

A LIBERAL BENEFACTOR.

MR. JOSEPH FISHER.

£3,315 GIVEN FOR PUBLIC AND CHARITABLE PURPOSES.

The following letter was on Tuesday addressed to the Editor of The Register:—

Sir—I have much pleasure in sending you herewith a list of donations which I have decided to give to the various institutions enumerated therein. Will you kindly communicate with the representatives of those institutions, so that they may collect the amounts in which they are respectively concerned? Subject to your consent, the sums are payable at The Register Offices, in Grenfell street, Adelaide.

In explanation I may say that for many years past I have made provision in my will for charitable and other public purposes, but I am now led by several considerations to anticipate the date on which effect can be given to that document. The only one of these which I need mention here is the law now in force that all moneys given in his will by a testator for charitable purposes are subject to a deduction of 10 per cent. payable to the Government. I regard this exaction as equally unjust and unwise, and as one tending to check the flow of public-spirited benevolence. In these circumstances I have resolved to make during my lifetime the distribution which I had intended to reserve until after my decease.

I specially desire that you should be the medium of distribution, because, apart from your personal experience in the gathering and distribution of funds for purposes of public benevolence, I was for many years connected with the proprietary of The Register and The Observer newspapers; and in that establishment was laid the foundation of such success as I have since enjoyed in commercial life. An additional consideration is that The Register has been praiseworthy prominent in initiating public movements of a philanthropic and kindred nature, and has been the means of collecting many scores of thousands of pounds for the benefit of the poor, the needy, and the suffering. Through your agency, too, I shall be spared the necessity of entering into correspondence with the secretaries of the various societies named in my list, as one intimation will suffice for all.

I am, Sir, &c.,

J. FISHER.

Woodfield, Fullarton, April 14.

LIST OF DONATIONS.

University of Adelaide.—To encourage commercial education—(1) a perpetual gold medal to the student of exceptional merit on completion of the course for the advanced commercial certificate; (2) a special lectureship on the commercial side—a lecture to be delivered in alternate years, and published; (3) the remuneration of lecturers, examiners, and professors engaged in the general work of the commercial course	£1,000
Public Library Board (for the National Art Gallery).—To be spent upon the purchase, under certain conditions, of a work of art to be selected in London by Mr. J. H. Finlayson, formerly Editor of The Register, and other competent gentlemen associated with him	£500
Adelaide Children's Hospital.—For the perpetual endowment of a cot to be called "The Anne Wood Fisher Cot"	£315
Home for Incurables.—For the endowment of a bed to be called "The Joseph Fisher Bed"	£250
Blind, Deaf, and Dumb Institution, Brighton	£250
Adelaide Benevolent and Strangers' Friend Society	£250
Church of England Charities.—To be distributed under the direction of the Bishop	£100
Congregational Church Charities.—To be distributed under the direction of the Chairman of the Congregational Union	£100
Roman Catholic Charities.—To be distributed under the direction of the Archbishop	£100
Methodist Church Charities.—To be distributed under the direction of the President of the Methodist Conference	£100
Salvation Army Charities.—To be distributed under the direction of the management of the Salvation Army in South Australia	£100
National Park, Belair.—To be used at the discretion of the Park Commissioners	£100
District Trained Nursing Society, Adelaide	£50
Adelaide City Mission	£25
Convalescent Home, Semaphore	£25
Cottage Homes, Adelaide	£25
Orphan Home for Girls, Carrington street	£25

Total £3,315

[The various amounts which have been sent to us by the generous donor are available for distribution, and may be obtained by persons authorized to receive them on application to the cashier at The Register Office.—Ed.]

A WORTHY OLD COLONIST.

Few men are better known or more highly respected in business circles in Adelaide than Mr. Joseph Fisher, whose latest liberal benefactions are announced above, and whose kindly disposition and bluff, but genial, manners have won for their possessor troops of friends. Mr. Fisher has spent practically all his life in South Australia; but, unlike most of the pioneer colonists, he has never left the original settlement for more than brief intervals, and he can claim the distinction of having been engaged in business in Adelaide almost continuously since he ended his school days, about 57 years ago.

—An Ideal Residence.—

In 1837 Mr. Fisher married Miss Farrar, a daughter of a highly respected Melbourne merchant, and the house which he formed at Woodfield, Fullarton, in that year has been his chief delight ever since. In later years, since he retired from regular business pursuits, he has spent several hours daily in his garden; and he is never happier than when tending his roses and fruit trees, or enjoying the companionship of his wife and family. The plain but substantial house which Mr. Fisher purchased 46 years ago is still in good repair, and forms part of the larger structure which now constitutes his dwelling. The walls of the old edifice were erected about half a century ago by the late Mr. J. C. Verco, who afterwards represented West Adelaide in the Assembly and became a director of the Commercial Bank; and the woodwork was built by Mr. (subsequently the Hon.) P. Santo, who also entered Parliament and became a Minister of the Crown. The present condition of the that portion of the dwelling is the best possible tribute to the excellence of the work which the legislator craftsmen were capable of doing. The handsome two-story structure which now faces the Fullarton road is only about 20 years old. Mr. Fisher is a man of refined tastes, and takes delight in beautifying the interior and the exterior of his home. The site on which the house is built commands a magnificent view of the city and surrounding suburbs, and from his bedroom window Mr. Fisher can see vessels steaming or sailing up and down the Gulf. The walls of the principal rooms and the hall are lined with works of art, many of which are greatly prized by Mr. Fisher on account of their old-time associations. Several of his most valuable pictures were bequeathed to him by old colonists who have long since passed away; others, including a fine representation of the clipper ship Hesperus and a life-size portrait of the late Mr. Anthony Forster (a former editor of The Register), recall various phases of Mr. Fisher's business career. He was part owner of the Hesperus, one of the finest clippers that ever traded between Australia and England until she was sold for use as a training ship for scions of the English nobility. A place of honour is given to a presentation portrait of himself, painted by Duryea, which was handed to Mr. Fisher by the commercial staff when he retired from The Register proprietorship; and several interesting photographs of his partners and members of the staff who served under him while he had control of the commercial branch of the paper have been hung over his writing table in the study. Side by side with these mementoes of a past generation

may be seen pictures by modern English and Australian painters of repute, which have been acquired by Mr. Fisher during the last few years. He has always been a patron of local art, and several South Australian artists are represented in his collection. A set of drawings by the late Mr. S. T. Gill, indicating the phrenological peculiarities of most of the prominent men in South Australia 50 years ago, are a source of perpetual interest to old colonists. Mr. Fisher's garden is a model of order and beauty, and he takes a pardonable pride in escorting visitors over his well-kept lawns and among his beds of choice flowers. He still visits the city almost daily to attend to his private concerns; and those who meet him there would probably describe him as a level-headed man of business without a particle of sentiment in his composition. Such a generalization would, however, express only a half truth.

—Interesting Reminiscences.—

It is necessary to catch a glimpse of his home life in order to obtain a full knowledge of the whole man. In his charming grounds at Fullarton a representative of The Register has had an opportunity of listening to Mr. Fisher's reminiscences of the far-off days when he played a more prominent part in the public and business life of the community than he has done during the last few years. He remarked, with a touch of pathos, that nearly all the friends of his youth had passed away; and for that reason he treasured many souvenirs which were of comparatively little interest to the present generation.

"I made a practice of entertaining a party of my old friends every year on my birthday," he remarked, "but I discontinued it several years ago because the constantly increasing number of 'vacant chairs' made the gathering a painful annual reminder of the missing comrades who had been removed by death."

—Parentage and Early Life.—

Mr. Fisher was born in Brighouse, Yorkshire, on September 14, 1834, and his parents left England for South Australia in the Pestonjee Bomanjee before he was four years of age. Governor Gawler came to the state in the same vessel. The passengers landed on October 12, 1838, and the late Mr. Joshua Fisher subsequently established at the corner of Hindley and Morphett streets a large grocery business, which he carried on with success until he died in 1841. Mr. Joseph Fisher's earliest recollection of Adelaide dates back to the time when the site on which the city now stands was covered with trees and dense scrub, and when the position of the future streets was marked by surveyors' pegs. In those days it was not always easy for a person to find his way from one part of the settlement to another at night; and, although Mr. Fisher boasts that he has lived within five miles of Adelaide ever since he arrived in South Australia more than 64 years ago, he has had personal experience of bush roads and bullock tracks. He was educated mainly at the Oldfellows' School, over which the

late Mr. J. W. Disher presided in the early days; and in October, 1846, he obtained a situation in the late Mr. Anthony Forster's mercantile office in Tavistock street. "I have been engaged in numerous enterprises in the course of my career," remarked Mr. Fisher, "but I really remained in the same employment from the time I left school until I purchased an interest in The Register. About two years after I entered Mr. Forster's service that gentleman received the offer of a partnership from Mr. John Stephens, who was at that time the sole proprietor of The Register and The Observer. Mr. Forster suggested that he should be allowed to take the position for three months, with the right to purchase a share in the business at the end of that period if he found the work congenial. Mr. Stephens agreed to those terms, and when Mr. Forster relinquished his former business he transferred me to the commercial department of the newspaper with which he was temporarily associated. At the end of the three months he decided not to enter into partnership with Mr. Stephens, and severed his connection with The Register. I remained in the commercial department, however, for several years."

—Hard Work With Variations.—

"The Register was published twice a week in those days," continued Mr. Fisher, "and a stationer's shop formed part of the commercial branch. Mr. Jenkins acted as shipping reporter in addition to supervising the stationery department, and when vessels arrived from England he would ride to Port Adelaide on horseback, cross the river in a boat, walk across Lefevre's Peninsula to the beach, and go out to the anchorage in a whaleboat. The duties which I had to perform did not lack variety, and it is hardly necessary to say that the eight-hours' system did not prevail in the office in those days. I had to assist the bookkeeper, deliver papers, take a turn at the old hand press occasionally, read proofs, and do numerous other odd jobs about the office. I frequently remained on duty for 12 or 14 hours a day, and I soon gained a practical knowledge of the work in almost every department of a newspaper office. The Register was published as a daily paper for the first time on January 1, 1850, and Mr. Stephens died in November of the same year. After his death Mr. John Taylor, one of his executors, took his place as manager and editor of the paper. In January, 1852, I obtained leave of absence for the purpose of making a trip to the Bendigo goldfields, but was reinstated in the office when I returned to Adelaide a few months later. In May, 1853, The Register was purchased by a proprietary, of which I was an official member. I remained at the head of the commercial department until September 30, 1868, when I sold my interest to Mr. John Howard Clark, who subsequently became editor of The Register. Since that time I have not been actively engaged in any business, but have merely managed my own affairs and attended to several agencies, notably that of Mr. John Ridley, the inventor of the reaping machine. I have visited England five times, and have spent holidays in New Zealand and in the other states. My home has always been near to Adelaide, however; and I may almost say that I have walked about the streets of the capital of South Australia daily for 65 years."

—Public Life.—

Mr. Fisher has not devoted all his time to his private affairs. He has been deeply interested in the welfare of the country in which practically all his life has been spent, and he has assisted in many ways to promote the interests of his fellow-citizens. In 1808 he successfully contended the District of Sturt, and represented that constituency in the Assembly until the Governor (Sir James Fergusson) dissolved Parliament in 1870. Mr. Fisher did not seek re-election on that occasion, because he had previously made arrangements to spend a holiday in Tasmania, and he could not take part in the campaign without abandoning the trip, which he did not feel disposed to do. Two years later, however, he secured a seat in the Legislative Council, and was a member of the Upper House until 1881. When his term of service expired he expressed a desire to retire from public life; but, in response to a large and influential deputation of prominent citizens who waited upon him and urged him to reconsider his decision, he agreed to seek re-election. He was defeated, and since that time he has not made any attempt to re-enter public life. "If I had been willing to modify my opinions respecting certain political questions which were then engaging the attention of the electors, I have no doubt that I should have been re-elected," said Mr. Fisher; "but my views were not appreciated by a large section of the voters. My attitude towards the Chinese Exclusion Bill, for instance, proved a handicap when polling day arrived. Some of my friends thought that I was unnecessarily outspoken at times, and I was frequently told that it would be better for me to give more diplomatic answers when questions were put to me on the hustings respecting popular measures which I could not support; but I refused to make compromises in connection with matters of principle merely for the purpose of gaining a seat in the House. I was, and still am, opposed to many of the political ideals which have found favour with multitudes in Australia in recent years; and I would not consent to share my duties and responsibilities as a representative of the people merely to retain my seat in Parliament. I was prepared to give my time and energies for the public benefit if my fellow-colonists desired me to represent them; but when I found that a majority of the voters did not approve of my views I was quite content to retire from public life. My time is fully occupied, and I find plenty of interest in private circles." Mr. Fisher has been connected with a number of public companies and financial institutions, and has rendered good service to the community in that way. He was a director of the Bank of Adelaide for about 20 years, and during part of that time he was Chairman of the institution. He occupied the latter position during the trying period which preceded and followed the banking crisis in 1893, but resigned in the following year prior to taking a trip to the old country. He was also Chairman of the Port Adelaide Dock Company and of the Adelaide Marine Insurance Company. He is now a director of the Gas Company

and is Chairman of the Mortgage Bank of (South Australia, and has been on the directors of the South Australian Company. The only firm of which he has taken much interest is first-class cricket, and he was a Vice-president of the S.A. Cricketers' Association for nearly a quarter of a century. He was a lad the popular national game was practically unknown in South Australia, so that he had no opportunity displaying his skill on the cricket field. He was a successful exponent of the game known as "rounders," which was the most common form of recreation in those days.