

SIR ARCHIBALD STRONG.

[Memorial Address delivered by Rev. K. J. F. Bickersteth in St. Peter's Cathedral, Sunday, 7th September.]



We are met together this morning to do honour to the memory of a very dear friend. All of us would, I think, like to feel that we can claim Archibald Thomas Strong as our friend. His passing has come so suddenly and unexpectedly that we find it hard to realize his loss, and not a few of us have doubtless during the last day or two been trying to frame for ourselves some estimate of his character and work, to carry with us as we go forward, without his genial presence along life's road; to imprint upon our minds a memory, not so much perhaps of his achievements, great and many though they were, as of the man himself, what he stood for, what he was.

It is not possible in a few words to give a complete picture of his life and character. I can but say what I feel from my knowledge of him; each here will fill in the gaps in the picture for himself.

First then, I think, we have lost one who may fittingly be termed "a scholar and a gentleman." Born and bred in a cultured home, accustomed to love books from his earliest days, he must have turned gladly to the profession of letters. Yet he never allowed his scholarship to be selfish or self-centred. He was no recluse, steeping himself in a literature of by-gone ages for his own enjoyment, for he rejoiced to share with others "the things new and old which he brought forth out of his treasure" for their delight.

It is not yet possible to assess the place that his writings will take in the history of his country's literature. We are more concerned today over the loss of a friend and counsellor, rather than as to what fame posterity may grant him. Yet we know that we have had a remarkable man in our midst, whose qualities we have learnt to appreciate in his lifetime, thus making his removal from us all the harder to bear.

With all his love of books, he was equally

a keen student of men and peoples. His knowledge of languages and the history of many races made him keenly alive to the great possibilities which he saw in the building up of our youthful Australian Commonwealth, and made him a great lover of his country.

His writings on the Great War show a well-informed mind capable of reaching a sound judgment on current politics; and he was ever a man of firm convictions, eager to prove his point, and unbending in his opinions when principles were at stake. He never hesitated to proclaim what he felt was right or true, when he thought it necessary.

A somewhat rugged exterior covered the kindest of hearts. He was the very soul of courtesy, as much to the least able of his students as he was to his peers, always displaying a delicacy of feeling for the opinion of others, and this, because he had the real humility of the true scholar.

His ability and knowledge were always at the disposal of all who came to seek, and he took as much pains in preparing a talk to a schoolboys' literary society as he did for an important public lecture.

He was gifted with a fine sense of humour. How well we can recall the merry laugh and the twinkle of eye behind his glasses as he showed his appreciation of a good anecdote or story, or of some clever repartee. For all his book lore and studious habits he was essentially "a lowly and a humble man of heart," and with such qualities he could not but be a very lovable person.

He would probably never have claimed for himself great social gifts, yet many a hostess sought his company in her home, and without ever thrusting himself forward he was usually the centre of any social gathering; and often a room full of idle chatter would find itself suddenly silent and listening to what he had to say because it was worth hearing.

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He was slow and deliberate in speech, as fully aware of the value and beauty of the language he spoke, and from which his chair was named. He seemed ever anxious to give the true value to the humblest phrase.

There is not time here and now to record in full his services to the Commonwealth during and after the war, many and varied though they were; but it will be the Universities of Melbourne and Adelaide which will mourn his loss most of all, and the literary and dramatic societies of both cities of which he was so keen and able a member.

And here I feel in duty bound to record his support of the collegiate system for the Southern Universities. On his arrival in Adelaide he at once interested himself in the subject then being made to found St. Mark's College. He was quite certain that the life of a residential college had a very definite and invaluable contribution to make to the life of a University, a contribution which could be made in no other way. And when the foundation of University colleges in Adelaide was still considered by many as unnecessary, he supported the movement fully, and was later elected to the St. Mark's College Council, where his knowledge of University life at Liverpool, Oxford and Melbourne proved invaluable.

It perhaps his chief claim for our respect and love will be found in his firm devotion to that made for wisdom, truth and justice in this world. In an age and a country where the pursuit of these things sometimes grows faint, and the goal all too far, he never failed to set before himself his pupils those ideals, and to fight for them "as for a kingdom."

He cannot associate anything petty or self-seeking with him, and that is because he had "hitched his waggon to a star" and fought on unafraid; not without

days of depression and despondency, yet never losing faith in the ultimate triumph of the ideals for which he lived.

Of his religion I cannot, may not, speak. He would have been the last to wish it spoken of, for he probably had no desire to have it defined, but to deny that he had a faith would be untrue. He was for ever seeking spiritual rather than temporal things, and he valued life's opportunities for what they gave him in the pursuit of these things; and indeed I believe that we should not be far wrong if we were to say of him, as was said of another seeker after truth long years ago, "Thou art not far from the kingdom of heaven."

And I cannot, speaking from this place, consider that all we can do now is to sum up his character and write "finished" to all his activity of mind and soul. We believe in the "communion of saints." His keen, live and useful personality is surely part of that which cannot die. And our service in this cathedral today is more than a recital of our pride in his achievements, our sorrow at his passing, and our assessment of his value to his generation; it has behind it a firm belief in "the faith that all that is best and noblest in man can never die," and that we, still in our earthly pilgrimage, are "compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses." And may we not then say of him—

"O strong soul, by what shore
Tarest thou now? For that force,
Surely, has not been left vain!
Somewhere, surely, afar,
In the sounding Labour house vast
Of being is practised that strength—
Zealous, beneficent, firm!"

God accept him! Christ receive him!