

Francis Napier Broome

1891–1980

Frank Broome, who died in his 90th year on the 10th March, 1980, was one of the most distinguished and revered Natalians of his generation.

He made his mark early. In his final year at Hilton College he passed first in Natal in the Cape Intermediate examination and this paved the way to the award of a Rhodes Scholarship. There followed three rewarding years at Oriel College, Oxford where he obtained a good degree making a special study of the life and works of the great 18th century political philosopher, Edmund Burke. Burke's writings had a great influence upon him, and from then on until the end of his life his speeches were enriched thereby.

On his return to Natal from Oxford, Frank Broome practised as an attorney until the outbreak of the First World War when he took part in the South West African campaign as a trooper in the Carbineers and when that was over, journeyed to England, joined the Royal Artillery and fought in some of the bloodiest battles on the Western Front. For some time he was Adjutant of an Artillery Regiment and he won the Military Cross. After the war he resumed practice as an attorney but when the Natal Bar was established in 1929 he became a foundation member. As a K.C., he set a standard of forensic skill and thoroughness in preparation which earned him universal respect. His distinguished appearance and dignity compelled attention and his integrity shone forth for all to see. He was in every sense a leader.

In 1938 he became M.P. for Pietermaritzburg District and was in parliament for the crucial debates which led to the declaration of war against Germany. In the following year a vacancy arose on the Natal Bench and Frank Broome gave up a very promising political career to become a judge. He was an immediate success, and his appointment as Judge President in 1950 met with universal satisfaction. When he retired from the Bench in 1961 he had made his mark as a judge and his excellently phrased judgments which proceed in persuasive, logical progression with occasional flashes of dry wit, add distinction to the Law Reports. He conducted himself as a judge with dignity, patience and courtesy which became something of a legend, as did his passion for punctuality.

Frank Broome did not, however, confine his energies to the Courts. On two occasions he presided on the important judicial commission dealing with Indian property rights and his reports were lucid and produced without delay. He served for many years on the Council of the Natal University and he repaid his debt to his old school, Hilton College, by serving as Chairman of the Board of Governors for a very long period, successfully resolving problems that inevitably arose from time to time. He gave expression to his love of Natal's mountains and wild life by becoming an energetic member of the Natal Parks Board. He never spared himself in promoting anything which he conceived to be for the general good: he was a man of the widest interests who possessed rare precision of thought which he expressed in admirable,

unadorned English. This oratorical skill was a by-word. He put much thought and care into the preparation of his speeches and yet managed to deliver them in an effortless way which made it appear that his words were quite spontaneous. He was always listened to with respect and interest, and his words carried great weight. If ever he interested himself in a cause his impact was considerable.

His autobiography, *Not the Whole Truth*, is a well-told account of a life of achievement, and with the passing of the years will become valuable source material for anyone delving into the political and social history of Natal during the period it covers.

Frank Broome was sometimes regarded as being a reserved man but to anyone fortunate enough to earn his friendship he displayed a generosity of spirit, a warm humanity and a genuine concern for one's welfare which was unforgettable. His long life was rich in achievement and he experienced great joys and also great sorrows. He endured the latter with uncompromising stoicism and whatever fate had in store for him, whether good or bad, he remained true to himself with his courage, dignity and humanity unimpaired. He was a man of stature and throughout his life he served his country and his friends with devotion and abiding affection.

NEVILLE JAMES



F.N. BROOME

Photograph: *The Natal Witness*, Pietermaritzburg