



K. BOURNE

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Kenneth Bourne 1930–1992

PROFESSOR KENNETH BOURNE, who died on 13 December 1992, probably knew more about British foreign policy in the nineteenth century than anyone who has survived him. In this field he was working in the tradition of distinguished scholars between the wars, and immediately after the Second World War, a tradition which included Sir Charles Webster, H. W. V. Temperley (who has already had a book written about him), G. P. Gooch, Dame Lillian Penson and W. N. Medlicott. It is even probably true to say — and reflects no disrespect to this list of eminent historians — that Kenneth Bourne knew more about British foreign policy, and the society from which it sprang, than any one of them.

Born on 17 March 1930, Kenneth Bourne was the son of Clarence Arthur Bourne and Doris (née English). He went to school at Southend High School, and retained a high opinion of the basis for his education that he obtained there. He was an undergraduate at the University College of the South West, which was later to obtain a charter as the University of Exeter. It was there, in Exeter, that I first knew Ken Bourne. Although I was several years older than Ken, and had been in the war, he seemed, in his understanding of the needs of success at university, to be more mature than I was. He had quickly acquired a knowledge and understanding of the periods of history which we were required to study. They were dictated by the University of London, since Exeter students were preparing for London external degrees. The degree of BA in History, of the University of London, was, as has

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remained, a demanding qualification. To obtain a London First it was important to read and understand a great deal of history. But it was also important to apply one's intelligence to the craft of examineeship. Knowing that he had become a genuine young scholar in European history, Ken was determined to use the examination system to display his scholarship. He explained to me skills of question-spotting, especially for the one compulsory paper which he had to take, in Medieval English History. I shall always feel gratitude to Ken for explaining to me what were the particular quarrels between medievalists at that moment, and what precise questions they were likely to ask. One of them, if I remember rightly, concerned the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons in Britain. What literary evidence there was suggested that they came by one route, but the archaeological evidence suggested that they came by a quite different route. Apart from the one paper on Medieval England, and a paper on the History of Political Thought, which started with Plato, all our papers were concerned with Modern European History, and I was grateful for Ken's advice on how to overcome my great ignorance of the Middle Ages. It was an early example of the careful analysis of problems that he was, many years later, to apply to the study of British and American foreign policy.

We were fortunate in having, as the head of the History Department in those years, W. Norton Medlicott, who was perhaps the closest thing to a role model that Kenneth Bourne ever had. Medlicott was a kindly, paternal figure, who never had children of his own, and gave us the sense of security which only an intelligent and successful father could have given. He was already a distinguished scholar. Kenneth Bourne and I took Medlicott's Special Subject on the Eastern Question, which involved taking two three-hour papers, one on the period from 1856 to 1878, and another with a sharper focus on the 1875–8 crisis. Medlicott made the course entertaining, by concentrating on personalities — Bismarck, the Russian Chancellor Gorchakov, the Austrian Foreign Minister Andrassy, Disraeli and Salisbury. They all became as familiar to us as our favourite uncles. This study in depth gave Bourne no problems. Effortlessly, and with enjoyment, he became a scholar while he was still an undergraduate. He was awarded a First Class Honours degree of the University of London (External) in 1951.

Medlicott's approach to history was a detached and slightly cynical one. He had no political allegiances in his own contemporary world, but tended to regard the Conservative, Labour and Liberal Parties as all being slightly ridiculous. Not that there was any malice in his

attitude. It was rather that he knew too much about the political history of Britain in the twentieth century to take any of the protagonists too seriously. The few figures he respected were people like Neville Chamberlain, who refused to over-simplify problems, or to take dramatic decisions. Bourne inherited this attitude to the extent that he never threw himself into contemporary political issues. It was as if he was reluctant to get involved in contemporary politics, because he knew so much about the minutiae of politics in the past, that he could not quite believe that the present-day ones could be that important.

In 1953 Bourne became a postgraduate student under the supervision of Professor Medicott, who had just been appointed to the Stevenson Chair of International History at the London School of Economics, the most distinguished chair of international history in Britain, equal only to the Woodrow Wilson Chair of International Politics at the University College of Wales, at Aberystwyth. Bourne secured for the period of his postgraduate studies a Research Fellowship at the Institute of Historical Research of the University of London for the academic year 1955–6, and a Research Fellowship at the University of Reading for the academic year 1956–7.

He chose as the subject for his doctoral thesis 'The Foreign Policy of Lord Stanley, 1866–1868'. Although the period thus studied was a short one, it involved a knowledge and understanding of the whole of British foreign policy at a time when British finance and the British fleet dominated the world. For Bourne it was the stepping-off mark for his study not only of British foreign policy, but of Anglo-American relations in particular, and of American history so soon after their terrible civil war and the assassination of Lincoln. Stanley himself was an enigmatic character. The future fifteenth Earl of Derby, he was serving in the administration of his father, the fourteenth earl. Bourne developed no great admiration for Stanley, though he recorded that in his day this short-lived foreign secretary raised great expectations. It was believed that he was a man of some brilliance, just as it was said that his father was a great orator. Neither Disraeli, who was Chancellor of the Exchequer in this government, nor Bourne, who acquired very considerable knowledge of the Stanley/Derby family, were deceived by these contemporary opinions.

On the strength of his thesis Kenneth Bourne was awarded the degree of Ph.D. of the University of London — this time an internal degree. In 1957 he was appointed as Assistant Lecturer at the London School of Economics.

For the next thirty-five years the LSE was to be Kenneth Bourne's academic home. He was promoted to a Lectureship in 1960, to a Readership in 1969, and in 1976 became a Professor of the University of London, chairs being university appointments. In 1957 the LSE still had the reputation of being a slightly seditious place, which had spread Marxist doctrine to Asia and Africa, where ex-LSE students were holding important political posts. The reputation did not bear much relationship to the truth, so far as the existing staff were concerned, though the students certainly still held left-wing views. Harold Laski, who had been Professor of Political Science, had died in 1950. R. H. Tawney, who had anyhow been a Christian Socialist, rather than a Marxist, had retired from the Chair of Economic History in 1950. He was to live until 1962, and was still a familiar and much loved presence in the School. Eminent figures to the right of the political spectrum had more recently arrived. Michael Oakeshott had succeeded Laski in the Chair of Political Science, and Lionel Robbins was the senior Professor of Economics. Robbins was very much more conservative in his economic philosophy than the public — who associated him with the Robbins Report on education — realised. Broadly speaking, it could be said that the Economics Department, since the arrival of Robbins and people appointed by him, was right-wing, the Politics Department, under Oakeshott was inclined to the right, though essentially staffed by individualists. Eminent figures on the left — Richard Titmuss and Ernest Gellner among them — there still were.

Of these distinguished people Ken Bourne was perhaps closest to Oakeshott, with whom he became a good friend. Oakeshott was a genial person, completely free of the pomposity from which some of his colleagues in the School suffered. And if Oakeshott would sometimes argue that the National Health Service was turning us all into sheep, the remark was less likely to shock Bourne than it did some of the rest of us. The department to which Bourne had been appointed was being efficiently run by Norton Medlicott, who was retaining the respect for diplomatic history shared by his predecessor, Sir Charles Webster, and soon to be eminently illustrated by Kenneth Bourne. Medlicott had arrived at the Department of International History to find several fine historians working there. Among these were colleagues who were to be lifelong friends of Ken Bourne. Ragnhild Hatton, who was to write the definitive life of the Swedish king, Charles XII, and Matthew Anderson, who was to publish many fine works on the nineteenth century, and specifically on the Eastern Question, were two of

the senior members of the department. Another colleague who was to become a very close friend of Ken was George Grun, whose death in November — less than a year after Ken's own death — has been a sad loss to those of us who knew his wonderful, warm personality.

Three years before Kenneth Bourne arrived at the LSE, Medicott had made his first two appointments: Donald Cameron Watt and myself. Donald was himself to become the Stevenson Professor of International History after the retirement of James Joll, Medicott's successor. Donald Watt became a close friend of Ken, and the two worked happily together for many years. Ken's arrival at the LSE was a cause for rejoicing on my part, since we could revive the relationship of our undergraduate days in Exeter. Ken had changed very little since those days. He still regarded life, and the academic profession in particular, with a gentle cynicism and amusement — very much in the tradition of Norton Medicott.

In 1955 Ken married Eleanor Anne (*née* Wells), who had also been a student at Exeter. They did me the great honour and kindness of asking me to be their best man. Over the years I have gained enormously from the friendship of Eleanor and Ken, who invariably put me up when I visited London as an external examiner, and organised handsome dinner parties to correspond with my stays. In spite of a busy professional life, Eleanor produced a superb cuisine, of which Ken was quietly proud: he provided the carefully chosen, and always superior, wines. I have a memory of one of these occasions which illustrates Ken's rigid standards of scholarship. I had read a paper to his seminar at the Institute of Historical Research. When we arrived at their home Eleanor asked Ken how the paper had been. 'Well, Harry is always very sound', said Ken. In the mouth of anyone else this might have been taken for a damning with faint praise. In the mouth of Ken Bourne it was high praise indeed. His own scholarship was of such a high standard that he easily detected a lapse of 'soundness' in fellow historians. It is a testament to his severity of judgement that I should remember this incident for so long, and with such satisfaction. Apparently Bourne would conduct an opening meeting with prospective postgraduate students by asking them which secondary works they had read. After they had stumbled through a few titles, he would say, 'That's good, but how about this. And this. And this . . .', as he pushed across his desk towards the students a formidable array of large volumes. Sufficiently chastened, the students would retreat to do some solid reading, before the next encounter.

From his thesis, Bourne published three articles, none of which was to lead to the major works which were to follow. But they all had an intrinsic interest and originality. Two were published in 1956, one in the *Rassegna Storica del Risorgimento* (October-December 1956) which dealt with 'The British Government and the Proposed Roman Conference of 1867'. This distinguished Italian journal, which is still very much alive, was, and is, the product of the Istituto del Risorgimento Italiano, whose offices are dramatically placed on the highest point of the Victor Emmanuel monument in Rome. Lord Stanley had been obliged to face the crisis in Italy following the war of 1866, the Italian acquisition of Venice, and an acute phase of the Roman Question. Bourne's other two articles in these early days marked a return not only to the material in his doctoral thesis, but to the Special Subject of our undergraduate days, in that they dealt with aspects of the Eastern Question. One, 'Great Britain and the Cretan Revolt, 1866-1869', was published in the *Slavonic Review* in December 1956, and the other, 'T. W. Riker and British Near Eastern Policy' in the same journal in December 1957.

Having in a sense exhausted his interest in the Eastern Question and Stanley's foreign policy, Bourne now turned his attention to what was to be his major concern for at least a decade — North America. In 1961-2 he visited the USA to do research with the assistance of two Fellowships — one from Fulbright, and the other a Senior Research Fellowship of the British Association for American Studies. His interest in British foreign policy was now moving towards one in military or strategic studies, as he found that Anglo-American relations could not be studied in the traditional context which was more applicable to international relations in Europe, but involved military and naval matters more directly. The archives of the War Ministry and the Admiralty were to be more important than those of the Foreign Office. Two articles gave a foretaste of the book that was to come: 'The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty and the Decline of British Opposition to the Territorial Expansion of the U.S., 1857-60', in the *Journal of Modern History*, September 1961; and 'British Preparations for War with the North, 1861-62', in the *English Historical Review*, October 1961.

Bourne was Visiting Lecturer on the Davis Campus of the University of California for the session 1966-7, and it was from here that he dates his first important book, *Britain and the Balance of Power in North America, 1815-1908* (University of California Press and Longman). It was something of a *tour de force*, and marked the ease

with which he had switched from being a diplomatic historian to being a military and naval one, though he was not going to be permanently fixed in the latter category. It was typical of Bourne that he gave a full and completely honest account of his research for the book in the preface. It would be 'an impossible task', he wrote, to look at every relevant document in the Public Record Office, and he had therefore concentrated on the 'moments of crisis'. A lesser — and less confident — historian would have pretended that he had looked at everything. But Bourne put in a word for historians by allowing himself some criticism of the archival policy of the War Office, with a reference to 'some crazy "weeding" fever'.

Britain and the Balance of Power in North America presented the clear theme that Anglo-American military and naval relations had, in the course of the nineteenth century, moved from a position in which war had been a strong possibility to one in which it had become almost unthinkable. In that sense it was a story with a happy ending, though it involved a study of comparative decline on the part of British power in the North Atlantic. The book was awarded the Albert B. Corey Prize of the American and Canadian Historical Associations.

Bourne's research to this date had already introduced him to the Palmerston Papers, whose somewhat troubled history had landed them, at that moment, in the safe keeping of the National Register of Archives in Chancery Lane. Before her tragic death, Countess Mountbatten, in charge at Broadlands, and so of the Palmerston Papers, had given Bourne a rather special permission to consult the papers. His familiarity with the Palmerston archive was to be of immense importance for the future, but for many years to come Bourne was interested in appointments in the USA — appointments which took him to the South, the Mid-West, and, again, to California. In the autumn of 1971 he was the Scaife Distinguished Lecturer at Kenyon College, Ohio. In the spring of 1979 he was Kratter Professor of History at Stanford University. In the spring of 1981 he was Visiting Professor of Anglo-American History at the University of Southern Mississippi. In the spring of 1983 — after the publication of the Palmerston Papers — he was Visiting Professor of History at the University of Alabama. And for the session 1984–5 he was James Pinckney Professor of History at William and Mary College.

Meanwhile Bourne had returned to the research and writing of the history of international history from the political, rather than the military, angle. With Donald Cameron Watt he edited a Festschrift to

W. N. Medlicott, entitled *Studies in International History* (Archon Books and Longman) in 1967. In 1970 he produced an interesting work, entitled *The Foreign Policy of Victorian England* (Clarendon Press, Oxford). It contained nearly 200 pages of commentary, followed by 500 pages of documents. Robert Seton-Watson had published his *Britain in Europe* in 1937, and no comprehensive study of British foreign policy in the nineteenth century had been published in the intervening thirty-nine years. Unlike Seton-Watson's book, Bourne's was not limited to Europe, but considered British policy in Africa, Asia, and, inevitably, America. It remains the most recent study of its subjects, which is vividly illustrated by the documents.

A much more light-hearted and entertaining book followed in 1975: Kenneth Bourne's edition of intimate and previously unpublished letters from Harriette Wilson to Henry Brougham, Lord Chancellor from 1830–4. Bourne called the collection, which is delightfully illustrated, *The Blackmailing of the Chancellor*, and the letters certainly constituted blackmailing of a ruthless kind. Bourne found the letters in the Brougham Papers in the Library of University College London. It showed the lighter side of Kenneth Bourne as a writer — his delight in getting to know the figures of the nineteenth century with all their amusing quirks and weaknesses.

But by far Bourne's most important work was *Palmerston: the Early Years 1784–1841* (Allen Lane, London, and Macmillan, New York, 1982). This impressive work, which runs to 749 pages, was to have been the first of two volumes. Professor Bourne's sudden death has deprived us of the second volume, but this book has the appearance and character of a single work. It is the product of immense scholarship, and a profound knowledge of the political and social life of England in the reigns of George III, George IV, and William IV, and in the opening years of Victoria's reign. Much of it is highly entertaining, but its major importance, of course, is of the figure of Palmerston that emerges. It is an endearing figure of a basically honest man, of considerable ability, but never quite so competent or confident as the world assumed him to be — an essentially human figure, generous, courageous, if not always wise.

Bourne's *Palmerston* is full of splendid quotations. For one example, there is the opinion of Palmerston attributed to Canning, that 'he nearly touched the top of mediocrity', an unfair judgement, but an amusing one. The detailed account of Palmerston's election to the Cambridge University parliamentary seat will be of interest to political

historians of England, and the great detail on Palmerston's income and debts must surely provide an important source for social historians. But the biography becomes even more important, of course, when Palmerston is appointed Foreign Secretary, and establishes his prestige as a statesman. If there is such a thing as 'a definitive history', then Bourne's *Palmerston* can surely claim to be one. Two years after its publication, Bourne was elected a Fellow of the British Academy, a well deserved award, in which he rightly took great pride.

After 1982 Bourne spent much time on administrative tasks at the LSE. So far as scholarly activity was concerned, he undertook important editorial tasks, which will be of considerable use to historians, but which postponed the writing of the second volume of *Palmerston*. The list of the volumes he edited is impressive. He had already edited Palmerston's letters to the Sullivan family, in 1979. At the time of his death he was involved in no fewer than four editorial projects. One, with his colleague, D. C. Watt, was the *British Documents on Foreign Affairs, 1983*. A second, with an American publisher, was to be a general editor of a huge publication of 420 volumes of reports and papers from the Foreign Office Confidential Print, 1850–1939. Of these, Bourne himself edited some fifteen volumes, on North America, 1850–1914. The third editorial project on which Bourne was working was, with W. B. Taylor, *The Letters and Writings of Francis Horner (1778–1817)*. Bourne was in the middle of correcting the final proofs of this work when he died. The fourth editorial task which he was carrying out was *The Political Journals of the Second Earl of Minto* for the Camden Series of the Royal Historical Society. Minto's diaries were proving to be both entertaining, and important for — among other things — Italian history in the mid-nineteenth century.

One source of pleasure for Ken Bourne was the collecting of valuable books and *objets d'art* for his period. Within its warm and hospitable walls the Bournes' house became something of a museum. Some indication of the extent of the collection can be gained by a study of the illustrations in the *Palmerston*, many of which are from 'the Author's collection'. Kenneth had become an authority on antiquarian, rare or simply second-hand, books, and would pick up finds valuable not only for his own collection, but for his friends. I have several treasured possessions which I owe to Ken's generosity and knowledge of the market: a beautiful edition of the Letters of Cavour, edited by Luigi Chiala, and bound in white leather, a curious lead bust of Garibaldi,

dressed in the uniform of a Piedmontese general, dated 1859 and evidently French, and other books of value.

Another great source of pleasure for Kenneth Bourne in the last period of his life was a house which he and Eleanor and a few of their friends bought in Southern Tuscany. It was called Pastina, and was in a lonely range of hills. I have happy memories of spending two or three of the last weeks of Ken's life, in November and December of 1992, in his company. He drove me across France, and southwards across Italy, to their house, which was near Arezzo. In the evenings, on the journey, we enjoyed the food and wines of Burgundy, and I feel fairly sure that Ken had no suspicion of his impending death. We were going to collect the olives of the Pastina estate, with the help of the farmer, Luigi. It was an excellent olive harvest. We felt proud of our olive picking, as did Luigi, who brought us his own wines, which he assured us were not just 'Chianti', but 'Chianti Chianti'. Ken concealed his distaste for the coarse wine, which had little to do with Chianti, except for the geographical nearness. But Luigi took us to the mill where our olives were turned into oil, and there is no doubt that the olive oil of Pastina is as good as any in the world.

Ken enjoyed showing me the delightful little towns around Pastina, towns with lovely Tuscan names — Monte San Savino, Montepulciano, and (perhaps the most lovely name of all) Sinalunga. It was good that Ken and Eleanor and their friends, had discovered this wonderful corner of the world, so that a novel element had come into Ken's life in its last days.

Besides his widow, Eleanor, Ken Bourne leaves a daughter, Joanna, and a son, Henry. His sudden and early death is for them a personal loss. For the world of scholarship it is the loss of a fine historian. For the rest of us it is the loss of a good man and a dear friend.

HARRY HEARDER