

[13]

LEICESTER'S HOUSE TEAM GOES INTO A SECOND EDITION

Reece was working when the deputation entered. He looked up enquiringly, but if he was pleased to see his visitors he managed to conceal the fact.

'Oh, I say, Reece,' began Monk, who had constituted himself spokesman to the expedition, 'are you busy?'

'Yes,' said Reece simply, going on with his writing.

This might have discouraged some people, but Nature had equipped Monk with a tough skin, which hints never pierced. He dropped into a chair, crossed his legs, and coughed. Danvers and Waterford leaned in picturesque attitudes against the door and mantelpiece. There was a silence for a minute, during which Reece continued to write unmoved.

'Take a seat, Monk,' he said at last, without looking up.

'Oh, er, thanks, I have,' said Monk. 'I say, Reece, we wanted to speak to you.'

'Go ahead then,' said Reece. 'I can listen and write at the same time.'

I'm doing this prose against time.'

'It's about Gethryn.'

'What's Gethryn been doing?'

'Oh, I don't know. Nothing special. It's about his being captain of the House team. The chaps seem to think he ought to resign.'

'Which chaps?' enquired Reece, laying down his pen and turning round in his chair.

'The rest of the team, you know.'

'Why don't they think he ought to be captain? The head of the House is always captain of the House team unless he's too bad to be in it at all. Don't the chaps think Gethryn's good at cricket?'

'Oh, he's good enough,' said Monk. 'It's more about this M.C.C. match business, you know. His cutting off like that in the middle of the match. The chaps think the House ought to take some notice of it. Express its disapproval, and that sort of thing.'

'And what do the chaps think of doing about it?'

Monk inserted a hand in his breast-pocket, and drew forth the

round-robin. He straightened it out, and passed it over to Reece.

'We've drawn up this notice,' he said, 'and we came to see if you'd sign it. Nearly all the other chaps in the team have.'

Reece perused the document gravely. Then he handed it back to its owner.

'What rot,' said he.

'I don't think so at all,' said Monk.

'Nor do I,' broke in Danvers, speaking for the first time. 'What else can we do? We can't let a chap like Gethryn stick to the captaincy.'

'Why not?'

'A cad like that!'

'That's a matter of opinion. I don't suppose everyone thinks him a cad. I don't, personally.'

'Well, anyway,' asked Waterford, 'are you going to sign?'

'My good man, of course I'm not. Do you mean to say you seriously intend to hand in that piffle to Gethryn?'

'Rather,' said Monk.

'Then you'll be making fools of yourselves. I'll tell you exactly what'll happen, if you care to know. Gethryn will read this rot, and simply cut everybody whose name appears on the list out of the House team. I don't know if you're aware of it, but there are several other fellows besides you in the House. And if you come to think of it, you aren't so awfully good. You three are in the Second. The other five haven't got colours at all.'

'Anyhow, we're all in the House team,' said Monk.

'Don't let that worry you,' said Reece, 'you won't be long, if you show Gethryn that interesting document. Anything else I can do for you?'

'No, thanks,' said Monk. And the deputation retired.

When they had gone, Reece made his way to the Bishop's study. It was not likely that the deputation would deliver their ultimatum until late at night, when the study would be empty. From what Reece knew of Monk, he judged that it would be pleasanter to him to leave the document where the Bishop could find it in the morning, rather than run the risks that might attend a personal interview. There was time, therefore, to let Gethryn know what was going to happen, so that he might not be surprised into doing anything rash, such as resigning the

captaincy, for example. Not that Reece thought it likely that he would, but it was better to take no risks.

Both Marriott and Gethryn were in the study when he arrived.

'Hullo, Reece,' said Marriott, 'come in and take several seats. Have a biscuit? Have two. Have a good many.'

Reece helped himself, and gave them a brief description of the late interview.

'I'm not surprised,' said Gethryn, 'I thought Monk would be getting at me somehow soon. I shall have to slay that chap someday. What ought I to do, do you think?'

'My dear chap,' said Marriott, 'there's only one thing you can do. Cut the lot of them out of the team, and fill up with substitutes.'

Reece nodded approval.

'Of course. That's what you must do. As a matter of fact, I told them you would. I've given you a reputation. You must live up to it.'

'Besides,' continued Marriott, 'after all it isn't such a crusher, when you come to think of it. Only four of them are really certainties for their places, Monk, Danvers, Waterford, and Saunders. The rest are

simply tail.'

Reece nodded again. 'Great minds think alike. Exactly what I told them, only they wouldn't listen.'

'Well, whom do you suggest instead of them? Some of the kids are jolly keen and all that, but they wouldn't be much good against Baynes and Lorimer, for instance.'

'If I were you,' said Marriott, 'I shouldn't think about their batting at all. I should go simply for fielding. With a good fielding side we ought to have quite a decent chance. There's no earthly reason why you and Reece shouldn't put on enough for the first wicket to win all the matches. It's been done before. Don't you remember the School House getting the cup four years ago when Twiss was captain? They had nobody who was any earthly good except Twiss and Birch, and those two used to make about a hundred and fifty between them in every match. Besides, some of the kids can bat rather well. Wilson for one. He can bowl, too.'

'Yes,' said the Bishop, 'all right. Stick down Wilson. Who else?

Gregson isn't bad. He can field in the slips, which is more than a good many chaps can.'

'Gregson's good,' said Reece, 'put him down. That makes five. You might have young Lee in too. I've seen him play like a book at his form net

once or twice.'

'Lee--six. Five more wanted. Where's a House list? Here we are. Now. Adams, Bond, Brown, Burgess. Burgess has his points. Shall I stick him down?'

'Not presume to dictate,' said Marriott, 'but Adams is streets better than Burgess as a field, and just as good a bat.'

'Why, when have you seen him?'

'In a scratch game between his form and another. He was carting all over the shop. Made thirty something.'

'We'll have both of them in, then. Plenty of room. This is the team so far. Wilson, Gregson, Lee, Adams, and Burgess, with Marriott, Reece, and Gethryn. Jolly hot stuff it is, too, by Jove. We'll simply walk that tankard. Now, for the last places. I vote we each select a man, and nobody's allowed to appeal against the other's decision. I lead off with Crowinshaw. Good name, Crowinshaw. Look well on a score sheet.'

'Heave us the list,' said Marriott. 'Thanks. My dear sir, there's only one man in the running at all, which his name's Chamberlain. Shove down Joseph, and don't let me hear anyone breathe a word against him. Come on, Reece, let's have your man. I bet Reece selects some weird rotter.'

Reece pondered.

'Carstairs,' he said.

'Oh, my very dear sir! Carstairs!'

'All criticism barred,' said the Bishop.

'Sorry. By the way, what House are we drawn against in the first round?'

'Webster's.'

'Ripping. We can smash Webster's. They've got nobody. It'll be rather a good thing having an easy time in our first game. We shall be able to get some idea about the team's play. I shouldn't think we could possibly get beaten by Webster's.'

There was a knock at the door. Wilson came in with a request that he might fetch a book that he had left in the study.

'Oh, Wilson, just the man I wanted to see,' said the Bishop. 'Wilson, you're playing against Webster's next week.'

'By Jove,' said Wilson, 'am I really?'

He had spent days in working out on little slips of paper during school his exact chances of getting a place in the House team. Recently, however, he had almost ceased to hope. He had reckoned on at least eight of the senior study being chosen before him.

'Yes,' said the Bishop, 'you must buck up. Practise fielding every minute of your spare time. Anybody'll hit you up catches if you ask them.'

'Right,' said Wilson, 'I will.'

'All right, then. Go, and tell Lee that I want to see him.'

'Lee,' said the Bishop, when that worthy appeared, 'I wanted to see you, to tell you you're playing for the House against Webster's. Thought you might like to know.'

'By Jove,' said Lee, 'am I really?'

'Yes. Buck up with your fielding.'

'Right,' said Lee.

'That's all. If you're going downstairs, you might tell Adams to come up.'

For a quarter of an hour the Bishop interviewed the junior members of his team, and impressed on each of them the absolute necessity of bucking up with his fielding. And each of them protested that the matter should receive his best consideration.

'Well, they're keen enough anyway,' said Marriott, as the door closed behind Carstairs, the last of the new recruits, 'and that's the great thing. Hullo, who's that? I thought you had worked through the lot. Come in!'

A small form appeared in the doorway, carrying in its right hand a neatly-folded note.

'Monk told me to give you this, Gethryn.'

'Half a second,' said the Bishop, as the youth made for the door.

'There may be an answer.'

'Monk said there wouldn't be one.'

'Oh. No, it's all right. There isn't an answer.'

The door closed. The Bishop laughed, and threw the note over to Reece.

'Recognize it?'

Reece examined the paper.

'It's a fair copy. The one Monk showed me was rather smudged. I suppose they thought you might be hurt if you got an inky round-robin.

Considerate chap, Monk.'

'Let's have a look,' said Marriott. 'By Jove. I say, listen to this bit. Like Macaulay, isn't it?'

He read extracts from the ultimatum.

'Let's have it,' said Gethryn, stretching out a hand.

'Not much. I'm going to keep it, and have it framed.'

'All right. I'm going down now to put up the list.'

When he had returned to the study, Monk and Danvers came quietly downstairs to look at the notice-board. It was dark in the passage, and Monk had to strike a light before he could see to read.

'By George,' he said, as the match flared up, 'Reece was right. He has.'

'Well, there's one consolation,' commented Danvers viciously, 'they can't possibly get that cup now. They'll have to put us in again soon,

you see if they don't.'

"M, yes,' said Monk doubtfully.