

THE BEST POKER PLAYER I EVER KNEW

With due respect to all those who ever played the game, I must say that Burt Sawbuck has no equal. It might seem like an overstatement when it first reaches your ears and you think about it. But to those of us who have seen him in action, it is as though the revealed truth has at last been put into writing.

His hereditary and environmental strains predestined him to the art or the science, depending upon your philosophy of the game. Both his grandfather and father graduated from the same ignoble institutions where there was plenty of time and opportunity to learn the game well. They were his first and foremost teachers. It has been said that he cut his first teeth on a deck of cards but I cannot vouch for this. Even in his youth he would rarely open his mouth long enough for anyone to look in. He may never have had any teeth. Nevertheless, time developed and nursed him until he had reached his peak of perfection.

I can still visualize his sitting there. Never once would he blink those ever shifting eyes, even when the smoke was so thick that one could only make out the silhouettes of the players sitting around the table. His shoulders were hunched over so, and his neck craned at such an angle that even if one were standing directly behind him, it was impossible to see his cards. But if you did stand behind him, a feeling would come over you as though he knew the very spot on the floor that you were standing on. He had such an expressionless face that even a dead man would envy him. I once watched a fly light on his ear, then walk over under his nose and up across his open eyeball without even stimulating a muscular twitch. And those smooth uncalled hands of his, each finger being like a hand in itself, were capable of coordinating independent motion.

Many of us talk of having a sixth sense, but few of us have ever had that type of intuition by which we perceive that something is going to happen before it actually does. With Burt I will even go a little farther and classify his intuition as a form of mind-reading. Perhaps his hand of cards was some sort of crystal ball which told him all that he wanted to know. When one of his opponents would draw a better hand than he, he would glance around the table moving his head with a radar like motion until it detected the seemingly unsuspected player, then he would look into his right eye as though it were a keyhole to the inner chambers of his brain. Without further delay, he would fold his cards and lay them face down in order that the next round could be started immediately.

I have often asked myself why do others play with him. But then why must there be trapeze artists; why must there be dare-devils in auto races or demolition experts who virtually live in danger? What is it that urges us to do something when we know the very act of doing it will hang our life or property in the balance of chance. It might be the material reward that we receive, but

it is more likely to be the satisfaction of accomplishment. His opponents meet this with the thought, perhaps this will be the day, maybe this time he will loose and I will have beaten him. Other times they would say: "Oh if only we could see a look of satisfaction on his face when he wins; any indication of emotion would perhaps convince us that he is really human". But even when with disregard for all laws of averages he lays down a royal straight flush, there is nothing there to greet them but the motion of those long slender fingers and a quick glance at each player with his ever-shifting eyes. One might think that he is the lowest type of human being, one without emotion or feeling, but at least he is not a hypocrite as many of us who display false emotion in order to foster our material gain. There can be as little or no charity behind a smile as the so-called pokerface, and there is nothing more deceiving than the financial smile.

People are forever using P. T. Barnum's quotation "There's a sucker born every minute" to describe those of us who gamble poorly or loose through deception, but Burt is not really interested in our birthrate as long as our fatality rate does not grow to alarming proportions. It seems that every one of us is a so-called sucker in one way or another. Each time the bait goes out we reach for it and get stung. But I am writing for the Burts of this world, that small handful of men, who, right or wrong, have more determination and put forth more effort than all of the rest of us. Burt certainly was a perfectionist. What does it take and where does this ambition come from? I once asked him and received an indirect reply, which might have been the answer after all. His words were "Shut up and deal".

—DANIEL E. SHEA '59

A SYMPOSIUM ON EMILY DICKINSON

The Poetess who wished to be nobody

I'm nobody! Who are you?
Are you nobody, too?
Then there's a pair of us—don't tell!
They'd banish us, you know.

How dreary to be somebody!
How public, like a frog
To tell your name the livelong June
To an admiring bog!

In this poem the poetess expresses that attitude toward life with which she was imbued and which caused her to become known in her home town legend as "the white clad phantom behind the palings of the garden". Attachment to the privacy of her home