

C. Michie Smith, C.I.E., B.Sc., F.R.A.S. By J. R. Henderson,
C.I.E., M.B., C.M., F.L.S.

(Read May 21, 1923.)

CHARLES MICHIE SMITH, who died on 27th September last, was born on 13th July 1854 at Keig, Aberdeenshire, where his father was the Free Church minister. He was a younger brother of the distinguished scholar Professor W. Robertson Smith, whose theological views, at that time held to be "dangerous and unsettling," led to much commotion in Scotland over forty years ago. Michie Smith received his early education at home, and after a short period at Aberdeen University proceeded to Edinburgh, where he took the degree of B.Sc. in 1876. During 1874-75 he served on the electrical staff of Thomson and Fleeming Jenkin, and was engaged for some time in cable-laying. In January 1877 he became Professor of Physics in the Christian College, Madras, an appointment which he held till 1891, when he succeeded his friend Norman Pogson, who died in that year, as Government Astronomer, Madras.

A good deal of Smith's early work at the Madras Observatory was the collating of the meteorological observations which had long been accumulating, and in 1893 he published those of the years 1856 to 1861. In 1899 he brought out the New Madras General Catalogue of 5303 stars. He observed the annular eclipse of 1894 and the total one of 1898 at Sahdol, obtaining important coronal photographs. He also observed the Leonid meteors in 1899, including thirty-seven of the first magnitude, and published a record of meteors seen at Madras from 1861 to 1890.

It had been decided to erect a new observatory in South India for the special study of solar physics, and after careful investigation Smith recommended a site near Kodaikánal, at an elevation of about 8000 feet on the Pulni Hills, an offshoot of the Western Ghats. He was appointed Director of Solar Physics in 1899, and set free from the meteorological and other work of the Madras Observatory. Practically the remainder of his life was spent at Kodaikánal, but he visited Australia in 1914 for the meeting of the British Association, and in spite of failing health paid a final visit to Scotland in the summer of 1920. In 1910 his public services were recognised by his being made a Companion of the Order of the Indian Empire; in the following year he retired from Government service and took up his abode at Kodaikánal. Life in India had unsuited him for the rigorous climate

of his native land, and the severity of the home winters led him to spend the evening of his life under sunnier skies. He never married, and one of his sisters kept house for him for a number of years.

Michie Smith was a man of unbounded energy, which he displayed in many activities outside the sphere of his professorial and scientific work. He was for many years a Fellow and for several a Syndic of Madras University, secretary of the Madras Literary Society, editor of the *Christian College Magazine*, and for six months of the *Madras Mail*, the leading daily paper in Southern India, president of the Friend-in-Need Society, and a member of the Madras Municipality. Too busy a man to devote much time to sport, he was a keen fisherman and played a fair game at golf. During his later years he devoted a good deal of his time to gardening.

To the Royal Society of Edinburgh, of which he became a Fellow in 1882, he contributed papers on the eruption of Bandaisan, the determination of surface-tension by measurement of ripples, and on atmospheric electricity and the absorption spectra of vegetable colouring matters. He wrote numerous magazine articles on scientific subjects, and contributed articles to the *Encyclopædia Britannica* (9th edition), including those on "Madras" and "Zodiacal Light."

True and honourable in all his dealings and with a kindly nature, which in Scottish fashion was sometimes concealed, Michie Smith had the gift of friendship, and those who had the privilege of knowing him well feel that they have lost a real friend. To the end he never forgot the debt he owed to his Alma Mater, and in particular to his revered teacher, Tait; his gratitude found expression in his will, and the bulk of his fortune passes ultimately to the University of Edinburgh.