

Monday June 19/9/30

SIR ARCHIBALD STRONG

Australia Loses Leading Litterateur A PERSONAL TRIBUTE

As happened through the death of Professor Bradford Robertson, not only the University of Adelaide but Australia is the poorer by the passing of Sir Archibald Strong.

Professor Robertson was one of the most brilliant, and perhaps the most brilliant, of Australian scientists. His research work was of enormous value to Australia in the matter of material production, and his death was directly due to his devotion to the scientific work he was doing for the producers of this continent. He was moreover a man of rich mental and spiritual culture, and one whose life gave the lie direct to the popular idea of the scientific investigator as a brain devoted to cold abstractions remote from the warmer feelings and aspirations of humanity.

Dr. Strong was Australia's best known exponent of the "humanities" as represented by English Literature. A profound scholar, a brilliant writer, and a literary critic of distinction, his name was honoured wherever there are men who love good literature. Nearer home his University Extension and popular lectures did much to foster an appreciation of the English poets and dramatists in the "city of culture".

He was a notable supporter of the drama in Australia by means of the Repertory Theatre and through other channels. What was probably one of his last contributions to the press consisted of a generous appreciation in the pages of *The Australian Quarterly* of the work of Allan Wilkie and of the supreme importance of cultivating the intellectual life of Australia—an article that furnished the substance for a "leader" in this paper.

It was never my good hap to meet Professor Robertson or to hear him lecture, though I came to know him by correspondence following a review of one of his scientific bulletins. With Sir Archibald Strong I was more fortunate. I first learned of him many years ago through *The Trident*, a Melbourne literary review of high achievement that in its early stages appeared with sections in French and German as well as English, and of which he was the editor. I have the numbers published during 1908 and 1909, in which latter year it ceased to exist, and a very valuable volume they make.

But it was "Peradventure", a book of essays originally contributed in a series of weekly causeries to *The Melbourne Herald* and published in 1911, that made me an enthusiastic admirer of Archibald Strong. The book has for its motto a quotation from Anatole France: "The good critic is he who narrates the adventures of his soul among masterpieces", and in the essays he writes in the spirit of an adventurer, gallant, gay and free, of Poe and Baudelaire and Villon, Keats, Shelley and Swinburne, of Nietzsche, Marlowe and the Elizabethans, with an erudition, a verve, a fitness of phrase and a lightness of touch such as I fancy no other

Australian writer has compassed.

Perhaps more than anything else it was his manifest love and high appreciation of Shelley's poetry and religious philosophy—Shelley "whom (as he tells us in "Peradventure") modern criticism tends, with ever-increasing insistence, to regard as a great world-genius—a one, probably, of the three greatest poets whom England has produced"—that drew me irresistibly to Strong. In after years, when I read the book he wrote about Shelley (I forget its title) I realized how insignificant by comparison with the knowledge of a master was my own knowledge (on which I had rather prided myself) of the works of that archangel of song.

It will probably be by books such as this and his translation of the Old English epic of *Beowulf* and perhaps by his poems, that Sir Archibald will be remembered by the erudite, for the ordinary and not very scholarly book-lover his memory should live as long as copies of "Peradventure" are obtainable.

My opportunities of hearing and of meeting Sir Archibald Strong were limited. I heard him lecture—not very effectively. I thought—on the Shakespearian stage, wholly delightfully on some modern poets, and once before the League of Nations Union: I owe to that most lovable man Professor Darnley Naylor a chance to lunch with Strong. I found him then, as at our subsequent brief meetings and in our occasional correspondence, a very prince of courtesy, deferring, with all his weight of learning, to the opinions of one who was the merest sciolist in subjects and languages of which he was a master.

How often one has been left lamenting the failure to answer a letter or the omission of some intended token of appreciation with respect to someone we have loved or admired and whom Death has suddenly taken! I am glad to remember that the last note I had from Sir Archibald—charming as always—was in acknowledgement of a little book of German love songs, "Es Lebe die Liebe", I had sent him.

To the English speaking world Archibald Strong was perhaps Australia's most outstanding literary critic, and it was fitting that he should be selected to write of this country's literature for the special Australian number of *The Times*, two or three years ago. He will be remembered in his own land in years to come as one who sought to found Australia's claims to greatness on something less ephemeral than the skill of her athletes or the material prosperity of her people.

—H. S. T.