WHIST

American Leads and their History

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AMERICAN LEADS AND THEIR HISTORY

WITH A REVIEW OF

LATER INNOVATIONS

IN THE GAME

BY

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We now come to an event in the history of whist, apparently insignificant, but which was fraught with the future welfare of the game, for it led to the introduction of "*Cavendish*" into the whist world, the man to whom Whist owes more for its advancement than to any other since the days of Hoyle.

This event was the coming together of the "knot of young men" who played whist at Cambridge, and afterwards in London, between 1850 and 1860, referred to by Dr. William Pole in the introduction to his *Philosophy of Whist*.

The facts concerning this "Little Whist School", so far as I have been able to ascertain them, are, that shortly after 1850 Mr. Daniel Jones, brother of "Cavendish", and others, some of whom are mentioned below, used to play whist at Cambridge in much the same way as other young men. It seems that, contrary to the general impression, Mr. Henry Jones was not party, as he was then pursuing his medical studies at St. Bartholomew's Hospital, in London. After these gentlemen had taken their degrees, they and "Cavendish" used to meet in London about the year 1854. The regular players were Mr. Edward Wilson, Mr. W. Dundas Gardiner, Mr. Daniel Jones, and Mr. Henry Jones. Although others used to join in the play at times, the four named formed the backbone of the "Little School". When these four met they used to play every hand through to the end for the sake of science, and also for the purpose of making certain calculations. They, moreover, wrote down interesting hands, of which more anon. It was in the nature of things that these four whist enthusiasts, who were young men of "considerable ability", as Dr. Pole calls them, should argue, and that they should not always agree. They had the advantage over most beginners of being able to refer disputed points to the late James Clay, then the acknowledged authority on whist. The cases were writen down and submitted to Mr. Clay through the medium of Mr. Henry Derviche Jones, F.F.C.S., father of "Cavendish", who happened at that time to be chairman of the Portland Club, the headquarters of English Whist, where he often met Mr. Clay.

About 1860 the "Little School" ceased to meet, owing to circumstance over which the members had no control. A number of manuscripts which had accumulated were thrown into a drawer, and there they would probably have remained to this day but for the following accident.

In *Macmillan's Magazine* of December, 1861, appeared an article, "Games at Cards for the Coming Winter". It was signed "W. P.". In the course of the article the following passage occurred: "It would be a great boon if some good authority would publish a set of model games of whist with explanatory remarks, such as are found so useful in chess, for example".

The future "Cavendish" having read this article, wrote to "W. P." that he happened to have a number of whist hands in manuscript, and should be happy to lend them to him. He received a reply from no less a person than Dr. William Pole, F.F.S., etc., saying that he should like to see the hands.

Before forwarding, “Cavendish” thought he would just read the hands over. He found the “Little School” had taken so much for granted that the MSS. would probably be unintelligible to Dr. Pole. Thus, if A led from his strong suit, no remark was made about it; or, if B, when returning his partner’s lead, and holding the three and the two, returned the three in preference to the two, no reason was given for it. So “Cavendish” began to rewrite. In order to avoid repetition, he erected some of the instructions into principles, to which he referred as occasion required. He also added a few elementary reasons for each line of play. Dr. Pole examined the MS., and wrote to the effect that its contents were a revelation to him, and that Jones ought to publish; so as “Cavendish”, the name of his then club, he ventured into print, in 1862, with a modest 250 copies. The rest every whist player knows; his success was great; and I have his authority to say that by 1891 he had disposed of 59,000 copies of his *Laws and Principles of Whist*. Since that date he must have sold several thousands more. so much for an accident. But to return to the “Little School”.

It was first so christened by a writer in the *Quarterly Review* of January, 1817. Then a storm arose. The late Abraham Hayward wrote to the London *Morning Post* to say that none of the most celebrated players of the day were aware of the existence of this school. That was not surprising, considering that the players named had no idea they formed a school until after the publication of the *Quarterly*, when they “awoke and found themselves famous”. Hayward added, in the *Post*: “Did these young men originate or elaborate or compass anything, or did they merely arrange what was well known and procurable before?” To this “Cavendish” replied: “What I claim for the Little School is that in our book we gave for the first time the reasoning on which the principles of whist-play are based, logically and completely.” It does not appear that the “Little School” originated any alterations worthy of record. These came later, as we shall see further on.

End of quoted passages.