

RENMARK'S FIRST TOWN GARDENER

Willis Bronze Memorial Tablet Unveiled

"A SOLDIER AND A MAN".

The traffic down Renmark Avenue ceased for a few minutes at 4.30 on Saturday afternoon last, when Mr. S. J. Dridan, chairman of the Renmark hotel committee, unveiled a bronze tablet erected in the town gardens to the memory of the late W. E. L. Willis. It was a right and proper thing that the flag of Australia should drape the bronze tablet. Its folds have covered many an Australian soldier, and the late Mr. Willis served both in the Imperial and Australian armies.

Mr. Dridan said they had met that afternoon to honour the memory of Renmark's first town gardener, and he was pleased to note that the members of the A.N.A. conference had for a while adjourned to pay a tribute to the dead.

For six years Mr. Willis had laboured under unfavourable conditions to give the town the beautiful gardens they now saw extending up the main Avenue. Mr. Willis was a man of sterling bravery and laboured under great physical disadvantages. He had been a wonderful gardener and took a keen interest in tree planting. The children's play ground they now stood on was one of the best outside the city in South Australia. (Applause).

The Rev. O. F. Snell said that Mr. Willis was one of the first Renmark settlers. His hospitality was well remembered. He loved flowers and the beautiful. He had served his country for a long number of years in the South Wales Borderers as a Sergeant, had soldiered on the frontiers of India, and had been mentioned several times in despatches. His father, the late Colonel Willis, had served for 40 years in the Imperial Army. The tablet unveiled that afternoon should stand as a lesson to the rising generation. (Applause).

Mr. Dridan then asked the Chief

President of the A.N.A. (Mr. W. Jennings) to say a few words. He knew that the society was deeply interested in the subject of afforestation.

Mr. Jennings said that from what they had just heard Mr. Willis must have been a soldier and a man. He had trained Australian soldiers and when his service was over had proved himself a good citizen. The Renmark people had beautiful gardens and a splendid children's play ground in the town, and he had never seen anything better. He deprecated the cutting down of trees, and mentioned that at Clare lately the town had been disfigured by the destroying of trees in the township area. Mr. Willis had been a planter of flowers and trees. "May they long preserve his memory."

Mr. Dridan, on behalf of the Renmark Hotel Committee, then invited Cr. E. C. Gibbons, chairman of the Town Council, to take over the custody of the tablet. In doing so Mr. Gibbons said that for all time the beautiful garden they stood in would be known as the Willis garden. Mr. Willis had a hard row to hoe, and was a brave man who did not complain about his physical disability. He had known him for 35 years. The tablet unveiled that afternoon would stand as a lasting memorial to a person who worked so hard to give them the lovely gardens the town now possessed. (Applause).
