

Eli Bates: 'Uncle Rook', (H.E.'s maternal great uncle).

(1845-1924)

Eli was an older brother to H.E.'s maternal grandmother, Deborah Bates.

He appears in the story [Great Uncle Crow](#). [Fishing](#) is another tale of crafty old fishermen.

H.E. describes him in as 'the piscatorial saint' of the family¹. *'He never worked, but could angle like an angel. A half-crazy rip-van-winkle kind of man who lived the life of a celibate hermit as far as I know on about threepence a week, who even into his old age was a master fisherman, as superb and cunning artist who could take rod and line on any day of the season and sit by the river between two bungling duffers who had sat there without a bite all day, and proceed to pull out the fish almost as fast as he could bait the hook. In the sober midland districts in whose rivers he fished his name is still remembered with wonder and a little awe. I remember him with just those emotions myself, seeing him as a tall, gloomy sepulchral man, with black coat faded to snuff-colour, white tobacco-stained beard, black rimmed spectacles, walking along in eternal piscatorial preoccupation, never recognising any of us except my father, with whom he sometimes stopped in the street and held brief beard-muffled conversations. with his sleepy, milky-white old eyes he looked about as likely to catch a fish as an elephant. Yet men will say to me 'Rook was a masterpiece'. A man never had a better nickname. It describes perfectly the gloomy, hunched up figure sitting on the river bank or walking in the streets, lost in preoccupation during the fishing season, like some lonely old rook waiting for spring days'.²*

¹ *Through the Woods*

² *Flowers and Faces*