

THE SHORES OF SEALANDINGS - a review

The Shores of Sealandings by Jonathan Grant - Arrow Books (Random Century) 1992 pbk; 470pp; £4.99; 1st ed.hbk 1991; cover subtitle 'A stirring saga of nineteenth century East Anglia'; author's note: "As tribute to the admirable Sabine Baring-Gould I have incorporated his own description of the lonely East coast sea marshes he so loved to hate". The author is better known by his pseudonym Jonathan Gash, the inventor of Lovejoy.

The story begins with the rescue of Mehala from the sea, where she had nearly drowned in circumstances never explained but only hinted at, as her memory partially returned. Elijah Rebow, George de Witt, the Red House and Mersea Island (see SBG's *Mehalah* are mentioned, but the character of the girl is developed along rather different lines by her 'new author'. She is assumed by the inhabitants of Sealandings (Brightlingsea?) to be of the servant class, yet she gives evidence through her poise and abilities to be of 'gentler' stock. While appropriately grateful to her rescuers and respectful to her employers she is her own person, and perhaps remembers more than she is willing to admit. This makes for a fascinating plot - a gently romantic tale thoroughly well told; the background research is impressive without being intrusive, and there is a brilliantly described episode when the local doctor performs an inventive operation to relieve a potentially lethal condition of croup.

Jonathan Grant's sally about the 'marshes he so loved to hate' goes a bit far, one might think. True, SBG did not have much to say in favour of the island or its inhabitants, but he could hardly have composed such haunting descriptions as he did of an environment to which he felt total antipathy. Incidentally, can any reader spot the passage that Mr. Grant claims to have incorporated from *Mehalah*?

Further tributes to the original author are found in the names of the Rector of Sealandings, the Reverend Josiah Baring, and the housekeeper of Shalamar, Mrs. Trenchard.

The sequel, *The Storms of Sealandings*, is due to be published this year.

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