

THE REV. S. BARING-GOULD AT HOME

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To ramble over Dartmoor with Baring-Gould - (one gets into the habit of dropping the courtesy title "Mr." before double-barrelled names) - is a great privilege. It is a still greater one to spend a week as a welcome guest at Lew Trenchard, since the early years of the 17th century the ancestral home of the Gould family. For one who has so long recognised the sterling qualities that lie in the vast library which the pen of Mr. Baring-Gould has contributed to English literature during the past fifty years, there are few more gratifying joys than to sit at his hospitable board and to watch the twinkling humour that lights up his face, and that of Mrs. Baring-Gould in response to the badinage that passes round the table.

With a Yorkshire visitor it is, of course, a foregone conclusion that the young people of the family should air the modicum of dialect of that county which they possess, while Mrs. Baring-Gould - a Yorkshire lady - and the visitor smile indulgently at the effort and recall to each other half-forgotten words and modes of expression. And these young people are living replicas of the 18th century portraits that line the old oak panelled dining-room, and stair cases of Lew Trenchard. The young lady on my right, however, stoutly denies her similitude to Godfrey Kneller's portrait (painted in 1711) of her ancestor, the Hon. Joseph Sabine, Field Marshal, Governor of Ghent, and later Governor of Gibraltar. He died in 1739. We slyly hint that she repudiates, and with justice on her part, the double chin with which the painter has endowed her ancestor.

It is pleasant to have cosy evening chats with the novelist and antiquary, who combines with his literary position the offices of Lord of the Manor, Rector, Chairman of the Bench of Magistrates, and Squire of large tracts of wood and meadow land, besides being kindly advisor and helper to all who seek his counsel. By the old chimney of grey Devonshire granite, in a halo of tobacco smoke, we interchange ideas of literature, politics, of current incidents, and I hear many romantic stories of the doings of the Goulds, the Sabines, and the Barings. Of himself and of his writings it is more difficult to make him talk, for his modesty is as great as his talents.

"How many books have you written?"

"Haven't an idea. I really must make a list. I will do it the next time I am in the British Museum. I cannot trust my memory."

I urge him to do so, and mentally estimate his output at about two hundred volumes. His memory, however, is one of his greatest points, and as he is conversant with the literature of Germany, France, and some other countries which he reads in the original, his writings on historical and antiquarian matters have a value and breadth that nothing else can give.

Then an expedition is planned to explore the Dartmoor prehistoric remains, and he asks me if I am game to arise at seven in the morning. And so Dartmoor is reached by aid of motor, and friendly lift is given, when roads are non-motorable, by the Vicar of a Dartmoor parish, who, equally a lover of the wild moorland, accompanies us, and after a long tramp, and an examination of many curious remains, hospitably entertains us at the vicarage. In this long

scramble over rock, bent and bracken, Mr. Baring-Gould, in spite of his seventy-odd years, outwalks his companions, twenty and thirty years his juniors, even planning a further extension of the walk to the summit of a high and formidable "Tor." "Nobody is ever ill on Dartmoor," announces the vicar with enthusiasm, and our taste of Dartmoor air makes us quite believe the assertion.

In the quiet chats at Lew Trenchard, Mr. Baring-Gould tells me a great deal of much interest regarding himself and his forbears, that may be fitly reproduced here, and as he tells it we go round the house and examine the family portraits, about the originals of which hangs each a story.

John Gold, or Gould, the Crusader, is the first-recorded of the family, and his monument and effigy, cross-legged is in Seaborough Church, Seaborough, being a Somerset parish, where the family have been settled from the 13th century. Then much complicated family history of inter-marriage, and how lands and manors pass from one branch of this family to another, all within easy range of Dartmoor. Then the family chronicles reach the purchase by Henry Gould of Lew Trenchard, about 1626, ever since which period the old manor house has been inhabited by a Gould. There is a portrait of a handsome young lady (early 18th century), and of the same, as a married lady, of a little later date, that depict a notable character who supplies the family ghost. Margaret Gould, a domineering old lady died in 1795, and her restless high-heeled shoes have tapped along the corridors within very recent years. At a coming of age ball of one of Mr. Baring-Gould's daughters she was visible, seated in the drawing room under her own portrait, to many visitors inquired "who the lady in black, with white lace, is?" My host tells me many tales of her vagaries, and as a boy had known one of the villagers who remembered her. Her son, commonly known as the "Scamp," had led a wild, reckless life (about 1760) and parted with many goodly acres of the Gould estate.

Her daughter had in 1767 married Charles Baring, brother to Sir Francis Baring, and the son of this union taking over the estate at the old lady's death in 1795 had, by royal warrant, assumed the name "Baring-Gould"; this gentleman was the novelist's grandfather, William Gould. He married Diana Amelia Sabine, a descendant of Joseph Sabine, the Field-Marshal whose portrait by Godfrey Kneller, with that of his wife and daughter are prominent among the family pictures in the Lew Trenchard dining-room. This couple had two sons, one of whom, Edward, born 1804, was the father of the subject of this article. The other son was presented to the living of Lew Trenchard, holding the same until his death, when he was succeeded by his nephew Sabine Baring-Gould, the subject of this article.

Edward Baring-Gould served on the staff of the Madras Light Cavalry, but upon the dislocation of his thigh by an accident, left India and married Sophia Charlotte, the daughter of Admiral Bond. By this marriage Sabine Baring-Gould came into the world. In the ball-room at Lew Trenchard, there is a portrait of the gentle mother and little Sabine, a fair-haired boy with an intellectual face, and this same golden-haired little boy lives again both in looks and name "Sabine Baring-Gould" in the person of the novelist's grandson, now about nine years of age.

Sabine Baring-Gould was born in Dix's Field, Exeter, on January 28, 1834. His father had a restless spirit and abhorred the dull life of a country squire at Lew Trenchard. Therefore with his wife and family he spent most of his time on the continent, residing at Pau, in the South

of France, and at different towns in Germany. His son Sabine was put to school at Manheim. As a boy Sabine developed an antiquarian taste which does not appear to have belonged to either his father or grandfather. In 1850, while at Pau, he discovered the mosaic pavement of a Roman Villa, and drew the attention of the municipal authorities to it. Some excavation and clearing was made, but the guardians were lax, and the pavement disappeared bit by bit. As a youth he explored Dartmoor, and saved many a prehistoric relic and standing stone from vandal usage. His grandfather, imbued with the modern spirit, cleared away much of the fine old oak that, in shape of screen and bench ends, adorned the old church. It was Sabine who rescued these from the wood closet and who, when he came into possession, restored them to their places. In due course he went to Cambridge, to Clare College; and after being designed for the Army ultimately took Holy Orders.

In 1861 he made an expedition to Iceland, with the result that he published his "Iceland: its Scenes and Sagas." This was by no means his first book. "The Path of the Just" was issued in 1857. His connection with Yorkshire began in 1864, when he became curate to the Rev. John Sharp, vicar of Horbury. With that heart and soul so characteristic of the man he entered into church work with astonishing vigour. He established a mission room in a cottage house in the poorer district of Horbury, and finally built a Mission Hall without leaving a penny debt upon it.

From 1865 to the present time he found in the lady who became his wife a helper, and a help-meet of whom any man might be proud. Miss Grace Taylor, a native of Horbury, was associated with his mission work at Horbury and they were married in 1868. As wife, mother, and hostess she has won affection from his family, and the highest esteem of all who have come in contact with her. While curate at Horbury he wrote his most famous hymn, "Onward Christian Soldiers," at Whitsuntide, 1865. It was intended for the teachers and school children to sing as they marched from Horbury Brig to the Parish Church on Whit Tuesday. It was done in a great hurry, taken to the local printer, and copies struck off on Monday. It was originally adapted to an air by Haydn. In 1866 he was presented to the living of Dalton-in-Swaledale, and in 1871 to that of East Mersea in Essex. In this dreary place, in the Salt Marshes, he lived for ten years, and here his eldest son was born. So well Mr. Baring-Gould describes the place and its people, that we can realise that the characters in "Mehalah" are by no means overdrawn. Indeed, the novel was written among its scenes of action, and many of the characters in it drawn from living originals. It was Mr. Baring-Gould's first novel, and brought him £50 - with a subsequent payment of £35 - for rights of translation. "John Herring," a book published in 1883, brought double the money.

On the death of his father, in 1872, he inherited the family estate, but did not leave East Mersea till 1881, when he moved, on the death of his uncle, to Lew Trenchard, the living being in his own presentation. It may be mentioned that his literary work does not interfere with his clerical duties, for he takes three services every Sunday, and maintains a curate. Though he is generally known as a novelist, yet his novels are perhaps the least important of his literary work. Such works of fiction as "Court Royal," "In the Roar of the Sea," "Red Spider," and some others rank with the best of the later Victorian novels, but his antiquarian and historical volumes for profound knowledge and grasp of subject are of the highest quality. "The Lives of the Saints," and its more recent companion, "Celtic Saints," will for ever remain standard. His antiquarian books, such as "Strange Survivals," "Curious Myths of

the Middle Ages," "Yorkshire Oddities," "Old Country Life," and a host of others are written in a charming manner, and with great lucidity of style. He has succeeded - a difficult task - in writing, on what to many might be dry subjects, in a popular and pleasing style, without in any way sacrificing anything of value to the earnest student of the subject he deals with.

"I have given up novel writing," says Mr. Baring-Gould, but he tells me of a work he has just finished, still in manuscript, that should prove of the highest historical value and interest to Yorkshire and other readers. It is, in fact, a history of the battles and engagements fought in Yorkshire by the invading Danes. He has turned up a new source for these facts, the Icelandic Sagas, which, having himself translated, he finds to contain information of the different Danish expeditions, and the Danish heroes who landed on the coast north of the Humber.

Budding writers may ask how is such literary skill obtained. I can merely mention that Mr. Baring-Gould writes much before breakfast, uses a quill pen, and that most of his work was done standing at a high desk. At home he is a busy man, and with many other matters beside literary work. He, however, finds plenty of time to entertain his visitors and callers. I think his chief asset is his ability to do things at once, and the firm grasp he immediately takes of his subject. The French and German languages he acquired as a boy, and his big library of their literature has stood him in good stead.

"I shall always be remembered," said Mr. Baring-Gould "by my folk-song collecting," but how, in 1888, he began the great work of gathering the folk-songs of Devon is so long and so interesting a story that it cannot be put in the few lines now left at my disposal.

How his heart was warmed to the old Devonshire songs and their singers only those who have heard him talk on the subject can tell. If any man had sympathy with the old country labourer whose songs and traditions he has so lovingly preserved, surely Baring-Gould is the one. There is a touching tenderness when he speaks of the old singers, and tells of such a one, perhaps now dead, from whom he had obtained a particular song.

The old folk-songs of Devon have for him great sacredness, and it is pleasant to listen to his stories of his long rambles in search of them and of nights spent in lonely inns where he had gathered round the board those old men in whose memories they linger.

Frank Kidson