

A NOTABLE CITIZEN.

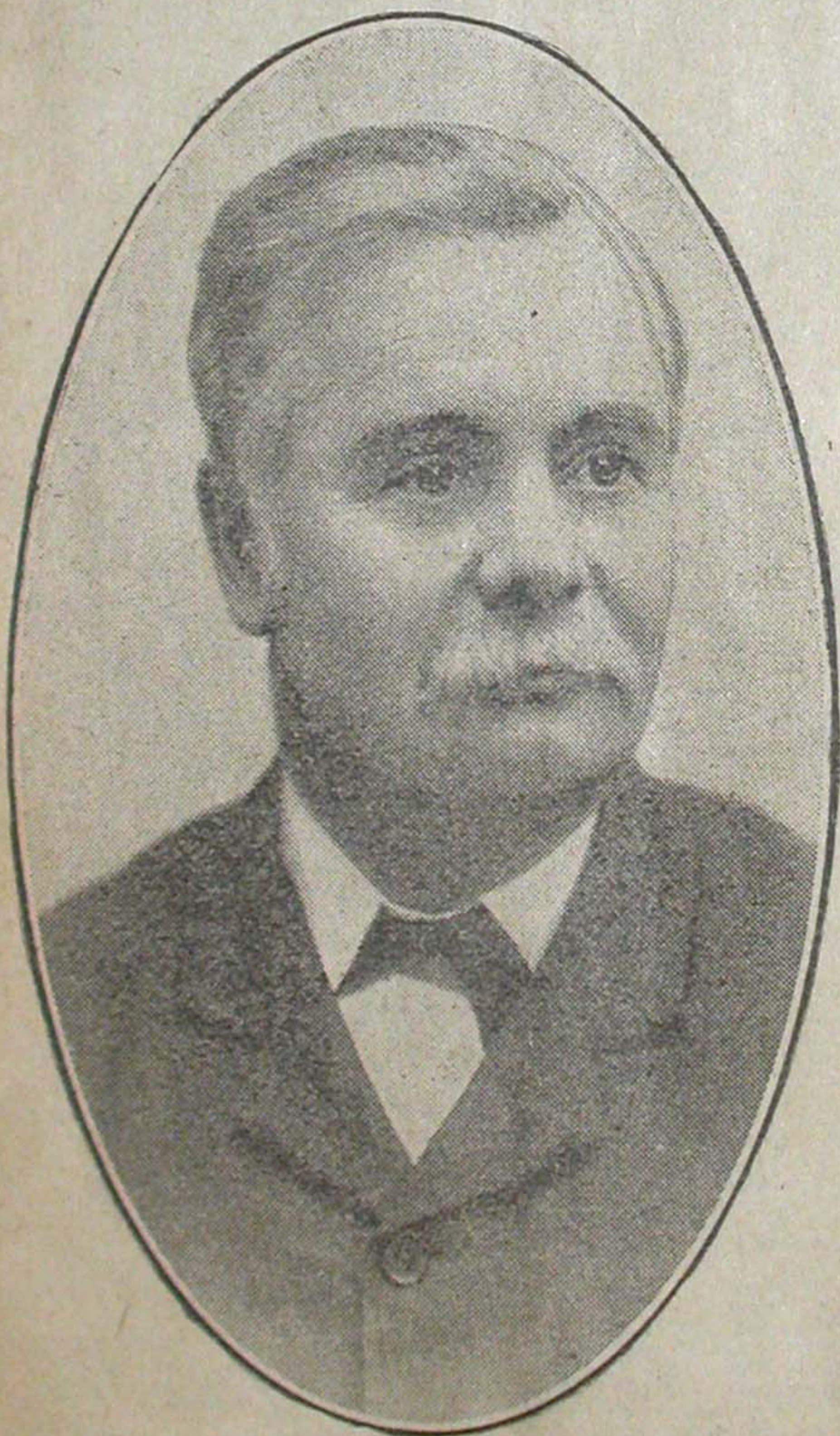
The Late Mr. R. Barr Smith.

Universal sorrow will be occasioned by the news of the death of that well-known South Australian, Mr. Robert Barr Smith, which occurred at 40 Angas street between 3 and 4 a.m. on Saturday, at the age of 91 years. Thus has passed away a man who has stamped his identity on the records of South Australia for all time. Although for several years he had lived in retirement, he will be missed from many of the activities of the State. Public life will be the poorer, not that he took part in it in any governmental or political sense, but he undoubtedly influenced it. Deep sorrow will be felt in philanthropic circles, where the wants of the needy ever outweigh the efforts of the generous. The loss will be keenly felt in the fields of education, where money cannot overtake the demands of knowledge. In the realms of art and sport, of utility and idealism, in matters that benefited the public in every direction, this great citizen will be missed. Mr. Barr Smith was lavishly thoughtful for others. Much money he had, but he

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—A Horse Lover.—

The late citizen was a keen judge of a horse, and a lover of a good animal. He was a patron of hunting and the turf, and his colours used to be seen regularly at the principal race meetings in South Australia and in Victoria. Mostyn, whom he imported, won the Goodwood Handicap in 1894 and 1895, and the City Handicap in 1896. Indeed, that year the stable won the double, Destiny, entered in the name of Mr. Tom Barr Smith, carrying the well-known tartan colours to victory in the Birthday Cup in front of Lord Grenville. If every one went in for racing as did Mr. Barr Smith, for the pure love of the sport, there would be no need for any crusades against the evils of the turf, because if every one was actuated by the same spirit there would be no evils. He was also part proprietor of the Morphettville Stud. Coursing claimed his attention. Buckland Park, in its palmy days, knew him frequently. It was truthfully said of him that he had been the patron, friend, and right royal good fellow of all who followed the pack or coursed with the greyhound. At one time he was President of the South Australian Coursing Club. Many



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gave it away without stint. His benefactions may be described as indicative of his nature. Once convinced that an object was worthy, and Mr. Barr Smith never hesitated to assist it. And if he could do so without receiving thanks and praise for his actions, he was all the better pleased. He absolutely shrank from publicity of every kind, and nothing pained him more than to be dragged into the limelight, and praised for the humane and noble conception he took of the uses to which his wealth should be put. "No, no," he once emphatically exclaimed to a journalist, who desired to interview him on his birthday; "if you must say something, just say I'm alive. That is enough." Being the man he was, and holding the position he did, he could not altogether hide himself from the public view, yet, after all, the people did not know him perhaps as much as they would have liked. Although his name was a household word, and although he had literally thousands of friends and acquaintances, there were large numbers of Adelaide citizens who had never even seen him.

—Early Life.—

It was a fortunate thing for South Australia that it was able to attract such a man to its shores. He would have achieved success in any land, but the new country urgently needed men of his character. It had many and big problems to solve, and only great determination, sound judgment, noble probity, and wonderful foresight could adequately grapple with them. Mr. Barr Smith was born at Lochwinnoch, Renfrewshire, on February 4, 1824. His father was the Rev. Dr. Smith, of the Free Church of Scotland. He first went to Melbourne, where he was a partner in the firm of Hamilton, Smith, & Co., merchants. In 1854 he came to Adelaide to take the place of the late Mr. George Elder, in the firm of Elder & Co., which in 1856 changed its name to Elder, Stirling, & Co., owing to the fact that the Hon. Edward Stirling and Mr. John Taylor had been admitted as partners. In 1863 Mr. John Taylor retired, and the firm became Elder, Smith, & Co. By marrying Miss Elder, Mr. Barr Smith became brother-in-law of that notable Australian benefactor, the late Sir Thomas Elder, G.C.M.G. The knight and Mr. Barr Smith were for very many years associated in the business of Elder, Smith, and Co., whose wide interests are closely bound up with Australian trade and Australian progress. This house is one of the most extensive trading concerns in Australia, and is connected directly or indirectly with every important branch of commerce—mercantile, shipping, mining, pastoral, financial. Elder and Smith were great pioneers in Australian shipping and commerce, in the expansion of pastoral development, in the opening up of undeveloped tracts of country, and they and a few who were associated with them must always have the credit for having paved the way for trade and settlement in much of our inland country and for having found in their day profitable outlets and markets for Australian produce.

—Pastoral Pursuits.—

The two partners were the real pioneers of the pastoral settlement of the State. Every one at all acquainted with our north knows what the firm did to open up and settle the country. It was they who late in the sixties and early in the seventies showed the other lessees the value of fencing and turning the sheep adrift, as against the costly practice of shepherding. They did not confine their pastoral pursuits to South Australia alone. Other States, particularly New South Wales, knew them as well. As financiers of station property, their influence was widespread, and many a pastoralist had reason to bless them for shrewd assistance rendered in time of need.

—Mining.—

In the mining field Mr. Barr Smith was equally to the fore. Wallaroo and Moonta owed him much. His firm assisted prospectors for copper on Yorke's Peninsula by means of advances of capital for working expenses. But it did very much more than that. It became responsible for £80,000, in the first place for the purpose of keeping the Wallaroo and Moonta Mines going, and it is due to the firm's liberality and strong confidence in the future prospects of the copper country that the mines bear such an important part in the prosperity of South Australia. The deficiency of the Wallaroo and Moonta Mines at one time was something like £100,000, which was ultimately largely repaid; yet during some years the earnings of the Wallaroo Mine were divided among the workmen, the proprietors reaping no income whatever from them. In a lesser degree,

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adventures he took part in as a follower of the leash, including spills from his horse; but misadventures he always accepted with good humour.

—Business Influence.—

In his prime Mr. Barr Smith not only had his finger on the financial pulse of the State, but actually controlled its beats. There was no sounder authority on finance in Adelaide. Naturally his business position made him somewhat of a dictator, but there was no kinder-hearted friend or mentor than he was. He was the consultant of influential men in every direction, who were always prepared to accept his advice. At the time of the bank smashes in the State, if there was one man in the city who was besieged night and day by anxious and bewildered business men it was Mr. Barr Smith. He was director to several large financial institutions other than Elder, Smith, & Co. He would never consent to enter public or municipal life, but one of the exceptions he made was in favour of the Botanic Gardens Board, and deep regret was felt by his colleagues when he resigned from that body just before he and Mrs. Barr Smith left on a two years' holiday trip in 1899. He was also formerly for some years a member of the Public Library Board.

Where to begin a history of the assistance rendered by Mr. Barr Smith to all sorts of institutions is a problem. He lent works of art to the State, he assisted to complete cathedrals, he helped to build trades halls, and he gave much money for educational purposes. Those were his more public efforts, although he always objected to having them described as such. In the matter of private benefactions what he and his devoted wife did will never be known. For years efforts were made to complete St. Peter's Anglican Cathedral, which lacked its towers, and one morning the officers of the diocese were electrified by the receipt of a cheque for £10,000. It bore the signature of "Robert Barr Smith." On another occasion he assisted the same church by giving £2,000 to the fund raised to establish the Bishopric of Willochra. Other churches benefited by his generosity, for he gave indiscriminately to every church in need, and to every cause connected with the churches which he regarded as worthy of help. One of his best gifts was £10,000 to the Adelaide University in 1913. It was for the purpose of starting a residential college. In the covering letter he wrote:—"I am willing to give the University of Adelaide the sum of £10,000 at once for the purpose, in the first instance, of building a common hall for the meeting of professors and students for meals and social purposes. My idea is that this should serve as a commencement of a residential college. The conditions of this gift are:—1. That the Government will subsidize the donation pound for pound, to be used for the above purpose. 2. That the Government will allocate to and vest in the University the additional grounds for which the council has made request." Cabinet accepted the offer without hesitation, as the nucleus of what will be a large and extensive undertaking. In acknowledging the gift, the Premier of the day (Hon. A. H. Peake) wrote:—"I am directed to express the high appreciation of Ministers of your noble gift." It was characteristic of Mr. Barr Smith, that, for some little time the public did not know the name of the giver of the £10,000, although they guessed it. The University in other ways was helped by the same generous hand. For instance he gave the library £2,000.

—The Trades Hall.—

Perhaps of all his gifts that which gained the most widespread attention was the cheque for £2,300 towards the Trades Hall in Grote street, which was sufficient to free the building from debt. The Trades Hall management had a mortgage to bear, and they were also worried by their inability to extend the building so as to meet the many demands made upon them for accommodation. Mr. Barr Smith stepped forward with his acceptable donation, and at once the Trades Hall Committee was able to take steps which, not long after, saw fruition in the erection of a fine new wing. Mr. Thomas Ryan, the collector of the cheque, echoed the feeling of every one of his fellow-members when he wrote across his letter informing them of the donation the words of Lowell—"Not what we give, but what we share. For the gift without the giver is bare."

—Other Gifts.—

Mr. Barr Smith, in 1895, presented South Australia with a steam lifeboat, which was named the City of Adelaide, and which cost £3,500. The boat is stationed on the southern coast. It was his liberality which enabled Mr. Clement Wragge to bring about the establishment of the observatory on the summit of Mount Kosciusko, in New South Wales. He was mainly responsible for South Australia's contribution which enabled the State to be represented in the first team at the Bisley rifle matches. He also contributed largely to the equipment of expeditions for the exploration of the interior and the development of natural resources in every possible direction, and his practical aid inspired others to help in the advancement of exploration.

—Private Hospitality.—

The deceased citizen possessed one of the most beautiful homes round about Adelaide in Torrens Park (Mitcham), which was purchased from the estate of the late Sir W. W. Hughes. There, for many years, the family exercised great hospitality. Attached to the house is a bijou theatre, which was erected solely for the purpose of affording entertainment to friends. At Mount Barker is another residence, Auchendarroch, which was used in the summer months. Mount Barker was always glad to welcome Mr. and Mrs. Barr Smith. Their presence meant a solid gain to the life of the town, for their open-heartedness was princely, and every one who had the privilege of being entertained at Auchendarroch was not likely to forget it. Not only that; but every local institution received a filip, and the people all over the district were made fully aware of the generous friends who were in their midst. Christmas time at the house was something to be remembered, particularly by the young people, whom Mr. and Mrs. Smith delighted to have around them. A friend had this to say of them:—"The names of Mr. and Mrs. Barr Smith will not fade from the memory of South Australians. The noble and charming lady who had been the life partner of this noble man was, like her husband, a cheerful and liberal benefactor. Probably the full extent of their unostentatious deeds in conferring blessing and happiness upon widows and orphans, the poor and indigent, the distressed and helpless, will never be known in human records. Eye hath not seen nor ear heard what they have done in the cause of charity. Who can tell the amount of sunshine they have been the means of imparting to lives of men and women when dark clouds of sorrow intervened, and amid anxious cares and burdens of life Mrs. Barr Smith has been a veritable angel of light and love."

—The Family.—

The deceased gentleman left a widow and one son and three daughters (Mesdames F. W. Braund and G. C. Hawker, jun., now resident in England; Mrs. T. O'Halloran Giles, Adelaide; and Mr. T. E. Barr Smith, Glen Osmond).