

Classic Poetry Series

Archibald Thomas Strong

- poems -

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Archibald Thomas Strong(30 December 1876 – 2 September 1930)

Archibald Thomas Strong was an Australian scholar and poet.

Early Life

Strong was born at South Yarra, Melbourne, the son of Professor Herbert Strong, professor of classics at the University of Melbourne, and his wife Helen Campbell, née Edmiston.

Strong and his family moved to Liverpool, England in 1883 when Prof. Herbert Strong became professor of Latin at University College, Liverpool. Archibald was educated at Sedbergh School and University College, Liverpool where he graduated B.A. in 1896 with first-class honours in classics. Strong then went to Magdalen College, Oxford, however a long illness prevented any possibility of a first in "Greats". Strong graduated in Literae Humaniores (1900) and spent several months at the University of Marburg, Germany, before returning to read law with F. E. Smith, 1st Earl of Birkenhead, then a rising barrister, afterwards to become Lord Chancellor of England. Strong became a member of the Middle Temple, but ill-health caused him in 1901 to return to Australia seeking a warmer climate.

Literary Career

Settling again in Melbourne, Strong did some tutoring and lecturing, and published a volume of verse, *Sonnets and Songs* (1905). In 1910 Strong was president of the Literature Society of Melbourne and his presidential address, 'Nature in Meredith and Wordsworth', was printed as a pamphlet in that year. Strong was a long-term literary critic for the Herald newspaper and in 1911 republished some of his earlier writings for this journal under the title of *Peradventure, A Book of Essays in Literary Criticism*. Strong was appointed lecturer in English at the University of Melbourne in 1912, and brought out a volume of translations, *The Ballads of Theodore de Banville* (1913), followed by *Sonnets of the Empire* (1915). When Professor Robert Wallace enlisted due to World War I in 1916, Strong became acting-professor of English for three years. He was passionately patriotic and, having been rejected for active service, did much war work in addition to carrying on the English school. Some of his work was in the nature of propaganda; a collection of his articles, *Australia and the War* (1916) and *The Story of the Anzacs*, published anonymously at his own

expense in aid of patriotic funds, appeared in 1917. From 1919 to 1922 he acted as Chief Film Censor for the Commonwealth government. A small volume of verse, *Poems*, appeared in 1918. In 1920 he became associate professor in English language and literature, and in the following year the Clarendon Press published his *A Short History of English Literature*, and *Three Studies in Shelley* and an *Essay on Nature in Wordsworth and Meredith*. In 1922 Strong was appointed the first Jury professor of English language and literature at the University of Adelaide.

Strong was ready for his new task, as in addition to his knowledge of the work of his own school he was an excellent classical scholar, familiar with French and German literature, and with some knowledge of Italian and Spanish in the originals. At Adelaide he became a valuable member of the staff, fully convinced of the importance of the humanities in university life. He visited Europe in 1925 and represented South Australia at a world conference on adult education held at Vancouver in 1929. Strong published his translation of *Beowulf* into English rhyming verse in 1925.

Late Life and Legacy

Strong died after a short illness on 2 September 1930. In 1932 *Four Studies* by him, edited with a memoir by Robert Cecil Bald and with a portrait frontispiece, was published in a limited edition at Adelaide. Strong never married; he was knighted in 1925.

Strong played both cricket and football at Liverpool University; he was also interested in boxing. Strong was one of the promoters of the original Melbourne repertory theatre and became president of the similar organization at Adelaide. Strong was a good lecturer in English, never losing his enthusiasm for his subject and communicating it to his students. Strong's *Short History of English Literature* is an excellent piece of work within the limits of its 200,000 words, sound and interesting. His verse is technically excellent, often no more than strongly felt rhetorical verse, but at times rising into poetry. Strong's translations from Théodore de Banville and *Beowulf* were both successful

Australia To England

By all the deeds to Thy dear glory done,
By all the life blood spilt to serve Thy need,
By all the fettered lives Thy touch hath freed,
By all Thy dream in us anew begun;
By all the guerdon English sire to son
Hath given of highest vision, kingliest deed,
By all Thine agony, of God decreed
For trial and strength, our fate with Thine is one.

Still dwells Thy spirit in our hearts and lips,
Honour and life we hold from none but thee
 And if we live Thy pensioners no more
But seek a nation's might of men and ships,
 'Tis but that when the world is black with war
Thy sons may stand beside Thee strong and free.

Archibald Thomas Strong

Grey

LADY of Sorrow! What though laughing blue,
Thy sister, mock men's anguish, and the sun
Glare like a wrathful judge on many a one
That longs for night his bitter shame to rue,
Yet dost thou grant thy mercy of mist and dew
And cloud and calm ere angry day be done,
Weaving over the vault the weary shun
Thy veil of peace, with pity trembling through.

When all light loves and all brave hues are flown,
When beaten hope falls from the reeling fight,
And life is lone upon her desolate way,
And noon is fierce, and no men see aright,
Then weary eyes turn unto thee, their own,
Lady of Grief, the soul's madonna, Grey.

II

Yet not in sorrow only art thou fair,
For joy may know and love thee in the pall
Of spray that slumbers on the waterfall,
Or in low cottage-smoke in evening air
Or in brave stone carven in glory rare,
Or when the tender mists of Autumn fall
Dappling the mead with beauty, and the tall
Stark dreaming oaks thine ancient livery wear.

Yet none hath known thy loveliness aright
Save him who gazing in his lady's eyes
Sees dim lists tossing with plumes of many a knight
And woods where elfin waters gleam and glance,
And all the vision and faith of old romance
And the great dream of youth that never dies.

Archibald Thomas Strong

Sonnets Of The Empire: Australia 1905

Careless she lies along the Southern Main,
The lovely maiden, wanton with the spell
Of sun and vastness and the ocean swell:
Northward the great gnomes watch her beauty, fain
To snatch her wealth of gold and fleece and grain,
And bend her being to their purpose fell:
But she lies lazy, and the passing bell
Of older glory stirs her sense in vain.

Nor shall she wake and know her danger near
Till some high heart and true, her fated lord,
Shall kiss her lips, and all her will control,
And fill her wayward heart with holy fear,
And cross her forehead with his iron sword,
And bring her strength, and armour, and a soul.

Archibald Thomas Strong

Sonnets Of The Empire: Australia 1914

The Night is thick with storm and driving cloud,
Lurid at instants through the blackness break
Quick gleams of war across the perilous lake
From yonder isles that awe and magic shroud:
Far in the northland smite Thor's hammers loud
On steel that warlocks for her spoilure make,
Till lo! from sleep Australia starts awake
And lifts the queenly head that sloth had bowed.

Not yet her eyes are clear: throughout her brain
Still swarm the antic creatures of her dream,
The idiot jests, the sports that kill the soul,
Yet shall not night lay hold on her again,
For through the rack she spies the morning gleam
Clear on the sword that lights her to her goal.

Archibald Thomas Strong

Sonnets Of The Empire: Australia To England

By all the deeds to Thy dear glory done,
By all the life blood spilt to serve Thy need,
By all the fettered lives Thy touch hath freed,
By all Thy dream in us anew begun;
By all the guerdon English sire to son
Hath given of highest vision, kingliest deed,
By all Thine agony, of God decreed
For trial and strength, our fate with Thine is one.

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But seek a nation's might of men and ships,
'Tis but that when the world is black with war
Thy sons may stand beside Thee strong and free.

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Sonnets Of The Empire: Dawn At Liverpool

The Sunlight laughs along the serried stone
About whose feet the wastrel tide runs free;
Light lie the shipmasts, fairy-like to see,
Athwart the royal city's splendour thrown;
On runs the noble river, wide and lone,
Like some great soul that presses to the sea
Where life is rendered to eternity
And eager thought hath rest in the Unknown.

So sets thy tide, my country, to the deep
Whose face is black with thunder near and far,
And vexed with fleering gusts and tyrannous rain.
Shall the cloud lift and give thee rest and sleep,
Or wilt thou 'mid the surge and crash of war
Shatter thy life against the invading main?

Archibald Thomas Strong

Sonnets Of The Empire: Hawk

Great sea dog, fighter in the great old way!
What though thy ships were tinder, and the pest
Rotted thy ruffian crews that need had prest,
And all thy keels were clogged with foul decay,
Yet through the roaring months thy squadron lay
A watch-dog eager at the throat of Brest
While all the ocean smote her from the West
And all the tempests tore her in their play.
Thy soul was of the whirlwind, and thy cry
Still leaps from out the crash of guns and waves
To hurl us headlong on the foeman's van,
As in the Bay of Death, 'mid breakers high
And felon reefs whereo'er the Atlantic raves,
Thy flagship foremost into glory ran.

Archibald Thomas Strong

Sonnets Of The Empire: Nelson

White soul of England's glory, sovereign star!
Ne'er shall disaster beat her down, nor shame,
While still she sees thee by the leaping flame
That kindled o'er Aboukir, near and far,
Or feels thee quivering through the onset's jar
That filled the North with fear of England's name,
Or trembles with the joy of all the fame
That died and cast out death at Trafalgar.

Thy name was lightning, and like lightning ay
Thine onset shivered, far and swift and fell:
Ever thy watchword holds us, and whene'er
The fierce Dawn breaks, and far along the sky
Roars the last battle, yet with us 'tis well—
We keep the touch, thy hand and soul are there.

Archibald Thomas Strong

Sonnets Of The Empire:Australia, 1902

Gallant is Spring along thy laughing hills,
With wattle's loveliest scent and gleam of gold,
When the good rain hath quickened all thy mould,
And the hot musk thine air with incense fills.
Sweet is the chime of all thy tinkling rills,
And fair thy Summer's glory to behold,
And soft is life for thee, the sunny-souled,
Far from the world and all its olden ills.

Yet 'tis not calm that builds the hero breed,
High hearts are tempered 'neath a stormy star,
Through want and danger doth the soul increase,
Stern rings the clarion voice of Angel Need
To bid thee vanquish self, and gaze afar
And save thy soul alive from Harlot Peace.

Archibald Thomas Strong

Sonnets Of The Empire:Gloriana's England

Forth sped thy gallant sailors, blithe and free,
Fearing nor foeman's hate, nor iron clime,
Nor Lima's flame, nor Plata's fever-slime,
So they might give thee far Cathay in fee;
Yet swept thy poets o'er a vaster sea,
'Neath fairer gales to Indies more sublime,
Questing along the golden shores of Rhyme
For all the treasure of eternity.

One will, one end, one pulse of deep desire,
Drove Hudson through the ice to joy and death,
Sped Drake to glory through the long South roll:
And kindled Marlowe's eager heart with fire,
Set Spenser voyaging 'neath the spirit's breath,
And won the world for Shakespeare's captain soul.

Archibald Thomas Strong

Vain Death

ALL the first night she might not weep
But watched till morning came,
And when she slept at dawn, she heard
The dead man call her name.

The second night she watched and wept
And called on death for grace,
And when she slept before the dawn
She saw the dead man's face.

The third night through she laughed as one
That knows her way to bliss,
And in the instant ere she slept
She felt the dead man's kiss.

She rose and faced the flickering fire
(And oh, but she was fair!),
Like a wild witch behind her danced
The shadow of her hair.

She took her penknife from its sheath,
The tender blade she kissed,
And by the firelight's dying leap
She bared her little wrist.

And where the vein ran large and blue
She cut, once and again,
Yet ere she swooned from life, she knew
Her death had been in vain.

For while life thundered in her ears,
Ere yet her pulse might fail,
Far off across the kindless night
She heard the dead man's wail,

And knew her doom was one with theirs
That kill the life God gave,
And that she might not leave this earth
Her soul alive to save,

But ay must dwell within that house
As in a living grave,

While he for whom she died might ne'er
Win to her in that place,
But must for ever make his moan
Ranging in agony alone
The trackless void of space

Archibald Thomas Strong