

REVIEW PAGE

"Songs of the West" - a Wren Trust cassette

Do most of your tapes frustrate you with the unintelligibility of the lyrics? Here is a glorious exception - every word, said or sung, perfectly clear and often movingly rendered. Here is an hour of excellent entertainment and a model of good presentation. Of the 202 songs deposited by SBG in the Plymouth Library between 1892 & 1900, we have here a judicious selection, with introduction, comment and readings from SBG's autobiographies, together with a memorial tribute to many of the song men themselves.

If one were to pick the two star items, for me they would be 'Sweet Nightingale' and 'The Bellringing'. It would be easy to miss the excellent summary on the inside of the sleeve of 'the principal achievement of my life' (to use SBG's own words), and so the entire sleeve is reproduced on p.7-10 of this issue (a slightly revised version of the Sidmouth Festival programme - see no.8, p.7-10). This represents a thoroughly good £7.00 worth (£7.50 by post from Killerton House, Broadclyst, EXETER, Devon).

***Footnote:** the sleeve mentions SBG's 211 publications, excluding the articles; no precise mathematical summary is possible at the moment, but this reviewer would put the total in book form at 153 plus a further 8 with shared authorship. The articles, letters and small pamphlets currently add up to approx. 221 items.*

"Storms at Sealandings" - Jonathan Grant

The Mehala mystery continues with another period piece of 534 pages from Lovejoy author's alter ego. (See newsletter no.8, p.2f; no.9, p.6; no.11, p7,15). The heroine's identity and status - and the fate of her former husband - are gradually unfolded, as is her love for the despised but dedicated doctor - and finally his for her - through all the tribulations of an east coast flood and an outbreak of cattle disease. Intriguingly, the whereabouts of Sealandings seems to have shifted from Brightlingsea to Kessingland or thereabouts - if the clues can be relied on.

As with the earlier novel, a medical author's distinctive touches are to be found - an abscess of the tooth 'tergid with pus', stethoscopy in its primitive form, rural prostitution, and the 'modesty' of a gentleman's six-course breakfast taken to save time. The book's jacket gives the date as 1827, but the only specific clue in the text would put it 8 years earlier.

The SBG reader will pick up references in addition to Elijah Rebow, Josiah Baring and Mrs. Trenchard, to such as Matilda Gould and the estate of Arminell.