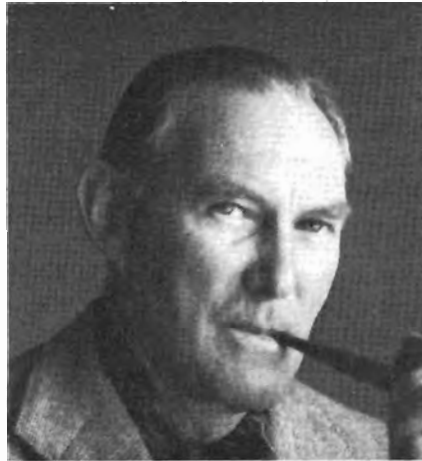


## *Allan Carlyle Mitchell*

With the death of Allan Mitchell on 12th August, 1984 at the age of ninety one years, there ended a remarkable era of service to The Natal Society. It began in April 1882, thirty one years after the founding of the Society on 9th May, 1851, when his father, Thomas Carlyle Mitchell, became its Honorary Treasurer. He occupied the office uninterruptedly for fifty-seven years until his death on 19th October, 1939, when his mantle fell, not unexpectedly, on the shoulders of his son who continued in that office from January, 1940, until his retirement in December, 1967. He remained, however, a Trustee of the Society until his death.

It was a remarkable achievement that father and son should successively serve The Natal Society for over one hundred years. Such tenacity might



Mr A.C. Mitchell.

(Photograph: Natal Society Library)

well astonish the less hardy but it should be remembered that Thomas Carlyle Mitchell, a son of William Mitchell of Edinburgh, had emigrated from Scotland, bringing with him to Natal that strong sense of duty and those sound values so often discovered in the men of Caledonia.

Thomas, whose maternal grandmother was the sister of the eminent Thomas Carlyle, married Mary Louisa Bird, a daughter of John Bird, now chiefly remembered for his *Annals of Natal*, whose own life of public service had encompassed the offices of Surveyor-General, Treasurer-General, Chief Clerk of the Colonial Office, Private Secretary to the Lieutenant-Governor, Resident Magistrate of the City and County of Pietermaritzburg and for a short time in 1878 and during the following year, of a judge of the Native High Court.

It affords no surprise, then, that Allan Mitchell, whose values had been so firmly moulded in the traditions of his distinguished family, should have sought a similar life of service. He set about his dedication with dignified reserve, a sharp wit and a delightful sense of humour.

As Honorary Treasurer to The Natal Society he displayed his financial skills in the almost hopeless pursuit of making a small income do many marvellous things. His treasurership was marked by a rare degree of caution and austerity which, in the end, carried the Society's subscription library in Longmarket Street to its present splendid public library on Churchill Square. While he expected the Library Council of those days to be bound by the stringencies of his budgets, his only idiosyncrasy was to refuse to pay those very fines he had himself so eloquently urged the Council to impose.

Allan Mitchell had, of course, other interests but his disinclination to make them known left largely in obscurity until his death his devotion, in particular, to his Church and to the welfare of the poor. As a member of the Society of St Vincent de Paul, his compassion for their needs and comfort took him for many years to the sick, the poor and the dying, a vocation he faithfully maintained until his eighty-ninth year when he succumbed, grudgingly, to his own frailty. It was in his very nature that his charitable works remained generally unknown; the essential mark of the man was to

give and not to receive. Formal recognition, however, came to him in 1960 when Pope John XXIII conferred upon him a knighthood in the Order of St Gregory for his exemplary life and his service to the Church. While he sought none in his lifetime, his reward is the esteem and admiration in which his memory is now held by so many who benefited by his generosity.

Born in Pietermaritzburg on 2nd April, 1893, Allan Mitchell's formal education commenced at Merchiston where he was Dux in 1905. His schooling continued at Maritzburg College and in 1910 he attended Natal University College as it then was. After active service in the 1914-1916 campaign in German South West Africa, he returned to his profession of accountancy, joining his father in the firm of Mitchell & Eadie. He was much loved by the staff there and older members can recall the many happy outings when Allan, his sister, May, the staff and the family dogs would take a day off into the country.

As a sportsman, he enjoyed good games of tennis and golf, the latter first as a member of the Maritzburg Golf Club when Alexandra Park served as the links and later at the Maritzburg Country Club, of which he was a foundation member. He was keenly interested, too, in the arts and music and was a member for many years of the Pietermaritzburg Philharmonic Society.

All in all, he had many interests in Pietermaritzburg and amongst its people.

Allan Mitchell honoured in every way the traditions of his forefathers. In character he was strong, in heart compassionate and in his judgement ever sound. He was never moved to anger nor to idle words; his sense of fairness was impeccable and his friendship, once given, life long.

Many distinguished men and women have moved across the Society's stage in the past one hundred and thirty three years but none more excellently than Allan Mitchell. He deservedly finds his place in that gallant company.

MICHAEL DALY

