

BOOKS ABOUT SBG

Presumably SBG planned three volumes of autobiography, but only two saw the light of day: his Early Reminiscences 1834-1864 published in 1923 and Further Reminiscences 1864-1894 published posthumously in 1925. Since he had almost completed his third thirty years of age when he wrote the first two volumes, another to cover the years 1894-1924 must surely have been in mind - Late Reminiscences perhaps? The particularly tantalising aspect of this literary arrest is that a huge quantity of Baring-Gould papers is said to have been consigned to the bonfire some years ago when Lew Trenchard House ceased to be a family home and became a hotel, so that many fascinating facts and fancies may never be known concerning his later life. (But see footnote). However, these two volumes are substantial, charmingly written, fully illustrated with photographs, and well worth obtaining; £10-£15 should purchase a reasonable pair.

There are two biographies: Onward Christian Soldier by William Purcell was published by Longmans in 1957. Subtitled A Life of Sabine Baring-Could: Parson, Squire, Novelist, Antiquary 1834-1924, and with a two page introduction by John Betjeman, who hails him as 'that forgotten and despised character, the enthusiastic amateur', Purcell's book is warm to his subject while not blind to his faults and quirks. It is a pity that two thirds of the book take up the pre-Lew Trenchard part of his life.

SBG's grandson, Bickford Dickinson, redresses that imbalance in his Sabine Baring-Gould: Squarson, Writer and Folklorist, published by David and Charles in 1970. This is a much more difficult book to find, but well worth running to earth, as the author has been able to draw on the personal memories of the subject's family and acquaintances, as well as his own. As an incumbent of Lew Trenchard for six years himself, he had the advantage of breathing the same atmosphere. Not surprisingly, but appropriately, this later biography covers the Lew Trenchard period in the proportion of five to three. The text is interspersed with some excellent illustrations (three of which are also found in the earlier biography), and there is a clear list of his works by subject matter, as well as an index - the latter it must be admitted not as thorough as Purcell's.

footnote: however, a substantial number of his letters are still extant, and we plan to publish some facsimiles and transcripts in the Newsletter. A future article will deal with shorter items about SBG.