



CONRAD HUNTE BY HARRY SCHOFIELD

There are two main ways of being remarkable, either that of outdoing your contemporaries in a particular characteristic or of being so untypical that you provide such a marked contrast to the typical that people cannot fail to notice you. Conrad Hunte belonged very definitely to the latter category.

We live in an age which loves, in its bureaucratic way, to assign every man to his own type category. Even psychologists comb novels and classify Mr. Micawber as a typical extrovert and Sherlock Holmes as typical of Kretschmers' leptasthenics. Cricket is regarded in some places, such as the precinct of Lord's, as sacred, but even cricket and cricketers are not sacrosanct when it comes to type-casting. Consequently we are led to believe that the Australian is tough and hearty, dislikes to lose (as if some thrive on it) and that the West Indian cricketer is volatile, exuberant, cavalier, and possibly in times of cricketing crisis, irresponsible, unable to bring to the situation the application of a Leyland.

If this is true, Conrad Hunte was untypical. He was much like Sir Stanley Matthews in one respect, namely that people cannot recall ever having seen him commit a mean or unsporting act on a cricket field. He remained true to the man off the field, the preacher and champion of Moral Rearmament, a man of integrity and principle. Yet he was no plaster paragon but rather by his easy manner, endeared himself to those who watched him, and won respect for himself and for those things for which he stood. He won your support for his ideals by essential example, not by pressure.

He was one of the few cricketers who could laugh in the right place and refrain from bearing malice. I have seen him greet the most wicked bouncer with a (perhaps typical) wide, white-toothed smile and with dignity. In like manner I have seen him leave to a decision which others question, and as he passed the somewhat fortunate bowler lay a reassuring hand upon his shoulder as if to say "This is a game, my friend. The umpire is the final arbiter, and there will be no recriminations." Once he alone clapped a fellow coloured man playing for the opposite side when the remainder of his team showed petulance by refusing to applaud. Small acts like that require character and courage, and do more for a man than sensational outbursts and extravagant demonstration.

Conrad Hunte was a complete opening bat. In his latter years as a player, he bore a heavy responsibility, since a series of opening partners proved even more frail than summer's flower, even though their brief stay may have been spectacular. On countless occasions he was the "Black Hutton", bearing with fortitude the heavy burden of responsibility, but with less than Hutton's asceticism. Such an innings was his 182 at Old Trafford where he could well have been described as "an anchor for the innings sure and steadfast" so that the finished product was comparable in character, if not in magnitude, with Simpson's 311 on the same ground.

On another occasion he smote twelve off the first over from no less a personage than Fred Trueman, newly reinstated in a Test match. Then, as if somewhat regretful of such prodigality he settled down to accumulate more gracefully by deflections interspersed with the occasional drive. He had made his point

and there was no need for extravagant exaggeration.

Hunte was a most frustrating man to bowl to, for he moved almost imperceptibly onto the back foot so that you could swear that you had trapped him in two minds, until the ball swung violently towards slip with the batsman so perfectly positioned that at the last minute he could withdraw the bat. If he did decide to advance from the crease against the spinner, he did so in the same unspectacular way, and was merely "there" that essential fraction before the ball pitched, showing that masterly judgment which belongs to "lasting" openers.

His resistance was dynamic, in marked contrast to the almost frozen immobility of a Lawry. Always there was the hidden menace, the threat that he would strike with a swiftness that deceives the eye. Lawry's defence is so often like that of an Atlantic weather depression, deepening and stationary.

It was known for Hunte to bowl, though I never saw him put himself on when, promoted from first lieutenant to captain he led the side, unless it were to bowl that formal over from which the winning run must be scored. But there were occasions when he was invited, rather than instructed, to turn his arm over. He approached this with the same easy dignity, lacking the guile of a serpent, but also far removed from the entirely innocuous and negative. He bowled at the stumps and was a better bowler when Lance Gibbs was at the other end, possibly, as he himself would admit, because the batsman's mind was still troubled by what had been and what was yet to be rather than by what was an uncomfortable problem in cricket as well as in philosophy.

In the field Hunte was still true to his own character, sleeves neatly arrayed, body relaxed; but at the same time a muscular deportment which at any moment threatened to explode into life warned the batsman that liberties could not be taken lightly. It is always disconcerting to be confronted by gentlemanliness and menace. The supreme example of the mixture was surely Hobbs at cover. Hunte was never a Hobbs in the field, but he must surely have held a psychological advantage over the batsman. A Bland or a Lloyd is aggressively efficient and every movement is a menace to your wicket. You can never forget that they are there. But it was easy to forget Conrad Hunte's presence, to mistake the outward languor for lack of incisiveness. You realised your mistake as you trekked back to the pavilion.

Conrad Hunte will never be referred to in the same breath as the great batsmen. To do so would, I think, offend against his innate modesty. He rarely dominated an innings to such an extent that the performance of all his team mates paled by comparison. But in cricket as in life the reliable man is the salt of the earth, the man who will give of his best in fair weather or in foul, who will still be there controlled, composed and cheerful when the more illustrious have departed.