

BOOK REVIEW

Now The Day is Over

Author: Harold Kirk-Smith Publisher: Richard Kay, Boston, Lincs Subtitle: The Life and Times of Sabine Baring-Gould 1834-1924 Price £20

Issued in a plain blue cloth with gilt lettering on the spine and a charmingly idiosyncratic dustwrapper, and clearly printed on heavy art paper, this biography is no mere repetition or update of its two predecessors. Dr. Kirk-Smith has invested a great deal of scholarly research into his work, drawing extensively on the reviews and articles contemporary with his subject as well as Baring-Gould's own writings. He has skillfully brought to life the characters and events he describes, and puts them helpfully into their historical and social context.

Following an absorbing if somewhat biased overview of the 19th century church history - Lord Shaftesbury is presented as 'a bigoted Evangelical' for instance - the author steers a balanced and interesting course through the intricacies of the family history, with enough detail to add substantially to the knowledge and understanding of those familiar with Purcell and Dickinson. This is especially the case with the earlier part of Baring-Gould's life, enhanced by the skilful intermingling of quotations from the autobiographical novel THROUGH FLOOD & FLAME. Perusal of the relevant correspondence had added to our understanding of THE VICAR OF MORWENSTOW controversy, and of Baring Gould's social life. There is a well rounded chapter on life at Lew Trenchard with insight into details about the main houses in the story, and Sabine's life as a JP; chapter 10.

'The Archaeologist and Collector of Folk Songs' is likewise really interesting and informative. Many of the novels are clearly summarized, with assessments and comments from contemporary critics.

Your reviewer would want to suggest that a book presumably intended for the general reader is not perhaps the place for a partisan estimation of Baring-Gould's theological views - though surely brave to attempt something! Similarly the rather heavy emphasis on the blessings of 'high churchmanship' might not be to every reader's taste.

There are some lapses which more careful sub-editing could have avoided. ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS was published in THE CHURCH TIMES (back cover blurb); the year of Charles I's execution was 1649 (p18); Clare College was known as Clare Hall in SBG's time (p52); 'synodically' is likewise anachronistic (p121); 'Peace, perfect peace' is the only hymn of Edward Bickersteth's to survive in Hymns Ancient & Modern, The English Hymnal and Hymns for Today's Church, but the Anglican Hymnbook, still widely used, contains five of his hymns (as it does also of SBG's); Grace died in 1916, so there is a discrepancy in the dating of the heating system (p214); the editor of THOUGHTS FROM S. BARING-GOULD does acknowledge 'kind permission of Methuen, Cassell and the author - so perhaps there was a lapse of SBG's memory, or on the part of the postman (p238).

It is not clear that the appendices add much of value to the book, except A - the family tree.

The notes and references are well laid out, although the blanks could have been sorted out at the proof-reading stage; the index is certainly enhanced by the helpful identifications in brackets. Quite a serious irritant for the reader is the unduly large number of printing errors, and especially the inconsistent and quirky punctuation. Not at all troubled by these, but for the cover price of a book in which the few modest illustrations all appear at the beginning, a higher standard should have been obtained.

David Shacklock

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