

In Memoriam: Charles Manning

1894-1978

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CHARLES Anthony Woodward Manning, a distinguished authority on law and jurisprudence, a controversial writer on South Africa, and for over 30 years (1930-1962) Montague Burton Professor of International Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science in the University of London, died at the age of 83 at Constantia, Cape Province, South Africa, on 10 March 1978. Though most of his life was spent in England - he went to Brasenose College, Oxford, as a Bishops Rhodes Scholar in 1914 - he left for his homeland for the last time in September 1977, a few months after the death of his wife Marion (or 'Maisie'), whom he married in 1939 when she was a pupil of his at the LSE. They had no children.

Though Manning was a man of many parts - he loved water-colour painting, wrote poetry, most of it with a humorous twist, watched cricket, spoke up, increasingly in his later years, for South Africa - the centre of his life, without doubt, was his post at the LSE. There was where his true heart lay; he tended the department of International Relations with unsparing affection and impressed on his subject the peculiar, complex stamp of his personality. When appointed to the Chair in London in 1930, Manning, by his own account, had no special qualifications for the job. But no-one had in those days. The subject to be professed was new, a child of the First World War, conceived in revulsion against that monstrous event. The first Chair in International Relations in Britain was founded in 1919, and owed its existence, like the Montague Burton Chairs in the subject later created at the LSE and Oxford, not to the wisdom of any academic body, but to the munificence of a business man. Incumbents of these new, still rare, Chairs had literally to get up the subject while their first students sat waiting in the lecture-room.

But Manning, as usual, understated his qualifications for his appointment. He had had two experiences, apart from his war service, which helped prepare him. One was his post in the secretariat, first, of the International Labour Organization (ILO), then of the League of Nations; he was for a time personal assistant to the League Secretary-General, Sir Eric Drummond. In those days, of course, the League was a symbol of hope for the generation which survived the Great War, but also, in a more direct sense even than the bigger and more strident

United Nations of today, the supreme theatre of international affairs, while Hitler was still a failed politician. But the League never went to Manning's head; he was a 'realist', in the late 1940s sense of the term, when it was unfashionable in university circles to be one. He would not believe that Foreign Ministers were transformed into saints the moment they stepped off the train in Geneva. To Manning, the League of Nations was never more than the maximum of international co-operation that the states of the world were willing and able to practise at any one time.

The other qualification Manning had for his new professorship was his legal training. He took a First in the BA (Jurisprudence) at Oxford in 1921 and the BCL a year later, and these earned him a Fellowship in Law at New College and a lectureship in Law at New and Pembroke Colleges. His chief published work during these years was his eighth edition of Salmond's *Jurisprudence* and his articles on the legal theory of the English jurist, John Austin. It was not so much, however, the actual rules of a legal system, English or other, which preoccupied Manning, but the sociological basis of any system of legal rules. The nature of a legal system, he argued, is essentially governed by the nature of the society in which that legal system exists: the determinate society, its *mores*, assumptions, working mental habits, determine why a legal rule is binding and when, and determine whether it is to be enforced, and, if so, how. From this sprang one of Manning's most illuminating theses, the idea that, looked at sociologically, international law is not, as so often described, a 'primitive' kind of municipal law, an 'under-developed' body of rules which in the fullness of time will become a sort of municipal law, no more than table tennis is a primitive or under-developed sort of lawn tennis. It is in fact a different sort of game, because the players are states, and not men and women, and because states are actuated by different motives, seek different objectives, respond to different moral impulses, from individuals. To expect international law to 'grow up' into municipal law, when international society is not the same as municipal society, and to be angry when it never shows sign of doing so, was, for Manning, not so much to misunderstand law, national and international, but to misconstrue the social *milieu* which makes any system of law what it is.

There were other assets which Manning brought to his LSE professorship, which, as time went on, gave a peculiarly personal stamp to his occupancy of the Chair. Not least, certainly, was his striking appearance – he was almost the ordinary person's stereotype of the professor: tall, spare, always meticulously dressed, with a handsome, lean, almost emaciated face, invariably lit by a humorous, questioning smile, and, to crown it all, that magnificent shock of beautiful white hair. The white hair, the story ran, was the aftermath of one of many illnesses; if so, never did illness leave such a fortunate mark.

There were also, of course, the intellectual endowments in Manning

which enabled him to put the subject International Relations on the map at the LSE and created for him a numerous band of followers and imitators (though the group had a hard job in front of them), both in Britain and throughout the world. There was his intense self-discipline, spartan, unsparing, his devotion to the subject and determination to fight for its recognition against critics in season and out of season, his incomparable felicity of expression, in the spoken word rather more than the written, his ever-active mind, ceaselessly hunting for some analogy, simile, image, parallel, snatched from anywhere – the everyday world around him, cricket, the theatre or music-hall, that morning's newspaper or radio programme – which could throw into sharper focus the shadowy world of states and their dealings with one another. Anyone who remembers his lectures at the LSE will recall with delight Manning's superb flight of analogies which startlingly pinpointed the things he was trying to say. They are encountered again, page after page, in his one really substantial book, *The Nature of International Society*, first published by the LSE in the year of his retirement, 1962, and reissued with a new preface 13 years later.

This essay portrays how he wished the international cosmos to be seen by young people; and that it should be approached in a scientific spirit, even if the latter-day, and mainly transatlantic, pretensions to make of it an exact science, in the manner of Chemistry or Physics, seems to him over-ambitious. Charles Manning was utterly and unreservedly detached in his academic role, and in this respect strikingly differed from most of his predecessors and contemporaries in his field, who tended to see the subject as an implement for bettering the human lot or improving the world. At the same time, Manning always insisted, with some passion, that scientific detachment did not, and must not, mean refusal to commit oneself to causes in the political arena, when laboratory coat and academic gown are doffed, and Manning did commit himself to at least one such cause, that of South Africa and its regime. But scientific inquiry and political partisanship were at all times rigidly separated from each other in his mind, and only linked in so far as the political partisan, the committed voter in a democratic election or the professional politician, enact their chosen roles the better after serving their time as non-partisan students of the world in which their partisanship subsequently does its work.

With these intellectual and personal assets at his command, Charles Manning took the subject, International Relations, as he found it when he came to the LSE in 1930 – a thing of bits and pieces, framed from nineteenth and twentieth century international history, fragments of international law, geography, anthropology, the techniques and procedures of diplomacy, the organs and rules of the League of Nations – and welded it, if not perhaps into a wholly coherent subject, at least into a clearly conceived focus of interest. That focus was the fact that the 50 odd states of the world (in 1930) had chosen, for the

time being at least, to reject the notion of a central government to make law for them all and enforce it through some world constabulary or army, and had thereafter to live with the consequences of their refusal. This meant that they had to make do with imperfect substitutes for central government and enforcement agencies, makeshifts like diplomacy, conferences, a thing called international law, which the layman refuses to take seriously, lethal weapons and alliances, espionage, force, fraud, and sometimes co-operation and goodwill. And in time there had grown up in this peculiar environment, and contrary to all logic, some sort of order, some stability and even predictability. The result was not chaos, but, miraculously, more peace than the states, with all their hard, unforgiving, jealous idiosyncrasies, really had a right to expect.

Not an easy subject, by any stretch of the imagination, rather an enterprise of heroic dimensions, measured in time and space, demanding in those who took it on acquaintance with many more orthodox academic disciplines, from History to Psychology, Geography to Nuclear Physics; but nevertheless a subject which, as Manning perceived it, manifested itself in a central body, if not so much of easily communicable fact, at least of intellectual concern and preoccupation, a subject, too, which had as much social importance as any other humane subject, if not more, and the moral and emotional compulsions of which were impossible for any sensitive person to resist.

But perhaps Manning's greatest contribution to the world of learning was not the conventional one of disseminating and advancing knowledge of his subject, and this fact is reflected in the comparative paucity of his published output. His most authentic power lay in an ability to steer young people into thinking for themselves about the hard and difficult world they lived in; to clarify their ideas about it and the terms in which they mentally coped with the social cosmos about them; to improve the precision of their language; and, above all, to separate their own wishes and aspirations from that external world they had to inhabit.

But this brings us to perhaps the central dilemma of Manning's life, which he never seems to have resolved, and which may have set a limit to his considerable achievement. Manning was certainly the scholar *par excellence*, in the sense of setting the highest value, not on the accumulation of facts, but on the pursuit of truth, the 'closest approximation', as Bacon wrote, 'betwixt the mind and the object'. And it was truth about human society in the broadest sense, and international society in the narrower sense, that he sought for himself and prodded his students into seeking, or rather perhaps human and international society as pictured in the imagination of human beings, in their hopes and dreams, in which their actions in the real world have their beginnings. It was all the more necessary for a Professor of International Relations to safeguard the scholarly character of his work, functioning

as he did in an academic environment in which International Relations was (and perhaps is) still not universally recognized as a truly scholarly subject.

At the same time, Manning was never content simply to observe the social universe. He wanted to fight for social causes, and his academic home, the LSE, was the sort of place in the 1930s in which that was expected, almost demanded. But, in truth, Manning's was not the stuff that partisans are made of: he was too self-deprecating, too honest, too prone to question his own opinions and his motives for holding them; he had all the courage of his lack of convictions. Moreover, the political causes which he did believe in were more negative than positive, and ran against the *Zeitgeist* of his age. He never accepted the wishful thinking of League of Nations or United Nations enthusiasts, never identified with the embattled legions of Left or Right in the 1930s, never warmed at the right times to the Soviet Union, about which he always entertained a strangely unreflective suspicion, never enthused about decolonization or the Third World. He was, if truth be told, faithful to the South African ideal: white, Christian, intensely anti-Communist, a man in the Smuts mould. These traits tended to isolate him from the forces and spirits of his own times, such as they were, men like Laski and Titmuss. They also perhaps, to his admirers' regret, tended to blind him to his own greatest achievement, for which he will be chiefly remembered: his ability to make students, or some of them, believe that pondering about political and social problems was the supreme human activity, and skill in doing it well the supreme mark of the civilized man or woman.