

BARING-GOULD AT NINETY

The Rev. Sabine Baring-Gould might well be expected to shake his head a little over an age like this. He belongs to the strange company of "Squarsons," for he owns 3,000 acres at Lew Trenchard, and was presented to his first living by Mr. Gladstone, and to his present one by himself. He claims to be the last person in England who rode in a Sedan chair. He has written a hundred books, a hymn - "Onward Christian Soldiers," which is the common property of all types of Christians, and at the age of ninety presents us with a large volume dealing only with the first thirty years of his life.

Mr. Baring-Gould goes back to days that seem less interesting to us now than those of Tutankhamen.

"When I was a boy," he says, "a waggon was sent up annually to Exeter, 33 miles distant, to bring down the groceries needed for the year, and now the grocer's motor-bus brings supplies weekly to one's door."

THE RULER

The terrible physicking and the drill-sergeant discipline which would now bring down the NSPCC, left its actual marks on him. "I have on my chest to this day," he says, "the triangular scars produced by the bites of leeches." But even in those days a boy could be boyish. Two rulers were kept in his home - a round one and a square one. On one occasion, after the square one, his Aunt Emily found him seated on the doorstep.

"Why are you sitting there on the stone? You'll get chilled, "

"I want to be, I'm burning hot. "

"Hot! You don't look red and heated."

"Not the face end of me. "

No wonder that a man brought up in the days when his father solemnly argued that Providence which designed the human frame to receive sounds and sights had also designed it to receive punishment, thinks a little cheaply sometimes of an age like ours.

"In my advanced age when deafness has supervened, I feel little or no concern over the fact that I cannot hear what I am passing from mouth to ear about me. Those whose words I really do value are to be found in books, not in small talk on food, motors, lawn tennis, bridge, and novels."

He dislikes smoking by ladies, and hopes it will go out as snuff-taking did.

"At one time snuff taken among the ladies was quite fashionable. Queen Charlotte had a train of snuff laid on her bare arm and ran her nose along it, sniffing it up from one end to the other."

There is still a touch of the ramrod about this venerable lover of life and good songs. The firmness in his constitution shows in his devotion to the Anglican Church. If he did not love her for her own sake, he would do so for her superiority to all the other Churches. His contempt for Romanism and Lutherism and Nonconformity is awesome. If any members of these Churches are to go "onward", it cannot possibly be as Christian soldiers. To Mr. Baring-Gould they are at best camp followers of the true army.

STORY OF A SAINT

He loves to tell stories of them. One about a female saint in France who sat down on a rock and naturally imprinted the holy face there delights him.

"Don't unbelievers laugh," he said to the parish priest.

"Unbelievers will laugh at anything," said that sturdy believer.

But his story of the Crown Prince of Saxony is enough to make a believer laugh. The prince had vowed a pilgrimage to Jerusalem. His father objected, so his confessor agreed that by pasting up the word "Jerusalem" at the end of the long gallery and pacing up and down for three hours a day for four years a suitable equivalent would be offered. The prince had been walking for two years when it occurred to him that there were mountains and seas between Dresden and Jerusalem. His confessor did not give in, but advised him to place a pan of water on the floor with "Mediterranean" painted on it, to have a chair for each mountain range and jump them in his passages.

Mr. Baring-Gould says the Prince was seen doing it. He does not offer the same confirmation of his story of the nuns who, when they thought the French were coming, said "Oui," to make their lips small and pretty, and when they thought the Germans were coming practised saying "Jah" to make them large and tempting.

He looks out from the elevation of his character and his years, and ends his record thus: "I do not look back and say: All is dead. What I repeat in my heart is: "All is promise."

"Early Reminiscences, 1834-1864." By S. Baring-Gould, Bodley Head 26s.

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