

OBITUARY

W. F. A. Ellison

William Frederick Archdall Ellison, eldest son of Humphrey Eakins Ellison, Dean of Ferns, and Letitia Archdall, was born in 1864.

He was educated by his father, and entered Trinity College, Dublin, with a Sizarship in Classics in 1883. His father was a man of unusual scholarship and tutorial ability. This is abundantly evident from the fact that William and his five brothers, coached by their father, all gained entrance scholarships to Trinity College, surely a unique record for any university.

He became a Scholar of the House in 1886, and in the next year graduated with Junior Moderatorships in Classics and Experimental Science. He took his Divinity Testimonium in 1890. Four years later he took his M.A. and B.D. degrees, and in 1895 he won the Elrington Theological Prize.

He was ordained by Bishop Westcott for the diocese of Durham in 1890, and he held successively the curacies of Tudhoe and the Venerable Bede's, Monkwearmouth. In 1899 he returned to Ireland as Secretary of the Sunday School Society, a post which he retained until 1902, when he became Incumbent of Monart, Enniscorthy. Six years later he became Rector of Fethard with Tintern.

It was at Fethard-on-Sea, Wexford, that his first Observatory and optical workshops were constructed. Telescope making and observing soon came to occupy all his leisure time, and it was then that he commenced that wide correspondence with astronomers, amateur and professional, all over the world, which he continued actively until the end of his life. In this he was greatly assisted by a remarkable command of foreign languages, writing to his correspondents, whenever possible, in their own tongue.

From Fethard also began that steady stream of telescope mirrors and lenses which were celebrated for the excellence of their figures as well as the quality of their practical performance. In the course of his thirty years' optical work he introduced many improvements to the existing technique for the grinding and polishing of parabolic mirrors. This long experience was made available to his fellow-

workers in his book *The Amateur's Telescope*, in the *Scientific American* publication *Amateur Telescope Making*, and in a long series of letters and practical articles contributed to the *English Mechanic*. His life was spent, as he said himself, in helping lame dogs over stiles.

His skill at mirror making was developed at the beginning of the present century in close collaboration with Dr. Nathaniel Alcock of Dublin, and later Professor of Physiology in McGill University, Montreal. Out of this friendship the infant art grew rapidly, so that by the end of his life Ellison had one hundred and forty-two lenses and mirrors to his credit, while he must have tested and refigured very many more.

He was appointed Director of Armagh Observatory in 1918. He brought with him to Armagh his 18-inch Calver reflector, which he later presented to the Observatory so that it should find a permanent home. This fine instrument was constructed originally for Col. Tupman, a well-known English amateur. It was acquired from him by the late John Pierce of Wexford, industrialist, in exchange for a steam yacht. Pierce soon found that the difficulties of erecting an observatory to house such an instrument were much greater than he had anticipated, and soon the telescope became such a white elephant that he was glad to make a present of it to Ellison at Fethard. The latter immediately planned and built with his own hands a light ruberoid dome, much more suitable for housing an instrument of this type than the massive construction which Pierce had projected. Having refigured the mirror, which proved to be rather too much undercorrected, he used the instrument for observations of Mars and other planets.

At Armagh he also kept up his clerical work, being Incumbent of Kildarton and Canon and Prebendary of Ballymore, Armagh Cathedral.

Ellison married first in 1895, Elizabeth Havelock, daughter of Joseph J. G. Blackburn and grand-niece of Gen. Sir Henry Havelock of Lucknow. By her he had three sons, the eldest of whom was killed in the Great War. He married secondly Kathleen, daughter of the late F. R. Sproule of Dublin, in 1934.

He is survived by his widow and two sons, Henry Havelock Ellison of Elstree, and Mervyn Archdall Ellison, Sherborne School, Dorset.

The late Canon Ellison was a noted Hebrew scholar. His translations of the Psalms from original sources and other works were well known to the clergy of the Church of Ireland. He possessed, in addition, a phenomenal memory which made him a delightful companion to all who knew him and were privileged to draw upon his wide store of knowledge.

He was a Fellow of the Royal Astronomical Society, a Fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society, Member of the Royal Irish Academy, Membre de la Société Astronomique de France and a Contributing Editor of the *Scientific American*.

He joined the B.A.A. in 1913 December, and his first paper

appeared in this *Journal* of the following June on "The Influence of Changing Temperature on the Silvered-Glass Speculum." From that date he made many communications to the Association, his last being on the observation of the occultation of Jupiter on 1929 April 11. He died on 1936 December 31, the twenty-third anniversary of his election to membership of the Association.