

Henry Hill (1849 – 1933)

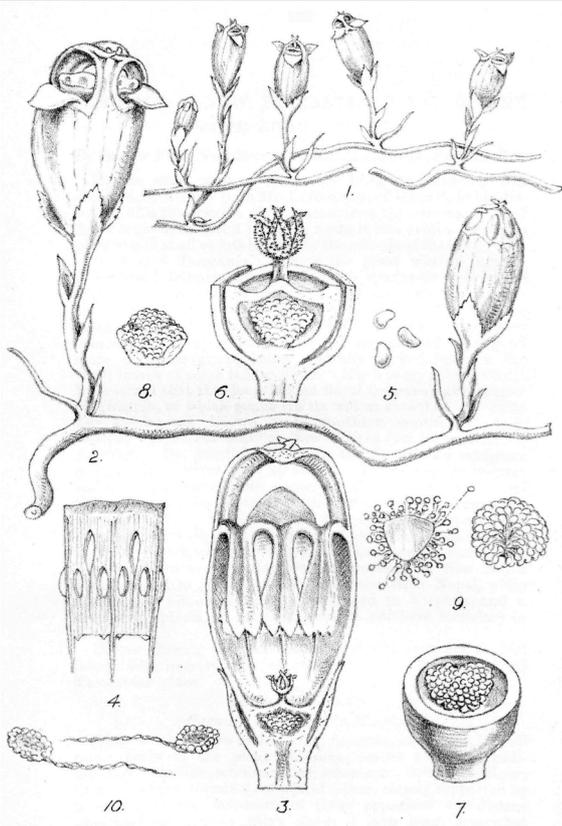
Henry Hill, also known as Henry Thomas Hill, was born on 24 October 1849 at Wollescote in the district of Stourbridge, Worcestershire, England. His father Benjamin Hill was a horse nail-maker and his mother Mary née Parkes a nail-forging from nearby Lye. Henry was the youngest of their five children. Life for the nailers was hard and often short. Henry was orphaned before reaching his teens, and while his siblings laboured in the forge from a young age, he studied diligently at the Lye school. In 1863, supported by the Anglican vicar, he secured a five-year pupil-teacher apprenticeship in Birmingham and board in a clergyman's household. A scholarship in 1868 took him to St Mark's Training College, Cheltenham, where he became a close friend of Emily Knowles, also from Lye. With a first-class teacher's certificate in 1870, he was sent to organise a group of new schools in Nottingham and fitted in extra-mural study to qualify in 1873 as

a science and art master. His application for employment in New Zealand was successful, but required him to be married; Emily accepted his proposal and they married on 23 July 1873, twelve days before embarking on the *Meriope*, Emily as the ship's matron and Henry the schoolmaster.

Hill's first work in New Zealand was administrative until June 1875 when he was appointed headmaster of the new Christchurch East School, with Emily its first infant mistress. Combining teaching duties with part-time university studies and increasing family responsibilities, he graduated BA in 1878. There were to be four daughters and three sons of the marriage. Supported by glowing testimonials, Hill was appointed inspector of schools for the Hawkes Bay Education Board, and for the next 37 years he worked to improve the standard of education in the region. Like William Colenso before him, he spent many hours on horseback and often camped out in all weather, to cover his area twice a year. Sometimes on early trips he was accompanied by Colenso – they were already known to each other through mutual scientific interests.

Hill was particularly interested in the volcanic plateau of the central North Island and presented many papers on the subject to the New Zealand Institute. For his contribution to scientific research he was made a fellow of the Geological Society of London in 1887. In 1903 he sent a damaged specimen of an unusual plant from Opepe, near Lake Taupo, to botanist Thomas Cheeseman. Further searches were unsuccessful until January 1907 when Hill, accompanied by the director of the Dominion Museum, Augustus Hamilton, found some in full flower. Seeing similarity to the genus *Thismia*, but also noting differences, Cheeseman placed it in the closely related genus *Bagnisia*. He wrote: "It gives me great pleasure to associate Mr Hill's name with the species as some slight recognition of the long-continued interest he has taken in New Zealand botany, and of his unwearied kindness in supplying Mr Colenso and myself with specimens of many interesting plants collected during his journeys in the interior of the North Island."

Reflecting his own start in life, Hill supported the education of Hamiora Hei until his return to the East Coast as a qualified lawyer. Henry Hill was active in church, civic, political and scientific matters, and after retirement was mayor of Napier 1917–19. He continued his geological pursuits, making frequent ascents of the Ruapehu summits, but his later life was blighted by Emily's death in 1930, the subsidence of a large part of his hillside section in the Napier earthquake and subsequent financial loss. He died at Napier on 15 July 1933.



Thismia rodwayi

Cheeseman described *Bagnisia hillii* (*Thismia rodwayi*) as a minute colourless saprophyte, perfectly smooth in its parts, leaves wanting or reduced to minute scales, its habitat primeval woods at Opepe, near Lake Taupo, flowering in January. He added that it is usually found on mounds of decaying leaves and humus at the base of the trunk of kahikatea, and until the bright rose-pink colour of the first flower is spotted, is easily overlooked.

IMAGE: Cheeseman: *Illustrations of the New Zealand Flora* 2