

Pamph
1920
no. 74

William Hodgson Ellis

A Family Record

By His Daughter



Mr. Benson
with the writer's kind regards.

1923

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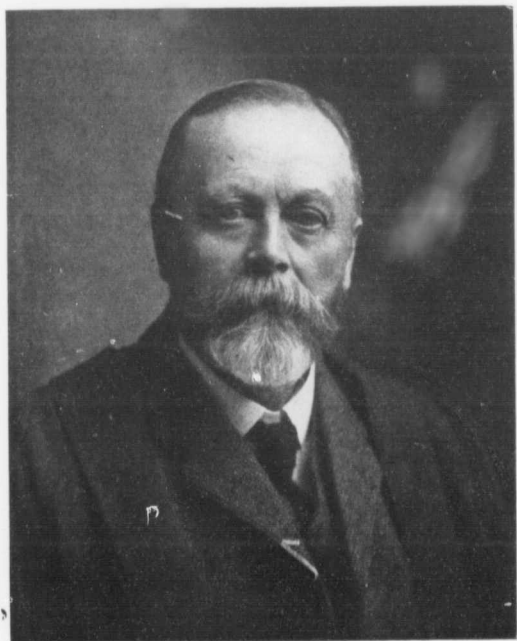


To His Grandsons:

William Hodgson Ellis

William Ellis Crooks

David Alexander Crooks



In Memoriam

My Autobiographia Topographica

The place that heard my earliest squawks
Was Bakewell, on the Wye and Derwent;
My Pa and Ma to Mirfield, Yorks,
Removed, and I with him and her went.

To Jersey next our course we set,
No coast is shrimpier or shellier,
I paddled round it with a net
From St. Brelade to gay St. Helier.

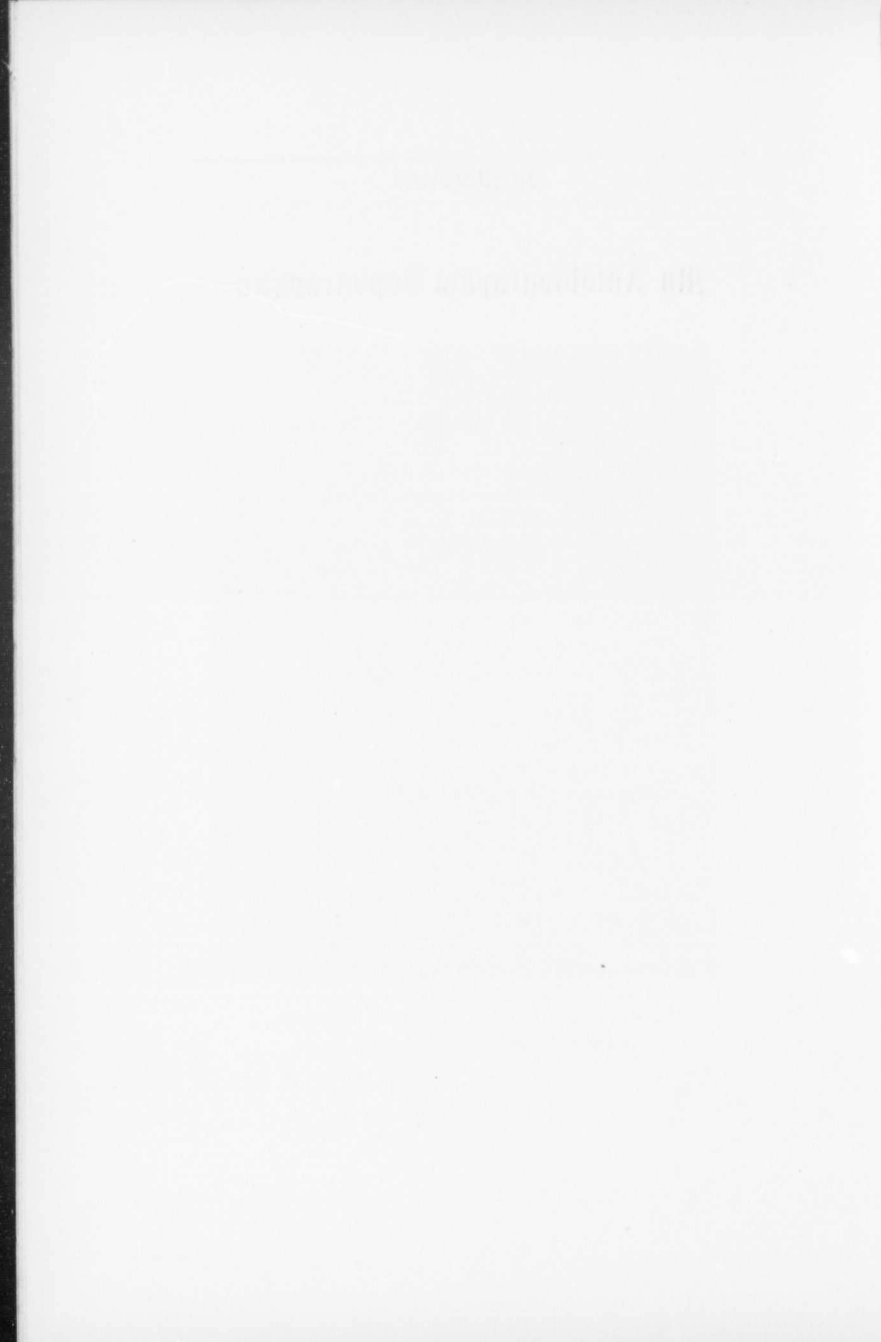
Fair was the Isle, but short, alas!
Our stay; I cannot tell you why
We changed our minds, but Boston, Mass.
Was where we sought to change our sky.

With beans my body, and my mind
With culture there I strove to fill;
Then fled to Bloomington, to find
That even Bloomington was Ill.

In Illinois my father tried
To rear me by the ancient rule,
Taught me to tell the truth, to ride,
To shoot—then sent me here to school.

And here until my story ends
I hope to live, for all I want
Love, work and home, wife, children, friends,
I've found them in Toronto, Ont.

W. H. ELLIS, 1915.



William Hodgson Ellis

IT is a far cry, as human life goes, from 1845 to 1920—from Derbyshire at the time of the repeal of the corn laws, to Canada at the close of the Great War. Such was the period covered by my father's life.

William Hodgson Ellis was born on November 23rd, 1845, at Holme Hall, Bakewell, Derbyshire. He was the eldest son of John Eimeo Ellis and Eliza Hodgson. John Eimeo Ellis was the son of William Ellis, a scientific missionary of some note, who wrote many books on Madagascar and the South Seas, and was an eloquent speaker. He was also at one time secretary of the London Missionary Society, and in later life he lived at Rose Hill, Hoddesdon. I have always thought that my father inherited a great deal from his grandfather Ellis, whom he resembled in many ways, though differing widely in others. The love of animals, the love of botany, the poetic gift and the scientific spirit were all marked characteristics of Rev. William Ellis, who in his later years was called "the Apostle to Madagascar". He was twice married, and his second wife was Sarah Stickney, a well-known writer, author of "The Women of England", etc., and an ardent educationist. She conducted a school for girls at Rawdon House, Hoddesdon, which was one of the first experiments in combining higher education with what we should now call Domestic Science.

The first Mrs. Ellis, my great grandmother, accompanied her husband to the South Seas, and her eldest son was born on the island of Eimeo in 1818.

John Ellis graduated from University College, London, in 1839, with the gold medal in physiology and anatomy, and became a member of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1840. He settled down to practise in Bakewell, where he met and married Eliza Hodgson.

In Memoriam

Eliza Hodgson was the only child of Joseph Hodgson, who had purchased Holme Hall in 1837, having come to Derbyshire from Halifax, Yorkshire.

Joseph Hodgson's father Samuel owned a good deal of property in Yorkshire. Francis Hodgson, once rector of Bakewell, and afterwards headmaster of Eton, a writer and a friend of Byron, belonged to another branch of the same family, and in the 17th century an ancestor was one of Cromwell's officers—though as Carlyle alludes to him as "Pudding-headed Hodgson" he was apparently not conspicuously brilliant! Joseph Hodgson was evidently a man of parts, and must have had literary tastes as he had quite a large library, some of which my father inherited. When he lived at Holme Hall he was a magistrate and my father always used and my brother now uses the great mahogany table at which he conducted his sittings.

John Ellis and Eliza Hodgson were married in January 1845, and for a short time they had a house in the town, but the Hodgsons were so lonely without their only child that in less than a year the Ellises gave up their own home and went to live at Holme Hall. Here their three children, William, Herbert and Mary were born.

Holme Hall, a grey stone house in Tudor style, stands on the banks of the Wye just outside Bakewell. It was built in 1621, but has had a chequered history, never having been long in the possession of one family. It has terraces and lawns, and fruit trees growing against walls, and a long avenue of lime trees from the Lodge to the house. It was while walking up this avenue one day in 1852 that my father was told that the Duke of Wellington was dead.

Bakewell nestles charmingly in a valley between the soft Derbyshire hills; and the river Wye, beloved of anglers, runs through it. There is a beautiful old stone church, which preserves some Saxon coffins and chests, and in the churchyard stands a very ancient Anglo-Saxon Cross. The church

William Hodgson Ellis

also contains the tombs of the Vernon family, among them that of the well-known Dorothy Vernon, who is said to have eloped from Haddon Hall with the son of the Duke of Rutland, and has been made the subject of song and story. Haddon Hall stands, a splendid relic of the past, in the meadows three miles away from Bakewell. When my grandmother was young she was very fond of the beautiful old castle, and as she used to be given the keys and allowed to explore at her pleasure she knew every inch of it. On one occasion the young people of the neighbourhood were allowed to have a dance there, and they decorated the Long Gallery and lighted it with candles. In later life when my grandmother had been married for many years, and away from England for 15 years she revisited Haddon, and the same caretaker handed her the keys, saying, "You will like to have the keys, Miss Hodgson"!

A few miles from Bakewell in another direction lies Chatsworth, the famous seat of the Dukes of Devonshire. Hither came the young Queen Victoria with the Prince Consort, in the early years of her reign. Among other festivities there was a grand ball. My grandmother has often told me that her father and mother were invited to the ball, but she was too young to go, so she was allowed to look through a window. She was close to the Queen, who wore a pink satin dress. My grandmother always said that never had she seen any human being look so perfectly happy.

Mr. Joseph Paxton was landscape gardener at Chatsworth at that time. He designed the great greenhouses there, and afterwards designed the Crystal Palace, for which he was knighted.

It was a great source of pride to him that the morning after the ball at Chatsworth when the public had been allowed into the grounds, and a great display of fireworks had been given, the Duke of Wellington, who was a guest and had risen early on purpose to see the havoc they had

In Memoriam

made, found everything in perfect order, raked and tidied, and not a sign of anyone having been there!

Bakewell was on one of the coach roads between London and the north, and one of my father's early pleasures was to watch the horses being changed. He once tried to find out from the ostler by repeated questions how many horses it would take to get the coach to London in a day, and was much puzzled by finding that even sixteen horses could take it no quicker than four.

But all coach records were soon to be broken by the iron horse, whose introduction into these peaceful and beautiful dales seems to have been looked upon with horror, and considered almost a sacrilege! When I first visited Bakewell in 1894 it was strange still to hear echoes of regret for the beauties which railways had forever defaced.

This peaceful and apparently settled life in Holme Hall came to a sudden and unexpected end about 1853. Joseph Hodgson was co-executor of the estate of a young man and in that year he discovered that the other executor had absconded with all his ward's money. Considering himself in honour bound by some documents he had signed, although there was no legal claim against him, he determined to pay the young man's losses, and sold all his property in order to do so.

It was with the greatest sorrow that the family left Holme Hall, to which they were deeply attached. Thirty years afterwards, when discussing some proposed move, my grandmother said, almost involuntarily, "What does any change matter after leaving Holme Hall"?

About the same time my grandfather decided to give up his practice as he found it was affecting his health.

The Hodgsons and Ellises went first to Mirfield in Yorkshire, and then to the island of Jersey. However about 1854 they decided to emigrate to America. They sailed from Liver-

William Hodgson Ellis

pool to Boston and from there went to Illinois, where they bought a farm near Bloomington.

My father wrote several little sketches and stories at this time, and no doubt he here first acquired the love for the woods and wilds which was so marked a characteristic the rest of his life. A curious little incident has been told me of this period. My father's only sister, Mary, had a pet lamb which lived in the house and played with the dogs. One day a hunt was organized for a wolf which had been seen in the neighbourhood. All the dogs turned out, and the lamb went with them!

While in Illinois my father once heard Abraham Lincoln speak, a fact to which he often referred with interest in the later years of his life.

The rough backwoods life of the time was, however, uncongenial to the Hodgsons and Ellises, and still more the anti-English—or at any rate un-English atmosphere. About 1860 they decided to come to Canada. The Hodgsons settled in Toronto, and the Ellises bought a farm near Guelph where they lived for two or three years. Joseph Hodgson died in 1865 at sea on his way to visit England. His wife had predeceased him by two years.

My father went to the Model Grammar School in Toronto, living during the term first with his grandparents, and afterwards with friends, but in 1863 the Ellises left Guelph and came to live in Toronto which was ever afterwards his home. My grandfather rented a farm at Mashquoteh (near St. Clair Ave.) for a short time and then moved down into the town to a house on Brock Street.

In 1863 my father entered the University of Toronto as a student thus first forming the association which was to be almost unbroken for fifty-five years.

In Memoriam

II

My father's undergraduate days were supremely happy ones. Each opening avenue of knowledge was a delight to his keen mind, and his powers enabled him to grasp clearly what was unfolded to him, and to retain accurately what he learnt. It was the golden age of Science. Darwin's "Origin of Species" had been published only four years before, causing one of the great revolutions in human thought, and Wallace, Tyndall, Huxley, Spencer, Pasteur and Lister were all in their prime. What more stimulating period could be conceived? And it was at the University he formed many of those wonderful friendships which were an outstanding feature of his life, and only closed with death, some of them after fifty years. He became one of a band of eight or ten delightful young men, who formed among themselves "The Club", for smoking and good comradeship, and who when they met were always overflowing with fun and almost child-like high spirits.

At that time everything was on a small scale at the University, and the students were all one body. My father regretted not a little the inevitable breaking up into cliques and societies which larger numbers afterwards necessitated. Owing to the small classes, the personal influence of the Professors was much stronger than it can be now, and one in particular became an ideal to William Ellis, and inspired an enthusiasm which undoubtedly affected his whole career. This was Henry Holmes Croft, who held the chair of Chemistry. Although he left Toronto when I was a child of three I always seem to have known him, I heard so much of him in my early days, and always in terms of the most affectionate admiration. I remember with what awe and interest I used to regard a lady who sometimes visited us, because she was Professor Croft's daughter, and therefore on quite a different

William Hodgson Ellis

plane from other people! My father was not only his pupil, but in 1867 after taking his B.A. degree he was his assistant for one session.

The students wore gowns in those days, and mortarboards. The President, Dr. McCaul, was very particular about this and desirous that the custom should continue for democratic reasons, and for its unifying effect. A student in a cap and gown was a student, and it mattered not what the cut of his coat might be. The cap and gown, however, gradually disappeared, and I remember, on the day of Dr. McCaul's funeral, my father remarking that he would not have liked to see so many students without gowns.

My father was a corporal in the University Company of the Queen's Own Rifles, and on May 31st, 1866, when he was reading late for an examination that was to come off the next day a non-commissioned officer arrived with the news that the Queen's Own were called out for active service on account of the Fenian Raid. They left early next morning and took part in the action at Ridgway where three of the company were killed, four wounded, and several taken prisoner, my father among them. He was kept under guard in a house at Fort Erie and released the next day when the Fenians left the country threatening to return soon and take the whole of Canada! He wrote an interesting account of his "Experiences as a Prisoner of War" in the July number of the Canadian Magazine 1899, and also a general survey of the whole action, in the University War Supplement of 1915. Mr. John King in his book "McCaul, Croft, Forneri" has also an interesting account of this and other events of the same period. My father always liked "soldiering", and remained in the Queen's Own for another ten years, retiring with the rank of captain.

The chief student organization of those days was the Literary and Scientific Society, which was to Toronto what the Union is to Oxford. Reputations were made there that

In Memoriam

frequently proved lasting. My father was President in 1869 and throughout his University course he keenly enjoyed the meetings.

In 1867 he graduated in Arts with the Gold Medal in Natural Sciences and in 1870 he graduated in Medicine, and went to England to "walk the hospitals". He went to St. Thomas' which was then being rebuilt, and was temporarily occupying, absurdly enough, the old Surrey Zoological gardens, so that the different wards were called Lion House, Monkey House, etc., and the small-pox ward was the Giraffe House! He shared lodgings for a time with Dr. George Warren, who, at the outbreak of the Franco-Prussian war, joined the Prussian army as a doctor, an experience which my father much envied him. It was a time of great excitement.

While he was at St. Thomas' there was an outbreak of small-pox in London, and my father was busy vaccinating all day long. He used to relate with great amusement how he vaccinated all the nurses in the hospital. They were accompanied by a matron—a "dragon" he always called her!—who was very severe with them if they flinched, but the minute he touched her arm with the needle, she went off in a dead faint! How he did enjoy that story!

My father had been brought up a Congregationalist, but about this time he decided to become a member of the Church of England. He was confirmed at the Church of St. Lawrence, Jewry, by the then Bishop of London. During his year in London he attended St. Mary's, Newington, the rector of which was Rev. William Dalrymple Maclagan, afterwards Archbishop of York. He was a regular and faithful churchgoer to the end of his life, and even in his 75th year was never deterred by stormy weather.

He spent his holidays in England at the house of his grandfather William Ellis, in Hoddesdon, where he was very happy. He enjoyed the many walks and other pleasures of the English country. He revisited Bakewell, and was astonished to find

William Hodgson Ellis

how things that had seemed so large to his childish mind—the foot-bridge, the fish in the river and so on—were after all no bigger there than anywhere else! On one of his visits to Hoddesdon he took down with him "Alice in Wonderland", which had just come out, and he has often told me how he remembered reading it under the apple trees at Rose Hill, and rolling over with shrieks of laughter!

In 1871 he returned to Toronto with the qualification of L.R.C.P., and practised medicine for a few months, living in a small house at the corner of Church and Alexander Streets. In October 1871 he became Professor of Chemistry in the Medical Faculty of Trinity College, and subsequently lecturer in chemistry in Trinity College itself. He was also lecturer in Chemistry in the College of Technology.

In 1872 Rev. William Ellis died and my grandfather, who was on his way to visit him, remained in England to write his biography, which he published in 1873. It proved, however, too much for his health, which had been failing for some time, and he returned to Canada only to die in 1874 at the age of fifty six years.

In Memoriam

III.

In 1875 my father was married. My mother was the daughter of Charles Mickle of Guelph, and her mother was Ellen Thurtell, who belonged to an old Norfolk family. Her great grandfather was William Julius Mickle—"the excellent translator of the *Lusiad*" as Boswell calls him, and the author of many ballads, among them "Cumnor Hall", which Sir Walter Scott inserted as the prelude to "Kenilworth", and "There's nae luck about the Hoose".

About six months before my father died he was asked to reply, at a students' dinner, to the toast "Sweethearts and Wives". He began his speech by saying that he was not very well fitted to reply to this toast, as he had only had one sweetheart, and one wife, and both were one person.

My father and mother first lived at 99 Charles Street E., then they moved to 100 St. Vincent Street, and in 1885 they built No. 74 St. Alban Street, which was their home till 1918, when they built a house next to ours on Woodlawn Ave., E.

In 1878, on the opening of the School of Practical Science, my father became assistant Professor of Chemistry, giving up his lectureships in Trinity College. In 1887 he became Professor of Applied Chemistry. He was also Public Analyst for the Inland Revenue Department for over 30 years, 1876-1907, and during that time also performed most of the analyses in criminal cases in connection with the department of the Attorney General. He remained a member of the Advisory Food Board until his death. He was Lecturer in Toxicology from 1892 and Professor from 1897 to 1913, and in 1907, when the School of Practical Science became officially what it had long been in practice—the Faculty of Applied Science and Engineering—my father was made Head of the Chemistry department of the University of Toronto.

William Hodgson Ellis

He thus lectured to students in Arts, Medicine, Engineering and Forestry for a very long period, and many men who passed through his hands have given loving and grateful testimony to the lessons he taught, and to the deep impression they received of the paramount importance of truth and accuracy and the uselessness of careless or hasty deductions: while his flashes of humour and genial kindness captivated all.

In 1902 his mother died. She was a woman of remarkable sweetness of character, who made a profound impression on all who knew her. I often heard it said that no one could say an unkind thing before her. She was so good that everything base seemed to wither away in her presence. Always something of an invalid, she lived with her unmarried son and daughter in "Holmedene", No. 8 Elm Avenue, a house full of beautiful and interesting things, some brought from England, and some from Madagascar and the South Seas. A bright fire generally burned on her hearth, and no less bright was the welcome she gave to her friends and family when they came to see her. The Sunday afternoon walk, which was second nature to my father, for many years always ended with afternoon tea with his mother.

And so the years sped by, each one adding to his reputation, bringing new work and new friends and increasing the love and admiration of old ones. He had a wonderful faculty of making friends, and as time called away many of the friends of his youth, one by one, he was happy in a circle of younger men, and to all he was always a delight by his courtesy, his sympathy, his wit and humour, and his cleverness with pencil and pen.

He was, of course, a member of several learned societies—a Fellow of the Institute of Chemistry and of the Royal Society of Canada, twice President of the Canadian Institute, and President of what was then the Canadian Section of the Society of Chemical Industry.

In Memoriam

In 1914 came the war, which was a great grief to my father. His gentle nature recoiled alike from the hatred and the carnage. My two brothers went almost at once, one as a doctor, and one as a lieutenant in the infantry. Arthur was four years in France, and the last two years was in command of the Canadian Mobile Laboratory. Harold was badly wounded in his first action on June 3rd, 1916, at Zillebeke, fifty years from the battle of Ridgway! After a whole day of terrible suffering in shell holes he crawled back to the lines with both hands shattered. My mother went over to him and brought him home, risking and escaping the submarines, which were then at the height of their activity.

My father, who had been Dean of the Faculty of Applied Science all through the war, resigned at the end of June 1919, and was happy in seeing his place taken by Brigadier General Mitchell, one of his old pupils, who had done brilliant work on the Intelligence Branch of the Imperial Staff. Both before and after his resignation he received many honours, and surely he realized Shakespeare's ideal of old age, surrounded by honour, love, obedience, troops of friends. He was made LL.D. of both Toronto and McGill Universities, and Honorary Member of the Engineering Institute of Canada. His portrait was painted and hung in the Engineering Building, and at many complimentary dinners his students and friends vied with one another in trying to show their love and admiration. His old colleagues were most loyal in consulting him and trying to make him feel he was still one of them, and indeed while he lived they valued his counsel and advice as one of their most precious possessions. But I know he missed his work.

When the summer of 1920 came he gladly accepted an invitation from his friend and physician Dr. Rudolf to visit him on Lake Joseph, Muskoka, and after a fortnight with us on Kempenfeldt Bay he bade us good-bye, and went away in good spirits. I had one letter from him telling me how

William Hodgson Ellis

happy he was, and how Dr. Primrose had invited him to visit him, "and so I am going there on Monday!" Alas—on Monday, August 23rd, after two days illness, he went "where we cannot see nor follow".

The night before he went my mother heard him say—"Faith, Hope, Charity—I'm sure the Apostle was right—Love is the greatest force in the world". Very thankfully we acknowledge that nothing else could so fittingly have been his last message, for that supremely was the message of his whole life.

In Memoriam

IV

The greatness of my father's character sprang from the union of remarkable qualities of head and heart. He was full of learning and full of love.

Of his attainments in chemistry, I am not qualified to speak, but his knowledge of the Natural Sciences made him a wonderful father! As children we hardly ever asked him a question he could not answer. "Ask Papa" was the solution of everything,—as to a later generation was "ask grandpapa"!—and I remember how surprised I was when it dawned upon my childish mind that all other fathers did not know as much as he did! As we grew older what a delightful companion he was for walks—equally interested both in nature and humanity, enjoying and appreciating our growing faculties, and always eager to lead us on—the born educator.

His reading was extraordinary, and he seemed to remember everything he read. The result of his knowledge, both of science and history, united to a heart full of good will to all, was an almost perfect judgment. He had a marvellous faculty for seeing the right thing. It gave authority also to his opinions, and combined with his sense of humour, his cleverness at making *a propos* rhymes, and his inimitable sketching, made him a hero to his children. At home there was scarcely a domestic occurrence, grave or gay, which was not immediately capped with a rhyme, and often illustrated by an equally clever and amusing drawing; just as there was never a crisis or difficulty of any sort when he was not the kindest, truest, wisest of fathers and friends. That some of his verse was true poetry "Wayside Weeds" remains to show, but he never could be persuaded to publish anything himself.

He had a meticulous love of truth, and would never allow us to be told anything that was not true. Even the Santa Claus myth, although he was willing enough to act it, yet

William Hodgson Ellis

when he found that we absolutely believed it he explained that it was only a sort of fairy tale. He enjoyed charades, and was very fond of writing little plays, of which we often had amateur performances. Indeed he excelled in games of all kinds, though he did not care for Bridge. As for puzzles and riddles he was untiring in solving them and invariably successful.

His sketching was a great pleasure to himself and his friends. When he was younger he used water colours, later on he took to crayons, and when he was sixty-eight and recovering from a serious illness he took lessons at the Ontario College of Art and enjoyed them very much. He made some charming sketches in pastel the week before he died.

He was also a most artistic photographer. He inherited this, I fancy, from his grandfather, William Ellis, who was one of the earliest photographers, and who when he ran out of acetic acid in Madagascar experimented in developing with vinegar, but did not find it very successful. My father developed his own photographs for a good many years, and owing to his combined qualities of chemist and artist he made some very beautiful pictures.

And then, of course, there was his fishing. He was a prince among fishermen, and an ideal camper. He and some friends discovered Muskoka long before the stream of tourists set that way, and he loved it to the end. Nearly every year for about forty years he went on a camping trip to some of the northern lakes, and in camp, as everywhere else, his infinite capacity for taking pains made him excel in the woodsman's arts and lore. He was very fond of the Indian guides and they loved him, and gave him and his friends Indian names. One of them, John Peters, who went with him many times, told him the legend of Nanabozhoo, and how often he delighted a happy party with it round the evening camp fire!

He was about forty-five when golf was introduced in Toronto, and he took it up with great delight, and played it

In Memoriam

with keen enjoyment for thirty years. The last book he took out of the Public Library was "First Steps in Golf".

But I must come back again and again to his learning, and that also was partly the result of the infinite capacity for taking pains. He took an interest, such a keen interest, in so many things, and when he was interested he read them up, and looked them up until he *knew*, and then he remembered, and was always willing to share the knowledge. When you asked him a question it seemed at once to become the subject of most absorbing interest to him, and he explained it eagerly in terms which you could understand, and in most perfect English.

All his life he was a student, and almost every winter saw some fresh subject taken up as a relaxation, and the knowledge he gained of it was always accurate. He was very fond of history, and much interested in battles, which he studied until he quite understood the tactics. He used to have the most elaborate games of lead soldiers with the boys. Opposing armies would be spread all over the nursery floor, and advanced or retired according to set rules, the artillery being a cork, propelled by a flick of finger and thumb.

The knowledge of botany which he acquired in his undergraduate days was very extensive, and he kept it up to the end. There was hardly a plant—weed, flower or tree—in Ontario, of which he could not tell the common and Latin names, and the family, and something of its habits. How many years he went out in March to hunt for the earliest messenger of Spring—the Skunk Cabbage—and bring it home in triumph!

He was passionately fond of simple music. He loved Haydn and Handel, the old English songs, and the old hymn tunes and church music. He inherited from his grandfather Hodgson a very fine 'cello, on which it was said Paganini had played, and he learnt to play a little on it as well as on the piano. He also had a sweet and true though not powerful

William Hodgson Ellis

voice. He lived opposite to the Convent of St. Joseph for thirty years, and the singing of the nuns was a great delight to him.

I cannot conclude this slight sketch without mentioning his courtesy, which was so marked a characteristic. He was scrupulously afraid of hurting the feelings of others, and would deny himself anything to spare them. He was courteous to all alike—to his equals, to his own children—and to those who were socially inferior to him, he was perhaps most courteous of all.

Gentle, learned, wise, accomplished, with a perennial fountain of wit and humour, a beautiful face on which peace was written, and a love of everything that is good and true, was he not a very good and perfect gift of the Father "of Whom every Fatherhood in heaven and on earth is named"?

E. M. CROOKS.

Nov. 13th, 1920.