

Lecture by Sir Archibald Strong.

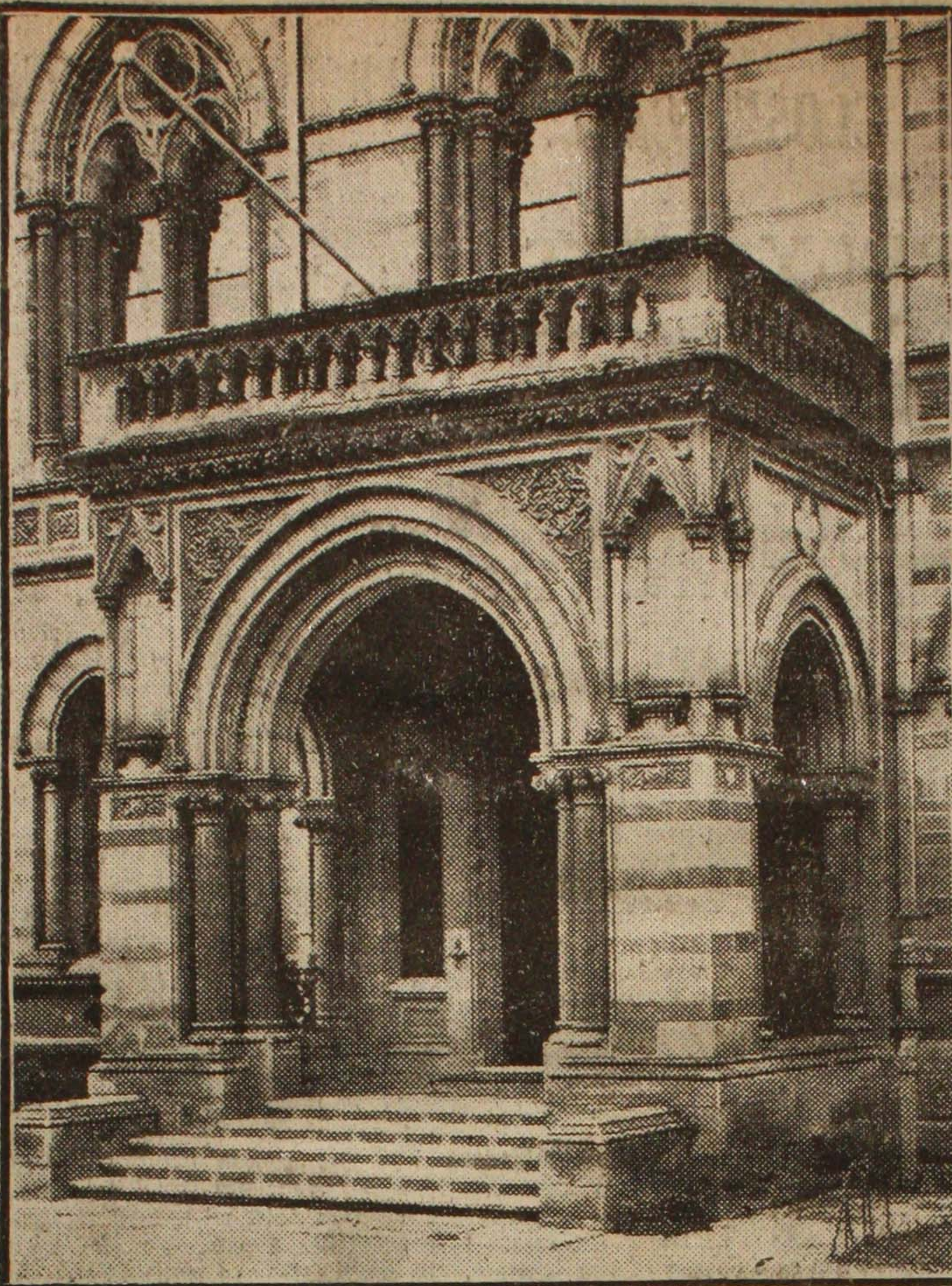
At the Prince of Wales Theatre, University, on Tuesday evening, Professor Sir Archibald Strong, gave the second of three extension lectures on some aspects of modern English poetry, the subject last night was the lyric and dramatic poetry of Thomas Hardy.

Sir Archibald began by showing that Hardy could not be understood without some knowledge of his faith and philosophy, and his interpretation of life, and that interpretation was in conflict with the orthodox beliefs of his day. Hardy's sense of life is at once ironic and tragic. Irony was, with many writers, the obverse of a passionate idealism which had been foiled of the satisfaction it craved. Similarly, tragedy in the hands of a great thinker and artist such as Hardy, although it deals with terrible issues, did not result in depression, inasmuch as it affirmed the permanence and triumph of higher values of life, even in the impact of the downfall or destruction of the human beings in which those values had become incarnate. Dealing with Hardy's lyric or lyrical narrative, poetry, the lecturer said that Hardy was a true Victorian in his preoccupation with the significance of life, in his strenuous desire to bring meaning out of the riddle of the universe. Yet his reading of the riddle differs totally from that of such great Victorian poets as Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, and Meredith. Lacking the exultant Christian faith of Browning he lacks also Meredith's belief in nature's kindness to the human race. Nor was his tragic sense the same as Swinburne's; with Swinburne the tragic agony was constantly transcended and transfigured by his sense of the radiance and worth of the human soul. Hardy's reading of life was ultimately tragic, too, but his reading of nature issues in spiritual bafflement and despair regarding her meaning, and he turned away from her, as did Alfred de Vigny, to man, and found consolation, though no revelation, in the heroism with which he faced the agony of existence. Sir Archibald quoted from several poems of Hardy's which illustrate that attitude. In many of them, he said, the conflict between man's idealistic aspirations and the cruelty and meanness of reality supplied Hardy with an ironic contrast, which coloured his whole reading of existence. In poem after poem the drama of the foreground was a human drama wrought directly out of the stuff of daily life, and here was found a piercing psychological insight and a superb narrative power with which most people were probably more familiar in Hardy's novels. Many of Hardy's short poems read like short stories.

Sir Archibald quoted and referred to numerous poems illustrating Hardy's power to tell a human story in lyrical or semi-lyrical form. Dealing as Hardy usually did with stark tragedies and dark ironies of life he seemed determined that life should be hammered home with stern and ruthless strokes to the accompaniment of no romantic choruses. It seems almost incredible that so subtle and complete a story could have been told in so few words.

The lecturer passed from Hardy's lyric poetry to the stupendous epic drama of The Dynasts. This type of epic drama was Hardy's own. The actual story of The Dynasts is that of the 10 most momentous years of the world's history, the years between Trafalgar and Waterloo, with Napoleon as the supreme figure in the ever-changing scene. Nearly all of Napoleon's great battles of the period were shown in dumb show, or in a panorama which served as a back scene to the drama played by the main characters in the foreground. The interest was most intense when the Emperor himself was acting. The lecturer also gave some examples of Hardy's humour, which was perhaps more evident in The Dynasts than in the novels, when he portrayed peasant types. The human action of The Dynasts was set within a still more stupendous play in which the speakers were the forces which moved the world and of other and more passive forces which watched the movement and interpreted it in different senses. As in lyric after lyric of Hardy's, there was found throughout The Dynasts the tragic interpretation of life, sometimes clashing and sometimes blending with the ironic. It exemplified and united all of Hardy's greatest qualities. The narrative power evident in his novels here found a field vaster than had been offered by all of those combined. His religious sense, his intense preoccupation with the significance of life found its supreme expression in the cosmic choruses, and the same choruses gave free play to his lyric gift. All of those masteries were perfectly combined and blended in The Dynasts. Few poets had ever found a form so completely fit to express their genius in its full diversity and power.

IMPOSING ENTRANCES.



No. 7.

The entrance to the University is a very fine example of the Geometrical Decorated style of Gothic, which flourished in England in the late fourteenth century. Some authorities do not consider that the Gothic style, evolved as it was in England under grey skies, is suitable to our sunny climate, hence the new buildings at the University are being carried out in a style which is based on Italian principles. But there will never lack admirers and lovers of the Gothic lines of the original University block.

THOMAS HARDY'S POETRY.

LECTURE BY SIR ARCHIBALD STRONG.

The second of a series of three extension lectures on "Some Aspects of Modern English Poetry" was delivered by Professor Sir Archibald Strong in the lecture theatre of the Prince of Wales Buildings at the University on Tuesday evening, when he dealt with the works of Thomas Hardy, a great part of the lecture being devoted to a discussion of the great epic drama, "The Dynasts."

The lecturer prefaced his remarks by saying that Hardy's poetry could not be understood without some knowledge of his faith and philosophy, and of his interpretation of life. That interpretation was in conflict with the orthodox beliefs of his day. The important thing in reading a great poet was not the coincidence of his beliefs with their own, but the variety and richness of spiritual experience with which he acquainted them in expressing those beliefs, and also the intensity and beauty of form with which the beliefs were uttered. Hardy's sense of life was at once ironic and tragic, and it must not be assumed that an ironic sense of life meant a callousness regarding life's higher values. Irony was with many writers the obverse of a passionate idealism which had been foiled of the satisfaction it craved. Similarly, tragedy in the hands of a great thinker and artist, such as Hardy, although it dealt with terrible issues, did not result in depression, as it affirmed the permanence and triumph of the higher values of life.

Dealing with Hardy's lyric or lyrical narrative poetry, Sir Archibald showed that Hardy was a true Victorian in his preoccupation with the significance of life, and in his strenuous desire to bring a meaning out of the riddle of the universe. Yet his reading of the riddle differed totally from that of such great Victorian poets as Browning, Tennyson, Swinburne, and Meredith. Lacking the exultant faith of Browning, he lacked also his belief in Nature's kindness to the human race. Neither was his tragic sense the same as Swinburne's. With Swinburne the tragic agony was constantly transcended and transfigured by his sense of the radiance and worth of the human soul. Hardy's

reading of life was ultimately tragic, too; but his reading of Nature issued in spiritual bafflement and despair regarding her meaning, and he turned away from her, as did Alfred de Vigny, to man, and he found consolation, although not revelation, in the heroism in which he faced the agony of existence. The lecturer quoted several poems of Hardy's which illustrate that attitude. In many of them the conflict between man's idealistic aspirations and the cruelty and meanness of reality supplied Hardy with an ironic contrast which covered his whole reading of existence. Such was the dark and enigmatic background of Hardy's poetry. Many of his short poems read like short stories done with verse, and they gained poignancy and intensity through his choice of medium. That, again, when it occurred, was due to the grim austerity of his poetic style, to an economy of words perhaps unparalleled in English poetry, and to his forthright simplicity and directness of attack. Dealing as Hardy usually did with the stark tragedies and dark ironies of life he seemed determined that life should be hammered home with stern and ruthless strokes to the accompaniment of no romantic chorus. That was especially true of his short narrative poems. Sometimes when they read them it seemed almost incredible that so subtle and complete a story could be told in so few words. Hardy's poetic method was almost the opposite of that of Swinburne. He was never a singer, as Swinburne constantly was out of sheer delight in song, and outside his early verse, his poems which haunted one by their melody were few. To say that, of course, was not to say that his poetry lacked the true and high poetic form. This it constantly possessed, yet the mastery was generally due, not to any haunting quality of song, but rather to the perfect correspondence of poetic pattern with the persistency and intensity of his ideas.

In passing from Hardy's lyric poetry to the stupendous epic drama of "The Dynasts," the lecturer said this type of epic drama was Hardy's own. The story of "The Dynasts" was that of the ten most momentous years of the world's history, those between the battles of Trafalgar and Waterloo, with Napoleon as the supreme figure. The characters which appeared and spoke in the three parts of the play numbered 298, besides which there were many mute and unnamed characters. The scenes shifted across the length and breadth of Europe from England to Russia, and from Madrid to Paris. Nearly all Napoleon's great battles of that period were displayed in dumb show or panorama, and on those occasions served as back scenes to the drama played by the main characters in the foreground. The interest was most intense when the Emperor himself was acting. To illustrate this the lecturer

read the scene in which Napoleon breaks to Josephine his intention to divorce her, and another showing the suicide of Admiral Villeneuve after his defeat at Trafalgar. Sir Archibald said the human action of "The Dynasts" was set within a still more stupendous play in which the speakers were the forces which moved the world, and other and more passive forces which watched that movement and interpreted it in its different senses. The Spirit of the Years was the interpreter of the blind driving force, the Immanent Will, which formed the entire scheme of things propelled it relentlessly upon its way. That spirit was Time withering Life throughout the ages, and declaring its impartial reading of the will's blind indifference to human fate. Against that relentless verdict upon Life was directed the pleading of the Chorus of Pities, who represented the passionate aspirations of humanity, that the will should cease to be blind and unconscious, and with the awakening of its consciousness it should awaken the will, not merely to life, but to good. To that pleading the Spirit of the Years would vouchsafe no hopeful answer. As in lyric after lyric of Hardy they found throughout "The Dynasts" the tragic interpretation of life, sometimes clashing and sometimes blending with the ironic. The Spirit Sinister appeared to be a power wholly malignant, exulting in the harm wrought by such an extreme expression of the will as Napoleon. The Ironic Spirits, however, were more dispassionate. "The Dynasts" exemplified and united all Hardy's greatest qualities. The narrative power evident in his novels there found a field vaster than had been offered by all these combined. His religious sense, and his intense preoccupation with the significance of life found their supreme expression in the Cosmic Choruses, and the same choruses gave free play to his lyric gifts. All of his masteries were perfectly combined and blended in "The Dynasts." Few poets had ever found a form so completely fit to express their genius in its full diversity and power.

REG. 22.6.28  
ALSO ADV. NEWS.  
UNIVERSITY STUDENTS' UNION BUILDING.

A conversazione will be held at the University of Adelaide on Saturday, July 7, in aid of the Students' Union building fund. The function is being arranged, and will be carried out purely by the students themselves, who wish to do something to support the fund. The University will be open to the public. Experiments and demonstrations will be carried on in the various laboratories; museums and libraries will be open to inspection; lectures with lantern slides will be given by prominent professors and lecturers at appointed times. Short plays will be presented by various University societies. Tickets will be sold at 2/ each, and the proceeds will go to the union building fund. His Excellency the Governor and Lady Hore-Ruthven will be present (the Governor in his official capacity of "visitor" to the University). The Premier, the Lord Mayor, the Judges of the Supreme Court, and many other prominent citizens have been invited. Sir Josiah Symon, K.C., who has done so much for the movement, will be among the principal guests. The Chancellor (Sir George Murray, K.C.M.G.) will be received by the central organizing committee of the function (Messrs. M. C. Anderson, D. R. Downey, R. N. Irwin, and G. Heaslip), and he will then receive members of the viceregal party and conduct them over the University.

CONSERVATORIUM OPERA PERFORMANCE.

To the Editor.  
Sir—In connection with the performance of "La Mascotte," I should like personally to acknowledge my appreciation of the splendid work done by Mr. Frank Johnston in collaboration with Mr. Winsloe Hall in the production of this opera at the Norwood Town Hall. As producer Mr. Johnston has shown a very signal ability, for which he deserves the greatest praise. I am, &c.,  
E. HAROLD DAVIES,  
Elder Conservatorium, June 22.

Conservatorium Opera Performance.

Sir—In connection with the performance of "La Mascotte," I should like to personally acknowledge my appreciation of the splendid work that has been done by Mr. Frank Johnston in collaboration with Mr. Winsloe Hall, in the production of this opera at the Norwood Town Hall. Press reports have not sufficiently stressed the responsible and important work of the producer, and Mr. Johnston in this capacity has shown a very signal ability, for which he deserves the greatest praise. I am, Sir, &c.,  
E. HAROLD DAVIES.