and Vanderbilt's loss, caused by the opposition controlling over a million shares more than the management, was one incalculably more bitter than any suffered with cards or racing boats.

His ability to shift from his business affairs to his pastimes with such success can be attributed to a mind which is of a specific rather than a general nature. If the average man's mind can be compared to a bonfire at night which lights up a substantial area, Vanderbilt's mind is like a thin, intense searchlight beam—lighting up one object to the exclusion of all else. His two excellent books on yachting—*On the Wind's Highway* and *Enterprise*—are remarkable in that, though they cover the decade from 1930-1940, there is not a hint in either of the outside world: the Depression, the fall of governments, the rise of fascism, or even, for that matter, closer at hand, the limited but colorful social whirl of Newport during the Cup series. Vanderbilt's mind is concentrated on his yachts and their races—to the exclusion at the moment of what is neither of concern nor even of interest to him.

In the sporting world, such singleness of mind, whether it leads to success or not, does not capture the imagination of the general public. True, he has been widely acclaimed—thousands of handkerchiefs fluttered from the slopes of Newport's Castle Hill and the concentrated blare from the horns of hundreds of parked cars saluted his victories in the America's Cup series. But as a champion he is in the tradition of golfing's Ben Hogan: shy, reserved, Vanderbilt is not at home with the amenities of sport; he is not a man to be found amid the convivial company in the barroom of the yacht club following a race; he abhors the type of bridge play which is a front for dispensing gossip.

Fate itself seems to take a hand on the few occasions he has catered to the theory of the camaraderie of sportsmen. On one occasion in 1939 in England, during what was in essence

a goodwill tour, Vanderbilt gave a dinner to which he invited a multitude of yachtsmen he had defeated that summer. Short on spelling but conscientious, Vanderbilt's Swedish steward laboriously copied out special menus to put before each plate. Startled yachtsmen picked up their menus to read that *vicious soose* was their soup course, to be followed by a fish course not calculated to put them at ease: *sole manure*.

That the amenities of sport come hard to him can be no reflection on Vanderbilt. It is difficult to think of a sports figure who has made such a profound contribution to the public. When he left college, Vanderbilt told his father that he wanted to take up an active interest in the New York Central. His father would not recommend it. "You are fortunate enough not to have to work," he said.

Vanderbilt's decision not to follow his father's advice, and to bring his instinct to excel to everything he's tried, has had a strange latter-day echo. "The public be damned" is a phrase every schoolboy knows—a famous tag to the Vanderbilt family name. It is a statement Vanderbilt and his family are very sensitive about, believing firmly that the circumstances under which his grandfather made the remark have never been fully appreciated. Whatever the spirit of the remark, by his contributions to the millions who sail and play bridge, Vanderbilt's life has been a refutation of that phrase, and a ghost has been laid low.