

Chapter 9

Lost Friend

Michael Howard

When Alastair Buchan died, as tragically though more suddenly as did Hedley himself, Hedley was at the time in Oxford, as a Visiting Fellow at All Souls; and our first reaction on recovering from the shock of Alastair's death was to urge Hedley to apply for the Chair.¹ He was so very much the obvious candidate. Alastair with his driving energy, his flair for organisation and his global network of friendships, political as well as academic, had laid the foundations for a great school of international relations. What we now needed was an intellectual leader of outstanding calibre who could build on those foundations and give the school that distinction (in the literal sense of the word) which would enable it to make up for its late start and make Oxford as admirable and admired in this field as it was already in so many other.

There was to my mind literally no one better qualified to take on this task than Hedley. I had known him since his early days at the London School of Economics—where he had made his mark from the very beginning, in that richly talented team put together by Charles Manning—as a scintillatingly original mind. Alastair, with his genius for talent-spotting, singled him out act as draftsman and rapporteur for the ISS Conference here in Oxford 1960, which resulted in his first book *The Control of the Arms Race*. I can still vividly recall the sessions where veteran disarmers, bureaucrats and warriors shook their heads over the lucid draft chapters, clear, uncompromising, sensible, in which this tall, diffident yet abrasive young man cut through half a century's emotional waffle and forced them to think again from first principles. It was this experience which first cast Hedley in the role of the *enfant terrible* of International Relations; one whose impatience with political cant and academic folly made him the delight and terror of every conference he attended. I think all of us carry the scars, usually well deserved ones, which we received at Hedley's hands—all of us, that is, who were his contemporaries or seniors. Never did he inflict them on his pupils; and those who knew him only in later life when he became a magisterial, almost awe-inspiring figure, may find it hard to visualise what that earlier, ferocious *persona* had been like.

Hedley matured quickly when he returned to Australia to take up the Chair of International Relations at [The Australian National University in] Canberra.

I still saw him at conferences where he remained as refreshing and iconoclastic as ever. When to our delight he decided to apply for the Montague Burton Chair in Oxford, he named me as one of his referees, and among other things I wrote the following words:

From his earliest days as a teacher it was clear that he brought to the study of International Relations a very remarkable mind: active, sceptical, analytic: the mind of a natural scientist or a philosopher rather than a historian. This approach was accompanied by a rather abrasive and arrogant manner which was, and is, not to everyone's taste, but which I believe masked, and still masks, the endearing uncertainties of a young man ill at ease in the salons of a richly corrupt Old World which he alternately admires and despises. Even now he cannot resist the occasional Antipodean temptation *epater le bourgeois*, especially if the bourgeois concerned is English and rather grand. His period as Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Research Unit at the Foreign Office gave him plenty of opportunities for doing this, but the outstanding quality of his contributions to thinking about this fuzzy subject far outstripped any annoyance he may have caused. His little book *The Control of the Arms Race*, a classic of lucid judgement and common sense, had an international impact, on practitioners as well as theorists. It was a Cartesian contribution in that it was from that work (together with the contemporary American studies of, notably, Thomas Schelling) that all subsequent thinking about the place of armaments in international relations must be dated.

As a colleague I can say only that Hedley fulfilled, and more than fulfilled, all the hopes we had placed in him. But it was our common misfortune that within a very few years of his arrival here the economic Ice Age closed in, and so far from being able to expand its activities the university had to fight quite desperately to preserve those which were already in progress. There was no limit to the number of first-rate students Hedley could have attracted from all over the world: the bounds were set by the numbers of people available here to teach them. We were supremely fortunate in being able to raise the money to endow the Alastair Buchan Readership, and even luckier to get Adam Roberts to fill it. But without Hedley's reputation, drive, ingenuity and self-sacrifice (his teaching hours must have been astronomical) the whole enterprise would have withered, if not died. How far his incessant labours affected his health I cannot say, but certainly no consideration of his personal convenience, comfort, or even perhaps survival would have affected his determination to press on with them while there was still breath in his body.

By the end of his life, Hedley was well on the way to becoming one of those grand elder statesmen whom he used to tease when young. Election to the British

Academy came just in time for him to appreciate it. But in his case the grandeur came not from pomposity or self-importance but from a truly comprehensive vision of the world and a shrewd insight into affairs which gave his pronouncements an authoritative quality to which one listened with awe. His abrasiveness had softened into an ironical amusement, which in its silence could sometimes be more disconcerting than the direct assaults of his youth. He had achieved that most precious of all qualities, wisdom. But one still felt that there lurked, never far away, that impish desire to tease, if no longer to outrage, the bourgeois which kept him till the end of his life such a fundamentally youthful and such an endearing person; and which helps to explain why we miss him so much.

ENDNOTES

¹ This address was given as 'Hedley Bull: A Eulogy for his Memorial Service' at the memorial service to Hedley Bull on 17 October 1985. See Robert O'Neill and David N. Schwartz (eds), *Hedley Bull on Arms Control*, p. 276. The address is reprinted here with the kind permission of Professor Sir Michael Howard.